

News & Views

86 · SPRING 2023

The Courage to Encourage!



Alastair Reid
TISCA General Secretary

I can still remember one of the Schoolmasters at my Prep School in the 1960s saying to me in my final year: *'Well, Reid, I think you'll manage your rugby colours if you keep trying hard – and you'll also get in the top three of the cross-country competition'*. He was right on both counts (it was the last match of the season for the 'colours', however!) and I am sure that but for his confidence and encouragement I may well have fallen short of expectations.

In our January regional meetings, at Farringtons School and at Thames Christian School, our contributors all took up this theme of 'courage' and all made much of **the importance of encouragement**. At the Farringtons' event (in Chislehurst), we heard the testimony of a recent school leaver from Eltham College called OD. He was glowing as he recalled the importance of older Christian pupils putting a school CU meeting ahead of a break-time game of football and also as he related how Christian staff at the school 'simply' responded



OD and Jim Houghton (Chaplain at Eltham College) at Farringtons School regional meeting

Coming up in this edition

- Chaplains
- Heads
- Parents
- Staff
- Governors
- Pupils
- Supporters

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The Courage to Encourage! continued

differently to other staff and in a winsome way. A school trustee attending the Farringtons' evening told me that she had had three extremely busy days but that just hearing OD speak made the extra effort of coming out to an evening meeting worthwhile.

And then there was Gareth Jones, a schools' worker for London City Mission, who spoke at Thames Christian School. Gareth confessed that he had been an extremely tricky schoolboy, even running away at one point. He was 'saved' aged 17 years and now has the wonderful task of reaching out to troublesome young people today. He told us about Jayden who joined a youth evening event and seemed to cause controversy and upset in every activity he joined. Gareth was getting angrier and angrier as he followed Jayden around causing mayhem until he heard the Lord speak to him quietly: 'Encourage Jayden'. Watching the youngster play football, Gareth realised he had talent and told him so. In Gareth's words, 'Jayden just melted' and

became the wonderful young man that God made him to be. An opportunity to share the Gospel followed.

Alix (our Development Officer) and I have been privileged to visit a significant number of schools since September – including in Scotland, the north of England and the Home Counties – and have been encouraged each step of the way. We were thrilled to meet a Chaplain in a reasonably isolated school and to see his face light up as we connected him to other Christians in his region. We were inspired, too, in a visit to a school set up by a group of churches (but which has a significant number of children from non-church homes) which begins each lesson with a pupil-led prayer, has Scripture verses beautifully illustrated on corridor walls and which employs a Christian artist to help the most troubled explore their creativity in a God-centred way.

It's not always easy to get along with the crusty long-serving staff member, with the loudly atheistic new teacher or with the child who always seems to be causing unrest in class or activities. Let's look, however, to have 'the courage to encourage', to pray hard and then to stand back and see what God can do!

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Heads' WhatsApp group
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Launched this year. Details from Alastair or Alix

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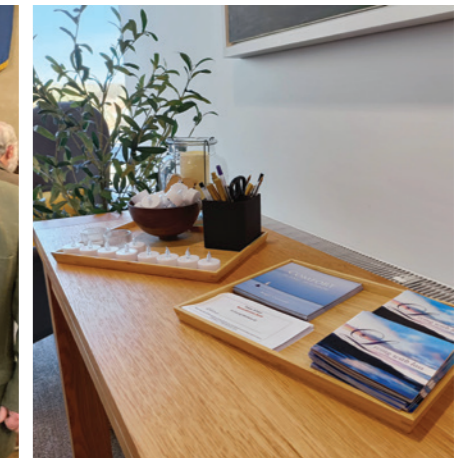
Alix and Alastair at Fettes College, Edinburgh



Three Scottish chaplains meet for the first time – Gordonstoun, Glenalmond and Strathallan



The Chapel at Trinity School, Sevenoaks



With the Chaplaincy team at Trinity School, Sevenoaks – in their new chapel sprayer space



Alastair with Ray Maher (Bursar) and Paul Robinson (Chaplain) at King Edward VI Southampton



Alastair with James Radcliffe (Chaplain at King Edward's School, Witley)



TISCA regional meetings in Autumn 2022

Chaplains Heads Parents Staff Governors Pupils Supporters

Alastair Reid and Alix Stockwell
TISCA staff

Our theme for regional meetings in 2022-23 is 'Courage' and we have been privileged to visit three schools in the Autumn Term 2022 to hear speakers address this topic.

At **Dean Close** in Cheltenham, **James Mears** (a staff member who also works with his wife, Laura, to run 'Salmon Swimming', a team and leadership organisation), focused on The Parable of the Talents from Matthew 25. James asked us several challenging questions as we consider how we work alongside others: what am I afraid of losing, what am I trying to hide and what am I trying to prove – and to whom? Using Myers-Briggs' research, we considered how the servants in the Parable were driven by 'Head' or 'Heart' tendencies. In our own situations in schools, James suggested that whilst we might normally play to our strengths, we might do even better by being courageous and saying to a team-mate: 'I can't do this, but you can. Perhaps we can work better together sharing our talents?'



James Mears with John Ash, the Dean Close Chaplain – October 2022

We had our first 'road trip' to northern England and to Scotland. We were warmly welcomed at the 'Lovewise' offices in **Newcastle** where we heard about school resources being launched to help Christians deliver the RSE curriculum. A visit to **Durham School**, where we were kindly hosted by the Chaplain (Fr Simon McMurtary), gave an opportunity for us to visit the stunning chapel, to share lunch and to pray together. Once in Scotland, in addition to a one-to-one meeting with former TISCA Trustee, Revd Libby Talbot (and tea overlooking the Edinburgh skyline), we attended a gathering in **Livingston** at the home of Megan Patterson (of SIM and Christian Values in Education, Scotland). Representatives from SU Scotland, CVE, the C of S education in schools' dept and The Message Trust gathered to share and to pray. Our northern-most situated TISCA member, Revd Alen McCulloch (pastor and school chaplain on North Uist in the Western Isles), took the trouble to join us and what an encouragement this was! Our devotional for the meeting was from Acts 13 and 14 (Paul and Barnabus' first missionary journey) – seemingly chaotic, certainly tough and definitely full of the unexpected. This can also be the case in schools and we were reminded that God is in control even when we feel our plans are being resisted and our vision squashed. Despite all that happened to them, we read: 'And the disciples were filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit' (Acts 13:52). Megan Patterson's article on 'human flourishing' can be found elsewhere in this edition of TNV.

At **Fettes College**, Alastair's alma mater, we were treated to a tour round the school by some pupils and also tea with Helen Harrison, the Head, and Tony Clark, School Chaplain. There then followed a regional meeting in the staff dining room at which former Edinburgh Academy teacher, John Meadows, challenged us to be 'Lanterns in the Night' in schools. (John's article is summarised elsewhere in TNV.)

Some of those gathered at Fettes College, Edinburgh



We went on to **Glenalmond College** where we were delighted to meet the College Chaplain, Fr Stephen Graham. If Stephen had been the only person we had met on our 'road trip' we would still have returned encouraged! Having heard of the difficulties SU was now having going into some schools where they had been welcome for years, being shocked by one large Edinburgh day school (founded by Christians) where Christian songs / hymns were now replaced by Scottish songs in assemblies and another where the century and half tradition of a prayer before the staff meeting was abandoned (all of these changes because of apparent objections from those wanting greater diversity), it was a joy to hear Stephen tell us of his 'mission' to the whole of his school community. (He has also written about this elsewhere in TNV.)



With Fr Stephen Graham at the idyllic Glenalmond College in rural Perthshire

Our final school gathering was at **Strathallan School** where we were delighted to link up in person the geographically far-flung chaplains of Glenalmond, Gordonstoun and Strathallan. Ben Mason of 'Globalbridge' (helping pupils with their 'next steps' in education) spoke on listening to God, being obedient and living through the difficulties in His strength. He mentioned three 'giants' which often face us in our Christian walk in schools: conflict, pressure and busyness. He referred to Luke 5 when Jesus urges the fishermen disciples to 'cast their net's out again, despite earlier frustrations, and to expect great things.



Having dinner together at Strathallan School, Perthshire

Our 'road trip' had been planned two years ago and postponed twice owing to Covid – but it had been worth the wait!

Lanterns in the Night

Christians in Teaching

Chaplains Heads Parents Staff Governors Pupils Supporters



John Meadows

recently retired Head of English, The Edinburgh Academy

The poet Gerard Manley Hopkins, in his great poem 'Lantern out of Doors' presents us with the image of a passer-by – perhaps some farmer, out in his field after dark – and all you can see of him is the light of the lantern he is holding, which streams down past his legs.

For Hopkins, this is a symbol for those human beings who 'rain against our much-thick and marsh air/Rich beams...'. The phrase 'our much thick and marsh air' might be a good description of what a young person feels about growing up in today's society. In such times, the role of the Christian teacher is surely more important than ever before.

The New Testament uses very similar imagery to Hopkins to illuminate our responsibility in such times. Jesus describes himself as 'the light of the world' and it is *he* who says to his followers, 'You are the light of the world.' Paul varies the image still further by entreating us to 'shine like stars in the universe.' And these culminate in an even more dramatic variation still, to be found in the Old Testament book of Proverbs (4:18):

'The Path of the righteous is like the first gleam of dawn, shining ever brighter till the full light of day.'

So what does this mean for us as Christian teachers?

The first thing to say is that all of these images reveal that our light is not for ourselves. It is not to make *us* feel better about *ourselves*. It is for others: it is to lighten the path of others – it is to throw the light of comfort or hope upon their way.

