

THE MAGAZINE OF THE MESSAGE

*the* message

# flow



## HOPE FOR THE FUTURE

Lives turned around through Christ-centred enterprise

ALSO IN THIS ISSUE 25 YEARS OF EDEN | IMPACTING THE GENERATIONS

## *'It really does feel like God's on the move'*

Dear friends,

What a few months it's been! It really does feel like God's on the move more than any other time in my life at the moment. As our teams faithfully share the good news of Jesus in word and action, we're seeing lives being transformed in schools, prisons, groceries and communities, not only here but across the world too.

Every Tuesday morning, we gather our team here at The Message together for a power-packed time of prayer and worship (which is available for you to watch for free on our YouTube channel). The past few weeks, I've started to journey through Paul's precious letter to the Romans. Eleven chapters of amazing doctrine followed by five of how we can live out what we've learnt. By the time you get to Romans 12, if you don't want to 'present your body as a living sacrifice and have your thinking transformed' then I really think you can't have understood the gospel at all.

I love that in Romans 12:6-8, he brings a list of different gifts that we are to expect to see in the church and are to use to bless the world. These include leadership, prophecy and teaching but also serving, encouragement and giving generously to the needs of others. It's as these gifts work together that we get the job done.

And I honestly believe this is what is happening as we partner with churches, organisations and amazing people like you at



the moment. People are prayerfully saying 'here I am, send me' and are stepping out. I'm so thankful not only for our team here, but for all those of you who serve alongside us, encourage us, and give generously so that we can reach more of the least, last and lost.

You know who you are and once again, thank you so much!

God bless,

**Andy Hawthorne**  
Founder & CEO, The Message Trust

*P.S. This month we're launching another urgent food appeal as we help to feed unprecedented numbers of families facing the cost-of-living crisis, not just with a healthy shop for their families for just £4 but with the bread of life. If you could stand with us it would mean so much. Just go to [message.org.uk/food](https://message.org.uk/food)*

# flow

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**OUR COMMITMENT TO THE ENVIRONMENT**

The paper used for Flow is manufactured using pulp sourced from sustainable sources from within Europe. It is 100% TCF (Totally Chlorine Free) and is manufactured to ISO14001 standards.



## Stepping out

*In schools, prisons and communities, our Message School of Evangelism (formerly Message Academy) students are taking their call to evangelism seriously and using every opportunity to share the good news of Jesus with those they meet. Read more on [page 10](#).*



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BRAZIL

# ‘We’re not called to be comfortable’

**BEST** known for heading up Brightline and taking the gospel into schools, Daniel Eduardo and his wife Emily are about to set out on a new adventure with The Message and launch Message Brazil. We caught up with them to find out more and hear about how God’s been speaking to them.

**Brazil, wow that’s quite a move!**

**Daniel:** It really is for both of us! Leaving our home and families to move halfway around the world, to a different hemisphere, is exciting and daunting in equal measure. But as Emily says, ‘we’re not called to be comfortable’ and it’s a move that God’s shown us time and again that he wants us to make. The ways he’s done this, and the doors he’s still opening, is staggering.

**So why Brazil? What’s been happening already?**

**Emily:** We both always felt God had a new adventure for us but weren’t sure if this would be here in the UK or internationally. Then back in 2019, he started putting Brazil on our hearts, and through this and a lot of other conversations and circumstances, we started to wonder if he was calling us there. So we decided to visit. And when we got there, he broke our hearts for the people and the place.

When you picture Brazil, it’s easy to think it’s all beaches and the Insta-perfect life, but scratch beneath the surface and head into the favelas and it’s a different story. Drugs are all around, boys carry guns and lawlessness rules in places. It’s here we’re feeling called to. The place people try to get away from. God’s been so good providing us with connections and people we can work with, opening up opportunities for mission and



even giving me an amazing teaching job. We can't wait to see what he's going to do next.

### What's Message Brazil going to be doing?

**Daniel:** Based in Rio de Janeiro, we're going to be starting with creative mission and partnering with churches to go into schools in the city, showing kids they're not forgotten and that they're loved by Jesus. We're also both really excited about how we can impact the lives of women and young people in the favelas with the gospel.

