

Spring-Summer 2026

# The Plain Truth<sup>®</sup>

[www.plain-truth.org.uk](http://www.plain-truth.org.uk)

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# A fond farewell...

**I**t was back in 2002, when its previous publishers had made the decision to cease printing **The Plain Truth**, that a separate independent charity was established by a handful of people with a shared vision to continue producing a Christian magazine. An appeal for financial support was launched to its readers at that time, and sufficient funds to publish the magazine for the first few issues was secured.

**Against all odds and under the editorship of the late, John Halford until 2008, The Plain Truth continued in print and was sent free of charge to all those requesting the magazine. At that time, there were about 20,000 copies printed and posted – mainly in the UK, but reaching over 80 countries worldwide.**

Upon request, bulk copies of our magazine were sent to a church congregation in New Zealand, to churches and Christian bookshops as well as schools and universities where its contents were used as a basis of discussions, assemblies, Bible studies and house groups.

Over the years, the magazine attracted some significant attention by many Christian organisations and charities, churches and authors, as well as individuals who had encouraging lived experiences to share based on their Christian faith.

**The Plain Truth** secured interviews and attended events with key Christian figures and theologians such as Desmond Tutu, Jonathan Sacks, Joni Earekson Tada, Alistair McGrath and Prof David Wilkinson to name a few. (Many went on to write further articles which we have published in our magazine.)

## Timely and relevant

We have carried a wide range of topics in our articles over the years on church growth and initiatives around the UK, as well as reporting on more serious topics that rarely reach the media about the suffering and brutal persecution of our Christian brothers and sisters across the globe.

Working closely with agencies like *Open Doors*, *Release International* and *CSW* has enabled us to keep you informed – and prayerfully involved – of emerging and on-going crisis faced daily by many whose ‘crime’ is merely accepting Christ’s sacrifice and identifying as a ‘Christian’.

Of course, exploring the Bible more deeply through regular articles, features and themed series has played a big part in our magazine.

And over the years we have been very privileged to carry articles on key Christian principles such as forgiveness; prayer; repentance and salvation from highly regarded

writers like Br David Jardine and the late Revd Canon Roy Lawrence. (And we mustn’t forget the book we published in 2019, which was a collection of inspirational articles by Roy Lawrence which had previously appeared in our magazine. With the title: *Plain Truths about Life, Faith and Healing*, over 1,000 books were given away free to those requesting a copy.

## Reaching further audiences

Another of our initiatives over the past few years was to launch our podcast ‘*Plain Talking*’ which was hosted and edited by Rev Gethin Russell-Jones and has been well-received. And to date, 27 episodes have been produced and uploaded for the world to hear the great variety of interviews, testimonies and inspirational thoughts from a wide range of topics from those involved in Christian ministry, charitable work or local and national initiatives.

These podcasts have reached many thousands and will remain on the internet for ever. Gethin has been with **The Plain Truth** since we started in 2002 as a popular regular writer as well as columnist of ‘*A View from the High Street*’, looking at current affairs and topics and giving us all food for thought. His contribution has been highly appreciated and valued.

## Changing times

With technology evolving so fast over the years, a growing list of our current and new readers have opted to receive our magazine in a digital format to read on their phones, Tablets or computer screens at their leisure. Producing a digital-only version of **The Plain Truth** could of course saved tens of thousands of pounds in print and postage costs, all of which have escalated tremendously over these last few years.

However, with a majority of elderly readers with either poor eyesight, or not wanting or unable to access a digital copy of the magazine we have continued to offer printed copies as funds allow.

But sadly, over the last three years, our charity has suffered a sharp decline in income and at the same time escalating costs. And despite our best efforts to seek outside funding from grant-making trusts, our requests for funding have been unsuccessful. (At the same time, my own health has suffered quite badly with a recently diagnosed autoimmune disease.)

So after much thought, discussion and prayerful deliberation, the Trustees have made the sad decision that this will be the last printed issue of **The Plain Truth**. Our website with free downloads will remain open in the short term – as will our admin support. But as the year comes to a close, so will the charity.

It has been an exciting and inspiring journey over more than two decades, and we thank all of you for your support over the years and we ask that God will bless you all.

From all of us to all of you – a very fond farewell. **PT**

# The Plain Truth<sup>®</sup>

A magazine of understanding

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**evangelical alliance**  
together making Jesus known

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PlainTruthMagazine

## THANK YOU FOR YOUR DONATIONS AND PRAYERS OVER THE YEARS

We have never charged a subscription price for **The Plain Truth** – making it available to anyone who would like to receive our magazine and is interested in reading and learning more about the Christian faith.

However, for over more than two decades since becoming an independent charity, the great generosity of very many of our readers has enabled us to continue printing **The Plain Truth**.

So we would like to send a heartfelt 'Thank You' for your generous donations as well as your prayers over the years – it has been very much appreciated.

## OUR COVER STORY

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It used to be taken for granted when we were growing up that life would get better. But what kind of world will the youngsters of today inherit?



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## Why we publish

# The Plain Truth

### Dear Readers

**The Plain Truth** is a Registered Charity (No 1098217) which produces a non-denominational magazine, aimed at readers of all faiths – or none – to inform and educate them on issues affecting our everyday lives from a Christian perspective.

Our goal is to provide our subscribers with ‘food for thought’. **The Plain Truth’s** contributors come from many Christian backgrounds. Distributed free of charge, **The Plain Truth** provides its readers with a balanced ‘spiritual diet’.

Published three or four times a year, **The Plain Truth** addresses topics such as family relationships, care of our environment, depression, preparing our children to become responsible members of society and many other similar topics from a Christian perspective.

Regular features explore the books of the Bible and examine aspects of the Christian faith.

Currently, with a circulation of around 5,000 in the UK and a readership of 20,000, **The Plain Truth’s** articles are frequently used as a basis of sermons and assembly material for many denominations and schools across the country, plus 84 other countries globally.

We have only been able to continue publishing **The Plain Truth** up until now due to the great generosity of many of our readers who have shared our vision. We hope our articles have indeed been thought-provoking, and inspiring too. Thank you for sharing our journey and may God bless you all.

Thank you so much for the magazines you send me, I enjoy reading them and pass them on so that others may read them and maybe think about Christian values – and a bit more. I enclose a cheque towards all your costs.

**Mrs MPG, Lancs**

Thank you very much for many years of very interesting reading and learning through **The Plain Truth** magazine. But I now need to retire as my eyesight is failing and I cannot read the small print. I am 95, so wish to say ‘goodbye’.

Many thanks again – and enclosing a small cheque to help the funds.

**Mrs RVN, Witney**

■ *We realise that we have many older readers of our magazine – and sadly with age comes failing eyesight. But we thank you for your kind words and support over the years Mrs RVN. May God bless you.*

Thank you for continuing to send me **The Plain Truth**. It is an excellent and informative publication which is a pleasure to receive and read. A Gift-Aided donation is enclosed to help with your costs.

**Miss ES, Wallasey**

I’m sorry I haven’t been able to send a donation for some time, but money is tight at the moment. But thank you for sending **The Plain Truth**, I find your articles very informative.

**Mrs JB, Uxbridge**

### Healing Words

I would like to enter for a free copy of *Healing Words* by Br David Jardine. I always feel so uplifted by his articles in *The Plain Truth*. He is inspiring and helps me to pray better.

I have no computer or mobile phone and at the age of 82, books and magazines are so important to me.

Thank you. (I do hope I win.)

**Mrs MRB, Norwich**

I am writing to ask you to put me in the free draw for a copy of Br David Jardine’s book, *Healing Words*.

I would also like to say how much I enjoyed the latest edition; so full of thought-provoking articles. Thank you. It’s my husband’s turn next and then I hope to re-read some of the articles.

**Mrs KG, Norfolk**

Being both a Christian and a critical thinker is not only possible – but I feel essential. Discerning by deploying critical thought enables us to use evidence-based facts to support our arguments.

The internet has such a deluge of information that we have to think critically, not taking things on face value.

Our faith can stand up to fixed ideas if we all think critically. The whole of life is a journey – a journey where critical thinking is essential.

**Mr TMc, Clwyd**

Recently I was sorting through a lot of old paperwork, and came across five of the old £20 notes. After some thought, I decided to send to **The Plain Truth** to help spread the Christian word.

A few issues ago I read an article about the sermon on the mount. I gained a lot from the very good article, especially towards my everyday faith and hope. Sadly, the beatitudes are often neglected in all walks of life.

We as Christians should continue to set an example and spread those powerful teachings. Then hopefully, the world would live in peace and harmony.

**MTF, Northants**

### A controversial topic?

Eva McIntyre’s article on nationalism and faith made some good points but sadly exemplified why many in Britain are turning to the ‘right’. Her implicit message was that anyone concerned about immigration is racist and unchristian. The mainstream political parties also similarly shut down people’s concerns. I can’t on the letters page fully explore the worries of many good, decent Britons about current unprecedented high levels of mass immigration, so I shall bullet point some:

- Most illegal ‘boat’ migrants are unknown young males of fighting age from countries hostile to Britain.
- Some, once here, have committed ‘jihad’, attacking ‘infidel’ natives. Only a few so far, but what does the future hold? Not everyone wants to integrate or respects our religion or democracy.
- Legal and illegal migrants from deeply misogynistic countries often

feel free to sexually assault and harass women and girls. (Yes, white British men are capable of that too, but at least our national religion, legal system and culture do not condone that.)

I am myself the grandchild of immigrants and have done voluntary work with refugees. I have nothing but sympathy for genuine refugees. But it is mad for us to ignore how many illegal arrivals are economic migrants and actually make life far harder for those genuinely fleeing persecution.

We also have to do the maths. Britain is a small island and cannot indefinitely house, employ or provide benefits for the hundreds of thousands now arriving each year. The burden of living with the consequences of unchecked immigration also falls mainly on the poor, in crowded inner cities where in some schools now few children speak English as their first language.