It would be possible to argue that society now generally questions not whether Christianity is true but whether it is good. For the apostle Peter, this goodness of the gospel is linked in public perception with the character of its bearers. For him, if any good work is to be done in the world, it will depend on character. Only



character is light: Christ's *character* at work in ours. 'Make every effort', says Peter in 1 Peter 1:5, 'to add to your faith goodness...self-control...perseverance...brotherly kindness...love. For if you possess these qualities in increasing measure, they will keep you from being *ineffective and unproductive*.'

So, how are we to shine the lantern of Christ's character into school life first among pupils? Quite simply, this same self-control, perseverance and kindness *must* mark our teaching. As leaders in the classroom or on the sports field, we must be figures of self-control if we are ever truly to be *leaders*. We must begin with controlling our instinct to be vainglorious or defensive. No pupil will ever trust or be encouraged or uplifted by a teacher interested only in themselves and their own image.

And our self-control should reveal itself in balance – the balance of justice with mercy that we ourselves look for in *our* leaders. When we do discipline, it must be evenly, not in anger or threat - demonstrably for *their* good not our relief. Sometimes we might offer, instead of detention, the opportunity to go through a piece of work together during lunchtime – when the self-sacrifice can act as an inspiration which can work more effectively

than coercion.

As leaders we should also be people of real perseverance. Never should it be hinted that we might be lazy. We should be the first to offer the extra lunchtime tuition even when it hurts.

Kindness should also mark our every interaction with pupils - whether in our expression and tone, or in our interest in pupils' lives, or in our gentleness in dealing with them. Kindness is often picked up as an atmosphere: it can be generated by the way we speak to the least confident child in our class; the way we quench the least suggestion of mockery or belittling among other pupils; the way we leave no hint of a pedestal for mere popularity; the way we challenge *everyone* for unkindness to others; the way we treat *all* pupils with the same respect – the *least* able to the *most* able. And all of this can transfer to a parental trust of *us* – a desire to have *us* teach their children. Such trust is a very bright lantern indeed.

And what about colleagues? James writes in James 3:17, 'But the wisdom that comes from heaven is... peace-loving, considerate, full of mercy, impartial, and sincere. Peace makers who sow in peace raise a harvest of righteousness'. Ours should never be the strident voice of dissent or vituperation. Over our years at a school we should cultivate a reputation, for wisdom; the ameliorating, balancing respectful voice that calls with gentleness for good judgement. When someone treats us with unfairness or lack of respect, instead of broadcasting this to the four winds, we should deal personally and quietly and courteously with the one who has offended. When the Common Room is in uproar, ours should be the voice of balance – the voice always looking for the best in people and their motives and the voice that seeks to understand *why* the latest problem has arisen and to seek *resolution* rather than *complication* of an issue.

And what about our approach as managers or our



Fettes College, Edinburgh, venue for a regional meeting in Scotland

response to those who are in management positions above us? What about when we are asked in either case, to give our allegiance to policies which we judge are mistaken, or run counter to our duty as Christians? What about when we feel that others above or below us are treating us in ways that are unjust, foolish or irresponsible? Again the Holy Spirit, through his apostles, says, 'Speak the truth in love.' If we are to speak up, we must do it with humility, we must do it directly and we must do it disinterestedly. In Romans we are told, 'Do not repay evil for evil but overcome evil with good'. Perhaps the issue is over the school's response to the great question of the day: how we deal with the increasing demand to give unquestioning support to untested and un-researched guidance on gender identity generated by interested lobby groups. In *this* case, any stand we take might be buttressed by the 'good' of going out of our way to love and serve that pupil who is confused about their identity – to serve them with kindness, respect and extra help.

If we are managers ourselves, there is perhaps one word more. Jesus says in Matthew 10:16-17: 'I am sending you out like sheep among wolves. Therefore be wise as serpents and as innocent as doves.' Part of wisdom, surely, is preparedness. I heard recently of one pastoral meeting where it was declared that 'Christian values are the problem, aren't they.' Have we considered our answer? And must it necessarily be couched in specifically Christian terms? That might not be wisest. The apostle Paul says in Acts 17 when debating with Pagans 'Even your own poets have said...'. There are plenty of agnostics and atheists saying the same things we are at present and we must not be hesitant to make common ground with them, surely, if we are to win the day in some key areas.

The poet George Herbert was a young contemporary of William Shakespeare. In his poem 'Constancy', he tells us what he thinks goodness looks like.

"Who is the honest man?

**He that doth still and strongly good pursue.
To God, his neighbour and himself most true.**

...

**Whom none can work or woo
To use in anything a trick or sleight**

...

**This is the mark-man, safe and sure
Who still is right, and prays to be so still.**

It is this character that ought to mark us as Christian teachers. We must aim to be mark-men and women – those that others aim to be like, whose *characters* are a model and inspiration to those around us. We are, in short, to be lanterns in the night.

Pray God that he enables us to burn brightly in the days that are to come.

Human flourishing – and pressure on the curriculum

As part of our 'road trip' to Scotland in September, we attended a meeting in Livingston which was hosted by Meg Patterson of SIM Scotland. Also in attendance were representatives of CVE (Christian Values in Education), Scripture Union and The Message – as well as 'local' TISCA supporters, including a chaplain who travelled down from North Uist!

In order for children and young people to make informed choices about beliefs and values, schools need to provide an objective exposure to a multiplicity of views and training in how to critique them. The paper below presents a positive statement from a Christian perspective on the contentious subject of what it means to be human. It's written by someone based in Scotland.

With a deep awareness of the majesty of God and the limitations of our understanding as human beings the paper is presented humbly, and with prayers that those working in schools will be encouraged to include this viewpoint in their pluralistic approach.

What does it mean to flourish?

Staff



Megan Patterson

Education Consultant for SIM International and Chair of CVE Scotland · May 2022



Education Scotland describing what is important about the curriculum for excellence says:

"As part of their learner journey, all children and young people in Scotland are entitled to experience a coherent curriculum from 3 to 18, in order that they have opportunities to develop the knowledge, skills and attributes they need to **adapt, think critically and flourish in today's world.**" <https://education.gov.scot/education-scotland/scottish-education-system/policy-for-scottish-education/policy-drivers/cfe-building-from-the-statement-appendix-incl-btc1-5/what-is-curriculum-for-excellence>

Human flourishing is on the agenda, not least in education. But what does human flourishing look like? As Christians, we too, want to see children and young people flourish.

And we believe we have a distinctive voice in the debate because there is often a missing piece. Leave God out of the equation and we don't have the full picture for flourishing individuals and communities.

God has shown us how He wants us to understand what it is to be human. Knowing His amazing love and following his creational design, we flourish as men and women, children and young people.

Today, when flourishing is so much talked about, we have a wonderful opportunity to share the biblical story we live in as Christians. I hope this paper will be

an encouragement to you and help you to be confident about what you believe so that you can tell the biblical story with contagious enthusiasm.

What is the biblical story?

God tells us He's the Creator, we are created.

How does that help us? It says we are not alone in the universe, and we are not independent. We live in complete dependence on Him for our every heartbeat. We breathe, eat, sleep, cry and laugh because He enables us. That makes us feel thankful and it stops us from being arrogant. We can't do life on our own.

To be human is to depend on God and to live in response to Him, either positively or negatively. *We flourish when we respond to Him positively in love, obedience and worship.* And that doesn't make us robots or servile. It enables us to be what we are, people made with the privilege of working in partnership with God to care for the world.

The Creator has made and sustains this beautiful, ordered cosmos for us to enjoy. He's entrusted to us its care and development. **To be human is to have purpose and to see significance in our daily work** as we study and shape the planet on His behalf, using it in love for God and our neighbours.

A story is told that one morning, when St Paul's Cathedral was being rebuilt Wren, who was not personally known by many of the workers, stopped and asked three different labourers, all engaged in the same task, what they were doing. He got three different

answers. The first said, 'I am cutting this stone'. The second answered, "I am earning three shillings, six pence a day." The third man straightened up, squared his shoulders, and still holding his mallet and chisel, replied, "I am helping Sir Christopher Wren build this great cathedral." They each had three different ways of looking at the same job. The first one was just doing a task. The second one was just earning a living. The third was doing a small part of a great work. He did not personally know the architect or understand how his task fit into the overall plan. But he believed that there was a plan and that by following it, he would help create something greater than himself. *We flourish when we have purposeful work, not just earning a living but doing something that is part of a bigger purpose.*

We all acknowledge the importance of relationships for human flourishing. We need each other. But can this be explained simply as a sociological phenomenon? Where does this need come from? We believe God has wired us for relationships as He is relational. We are incomplete without others. **To be human is to live in community, responsible for each other's well-being.** *We flourish when we cause others to flourish.* And where does the idea of an inclusive community of equals come from if not from all humans being made equal in the sight of God? It was part of the community of Jesus from the beginning, challenging the embedded hierarchical structures of society of the time.

To be human is to be given an identity by God.

Finding our identity, indeed choosing our identity is one of the key issues for our society. We want to know who we are, to be proud of who we are and to find value in who we are. A solid sense of identity is fundamental to flourishing. But is it something we manufacture or does our value and sense of identity lie somewhere else; in a God who made us, loves us, wants to be in relationship with us and to make us whole?

The story of Jesus is about welcoming and accepting people as they are. His compassion becomes a source of criticism by those who find him too inclusive. But to say

I wrote the poem below some years ago after thinking about Jesus giving up the glory of heaven and becoming human for my sake.

I walk the road of human-ness in His steps.

He slept in a boat

He prayed on a mountain

He rested at a well

I walk the road of human-ness in His steps.

He was tempted in a desert

He wept at a graveside

He was betrayed by His friends

I walk the road of human-ness in His steps.

