

New Title Sampler Booklet

Spring and Summer 2020 Titles

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New Title Sampler Booklet
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Salt Water & Honey by Lizzie Lowrie

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Ever Present by Austen Hardwick

∞

God Calls Everyone by Derek Walmsley

∞

Our Precious Lives by Steve Morris

∞

Overflow by Matthew Porter



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'If you've had your heart broken by life and are wondering how to get out of bed again, this memoir will speak to you.'

JODY DAY. FOUNDER OF GATEWAY WOMEN

Salt Water —&— Honey

LOST DREAMS. GOOD GRIEF
AND A BETTER STORY

LIZZIE LOWRIE

Salt Water and Honey

Lost dreams, good grief and a better story

Lizzie Lowrie



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Foreword

Whether you consider yourself a Christian or not, if you've experienced involuntary childlessness, it's quite likely that your faith in life (let alone your faith in God) has been seriously shaken. Because not only does the blatant unfairness of involuntary childlessness bring us face to face with the inconvenient truth that life isn't actually fair, it also reveals how utterly clueless most traditional faith-based communities and wider society are at acknowledging and supporting those grieving the family they longed for.

And this is why Lizzie's earthy, frank and humane memoir is so important. It's a story of enduring multiple unexplained miscarriages whilst struggling to fit into her role as a Church of England vicar's wife; a world full of 'middle-class conversation, extravagantly fertile women and cake', and the depths of despair she plumbed before making peace with that. She recalls looking for advice on the internet about how long it might take her to get over a miscarriage, but finding nothing apart from women talking about getting pregnant again. As she writes, 'the story of the in-between has no voice on the internet.'

This is the story of that in-between. Of being in-between the hope of motherhood whilst experiencing the heartbreak of multiple miscarriages. Of being in-between joy and envy when

it seems that everyone else is sailing into parenthood leaving you behind. Of being in-between pregnant and unpregnant, even whilst carrying a child, and the medical profession's cluelessness around this ambiguity. It's about living in limbo in your body, your soul, your life, your marriage, your work, your friendships, your family, your community, your Church, your faith and your identity as a woman. And of the devastating sadness of feeling lost and alone in that in-between.

Deeply moving, tragic and shot through with dark humour, this memoir charts Lizzie's years of heartbreak and desolation over her inability to keep a baby alive in her womb, her sense of alienation from the community and faith that had formerly given her life purpose, and her gradual redefinition of herself as a woman, a wife, a Christian – and as something much greater than her childlessness. It's also a moving love story of a marriage tested and not found wanting, even in the bleakest of times. About how breaking through the wall of silence around infertility, miscarriage, baby loss and childlessness can create a space for others to grieve their losses too, and in doing so can bring together a new kind of faith-based community, a grittier one built on helping others find their way through their dark nights of the soul, with the loving support of those who've been there too.

This book is a story about finding something else at the end of the rainbow other than that longed-for baby; it's about a different kind of happy ending than the one you expected. It's about redemption, but not in the way you'd imagined. And a lot of cake.

Jody Day

Founder of Gateway Women

www.gateway-women.com

Dearly Beloved . . .



I cup my hands and bring them up to my mouth trying to breathe life into them, but it makes little difference. I check my watch again under the light provided by a street lamp as we wait for the winter sun to rise.

‘It’s almost five,’ I tell Dave.

‘It’s fine,’ he mumbles. ‘They know we need to clear everything out first thing, they’ll be here soon.’ He pulls his beanie hat further over his ears, then goes back to kicking stones down a drain. Hands tucked into the pockets of his jeans, his breath curls up into the frozen December air. He’s still not wearing a coat. I don’t even know if he has a coat. I can’t believe I’m going to marry him and I don’t know if he owns a coat or not.

‘Here they are!’ The headlights from Rob’s white transit van feel like spotlights, illuminating the secrecy of what’s about to happen. Rob skilfully manoeuvres the van and trailer outside the grey back doors of the café, before Joy jumps out the front seat and gives us both a big hug. Her tall frame feels larger than normal, holding the broken pieces of me together. Things must be really bad because Rob hugs me as well. Few words are spoken as we walk towards the back doors; we’ve got a job to do and the sooner it’s done, the better.

Dave unlocks the doors and we walk down the brick corridor, past our office, through the double doors and into the café. I flick the panel of light switches on, as I have done every morning for the past ten months, Rob starts tearing bin bags off a big black roll and we silently blackout the glass front of the café. When the café opened, we invited everyone to celebrate, but now we're hiding; the shame of failure obscured by black bin-liners.

'Show me everything you want to take first, then I'll tell you what order to bring it out in, so we can pack the van properly,' Rob says.

We point to the large, brown leather sofas that were just starting to relax, their fabric softened by the many coffee dates they had entertained; the mismatched wooden chairs and tables we'd bought at an auction; the pool table and the coffee machine that Dave spent months researching and promptly fell in love with as soon as it arrived. I wasn't jealous. I was pretty certain that he loved me more, but I'm worried now about how sad he'll be when we drop her off at her new home in an arts café in the basement of a church in Manchester.

'Right, let's take this table first,' Rob tells us. The four of us gather round the big, long table at the front of the shop, hands under the table top. 'One, two, three, lift.' We slowly shuffle it out of the building, Joy and I walking backwards without tripping up – quite an achievement – through the corridor and outside into the promising light of a new day, the wintry sun resting on the rooftops of the city taking its Sunday morning lie-in.

'It's quite pretty, isn't it?' declares Joy, looking up to the pinky-yellow sky.

'Still not pretty enough to make me get up this early more often,' adds Rob, as he grabs the chairs Dave hands to him and stacks them in the back of his van.

We silently travel between the van and café. My body moves with an energy that should not be there. Each object is carefully carried out of the building with the honour afforded to our meticulously constructed dream; the silence of the empty café space following us out like the silence following an explosion in a film, the impact of the blast expanding with a force so loud, it almost can't be heard.

As soon as we load the last sofa onto the trailer, Joy jumps onto it, arms and legs sprawled over the soft, red cushions. 'Can we rest now?'

'No,' Rob tells her, carrying blue tarpaulin over to the trailer. 'If you don't get up soon, you're going to be strapped in!'

'That sounds like fun!'

'OK, then.' Rob hands Dave one end of the tarpaulin and they throw it over her. She lies still underneath for a few seconds.

Ripples appear under the blue sheet. Her head appears. 'Pah! That stinks! I'm getting out!' She clumsily picks her way through the chairs and coffee tables, jumping off the trailer. The boys rope down the tarpaulin, then drive off to distribute its contents to some of the local churches in Chester. Joy and I drive back to hers with the boot of my Peugeot 206 filled with paperwork, failure written through each page.

There was so much more I wanted to pack up into Rob's van, like the orange and brown retro wallpaper and a wall mural of an angel, surrounded by a Bible verse that said, 'See, I am sending an angel ahead of you to guard you along the way and to bring you to the place I have prepared' (Exod. 23:20). I wanted to take the poems and words written on the walls in the prayer room. I wanted to relive moments again – Rob moaning about how much time it took to paint the ceiling. Our coffee taste-testing session – downing shots with Dave's friend from a

local coffee house, chatting and laughing past midnight. Our opening party when we announced we were dating and Dave's mum hugged me. Our music nights, the wedding reception we gave for a couple from AA – Alcoholics Anonymous – the time when two guys just walked in and started playing flamenco guitar. The games of pool with the staff from the Pakistani restaurant next door. I wish I could pack all this up in the back of Rob's van or at least bottle it and take it on the train back to Sussex with me to help make the news I had to break to my parents a bit easier to swallow.

I tell Mum and Dad about the café on Christmas Eve and spend the following week avoiding eye contact and silencing hushed conversations when I enter a room. I'm just as worried as they are about me, but I'm middle class and a Christian, so unravelling is not an option. At least we've got a wedding to talk about. In four months Dave and I will be married, so I just keep steering the conversation round to weddings because everyone knows what to do with that. During my week at home, I give out Christmas presents bought with someone else's money, pull crackers, play games, sing at the flaming Christmas pudding and say goodbye to my parents in the same way I greeted them – tired and unable to look them in the eye.

My return, back to the familiarity of Chester and Dave, hasn't stopped the dark thoughts that keep claiming my head and my heart. The mornings are worse – my mind opens up before my eyes open, and that's the bit I don't like. For a moment there is peace, and then I remember. I turn over. I'm not ready to face what lies beyond the daylight falling through the floral curtains. The dark-green carpet surrounding my bed absorbs the light, enabling me to fall back into the ignorant peace of sleep for a little bit longer. My routine has changed, defined by what I've stopped doing. I don't set my alarm. I don't work.

We've decided to wait until after the wedding to give us time to close the business and recover.

I no longer read my Bible and I'm definitely not praying. Reconciling my faith with what's happened hangs too heavy over me, and for now I feel I've earned a break from God. I thought it would be easy, but this conscious avoidance keeps catching me, as though God is trying to squeeze through the crack in a door and I'm having to repeatedly slam it shut in his face.

