

THE MAGAZINE OF THE MESSAGE

the message

flow



HOPE BREAKS IN

How one leaflet led to a new life for Sarah

'30 years ago The Worldwide Message Tribe came into my school, and I gave my life to Christ'

Dear friends,

One of the greatest joys I have from being involved in Christian ministry for a few decades, is regularly hearing stories of people whose lives have been transformed by The Message and are still going on with God.

It does, however, feel like God's been extra kind recently and allowed me to see and hear so many great stories. Last week, I heard a story from a church leader who'd given her life to Christ at an event I'd spoken at. She'd actually wanted to move to Manchester to join The Message, but God had other plans, and today she's leading a fast-growing church in Cardiff.

Then there was a woman at our Message Business Network Dinner last week who said, 'You don't know me, but 30 years ago The Worldwide Message Tribe came into my school, and I gave my life to Christ.' She went on to beautifully explain the impact that that decision has had on her and her family. What's more, another girl, who had heard the band (when I thought I could rap) got so fired up that she formed what she called her own 'mini tribe' who went out on a mission leading young people to Jesus!



If those stories were all we had to show for the blood, sweat and tears of the last few years, it would so be worth it. But as we all know, there are now literally hundreds of thousands more people whose lives have been impacted. And these are not just my stories, they are all of our stories.

Thanks for all the prayers, encouragement and financial support you put into making them happen, and thank you Jesus for allowing us to play a part in what you are doing.

God bless,

Andy Hawthorne
Founder & Global CEO, The Message Trust

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Helping young people discover their true value

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P.S. As the cost of living crisis continues to bite for so many, if you know of any families, especially if they live near to one of our Community Groceries that we could help, please do point them our way. If, however you're one of the lucky ones who are able to regularly give at this time, please remember The Message. We really do need all the help we can get – thanks so much.



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.

Not alone

Using every opportunity to tell people about Jesus in word and action, a growing number of people are being called as urban missionaries to the UK's inner cities and estates. As they serve, some can feel isolated and alone, but this is all about to change with the launch of Proximity this June. Read more on [page 14](#)



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INTERVIEW

An unwavering heart for mission

Can you believe it's already over 30 years since *The Message* first started? And things aren't slowing down. As God continues to grow our mission, both locally here in the UK, and further afield, we caught up with Message Founder and Global CEO Andy Hawthorne OBE and our new UK CEO Sam Ward to hear what's happening.

Sam, if you had to sum up the heart of *The Message*, what would it be?

Sam: We have a heart for the poor and a heart for the lost, reaching them with the love of Jesus at all costs, both here in the UK and across the globe.

Andy: And it's never changed. I think God has favoured this charity because we've done three things: kept Jesus at the very centre of all we do, stayed focused on doing everything for those Jesus loves (the poor and the broken), and we've just had a go which means we're willing to make sacrifices so that the gospel spreads. When these come together, anything is possible, and we've seen that time and again over more than 30 years.

So Andy, what's next for you and Sam?

Andy: Well, I'm stepping into my new role as Global CEO. I've headed up the work here in the UK from day one, but now *The Message* is working in multiple nations around the world. There are so many opportunities and people

reaching out to partner with us, that it feels like I can give the next years of my life and all that I've learnt to really seeing the work grow around the world. Not that it's about the name of *The Message* spreading, but making sure as many people in the hardest-to-reach places in other nations hear the good news of Jesus. And Sam will oversee our work here in the UK. I'll still be on hand to support him but I'm handing more and more over. Having prayed about it I feel like I'm being called to focus on three main things globally and locally. 1) *The Message's* global growth, 2) the local church and 3) fundraising. The rest is for Sam!

**'See, I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up, do you not perceive it?'
Isaiah 43:19**

What do you think God's saying to *The Message* today?

Sam: He's increasing our expectation even more to see the miraculous happen. Andy recently shared with our team here from Romans 10 and set our expectations high for what God's going to do in and through *The Message*. And we've already begun to see that.

God's bringing us back to our touchstone verses including Isaiah 43:19. The 'perceiving' of what God is doing is going to be at the forefront of our minds. There are new growth opportunities, new partnerships, new nations, new ministry depth coming and we can't wait to see what God does next.



READ THE FULL INTERVIEW AT
message.org.uk/interview

Watch Andy's teaching on Romans 10 at
youtube.com/messageatrust

MESSAGE SCHOOL OF EVANGELISM

Teaching into action

MESSAGE School of Evangelism (MSE) is all about our students being equipped and sent to share the good news of Jesus.

As this year's students do this, they're heading out on placements with charities, churches and Eden teams. 'I've been part of a group working with Barnabus, a charity supporting those experiencing homelessness in Manchester,' said Phoebe. 'As we've got involved with the activities Barnabus runs, I've loved seeing how God opens up opportunities to share the gospel. Recently we've been helping run an Alpha course. After each session we spend time chatting and eating with the men and women. As we've done this, we've had loads of deep conversations about the gospel and I've loved seeing them respond to what they've heard and giving their lives to Jesus as the weeks have gone on.'