From there who knows? God does! We'd love to explore enterprise, helping people break

free of lives of crime and gangs, and I have a real heart to see how Eden could impact what's going to be our home town. Imagine Eden in a favela, it's so exciting!

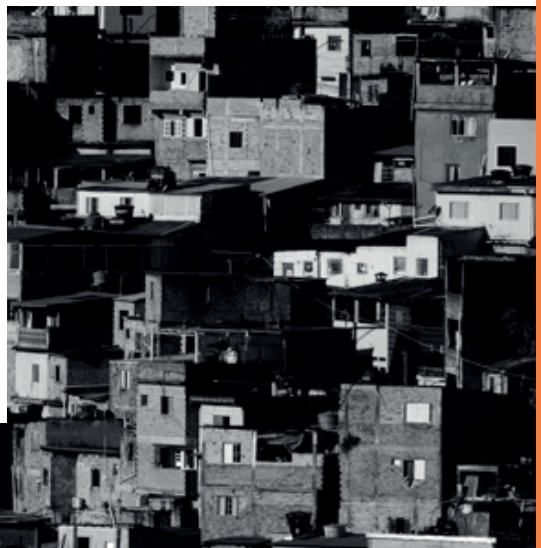
But none of this is just going to be about The Message. It's all about partnership and working together with local churches to impact lives with the gospel.

**Emily:** I can't wait to see what God's going to do.

.....  
*Read the full interview with Daniel and Emily and find out more at [message.org.uk/brazil](https://message.org.uk/brazil)*

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**'It's here we're feeling called to. The place people try to get away from'**



SAVE THE DATE

# Grab your free ticket today!

ON Saturday 14 October, we're putting on a free vision night for you. Join us as we get excited about how God's transforming the lives of the hardest-to-reach people in some of the toughest places.

As we thank God for all he's done, we'll be inspired by powerful stories and teaching, and come together in worship, whilst getting excited for what he's calling us all to next. It's all happening at Audacious Church in Manchester, and we'd love you to be there.

Get your free ticket today at  
[message.org.uk/visionnight](https://message.org.uk/visionnight)



FUNDRAISING

# Ride of their lives



FOR nine days in March, Andy Hawthorne and a team of cyclists took on one of the toughest challenges of their lives cycling 1,000 kilometres across South Africa, whilst climbing a height equivalent to Mount Everest!

Along the way, there was stunning scenery and torrential storms, as well as flat tyres and aching muscles! Why do it, you may ask? Each of the team pushed their love of cycling to the limit to raise vital funds for The Message so that we can reach more people and communities than ever with the gospel. And it's not just these cyclists who can help make a difference. Why not take on a challenge you'd love and help raise money to make more Message mission happen?

Get involved at [message.org.uk/fundraise](https://message.org.uk/fundraise)



## NO MORE KNIVES

# ‘No’ to knives and ‘Yes’ to Jesus

THE No More Knives tour has already been in front of 50,036 pupils this year, and the lessons are having a life-changing impact.

After one school day in the North East, a headteacher came to the team and told them that he'd spent time that day with two pupils who had arranged a fight with boys from another school that evening. However, one of the boys had been in the No More Knives session and heard about the impact that carrying a knife can have, and how there is always a choice to make a better decision.

Straight after the session, he went to the headteacher, told him everything and asked for help to resolve the situation in a positive way. The headteacher was able to get him and his friend home safely and the fight was avoided. What's even better is that this lad went along to the tour gig, heard the gospel and responded to it! He's now getting plugged into the local church and being disciplined. And he's just one of 858 young people we've met in schools who've come along to the end-of-tour gigs and responded.

Things aren't slowing down for the No More Knives tour. Over the next few months, it's heading to Newcastle, Cardiff and Blackpool, to name just a few places!

Find out more and get involved at  
[message.org.uk/nomoreknives](http://message.org.uk/nomoreknives)



## GET INVOLVED

## Leave a gift of hope

COULD you help us change lives both now and for eternity by leaving a gift to The Message in your will?

Your gift would help make mission happen, and as people hear about the love and hope Jesus offers, lives will be transformed.