I really should get up. My head is desperate for coffee. I tread along the dark-green carpet and into the green bathroom, with its matching avocado bathroom suite. I splash water on my face. Although I know the water's clean, I still close my mouth, just in case the green ceramic has finally penetrated the water flowing from it and turned it into dark-green sludge. I grab the jumper and jeans I'd thrown onto the swamp-like carpet late last night and descend into the darkness of the lounge-diner below.

The house I'm renting is owned by a missionary and it's cheap. I've never met my landlady but I feel just as blessed by her life as the families she works with in India, because I know that without her generosity I would probably be homeless right now. As well as her life of service to the poor, the only other thing I know about her is that she likes earthy colours – well, basically, green; in particular, a kind of greeny-brown. When you walk through the front door and into the lounge-diner, the green walls, carpet and matching furniture envelop you, leaving you wondering if any other colour even exists. The walls and furnishings absorb most of the daylight travelling through the net curtains. The remaining light is enough to remind you that there was life outside, but not enough to make you feel as though you should be joining in.

The long, dark-brown kitchen boasts two kettles, five cafetières and cupboards crammed full of crockery. There's the obligatory greeny-brown dinner plates with matching coffee cups, then next to them a cupboard crammed with just frying pans. There's also a cupboard full of repurposed food containers spanning several decades; ice-cream tubs from the eighties, sunflower-spread tubs from the nineties: the history of UK plastics. The shelves are so full of recycled Tupperware that every time you venture inside for even the smallest of pots you have to quickly shut the cupboard doors again, for fear of the entire contents spilling out onto the green-patterned lino floor, crashing into the dark-green silence of the house.

Although I'm sleeping in the green house, I'm basically living at Joy and Rob's. Dave's staying in their spare room until we get married. I don't think having Dave and I around the house has helped Rob's motivation to find jobs for his handyman business. We all watch quite a lot of telly, drink coffee and eat cake and then Dave and I try to do some café admin, but mostly I just want to do wedding planning.

Working together is easy; we've always been good at that. That's why I moved up north, to work with Dave. It was just over two years ago now when I received an email from a friend, forwarding a message from some guy called Dave who wanted to set up a café in Chester. I'd just moved back in with my parents after my fourth gap year and had got a temp job that involved a lot of photocopying, so reading an email describing a dream I'd also been carrying for years got me very excited. I emailed back straight away and a couple of months later travelled up to Chester to meet Dave and talk about coffee shops.

When Dave and I first met, I didn't think of him in 'that way'. Well, he was taller than me, and that's rare, so I can't say the thought hadn't crossed my mind – I was six foot and

finding a tall guy who was 'normal' wasn't easy. So, he was tall, but he had no hair. He wasn't bald, he'd just forgotten to put the attachment on his clippers that morning and had given himself a '0' haircut. I also thought he had a small mouth. I can't say why I saw this as a negative, but in that moment it felt significant.

We spent the day walking round the city, drinking coffee and talking about what our café would be like, and rather than stay in Sussex photocopying my life away, I decided to move up to Chester to open a café with Dave. We'd agreed that working and dating was a bad idea, but Dave grew his hair back and I stopped worrying about the size of his mouth and now we're getting married.

'Have either of you had any thoughts about the wedding service and what readings you'd like?' asks Andrew, our vicar. We're sat in his small study, surrounded by stacks of books and papers, our mugs empty as the conversation ebbs and flows, with him skilfully leading us from the excitement of the wedding to the sobering reality of what we've lost. He's one of the few brave enough to enter this unknown, willing to sit with the unanswered questions. But I'm just not ready to let him take me there yet.

'Actually,' Dave replies, 'I was wondering if the readings and the sermon could be based on Genesis. I've just read this great book and in it there's a chapter about Adam and Eve. I've got the book here.' He leans forward, passing the book to Andrew who's sat opposite.

'Which chapter is it?' Andrew starts flicking through the pages.

'It's the one about nudity.'

'Ah! I see it!'

Dave explains: 'Basically, the chapter talks about when Adam and Eve first met in the Garden of Eden and how important it was that they were naked; they had nothing to hide, they didn't need to pretend, they were completely comfortable with one another. When I read that, I thought it would be great for our wedding day.' We both look to Andrew, flicking through the pages of the chapter, trying to gauge how he's going to respond. He puts the book down on the small coffee table next to him.

'I think it sounds like a great idea,' he replies eventually. 'I mean, no one's going to forget the wedding where the vicar talked about nudity, are they?'

It's 5 April 2008. I leave the quiet of the green house to get ready for my wedding at the hotel where the reception is taking place later. Many of those coming to the wedding haven't seen me since the café closed, and I'm glad. I'm ready to get dressed up and show people how happy I am.

I love my wedding dress. It's beautiful. I love wearing it. The antique pink silk stretches in folds across my chest, falling down to the floor and collecting in a bustle at the back, all held together with pink and ivory flowers. Sequins sparkle over the fabric, nestling under the long veil hanging over the curls of my hair, down over my bare shoulders and falling to the floor. The silver necklace and matching earrings, designed by a friend, shine in the early spring light as I step out the car. Andrew hugs me.

Lesley, one of my bridesmaids, passes me my posy of dusty pink ranunculi, sage and rosemary and we walk into the church. The music starts and one of our regulars from the café who always ordered a peppermint tea joins in with his guitar, and my dad and I move forward as one of the other regulars

from our café open mic nights starts to sing. Everyone's looking at me, watching as I walk towards Dave. I haven't felt this good in months. My hand holding my posy rests on my tummy, miraculously flattened by the power of my beautiful wedding dress. I reach Dave.

'You look amazing!' he whispers.

I try to listen to the sermon, but the excitement of the day, along with the fact I was wearing a really pretty dress and was sitting next to a man now about to be called my husband, was all a bit too much. I smile and nod, knowing the words Andrew's sharing have been crafted for us as well as for the rest of the congregation. Next to me sits Dave, looking handsome in his grey three-piece suit, with his hair and his small mouth. I hold his hand. His hand that had daily touched my face to wipe away the tears whenever I thought about what we'd lost. Our fingers locked together, sharing the heavy guilt of losing money we knew we could never repay. We are bankrupt, both relying on parents bailing us out and food from friends. I had often heard Dave's late-night confessions to failing those who'd relied on us, whose wages we'd paid. I know the shame he feels whenever he sees my dad, reminding him of the money invested and lost. I know the ways in which stress still tortures his body. We've both been stripped bare, left with nothing, naked.

Andrew finishes his sermon and asks us to stand for the marriage bit. Stood at the front of the church ready to say our vows, I look up to the gilded statue of Jesus on the cross suspended above me. Yes, he has a cloth covering his modesty on this statue, but I imagine he was naked when it happened; exposed, humiliated and weak. Standing under that cross wearing my expensive dress scattered in sequins, I feel so distant from the raw humanity displayed above me. The congregation stands with us. The dimly lit Gothic church is full, friends filling the

pews that are normally stacked in a corner, quickly separated into rows by the ushers. Church leaders who'd prayed for the cafe, students who'd hung out on the sofas, the guys from AA, local business owners and a friend who used to sneak out the house to have a banoffee waffle without telling his wife. All had given time and love and money to the café. They're all here. Regular customers like the guy who always ordered a large cappuccino with an extra shot, who drove me and my dad to church this morning in his classic red Jaguar Mark Two. Then there are the two media students obsessed by our white chocolate cheesecake, who are filming the wedding, and a talented young couple from our open mic nights who will be performing at the reception this evening with their swing band.

Although the café doors have closed, everyone's here, and I'm so glad. This is how I want them to see me – as the beautiful bride, not the girl who tried something and failed.



EVER PRESENT

RUNNING TO SURVIVE,
THRIVE AND BELIEVE

AUSTEN
HARDWICK

'Moving, challenging and, above all, inspirational!'

Rob Parsons, Care for the Family

Ever Present

Running to survive, thrive and believe

Austen Hardwick



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Foreword

Eric Liddell of *Chariots of Fire* fame is quoted as saying 'God . . . made me fast. And when I run, I feel His pleasure.' By contrast, in this book *Ever Present*, marathon runner Austen Hardwick implies that *when he runs, he feels God's presence*. It is as though, for Liddell, God was present in his life but more as a spectator when he was running. Austen describes God as always being there on his shoulder, going through all that life throws at him, but when he runs, he feels especially close. And Austen has had some pretty tough stuff to deal with.

When I first started to read the book, I was so captivated that I wanted to rush through to the finish to discover what happens but then, as an Olympian, my mindset is to always press on towards the goal as quickly as possible. However, the more I read, the more I had to stop to think. There are so many challenges to my way of thinking in this book. The biggest being, have I been missing out? One of the key criteria to moving fast is the efficiency of how you use your body, with elite athletes constantly looking for minor adjustments. The theory is simple: many marginal gains can make a significant difference. *Ever Present*, however, has made me give much consideration

to the gains that could come from the harmonisation of mind, body and spirit, which Austen has clearly found, not only for the benefit of my sporting performance but life in general. This book is very much about exploring the relationship between running and believing which is quite unique and not the more usual story of how God/Jesus has helped a sportsman excel, often overcoming adversity along the way.