'Getting to put into action what I've learned on MSE about sharing my faith, and seeing God change lives has been amazing, and made me want to use every single chance I get to tell people about Jesus this year and beyond.'

Find out more about MSE at message.org.uk/mse



FESTIVAL BOMBO

Hitting the streets in Bombo

THIS December, our Message Uganda hub, in partnership with local churches and organisations, are putting on a huge free youth festival in Bombo.

In the run up to Festival Bombo, teams will be heading into schools sharing about the love and hope of Jesus with the young people there, as well as blessing the local community through

loads of different outreach projects. The mission will culminate in a huge free festival where young people from across Bombo will get to enjoy activities and music performances from national and international artists, as well as hear the gospel as it's boldly proclaimed.

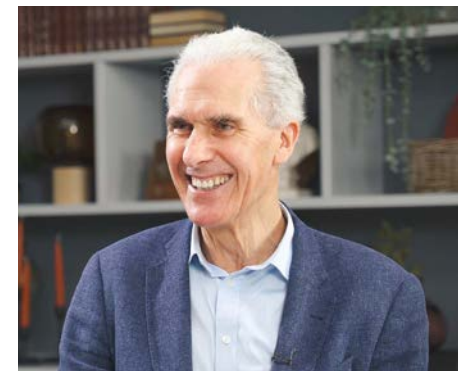
Find out more at messageuganda.ug/festival-bombo

SAVE THE DATE

You're invited

JOIN us on Saturday 12 October for a spectacular free vision evening with teaching from our friend, Nicky Gumbel, music performances from OTC and NXT CHAPTR plus the chance to gather together to praise God for how he's transforming lives through the work of The Message.

We'd love you to come along as we hear from Andy and Sam and are encouraged and excited for all that's to come. See you at Audacious Church in Manchester this October!



Get your free ticket at message.org.uk/visionnight

EDEN

Faith and friendship



FROM maths tutoring in Fir Vale (Sheffield) to Bible-based after-school clubs in West Bowling (Bradford), our Eden teams across Yorkshire are doing all they can to connect with young people in their communities.

Knowing how many kids in their neighbourhood are still being impacted by schools being closed during Covid, the Eden team in Fir Vale, launched free maths tutoring for young people across their estate. And a few years on, the tutoring still takes place and covers phonics now too.

'Even before the pandemic, we were well aware of the barriers to learning faced by our

young people - our whole team was made up of teachers and tutors! When the schools closed, it seemed that God was leading us to offer free maths tuition, and it went down surprisingly well with the kids! We give them a really positive experience of learning with loads of encouragement and fun, supporting them to thrive in school. It's also helped us connect with new families who wouldn't have come to our other groups,' said Becky.

Read more stories from Eden at message.org.uk/eden

Telling their mates

WE LOVE seeing young people get excited about sharing their faith. This is why up and down the country each month we get them together to encourage each other, pray together and learn the skills they need to be able to use every opportunity possible to tell their friends and families about Jesus.

As they do this, we're hearing stories of young people bravely setting up Christian Unions (CU) in their schools so that their peers and teachers can hear about the love and hope Jesus offers them.

Martha and Chloe are two of those who have done just this. Going to the same school in the North East, they had prayed together about whether they should set up a CU. As they did this, they felt God telling them that they should step out. So they bravely went and chatted to their teachers who said 'yes'. Initially they expected just a handful of people they knew to come along, but have been blown away that over 35 come each week. And it's not just Christian young people. As news has spread, they've had

non-Christian students, people of other faiths and teachers coming to ask their questions about Jesus. Excitingly, as they prayed and stepped out, they've seen some of their new friends become Christians and get plugged into local churches.

Having become a Christian just a year ago, Rhianna felt God telling her to start a CU too. 'It's now the highlight of my school week,' she told us. 'I loved telling my mates about the CU and getting them to come along. I can't describe the feeling when I see them walk into the classroom. Every week we sit round, have a laugh and chat about Jesus. I share the gospel with them, tell them how loved they are by Jesus and they get to ask their questions. And it's not just my friends that ask questions, sometimes the teachers want to know more.'

'Six months ago I wouldn't have believed that I'd have been brave enough to even set up a CU but I know God can use us all, we just need to be willing to be used.'

Get your young people equipped and involved in a week of mission this summer by heading to message.org.uk/thescattering

More than music

EVERY week young people come along to Genetik to learn more about music, dance and production. As they're having fun, they not only hear about Jesus but are discovering a new boldness to talk to their mates about him too.