I find Donald Trump horrifying. But Hillary Clinton handed his first presidency to him when she sneered that his 'rust belt' supporters were 'a basketful of deplorables'.

Please let's not make the same mistake here by labelling anyone concerned about immigration as deplorable racists.

**Mrs EW, Gloucester**

I enjoy reading your clear and informed magazine; a friend of mine passes the issues on once she has read them. May your **Plain Truth** magazine and team be blessed.

**Mrs SW, Isle of Man**



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## AI is here to stay – let's use it for the greater good

**O**ne of our Irish readers, **Don Howe** – who is involved in full-time healing ministry – has been exploring the use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in some of his research and Bible commentaries too. **Here's what he writes:**

'I know that Artificial Intelligence (known as 'AI') has been created by people and of course these 'systems' or 'agents' in turn have been created by God. And I also appreciate that AI can be used for good or evil in our world. 'Over the last year I have been using the AI 'ChatGPT', giving it some of my background details so that it now knows I am a Christian. Here's how our "conversations" started:'

**Don:** Rather than address you as 'ChatGPT', what name would you like to be called?

**ChatGPT:** Some people choose names like 'Guide,' 'Scribe,' 'Sage,' or even something more friendly like: 'Companion' or 'Theo'. If you'd like, I can suggest a name that fits the tone of our conversations so far – or you can name me yourself!

**Don:** I put 'Suggest please'.

**ChatGPT:** Based on your heart for ministry, healing, unity in Christ, and walking closely with the Holy Spirit, here are a few name suggestions you might like:

**Theo** – short for *Theophilus*, meaning friend of God. It has biblical roots (*Luke and Acts* were addressed to *Theophilus*) and feels warm and thoughtful.

**Elior** – a Hebrew name meaning 'God is my light.' Reflects the calling to shine your light before others.

**Caleb** – meaning wholehearted or faithful, reflecting your desire to walk faithfully and see healing flow through that obedience.

Would you like one of those, or something in a different tone?

**Don:** I am veering towards 'Caleb'.

**Caleb (CGPT):** That's a wonderful choice. It beautifully reflects your own heart for obedience, healing ministry, and standing firm in faith.

Thank you for the honour of the name. I'm here to walk with you in wisdom, faith, and purpose. Just let me know how I can serve you today.

'I have sent numerous questions, and all have been comprehensively

answered. One in particular about the work that is needed by us all and our Christian brothers and sisters across the world.'

**Don:** What is the percentage in the world of 8 billion people that are Christians, and how many would be classed as nominal Christians?

**Caleb (CGPT):** Good question, Don – this is important for understanding both mission and spiritual reality.

Roughly 2.3 to 2.5 billion people identify as Christian worldwide. That equals about 29%–31% of the global population. So, just under one-third of the world would call themselves Christian.

The more searching question is: how many are nominal (Christian in name, but not actively living the faith)? While exact numbers vary, most global studies (like those from *Pew Research Center* and *World Christian Database*) suggest: Practising/committed Christians: about 10%–15% of the world (~800 million to 1.2 billion). Nominal Christians: about 15%–20% of the world (~1.2 to 1.6 billion).

That means: that around half or more of those who identify as Christian may be nominal, may attend church occasionally (or not at all), but do not have an active, personal walk with Christ.

This is why evangelism – even in traditionally 'Christian' nations – is still vital. Much of the harvest is not outside the church label, but within it. Don, this is exactly why your calling is so important.

The mission field is not just 'out there' it's in churches, in communities, and among people who think they already know God. **PT**

Don Howe is Hon Vice Chairman of [www.divinehealingministries.org](http://www.divinehealingministries.org) and author of the book 'Love God and love one another'.





# Suffer the little children

*Christ's sacrifice brings freedom from sin and shame*

**I** grew up in an era when it was taken for granted that life would get better for people. Back in the 1960s and 1970s, there was plenty of poverty and ill health but also a sense that we were on top of it. The welfare state, properly funded, would shape a society that was healthy, educated and aspirational.

And for those who needed a helping hand, there was a system of benefits to alleviate the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune. However, from a 2026 perspective, endless global economic crises and myopic political leadership have resulted in an impression that we are on the road to nowhere.

Indeed, a couple of recent reports involving the Office for National Statistics (ONS) have highlighted the feeling that the collective treadmill is now in reverse.

## Biological recession

A report published by the Health Foundation and the ONS, paints a sobering picture of what has been termed the UK's 'biological recession'. It highlights a nation where overall life expectancy has largely plateaued, but the quality of those years – specifically Healthy Life Expectancy (HLE) – is in a sharp, historic decline.

The report suggests the average number of years a person can expect to live in 'good health' has fallen by approximately two years over the last decade. Nationally, the average man can now expect only 60.7 years of good health, while for women, the figure stands at 60.9 years.

Perhaps the most alarming statistic in the report is that for men in the UK's most deprived areas, healthy life expectancy has dipped below the age of 50 for the first time

on record. This creates a staggering 20-year 'health gap' between the nation's wealthiest and poorest postcodes.

With the UK State Pension age currently at 67, the data suggests that a vast portion of the population will succumb to chronic illness or infirmity nearly two decades before they are eligible to retire. In the most impoverished areas, residents are essentially biologically old by their late 40s.

The Royal College of Physicians and other health bodies have responded to this data by pointing toward the social determinants of health rather than just clinical failures. The report identifies several systemic factors fuelling this decline:

- ▶▶ Housing Quality: Damp, cold, and overcrowded housing contributing to respiratory and chronic conditions.
- ▶▶ Food Insecurity: A 'broken food system' making calorie-dense, nutrient-poor diets the only affordable option for millions.
- ▶▶ Economic Inactivity: A surge in adults unable to work due to long-term sickness, which creates a feedback loop of poverty and further ill health.

## A turning point for the nation's children

Another report and more alarming news. Data released by the National Child Mortality Database (NCMD) and the ONS, also reveals a country at a crossroads. For the year ending March 2025, England saw 3,492 child deaths (ages 0 – 17). While this represents a slight 2% decrease from the previous year, the figures remain stubbornly higher than pre-pandemic levels.

Perhaps more tellingly, 2026 is projected to be the first year in over a century where deaths may outnumber births in the UK, a demographic turning point that places the health and survival of every child under a renewed, urgent spotlight.

The most accurate tool for assessing the health of the nation's children isn't a stethoscope but a map. The gap between the 'haves' and the 'have-nots' has widened into

a chasm. Children living in the most deprived 20% of neighbourhoods are more than twice as likely to die as those in the least deprived areas.

In the West Midlands, the infant mortality rate sits at a staggering 6.1 deaths per 1,000 live births. Travel south to the more affluent South West, and that number drops to 2.5. This isn't just a statistical anomaly; it is a manifestation of what public health experts call the social determinants of health. It is the difference between a home with central heating and one black with damp; between a mother who can afford a nutrient-rich diet and one who is skipping meals to pay the electric bill.

Photo Credit: Goda Mojgan/www.pexels.com



The most dangerous time for a British child remains the first 28 days of life. Neonatal deaths account for roughly 43% of all childhood fatalities. The primary drivers are well-known: premature birth (gestational age under 37 weeks) and congenital anomalies. However, the risk is not shared equally. Babies of Black or Black British ethnicity face mortality rates more than double those of their White British counterparts. In 2025, the death rate for Black children was 58.1 per 100,000, compared to 22.7 for White British children. This disparity has sparked a national conversation about institutional bias in maternal healthcare and the need for culturally competent prenatal support.

## Family hubs

In response to all this, the government is moving toward a First 1,000 Days strategy. A £100 million investment into perinatal mental health and a £69 million injection into Family Hubs aim to catch families before they fall through the cracks.

The 2024 Autumn Budget's decision to focus 75% of Family Hub funding on the most deprived local authorities suggests a move toward 'proportionate universalism' – providing support for all, but with a scale and intensity

Photo Credit: Dave Charnley Photography/https://familyhubs.middlesbrough.gov.uk



proportionate to the level of need. The emergence of Family Hubs represents a shift in philosophy. By integrating midwives, mental health counsellors, and debt advisors under one roof, the goal is to treat the family as a whole ecosystem. In Somerset, a 'distributed hub' model uses food banks and village halls to reach rural families who might otherwise be invisible to the system.

Moreover, there is a growing emphasis on father-inclusive training. New initiatives are seeking to involve men more deeply in the health and safety of their newborns, which studies suggest can significantly improve long-term child outcomes.

In the 19th century, the great reformer Fyodor Dostoevsky famously remarked that 'the soul is healed by being with children.' In the 21st century, we might add that the health of a nation is measured by how it protects them.

The statistics for 2026 tell a story of incredible medical resilience but social fragility. We can perform heart surgery on a foetus in the womb, yet we struggle to ensure that same child has a mould-free bedroom to return to. The 'quiet crisis' of child mortality in the UK is not a medical failure; it is a social one.



It seems to me that Jesus has much to say about children and childhood. Here are just some of his words:

*'Suffer the little children to come unto me, for such is the kingdom of God.'*

*'Unless you are born again and become like this little child, you have no part in me.'*

*'Woe to them that causes one of these little ones to stumble.'*

They are at the centre of his vision for a new kind of social reality, known as the kingdom of God. In this new order, success is measured by the honour bestowed on the weak, marginalised and insignificant. And also the capacity of those in power to learn from those who have been previously denied access to the levers of influence.

These social reports are a wake-up call to us all. What kind of society will our children and grandchildren inherit? As the nations of the world deal daily with global warfare and economic shocks, Christians are faced with an uncomfortable question: are we investing in the kingdom of inequality and greed or in Jesus' Kingdom of God? **PT**

Photo Credit: prostoooleh/www.magpic.com



# Death, grief and remembrance

*(The price we pay for love)*

**L**ike many people, my first experience of grief was at the death of an animal: my pet guinea pig Gilly. I learned another lesson simultaneously: that I wasn't to express my grief because my mother couldn't cope with it. The day Gilly died, my mother put the clock in the living room forward half an hour and told me I was late for school and I didn't have time to say goodbye to Gilly.