Austen is an artist who is not only able to paint but is also able to draw word pictures about situations and the environment in which he has found himself that instantly capture your attention. For example, having a stroke would be worrying for anyone, but having three takes you to a place where every aspect of your life is under serious threat. Yet Austen is able to bring readers close to his predicament by talking about the old speaking clock and those all-too-familiar words 'at the third stroke it will be . . .'. Analogies such as this abound in the book and make it a joy to read.

This is certainly a book that I shall be reading many times over and will be keeping on my bookshelf for future reference.

Ian Richards OLY

1980 Olympian and currently one of the world's top masters athletes having won 8 world age group championships and set 6 world age records in the last 10 years

At the Third Stroke

And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love.¹

I've attended enough weddings to know that these words of the apostle Paul written to the early church can be a cliché of many ceremonies. They follow a projection of what husband and wife hope to become as they embark upon their lives as loving spouses; patient, forgiving, truthful – it's a list of virtues I achieve when I'm in a good mood but not when the washing-up needs doing or the family are screaming about time allocation in the bathroom. Everybody approves in the soft-focus atmosphere of the crumbling church walls, as sweaty palms cling to orders of service and we leave feeling like all conscience boxes are freshly ticked when it comes to loving our other halves.

These words came back to me in a completely new way as I lay helpless in a hospital bed in November 2017, my palm clinging to the glossy revamped hospital menu. After a third brain haemorrhage in just beyond as many years, and consequently my third stroke, I began to see that faith, hope and love represented three experiences which had become the corners of a triangle during my life: faith was my Christian experience as somebody with a changing understanding of what 'fullness

of life'² might mean, hope had always accompanied my experience of sickness like a surprising parrot permanently perched upon this woeful voyager's shoulder, and love encapsulated my experience of freedom through running. When I say 'love', it is because I invest time in it, diary it, and it holds a reciprocal life-affirming quality which brings me to a more mentally and physically healthy place in my own self. In this book, fullness of life, suffering and running are therefore representative, on one level, of what I mean when I speak of faith, hope and love.

There is an irony to having three strokes, as a piece of British cultural history flew into my hospital patient mind as a person with a weakness for words. It seems impossible in our personalised, device-saturated age, but the Speaking Clock first spoke in 1936 with the voice of Ethel Jane Cain, a Post Office exchange operator from Croydon. Since then, 'At the third stroke' is a cultural quirk which has traditionally been the opening words of the voiced British dial-the-time service which at its peak had millions dialling 123 each year to hear an accurate time. Sometimes genuinely sought, at other times to combat loneliness, the voice and words were reassuring and consistent, much like the wedding words of Paul. As a runner with a Christian faith but further from being a serious theologian than Blackheath is to The Mall, I had long been considering a book about the impact of running upon what I believe and vice versa, and this third stroke was the right time; a moment of decision when the clock spoke. I didn't hear a voice from God, I never have – but I resolved to make use of the unplanned time-out as an opportunity to bring some strands from my life of running and believing together, using faith, hope and love as the three markers on our course.

First some personal history. Born in 1974, I am old enough to appreciate Commodore as a retro computer brand and would happily Dad-dance in a Subbuteo T-shirt. Stepping back around thirty-five years, I grew up in that age of early video-gaming with a console the size of a small suitcase, when one of the earliest arcade games had two thin lines (or pixelated rackets) which could be height-adjusted using a wheel on a controller to make a small square ball rebound back and forth across the screen. This clumsy game of table tennis, called 'Pong', was first released by Atari in 1972, appearing predictable until you got good at it, at which point you could adjust your speed to impact the angle of ricochet in order to defeat your opponent. It was basic, repetitive and one of the hottest games on the market. I was very competitive as a child, equipped with the fiery temperament that some believe comes with red-heads, and with a fellow sports enthusiast for an older brother, we Ponged all summer; I wanted his scalp and grew desperate to perfect the angles off my racket.

Our lives consist of events which cause a reaction, choices we face, and often we find our angle on faith being adjusted as we rebound from their impact. The older we get, the less like a game it feels; things matter more, we believe in less but hold to what remains more passionately. But I invite you to grab the other controller and enter this rebounding world with me because I believe that faith, hope and love each have something to say to one another as we explore how movement in one can adjust our angle of approach to the next. And I feel very grateful for this triangle, not least because it keeps me on my toes like that prehistoric video game. Just as a birth certificate does not prove we are truly living, hospital heart monitors have

recently reminded me that flatlined faith is one where no life is evident. My faith feels as though it is, like C.S. Lewis's Aslan, on the move.³ It has been tried and tested, rebounded and informed, and it feels more alive than ever before. A blue line is being discovered for this spiritual marathon which I cannot run from. Conversely, I may wish to run quickly, as I have become accustomed, but its discovery will not allow me. Tempo is traditionally only of real interest to elite athletes because it represents speed and efficiency, qualities which seem to work against a life of faith, where so much is unseen and patiently awaited.

I want to return again to our three-word triangle through the eyes of Paul. Before concluding with the three remaining priorities of faith, hope and love, the apostle had heard of various problems in the church in the Greek city of Corinth which he had once visited, particularly with the visible outworkings of spiritual gifts. I recognise the quick wins of the visible gifts he lists: speaking in tongues, prophecy, giving to the poor and knowledge. Everybody *notices* these. They are loud gifts. Faith, hope and love, on the other hand, are quiet gifts; their power is unspoken until a life responds, because their volume is only increased when they are personally embodied; actions voicing my outlook upon God and others.

Paul places love at the height of our triangle as the greatest of the three, and he is clear that there is nothing to be gained in the enactment of gifts if love is not present. If you, like me, have spent many years of good intention within the church but became distracted by the approval and recognition to be gained from the use of loud gifts, it is likely that love will have been lost somewhere along the way. You did not mean to, just like you did not mean to drop your car keys in the dark. What we

know to be essential is so often misplaced beneath the mounting pile of urgent tasks that appear equally important. So, the blue line must take on this essential characteristic of love; the way in which we must walk and a way in which we must know God. There will be no short cuts, no personal bests (PBs) to be gained, no applause from the crowd, simply the aim to reconnect with our purpose to know God, to know love.

I promised to share weakness, and us runners always have bad races. To date, my worst was the Bupa 10k around London in 2013. The race organisers had erected a PA system just in front of Buckingham Palace as we assembled along The Mall. I had been out late the night before at a concert and not had much sleep, but as the announcer welcomed us all and acknowledged Sir Mo Farah CBE leading the field on a beautiful summer's morning, I was expecting to run well under 45 minutes. In spite of such elite company, seductive weather and scenery, I felt quietly focused and was clear on my pacing strategy, until disaster struck with the starter's siren. The PA system belted out the Queen classic 'Don't Stop Me Now', at which point I disengaged from any game plan and just shot off like the rabbits in neighbouring St James's Park. I don't remember much about the first few kilometres, just being dangerously pumped on life in this convergence of beauty, community and music (always my weaknesses). Silly man.

My composure absent, it was around halfway that I began to suspect I was in trouble. My normal rhythm was not there, I felt laboured and had ceased to enjoy the sights of London around me, with my head dropping lower and lower. I don't give up easily in races, but the run was not enjoyable and became more an act of aggressive will, more mechanical than usual. My target time began to hang over me like a grey cloud

instead of a motivation (although I still had not surrendered this as a possibility), but by the final kilometre I got the worst stitch I can remember and reduced speed significantly. The final 200 metres felt most undignified as I hobbled, bent double, shaping a silhouette of a Picasso cubist figure to the finishing line. I could not even hear the crowd but listened to the pain coming from my stitch, thinking I should probably just walk for safety. My brain began nagging: 'How could you be so foolish? You have a wife and family to support! You should no longer be pushing yourself this hard.' I would not walk, I hobbled in. Medal, race T-shirt and banana followed, but they could not disguise the fact that I was disappointed at my lack of self-awareness and failure to achieve my target for a fast 10k. This was not the ending I had had in mind, but neither was a stroke when my wife and family needed me the most.

Since my own season of leadership concluded, I've done a lot in churches over the years, and their leaders have been very gracious and encouraging towards me; leading the music, preaching, Bible studies, mission trips to rough cities and giving hot chocolate to rough sleepers, but not always with the self-awareness to remain humble. Worse still, when you are good at some of these things and people enjoy telling you, even with the best intentions it can go to your head a little. As a guitarist, I've learned some tough lessons along the way, such as the trap of pushing God off the stage, mistaking the guitar groove for his presence amongst his worshippers and the toxic belief that I am being overlooked and under-used in some places I have ended up. Objectively, I think that there remains a place for pointing out shortfalls in the musical worship we create – that the drummer was too obvious, the amp volume at 11 almost broke the glasses of the people sat in the back row, or

a bit of rehearsal would have helped – so I still struggle to keep my passion for music that enables others to draw nearer to God a secret from my family's lunch table or my closest friends. The big lesson I must learn and re-learn is humility and that the aim for all leaders of musical worship must surely be to disappear; facilitate then evacuate.

