



ACT 1: TARGET

CONTRIBUTOR

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Mike is Chief Executive of Stewardship. He is passionate about simple acts of generosity and encouraging others to develop a generous lifestyle. Mike is married to Donna and they have three young children.

We all want to live lives of radical, community-transforming generosity. Many of us think it'll start when we hit some epiphany, have a life-changing event, or hear a thundering voice from heaven. But the good news is that generosity is something you can choose: it doesn't have to wait. Ask God to show you his generosity, then find one person to target with it.

Green: Draw a target (like a bullseye). At the centre, write 'God', then in each ring, working outwards, write who you have in your social circles, family, friends, and work networks. Who will you target with generosity?

Amber: If you've done today's green challenge and want to go further – find a 40acts buddy. Someone to check in with over the next few weeks, both asking how your acts are going and if the other needs help.

Red: Done both green and amber, and itching to get started with 40acts? Do something today for one of the people in your target.

***"Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love."
(1 John 4:7–8 NIV)***

Throughout my childhood Lent was a season when I was supposed to sacrifice something I loved. I was told quite clearly that if it wasn't special, if I didn't love it, it wasn't a sacrifice.

Chocolate, alcohol, TV, meat, coffee and social media are some of the more popular sacrifices that consistently rank high on the list during Lent today. As a child, I was conditioned to believe that in giving up that which I loved, I would draw closer to the Lord.

I don't recall a single year when that worked.

I get the logic, but somewhere along the way Jesus dying on the cross and my giving up chocolate didn't quite seem to be a fair exchange. That, I would learn later in life, was exactly the point. There could be no exchange, only a gift.

You see, it wasn't until I was in my early 20s that I understood God loved me unconditionally. By responding to His unconditional expression of love for me on the cross it freed me from the impossible



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task of trying to earn that love through acts of sacrifice or service, and compels me to love others. Or, at least to try! It isn't always easy, is it?

I recall being unable, subconsciously, to accept a compliment. Compliments can be amazingly uplifting, but for some, they can be deeply uncomfortable. Blanche, a woman instrumental to my becoming a Christian, once paid me a compliment, and I began to explain away why I didn't deserve her attention. She was having none of it, and interrupted and flatly said, 'No. Just say thank you.' It may seem a small thing to many of you, but for me, it was utterly transforming.

It is the same when responding to the Lord. In the most extraordinary act of generosity the world will ever know, He offered His son, Jesus, as a gift to all. We need only say thank you. For some the response is too difficult; for others, too easy. But it's a gift that requires no exchange.

40acts 2018 takes its inspiration from the book of James and the inextricable connection between faith and deeds. While it's clear that we cannot earn our salvation or win God's approval by our own actions, James sets out a framework for the kind of practical day-to-day living that springs from hearing God's word, obeying it and acting on it.

So for the next 40 days will you join us as we sacrifice something we love? Our pride, privacy, time, reputation, treasure. Will you take a risk and be a radical expression of faith reaching out in love? Who can you target today?



ACT 2: ANON

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This blog was inspired by the 40acts community

The most thrilling type of generosity is done when no one's looking. When there's no one to impress. So: give in secret. Act in the shadows. Leave anonymously before you're noticed. And if you've struggled with generosity in the past, give this sort of anonymous giving a go – see if a switch goes on for you.

Green: This could be a tricky act if you can't keep a secret! Leave something anonymously for someone you know: a coffee on a desk, an encouraging letter taped to a car, a box of pastries left in the shared kitchen.

Amber: Think differently: tape some change to a car park machine. Or the office vending machine. Or, wheel all your street's bins back after the lorry's been. Three key words for this act: creative, helpful – and stealthy..

Red: Leave something anonymously for someone you don't know. This is your chance to do something you'd never do otherwise. You could jump onto a random wedding gift list, or pay for someone's petrol before they make it into the shop.