So, whether you want to give a second chance to someone currently in prison, help keep families fed through our groceries, reach

young people with the gospel in schools or see a forgotten community changed by Jesus, a gift to The Message in your will can spread God's love in practical ways and leave a legacy of lives transformed.

Head online to find out more  
[message.org.uk/legacy](http://message.org.uk/legacy)

# Seeing hope break in

**FROM day one our Message School of Evangelism (MSE) students not only get to grow their heart for others to hear about Jesus, but get to put their passion into practice too as they head out on mission.**

Already this year, students have been running youth groups, serving in community cafés, heading out on Message Buses to run sessions with the teams and going into schools to put on lunch clubs. At the same time, they've been involved in homeless outreach with Barnabus and headed into prisons with our team.

As they go out, the impact on the lives of those they're sharing the gospel with, as well as their own, is huge.

Keshar was recently in prison with some of our team. 'Being on the prison placement has completely changed me,' she said. 'My heart has been utterly broken for these guys; being able to witness and be a part of their journeys is such a blessing. As I've spent time with the guys in Bible studies or simply hanging out with them,

I've built relationships and heard about some of what they've been through. I've had the privilege of seeing a couple of the men accept Jesus into their lives, and you can see a transformation beginning in them. I'll always cherish the friendship and kindness I've found here and can confidently say I've seen what happens as the hope of Jesus breaks into lives where hope seems so far from reality.'

And this is what MSE is all about. Packed with powerful teaching that helps students grow in their faith and develop a deeper understanding of the gospel, as well as mission placements across the UK and beyond, it's ten months that changes students' lives and sees their passion for evangelism taken to a whole new level.

If you know someone who's passionate about the gospel and wondering what they're next step may be, why not tell them about Message School of Evangelism or suggest they find out about one of the open days?

Discover more at [message.org.uk/mse](https://message.org.uk/mse)



## ADVANCE YOUTH

# Can't stop sharing!

**CHAT** to some of the young people who are part of Advance Youth and you can't help but get excited about what God's doing.

Wanting to be equipped to live bold, mission-centred lives, eight teenagers came along to the first meeting in North London. Fast forward five years and we've seen God grow what's now known as Advance Youth beyond what we could imagine. But it's not about numbers, it's about hearts being set on fire for Jesus.

Desperate to take their faith seriously and knowing it's about more than church once a week, Advance Youth brings young people together to study the Bible and pray before putting what they've learnt into action by heading out on mission.

Here they chat to those they meet, help people practically and always offer to pray for them. But the impact goes beyond this. The young people are launching Christian Unions in their schools, using conversations to tell mates about Jesus and have even started meeting up with non-Christian friends to read the Bible.

Kieran is one lad who's done this. Desperate for three of his friends to know Jesus, he started using conversations with them to chat about faith. As time went on, they wanted to know more so the four of them met up so that they could get their questions about Jesus answered. Knowing what they heard from Kieran was true, each of them has recently given their life to Jesus! Sarah and Izzy who come along to Advance Youth have also been running Bible studies with two of their friends every couple of weeks and are having amazing conversations about God with them through these. How exciting is this!

We've now gone from one Advance Youth hub in London to three in Sunderland, Barnet and Enfield. And we're not stopping there, with new groups coming to Cardiff, Yorkshire, Manchester and East London soon!



*If you know any young people who'd love to grow in their faith and passion for mission, head to [message.org.uk/advanceyouth](https://message.org.uk/advanceyouth)*

# Reaching our nation

Catch up with the latest Message news from across the UK



## SCOTLAND

### Doors into schools opening

KATE, our schools worker in Scotland, is taking PSHE and RSE lessons into schools and demand is continuing to grow as she's getting to share the truth packed sessions with even more students.



## MIDLANDS

### Keeping food on the table

ACROSS the Midlands, More people than ever are using our Community Groceries to keep their families fed. But as they do, members are signing up for wrap-around courses which include numeracy for adults, a job club, CAP Money and Alpha, and lives are being changed.



## NORTH WEST

### The Big Weekend!

THIS May, young people and churches are coming together for The Big Weekend. It'll be two days where teenagers will gather together to pray and be equipped for mission, get stuck into social action and invite their friends to evangelistic events. Find out more and get involved at [message.org.uk/thebigweekend](https://message.org.uk/thebigweekend)



## LONDON

### Out on the roads

LONDON has its own Message Bus that's out delivering sessions across the capital. As Emmanuel takes the bus into communities, young people are hearing the gospel whilst having fun on board with their mates.