This must be something within my character because I used to be the same with preaching; trying to be the next 'big thing', coming up with the best anecdotes, structuring sermons around stories, shoehorning life into texts that could accommodate my latest joke; then, when the material is used and I had been working too hard, in the pragmatic sense, not having anything left to say when I entered the preaching arena the following week. However many times the mistake was made, I would make it, then make it again. Humility and investment in the work of listening to God, making time for God to speak, are disregarded at huge risk for those who need endorsement, and I confess this weakness in me.

So, the disappointments of seeking approval as a church celebrity and the fame of fast, loud, obvious religion dressed up as service, now leave me confronted with the slow place of this triangle which I have come to reluctantly acknowledge as a runner *without* a church to lead. I have to be still in order to know;⁴ to stop my activity if things are to occur to me. Like preparing for a marathon, there must be time invested when no one is looking – difficult for someone like me who thrives in teams or seeks approval. But at the point of this third stroke, there I was once again, lying on my back in King's College Hospital, questioning God, surprised at the absence of karma within Christianity: 'What more can I do, God? I try to be kind to others. I trained as a minister in The Salvation Army,

I led two churches and loved the people with every minute of my life. Don't forget that morning, God, where I stopped on a run and bought three stoned homeless men some cookies in a petrol station with the only change I had in my pocket! You remember, when the guy asked if they were flammable!' Random thoughts bombard the mind when your salvation project is cut short and God's love appears as a cruel joke; our faith crudely jolted like a new driver accelerating only to shift down from fourth into third by mistake, as we lurch forwards yet are held back.

But in this place of ridiculous bargaining and mental bombardment, I did not feel trapped. Taking a deep breath, I knew that there was a quality to the soft perimeter of this triangle. There is no fence keeping me in, I am allowed to wander wherever I please, rebounding between faith, hope and love – three words which won't leave me – before finally, of my own free will, discovering that an available water trough lies at its centre. I always seem to end up at the well, exhausted and parched, sometimes with a stitch, like a racehorse brought into paddock whose deep breath forms clouds of smoke on a crisp winter morning, having given everything on the track. It was at the third stroke that I chose to drink more slowly and remembered that the greatest gift God gives is love.

FOREWORD BY
JOHN PRITCHARD, FORMER BISHOP OF OXFORD

GOD
CALLS
EVERYONE



FINDING OUR PLACE IN HIS
GREAT STORY

DEREK WALMSLEY

God Calls Everyone

Finding our place in his great story

Derek Walmsley



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Foreword

We're used to books on ministry. We're even more used to books on the Bible. What we don't get so often is books that reflect on ministry through the discerning lens of the Bible.

But here we are with one book that does just that. Derek Walmsley has combined the good fruits of his ministry as an experienced Director of Ordinands and Vocations with his evident love of Scripture. He looks at ministry through the many biblical narratives of both Old and New Testaments and enables the reader to place his or her calling in the context of God's evolving, truth-telling word.

It's curious that most books on ministry float above the biblical story, touching down where appropriate to make a connection, but essentially starting from ministerial practice rather than biblical revelation. If the Bible is the core material on which the church bases its life, why would we not want to see our ministries shaped by its wisdom? Derek seeks to reset the balance.

Derek writes with a light touch, deftly combining ancient wisdom with new. His cultural antennae are as sharply attuned as his reading of Scripture. He is well acquainted with the messages, memes and madness swirling around in society today. It's

all grist to the mill for Derek, just as it was for the men (mostly) who kept filling papyrus after papyrus in the Bible's formation, and just as it needs to be for those who want to serve Jesus today. We too need to hold the Bible in one hand and the electronic tablet in the other.

This book is for Christians of every denomination. Anglicans like me are shaped by Scripture, Tradition and Reason, mediated through experience. But the greatest of these (or the base) is Scripture, handled with intelligence and humility. The Bible is not safe; it changes us. But neither is the Bible safe from scrutiny. It's the most complex compendium of writing anywhere, but it's not without apparent contradiction and complexity. It's not God-dictated but God-breathed. It's not for us to tame or control the Bible, but rather it's for us to enter into a conversation with God. And ultimately it's for us to be invited into life in all its fullness.

All this is reflected beautifully in Derek's book. It's for anyone who's trying to listen to God's particular call in their lives, and to discern a ministry, lay or ordained. It's a gift to the whole church, one we receive with much gratitude.

John Pritchard
Former Bishop of Oxford



1

God's Big Story: Overview

As I write this paragraph, I think back to just a few days ago, when I was called upon to explain the story of Genesis in two minutes to a couple of people as we bounced across the Jordanian desert in the back of a 4x4 jeep. As you do.

On several occasions in sermons or in one-to-one conversations, in churches or in pubs, I have given an outline of the whole Bible story in 5 minutes. I'm no longer surprised when people say 'That's amazing!' Not because I'm doing anything complicated or clever, but because people often have no idea of the big picture. They are used to hearing little bits of the whole, without any grasp of how it all fits together. Even in church, Christians often have a diet of two or three short readings followed by a 10-minute sermon.

The chapters that follow will be mostly chronological, though in most chapters about the Old Testament I will be jumping forward to show how the New Testament interprets or fulfils the Old, and I will be showing in particular how *Jesus* fulfils all of the Old Testament. Only in that context will we look at vocation. This means that the Old Testament will appear to be the subject of most of the book, with only a shorter section at the end concerning the New, but in fact we will have

covered quite a bit of the New Testament as we have discussed how the Hebrew Scriptures are fulfilled.

The big story

So what's the big story? Apologies if you already know all this – feel free to move on to the next chapter.

The Bible begins with creation; in fact there are two accounts of this, in chapter 1 and 2 of Genesis. In chapter 3, everything goes wrong as sin enters the world, and this is quickly followed by the first murder. The next significant event is the flood and the story of Noah, followed by the tale of the Tower of Babel.

Then we begin the great story of Abraham and his descendants – his son Isaac and grandson Jacob. Jacob's twelve sons include Joseph, who becomes a ruler in Egypt and rescues the known world from famine, but then we move forward a few hundred years to when Jacob's descendants have become slaves to the Egyptians, and God calls Moses to lead his people out of Egypt. They are now called the Israelites, from the new name God gave Jacob.

Moses leads the Israelites across the Red Sea and through the desert towards the 'promised land' (in those days known as Canaan), but along the way they receive the law from God, including the Ten Commandments. They are also instructed to keep various festivals such as Passover, to remind them of these great moments in their history.

The journey takes forty years as God's people wander around the desert, and Moses dies just before they enter the land, so Joshua takes over. Once they have occupied the land, it is separated into areas for each tribe descended from the twelve sons of Jacob and there is a lawless period as the Israelites colonize what will become Israel, but in the meantime God raises up

temporary leaders (known as 'judges') to lead the people when they are attacked.

Samuel is the last of the judges and first of the prophets. He appoints and anoints Israel's first king – Saul – but Saul proves a failure and David replaces him. David is followed by his son Solomon and the kingdom of Israel is at its height. David and Solomon are said to have written much of the 'Wisdom' literature, especially Proverbs, Psalms, Song of Songs, and Ecclesiastes.

But it goes downhill after that. There is civil war and the kingdom is divided into Israel in the north and Judah in the south. A succession of bad kings rule the two 'nations' until first Israel and then Judah is taken captive by the Assyrians and Babylonians. There are signs of recovery as Ezra and Nehemiah return to Jerusalem to rebuild the walls and the temple, but also stories of God's people surviving and keeping the flame going while in captivity, such as Esther and Daniel. Nevertheless, the Old Testament narrative ends here, only a third of the way through. What about the rest?

The books of Ezra, Nehemiah and Esther are followed in the Bible by the Wisdom books mentioned above. After that come the writings of the prophets, who are people who spoke or acted for God at key moments during the story we have just outlined. Here's where a simple Bible handbook comes in handy, with charts showing where the various prophets come in the historical timeline. The prophetic books are usually divided into the 'major' (the longer ones) and 'minor' (guess). Oddly, although the historical books end with Esther, the books of Daniel and Jonah, which are more narrative than prophecy, are included with the Minor Prophets.

The Old Testament ends with the book of the prophet Malachi, and several hundred years pass before the New Testament

begins to tell us the story of the Jewish Messiah anticipated by the Old Testament. The Old Testament is the Jewish Bible and it was the Scripture that Jesus used. Jesus says that he has come to fulfil 'all the law and the prophets', which is a phrase sometimes used to mean the whole Old Testament. More about what he meant later.

The New Testament has four 'gospels' – Matthew, Mark, Luke and John – which are short biographies of Jesus, each majoring on his death and resurrection. They're followed by Acts – written by Luke as a sequel to his gospel – which tells us all about the beginning and spread of the church, guided by the Holy Spirit. In Acts we hear about Paul and his travels across the Mediterranean countries, planting churches everywhere. Most of the rest of the New Testament is made up of letters written by Paul and a few others, often sent to correct some particular difficulties in the churches he established, but not always.