He was misinterpreted by His enemies

He was killed in my place

He rose in victory

I walk the road of human-ness in His steps.

He is crowned with glory and honour

He has sat down at God's right hand

All things are under His feet

He is my brother

I walk the road of human-ness in His steps.

For more on Human Flourishing visit <https://www.christianflourishing.com>

Jesus welcomes everyone is only part of the story. He wants people to find wholeness, so he accepts everyone but does not want to leave people as they are. He wants them to find a new identity, an identity arising from knowing you are loved, having been given a new purpose and fresh values.

We can search in the wrong places for our true



TISCA gathering in Livingston with host Meg Patterson (far right)

identity and for fulfilment. We may believe that sexual intimacy is the way to fulfilment. However, while sex is God's design and a wonderful gift it is not the path to flourishing. God has made us people who need intimate relationship. Marriage but also true friendships are gifts to help us flourish. We flourish in being in community with others. God has made us male and female in His image and given the gift of marriage between one man and one woman, as the context where our desire for sexual intimacy is met. Children are born and nurtured in a family context. We all need a 'family' of some sort to enable us to thrive. *We flourish, then, when we live in harmony with God's creational design.*

The biblical story is realistic about the world in its brokenness. It witnesses to the all-encompassing and devastating consequences of sin which work against flourishing. We too are realistic that human flourishing will never be untainted in this world. Everything in creation is susceptible to sinful distortion and needs to be renewed. Even our ability to reason is now flawed. We hear the heartbreak of some of our colleagues and pupils who are struggling to discover who they are and why they are here. We listen with compassion to those in anguish and as opportunity arises share the message of God's remedy. We can see substantial healing as we find

unearned forgiveness and fresh purpose through Jesus Christ. **To be human is to acknowledge our weakness and waywardness but to find and offer forgiveness.**

The coming of the Son of God to earth as a human makes possible our redemption and the ultimate renewal of every aspect of creation. Our message is one of hope in a world in which many things can cause us anxiety and even distress. On earth a renewed purpose and the prospect that in the new heaven and the new earth, the anguish will be over, He will wipe away every tear from our eyes. **To be human is to live in that hope of a different future.**

The road to human flourishing is in recognising that the loving Triune God who is sovereign over all of creation (both the natural order and the wide domain of human affairs) wants to know us and heal us. He lays down laws for all His creation which are not a restriction but the means of our flourishing and freedom. Many define freedom in terms of autonomy, but biblical Christianity says the opposite. We flourish and are free when we know Jesus as the one who rescues us from the damaging effects of sin and live in loving, obedient service of our Maker.

Bible references: Gen 1.26-28, Psalm 8, Acts 17.27-28, Jeremiah 31.35, 36, Genesis 8.22, Gen. 3, Revelation 7.9-17

A number of 'TISCA schools' are Prep Schools or Senior Schools with Junior Schools. We asked Andy Pritchard, Teacher and Chaplain at Elstree School, to share some advice for those involved with the transition of pupils from junior / prep school to middle / senior schools

Planting Seeds with Prep School Pupils

Chaplains Staff



Andrew Pritchard

is the author of *The Blockbuster Bible* and *The Teacher's Cut*, a two-book resource for teaching the Bible story for 7-12s in schools, homes, and churches.

My favourite film is *Inception*, an onion-layer masterpiece about the power of ideas planted deep in the mind. The best ideas are positive rather than negative, because, as Leonardo DiCaprio's character says: *"positive emotion trumps negative emotion every time. We all yearn for reconciliation, for catharsis. We need [the subject] to have a positive emotional reaction to all this."*

How can children in prep schools have such a positive reaction to Christian things? A positive association that will be sustained through their teens? How might Christians use and create opportunities that impact such open and fertile minds for good?

The work involves planting seeds. Jesus used the metaphor a great deal, not least because it reminds us how much the work *does* rely on us in part but, more to the point, *does not* rely on us. Sowers don't actually bring life – Jesus is the true vine, and his Father the gardener (John 15:1). The Apostle Paul said, "I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God has been making it grow" (1 Cor 3:6). Somehow therefore, God brings the growth, just as we don't remember each of our meals, but we see and feel their overall impact.

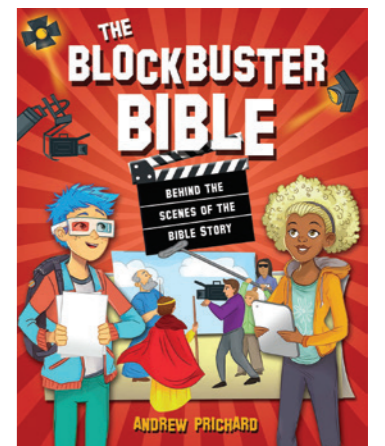
Supporting canes – oh to stretch the analogy – are set up in good relationships. Pupils will not care how much we know until they know how much we care. And they might forget what people tell them, but they will not forget how those people made them feel. The

challenge is to be radically kind and to teach radical truth, encouraging positive associations between the two.

Of course, this all starts with prayer. Perhaps consider forming a staff and/or parents prayer meeting. Perhaps set aside a fixed, longer slot each week to pray like the persistent widow (Luke 18). Those school leavers who join my boarding house Bible study also see prayer made and meant, applying teaching for life.

Senior school housemasters often give new Year 9s two tips: don't wear a mask but rather be yourself and try everything. In their transition, it might be possible to tell Prep School leavers about a Christian meeting at their next school or to give them Bible reading materials to take with them¹. There might even be ways for pupils to serve and then give them such books as End of Term prizes.

There are many ways to help our young people not to feel embarrassed about Christian things - attending, reading, talking, and praying - and that will look different for each of us.



One of Andy's publications

TISCA news

Chaplains

- **Revd James Righetti, Stowe School**, has been appointed from January 2023 in succession to Revd Tim Mullins who died last summer
- **Revd John Ash, Dean Close School** moves on after the summer term into parish work and a new ministry in the New Forest

Heads

- **Pete Last has been appointed to Kingham Hill School** from September 2023
- **Revd Nick Seward is moving to be Head at International Christian School, Hong Kong**, from next September

Schools

- We are delighted to welcome into new membership **Loretto School (Scotland), Samaritan School (India), Solihull School, Warwick School and Claysemore School**



In Westminster Hall with Andrew Lewer MP MBE, TISCA supporter and Chair of the APPG for independent education (January 2023)

Christian organisations

- **ACT** (Association of Christian Teachers) has re-branded and launched a new website
- **CCfE** (Christian Coalition for Education) has set up several sub groups and Alastair Reid now chairs the independent school section
- **Titus Trust and ROCK UK** have now joined TISCA as a member organisation



Elstree School, Berkshire

¹ Maybe something like this? Engage 365: Beginnings and Endings <https://www.thegoodbook.co.uk/engage-365-beginnings-and-endings>

This article is one in a series responding to the very real issue of stress and burnout amongst educational professionals and was kindly shared with us by a partner organisation, ACT – Association of Christian Teachers. Philippa Ruth Wilson has blogged about Jesus and depression at A Certain Brightness for 5 years. She holds a BA in theology, an MA in creative writing, and teaches English to Cardiff teenagers. You can purchase 'A certain brightness: Bible devotions for troubled times' here : A Certain Brightness Philippa Ruth Wilson 9781527106918 | Fast Delivery at Eden

The prevention plan

10 things worn out teachers should remember

Staff



Philippa Ruth Wilson
author

Let's make it crystal clear upfront that I am not an expert in staying stress free in teaching (oh, how my Year Eights would laugh to imagine such a thing!). But as a Christian who has juggled mental health issues with a career in teaching, I have reflected on ways Jesus has made a difference. So, here they are:

1. God is the one who justifies (not Ofsted!)

For many years, I had Tim Keller's words above my desk: "You are adopted into God's family, so you already have your affirmation. You are justified in God's sight, so you have nothing to prove." The gospel means I don't teach to gain affirmation, or to prove myself, but I live and work as someone who is free and loved.

2. Jesus has won me rest!

Sometimes the expectation for teachers is that, in exchange for Teaching Status, you lay down your life on the altar of education. But our ultimate work has been completed at the cross. Jesus did what we could not do. We are free to rest! So, I try to have set working hours. My best is not what I could do with infinite time. My best is what I can do within the boundaries put in place to honour my humanity, and the Lord who calls me to rest in Him. It's also always the lesson you spent five hours planning for that gets interrupted by a fire alarm anyway!

3. It's okay to be okay

I used to think that the best way I could be a good Christian teacher would be to be the best. My excellence (and helpfulness) would be my witness. I couldn't maintain this idea for long: my colleagues have been

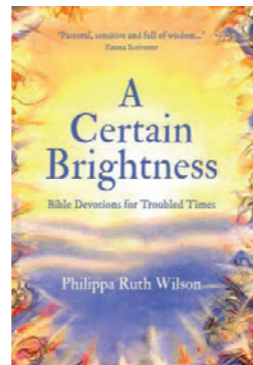
exceptional, and I've received infinitely more than I've given! Yes, I want to honour my boss (Jesus) and do my job well. And I am a better teacher than I would be without Him. But witness isn't about my excellence, but His! What an excellent God, who loves me on my good days and my bad. I am not the shining success of my department, but I am promised fruitfulness because I'm in Christ and he is fruitful. This is a wonder, and I hope my life is a witness to this grace!

4. Tag in Jesus

One of the great stresses of teaching for me has been the keen needs of pupils that bubble below the surface and flare up during tricky classes. I can go home and worry I've made things worse or feel anxious about situations I am helpless to deal with. Praying helps, as long as I pray instead of worrying, rather than worrying as I pray. It helps to say: "Jesus, I give you the situation with Draco." It's a handover: and once I've given it to Him, I do my best not to wrestle it back. If my mind gets back there, I gently remind myself it's with Jesus now: he can handle it when I can't.