SUBSCRIBE TO WEEKLY NEWS UPDATES

[message.org.uk/news](https://message.org.uk/news)



2,148

Young people have heard the gospel on Message Buses in the past year



### Going the extra mile

AT JUST 13 years old, Jay raised a whopping £2,204 for Burnley Community Grocery! No matter the weather, he ran two kilometres every day for 92 days (including Christmas Day) to raise money so we can support people in his local community.



£8,060,000\*

Saved by UK taxpayers as our enterprise work continues to cut reoffending rates

## Mates on a mission

Celebrating the remarkable people with us on the journey



### Vicky Lloyd

CHURCH leader Vicky Lloyd joined us to share her story at a Minds Matter event for Community Grocery members



### Mervyn Thomas

FOUNDER of Christian Solidarity Worldwide challenged us to be praying for our brothers and sisters who face persecution. Listen to his full talk at [message.org.uk/podcast](https://message.org.uk/podcast)



### Finu Iype

AS ADVANCE grows across Canada, Finu is our new Ambassador helping spearhead this growth and equip people to share their faith with boldness (see page 21)



40,397

Families now rely on our Community Groceries to stay fed

\*Based on Ministry of Justice spending stats. Read more about this and our other stats at [message.org.uk/impact](https://message.org.uk/impact)

# United in faith

**WE'RE all about seeing young people discovering who they are in Jesus and growing in their faith. And there's nothing better than seeing what happens in young lives as churches unite in this. This is why church partnership is vital for all our mission.**


Together with churches from across South Wales Message Wales launched Youth Nights events to encourage young people in their passion for Jesus. From looking at the power of prayer, to exploring the different ways we can worship, each event focuses on a different theme that draws young people closer to God.

As the young people from different churches gather together, they're uniting in a powerful way, passionately praying for one another and helping build each other up. 'We're seeing young people make friends those from other churches and step out of their comfort zones to encourage and empower others to go deeper in their love for Jesus,' one youth leader said after the last Youth Night. How incredible!

And this is being seen across the country. In the West Midlands, our team have been partnering with churches and organisations like 24-7 Prayer Youth, Youth for Christ and Gas Street Church to help run prayer gatherings for young people who are desperate to press into God, and get equipped for mission. As they come along to nights of prayer and worship, they connect with one another and most importantly God. And the response has been amazing.

One young person said, 'The event was a great experience. We got to meet new people and come closer to God. I enjoyed the worship and preaching. I had a great time and can't wait for the next event.' Another young person got



in touch with the team after the Birmingham prayer event saying, 'Before tonight, I'd never felt God speak to me directly but at the event, I heard God clearly for the first time and it was amazing!' 

Find out more about our youth events at [message.org.uk/events](https://message.org.uk/events)



01

# LIGHT IN THE DARKNESS

It's hard to believe it's been over 25 years since we planted our first Eden team in Wythenshawe. Since then, more than 700 people have joined us as we've launched 75 teams in some of the toughest communities across the UK and beyond. As they do life with their neighbours and point people to Jesus, lives are being changed >



Fast forward and Emma's living a life transformed. Drugs no longer play any part in her life and Ava lives with her again. 'Life is good and God is good', she told the team.

**'LIFE IS GOOD  
AND GOD IS  
GOOD'**

**P**REGNANT, struggling with heroin addiction and alone, Emma had hit rock bottom when she found herself outside St Peter's Church, the home of Eden Walsall. She wanted to step through the door but couldn't bring herself to. Soon after, Emma moved into a shared house and there met a lady who invited her to a drop-in at the very same church.

Knowing she needed to go, Emma summoned up her courage and went along. As she stepped inside, she immediately felt that this was where she was meant to be and that here she'd find the people who were going to help her. What Emma didn't know was that some of those she'd met in church were part of an Eden team.

Over time, the team got to know Emma and as they spent time with her, they not only told her about Jesus but showed her his love too. And she could feel herself changing. The anger she'd been carrying, and that she'd masked by using drugs, started to disappear.