The final book is Revelation, written by Jesus' friend John in his old age. It is often thought to be all about the end of the world, but that's to misunderstand it. Much of it had contemporary relevance and application, because John's vision was given to encourage Christians suffering persecution under Roman rule.

It's good that we end this introduction with Revelation, because that book in particular illustrates what can go wrong when we begin to interpret Scripture. People will often interpret Revelation as though it was all written about events today or in the near future, but it wasn't. They will also read meanings into the text that are fanciful at best. Once again, this is because they are reading it in isolation and not as part of the big story. We have to allow Scripture to interpret Scripture.

If we read the Bible carefully, we will discover an extraordinary richness as we spot numerous connections and insights. We have 66 little books written by over 40 authors over 2,000+ years that make one extraordinary volume with infinite connections, inspired by God's Holy Spirit. Some people have told me that seeing how it all fits together has been a strong encouragement to their Christian faith. It's complex, but it's a love-letter that asks for a response. That response will be our collective vocation.



FOR REFLECTION

- How well do you know the overall Bible story?

FURTHER READING

Clowney, Edmund P. *Preaching Christ in All of Scripture* (Crossway, 2003).

Fee, Gordon, and Douglas Stuart. *How to Read the Bible Book by Book* (Zondervan, 2002).

———. *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth* (Zondervan, 4th edn, 2014).

Hacking, Stuart. *His Story: The Story of Why We Are Here* (Resource, 2014).

OTHER

There are lots of Bible resources on the web, some more accurate or helpful than others, but in the end there is no substitute for reading the book itself!

- The Bible in 5 minutes and 37 seconds (including about 37 seconds of intro and summary): https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7_CGP-12AE0
- There's a simple text-based Bible timeline at: <https://biblehub.com/timeline/>
- The Bible Society has produced the Bible Course, an eight-session series that's great for groups. Details here: <https://www.biblesociety.org.uk/explore-the-bible/the-bible-course/>
- The Bible Project is a brilliant series of shortish movies uploaded to YouTube. It's a great way to get your head around the whole Bible story and the component books:
 - <https://thebibleproject.com/>
 - https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCVfwlh9XpX2Y_tQfjeln9QA

Rediscovering the heart of life, faith and everything

Our Precious Lives



Why telling and
hearing stories
can save the
church

Foreword by
Alister McGrath

STEVE MORRIS

Our Precious Lives

**Why telling and
hearing stories
can save the
church**

STEVE MORRIS



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Some names have been changed, and some stories are
composites of several narratives, but all come from real life.

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Foreword

Steve Morris's book *Our Precious Lives* is a delight to read, and a testimony of the power of stories to capture minds and change lives. Steve has grasped the way in which the Christian story can make sense of our own stories, show us what has gone wrong, and open the door to God's life-changing grace. His moving telling of his own story is the starting point for a deep, engaging and helpful exploration of how we can make sense of our lives – and help others to do so as well.

The Christian church must never be allowed to lose sight of the fact that the gospels tell the story of Jesus Christ. Too often, the Christian faith is presented as if it is a set of doctrinal boxes to be checked, leaving our imaginations and emotions untouched. Yet Steve does more than commend the power of stories. He shows that he has mastered the art of *telling*

stories – the story of his own life, the gospel story of Jesus Christ, and the story of a church that has lost sight of its roots in that story. As this book makes clear, we *can* and we *must* recover those roots. Steve shows us how it can be done.

I recently wrote a book on narrative apologetics, urging that we rediscover the power of the gospel story. As you'd expect, I've read the literature in the field. Please trust me when I tell you that Steve Morris's *Our Precious Lives* is the best manifesto I have read for Christian storytelling as apologetics. This is an eye-opening and life-changing work, that needs to be devoured and digested by pastors, apologists and evangelists. But most importantly of all, it will enrich the spiritual lives of ordinary Christians, who will gain enormously from this book as they read the Bible, and talk to their friends about their faith.

Alister McGrath

*Andreas Idreos Professor of Science and Religion
Oxford University*

1

First Word

If history were taught in the form of stories,
it would never be forgotten.

Rudyard Kipling, *The Collected Works*

I wonder what is your life whispering to you? Or perhaps it is shouting so loudly that you can't concentrate? It can be hard to escape our own stories, and we sometimes feel harried by them.

We are amazing creatures relying for our day-to-day survival on internal pumps and plumbing, scaffolding and electrics and yet we are more than gene machines.

We are created with a need to make sense of our lives and the lives of others. We are inquisitive and are beset with questions. We are full of stories, and we cannot live without them. Even with the march of evolution we have not outgrown them.

It is as if 'Once upon a time' will not let us go. It has a power over us that seems to be more than just about entertainment.

My life has been changed by stories. The stories I heard from my family helped me to see the struggles we had faced and the resilience we had shown. My school friends' and teachers' stories opened me up to new possibilities and horizons.

Stories today

Organizations have been alive to the power of stories for many decades. Management thinkers have spoken about organizational culture – or the way we do things around here – and that includes the stories an organization tells about itself. The business world knows that in many ways a company or charity or school is only as good as the story it has to tell about it itself and others tell about it.

Stories bind an organization together and give it a uniqueness – often with a founding narrative that speaks through the generations.

It isn't just organizations that understand such things. We are awash with stories. For instance, a TED Talk often begins with a personal story and that story acts as a pointer to orientate what is to come. It is as though we need a story to underpin an idea – to make it personal and to give it credence. In an age when facts are suspect, we need stories to help us to accept a truth.

Perhaps Christians have been a bit slow on the up-take when it comes to stories. This is odd because the founder of our faith tended to speak in short provocative stories. His teaching revolved around parables and the stories told about him revolved

around the plot of his birth, life, death and resurrection. The New Testament reads more like a novel than a manifesto.

Given this, it is surprising that we so often reach for propositional truth to explain what we are about. Alister McGrath delicately makes the point:

If C. S. Lewis and J. R. R. Tolkien are right in their belief that God has shaped the human mind and imagination to be receptive to stories, and that these stories are echoes or fragments of the Christian ‘grand story,’ a significant theological case can be made for affirming and deploying such an approach to apologetics.¹

Our explanations of why we have the ‘truth’ come better as stories than simple propositions. I sometimes wonder if the large banner outside a church with a truth such as JESUS IS LORD may do more harm than good. After all, if we know nothing of the faith or the founder of it, then what are we meant to do with such a bald exclamation? The most obvious response is, ‘Who says so?’

It’s worth wondering what the world would be like without stories – what would our discourse and interactions consist of? A world without stories would be like a world without birdsong.

When a dictatorship begins to take power, it often begins by forbidding certain stories and books. It sometimes seems that oppressors take stories more seriously than we do. The dictators know the power of stories and they want those voices silenced.

Ray Bradbury wrote his science fiction dystopia *Fahrenheit 451*² in 1953. It was at the height of the McCarthy purges and assaults on free speech. Bradbury wrote his little novel on a hired typewriter. He wrote it swiftly and it has remained in print ever since.

In later years he began to distance himself from the notion that the book had a prime motive of exposing McCarthyism. Instead, he said, it was about the mind-numbing effects of the mass media.

451° Fahrenheit is the temperature needed for the paper books are printed on to burn. The novel paints a bleak picture of a society where books are burned and those who read them are killed. Books and the ideas and tales they contain are dangerous.

The book's hero, Guy Montag, is a book-burner turned book-lover.

Fahrenheit 451 still has the power to shock. It is sparsely written, but its vision of a society addicted

to crass TV, zonked out on pills and where suicide is a natural response to the deadness of life seems terribly real.

It is a plea for more stories to be told, for counter-cultural stories to be welcomed and for us to get away from consumerism. It would have been a parable if it had been said 2,000 years earlier by a travelling Jewish rabbi from Nazareth.

So, this short book aims to redress the balance. It is about storytelling and how hearing about a life can open us to the wonders of God and open up ways of living out our mission, which is to love God and to love our neighbour.

A nagging voice

But as I write it, I have a nagging voice – a word of caution that I can't shake off. After all, if I want to write about the subversive power of stories, then I can't go censoring a subversive voice that has developed into an earworm.

What if stories and the art and culture that they are part of is, after all, no real defence against the darkness? Artists themselves have been aware of the seeming fragility of culture to hold back evil.

Florian Illies' charming book *1913: The Year Before the Storm*³ shows a Europe that would have never guessed it was about to be plunged into carnage. In the year before the First World War he paints a story of the artists and cultural icons – Freud, Rilke, Joyce and others. But despite their work and their art, nothing could stop the juggernaut of war. Art is powerless to defeat evil.

One of the greatest and saddest novels about the impotence of culture is Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go*.⁴ As is often the case, the critique of culture has to be done via dystopia. In the novel we see the tragic case of a society where some humans are bred to be organ donors – and to have those organs harvested. They have no real idea of what is at stake or the cruelty that has made them what they are.

The young people who are donors are kept safely away from the sensitivities of the majority population, in special schools. In one school, the head teacher tries to prove that the donors have a cultural sense – that they are more than just organs for others. The youngsters paint.