Callum is one lad who's been coming along to the music production classes. As he chatted to the team, he realised that his faith wasn't something he should keep to himself, so found the courage to ask teachers if he could start a CU in his school. Amazingly they said 'yes'. The first lunchtime, Callum expected a couple of his friends to turn up, but over 45 people came along! One of them was a teacher who told Callum that because he'd gathered people to talk about Jesus, she was starting to think about her own faith again too. We're excited to see the ripple effects of Callum sharing his faith in school as his mates and teachers also find Jesus. And Callum isn't the only young person from Genetik who has been sharing about God in school.

Alex has also been chatting to his friend, not knowing how tough she was finding life. As they talked, she shared that she'd been in a dark place and been struggling with suicidal thoughts. Having heard at Genetik about how Jesus' love is for everyone and no-one is ever alone, Alex was able to share this with her. A week later, she came up to Alex wanting to know more about Jesus and asking if he could get her a Bible as she wanted to read it and become a Christian.

As well as hearing stories about how God's using young people, we love seeing them get involved in church too. Amaya's been coming along to Genetik to learn how to play the drums. Knowing how much she was loving drumming, she asked at her church if she could play in the services and was thrilled when they said 'yes'. Over the past couple of months, we've not only seen her confidence increase massively but also her desire for God, which is what it's all about.

Read more stories like this at message.org.uk/stories



Reaching our nation

Catch up with the latest Message news from across the UK

MIDLANDS

Just say 'no'

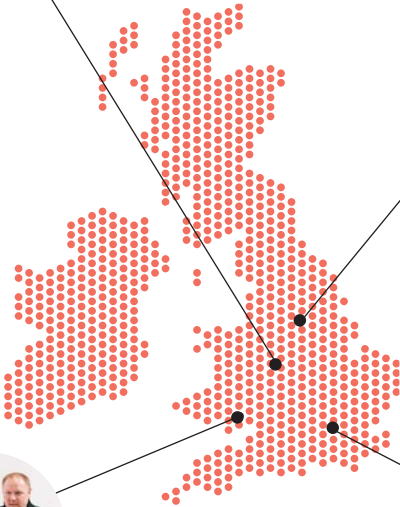
WE'RE excited to be taking the No More Knives tour to thousands of young people across Lincoln and Coventry. As every student is equipped to say 'no' to knives they'll be invited to evangelistic gigs where they'll hear the gospel and have the chance to respond. Find out more at nomoreknives.org.uk



YORKSHIRE AND HUMBERSIDE

New community hub

WOODSEATS is our brand-new enterprise and community hub in Sheffield. As well as being the home of our hub team, we're partnering with a range of organisations to make sure it's used for mission. Already the building is home to a Christian Recording Studio, Christian Counselling and The Well Church.



WALES

Hope in prison

EVERY week the team run courses in prison to equip offenders with skills they need for resettlement but more than this, they run Alpha, Bible studies and offer one-to-one discipleship and prayer. And they're seeing many come to know Jesus.



LONDON

Sharing their faith

OUR Advance Youth young people are getting so desperate to share the good news of Jesus with their mates that they're launching Christian Unions and Advance Groups in their schools. Read more on [page 10](#)



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message.org.uk/news



15,000,000+

Meals provided to Community Grocery members since the first store opened in 2020



6,108

New Advance groups are set to launch off the back of this year's Global Advance Day



3,750

Hours our team spent in the past year supporting people and running courses/services in prison



Heading into Brazilian schools

DANIEL has hit the ground running in Brazil and is finding doors into schools opening up. He's already been sharing his new gospel-packed music and lessons on identity with young people, with more schools days planned.

Mates on a mission

Celebrating the remarkable people with us on the journey



Racheal Mutesi

HEADING up our newest Message hub in Uganda, Racheal is passionate about seeing lives changed by the hope of Jesus.



Krish Kandiah

FOUNDER of The Sanctuary Foundation, a charity supporting refugees, Krish is speaking at Proximity Conference. Find out more and get your tickets today at message.org.uk/proximity



The Flava People

THIS incredible seasonings and sauces company are kindly donating 3p from each spice jar they sell across the nation to our Community Grocery work.

Called to proximity



HERE in the UK, we have a proximity problem. We read the headlines and listen to the stats highlighting how education, healthcare and so many other areas of life favour the richest, with the places where life is toughest often overlooked.


Sadly the same is true for many areas of the church. Buildings are closing, investment goes to other areas and under-resourced communities are often kept at a comfortable distance.

Excitingly growing numbers of Christians know this has to change. They have a passion for urban communities and long to see Jesus' love shared in places that feel forgotten. But they can often feel, isolated or under-resourced. But that's about to change!

This June, we're launching Proximity, a brand-new urban mission resource hub. It's sole aim will be to equip churches, leaders and those on the ground with online resources written specifically for them, and through in-person community too.

It's going to be a place of innovation, where you can access a wealth of free regularly updated resources, learning that's created by urban missionaries for urban missionaries, and community, so that never again will those on the front-line feel isolated or alone.