When her daughter was born, she was removed by social services and Emma felt like the bottom had fallen out of her world. But this time she wasn't alone – she had the church and Eden team walking with her. It was then that she realised how loved she was by God and gave her life to him.

Passionate about seeing others discover how loved they are by God, she can't stop telling people about Jesus. And Emma's is not the only story like this.



02

Building on the legacy of the very first Eden team is Eden Wythenshawe Park. Led by John, the team are passionate about reaching the young people they live among with the hope and love of Jesus. But John's journey with Eden started way before this team was launched. In fact, he was first introduced to Jesus by an Eden team.

Growing up, John lived in an area of Salford that was home to Eden Swinton. As a teenager he was invited by them to a youth group they



ran. He enjoyed it so much that he started going along regularly. As well as having fun, each week the team would chat to the young people about Jesus. As he heard more, John knew it was true and decided he wanted to become a Christian. Seeing the impact Eden had had on him started a fire in John's heart to be used by God and see the often-forgotten people of society shown Jesus. Little did he know that almost 20 years later, things would go full circle and he'd be back with Eden, this time running a team and getting to do life with people like Maisie.

John first met Maisie at a school lunch club the team were running. One week, he invited the young people along to Message Bus sessions the Eden team were running and the church youth group.

And just like John had, Maisie started going along to church too.

She's now on a journey discovering more about Jesus as she connects with the Eden team and

partner church. Recently she said to John, 'I didn't believe in God at all before coming to lunch club and now I'm really enjoying church and look forward to it each week.'

Right across the country, we're seeing local youth groups and churches grow as people meet Jesus.

It's just over a year since Eden Redcar launched and what a busy year it has been. One thing the team have been doing is partnering with Redcar Community Grocery to come alongside families in the neighbourhood and support them. As members come to the grocery to do their shopping, they're hearing the good

**AS PEOPLE HEAR THE GOSPEL, LIVES ARE BEING TRANSFORMED AND CHURCHES ARE GROWING**

news of Jesus, are wanting to know more about him and the church is growing. In fact, the church has had to move to a new bigger building to fit more people in! Better still, this new space is right in the heart of Redcar. We can't wait to see what God's going to do next through Eden and hear the stories of lives transformed. **1**



**INTERESTED IN JOINING EDEN?**

[joineden.org](http://joineden.org)



**01** Emma with her daughter

**02** John now leads Eden Wythenshawe Park after being introduced to Jesus by Eden as a teenager


**03** For over 25 years, teams have been doing life in communities across the nation

**03**



# HOPE FOR THE FUTURE

After seeing God move in her life and rescue her from rock bottom, Merlin is determined to use every day to share Jesus' love with those she meets in The Mess Café. We caught up with her to hear her story



**F**OR as long as I can remember, I wanted to own a fashion business. Growing up, my dad had a business and taught me everything he knew, so I gained lots of experience. Over time, I had the opportunity to start my own company and life was good. I was happily married with a daughter and felt like God was opening doors for me, and my business was growing.

‘But as more money came in, I started to want more. I decided to not trust God but go my own way so I asked friends if they wanted to invest, but offered them a bigger return than I could afford. Before long, I found myself owing so many people money that my debt was out of control.

‘Eventually I was reported to the police, arrested and released on bail. During this time, my marriage broke down, I lost my business, and getting ready to go to court was mentally exhausting.

‘I started struggling with anxiety, depression and suicidal thoughts, until one day I hit rock bottom and thought ‘I don’t want to go on anymore’. It felt like there was only one way out.

‘So, one day, I waited until my daughter was asleep, got painkillers out of the cupboard and started to crush them up with a plan to take them all that night. As I did this, I prayed ‘God, if you are with me and I’m not meant to die tonight, would you show me?’

**‘I WASN’T ALONE AND I KNEW GOD WAS THERE’**

‘I went to get a glass of water, turned around to where I’d left the tablets and a note for my daughter and saw that everything had gone! I checked three times, running around the house to make sure there wasn’t anyone else there before believing what I was seeing. That’s when I realised that I wasn’t alone. I knew God was there. >



## ‘THE MESSAGE FOUND ME WHEN I WAS IN MY DARKEST PLACE AND BECAME MY FAMILY’

‘I got on my knees, closed my eyes and said to Jesus, ‘I surrender myself to you right now.’ That was the beginning of everything.