5. I can forgive myself

Jesus' call to forgive remains remarkable and uncompromising. Teaching is a beautiful invitation to obey this call, to start each day afresh with an open heart towards those who've hurt you, with the battles



and frustrations of yesterday behind you, and them. I've had to learn to forgive myself too: I was defensive and defaulted to sarcasm, I took pleasure in out-sassing a 13-year-old, I wasn't totally fair. I am tempted to be critical and unforgiving of myself, but I am learning instead to trust in Jesus' forgiveness. Every morning brings new mercies, for me, too.

6. I can forget myself

I don't mean "never consider your own needs". But sometimes forgetting ourselves is what we need. It's a practical way to trust Jesus' promise that we gain our lives by losing them, that there's blessing in giving as well as receiving! So, I try to forget myself: buy a colleague or a dinner lady flowers or chocolate or write them an encouraging note. Stress often tempts me to selfishness, but I want to push back and remind myself, and those around me, that we were made for love!

7. "Help!" is a whole prayer

School can sometimes feel so intense you barely have a moment to remember what day it is, let alone remembering to pray. But setting a watch alarm to go off at midday helped me take a moment to silently remember Jesus: alive, reigning, and willing to help me with Year Nine!

8. Good break time chats

School is rife with opportunities to rant: about pupils, bosses, data requirements, the government. Sometimes talking through stresses can be helpful and required.

But often, doing a play-by-play of the worst moments of my day doesn't actually help. I try not to harm others and minimise the airtime I give to the negatives. Apart from anything else, if I'd indulged in only ranting, I'd have missed out on chances for podcast recommendations, Wordle strategizing, and opportunities to talk about Jesus.

9. Goodness follows me around

"Surely goodness and mercy will follow me all the days of my life." (Psalm 23:6) This verse reminds me to expect blessings from Jesus. He comes to make his blessings flow "as far as the curse is found" and that includes all the way into my specific classroom. It's there, where I am, that he's promised to do good. And this goodness will follow me even on days I can't see it or imagine how it could. And that's okay. Jesus will do good anyway.

10. Permission to heal

Taking time, or taking pills, or doing therapy to get better is not a failure. It is not a comment on competency. It is a way of honouring humanity. When I took sick leave, some people assumed I couldn't handle the stress of the job. But the roots of my depression pre-dated any knowledge that PGCEs, NQTs, CPD, SLT or any other teaching-based acronym existed. Having the courage to admit that my deep wounds needed time and space to heal was a significant step towards my getting better. I am a body that Jesus loves: it matters to him that I hurt, it matters to him that I heal. For me, taking time off was a way to trust these truths.

Demonstrating the teachings of Jesus with friends is powerful!

Parents Staff

Tracy Williams
Editor of testingtruth.com

**TESTING
TRUTH**

Children get to a certain age, and then, for whatever reason, they just turn mean...

I had a great time at school, but, up until around the age of 10, things took a dramatic turn. Maybe it was just in my school - it was a Christian school too! My pre-teens

were fraught with highs, lows and many tears. I was in a large girl group where everyone was competing for the friendship of others and people were turning on members of the group from one day to the next. We sang Christian songs together, said corporate prayers, many had

believing parents, so why weren't the practical teachings of Jesus entering into the daily life of this group?

Round and round the 'teary-go-round' we go

It was like a vicious circle, where you would receive insults about yourself or your parents and even though it felt unnatural, you would hurdle mean words back. I admit it, to my shame, I pushed through my conscience and made kids cry. It was fuelled by hurt, embarrassment and shame. When there are two or more kids together, it only takes one bully to be amongst them for a group to quickly turn into a gang of bullies. "You hurt me, so I hurt you", "you stole my friend so I'm against all of you" and around the 'teary-go-round' we go.

From tears to fruit

At some point in my life, as a child, I started reading my bible and really taking on board the teachings of Jesus. I had set in my heart that I was going to try His teachings for myself. I had a friend over at my house and we were hanging out in my room, but, she started to be mean to me and hurdle insults at me. This was the perfect moment to try break this toxic cycle and test one of Jesus's teachings. Instead of crying or retaliating, I got up, asked if she wanted some fruit and went out of the room to grab some fruit for us. Unbeknownst to me, spiritually that was a fruit-producing moment and isn't it amazing how God pairs the spiritual with the physical as we learn and grow. When I came back with our fruit and entered the room, I saw my friend and she had tears falling down her face. I was shocked and asked her why she was crying, to which she responded, she felt terrible as she was mean to me but I was nice to her. I was able to tell her about Jesus and His teachings and about how we should not retaliate but instead we should love one another. Her parents were not religious, but for her birthday, I gave her a bible and later in her life, she came to God and was saved.

From retaliation to admiration

When I was in a confrontation with a girl, she threw



an insult at me and I purposefully found something I admired about her and gave it back. She would say, for example, "You are such a loser!" and then I would say, "I really like your earrings and think they suit you, where did you get them from?". One of the hardest things to do is to have a fight with someone who is giving you a compliment as it says "A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger." Prov 15:1. This really baffles the mind of the person being mean and can actually win them over to become a friend.

From fiery gossip to trusted friendship

When my friend spoke to me about someone else, I found the best thing to do is to say something like this to them "I understand you would like to talk about that person, but it is probably best you speak directly to them if you have any issues with them, as I don't feel comfortable speaking about them when they are not here with us." It is better not to add wood to the fire or facilitate its growth "Without wood, a fire goes out; without gossip, a conflict ceases." Prov 26:20. In doing so, I gained more trust with my friends, as they felt safe with me. What they saw me doing for others, is what they knew I would do for them too.

Environment breeds impact

What an incredible impact believing children can have on non-believing children for the Kingdom of God. Children with no roots of faith are shaken when they receive what they have not deserved in the actions of Jesus demonstrated through a Christian child.

It is so important to provide the right environment that a Christian child needs. Where they are receiving love and acceptance from God in a personal relationship and have a solid and loving foundation at home so that they do not need these things from their friends. This enables them to become a watering can that regularly waters others, simply because, they are full themselves and have much overflow to give. I wish that I had stayed this course, but, sadly I did not, and I strayed from God for many years. It was, however, this root of relationship with Him that brought me back again at the age of twenty-four.

Putting faith into practice

Let's teach our children to call every challenge and hurtful moment an opportunity to demonstrate and practice the love of Jesus Christ. Let's show our children how to become so grounded in His love that we can't feel the sharp pains that come out of people's mouths, but, only have love overflowing to give. In doing so, we can all pick up the souls around us that have fallen to the ground and run together to finish the race. Just as rotten fruit makes other fruit rotten, love can spread too, and in doing this, we help build the Kingdom of God.

TISCA's Annual Conference on Tuesday, 13th June 2023 is again being held in Westminster at the Emmanuel Centre. Our theme is *In His image – our dignity, development, distinctiveness and desire to serve in schools*. In the article below, Alan Campbell, a Belfast pastor, considers our Image in Christ and a Biblical Worldview.

Cinderella, the Little Glass Slipper of Reality

Chaplains Heads Parents Staff Governors Pupils Supporters



Alan Campbell

is from Belfast, he pastors at Blurton Baptist in Stoke-on-Trent. He came to Christ from Atheism as a young adult. He writes for Reach the Isles and seeks to equip churches and ministries to engage the post-Christian culture.



It may seem daunting to engage this fluid generation of hybrid ideas, unfixed morality and easily triggered sensitivities with the good news.

However, beneath the easy-going indifference or the enraged cancel culture is someone wired by God to be fixed to something. We weren't designed to live in a vacuum of ideas, or in the free fall of relativism. No one can live there consistently for any length of time in the world that God created.

We all need a framework for identity (who am I?), meaning (why am I here?), belonging (where do I fit in?) and destiny (where am I going?). Unconsciously we all live out our answers to the complex issues of epistemology (what is true?), metaphysics (what is real?) and ethics (what is good?). We all have a gospel narrative; a view about what is wrong with our life/our world (fall) and how it can be made right (salvation).

Under these is the deepest question; *how can I know that I am right about what I believe?*

The answers to all these questions together make up someone's worldview.

God has mercifully revealed himself to us and has given us concrete answers. Scripture is consistent with itself throughout and with reality absolutely.

- Who am I? A creature, a sinner, forgiven in Christ.
- Why am I here? To know God, glorify him and enjoy him.
- Where do I fit in? In relationship with the Triune God and his people.
- Where am I going? Rescued from eternal destruction to one day stand before the presence of God, faultless.

- What is true? God revealed is our Source of all Truth.
- What is real? God revealed is our Source of all Reality.
- What is good? God revealed is our Source of all Goodness.

- What is wrong with us/the world? A good creation

broken by sin.

- How can it be made right? Jesus and his gospel.

How do we take the Biblical Worldview into our conversations? Picture the Prince of the realm, glass slipper in hand, seeking to find the woman whose foot fits. He will marry her alone.

1. Listen/Ask

Every conversation you are part of today involves worldviews. There will be global, national, local and/or personal matters discussed.

Simply find something that person is interested in. Listen. Ask questions; "why do you believe that?", "how did you arrive at that opinion?".

2. Filter

Pass everything through the Biblical Worldview:

- Are there claims about truth, goodness, reality?
- Are there opinions about purpose, identity, belonging and destiny?
- Is there a gospel narrative about what is wrong and how it can be fixed?