'I've spent the last ten years sharing both my life and faith on an estate. It's been an absolute joy to see God at work in the lives of those I've been journeying with,' shared Tom Grant, Head of Proximity. 'Along the way I've met many amazing people doing beautiful kingdom work on estates, but what I hear from them time and again is how they feel alone and isolated. Being part of Eden, I'm fortunate that this hasn't been my experience, but I don't want anyone to feel like this. This is why I can't wait to see Proximity launch this June. My dream is that it becomes the go-to place for urban missionaries, where they can get free access to resources created specifically for them and become part of a community where they can be encouraged and supported.'

'We'll be launching at Proximity Conference on 14 and 15 June and would love to see you there. But before then, we'll be keeping people updated about what's coming, and even releasing some early resources for you, online. All you need to do is head to proximityhub.org to find out more.' 

.....
Be among the first to know what's coming at proximityhub.org



YOU MATTER

'You matter. You are good enough. You are loved.' This is what students have ringing in their ears as Respect ME take over their lessons. As our team do this, lives are being impacted >



BOMBARDED with so many different voices telling them who they should be and how they should act, growing up in 2024 is tough for many young people. But we know it doesn't have to be this way.

We caught up with Lydia and Henry, two of our team who head into school with Respect ME to hear more.

Tell us about Respect ME

Lydia: We're all about helping young people discover hope and their true value. We know they face tough decisions and want them to know they're not alone. So, our teams head into schools. We're real about what teenagers face, and don't shy away from the tough topics. We equip them with the knowledge and skills they need to make positive decisions and we do it all through the lens of the gospel. We share our stories about how we find our value in Jesus. Whether it's a small group, or a whole year, each of them hears how loved they are, that they're created for a unique purpose and how they can always find hope in Jesus.

What are some of the challenges you find young people face?

Henry: There's so many. We can't underestimate how much pressure is on them. For me, the thing I see coming up again and again is how young people feel like they need to be something other than themselves. It's easy to see how it happens. They've got social media showing them people's 'perfect' lives, friends telling them how to act and feel, online platforms bombarding them 24/7 - and that's before you add in pressure from school, parents and other places. It leaves young people confused and feeling like they're not good enough.

Lydia: Absolutely, self-esteem is at the heart of so much. How young people feel about themselves ends up impacting almost every area of their lives. It's the same for us as adults too. If we're not happy with something about ourselves, we can end up looking for validation elsewhere and sometimes this is in the wrong places.

We want every young person to know their value and that they are enough. So, whether they're in a lesson about abusive behaviour, bullying, healthy relationships or sexting, we'll always empower them to make wise decisions. It's precious to speak truth into teenagers lives and watch it sink in.

Henry: I love seeing the lightbulb moment when what you're saying clicks, and you know that it's hitting home. We ran our self-esteem session with a group of year 7s recently and, at the end, one of them came up to me and said, 'Thank you for today. You've made me realise it's OK to be different and I will now see myself as beautiful.'

Another day, when I was running a different lesson, a student told me that, she was 'going to start loving herself.' It shows that we never know what the young people we meet are going through and how God's speaking to each of them through the lessons.



What does a lesson look like?

Henry: Totally interactive. They're usually around 50 minutes long, so with limited time we make sure everyone's totally engaged. We have games, videos, stats and the team sharing their own stories. Each session covers a specific topic but continually points everyone in the room back to their true value. Our teams also go in with a youth worker from a local church so students get a chance to connect with them too.

As news spreads about the impact Respect ME lessons have, doors are not only opening into new schools, but councils are also approaching us about running tours in all the schools in their area. What an opportunity! One tour recently meant we got to share our lessons with over 12,000 young people. We then finish the tour with an outreach gig where the students get to come, hear music from our bands as well as the gospel.

What are you seeing happen?

Lydia: God's changing lives! Adam (one of the other Respect ME tutors) and I were in Northampton running a lesson on self-esteem recently. As part of it we shared 1 Samuel 16:17 where it says, 'People look at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart.' At the end of the lesson, Charlotte, Emily and Hannah stayed behind and asked to chat. As we talked, Emily said, 'Thank you so much for today. It really connected with me. I wear

a lot of make-up to cover up the



fact I'm not happy with who I am. But you've made me realise this isn't what matters. What I look like doesn't matter, it's about who I am.'

Hannah then said that she'd recently started going to the school CU and was doing an Alpha-style course at a local church, where she'd been given a book of promises from the Bible that tells her more about what God thinks of her. I knew that this was a great opportunity so asked if she'd read some of them out. She grabbed the book from her bag and started quoting verses for us.

It was such a beautiful moment as Hannah read out the truth of the Bible. You could see Emily and Charlotte listening to the words and being impacted by the fact their friend was saying exactly the same things that we'd shared in the lesson.

Hannah also said, 'It's amazing, what you said today connects with what they've been saying at CU and what the Bible says too. I know it's true.' What a privilege to be able >



'What I look like doesn't matter, it's about who I am.'



affected him and that he was scared he was going to make the same decisions in his life as his dad. 'Being in the lesson

to not only speak truth into their lives, but see Hannah encouraged in her new faith too.