‘God cleared my mind of all the suicidal thoughts and replaced them with his peace, and gave me pictures of what was going to happen next in my life. It was then I knew I was going to go to prison, but that I wasn’t to be afraid because God would be with me. Everything changed for me in that moment.

‘That week, I was sentenced and sent to prison, but it turned out to be a time where God used me more than I could imagine. I made a friend who I prayed with every day and as other women heard about this more joined us. Each day we’d study the Bible, encourage each other and press into what God was saying.

‘I became a safe person that new people in prison would speak to. As women shared their stories with me, I was able to pray with them and tell them how loved they are by Jesus.

‘I decided to use this time to retrain and took as many courses as I could, getting qualifications in beauty. It was then that I met the Message in Prisons team who ran Bible studies and encouraged me in my faith.

‘When I was released, The Message offered me a job as a beautician on their enterprise programme, where I also got disciplined in my faith. It felt like I’d hit the jackpot! Since Covid, I’ve switched my role to work in The Mess Café and I love it. People here don’t care about my past, they encourage me, see my giftings and equip me for the future.



‘The Message found me when I was in my darkest place and became my family. Here I have a home, a community, a family and know that I’m loved.

‘Now, I’m an assistant manager, helping to train others as baristas and I know my future is bright.

‘Looking ahead, the most important thing is my faith. I’ve been given a second chance and need to use it. I know God saved me and I want to share my story to help others turn things around. I want to show them that there is a hope and there are people who love them and believe in them, like The Message showed me.’ ❶



**FIND OUT MORE ABOUT OUR WORK**  
[message.org.uk/enterprise](https://message.org.uk/enterprise)



# *Sharpening Each Other*



Regular readers of Flow have heard about the explosive growth of Advance Groups around the globe. But what are the groups all about and what's God been doing through them? We caught up with Ben Jack, who heads up Advance, to find out more ➤



**E**IGHT years ago, Andy Hawthorne and 11 other evangelists began meeting in his office to pray and push each other to make the most of every opportunity to share the gospel. As they spurred each other on, stories of people responding to what they heard came flooding in.

Seeing what God was doing, each member of that first group went on to set up their own group and Advance was born. As word about the groups spread, more people got in touch wanting to set up their own groups too. Today, you'll find Advance Groups in over 90 countries around the world.

## But what's Advance all about?

**Ben, for anyone who doesn't know about Advance, how would you describe it?**

**Ben:** The good news of Jesus is the only hope that the world has. So through Advance, we want to equip, encourage and empower the church to make evangelism a priority. The best way we've found to do this is through small group mentoring – providing places where people can come, share and encourage each other to go deeper in their faith and evangelism.

**Tell us more about who the groups are for and what they do.**

**Ben:** Simply put, they're for anyone who wants to understand the gospel more and be able to share it with boldness. It's easy to think we need to work hard for chances to do this, but actually we can all turn everyday conversations into opportunities to tell others about Jesus.

Groups meet once a month for a couple of hours and work through the Advance guide (which they get for free). As they dig into what the Bible says about sharing our faith, members chat through what this means for them, sharpening and challenging each other to put it into practice. And prayer is central to everything Advance does, so groups pray together and support one another to know and love Jesus more deeply.

### How are lives being impacted?

**Ben:** It's overwhelming to see how God's taken the simple idea of Advance and multiplied it from the first group in Manchester to more than 11,000 around the world! Recently we've heard of groups launching in a courthouse in Peru, among staff at Heathrow Airport, in South African prison cells, military units in Cape Verde, as well as among Ukrainian refugees.

The impact is shown in stories like Rejoice's – a young Muslim woman from Sierra Leone who was introduced to Jesus by someone from a local Advance group. Since then, her life's been totally transformed. She's so

desperate for others to hear the gospel that she now leads her own group and has led others to Jesus!

In Scotland, one guy caring for his mum as she battled cancer knew he could use even the toughest times to tell people about Jesus. So he chatted to the nurses and three of them became Christians! And a family of eight in Angola all came to Christ through Advance, got baptised and are now leading a group in one of the most deprived and violent communities in their city.