But the denouement is as chilling as it is all in vain. The cultural value of the donors convinces no one. It is no barrier. It cannot defend them. They are disposable.

We shall have to live with this nagging voice of doubt. Is culture as we know it a product of advanced capitalism, a luxury? Are stories of ultimate importance or no importance at all?

Are stories
of ultimate
importance or
no importance
at all?

This little book is about the power of stories and it is an encouragement to the church to be the place where they are told and heard. In being that place, everything changes and we live out the truth of the incarnation that everyone matters and deserves to be heard. And that includes the lost, the lonely and the marginalized. It also includes the argumentative, the awkward and those who don't agree with your doctrine.

Interestingly, Jesus would have been changed by the stories he heard when he was growing up – from his mates, his extended family and the customers who came into the family business.

Like the rest of us, the Jesus who walked the earth was a storytelling animal. Stories would have formed him and been part of his day-to-day life – part of the fabric of who he was. Perhaps none of us can escape stories – but then, who would want to?

Study questions

1. *My life has been changed by stories. The stories I heard from my family helped me to see the struggles we had faced and the resilience we had shown. My school friends' and teachers' stories opened me up to new possibilities and horizons.*

How has your life been changed by stories? What kind of family stories did you hear that had an impact on you? How has hearing the stories of your friends played a part in your life?

2. *It's worth wondering what the world would be like without stories – what would our discourse and interactions consist of?*

Try to imagine what a world without stories would be like. What areas of life would it affect?

3. *Is culture as we know it a product of advanced capitalism, a luxury? Are stories of ultimate importance or no importance at all?*

Are stories just entertainment? What is the importance of stories and culture? What part do stories play – in the Bible, in our faith and in the world around us?

Prayer

Thank you for the stories that have been part of my life. Thank you that we can tell our stories and listen to the stories of others. Please let us be open to the stories of other people. Lord, please help those who are unable to tell their stories – either because it is too difficult for them or because it is dangerous to do so.

OVERFLOW

A close-up photograph of a clear glass filled with water, overflowing. Water is being poured into the glass from above, creating a dynamic splash and bubbles. The glass is placed on a dark, textured surface, possibly a wooden table. The background is dark and out of focus.

Learning from the inspirational resource church of Antioch in the book of Acts

MATTHEW PORTER

OVERFLOW

**Learning from the inspirational resource
church of Antioch in the book of Acts**

Matthew Porter



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Foreword

Overflow is not another book of ‘how to’ methods of church leadership, although you will find much to equip you in Christian ministry within it. No, this is a book that catches what the Spirit is saying to the church at this time. It calls us to a renewed vision of the Christian life, and local church communities, overflowing with the life and grace of Jesus Christ. Understanding that this is the normal Christian life is a message that God has been bringing to his church through many voices. Now Matthew Porter calls us to take courage in the midst of the challenges of decline and lack of resources to look to the future with hope that God is pouring out a never-ending flow of his power and love and he is inviting us to step into this stream.

The first step into this overflowing life is to believe that it is possible and to begin to long for it. As Antoine de Saint-Exupery famously wrote, ‘If you want to build a ship, don’t summon people to buy wood, prepare tools, distribute jobs and organise the work, rather teach people the yearning for the wide, boundless ocean.’

In *Overflow* Matthew gives us a vision of a church and a life in God to long for that is characterised by boundless, overflowing love, joy, prayer, worship, and generosity. This vision comes

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from a rich engagement with the life of the church in Antioch from the book of Acts. Whenever God does a new thing, it is always a 'new-old' thing in which he reminds his people of who he is and what he has done before, and then says 'let's do it again'. The logic of Acts being included in the canon of Scripture must be that it is written to show us what the church in the power of the Spirit looks like. While we cannot be prescriptive in trying to copy what we read there, because of its unique time and context, I am convinced that it is more than simply a descriptive historical record. Instead it is instructive, giving us a vision to long for and principles to apply and learn from. Through it the Holy Spirit is saying to the church 'it can happen again'. And it is happening. I have the privilege of knowing something of Matthew's story and The Belfrey where he is vicar. I know that this is his lived experience and the stories he shares release faith that this is the life God has for us all and it is happening today.

Once we have begun to believe that this is possible, we then ask the question 'Yes but how?' This is a work of the Spirit and yet there are patterns and principles that we need to understand in order to partner with the Spirit's work. In John chapter 7 we read how Jesus described the overflowing life he was inviting his followers to live; 'Jesus stood and said in a loud voice, "Let anyone who is thirsty come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as Scripture has said, rivers of living water will flow from within them." By this he meant the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were later to receive' (John 7:37-39).

It all starts with the filling of the Holy Spirit and, as with everything that is filled, this starts to flow over the brim. This was the early church's experience from day one at Pentecost as the newly filled believers could not be contained within the

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upper room but spilled out into the streets. The gift of the Spirit was never given simply for the benefit of the individual believer. Too often the charismatic movement has reduced the Holy Spirit to personal experience. He was given to equip believers in seeing the kingdom of God come on earth. As the leaders in the New Wine family, who mentored me in the life of the Spirit, would often say ‘The Holy Spirit is in you, and he wants out’.

It reminds me of a quote from Francis of Assisi: ‘There are beautiful, wild forces within us. Let them turn the mills inside and fill sacks that feed even heaven’. The issue is not that the Holy Spirit lacks power or creativity or that he is absent – he is the wild force within us. The issue is whether we are filled and overflowing with his life and grace. As I prepared to write this foreword I met with K.P. Yohannan, the Metropolitan of the Eastern Believers Church in India. This church has seen more than 1.2 million people come to faith in Jesus Christ in the last few years and is currently planting an average of fifteen new churches every day. When I asked him about how this is happening, he said ‘we don’t tell people to plant churches it just comes from the overflow of God in our lives’. This is what *Overflow* is all about. But KP does train his leaders and members because, while this is a work of the Holy Spirit, it requires our participation. Matthew brings insight into how to take principles from the early church and apply them in our context. Understanding spiritual practices, what John Wesley called ‘the means of grace’, that sustain us in the fullness of the Holy Spirit and allow his grace to flow outwards is key. And fresh patterns of leadership are needed. Much has been written on the five-fold leadership gifts of Ephesians 4:11: apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers. Too often what has

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been written has been technical and organisational. *Overflow* puts flesh on these dry bones and brings to life each gift and helps us to see their contribution to the life of the body of Christ.

My overwhelming emotion as I read *Overflow* was joy. I think that was partly the Holy Spirit rejoicing with my spirit in what I was reading because it is the life we are called to. And it was joy that this is possible, releasing fresh faith in me to believe and live for this again. The joy of the Lord strengthens us and we are going to need his strength if we are to see his church renewed and transformed into the overflowing life he is inviting us into. May this be your experience as you read this timely word to the church.

John McGinley

New Wine Head of Church Planting Development and author



Small Beginnings

Things that grow start small. We often forget this, but it's true. Be it chives, children or churches, things that grow don't start life big. God has designed the world in such a way that living things normally begin with tiny seeds that don't look particularly promising. Yet in that seed is all the potential needed for something fine and strong to develop. This was true of the church in Antioch in the first century AD.

Antioch was a city on the eastern end of the Mediterranean, north of Israel in what was then called Syria. Founded near the end of the fourth century BC, sixteen miles inland and built next to the Orontes River, Antioch was the third largest city in the Roman Empire and a significant trading centre. Now a ruin, it lies near the modern-day city of Antakya in the south of Turkey. It was in this city that a new church community was planted. We read all about it in Acts 11:19–30 where we see four phases of initial growth.

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Phase one: Early evangelistic work amongst the Jews (AD36–41)

Now those who had been scattered by the persecution that broke out when Stephen was killed travelled as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus and Antioch, spreading the word only among Jews (v. 19).

God can use all sorts of things to start a church. The Antioch church, probably begun around AD36, was formed because of persecution. All followers of Jesus at that stage were Jews, based almost entirely in Jerusalem.¹ The Jerusalem church, formed six years previously, had been growing nicely until ‘a great persecution broke out amongst the church in Jerusalem, and all except the apostles were scattered throughout Judea and Samaria’ (Acts 8:1). Some of these Jewish believers went to Antioch and began telling other Jews about Jesus and as a result a small, fledgling church of Messianic Jews was born.

This is all we know of this first phase of church life in Antioch. We’re told nothing else. We don’t know who the first converts were, who its leaders were or what its characteristics were – although it may well have been a mini-version of the church in Jerusalem that we read about in Acts 2:42–47 and Acts 4:32–35.

It’s likely this church didn’t look at first like it had great potential. Most churches are like this when they start. Few would have guessed what the Antioch church would become and the influence it would have.² But the Holy Spirit knew and sparked into life this small new community of believers.