3. Expose

Underneath these views are shaky foundations. Society, law, and family are sandy foundations because they are constantly shifting. Go deeper, compassionately expose these foundations as unreliable. Show that the glass slipper of reality doesn't consistently fit the foot of their worldview.

4. Share

Graciously share the Biblical Worldview. Our goal is not to convince, we leave that to the Spirit. Simply help them see that the Biblical Worldview is robust and consistent with reality: the glass slipper of reality perfectly fits

the foot of the Biblical Worldview. It makes sense and it makes sense of the world we live in.

From there it's a small step to the gospel; "can I share with you what I believe about what is wrong and how it can be fixed?"

May we enter into our vocations this week confident

in the reality that each person we interact with, whether it looks like it or not, is desperately searching for the answers God has graciously given. May we gently, lovingly and confidently live out these realities and share them with others as God gives us openings.

In recent months, Prince Harry (Duke of Sussex) has alleged 'unconscious bias' within the Royal Family where racism is concerned. Our Christmas Term 'online evening with...' speaker, Ayo Awotona, addressed this theme in her presentation – and a summary follows...

Considering Bias and The Mind of Christ

Chaplains Heads Parents Staff Governors Pupils Supporters



Ayo Awotona
Founder & CEO of Joy Uplifts

Anyone who takes the bold step of accepting Jesus Christ as their Lord and saviour automatically – through faith – becomes a citizen of a realm that goes beyond what the physical eyes can see. This realm is the **Kingdom of God**.

Being a citizen of the **Kingdom of God** qualifies us to become ambassadors of the Gospel message – the Good News!

To be effective carriers of the Gospel message, however, a renewal of the mind is a daily habit we are encouraged to adhere to so that we progressively develop the mind of Christ.

What could overcoming unconscious bias with the mind of Christ look like in the context of our day-to-day working life?

Unconscious bias can be a challenging topic to navigate, to say the least...

One of the reasons for this is it's just that... unconscious. However, once a light is shed on an area within us that isn't

exactly *Christ-like* and we are made aware of biases, we – through being empowered by the Holy Spirit (rather than fighting the battle in our own strength) can experience a long-lasting transformation that will pass onto generations after us.

This personal transformation thereby has a positive impact within our spheres of influence.

This thought-provoking session causes us to look within, have that honest dialogue and practically see what steps we can make towards progressively overriding our unconscious biases – that so easily besets us – with the powerful word of God!

A TISCA evening with...
Ayo Awotona
(Joy Uplifts)
Thurs 17th Nov
18.15-19.30
TISCA | The Independent Schools Christian Alliance

Many schools have recently made appointments of staff responsible for well-being and some have also created 'well-being centres'. Whilst promoting well-being among pupils is central to schools, this can only be achieved if staff, too, are considered. One of our Chaplains addresses this key area and also touches on TISCA's theme for the year – 'courage'.

Promoting well-being – among staff

Chaplains Heads Staff



Paul Gooding
Head of Wellbeing, Assistant Chaplain, Abingdon School

Promoting healthy and sustainable staff wellbeing in schools should be a key focus for senior leaders and chaplains.

The current statistics about teaching staff wellbeing make for grim reading. Education Support's most recent Teacher Wellbeing Index reports that 59% of staff have considered leaving the profession (The Guardian also recently reported that a third of teachers who qualified in the last decade have left) and 78% have experienced mental health symptoms due to their work. It is important to recognise that if you are struggling, you are certainly not alone and it is important to get help, whether this is for you or for a colleague.

Reaching out is a sign of strength and not weakness, it takes courage (this is also a key message to communicate to our student body as well). Chaplains can play a key part in supporting staff; whether it be by offering a sacred space for prayer and reflection, "loitering with intent" to offer a genuine listening ear, having lunch with a colleague who is struggling, sharing

our own struggles in this area, offering hospitality as well as effectively signposting to external organizations and professional help.

It has also struck me that the only commandment called "holy" was to Sabbath, to model rest and that Jesus often retreated from the crowd, from the busy demands of his ministry, to be alone, to rest, and to receive from his heavenly father (we could also talk about Mary and Martha...). In a culture marked by teacher burnout, this provides chaplains with a key opportunity to model this important kingdom value of rest. On a practical level, this will inevitably involve helping colleagues to be more bounded and assertive, to actively make time for themselves each day, but we want to nurture staff that thrive rather than staff who are burnt out.

As we support staff, who are the engine room of our schools, so they, in turn, will have a positive impact on the students they serve. It is a win-win situation, therefore actively promoting staff wellbeing must be a top priority for senior leaders and chaplains alike.



Abingdon School

How did TISCA start?

TISCA – The beginnings

Chaplains Heads Parents Staff Governors Pupils Supporters



Peter Leroy
former Head of Monkton Prep School

The Independent Schools Christian Alliance (TISCA) was formed into a trust in 1995 by a group of about 50 independent school Christian heads.

They had been meeting regularly in London since 1988 under the title of the Wadhurst Fellowship. The intention was to adopt a more outward-looking and pro-active role, seeking to provide an intelligent evangelical Christian voice within the independent sector of education, and perhaps beyond.

The Wadhurst Fellowship

This had started with exploratory meetings at Wadhurst College about promoting Christian schools called by the Head, Daphne Swatman. Also involved was the Revd John Eddison (Wadhurst Governor, Chaplain to IAPS, Scripture Union staff member). It widened its reach under the leadership of Christopher Bacon (HM Dean Close) as a gathering of invited evangelical-minded heads, at the Royal Commonwealth Society in February 1988. He acted

thereafter as both Honorary Secretary and Treasurer. Robin Vickers, Bursar of Wadhurst College, assisted with the organisation, in due course becoming Treasurer of TISCA. The twice-yearly meetings were much valued, but the Wadhurst Fellowship confined itself to providing mutual support and encouragement, along with a forum for the exchange of ideas. A different Head chaired each meeting, but a constitution drafted by Richard Blake (HM Luckley-Oakfield) was approved in 1991. Attendance wavered, perhaps because of some uncertainty of purpose, along with the cost of travel.

When Wadhurst College finally closed in the early 1990s (after some attempts at amalgamation), John Eddison encouraged his governor colleagues to allocate a significant residual sum to the formation of a new organisation with evangelical Christian educational purposes.

The case for change

Secular protagonists of independent education stoutly defended its moral merits but seemed to have little to say about its spiritual responsibility, or about the cause of Christian education in particular. In order to fill this vacuum, TISCA would need to present the Biblical case for Christian education articulately, convincingly, and unitedly.

Most members of the Wadhurst Fellowship entered the teaching profession in the

Wadhurst College, Sussex



days when Christians saw vocation in terms of witness and evangelism and did not feel it necessary to justify independent education. Many of their schools were not within the evangelical tradition and were either nominally Christian or quite secular foundations.

These Heads now found themselves in positions of influence and authority without a coherent theological philosophy to support what they were doing. This was at a time when there were misgivings about independent education in general, about boarding in particular, and therefore misunderstanding existed.

A well-attended meeting in 1993 commissioned 'Three Wise men' (Ken Barnes - lately HM Eversfield, John Eddison, and Michael Coates - former Head of Monkton Combe Junior School and General Secretary of IAPS) to meet and report on the possible formation of a purposeful alliance. The proposal to establish a trust to support committed Christians in independent schools and promote Biblical thinking in education was warmly received.

The name on the initial trust deed in 1994 included the term 'Evangelical'; but the suggestion that its public name should include this word met with concern, especially among those who were Heads of schools where it might alienate and prove counter productive. The intention was that the new partnership should also serve a wider Christian teacher constituency. Following a vote among the Heads, in April 1995 it was named The Independent Schools Christian Alliance. The official launch took place in Church House, Westminster that October, where Michael Coates gave an address entitled, 'For such a time as this'.

TISCA emerges

TISCA's vision and objectives, along with its Biblical underpinning and rationale, were set out in an 80-page consultancy report written by Michael Coates. Commissioned by a Consultative Committee chaired by Richard Blake, it was produced in 1995. The Biblical Christian case for being involved in independent boarding and day education within the contemporary context was set out compellingly. The emphasis was on the Christian calling to be proactively 'transformationist' rather than simply 'conservationist'.

TISCA's objectives and intentions were expressed as four spheres of activity:

Spirituality

By providing opportunities for Heads of independent schools to meet for prayer, study, and fellowship.

Witness

By demonstrating an active and sensitive Christian presence within the independent sector.

Discussion

By creating a forum for debate and exchange of ideas on a Christian response to matters of professional concern.

Research

By supporting and encouraging in-depth consideration from a Biblical perspective of issues which relate to the education and spiritual nurture of young people.

The founding trustees appointed in 1995 were: Richard Blake, Chairman; Ken Barnes, General Secretary 1995-8; Robin Vickers, Treasurer; Hugh Bradby (HM Kingsmead); Revd. John Eddison; Michael Coates; Revd. Michael Hepworth (HM Birkdale); Gill Morris (HM Fernhill Manor); John Richardson (HM Culford); Peter LeRoy (lately HM Monkton JS and Vice Chair IAPS). At this juncture Christopher Bacon decided to step aside. That TISCA was established and developed so quickly and efficiently was undoubtedly due to the capability and dedication of Ken Barnes, assisted by his wife Margaret.

Full membership was open to Christian Heads of any independent school. Governors, staff, parents, and others were welcomed as Associate Members. TISCA aimed to provide support, advice, training, guidance, information, and fellowship. The new trust became a member organization of the Evangelical Alliance (EA) and adopted its Basis of Faith. TISCA set out to work in close cooperation with other organisations in the field of education who shared similar aims and values. These included the Association of Christian Teachers, Scripture Union, and in due course, the Titus and Stewards Trusts.