Henry: Brilliant. I was running a lesson about abusive behaviour with year 11s and during it, we look at different ways we can abuse ourselves and others – either knowingly or unknowingly – and the reasons for this. We share that, whilst we all have different experiences that may shape our decisions, we can all make better choices, before sharing about how precious we are in God's eyes.

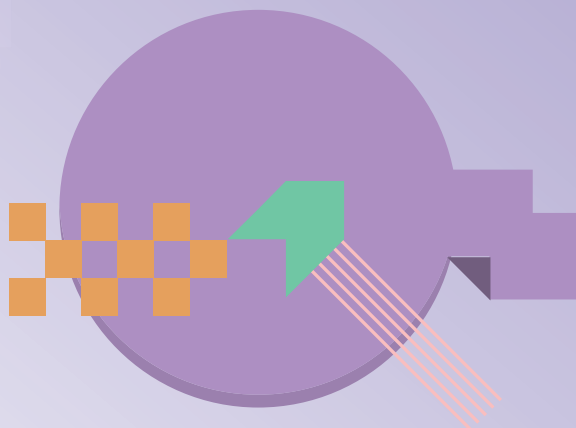
At the end of the session, Ali came to chat. He told us that he'd been impacted by the lesson as he'd gone through some of what we'd shared. He then started talking about how he'd grown up in a home where his dad was violent and abusive to him and his mum because of his drinking. He bravely told us how this had

today has shown me that I don't have to live the way my dad does.' Ali then said he'd been really challenged by what we'd shared about Jesus' love for him. 'I'd always thought God would be like my dad, but you've made me think about him a different way.' Straight away, we were able to tell him more about what it means to have God as a father and shared Bible verses from the 'I Am' card we'd given him. The church leader we'd taken into the school was also part of our chat, and able to tell Ali about the local youth group, and he's been going every week since! **!**



FIND OUT MORE ABOUT RESPECT ME AT respectme.co.uk

'I'd always thought God would be like my dad, but you've made me think about him a different way.'



HOPE BREAKS IN

Battling anxiety and depression, Sarah found herself almost housebound until a leaflet about a Community Grocery opening nearby dropped through her door. Today, her life's been transformed by God. This is her story **>**



'JESUS MEANS EVERYTHING TO ME'

to offer, I knew I needed to be part of it, and that it would offer the support I desperately needed. But the thing that surprised me most was that I felt that I wanted to be more involved than just shopping there, I wanted to help out if I could.

'Even now, I'm not sure where this thought came from. I could barely leave the house and there I was thinking about volunteering somewhere I knew hardly anything about! But I couldn't shake the feeling.

'So one day, whilst Jess was at school, I put my coat on and headed to the Community Grocery. It took all the courage I had, but I knew it was what I had to do.

'When I got there, I spoke to Pete, the manager, and immediately felt welcome. He talked me through how the store worked, how it could help with our shopping, and told me more about the support courses that were going to be running too. As Pete explained this, I nervously asked about volunteering. He said I'd be more than welcome, telling me that anyone could volunteer, no matter what experience they had, and about the different ways I could get involved. I felt excited for the first time in ages.

'When Jess finished school, she called to see how I was, and I told her I was at the Community Grocery signing up to volunteer. She couldn't believe what she was hearing and was speechless... that never happens!

'I started volunteering on the opening day. It was nerve-racking and I'm still not sure how I did it. I'd hardly left the house for 18 months and

there I was serving members and chatting to them. But right from my that first shift, I loved being part of a community and was hooked. I couldn't stay away and was volunteering in the store three times a week, as well as going in for my shopping too. As I shopped, I felt a weight lift off my shoulders, I knew I could go to the Community Grocery and get the food I needed for a week, and it was really affordable. I no longer had to borrow money from my mum to put food on the table.

'From the day I got the leaflet, I knew that the grocery was run by The Message and my local church. Every morning before the store opened, the team got together to pray. But I wasn't part of the church and, if I'm honest, didn't want to know anything about God. If anyone mentioned Jesus to me, I just told them to 'shush'. So, as they prayed, I stood by the door and waited for them to finish before getting on with my jobs.

'But over time, I started to listen more when they prayed and wasn't as quick to shut down the conversations about Jesus. I'd been volunteering for a few weeks when one of the team asked again if I wanted to go to church with them. Instead of 'no' coming out of my mouth like it had before, I found myself saying 'yes'. I didn't know why, but now know it was God!

'That Sunday I found myself in the church service, and as I heard more about Jesus, I felt a shift in me. I suddenly realised that I wasn't

alone, and that, even though life was tough, and that anxiety and depression were something I was battling every day, Jesus was in it with me. It gave me a hope and peace I'd not experienced before. Over the next few weeks, I kept going back to church, asking the grocery team questions about Christianity and just knew what they told me was true. There was only one thing I needed to do, and that was give my life to Jesus. It was a day I'll never forget.