Today all sorts of new churches are being formed across the world. I visited one in 2013 in Burundi, in East Africa. Ferdinand, one of the pastors, introduced me to some of the new

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believers and showed me the small church building they'd constructed on the hillside. He smiled as he told me that from this church they would soon plant a new community in the next village, and then the next and so on. 'I'm praying that in twenty years this church where we stand will be the cathedral – the mother church – of this area.' God had given him a vision of planting churches in his region and he was excited! He felt it was his destiny. I expect it is, as some six years on, many people have started to follow Jesus and a handful of new churches have already been planted. But let's not forget – it all starts small!

Jesus said just this in Mark 4:

Again he said, 'What shall we say the kingdom of God is like, or what parable shall we use to describe it? It is like a mustard seed, which is the smallest of all seeds on earth. Yet when planted, it grows and becomes the largest of all garden plants, with such big branches that the birds can perch in its shade' (vv. 30–32).

Jesus wanted his followers to see the potential in the seed of his good news. Inside is everything needed for vast growth. It's so easy to miss this and see such seeds as insignificant. Seeds also take some time to germinate and grow. New seedlings are vulnerable and not all survive. But those that do can grow surprisingly large. But it all starts small. The Antioch church when it was first planted was not yet the overflowing church it would become, but it had all the potential to be, despite its small and humble beginnings. The Bible says, 'Do not despise these small beginnings' (Zech. 4:10, NLT). From 'these small beginnings' began one of the most significant churches of overflow ever to have existed. It's been left to us in the New Testament

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as a model and a guide of what a church of overflow might look like.

This was phase one of four phases of growth in the church in Antioch.

Phase two: New evangelistic work amongst the Greeks (AD42)

Some of them, however, men from Cyprus and Cyrene, went to Antioch and began to speak to Greeks also, telling them the good news about the Lord Jesus. The Lord's hand was with them, and a great number of people believed and turned to the Lord (Acts 11:20,21).

We now jump ahead about six years. In the intervening period, the Holy Spirit had made clear to the church beyond Antioch that they were not just to reach Jews, but that non-Jews could and should also hear the good news (see the exciting story in Acts 10 of the conversion of Cornelius and his household in Caesarea). In Acts 11 we're told that this news reached Jewish believers in Jerusalem and no doubt beyond, too, with the result that Greeks began to follow Jesus as well. This affected the small church in Antioch, because believers from nearby Cyprus and Cyrene came and began to tell Greeks in the city how amazing Jesus was.

The Bible says that 'the Lord's hand was with them' in this missionary work – referring to God's hand of blessing.³ The Lord honoured and prospered their evangelism as they shared the good news of Jesus to all in the city, not just to one people-group. While all disciples are obediently and continually

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to share the good news of Christ whether we see much fruit or not,⁴ there are times when it feels like God is particularly helping the work and there is obvious and growing fruit. That's what was happening here, with the result that 'a great number of people believed'.

So, the Antioch church began to see significant growth when they began new evangelistic work with other ethnic groups. My friend Mark Miller, who leads Stockton Parish Church, noticed something very similar when a few years ago they opened their doors to Iranian asylum seekers in Stockton-on-Tees. From just one family and a single man eight years ago, many Iranians are now part of the church, most of whom have had life-changing encounters with Christ. Indigenous leadership has emerged with one already ordained and others in the pipeline. Through a warm welcome, faithful preaching and lots of love and care, a wonderful work of God is taking place!⁵

It's interesting that in Antioch it took people from outside the city to start this new phase of growth. That's often the case. It sometimes takes new people, even new leaders with new vision, to enable a church to move from one phase of life to another.

It sometimes takes new people, even new leaders with new vision, to enable a church to move.

When in 2000 I was invited to become vicar of St Chad's Church in Woodseats, Sheffield, the bishop and church council had recognised that it was time for a new phase of church life and they asked the new leader to help lead them into that. I was a young, rather naïve but nevertheless enthusiastic leader who helped take the church into a new season. Over nearly nine years we saw growth in numbers, in maturity, in finances and in community impact. It was not all straightforward or plain-sailing as the church

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changed significantly (and change is never easy!) but it was a good time, and it felt like ‘the Lord’s hand was with’ us. This was particularly the case in Antioch in AD42. As we read of ‘the Lord’s hand’ at work in this growing community we’re not told of the growing pains, but there must have been many, especially as the church began to fill up with non-Jews – people who were culturally very different from the original church. While they were probably pleased to see the growth, we can imagine that this must have been tough for the original congregation of Messianic Jews who no doubt had lots of questions and at times would have found the changes difficult.

In this second phase of initial growth of the Antioch church, the result was not just good growth, but *large* growth! We’re not told any figures, except ‘a great number of people believed’.⁶ This must have been exciting! Momentum picked up, as individual after individual and household after household encountered the risen Christ and became his followers. This was the start of what is sometimes today called *revival*.⁷

Revival is a sovereign outpouring of the Spirit of God, resulting in new followers of Jesus being made and the church growing. This normally results in social transformation as Christ-followers then bring positive change to their families, streets and communities. Throughout history, many great social advances have come as a result of revival.⁸ Revivals have happened in many places over the last 2,000 years.⁹ They are normally precipitated by a number of faithful disciples praying for God to pour out his Spirit. Indeed, this was what Jesus asked the disciples to do after his resurrection (see Acts 1) before the Spirit came in power in Acts 2. It’s likely therefore that during the initial six years of phase one of the Antioch church, the small but faithful Jewish disciples cried out to God

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in prayer for his Spirit to fall in their city. If this was the case, God was now answering their prayers. The nineteenth-century evangelist D.L. Moody knew of this, which is why he said that ‘every move of God can be traced to a kneeling figure’.¹⁰ God loves to answer such faithful and persistent prayers.

This ‘great number of people’ who believed, which Luke refers to in Acts 11:21, are also described as having ‘turned to the Lord’. That’s a good and helpful phrase describing what elsewhere in the Bible is called *repentance*. Repentance is all about change. It means changing your mind with a resulting change of direction. Someone who’s repented was once heading in one direction but now is going the opposite way. It’s a simple but profound picture of coming to Christ and following him. It describes the decision to start a new life, receiving the new identity that Jesus offers, which is sealed in baptism. Repentance and faith go together.¹¹ People believe in Jesus and now follow him and his priorities, rather than any other agenda.¹² In this simple phrase, saying that ‘people believed and turned to the Lord’, Luke is concisely and helpfully describing the heart of conversion. The fact that it was happening to ‘a great number of people’ is a description of revival.

As we seek for a similar work of revival in our day and in our land, so we need to be praying and working to see many believing and turning to the Lord. In York, the city where I live, I’m praying that we would see people every day beginning to follow Jesus.¹³ To be honest, I don’t think we’re seeing that yet, but I’m longing that we will. In the same way that the Lord did such things in places like Jerusalem and Antioch 2,000 years ago, and has done it in many other places since, so it is time for him to visit my city and my region in our day. ‘Come, Holy Spirit’ is my constant prayer.

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So, from ‘small beginnings’ in phase one we find a good-sized and growing church by the end of phase two. But for the church to mature and begin to become a church of genuine overflow, a new phase of growth was needed, guided by new leadership.

Phase three: New leadership under Barnabas (AD43–45)

News of this reached the church in Jerusalem, and they sent Barnabas to Antioch. When he arrived and saw what the grace of God had done, he was glad and encouraged them to remain true to the Lord with all their hearts. He was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and faith, and a great number of people were brought to the Lord (vv. 22–24).

When the church in Jerusalem heard about the revival in Antioch, they would have been excited! They also would have wanted to make sure that all was going well. They knew from experience that such an outpouring of the Spirit needs good leadership¹⁴ not to control, but to guide and lead. So they sent Barnabas.

Barnabas was the nickname of a man named Joseph.¹⁵ He was probably called Barnabas – which means ‘son of encouragement’ – because he was a natural encourager. Some people are like that. While all Christ-followers are called to encourage, some just can’t help bringing encouragement all the time. They exude encouragement! Barnabas had proved his leadership credentials in Jerusalem already. He had generously given the full proceeds of a field to the church and trusted the leadership with the money.¹⁶ He had also been identified as being ‘full of the

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Spirit and wisdom’ and so was chosen as one of seven to serve in the daily distribution of food to widows.¹⁷ He was a Jewish man and, being a Levite – a priestly tribe – by birth, was already trained for leadership, and yet he’d been brought up outside Jerusalem, in Cyprus, where some of those who’d started the revival in Antioch had come from.¹⁸ So it’s possible he already knew some of those leading the Antioch church. As such he would have fitted in nicely in Antioch and was ready to lead.

It’s noteworthy that there’s no record that the leaders already present in Antioch became threatened by Barnabas’s arrival. Maybe this was because his gift of encouragement smoothed the way with them and, as noted, his multiethnic background could have helped too. It’s also probable that the leaders in Antioch needed genuine help and were straining under the pressures of growth, and so were pleased when Barnabas arrived. I’d like to think that he was welcomed and well-received.