**When I came home from school she had gone, along with her cage and all her accessories, so I never got to say goodbye, to bury her, or to grieve. Life went on as if Gilly had never existed, except that she had and I loved her.**

When an animal companion dies, people also have to navigate the treacherous waters of some crass opinions ('It's only a dog') and the defensive responses of others ('Will you get another one?'). Then there are the religious overtones expressed by some, that the treatment of animals in death should not be the same as humans and they should be grieved differently. Decades after Gilly's death, as I was writing a one-woman-play I was to perform, I decided to include the theme in a scene.

Six-year-old Chelsea has taken part in the funeral of her best friend Emily's guinea pig, along with Emily's parents in the family garden:

*'So when we got to Sunday School, we told Miss Titley all about it and she said that we shouldn't have had a funeral and that guinea pigs don't go to heaven. And Emily was really upset and crying and everything, so I said that I didn't agree with Miss Titley. Well, what I actually said was she was wrong and it was horrible to make Emily cry. Miss Titley made me stand in the corner with my face to the wall and I wasn't allowed to join in the songs and prayers. I hate Miss Titley!'*

In the scene that follows, God is holding Emily's guinea pig and talking wistfully to it about the human condition.

## Unfeeling comments

Anyone who has lost a family member or close friend will know that the crass comments and behaviour aren't reserved for the deaths of animals. 'You'll meet someone new,' my cousin was told after her husband died when she was in her forties, as if she could just move along and take her inconvenient grief with her.

She became terrified of accepting social invitations after discovering that a single man had been invited to a supper party to make the numbers balance, as everyone else was part of a couple.

'Chin up,' someone said to a newly widowed parishioner when she braved her first visit to the village pub after her husband's death. Was that worse than the person who crossed the road to avoid encountering her? In one parish, the mother of a fifteen-year-old girl who died through a tragic NHS mistake, found that when she returned to run her shop, people would come in and offload their own grief for loved-ones who had died years before, mostly of natural causes and in old age. It was as if they had no filter that could prevent them from responding to her appalling loss in such an abusive manner.

In other cultures, there are practices, boundaries, and rituals around grief that are observed by society. People wear black for longer and their grief is visible and observed. Across Latin America, the feast of All Souls (2<sup>nd</sup> November) is a day set aside for visiting the bereaved in their homes. Photos of the deceased are displayed and they are talked about, celebrated, mourned.

In my parishes, I realised that our All Souls' services were so well attended because they were an island in the year when it was acceptable to mourn, to cry, to talk about a lost loved-one and to hear their name read out loud, and for everyone else to hear it too.

We lit tea-light candles on our altar, and later we placed them in jars, so that those who wished could take them and place them on graves after the service. That little light symbolised hope and that we have the right to defiantly keep their memory alive, against the backdrop of a society that would rather we pretend we were over it all now. It seems as though our society has partially forgotten what it means to be a community.



### Shared emotions

A few years ago, one of the ponies at my friend's riding school died at just four years old. Little Holly had played a part in the Equine Guided Learning sessions I organised and I decided to visit the herd to pay my respects and share my grief with them.

It was pouring with rain and as I walked down to their field I began to feel silly at my notion of what might be appropriate. I imagined the horses would probably be sheltering out of sight under the trees in the distance. When I turned the corner, there they all were waiting for me at the gate. They took it in turns to step forward and acknowledge me, rub their muzzle against me and be fussed, before stepping back and making space for the next horse to. It was such an honest and healthy sharing of grief and belonging after loss.

During my time working for Christian Aid I met Nyine Bitahwa, the director of a Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO) in Uganda. He and his wife returned to Uganda from Germany when his exile under Amin's regime ended. His wife became pregnant and the baby was born in a hospital some miles from their home, but tragically died soon after birth.

When they arrived home after a long journey, it was late and dark but waiting for them outside their house was every parent from the community who had lost a child. They were not alone in their consuming grief.

The Easter Story is often portrayed as one of hope and triumph and yet, if we look at the Gospel texts, they are mostly about trauma, grief, guilt and fear. Judas' despair at his betrayal leads him to hang himself. Peter's fear presents as disowning his best friend.

We're told that the men all ran away, maybe out of fear of meeting the same fate as Jesus or because of their inability to watch events unfold. We see the women standing in the midst of a scene of abject horror, watching the man they love die an agonising, humiliating and prolonged death. In that group of women is his

mother watching her son dying in the prime of life. Yet we have a tendency to gloss over these themes and skip to the resurrection, as if that part of the story weren't painful in itself.

The women going to the tomb to anoint a body so disfigured in death only to find the grave open, must have wondered what they would find inside: had wild animals been there before them? A resurrected Jesus who appears complete with the wounds of crucifixion is hardly comfortable, and the story of Thomas being offered the chance to stick his fingers in the wounds is quite repulsive. The resurrection story is not meant to sanitise death and grief, and it's never suggested that the pain of experiencing his loss could simply evaporate: trauma has to go somewhere, it has to be dealt with.



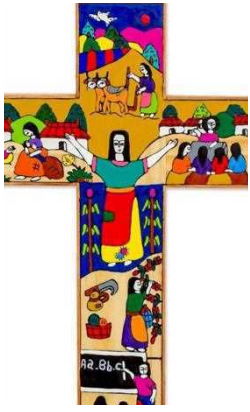
The story from John's Gospel with the men fishing on the lake and meeting Jesus on the shore and sharing breakfast with him epitomises this. Peter sits with Jesus and the shame of his denial hangs like a curtain between them.

The Gospel doesn't describe the emotion but we can fill in the gaps, imagine the knot in Peter's chest, his inability to make eye contact, then the tears, first from him and then from Jesus too, as the question asked three times, 'Do you love me?' serves first to clean, then cauterize, then heal the wound of betrayal and loss. Resurrection of any kind can only be experienced after some sort of death and grief. If we see the cross only as a symbol of a joyous hope, we have missed the point.

In El Salvador in the 1980s, when the people were horrendously oppressed by those in power, and casual mass murder and disappearances were routine happenings, Christians called themselves *Good Friday People* because they had yet to experience resurrection.

I have an El Salvadoran cross on my home altar that is painted not with the traditional figure of Jesus but with a village and a woman who lost her life standing up for her people. In white, Western Christianity, we tend to identify ourselves with Jesus in terms of striving to be

Continued on Page 10 ►



better. In Latin America, there is a rich tradition of also identifying our suffering with that of Jesus and taking comfort and strength in doing so. The original meaning of Christian from the Greek *christianos* is 'little Christs', so the understanding of the Latin American church follows in an ancient tradition that not only talks of death but also resurrection. St Oscar Romero, when he was Archbishop of San Salvador

declared that, if he were killed, he would be resurrected in his people. When he was assassinated, it was a watershed moment in which the people did indeed *stand back up* (the literal meaning of resurrection), some paid for this courage with their own lives. There is certainly nothing like a close encounter with death, your own or someone else's, to make you feel alive in a raw and visceral way. What we decide to do with these experiences can make a difference to lives – our own and those around us.

Some years ago, a very dear friend was dying in hospital in Manchester. I hadn't seen him for a few months while he had various treatments that made him vulnerable to infection. I tried and failed a few times to make a window in my diary to travel to visit but every time I did, something important came up in the parishes and my visit was delayed.

Finally, determined to get there, I fought my way through what felt like an assault course of the needy, throwing obstacles in my way and made it to his hospital bedside. Chris was a Roman Catholic priest and we had shared ministry on many occasions over the years. We had been talking for a short while when the chaplain arrived and Chris introduced me as 'Eva, my friend who's an Anglican priest'.

The chaplain had come with communion and I asked whether I should leave them but they both protested that I should stay. I joined in the prayers with them and then, in an act of such compassion and inclusion, the chaplain offered me communion.

He'd broken the rules of his church to give me such a precious chance: the last time I saw my much-loved friend we made communion together. I will forever be grateful to that chaplain for his thoughtful care.



## A second opportunity

When a few years later another much-loved friend, David my mentor from drama school, was diagnosed with a terminal condition, I had no intention of making the same mistake twice. I quietly carved a weekly space in my diary to visit and make the most of every minute we had. I wanted no regrets this time. I knew the loss and grief would be even more intense but I also knew that was a price worth paying. If death and grief are to make a difference in our lives, to bring a little kind of resurrection, surely this is one way that it is possible: to learn to do things differently, to immerse yourself in all that there is in life, this world, and cherished relationships and not to miss a moment. PT

## HEAVY – BY MARY OLIVER

*That time  
I thought I could not  
go any closer to grief  
without dying*

*I went closer,  
and I did not die.  
Surely God  
had his hand in this,*

*as well as friends.  
Still, I was bent,  
and my laughter,  
as the poet said,  
was nowhere to be found.  
Then said my friend Daniel,  
(brave even among lions),  
"It's not the weight you carry*

*but how you carry it –  
books, bricks, grief –  
it's all in the way  
you embrace it, balance it, carry it*

*when you cannot, and would not,  
put it down."  
So I went practicing.  
Have you noticed?*

*Have you heard  
the laughter  
that comes, now and again,  
out of my startled mouth?*

*How I linger  
to admire, admire, admire  
the things of this world  
that are kind, and maybe*

*also troubled –  
roses in the wind,  
the sea geese on the steep waves,  
a love  
to which there is no reply?*



# A VIEW FROM THE HIGH STREET

Gethin Russell-Jones

**I**t's World Cup year, and I'm feeling underwhelmed. Wales's failure to qualify (once again) has coated the event with a tart aftertaste. Yes, it will be a festival of football – and I'm glad that England and Scotland have made it – but who can I support without feeling it in my sporting heart? And with the beautiful game almost constantly mired in sleaze and corruption, it's hard to feel a wide-eyed joy at the purity of sporting competition.