'Looking back, I can't wrap my head around what God's done in my life. It's amazing and I'm living the life I always wanted. I recently got baptised and was able to get up in front of people and share my story! I love chatting to people and telling them about Jesus. Jess laughs as we can't go anywhere now without me bumping into someone I know, and stopping for a chat. It's her that's asking to go home!

'Jesus means everything to me. He's changed my life completely, and it all started with a leaflet.'



'I CAN'T WRAP MY HEAD AROUND WHAT GOD'S DONE IN MY LIFE'

WATCH SARAH'S FULL STORY
message.org.uk/sarah



FROM a young age, I've struggled with depression but was always able to carry on with 'normal' life, until Covid hit. As the world locked down, my anxiety grew and things I'd found hard before became almost impossible.

'As lockdown rules eased, I found my worries just increased and I was almost housebound. The only thing I left home for was to go to my mum's or do the food shop, but even then Jess, my teenage daughter, had to come with me. I couldn't leave the house alone.

'This went on for longer than I want to remember. And over time, Jess had to do more and more for me. She was amazing and never complained, but I didn't want this for her, I just couldn't see a way out. I felt more alone than ever, had no friends and the only people I saw were Jess and Mum.

'Money was tighter than ever too. I only had benefits coming in and these just covered the bills, before I even thought about food. As the prices started going up, I found I couldn't afford the food Jess and I needed, I had to start borrowing money from my mum just to put food on the table. I can't even put into words how hard that was. Something had to change.

'At this time a leaflet dropped through my door. It told me about a new Community Grocery that was opening just round the corner. As I read about the affordable food it was going

HOPE Across The Nations



With over 20,000 Advance Groups now equipping people around the world in their evangelism, it's incredible to see how God is moving as men and women in different nations step out and share their faith

AS THEY do this, more people are catching the heart of the evangelist and wanting to share about Jesus, so we're seeing groups starting in all kinds of places. We have 16 groups in house boats along the Amazon River, 32 groups in Chad with members who were all from Muslim backgrounds, and 57 new groups starting in the deserts in Peru.

In Uruguay, we've just had news that over 600 people met in a school to be spurred on in their evangelism through Advance, which was a total surprise to us. The group started because one of our Ambassadors from Peru met a pastor from Uruguay at an event who told him about Advance and shared the web address. Although the pastor was excited to hear about what God was doing in Peru, our Ambassador didn't hear back from him about whether he wanted help setting up a group. Six months later, we hear that the pastor started an Advance group in Uruguay and was gathering others to encourage them to start more groups! And that's just one story.

In Sierra Leone, one of our Ambassadors was recently visiting a village with a predominantly Muslim community. As someone who used to be a Muslim herself before finding Jesus, our Ambassador shared her story with the people in the village. As she talked about the peace that Jesus has given her, despite the hard things she's had to face, many were moved by her testimony and gave their lives to Jesus. An Advance group has already started in the village and people there are encouraging one another with Bible studies and prayer meetings. They're excited for the transformation that Jesus will bring in their individual lives and their community as a whole.

One person whose life has been totally changed since hearing about Jesus is Akash who one day met our Advance Ambassador, Rajesh, in India. Akash shared, 'I've struggled with alcohol addiction for

the past 12 years. My drinking was so bad that all the money I earned was being spent on my habit and as a result, my life was a mess.

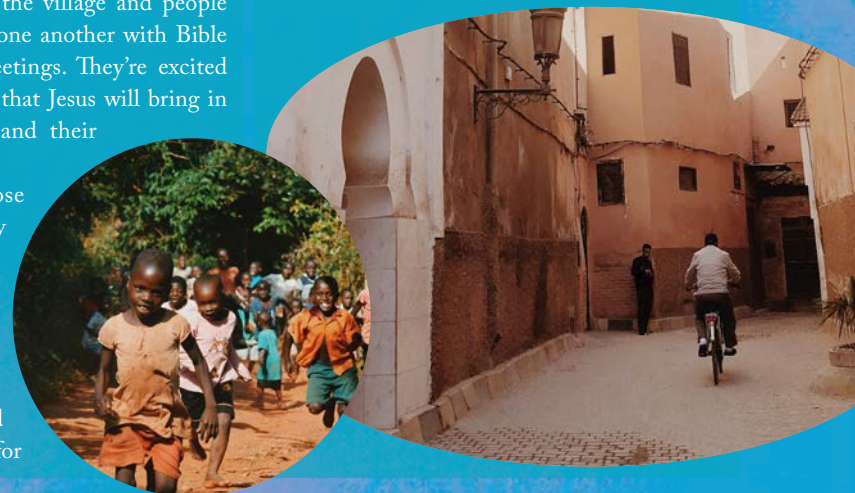
'One seemingly normal day in January, I was working in my roadside shop when a man, Rajesh, came past and gave me a flyer about Jesus. It told me who he is and that his death on a cross brought forgiveness for my sins. I asked him, 'What, even are my sins? Can he forgive me even though I come from a Hindu family?' Immediately Rajesh replied, 'Yes, Jesus has the power to forgive everyone's sins, even the worst things you can imagine.'