As we’ve seen, a new phase of growth often requires new leadership from outside. That was the case now as the church entered phase three of its life. Church authorities today would be wise to learn from this – that although indigenous lead-

Grace is . . . a
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ership is the norm and desire, it’s not always what’s needed in pioneering situations. Sometimes fresh leadership from outside is helpful. This new leadership should, however, tread wisely and carefully. This is what Barnabas does. He arrives, surveys what he sees and takes stock. As he does this, we’re told that ‘he saw what the grace of God had done’ and ‘he was glad’. He saw evidence of God’s grace and he was pleased with what he saw.

‘Grace’ is the biblical word for God’s love. It’s no ordinary love; rather, it’s a love that is undeserved, unconditional and

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unending. It's seen supremely in Jesus Christ.¹⁹ Barnabas knew that God loves pouring out this grace on people and that there is always more grace available. As he heard the testimony-stories of changed lives, he knew these were signs of grace. And the result was that 'he was glad'. His heart was stirred and moved and warmed. He became happy and (as we'll see more fully in Chapter 4) through his character and gifts, helped create a joyful church in Antioch that resulted in overflow.

As Barnabas took up leadership of the church in Antioch, what happened? We're told that 'a great number of people were brought to the Lord'. In essence, the church entered another period of significant growth and, as in phase two, this wasn't just a good number but 'a *great* number of people' (my emphasis). This really was starting to become a significant revival! The Spirit of Jesus was doing a work of real depth and establishing Antioch as an influential church. Barnabas would have known this work of God was for a purpose and that the Lord had greater plans for the city and region.

Growth and influence is God's desire for every church, but many churches fail to achieve their growth potential. There may be all sorts of reasons for this. One of the main jobs of leaders is to lead their church into growth. It was my privilege to play a part in this when I did my curacy training at Christ Church Dore in Sheffield in the late 1990s, and then as leader of St Chad's Church up to the end of 2008. I know from experience that this can at times be very difficult, especially if there are significant voices trying to lead the church in a different direction. Leaders need much prayer, help, strength, support and wisdom.

Growth and
influence is God's
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church.

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Although the Antioch church needed Barnabas's wise leadership, there's no sense that he was the one who made it grow. Rather, he was more steering and nurturing the growth the Lord was bringing.²⁰ Good leaders know this. They know that they can try too hard. As well as under-leading they can over-lead and get in the way of the work the Lord is doing. Learning from his experience in the Jerusalem church, it's likely Barnabas would have sought to do the basics well and to encourage the people. He was a great choice for this, being such an encourager!

Phase four: Growth in discipleship under Barnabas and Saul (AD46–47)

Then Barnabas went to Tarsus to look for Saul, and when he found him, he brought him to Antioch. So for a whole year Barnabas and Saul met with the church and taught great numbers of people. The disciples were called Christians first at Antioch.

During this time some prophets came down from Jerusalem to Antioch. One of them, named Agabus, stood up and through the Spirit predicted that a severe famine would spread over the entire Roman world. (This happened during the reign of Claudius.) The disciples, as each one was able, decided to provide help for the brothers and sisters living in Judea. This they did, sending their gift to the elders by Barnabas and Saul (vv. 25–30).

As the church grew, Barnabas soon realised he needed particular help. He needed not just the aid of those already in the church, important though that was. He needed help from outside. The help of a specialist. And he knew exactly who he wanted.

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Tim Keller, in his masterly paper *Leadership and Church Size Dynamics*²¹ has helpfully shown that as a church grows it becomes increasingly important to bring in specialists with particular gifts. Keller also recognises that there's benefit in headhunting the person you want – someone not just with the gifts needed, but most importantly, the right character. Barnabas instinctively knew this. He wanted an excellent evangelist and teacher whom he could trust, and he could think of no one better than a man from Tarsus called Saul.

This is the same Saul whom the readers of Acts have been introduced to at the end of Acts 7 – who was present at and approved the stoning of Stephen and looked after the coats of those who murdered him.²² It's the same Saul who in chapter 9 has a dramatic encounter with the risen Christ on the road to Damascus and receives an apostolic calling.²³ It's this Saul whom, by AD46, Barnabas thinks is the person needed in Antioch to help nurture the revival that's taking place.

There's a good lesson for leaders here, reminding us that we're not called to be 'Lone Rangers' and lead on our own. It's always about team. We need team. The right team. A complementary team. A unified team.

As we've sought to build team at The Belfrey, we recognised that it's best, if possible, to include a variety of gender, personality, experience and gifts in the mix. Our team balance may not always look precisely as we wish, but it's good to pray and ask the Lord for exactly the people on team that he desires, who will advance the apostolic mission of the church. This is what Barnabas was seeking when he went to find Saul.

Why Saul? It's probable that Barnabas was good at encouraging, nurturing and pastoring those who were already believers (see Chapter 4). He was also good at teaching (see Chapter 6).

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What he required was another teacher to work with him, but also someone with other gifts too, particularly gifts of *evangelism*. He needed an evangelist (see Chapter 7) who could continue the work already taking place and train, strengthen and equip the church for further ministry and mission. Saul was the man he wanted. So, he went to Tarsus and found him²⁴ and brought him back to Antioch so that ‘for a whole year’ they together ‘taught great numbers of people’. They poured out their gifts, time, energy and love into the Christ-followers in Antioch. It’s probable (although not stated) that the church continued to grow in numbers and strength. What we certainly know is they ‘taught great numbers of people’. We don’t know exactly how they did this, but certainly God was establishing a strong and strategic work in Antioch, preparing it for the mission base it was to become. The Holy Spirit was pouring himself into this church, through Barnabas and Saul, so the church could then pour out into others. They were being prepared for overflow.

I wonder if Saul needed much persuading to go to Antioch. It’s hard to know. He certainly was not frightened of travelling, hard work or opposition. During his significant God-encounter during his conversion, the Lord had called him to a work which he knew would be rewarding but difficult. He discovered this to be true straight away as he preached in Damascus but then had to escape for fear of his life. He then went to Jerusalem only to find that his preaching resulted in some wanting to kill him,²⁵ before he moved to Arabia.²⁶ It seems Saul then spent further time in Damascus and Jerusalem again before ending up back in his home town of Tarsus, where he stayed probably for around ten years, learning to preach the gospel, probably seeing some conversions and maybe even

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starting some churches.²⁷ It's in Tarsus where Barnabas found him in AD46. Maybe Saul had heard about the revival in Antioch and was pleased to be invited to join in. Certainly Saul and Barnabas already knew each other, and were probably friends, as it was Barnabas who bravely vouched for him soon after his dramatic conversion – when others were unsure of his authenticity – taking Saul to the apostles in Jerusalem.²⁸ So maybe Saul was pleased now to be invited to work in partnership with his old friend, now in Antioch. In any event, the work was so exciting and significant it must have been a wonderful and formative experience for both of them, as the Lord used them and developed them as disciples and leaders.

It was during this fourth phase of growth that the Antioch church had its first recorded experience of prophets and prophecy (see Chapter 5). Prophecy is saying what God says. It's sharing a particular word in season from God. Kris Vallotton, who has a significant prophetic ministry today, describes prophecy like this: 'God's voice is always around you; you just need to learn to "tune in" to His wavelength. To do that, you need the gift of prophecy, which will equip you to tap into the spirit realm that surrounds you even though you can't hear it with your naked ear. The gift of prophecy is like a radio received from Heaven.'²⁹ The Archbishop of York, John Sentamu says that 'God loves to speak to us. We need to be still and, like a radio, learn to tune in'.³⁰

During this time when Barnabas and Saul were teaching great numbers of people, some prophets came from Jerusalem, sharing messages from God. One of them, a man called Agabus, accurately predicted that a famine was coming – which indeed came 'during the reign of Claudius'. As a result of this prophetic word, the Antioch church decided to collect a

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generous gift to help the church struggling in Judea, which Barnabas and Saul then took to the elders in Jerusalem.³¹ So it's likely that, amongst other things, Barnabas and Saul had taught the disciples in Antioch to be generous. To give. When we give as a response to God's overflowing grace, the Lord gives more than enough, so we can give again (see Chapter 3). This is what Barnabas had seen in Jerusalem. It's what he'd been part of as he gave away his field. And it's what the Antioch church now did in response to the famine. They gave. The church in Antioch was now beginning to understand what it was to be an overflowing church.

The Antioch church didn't start off as a church of overflow. It took time as it grew, moved through various phases of church life and took on particular characteristics of overflow. In the coming chapters we'll look at some of these characteristics in more detail, beginning with one of its most basic but important features – being a people who prioritise worship, prayer and fasting.

Application: Growing a church of overflow

Questions for disciples and church leaders to consider from this chapter:

1. Which of these four phases of church life best represents where your church finds itself at present?
2. 'Do not despise these small beginnings' (see Zech. 4:10, NLT). Are there signs of 'small beginnings' in your church, or an area of work in which you're involved? How can you encourage growth?
3. Are you being called to a new church to lead (or help lead) them into a new phase of church life? What have you learned from the example of Barnabas, as he took the Antioch church into phase three?
4. Do you need to headhunt a specialist (like Barnabas found Paul) in order to help your church grow in discipleship and numbers?
5. What do you learn from the Antioch church, that will help you become more of a church of overflow?



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