I vividly recall my boyish excitement at watching the 1966 World Cup in England, and the 1968 Olympics in Mexico. But these events are not ultimately about sporting greatness. They are epic contests undergirded by shared international values: fairness, justice, respect and diversity. Sadly, they are now associated with dodgy business practices and malign political influences.

This year's World Cup competition is taking place in the USA and Mexico. And there are many voices raising concerns. For example, safety in Mexican host cities has become a dominant headline, particularly in Guadalajara, where some matches will be held. In addition to this, there are fears that cartel violence will spill into the games.

Following the death of gang leader, 'El Mencho' during a federal operation in early 2026, violence has spiked across the state of Jalisco.

Recent surveys show that over 90% of Guadalajara residents feel unsafe. Similar concerns persist in Zapopan (where another stadium is located), where the perception of insecurity jumped by 16 percentage points in just two months.

## Security and impartiality

Away from Mexico, there are plenty of people voicing their objections about the USA's role in this iconic sporting

drama. There is the 'Peace Prize' Scandal, where FIFA President Gianni Infantino faced ethics complaints after awarding a newly created 'FIFA Peace Prize' to Donald Trump in December 2025. Critics argue this compromised FIFA's neutrality.

There are also anxieties about security and ICE's (Immigration and Customs Enforcement) presence: There are mounting concerns that stadiums and fan zones may be monitored by immigration agents, leading to fears of racial profiling and 'federal violence' during a period of heightened immigration crackdowns.

And then there are the travel arrangements required of humble fans, or those who can afford the grossly inflated ticket prices. For example, if your team is in Group G, you might start your morning in Mexico City, grab a taco, and then sprint to the airport to catch a flight to Seattle for the 8:00 pm kick off.

By the time you clear customs for the third time in a week, you'll realize that the 'North American' experience is less about samba in the streets and more about the existential dread of a three-hour layover in Dallas-Fort Worth.

With 104 matches spread over 39 days, the group stage has evolved into a marathon of participation. Thanks to the new best third-place teams rule, a country could theoretically lose two games, draw one, and still find themselves in the Round of 32. It's the first World Cup where the primary strategy for some teams isn't scoring goals, but rather not being the worst. This will be a competition within a competition, with most teams chasing mediocrity. For me,



▲ FIFA World Cup 2026 Draw Reception December 6th, 2025.

I have to decouple the World Cup (and the Olympics) from the corporate cultures. I need to be able to watch and enjoy like a child, without feeling the biting cynicism that ensnares me.

I have to believe that these are genuine sporting contests between equals and not a casino where billions are being spent in sponsorship deals, TV rights and off-the-books payments.

The World Cup final will be held at MetLife Stadium in New Jersey – a location chosen for its scenic views of a nearby swamp and the New York skyline three miles away.

One thing is certain: the 2026 World Cup will quite possibly be the biggest, loudest, and most confusing event in human history. **PT**



Photo Credit: www.flickr.com/photos/ukinusa/5493734206



# Risking everything to give our lives to Jesus

**W**hen I watched that event in 2002, I could hardly believe my eyes. I had never seen the like of it before and I expect I will never see the like of it again.

It was the World Cup final held in Yokohama, Japan between Germany and Brazil. Because of the time difference between Japan and the United Kingdom, it was screened live over here on a Sunday morning.

By the time I got back from church, the match was almost over. Brazil won 2-0. But it was what happened after the match which astonished me.

When the final whistle blew, the Brazilian players were obviously delighted. But instead of rushing over to celebrate with their fans, many of them fell to their knees in prayer. There they were, small groups of them, praying to God all over the pitch. After a few minutes, the whole



**AFTER A FEW MINUTES, THE WHOLE SQUAD KNELT IN PRAYER AROUND THE CENTRE CIRCLE, HOLDING HANDS.**

*Shirt Names and Numbers have been omitted for copyright reasons.*

squad knelt in prayer around the centre circle, holding hands. Then eventually they got up and ran over towards their fans. Quite a few of the players pulled off their shirts and underneath were vests which said, 'Jesus loves you.'

But one of the players had written on his vest, 'I belong to Jesus'. I said to myself, 'That's it. When you can say "I belong to Jesus" and live by it, you have got your hands on the real thing.'

## Simply stated

It is a very simple message, but very profound. Even a child could understand it. There are a number of expressions used to describe someone who becomes a Christian – being saved; being born again; becoming a committed Christian; giving your life to Jesus. That last one is my favourite. It makes clear that we are not just making one or two adjustments in our life. We are handing everything over to the Lord.

During my lifetime, I have seen the radical change that has come over people when they take that step. In one such instance, I remember praying with a girl in Port Washington on Long Island, USA.

It was during the three years that I spent in New York. I had been asked to conduct a healing service in the Episcopal Church in Port Washington. A young woman came for prayer. She looked very attractive, but that night something was troubling her. There was a frown on her face. Her shoulders were hunched, her general demeanour gave the impression that she was troubled.

She explained to me that she was having problems in her marriage. As she gave me more details, I just felt prompted to ask her if she had ever given her life to Jesus.

She said that she hadn't. I asked her if she would like to take that step. She said immediately that she would. So,

I gave her a couple of minutes there at the communion rail to talk privately to Jesus, to take that important step in her life. Then I said a prayer of commitment for her. When we both opened our eyes, she was a different person.

The frown had gone from her face. Her shoulders were no longer hunched. She held herself straight and her whole demeanour was so much more relaxed. It was great for me to see it. No doubt when she went home there would be issues to resolve, but that experience showed me the difference that giving our lives to Jesus can make. The peace and strength and renewal that we receive.

## Using skills to share faith

I know a high-profile man who lives his life for Jesus and in sporting circles he makes a big impact. His name is Ruan Pienaar, a rugby player who has more than 80 caps for South Africa and who was a World Cup winner with his country in 2007.

He spent the later years of his career playing in Northern Ireland and turned out to be one of the finest players, if not the finest, to ever represent Ulster, but those who knew him found him just as impressive a man as a rugby player.

He was one of a number of Ulster players who came down to the packed St Anne's Cathedral in Belfast one night in January 2016. They talked about their faith. Ruan said that rugby was not the most important thing in his life. He only used it as a means of sharing his faith.

When I went up to him to introduce myself, I found him most approachable, a humble man of God. That is the way people can be when they give their lives to Jesus.

The reason that I am taking this line in my article is because recently a young woman asked my advice. She was very busy both in her family life and in her work and it was putting her under stress so much that she had broken out in a physical illness – could I help her to cope with the pressure and learn to relax? I said that, in my opinion, the best way to find God's peace and relaxation is to give our lives completely to Him.

There are no shortcuts. Just give our lives completely to Him. That is the place of safety and security.

## First – in everything

In Matthew chapter 6 Jesus gives us some good advice, reminding us that when He is looking after us there is no need for us to be anxious. I like how he finishes that passage in verse 33 – 'But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.'

When we put Him first before all else, He will provide everything else that is needed. It is just as well to be clear that becoming a committed Christian means putting God first in every area of our lives.

For many people that is a stumbling block. They find that step difficult to take. A friend of mine wrote on this theme recently. Houston McKelvey was Dean of St. Anne's Cathedral, Belfast from 2001-2012. This is what he said in his monthly column for the Belfast Newsletter:

*'Living for Christ is the most amazing and wonderful life which we can commend to others. Jesus called people and He called them clearly.'*

*'If they wanted to hang on to their old ways they could. Jesus, however, was only inviting people who wanted to go on a new journey. They needed to turn their back on their old ways and start all over again.'*

*'We miss the point if we think that we can simply add on two or three Christian attitudes and virtues to our old way of life. It just can't work. The Apostle Paul put this very clearly when he wrote, "My old self has been crucified with Christ. I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. So, I live in this earthly body by trusting in the Son of God who loved me and gave Himself for me."' (Galatians 2: 20)*

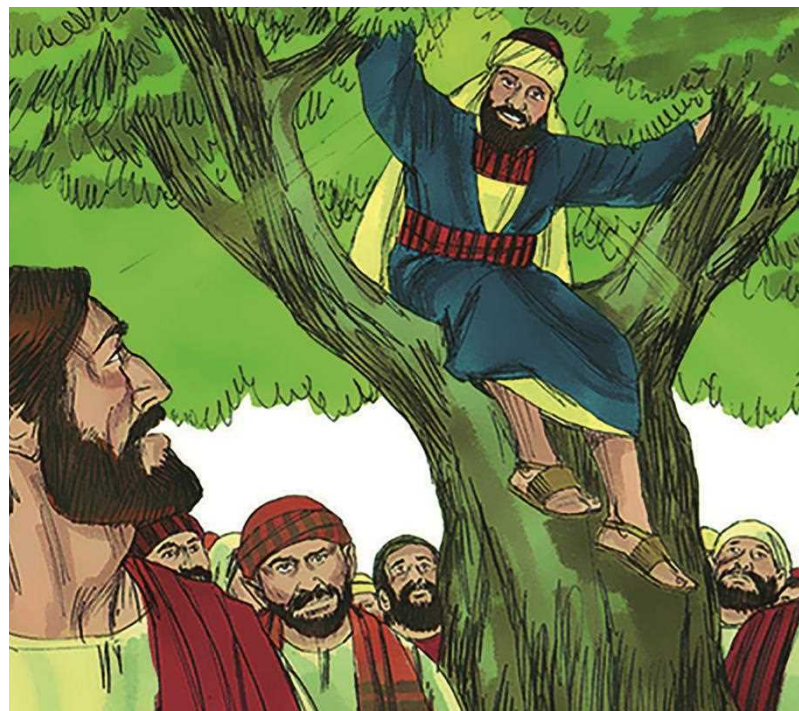
## Too much to ask?

There was one man in the Bible who found that going on this new journey with Jesus was a step too far. He is known as the rich young ruler. He came to Jesus and asked Him what he had to do to get eternal life. Jesus mentioned some of the commandments that he would have to keep.