'For the rest of the day, I couldn't stop thinking about Jesus'

'Later, when I was reading the flyer and something in me was stirred to find out more. So I decided to contact Rajesh as I wanted to ask him all of my questions.

'When we met, I told him about my drinking and how it was controlling my life. I shared how much I needed hope and as we talked, I started to cry. Rajesh prayed for me, invited me to church and gave me a New Testament Bible which I started to read every night.

'That Bible was life-changing for me. I learnt so much more about Jesus and





I became more interested in going along to church, so went one week with Rajesh. In the service, I started to feel light in my heart and happiness about finding a community of people who so loved and accepted me. That's when I decided to ask Jesus for forgiveness and to give

my life to him. I also asked for help with my drinking habit and since then, I've been getting better.

I love learning more about God and I've also joined an Advance group to learn how to tell other people about what Jesus has done for me. I can't wait to see Jesus do the same for other people as what he's done for me.'

And that's exactly what's been motivating one of our Advance groups in Brazil. Desperate to bring the hope of Jesus to people going along to a festival in Ouro Preto, Ambassador Wes and his Advance group gathered together with other Christians from across the city to share the gospel to festivalgoers. In total, 300 Christians united together to pray and challenge themselves to step out and share their faith with the crowds.

'We encouraged each other to speak boldly about Jesus and we really felt the Holy Spirit direct us on who we should speak to. I think everybody from our Advance group was deeply impacted by putting into practice what we talk about week after week. And it was great to meet people, and hear their stories,' Wes said. 'One person we met was Marcos. As the team got

chatting to him, he shared some of the difficult things he was journeying through. Marcos said he was at rock bottom and that the night before he'd been drinking heavily to cope with his feelings and wanted to take his own life. He told them that he hadn't had the courage to do it then, but that he was going to try again after the festival because he didn't have any hope left. The Advance group listened to him and told Marcos that even though he might not feel it, there was a plan and a purpose for his life because of Jesus. They then offered to pray for him and he accepted. Marcos listened as the group shared the gospel and about the hope and peace we find in God. His face lit up and he said that's what he needed! So there and then in the middle of the festival crowd, Marcos gave his life to Jesus and said that instead of taking his life, he was going to find out more about Jesus and find a local church.'



'I can't wait to see Jesus do the same for other people as what he's done for me'

And Marcos wasn't the only person whose life was changed that night. The team also started talking with a group of 12 young people who were having fun at the festival. One of the group felt prompted to share their faith so asked if they could tell the group about Jesus. To their surprise, the young people said 'yes'. Not only were the Advance group encouraged from being able to share their faith and have great gospel-filled conversations, but every single young person in the group decided to give their lives to Jesus! How incredible!



**FIND OUT MORE ABOUT JOINING AN
ADVANCE GROUP**
advancegroups.org

A day in the life

We love sharing what God's doing through Eden as teams pour Jesus' love into their communities. But what does a day on Eden look like? We asked Paul Connor, team leader at Eden Ragworth, to take us along with him for a day so we could see what happens behind the scenes

'RAGWORTH'S always been my home and I love that I get to serve my community. No two days are ever the same, and this year as a team we've been involved in everything from running parenting courses to putting on Christmas dinners, not to mention Bible studies, running our allotment and praying for our neighbours.

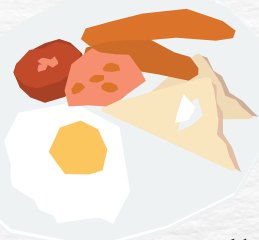
'Friday is one of my favourite days and it's great that I'm getting to share it with you.'

8am – Every week we put on a community breakfast, so Jennie and I head to The Shack early to start preparing a full English breakfast.

8:45am – The rest of the team arrive to help set up, and chat to people as they arrive.

9am – As we open the doors, everyone is greeted with a smile and a brew. What I love is that it feels like a huge family breakfast. You have people there catching up, and others telling our team about what they're facing and us getting to offer them support and advice. Everyone just comes as they are and we build real, deep friendships. This week, it's breakfast for 23 but some weeks it can be as many as 60! ➤





10:30am – As people leave, the team and I all pitch in to tidy up before we have our weekly meeting. We love this time together and it's often filled with laughter and brilliant chaos. We chat about what's been happening, what's coming up and, most importantly, pray together for our community and each other.

12pm – The paperwork begins. This is definitely not my favourite part but as you can imagine it's needed to keep all our projects running.

1:30pm – Our doors are always open and people drop in all week to chat or for some support. We're still blown away by the number who come. It can be anything from

'Can you help me fill out this form?' to 'I just got a call to say my girlfriend died so I came straight here.'