TISCA emerged as the only organization of its kind working specifically in the independent sector, offering Christians the chance to exchange ideas with each other and work collaboratively. TISCA's members soon realised that they had the potential to influence educational thinking at the highest levels. Its well-attended meetings in London attracted a range of distinguished speakers. Appointing a series of experienced and capable general secretaries enabled TISCA to flourish in the years ahead.



Mental health among young people, let alone adults, is an area of great concern in schools. In the following article, former teacher Kathy Pinsent (now a Mental Health Practitioner) focuses on social media and gives some suggestions...

Supporting the mental health of young people in our schools

Chaplains Heads Parents Staff Governors Pupils Supporters



Kathy Pinsent

is currently an Education Mental Health Practitioner/Supervisor in North Dorset. Kathy previously worked as a Dorm parent at Hebron School, Ootacamund (2005-2010) and then as a house mistress at Sherborne School for Girls (2010-2015). She then worked at the Pilsdon Community in Bridport, Dorset with adults whose mental health difficulties had severely impacted their lives (2015-2020). After this experience, she discovered that half of all mental health conditions in adults begin before the age of 14 and so she decided to retrain as an Education Mental Health Practitioner to work in one of the new Mental Health Support Teams in schools. The concept for these new teams was set out in the government Green paper (2018) *'Transforming children and young people's mental health provision'* and MHSTs are currently being rolled out across the country.



Adult stress and anxiety triggers the stress response in young people too. We know that we are wired to **flee, fight, flop or fawn** whenever we perceive a threat in our immediate environment. Every day in school, we see students experiencing panic symptoms, wanting to run away, zoning out, becoming angry or aggressive, not wanting to engage or constantly seeking reassurance – these are all signs that they are feeling overwhelmed and fearful.

We've all been through a very stressful time – COVID, the shock of Russian aggression towards Ukraine and now financial worries and so as adults, we are all struggling to manage our own anxiety. This filters down into our schools. The media do not help as the spotlight is thrown onto tragedy and climate change. Therefore, it is hardly surprising that young people are struggling with high levels of anxiety and they are often using very unhealthy ways to cope with it.

In the past, we have spent a lot of time educating our students about how to live physically healthy lifestyles but now they need a lot more good information about

how to regulate their emotions in a healthy way. This is a life skill and not many adults have habits or practices built into their daily lives to help them connect with feelings of peace and self-acceptance. Staying mentally well is something we have to discuss and model and make time for.

All human beings need certain things to feel mentally well:

- We need to feel that we are safe – free from threat of abuse and judgment.
- We need to feel that we belong especially to a group of our peers
- We need to feel connected to other people
- We need to feel that we are listened to – that we are significant and we matter
- We need to feel that our contribution to the world is valued and appreciated and needed

Social media fulfils many of these functions for young people and so it is an invaluable tool for them. However, it is also the place where the most judgment and criticism is unleashed. Can you imagine carrying around in your pocket the thing that can decimate

your self-confidence and self-esteem sparked by one thoughtless post? Social media can leave young people open to judgment or public ridicule. How to address this is a huge topic but I think helping young people to know their own values is very important. Living by leaning into your values gives you authenticity and confidence and helps you make value-based choices about how you live.

As adults, we need to review our own relationship with technology! A few practical ideas about how to manage your own social media use could be to

1. **Use an app to track how much time you spend on social media each day.** Then set a goal for how much you want to reduce it by.
2. **Turn off your phone at certain times of the day.** Don't take your phone with you to the bathroom.
3. **Don't bring your phone or tablet to bed.** Turn devices off and leave them in another room overnight to charge.
4. **Disable social media notifications.** It's hard to resist the constant buzzing, beeping, and dinging of your phone alerting you to new messages. Turning off notifications can help you regain control of your time and focus.

5. **Limit checks.** If you compulsively check your phone every few minutes, wean yourself off by limiting your checks to once every 15 minutes. Then once every 30 minutes, then once an hour. There are apps that can automatically limit when you're able to access your phone.
6. **Try removing social media apps from your phone** so you can only check Tik Tok, Insta, Facebook, Twitter, and the like from your phone. If this sounds like too drastic a step, try removing one social media app at a time to see how much you really miss it.

Helping schools become mentally healthy spaces needs everyone to play their part. It needs a 'whole school approach' where every aspect of school life is evaluated to consider if more could be done to think about everyone's well-being. If you're interested in thinking more the mental health in your school, the Anna Freud Centre creates a lot of helpful resources (<https://www.annafreud.org/schools-and-colleges/resources/care-animation-and-resources/>)



The gospel and teen culture: do they ever connect?

Chaplains Staff



Revd. John Ash
Chaplain, Dean Close School

The good news of Jesus Christ is acultural and ahistorical (in relevance, not in inception).

It has challenged and molded cultures throughout history and all over the world. It continues to do the very same today. Teenagers are culturally bound (ie. they hold a worldview which is molded by the prevailing worldview around them) and historically situated. Being people who live within history somewhere on the earth, we surely believe that the teen can and should find in the gospel both relevance and personal resonance. How strange it is, then, that so often we raise our hands in resignation to the gospel scalpel bouncing off the teen Kevlar of unbelief. I wonder how much of this attitude in us says more about the generational gap between 'us' and 'them' (accentuated through Covid?) than it does about the gospel and the teen? Where does the teen Kevlar allow the gospel in? Perhaps more accurately, where is the gospel best designed to woo the teenager into the Kingdom?

Here's a headline: in my experience, the average teen is not thinking through the big questions of existence and eternity. Their world of candy floss entertainment can anaesthetize against existential angst – at least for a while. Instead of the intellectual questions that past generation apologetics used to answer, we're left with their morals. Social media encourages fundamentalist moral pharisaism, which amplifies a burning sense of right and wrong morality ("You can't say that! You're not welcome here! We've got to care about this!") without



Dean Close School chapel

a wider scaffold of anthropology or philosophy or – dare I say it – theology. The points of connection, therefore, between the gospel and teen are moral in essence, from which we need to work backwards to the God who defines the essence of 'good'. In other words, no longer are we saying that legalism is bad. Rather, we're seeking to endorse some moralistic mores of the day, demonstrating that they make sense only in light of the God of all grace.

Here's a stab at some:

- *Creation care*: it's one thing to care for our physical world for our children's children, but how much greater a driver is the belief that this is God's world which is groaning with us (Rom 8:22)? Let me tell you why your sustainability passion is worth being passionate about.
- *Wellness movement*: mindfulness, (often Eastern) meditation, balanced diet, exercise, community involvement, and the emphasis on personal discipline which all of this requires, have their roots patented in Christendom. Disciplines of silence, solitude, community, confession, sabbath, giving and communion all seem to have a counter-cultural appeal to the subversive teen. Let's better enjoy and emulate the God of grace. Let's distrust our compulsive impulses. Learn the power of self-denial for the sake of... Christ.
- *Equality, Diversity and Inclusion*: cut off from community, often ashamed of family heritage, seeking to emulate the impossibly perfect influencers, teens are cut adrift from many of the anchors which held previous generations in personal security. 'Who am I?' There is a sense that it is safer to be/side with a minority group because then my lived experience becomes privileged and the E,D & I movement has my back. But why should the weak and marginalized be protected and given a voice? Why should those I may disagree with have their viewpoint amplified and heard? Because there is a Kingdom whose only qualification for membership is the recognition that I belong on the outside and want to come in. Because Christ's Truth cannot be

threatened by alternative views.

- *History and mystery*: The enlightenment culture of most of our schools is reluctant to admit when we have hit the buffers of our knowledge. The paradox is that the more mastery we obtain, the smaller our world can appear and the more cynicism creeps in. Against such a backdrop it is refreshing to revel in the mysteries of eternity and the Trinitarian Godhead, for example. "I Cannot Tell" (W.Y. Fullerton) is one of

my favourite hymns because it doesn't suffer from intellectual overreach. In showcasing mystery and knowable truth, we enjoy intellectual honesty and a worldview which shrinks humanity to our proper place, and which magnifies YHWH to his. As we showcase the same in our schools, we invite the next generation into the intellectual humility of many millenia past; something which seems attractively solid and lasting against the flimflam of the present.

As we continue to consider well-being and mental health, 'Hutch' (one of our Trustees and Head of Chaplaincy at Monkton Combe), focuses in on the world of the 'influencer'.

Tate & Our Teens...

Chaplains Heads Parents Staff



Revd Andrew Hutchison
Chaplain at Monkton Combe School

We are all influencers. Whether we like it or not, we are all influencers and are influenced by others. Reflect on our own lives and they will be full of people who have had an impact on us, who have shaped our values, our thinking and the way we live.

One of the biggest influencers in the world of our teens currently is the controversial figure of Andrew Tate. During COVID, our teens were pushed further into the online world of social media and they haven't subsequently been able to extract themselves from it since, so they are even more in the influence of those through the screen.

There is something attractive about Andrew Tate: his huge success, wealth, fast cars and extravagant living - who doesn't want to be rich and successful?! However, there is more than that: Andrew Tate is never afraid to say what he thinks and is prepared to hold some outrageous and controversial views. In our cancel-culture world, where often we are unsure about holding any view or representing any opinion that might be deemed controversial or offensive, there is something inspiring about someone who is prepared to do this.

Yet of course, however appealing, there is much that is very dangerous about Andrew Tate: the misogynistic self-centredness and the degrading of others are not only starting to define many of our teenage men but also the way they relate to others. Passing comments that



Monkton Combe chapel

are degrading in nature (especially to girls) that they put down as "banter" in fact stick and can cause lasting, emotional and sometimes very deep damage. Andrew Tate's defence is that he is taken out of context and, while context is key and things online are often at odds with reality, this is not the case here. The added danger is that many say that they can see through the misogyny and wrongness of Andrew Tate but like to watch him because he is amusing. However, I am not convinced that is true - they are still being fed something that is not good.