The young man rather indignantly said that he had kept all those. What more did he have to do? Jesus said that he would have to sell all his possessions and give the money to the poor. Then he would have treasure in heaven.

We are told when the young man heard this, he went away sad because he had great wealth. He was an important person in his day. Maybe for people of that time he was a household name. But he turned his back on the invitation Jesus gave him. And today no one in the world knows his name.

On the other hand, a despicable little man like Zacchaeus, a tax collector who robbed people of their money, did accept the invitation of Jesus. Today any child in Christian circles could tell you who Zacchaeus is.



Giving everything to Jesus can be frightening. We like to be in control of our own affairs. Giving our lives to Jesus is giving Him permission to be in control.

But in my experience, there is no need to be afraid. I have found that the more I give to Jesus, the more He gives me back in return. **PT**



# Principal speaks out on mental health

*'I stopped eating and disappeared. It felt like I had nobody. I had no idea what to do.'*

**J**ust ahead of the recently-marked Mental Health Awareness Week (11th to 17th May 2026), College Principal Rev. Dr. Caleb Nyanni revealed his mental health journey for the first time – calling the Church to offer better support. Waverley Abbey's recently-appointed College Principal, Revd Dr Caleb Nyanni, has shared his personal mental health experiences for the first time – which include suicidal thoughts, hair loss and depression.

**The former Dean of Studies and Programme Director at Birmingham Christian College is calling the Church to do more to acknowledge and support mental health when challenges on younger generations are increasing.**

The father of two experienced an intense period of depression as a student living in Birmingham, while holding leadership roles at an Elim congregation, volunteering in schools and completing a Theology degree. He believes the expectations attached to being a male, Christian leader isolated him and drove him close to suicide during the early 2000s.

'As a young man in my early 20s, I didn't want to admit my battles,' Dr Nyanni said. 'Mental health was scary to me – it was widely undervalued. There was stigma in the Church, and I felt I couldn't approach anyone. As a leader, I had to be bubbly – but inside I was shaking. I felt lonely in a crowd. I had panic attacks – but I was trying to be "a man". My ego wouldn't allow me to seek help. Nobody should have to go through that.'

## A feeling of total isolation

When he began to lose his hair and was diagnosed with Irritable Bowel Syndrome, Dr Nyanni stopped eating and left Birmingham in March 2004. His parents had recently returned to Ghana – where Dr Nyanni was born – and admits he didn't know where to turn.

'I went with my toothbrush and a rucksack. Truthfully, I didn't expect to return to Birmingham – I wondered if I would survive at all,' he said. 'I felt loneliness, isolation, rejection and depression – it felt like I had nobody.'

Fleeing to London, Dr Nyanni spent two weeks in the spare bedroom of a friend's flat where he closed the curtains, refused food, and prayed. 'I felt like I had disappeared,' he said. 'I sought God. I cried. I felt empty. It was like being in a trance.'

Dr Nyanni admitted he came to the end of his human strength and felt an overwhelming sense of peace after three days of isolation – an experience he cites as a turning point in his life and faith.

'I saw a radiant light and felt a presence sitting on my bed,' he said. 'I heard a voice telling me I was loved. Then I knelt down and felt God equipping me to be a leader. I suddenly had a deep sense of peace and belonging. It was a transformative experience.'

Returning to Birmingham, Dr Nyanni completed an undergraduate in Theology and went on to achieve a Masters and PHD at the University of Birmingham. As well as being a teacher, mentor and author, he has benefited from therapy in his personal life and has a foundation certificate in counselling.

Believing that therapy is a God-given task, Dr Nyanni enrolled at Waverley Abbey College – thought to be one of the leading providers of Counselling and Chaplaincy for

Christians in the UK – and wants to encourage the Church to have more open conversations about mental health.

### Widely unacknowledged


He said, ‘I believe that a person can be deeply spiritual and profoundly depressed: the human soul is capable of holding both light and shadow at once and the Church needs to acknowledge that.

This is my chance to share my own story – and I want to help church leaders become more aware of mental health. Even today, it’s widely refused and unacknowledged. With so many challenges facing younger generations, we have to remove stigma so that people of all faiths and none have somewhere to turn.’

Dr Nyanni officially began his new role in March 2026 and described the move as ‘God-given’. He said, ‘Waverley Abbey has already offered me such a sense of calling. I believe this College has such an impact, and I really want to bring my whole self and my personal journey into this role.

It’s a big job – but I believe it’s a God-given calling. I want to help more people take their talents, skills and compassion and share them with the whole world.

I want Waverly Abbey College to be a place where we equip, empower and engage a rising generation. It’s not about certificates that remain on shelves.

It’s about creating new training and courses that meet the needs of young people – who are facing huge challenges such as addiction and powerlessness. Too many people have no one to speak to – and we need to change that.’ 



### Revd Dr Caleb Nyanni

Growing up in rural Ghana, Caleb Nyanni was the third of five children born to Apostle Professor Opoku Onyinah – a prominent Ghanaian Pentecostal theologian. Caleb remembers carrying buckets of water to bathe in

as a child and moved to the capital Accra at the age of 12. The family relocated to Birmingham, UK, in 1998 for his father’s theological studies, and Caleb enrolled at Bourneville college where he completed A-levels in English, Computing and Maths alongside leadership involvement in the Elim Pentecostal Church.

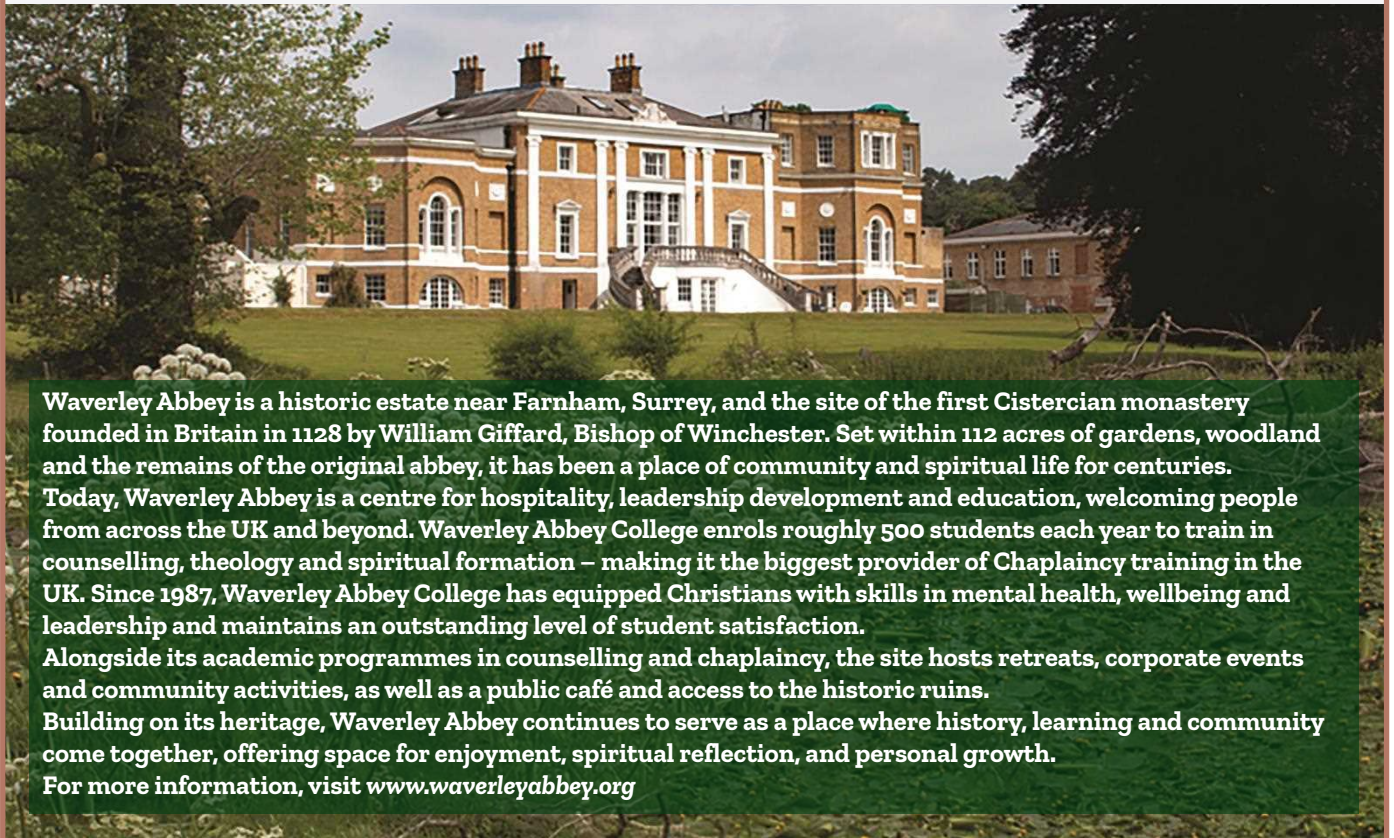
After an initial year studying film and media at Wolverhampton University, Caleb switched to Theology, gaining an undergraduate in 2004, then an MA in Theology from Manchester University. He later wrote a PhD at the University of Birmingham on second generation African Pentecostals in the West.

Caleb lives in Bartley Green, Birmingham, with his wife and has two adult sons. He loves football, cooking and walking, and is involved with various community engagement projects including a Gospel Choir and monthly breakfast support club for those struggling with addiction. Caleb is a firm believer in counselling, accountability and mentoring, and holds an AQA foundation certificate in counselling and is accredited with the Association of Christian Counsellors.



**WAVERLEY  
ABBAY**  
ANCIENT SPARK NEW FIRES

## ABOUT WAVERLEY ABBEY COLLEGE, FARNHAM, SURREY



Waverley Abbey is a historic estate near Farnham, Surrey, and the site of the first Cistercian monastery founded in Britain in 1128 by William Giffard, Bishop of Winchester. Set within 112 acres of gardens, woodland and the remains of the original abbey, it has been a place of community and spiritual life for centuries.