But what's phenomenal is the growth of groups in places where people are persecuted for

their faith. In India, a group member was badly beaten for sharing his faith but, undeterred, has launched another 25 groups and continues to pray for and witness to his persecutors! It's exciting to see the way the persecuted church is rising up and this is a challenge to me every day. Did you know that today there's a higher percentage of evangelical Christians in Pakistan than there are in Quebec? Imagine what God could do there.

### What's next for Advance?

**Ben:** Our dream is for there to be Advance Groups in every nation on earth in the next 20 years, and we're on track to be halfway there this year! That's not because we want people across the world to know about who The Message are, but because we want the good news of Jesus to be spread.

This means we'll continue to translate the Advance guide into different languages so that it can be freely distributed to groups around the world. All of this was unthinkable a few years ago, but God is on the move.

Our job is to be faithful to the opportunities he's giving us to support the church through Advance. 

*It's exciting to see the way the persecuted church is rising up and this is a challenge to me every day*

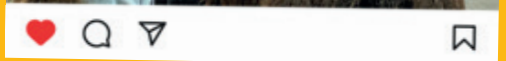


GET INVOLVED TODAY AT  
[advancegroups.org](http://advancegroups.org)



# IMPACTING THE GENERATIONS

Time and again, we see how one person meeting Jesus can transform whole families. As lives are changed by God's love, the impact spreads through generations, like it has in Claire's family







**‘E**VEN though I went to Sunday school as a child, church didn’t really feature in my life until recently. One afternoon, my nephew Tyson was in a local park and the Message Bus was there.

‘As he went onboard, he couldn’t believe what he found and had a great afternoon playing video games and football. As Tyson left, the bus team told him about a youth group at Message Community Church the next Monday - the church planted to make sure that Community Grocery members in Sharston have a place where they can hear about Jesus and grow in their faith. Always up for doing something different, Tyson agreed to go along.

‘That Monday, he had a great time, and as I chatted to Tyson I could see something was changing in him. Each time I saw or spoke to him over the next few days, he told me I needed to go to church with him that Sunday. I tried to put him off, but that was impossible when he turned up on my doorstep at 7:30am on Sunday morning for a church service that started four hours later!

‘As soon as I walked into church, there was something different about the place. Everyone was so happy, and I knew I needed that for myself as life has been tough the past few years.

‘I’m a single mum of twins and last year my Nan, who’d been my rock and like a mum to me, passed away. Around the same time I lost my partner too. I felt totally lost and had sometimes found myself turning to alcohol to try and cope. It had got to the point where I spent days wondering how I was going to carry on.

‘Without  
**God,**  
 there’d be no  
**hope**  
 for me or my family’

‘As I got to know people at the church, I opened up about how hard life was and they told me more about Jesus and the hope he offers.

‘At this time, my son was really poorly. This, combined with the fact that the price of everything keeps going up, meant I was constantly worrying about money. I didn’t know whether to have the gas and electric on or to put food in the cupboard. It was then that someone at church mentioned the Community Grocery to me. And it’s been a life saver. When I think about it, I just smile.

‘The fact I no longer have to worry about food and where it’s coming from means more than you’ll ever know, but the courses are helping make my life easier too. ➤



'Because of the grocery and the church, I've found Jesus and the hope he offers me. I now know I'm never alone, and whatever I go through, Jesus is always with me. Without God, there'd be no hope for me or my family, I can't believe how good life now is. I wanted to show people how much I love Jesus, so decided to get baptised recently.'

Claire's story alone should make us all celebrate the way God's transforming lives, but as they came along to church with their mum and cousin, Claire's twin sons also heard the gospel and responded to it!