We need a better influencer! It is not only a matter of helping our teens to consider what they want to be known for, to be influenced by and how to influence others, but to also be pointing them to the best influencer. The influencer who spoke and acted consistently with grit, determination, fairness, grace and mercy, who always put others before himself, who cared for those around him, who showed what it truly means to value others. The influencer who did not come to be served but to serve and give his life as a ransom for many (Mark 10:45).

The Freedom to Fail

Chaplains Heads Parents Staff Governors Pupils Supporters



Peter Middleton
Head of Oswestry School – and 'Strictly Shropshire' star!

Failure is all too often seen as a dirty word. The very prospect of Failure is so terrifying to us that we are crippled by a fearfulness that leads us to avoid the potential for any possibility of failure.

So why is it that we fear failure? I suspect that for most of us, a large part of our fear of failure is down to worrying about what other people think about us. We want to be accepted. We want to be seen to fit in. Failure, therefore, isn't a hat we particularly want to wear.

We don't want to fail, so we try our level best to avoid it. Instead, we tend to reside in our Comfort Zones, spaces where we feel confident, comfortable, and safe. A zone where we know that, even if it's not somewhere we will necessarily succeed, it is certainly somewhere that we can avoid failing.

Yet as anyone who has ever succeeded at the top level will tell you, to achieve success you are going to have to experience failure, and indeed embracing failure as not just an inevitability but a positive stepping stone towards helping you achieve the success that you strive for. From JK Rowling – who chose to speak on 'The Fringe Benefits of Failure' when she addressed graduates of Harvard University – to James Dyson, whose 5,126 prototypes eventually led to his final cyclone technology breakthrough, the list of successful authors, innovators and sporting stars who extol the benefits of failure is a lengthy one. Most famously, perhaps, one of the greatest – if not the greatest – basketball players of all time, Michael Jordan, put it like this:

"I've missed more than 9,000 shots in my career. I've lost almost 300 games. 26 times I've been trusted to take the game winning shot and missed. I've failed over and over and over again in my life. And that is why I succeed."

Last term, I was very much out of my comfort zone doing something that I find very difficult and have no prior experience in: dancing. Convinced to take part as a contestant in the charity event Strictly Shropshire

raising funds for Hope House & Ty Gobaith children's hospices, along with the other 11 contestants, I had to perform a salsa routine to a packed audience of over 400 people on the evening of Friday 25th November.

The very thought of it was utterly terrifying, but as a process, I greatly enjoyed the experience of being a learner once again, with all the frustrations, failing and falling that comes with it, but likewise the satisfaction, confidence and joy that comes – as CS Lewis put it – from failing forward towards success.

Strange though it may sound, my greatest ambition for the school in which I am Headmaster is that it is known to be a failing school. If Oswestry School is known as a failing school, that should tell you that we are comfortable with the concept of failure, understand its role as a stepping stone on the journey to success, and we don't fear failure. I want us to be courageous in our approach to failure, determined to step out of our comfort zones, doing things that are difficult, challenging, perhaps even a little scary. It doesn't have to be dancing, but whatever it is that would be in your discomfort zone, why not give it a try this year?!



Peter Middleton – in training for 'Strictly'!



Oswestry School, Shropshire

Working in the UK and abroad, serving God where you are placed

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Wendy Wright
HM Spouse and Head of MFL, St Andrew's Preparatory School, Turi, Kenya

I had a very 'traditional' upbringing.

I was the daughter of teachers who were established in their very local roles and without any ambition, as far as I could tell, of ever doing anything 'out of the ordinary.' So to find myself now with my husband over 2 years into our roles at St Andrew's School, Turi, would have seemed like fantasy all those years ago! The fact that we are here is testimony to the power of a gracious God who leads and nurtures, but also to the sovereignty of a thrilling and adventurous God who often has surprises for us when we totally surrender our own ideas for our future. Ian and I were, quite possibly, the least likely pair to lay everything down and follow a potentially 'wild' calling. But God asked us to do just that.

For us, our calling to Turi was a bit of a Damascus Road experience over the course of a single weekend – from an initial 'Oh no, no way José' to a unanimous 'Well, why not? Let's push a door.' We moved out to Kenya in August 2020, right in the middle of a global

pandemic and one which had yet to really grip Africa. We got to know our new school community through a computer screen and we were physically separated from our children and parents for 18 months. We did struggle with all of this, but have we ever doubted our calling? Not one single day. We are blessed to work in a community where Christ is at the heart of everything; we can be unabashed followers of Christ and we can share our faith with our students and colleagues in freedom and peace. There are opportunities every single day to share the Gospel with those yet to believe it. Yes, there are also plenty of challenges – Africa is hard – However, would we turn back the clock and say 'no' to the door? Not for a second. If you possess even the tiniest inkling to go overseas, examine the logistics of course, but push the door. I can testify to the truth that there is much blessing for those who are willing to serve God where He chooses to place them.

Not your usual school wildlife – anyone for Forest School?



St Andrew's School, Turi



Weekends off from St Andrew's, Turi

To serve – or not to serve – OVERSEAS?

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Christopher Barnes

Christopher Barnes has been a teacher and school leader for 23 years. He and his family have lived and worked in Moscow, New York City, Johor Bahru (Malaysia) and Staffordshire, UK.

I may not have ended up where I intended to go, but I think I ended up where I needed to be...
(Douglas Adams)

Whilst Adams was not a believer, this quote sums up very nicely the nature of serving God where you are and what can happen when you allow Him to work through you.

In 2003, I moved to Moscow to teach in an international school. I wouldn't say that I felt particularly close to God at the time, but the head of my school – on finding out that I was a lapsed Christian – insisted that I came to church with her. This proved to be a life-changing experience, as through this church I met my wife Nataly: we married in 2006.

Working overseas pushes you out of your comfort zone. You need to form friendships quickly, to be open to others and trust in a way that is not always needed at home. The people around you become your family, as you go through shared experiences in a much deeper way.

Serving God when working overseas is by walking the 'Emmaus Road' with people – seeking to live a Christian life and example that opens conversations, often at the most unexpected times. Reading the story of Aslan on the Stone Table from 'The Lion, The Witch and The Wardrobe' sparked the curiosity of a Year 6 class in Moscow one year. Some of them realised the hidden meaning and we began to discuss Easter in greater depth.

It was a blessing to be part of small group ministries in each church, and our strongest friendships are with those from our time overseas. This included being involved with the worship teams, as well as specific projects within the church, such as outreach to orphanages or local charities.

God opens doors you never thought possible when you let Him. If you feel the call to teach overseas, follow it – you don't know where He will lead you!

Return from Overseas

Staff



Fergus Llewellyn

Head, Cumnor House, Sussex

At a recent regional TISCA meeting at Cranleigh School, I was really challenged by an excellent talk from Martin Reader (Head at Cranleigh), who spoke with great personal conviction and humility about our role, as school leaders, in sharing our faith, and facilitating the gospel work in our schools.

Like many Christian school leaders, I was both excited by Martin's example, inspired to do likewise, but filled with wariness about my own circumstances. Prior to my post as a Headmaster of a Prep School in Sussex, I had the great privilege of working at a Christian School in Kenya, called St Andrew's, Turi. Here the whole ethos and practice was centred on the Christian faith. The gospel was preached openly; teachers prayed with their classes; Headmasters prayed with their leadership teams; bible studies and Christian Unions abounded; it was truly a Christian School.

Yet shortly after my appointment to Sussex, I received a phone call from my Chair of Governors. Parents had been researching me on social media, and had become very worried that such an evangelical had been appointed. Was I going to try and convert the children? Was I going to bring an attitude of judgement into a rather progressive and tolerant community? I

was flown over, and asked to attend two public forums with parents, where I was asked a series of questions about my faith, and how I saw it living in practice in my Headship.

As it happened, like all difficult moments in life, God used it for good. The forums gave me a platform for me to speak openly about my faith, but also reassure parents that I was here to love my neighbours, not judge them, and sow Christ-like values into the community in a manner that they would be comfortable with.

However, I would be lying if that moment has not had an effect on me. There have been several times when I have stopped short of being authentic about my faith, for fear of a possible reaction from a parent body that assume to still be sensitive about this. It is also a burden for Heads to carry when navigating the various requirements from the DfE that we might, on a private and personal level, have some concerns about. I am sure I am not alone in this.

So how to move forward? With gentleness but with purpose. The gospel is too great a prize not to work towards. Our lives should be distinctive, our hearts open and our mouths eager to share should the moment, and the context, be right. We seek wisdom and opportunity, hoping our example is enough to witness well, and that God will open the doors in his timing and grace.

– TISCA ANNUAL CONFERENCE –

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Cumnor House, Sussex

How much should a school use the voice of its pupils in Chapel? Jim Houghton, Chaplain at Eltham School, gives us his thoughts.

Student Voice in Chapel

Chaplains Heads



Jim Houghton

Chaplain and MFL teacher, TISCA Trustee, at Eltham College

Months before the day in question, I had asked one of the Christians in Y13, a boy from Sri Lanka who was winger for the 1st XV, to speak in Chapel to the whole school.