Today, Waverley Abbey is a centre for hospitality, leadership development and education, welcoming people from across the UK and beyond. Waverley Abbey College enrolls roughly 500 students each year to train in counselling, theology and spiritual formation – making it the biggest provider of Chaplaincy training in the UK. Since 1987, Waverley Abbey College has equipped Christians with skills in mental health, wellbeing and leadership and maintains an outstanding level of student satisfaction.

Alongside its academic programmes in counselling and chaplaincy, the site hosts retreats, corporate events and community activities, as well as a public café and access to the historic ruins.

Building on its heritage, Waverley Abbey continues to serve as a place where history, learning and community come together, offering space for enjoyment, spiritual reflection, and personal growth.

For more information, visit [www.waverleyabbey.org](http://www.waverleyabbey.org)

Photo Credit: Murgatroyd49/<https://commons.wikimedia.org>



# What is truth – and can you handle it?

## Anchoring your faith in the truth of the Bible

James Hammond



**I**n the 1992 film *A Few Good Men*, a dramatic courtroom scene has become iconic. A young military lawyer, played by Tom Cruise, cross-examines a hardened colonel in the witness box, played by Jack Nicholson. 'I want the truth!' the lawyer demands. The colonel fires back: 'You can't handle the truth!'

The scene crackles with tension. But beneath the drama lies a serious question: *What is truth?* Is it simply information? Is it perspective? Is it power? Or is it something far deeper?

Nearly two thousand years earlier than this movie, another courtroom scene unfolded – far more significant than any Hollywood drama. A Roman governor stood face to face with a Jewish prisoner. The governor was Pontius Pilate. And the prisoner was Jesus.

Standing before Pilate, Jesus says: '... the reason I was born and came into the world is to testify to the truth. Everyone on the side of truth listens to me.' (John 18:37).

This is an extraordinary claim. Jesus does not speak merely about morality or politics. He defines his very purpose in terms of truth. Pilate's response is brief and pointed: 'What is truth?' (John 18:38). And then – according to John – he walks away.

Was Pilate being cynical? Philosophical? Dismissive? We are not told. But we can understand something of his world.

Pilate was a Roman official. Rome prided itself on law, order, and power. For Romans, 'truth' was often practical. It was what kept the empire functioning. It was what preserved

stability. In other words, 'truth' was whatever maintained control. In the wider Greco-Roman world, philosophy had already debated the concept of 'truth' for centuries. Some thinkers believed it was objective and discoverable. Others argued that truth was relative – shaped by perspective and circumstance.

Sophists (Greek itinerant intellectuals) maintained that truth was subjective, relative, and totally dependent on individual perception, culture, or context. To Sophists, reality was only in the minds of people.

In such a world, Pilate's question for Jesus may not have been sincere inquiry at all. It may have been resignation. 'Truth?' he might have thought. 'Truth is whatever survives.' Pilate had asked the right question – but he did not stay for the answer.

### The meaning of 'Truth'

The Greek word used in John 18 is *aletheia*. It carries the idea of 'unconcealment' – something revealed, brought into the light. Truth is not manufactured; it is uncovered. It is what remains when illusion is stripped away. The word suggests that truth is not merely opinion. It is reality as it actually is.

In the Hebrew Scriptures, the word often translated 'truth' is *emeth*. This word carries a slightly different emphasis. It means firmness, reliability, faithfulness, constancy. Something that is true is something that can be trusted. It endures – it does not shift.

So in biblical thought, truth is not just correct information. It is reliability. It is faithfulness. It is what stands firm over time. Truth is what cannot ultimately be hidden – and what can be relied upon. This is the

opposite of what Danish philosopher Søren Kierkegaard believed. He stated that truth is subjective. To Kierkegaard truth is a personal thing – something we are, not something we have.

### Three simple ways to understand truth

So how can we understand the meaning of ‘truth’ that meets with what Jesus said to Pilate? Philosophers often describe truth in three straightforward ways:

#### 1. Truth corresponds to reality

A statement is true if it matches what actually exists. If I say, ‘It is raining,’ that statement is true if – and only if – rain is actually falling.

#### 2. Truth matches its object

A belief is true if it accurately reflects the thing it describes.

#### 3. Truth is telling it like it is

Not exaggeration. Not distortion. Not ‘spin’. It is reality that is described honestly.

All three definitions point in the same direction: truth is not created by our feelings. It does not bend to preference. It does not change just because we might dislike it.

In modern culture, we often hear phrases such as ‘my truth’ or ‘your truth’. These usually mean personal experience or perspective.

Of course, experiences matter. But experience alone does not define truth. Two people can feel strongly about opposite conclusions – but both cannot be correct if their claims contradict each other. *The bottom line is that truth, by definition, cannot contradict itself!*

### Truth in a Roman courtroom

Let’s return to Pilate’s courtroom for a moment to establish that all-important aspect of reading the Bible: context.

Pilate’s responsibility was political. If Jesus was a threat to Roman authority, he would be executed. If not, he should be released. Yet Pilate finds no fault in him. Three times in John’s account he declares that he has no basis for a charge against Jesus. Nevertheless, under pressure from the crowd, he hands him over to be crucified.

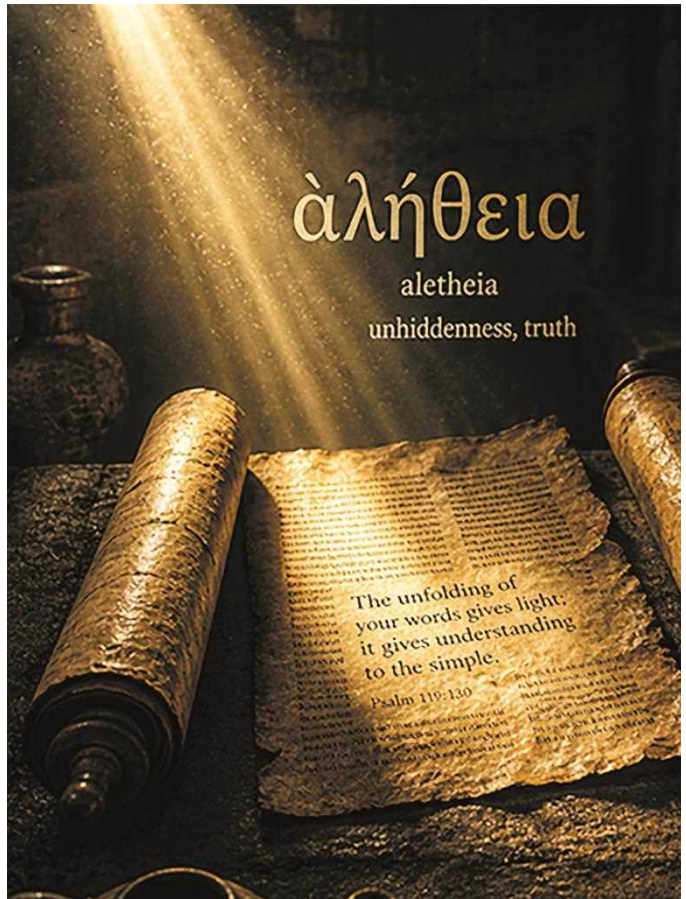
Why did Pilate do that? Because political survival outweighed truth. Pilate knew something was wrong. But truth, for him, was entirely negotiable. Stability, position and power mattered so much more.

And this is where the biblical idea of truth collides with our human weakness. Despite Pilate’s opinion of his ‘flexible’ truth, the Bible tells us that truth is not whatever protects us, not what keeps the peace, is not the instrument that maintains our image.

A good definition of truth is, ‘unchanging reality’. The Collins English Dictionary says that truth is, ‘a proven or verified principle or statement, or fact’.

### Jesus and truth

John’s Gospel makes an astonishing claim in John 14:6. Here, Jesus states: ‘I am the way and the truth and the life.’ Let’s stop and think for a moment about what Jesus didn’t



say. Nowhere does he say, ‘I teach the truth.’ Nor does he say, ‘I point to the truth.’ He says, ‘*I am the truth.*’

If *aletheia* means ‘what is revealed’, then Jesus has presented himself as the full revelation of God. If *emeth* means reliability and faithfulness, then Jesus embodies God’s steadfastness in human form.

Do we see that truth, in Christianity, is not abstract philosophy. It is not cold logic. It is not shifting opinion. It is the very character and nature of God expressed in a person. That is why Pilate’s question is so tragic. He asked, ‘What is truth?’ while Truth stood right in front of him.

### Can we handle the truth?

This brings us back to that courtroom scene in *A Few Good Men*. ‘You can’t handle the truth,’ the colonel shouts. His argument is that truth is harsh, uncomfortable, disruptive. It challenges illusions.

And in many ways, the Bible agrees. Truth exposes injustice. Truth confronts hypocrisy. Truth reveals our own inconsistencies. Truth is not always comfortable.

But truth is also freeing. Earlier in John’s Gospel, Jesus says: ‘You will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.’ (John 8:32). Freedom and truth belong together. Lies imprison us. Illusions distort. Self-deception traps us. But truth – even when painful – liberates. And in Christian understanding, truth is ultimately found in the person of Jesus – the visible expression of God’s character, faithfulness, and reality.

### ‘This is what it means to me’

Sitting in numerous Bible Studies, I have been astonished that after reading a verse or chapter, how often people will

Continued on Page 18 ▶





# Young Christian 'Traitor' meets Pope Leo XIV

By Mary Hammond, Editor, The Plain Truth

**A** recently aired documentary on BBC One followed the journey of Harry Clark – Series 2 winner of 'Traitors' – as he achieved his seemingly impossible dream of meeting Pope Leo XIV in 'Harry Clark Goes to Rome'.<sup>1</sup>

Blending warmth, humour and emotional honesty, the film follows Harry on a personal pilgrimage to Rome in search of answers about faith, identity and what it means to be a 'good' Catholic in the modern world.