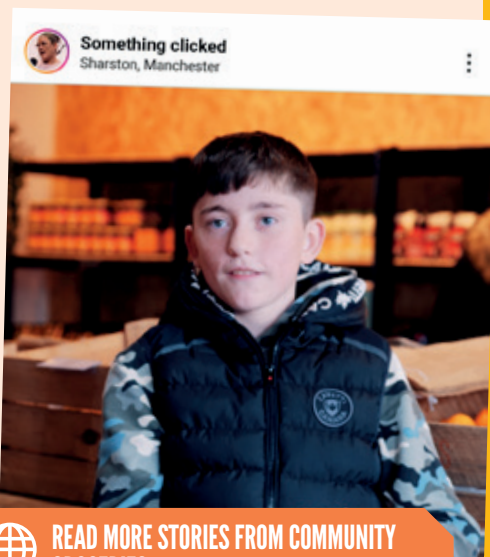
Twelve-year-old Riley says, 'Before coming to the grocery and church, I was having a really bad time. My behaviour at school was not good. My cousin, Tyson, told me I needed to go to church, I said I would because they gave out cake! But as I listened to what they were telling me about Jesus, something clicked, and I knew I needed to pay attention as it was important for me.'

He's always  
**I love Jesus**  
there for me

'I love Jesus. He's always there for me. I'm one of his and he's the dad I've never had.'

And it doesn't stop there. Seeing the change in Claire and the boys, a number of other members of her family have also started coming along to church services too.

More and more we're hearing stories like Claire's, of whole families being impacted as people discover God's love for them in groceries, through Eden or creative mission. **1**



**READ MORE STORIES FROM COMMUNITY GROCERIES**

[message.org.uk/communitygrocery](https://message.org.uk/communitygrocery)

# A PASSION FOR THE POOR



I WAS A STRANGER AND YOU INVITED ME IN



Speaking at our Message Conference, **Sam Ward** shares about God's heart for the poor

**A**FTER hearing God, I chose to be downwardly mobile and relocated from the suburbs of Manchester into an inner-city estate which carried all the hallmarks of deprivation. I've been serving in this community for 20 years now, and during this time, I've learned a lot. I've learned how to be myself (because people can sniff out when you're not being authentic), and I've learned how Jesus has an amazing ability to take our giftings and talents, and the needs of a neighbourhood, and shape them together to bring lasting change in a community.

But most importantly, God has been showing me more about his heart for the poor. I thought I had it when I first moved, but it was only when I was exposed to poverty and really got to know those who were struggling, that I began to experience God's overwhelming love for the poorest people. >



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A while ago, I got to know a dad who was struggling with addiction and battling to get his kids back from social services. I went to visit him and as I walked into his house with no furnishings and just one sofa that was his bed, it was there in the brokenness that I saw God's amazing heart for the poor.

I experienced it when a homeless man made his bed in the doorstep of my house. I experienced it when a man on my estate had his dog taken away from him, but he was in a worse state than the dog. I experienced it when I saw one of my neighbours begging in the city centre because he has no other way to feed his family. And my heart breaks. But maybe that's the point.

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## Poverty is an injustice

It breaks our hearts because it first breaks God's. God loves the poor, and he hates injustice. And poverty is an injustice, one against God himself who made us each in his image. Yet his rescue plan was to come into poverty through Jesus – the immortal made mortal, born into shame and as a refugee, becoming and embracing what it means to be poor. And still Jesus says in Matthew 25, 'blessed are the poor, weak and hungry'.

'For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.' (v35-36)

Jesus identifies himself as the poor in this passage. He says he is the hungry, naked and sick and stranger. Therefore, I see Jesus in the homeless man, the man with the dog, the beggar, the dad trying to get his kids back. And he tells me that when I serve these men, I serve him – and what a privilege it is!

This passion for the poor distresses me, in fact sometimes it ruins me. It hurts, it's intense and it's a burden that, at times, leaves me weeping. But would I wish it to go away? No way! Because I know that there's blessing here, and I know it's Jesus that tunes our ears and turns our eyes to the poor, and I never want to be deaf or apathetic.

It's Jesus that aligns our hearts with his. He feels what we feel, he anoints us and equips us to act and to bring good news to the broken and the poor and the lost. And when I feel at the end of myself, where my money, time, campaigning and ideas make no difference, I remember that Jesus' promises are for me too, and I choose to take comfort in knowing that God is enough. ❶

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*This is an edited version of Sam's talk from the Message Conference. Listen to the full talk at [message.org.uk/podcast](http://message.org.uk/podcast)*

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## When I'm at the end of myself, I remember God is enough



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