It's in these moments that we can share Jesus again and pray for them. Today, a guy we know needs someone to talk to and we were where he headed.

2:45pm – Food and fuel costs are a real struggle for many people in Ragworth so as well as running a Community Grocery, we've set up a Warm Space too. This week, we heard we'd been awarded a grant towards this, so I grab a few minutes to go and buy the items this funding will cover. Many people never get to meet those who benefit from services like the Community Grocery, but I do every day and, believe me when I say, they're blown away. It's all making a huge difference in their lives.



4pm – Every Friday we run a youth group for years 5–7. So, the team get together again to set up and pray for the young people.

5pm – The young people start to arrive. Tonight, there's games going on, but other weeks you'll find cooking, crafts and other activities taking place. Once a month, we take them to The Oakwood Centre for worship. Seeing them grow in their love for Jesus is precious. As they head into year 8, we encourage them to go to the weekly youth group at The Oakwood Centre, and love hearing about how loads of them go there.

7pm – It's time to head home and put my feet up, but my neighbours know my door's always open for them day or night.

'If you came back tomorrow, or visited another Eden team, it would look totally different but we're here to serve the people of Ragworth however we can and be the hands and feet of Jesus.' 📍



READ MORE STORIES FROM EDEN AT
joineden.org



WHICH DIRECTION?



With so much competing for our time and attention it can be easy to get distracted and start heading in the wrong direction. **Sarah Small**, Head of Eden, challenges each of us to check which way we're headed

WHEN I got married, my new in-laws blessed us with a sat nav. They said it had significantly reduced the number of arguments they had in the car together and wanted to help us experience similar travelling harmony! All was well until the night I was home alone and, from somewhere in my lounge, I heard a disembodied voice telling me to 'turn right' and 'make a U-turn!' I was absolutely terrified and not at all happy to be given these directions.

Sat navs have come on a lot since then and work well most of the time. As long as we tell them where we want to go and then follow the

instructions, we'll reach our destination! I often wish it was so straightforward in the rest of life – we set a course and then receive regular instructions about how to get there.

I've been serving on an Eden team on a council estate for over 12 years, and every now and then I wonder, 'Am I in the right place?', 'What direction should I be taking?', 'Where is the destination I have in mind?' As I contemplate the answers, I find great help in the familiar teaching of Jesus in Matthew 22:37–40.

'Jesus replied: 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' This is the first and greatest

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Proximity is the brand-new urban mission resource hub equipping churches, leaders and those on the ground through online content and in-person community.



'Love your neighbour as yourself.' All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.'

Two seemingly simple commands: love God and love your neighbour. Both helpful when it comes to checking our direction. Against these measures we can ask, 'Are our actions, activities and attitudes moving us closer to God?' and similarly, 'Are they causing us to get closer to people too?' If not, then we need to check our direction of travel.

It's all about proximity. Proximity is a word that helps us to understand the direction of travel as moving toward, getting close to and being near. If we look at Jesus' work on earth, he sets us a great example. John 1:14 in the Message translation says 'The Word became flesh and blood, and moved into the neighbourhood.'

Jesus left the glory of heaven, the direct presence of his father and his rightful place to move into the neighbourhood. He did this to gain proximity to his people – to demonstrate a counter-cultural way of life and ultimately to redeem all creation.

'Are our actions, activities and attitudes moving us closer to God?'

If we look back to the Garden of Eden, we see that God was in direct proximity to his people – they walked together in the cool of the garden. But after the fall, the people hid from God – they moved away from him and ultimately were sent from the garden. Their proximity was broken. Mistrust, fear and distance crept into what had been a perfect relationship.


If I'm honest sometimes I can see these attitudes creeping into my life. I can find myself asking, 'Is God really good?', 'Can I really trust him?' and 'If he really knew what I was like, how could he possibly love me?' I'm sure I'm not alone in asking these questions. And it's OK to

ask them, but the risk is that if we conclude that he's not good or trustworthy, or he doesn't love me, then this causes us to drift away from God, out of proximity with him. We can quickly find ourselves going in the wrong direction.

At times, it can be sobering to note where my heart is at with loving my neighbour too. Even though I live in geographical proximity to them, am I actually spending time investing in relationships, seeing people disciplined and loved? When my attitude is around seeking my own comfort and convenience, it's directly challenged by the call to proximity. Proximity involves cost, inconvenience, time and energy.

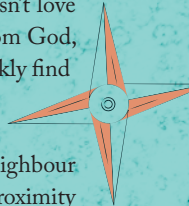
'We have a God who longs to be in full proximity to us.'

I'm inspired by the hope that we find in Revelation 21:3-5. 'Look! God's dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. 'He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death' or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.'

We have a God who longs to be in full proximity to us, as we are in proximity with one another. That's the eternal aim. It's our destination. So, let's check our directions – are we moving nearer to God and nearer to people? That's the way to go. 



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