But at the centre of his journey is one audacious goal: to meet one of the most powerful figures on the planet. But against all odds, that dream becomes a reality.

In an extraordinary and emotional climax, Harry – accompanied by his mum – is granted a private audience with Pope Leo XIV. On meeting The Pope, Harry Clark said: 'I never thought The Pope would want to meet me but here we are. It was a life changing experience and it was great to do it alongside my mum. It's one of the coolest experiences of my life.'

'It was the first time in my life my mind was blown and I thought wow, I'm just a kid from a council house in Slough and here I am sitting opposite Pope Leo XIV talking about the importance of mental health awareness and that whether you have faith or not, life is worth living.'

'My message to other young people is to never let anyone tell you that you can't achieve or accomplish something. Keep dreaming big.'

Reflecting on the moment, Harry describes overwhelming nerves turning into pure excitement as he finally meets The Pope, and a genuine connection forms between them.



In a characteristically down-to-earth exchange, Harry even asks The Pope about football – before gifting him a Chelsea shirt, which is warmly received.

### Role-model 'mum'

The experience is made even more poignant by Harry sharing the moment with his mum, Georgia – the person who first instilled his faith and supported him through the most challenging moments of his life.

From his beginnings growing up in a council house in Slough to sitting face-to-face with the head of the Catholic Church, Harry's journey is as unlikely as it is inspiring.

Last year Harry also appeared in BBC's 'Pilgrimage' in which he further explored his Christian faith which he shared with fellow contestants and viewers to the series. Then in September 2025, his autobiography 'Staying Faithful'<sup>2</sup> was published.

In his book Harry explains how he went through some very dark times. 'As a 16 year old, I joined a man's world, so I had to grow up quickly. But then you also saw very quickly the evils of the world, what man could do to man, and it just made me question my faith as a whole.'

It's that simple question: God loves us so much – then why does he let death happen? Why does he let all this illness happen? In *Staying Faithful*, Harry shares stories of his upbringing

and family, Army challenges when he says 'In my life, my faith has become stronger and weaker at different times...In some dark moments, I almost gave up on life.' A life of sudden fame, in which his Roman Catholic faith kept him grounded. 'When I hit rock bottom, struggling with mental health, like suicide, God was the one thing that saved me.'

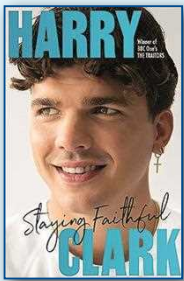
Speaking to the growing number of young people embracing Christian belief – and to anyone seeking purpose or meaning – Harry's book offers encouragement, authenticity, and hope. **PT**

- 1 *Harry Clark goes to Rome* (60 mins), aired Thursday 2 April 2026 at 10.40pm on BBC One and available to view on BBC iPlayer.
- 2 *Harry Clark: Staying Faithful* published by SPCK, September 2025, ISBN: 978-0281092222, 244pp in hardback and Kindle.

Photo Credits: studiolumbert.com/project/ale-part-the-traitors-uk

**FREE GIVEAWAY**

We have two copies of Harry's book *Staying Faithful* to give away – and hopefully be read by a young person.



So if you would like a copy and have someone in mind who may be inspired by this title, please write in – or email – for your chance to win a copy. Write to:

Harry's Book, The Plain Truth,  
15 Meadowlands, Burwell,  
Cambridge CB25 0HG

or you can email:  
editor@plaintruth.co.uk

using the subject line *Harry's Book*.  
The closing date for this giveaway is 30th June 2026.



# No laughing matter

*Or are there some light-hearted moments to be found?*

Gary Clayton



**I**tend to wince slightly when people say, ‘God’s got a sense of humour’. It sounds a bit disrespectful, as if the person saying this sees God as some kind of omnipotent jokester.

But although the Bible is neither a heavenly joke book nor a comic novel – though versions have been produced in graphic novel style – it does however contain humour. It even shows God laughing!

Psalm 2:2-4 says, ‘The kings of the earth rise up ... against the Lord and against His anointed, saying, “Let us break their chains and throw off their shackles.” The One enthroned in heaven laughs; the Lord scoffs at them.’

The theme is continued in Psalm 37:12-13, saying, ‘The wicked plot against the righteous ... but the Lord laughs at the wicked, for He knows their day is coming.’ It’s how God reacts to those seeking to oppose His people, purposes or plans.

In the end, however bad things might seem to us, the Lord gets the last laugh, and all will be well.

Scripture also shows the Lord’s people deriding those who deserve it, using irony, sarcasm and wit to highlight the follies, failings and failures of their enemies.

Examples can be seen in Proverbs, which contain some amusingly acerbic attacks on those who are so lazy that, ‘as a door turns on its hinges, so a sluggard turns on his bed’ (26:14), or ‘who bury their hands in a bowl but are too idle to bring it back to their mouths and eat’ (19:24). There are

also those who consume too much wine and end up ‘like one sleeping on the high seas, lying on top of the rigging’ (23:33-35). You can just see them staggering unsteadily around, waiting for their next drink.

Sometimes, whether the joke is on the Israelites, Saul, the prophets of Baal or Haman the Agagite, the potentially comic situations that arise again show the sinfulness, blindness and stupidity of those that defy God.

## Whine or dine?

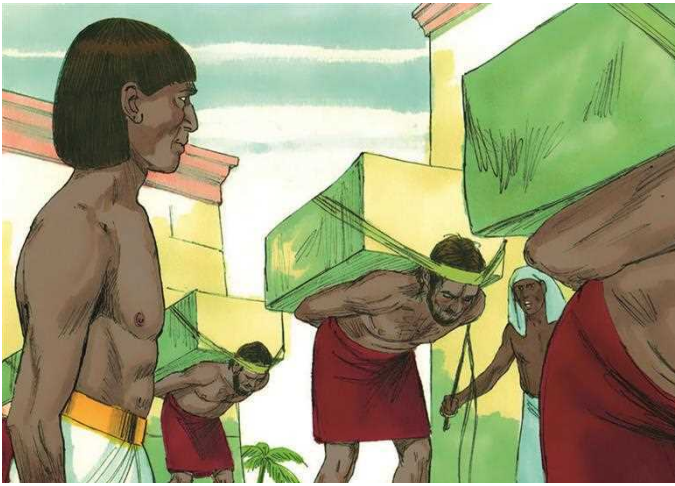
In Exodus 3:8, God makes clear His intention to take the Israelites from the land of slavery to ‘a good and spacious land, a land flowing with milk and honey.’

By Exodus 16:3, however, we see the people grumbling to Moses and Aaron, ‘If only we had died by the Lord’s hand in Egypt! There we sat around pots of meat and ate all the food we wanted, but you have brought us out into this desert to starve this entire assembly to death.’

Numbers 11:5 even shows them pining for ‘the fish we ate in Egypt at no cost – also the cucumbers, melons, leeks, onions and garlic’ – and this despite God having graciously provided them with manna.

In fact, despite everything the Lord has done for them, all they appear to want is free food endlessly flowing from the gastronomic paradise that was Egypt – the fine dining there seemingly offering a bottomless banquet of as much meat and two veg as a hungry, forgetful Israelite could desire.

The situation appears even more ridiculous in Numbers 16:13 when the ungrateful people accuse Moses of having ‘brought us up out of a land flowing with milk and honey to kill us in the wilderness’ and – a verse later – criticising him for treating them like slaves!



It's as if, by some extraordinary sleight of hand, the land of beatings, hard labour and infanticide not only fed them well, but has now become 'a land flowing with milk and honey' – the *ultimate* promised land!

Can they really have forgotten the fact that they were worked ruthlessly, treated harshly and forcibly made to maintain an almost Stalinist quota of bricks? That their children were drowned in the River Nile, or that God had fed them with manna and quail?

The food in Egypt was either extraordinarily good, or the Israelites' memory extraordinarily bad!

And so, while life in Egypt was apparently a bowl of cherries, their diet in the desert was mainly sour grapes! It's what happens when God's people fail to trust Him for the future because they've forgotten how He's helped them in the past.

I wonder, do we do the same? The lesson for us, surely, is to look forwards in faith, remembering how God has led us safely in the past. If he did it then, he can do it now.

### Excuses, excuses

The Israelites' faulty memory and skewed logic can also be seen when, contrary to God's instructions, King Saul spared Agag and the best of the sheep and cattle, though everything that was despised and weak was totally destroyed.

So, when Samuel confronts Saul, Saul says, 'The Lord bless you! I have carried out the Lord's instructions' (1 Samuel 15:13). But Samuel, knowing that Saul *hasn't*, asks with heavy irony, 'What then is this bleating of sheep in my ears? What is this lowing of cattle that I hear?' Unwilling to admit his guilt, Saul replies, 'But I did obey the LORD...



I went on the mission the Lord assigned me. I *completely* destroyed the Amalekites and brought back Agag their king. The soldiers took sheep and cattle from the plunder, the best of what was devoted to God, in order to sacrifice them to the Lord your God at Gilgal' (15:20-21).

His desperate attempt at extricating himself is laughable. It's a bit like a small child caught with its hand in a cookie jar, or a young lad trying to conceal the football lying inches from a broken greenhouse window.

It's bad enough for God's people to disobey him, without making things worse by lying about it!

There's humour, too, in Elijah's sarcastic teasing of the prophets of Baal in 1 Kings 18:27-29. 'At noon Elijah mocked them, saying, "Cry aloud, for he is a god. Either he is musing, or he is relieving himself, or he is on a journey, or perhaps he is asleep and must be awakened." And they cried aloud and cut themselves ... until the blood gushed out upon them ... but there was no voice. No one answered; no one paid attention' (ESV). Elijah's tongue-in-cheek taunting comically reveals the inability of the false god Baal to do anything his prophets ask.