A week beforehand, he sent me what he planned to say. It was his testimony in detail and language that I, as Chaplain, wouldn't have used. I edited it significantly and sent it back to him. Two days before he was due to give the Chapel, he came to see me. "Sir", he said, "this isn't my testimony anymore, it's your interpretation of it. Either I say what I wanted to say, or I don't want to speak in Chapel anymore". I relented and gave in, slightly dreading what might happen. In the event, it was one of the most memorable Chapel services of my eight years here. You could have heard a pin drop as he explained how the Lord had suddenly convicted him of deep sin, brought him to tears and then given him the peace that comes from knowing Jesus as Saviour. Was I wrong to ask him to change the language? Not sure...I still feel uncomfortable with how he phrased it. However, it emphasised to me a lesson that the Lord has been teaching me over the last decade: that the person who says it matters as much as what they say.

I think this finds support in Scripture: we're studying 1 Peter in our Christian groups this year and I've been struck recently by the exhortation to 'live such good lives among the pagans that though they accuse you of

doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us'. To the students, I guess I'm an old fogey who inhabits a pretty different universe to them - much as I try and be relevant, hip hop and happening and all that. But to hear the winger from the 1st XV, whose Christian example (I pray) they have seen day in and day out at school, speak of the overwhelming peace of knowing the Lord Jesus...that's something else.

This year, I have given almost half the Chapel talks to Sixth Formers. I still edit some of what they write but I'm trying much harder to keep their voice and wording...indeed, sometimes I try and reword to make it sound *more* like them and less like an economics essay. Sure, what they say is less polished and theologically coherent than what I might try to say but the impact of it coming from them is huge! We had a Year 13 boy come to faith recently: I thought he was an atheist and so I was a bit surprised when he turned up at our leadership group. "I used to be, Sir", he told me, "but I decided that there should be more Christians in the world"! I imagine this came from his watching the Christian example of those in his year-group who, when asked, were willing to give a reason for the hope that they had. I think my current conviction is to pray hard that the Christian students will live lives that glorify their Saviour and then to give them public opportunities whenever possible (though not to force them) to explain the power and motivation behind this behaviour.



Eltham College chapel



Jim Houghton (right) interviews former Eltham College pupil, OD, during a recent regional meeting.

Boarding school is a mission field, too

Chaplains Heads Parents Staff Governors Pupils Supporters



Fr Stephen Graham

Chaplain at Glenalmond College, Perthshire, Scotland

'Look around you and see how the fields are ripe for harvesting' (John 4:35).

I never truly perceived British boarding schools as a mission field until I left my job at Radley to spend a couple of years as a short term missionary working at a school in South East Asia. I'd grown up in a family and a church with a great interest in overseas work and this was the ideal time in life to be a part of that.

My role was to teach and develop the curriculum in a Christian school for MKs (missionary kids) which allowed their parents to get on with the work of evangelism,



Glenalmond College, Perthshire



Fr Stephen with the Glenalmond chapel in the background

training pastors, planting churches, running orphanages or whatever. It was an amazing experience and my own faith was nurtured as I was surrounded by believers, some of whom remain close friends, while the MKs grew in grace as disciples of Jesus. Because I was on the other side of the world working with a missionary organisation I had dozens of prayer supporters in the UK who eagerly read and responded to my regular email updates and prayer requests.

The school and I were remembered before God at prayer meetings in churches and in homes. Relationships with folk from such organisations as Wycliffe Bible Translators and New Tribes Mission made me see the world I'd come from in a more missional way. I began to be convicted by the great spiritual need of the 'people group' I had left behind and realised that there was a wide open door to young people from so many nations. The Perthshire hills may not be as exotic as the tropics but every day I get to share the good news with young people from countries as diverse as Mexico, Russia, Kenya and Denmark, and Scotland itself arguably has a greater spiritual need than anywhere else.

Our independent schools allow us to minister to folk - a tribe if you like - from a socio-economic background with whom we might otherwise have very little connection. Life is, of course, safer and more comfortable here and I am paid a good salary for which I am grateful. Our brothers and sisters ministering overseas do a precious and challenging work, but school chaplains are, in their own way, missionaries, too, as they respond to the Great Commission. Pray for us.

Sport and kindness, character development and relationships

Chaplains Heads Parents Staff Governors Pupils Supporters



Kate Randle

A PE teacher by profession, Kate spent 9 years working in Africa (Zimbabwe and South Africa) and then a decade with Christians in Sport. She now teaches PE at Emmanuel Christian School, Oxford, whilst doing some consultancy work on building and developing teams (management teams, not sports teams!)

What do you want to be when you grow up?'
"Kind." Replies the boy in Charlie Mackesy's book 'The Boy, the Mole, the Fox and the Horse.'

Shifts in thinking about character development in sport have spanned the ages. Muscular Christianity, impacting sport in the mid nineteenth century, was characterised by belief in patriotic duty, self-sacrifice, and discipline. Fast-forward, to the coaching styles today of Gareth Southgate or Sarena Wiegman, and we see a more rounded approach, balancing the tactical and strategic elements of the game with a care of the whole person.

Mackesy's book strikes an even more foundational note. Not every child will find a lifetime in sport, but every child can benefit from the lessons learnt through sport in our schools.

In 2002, Patrick Lencioni identified trust and vulnerability as foundational in well-functioning teams and likewise Google found that 'psychological safety' was key to 'What makes an effective team?' This is vulnerability-based trust that is able to admit, 'I got it wrong, I made a mistake, or I need help.' As Christians, this psychological safety comes through our relationship with Christ, although it is inevitably played

out in our relationship with others.

After 10 years with Christians in Sport, I returned to the world of PE teaching and have experimented by weaving these principles into my lessons. Sometimes these come through teachable moments which can't always be anticipated. But sometimes they can, which is why I've developed a team-building module where various elements are reflected upon through a range of practical activities. Christians in Sport developed an interactive training, which I have folded into this team building. It includes one sports activity in which every Christian's battle with sin is exposed. This provides a helpful bridge for everyone to acknowledge their own battle with sin.

Children face so many pressures from the world around them which devalue kindness. Sport in our schools provides a wonderful opportunity to model vulnerability-shaped trust and to be intentional in demonstrating what real-life relationships, marked by kindness, which build others up, really looks like. It's encouraging to see the fruit of this approach in the children's own spontaneous games with each other and to anticipate what this fruit might look like as they grow and mature into adulthood.



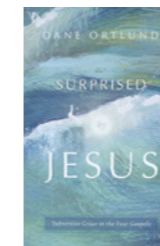
Sport at Emmanuel Christian School

Book Reviews

Chaplains Heads Parents Staff
Governors Pupils Supporters

Frankie Knight

TISCA Trustee



Surprised by Jesus: Subversive Grace in the Four Gospels by Dane Ortlund

The author of 'Gentle and Lowly' returns with another heart-warming look at the character of God, this time through the life of Jesus in the gospels. Examining one major theme in each gospel, Ortlund draws out the incredible nature of Christ and his gospel afresh, subverting our law-given instincts and reminding each Christian of the immeasurable worth of knowing Jesus.



The Air We Breathe by Glen Scrivener

When it comes to the values that our modern world celebrates, the Christian response 'we got there first' can sound simplistic and defensive. However, this book suffers from neither of those traits: intelligent, winsome and brilliantly written, it discusses how Western values such as equality, freedom, consent and progress are founded upon the teachings of Christ and what that means for engaging with our world today.



The Case Against the Sexual Revolution by Louise Perry

In this remarkable book journalist and campaigner Louise Perry argues that the sexual revolution hasn't brought the unfettered freedoms it promised. Rather, it has been deeply damaging for personal relationships, Western society and women. Not a Christian herself, she nevertheless promotes a return to values such as dignity, restraint and commitment when it comes to sex in the 21st century.



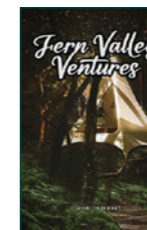
He Will Be Enough by Katie Faris

The subtitle of this book sums it up: 'how God takes you by the hand through your hardest days'. In each short chapter, Faris connects the deep mercies of God with the difficult realities of suffering. The book is helpfully illustrated and brilliantly applied. A great resource for personal use or to use with others.



Disruptive Witness by Alan Noble

Potentially the most helpful book you've never heard of. Noble examines the way that our modern lifestyles, technology and secular culture distract us from considering the big questions of life and devalue Christianity as one option among many. How can Christians, in contrast, present and live out the gospel in such a way that we 'disrupt' the buffered, distracted age we live in? Read this book to find out...



Fern Valley Ventures by Elizabeth Dooley (for 8-11 year olds)

Fern Valley Ventures is a children's fiction book chronicling the adventures of eight friends from the same village and school as they overcome challenges and solve mysteries. Each story has a hidden, underlying meaning that children and their parents, as well as teachers will enjoy discovering. In The Vanishing Tom and Ali builds a secret tree house in Fern Valley. But when Tom finds an even better hiding place, he has no idea it will soon turn into a near death trap. In The Vortex Jim seems intent on making Sameer's life a misery as the Venturers face the challenges of a week at an activity camp. Find out if Sameer will become his friend indeed when Jim is swept away towards a watery end. In The Villa identical twins Jill and Jackie enjoy confusing everybody as the Venturers are involved in an archaeological dig.

As well as discovering Roman coins and jewellery, they have to track down and catch the thief who steals the finds, and the vandals who threaten to ruin the dig. In The Verdict Laura is devastated when the cash box she has been entrusted with at the school fair is stolen. It is Guy Fawkes night and as the bonfire roars and rages out of control and fireworks explode all around them, can the Venturers catch the thief and recover the money? Sixteen interesting illustrations will enhance the enjoyment of the book and the wholesome nature of the stories will appeal to children and their parents and educators, making the book popular with schools, libraries, and children's organisations. You can visit the website eadooleybooks.com where you can follow the link to Amazon Books where copies can be purchased. (This review provided by the author)

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