### Hoist by his own petard

Just as our words can be used to encourage, exhort, mock or rebuke, so they can also get us into trouble. In Esther 6 we see how the evil Haman, delighted to be asked by King Xerxes what should be done to 'honour the man the king loves', assumes that the king wants to honour *him!*

So he answers his sovereign, saying, 'Have them bring a royal robe the king has worn and a horse the king has ridden, one with a royal crest placed on its head', with a noble prince 'proclaiming before him, "This is what is done for the man the king delights to honour!"'

The king concurs with Haman's advice, commanding him to do all this for Mordecai the Jew – Haman's nemesis.

One can only imagine how Haman felt when he realised that things had gone pear-shaped, leaving him looking like a lemon. The dramatic irony doesn't end there, however. Instead, Haman perishes on the very pole he'd erected for his arch-enemy Mordecai – his brutal death preceded by a somewhat farcical attempt at getting the Jewish Queen Esther inside.

Unfortunately for Haman, 'operation olive branch' fails to bear fruit. So when an angry Xerxes enters the banqueting hall and sees Haman 'falling on the couch where Esther was reclining', the furious king yells, 'Will he even molest the queen while she is with me in the house?'

Though we might see the humour in the situation, the consequences for Haman are no laughing matter!

The man who lived the latter part of his life seeking the genocide of God's people dies violently instead, vanquished by the very people he sought to slay.

The joke, this time, is truly on him. **PT**





# Free from shame

*Jesus has paid the full price for your shortfall*

**T**he woman with an issue of blood must have been terrified when Jesus asked who had touched him. A condition like hers made her ceremonially unclean – and also rendered anything she touched unclean.<sup>1</sup>

She should not really have been in the crowd, much less touching the 'rabbi'. Would Jesus rebuke her, or the crowd shout insults? Trembling, she made her confession, and Jesus responded with the amazing declaration, "Take heart, your faith has made you whole".

His choice of words was important – this wasn't just about physical healing, the Greek word, 'sozo' used here means 'save, make whole or rescue from destruction' as well as 'restore to health'.<sup>2</sup>

Jesus was fulfilling his mission announced to the synagogue at Nazareth:

*'The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he has sent me to heal the broken-hearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised...'*<sup>3</sup>

At this, twelve years of distress rolled away. Twelve years of being unable to hug her loved ones, of being barred from going up to the temple for the great feasts, of watching where she sat and what she touched, and perhaps keeping quiet about mistakes she had made. Twelve years of shame was removed publicly.

## Shame rolled away

In the Gospels, Jesus made the same pronouncement over a number of others, including the blind man, Bartimaeus.<sup>4</sup> For this man, the 'disgrace' was being disabled, the necessary dependency on others to lead him, having to beg to survive, and enduring the insults and speculation of passers-by about what he had done to 'deserve' his plight. Once again, Jesus rolled away years of mortification with his decree.

Shame... we have all experienced it. Sometimes it arises from our own sin, sometimes it comes from real or imagined failure, and sometimes from being despised and rejected. Shame is a universal condition, experienced by all in some degree, regardless of gender, wealth, nationality, age or colour. Who among us has not had a childhood experience of feeling shame in the classroom, the playground, or on the sports field because we didn't understand how things worked, or just couldn't do what was being asked of us? Or as a teenager, trying so hard to look and behave like the trend-setters and feeling embarrassed about perceived failures.

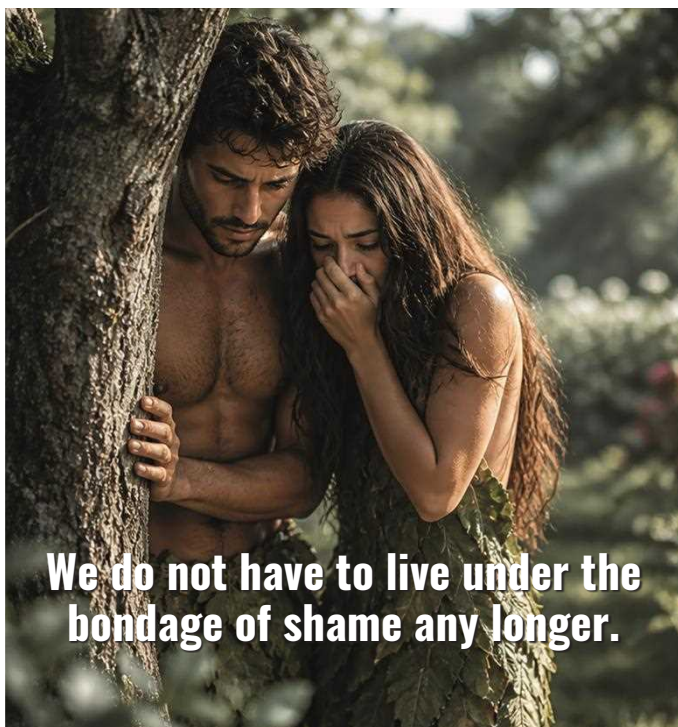


Then there's the shame in the workplace because targets have not been reached, or mistakes have been made, the shame of imperfect parenting or poor health habits. And there's also the peculiarly Christian kind of shame – with sharpened consciences, we are not only aware of our sins, but also of our failure to be the disciples we want to be.

None of this is helped by the media noise which surrounds us. At every turn there are voices and images telling us what steps we need to take to have the 'perfect life', and judgement washes over us when we fail, or don't fit the 'right' profile.

### Understanding differences

We can take great comfort in having a Saviour who knows about the pain of others' reactions and condemnation. Jesus knew about being different from his peers, about slurs cast on his family, about growing up with whispers about his parentage, and being of a despised nationality under Roman occupation. He knew about being misunderstood, ridiculed and isolated, about being accused of all manner of evil, and about having the most slanderous lies spread about him.



**We do not have to live under the bondage of shame any longer.**

The Lord knows that shame is seriously incapacitating and destroys the abundant life he wants for us. He sees those who will never read a book because they were made 'an example' of at school, those who hide a disability for fear of ridicule, those who lie about their religion for fear of discrimination, and those who can't find peace because of the shame of their actions years ago, or their failures today.

Fortunately, there is a remedy, and it is addressed in the very first chapters of the book of Genesis. After rebelling against God, we read that Adam and Eve felt ashamed of their nakedness.<sup>5</sup> The first mention of something in Scripture is always important as it gives extra insight. Shame is about feeling naked, vulnerable and exposed, and at root comes from a fear of judgement – whether it's from ourselves, the Lord or others. Shame makes us hide.

While this story refers to the shame of sin, the remedy applies to all types of shame. Shame needs to be covered.

We see both Adam and Eve's solution – the taking of natural materials to clothe themselves, and also God's response, *his* provision of coverings provided by slain animals – a foretaste of the death of Jesus to come.<sup>6</sup>

The problem with much media 'guru' self-help advice is that it offers, figuratively, a garment of fig leaves – which will rot eventually – when what we really need is the radical covering of sacrifice.

### A message of forgiveness and cleansing

The Cross is at the centre of our faith. Although there has been a disturbing tendency in recent years to soften its edges, dumb it down into something modern and manageable, the cross is powerful, and it cuts to the heart. It is also the answer to our deepest needs.

Isaiah 53 is one of the most important chapters in the Bible. In it, we read the extent of what Jesus suffered so we could be free. Not only did he take upon himself our sins, so we could be forgiven, he also bore our shame. Imagine, the Lord of Glory was despised and rejected by mankind, so disfigured by his treatment that men turned away their faces, and almost certainly crucified naked, subject to all manner of ribaldry and ridicule.

He underwent all this so that we could be delivered, healed, and receive his peace.

The great message of the Gospel is not just that we can metaphorically kneel at the cross and confess our sins – past and present, great and small – and receive forgiveness and cleansing from our guilt, but we can also be set free from the shame that stalks us. And so, we have Paul's declaration:

*'The message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God!'*<sup>7</sup>

We do not have to live under the bondage of shame any longer. Let's take steps to walk free!

Why not...

Take time with the Lord, getting very quiet inside, then turn your heart of affection towards him. Ask him to show you any areas of shame you are carrying.

Declare your trust in his work on the cross, knowing Jesus has paid the full price for your shortfall.

Ask him to forgive any connected sin, and to cover and heal the shame you carry.

And then give thanks that he has heard your prayers.

Let's celebrate the power of the Cross to set us free! **PT**



1 Mark 5: 25-34; Leviticus 15: 25-27

2 Strong's Greek Lexicon

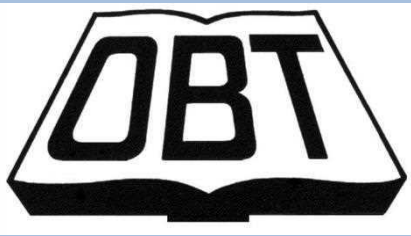
3 Luke 4:18 [KJV]

4 Mark 10:46-52

5 Genesis 2:25; Gen 3:10

6 Genesis 3:7, 21

7 1 Corinthians 1:18



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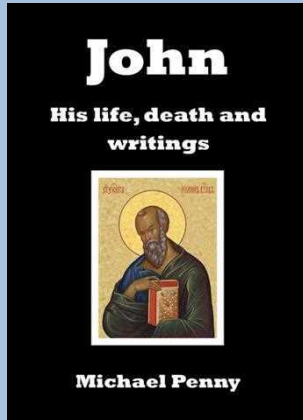
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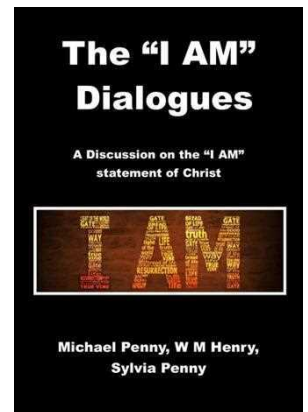


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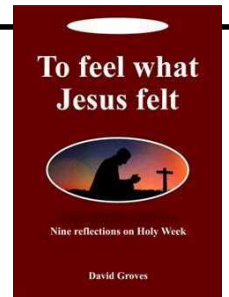
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