“But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your giving may be in secret. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.” (Matthew 6:3–4 NIV)

Anonymous. Smacks of something impersonal doesn't it? A faceless, nameless, featureless thing of unknown provenance. But when you put 'anonymous' together with 'generosity' and put it in the hands of the 40acts community it becomes something rich, inventive, full of colour, warmth and sheer personality.

Over the years we've asked you to tell us how you've got on with the challenges, and as a firm favourite 'Anonymous' has always overwhelmed us with stories that are at times funny, profound, moving and heart-warming.

Some stories have told of covers that were blown – sweets left on neighbours' doorsteps, which led to cards, conversations and invitations and became the catalyst for new friendships. Another told of buying a meal for a couple in a restaurant and trying to sneak out quietly only to be caught up with at the entrance and hugged by the grateful recipient who admitted to being humbled by the generosity. She and her husband had been arguing and the spontaneous kindness had pulled them up short and made them realise how trivial their bickering had been.

There have been stories of thoughtful generosity that wanted to bless without fuss or ceremony. An envelope through the door of a family struggling to make ends meet with a simple note attached: 'a Saturday evening treat for you all'. The mother later posted on social media that she felt 'blessed and loved' and excited that because of someone doing the 40acts of kindness they were able to have a takeaway dinner that evening.

Another 40acts follower told of a friend and her three boys who hadn't had a holiday in several years but couldn't afford to take up the offer of a cottage at a low price. Wondering what to do, she decided to anonymously give the money to cover the cost (along with a printout of the day's act).

Some have taken a simple approach: the person who had been thankful for her boss's kindness during her illness from work decided to send an anonymous 'you are fabulous' card to brighten his day. The mystery card sat on his desk as a daily encouragement that he was appreciated.

Then there was the act of forgiveness requiring a profound change of attitude to a family member. The person deliberately chose to do this anonymously, without telling the recipient of the forgiveness, and was astonished how the resultant change in their behaviour made a huge difference to the relationship. More than that, they acknowledged that it had made a huge difference to their faith.

These are just a few of the stories you have shared year on year, and no doubt for every story we get to hear about there are hundreds of others we haven't. Generosity without fanfare, quietly blessing others in all sorts of ways.



ACT 3: DEAL

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FIONA MEARNS

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Fiona Mearns is the Training and Events Coordinator at Stewardship and part of the 40acts Team. She loves listening to other people's stories which are always inspirational.

Putting ourselves first comes incredibly easy to our culture – just think about a group of strangers jostling to get on a train. Today, we're taking a firm 180 on that me-first tendency, and finding a couple of practical ways to put others first. Expect surprising results.

Green: If money's tight, check around the house. Got two copies of the same book? Chairs you don't need? Some extra biscuits? Upload a pic to your social networks and offer to give it away (and throw in the hashtag #40acts).

Amber: Got a loyalty card? Give your carefully collected points away to someone else. Or use them to buy someone something nice to give away.

Red: Boost a local business. Put some cash behind the till at your local coffee shop or café.

"...Freely you have received; freely give." (Matthew 10:8 NIV)

Forget socks and ties, this was the best Christmas present ever!

My friend was chuffed to bits with the small Bluetooth speaker which meant his in-car entertainment moved up a gear. But, as he later admitted to me, the best was yet to come: a little box with a ribbon, and inside six, yes six, completed sticker cards entitling him to a free coffee at any McDonalds! Over twelve months his daughter had foregone her own freebies and had patiently saved them up to give them to him. Not a bad deal; the pay-off for thirty years of cost and care, he joked.

It was, of course, a bit of fun and, yes, maybe it sidesteps some moral issues. But it made him think as well as smile. His daughter gave what she could have kept, shared what she could have saved for herself. The laughter it gave him and her thoughtfulness were worth far more than six free coffees.

We mused on the gift over a mug of instant.

Something special happens when we are generous with what we're given. Being irredeemably Anglican, my friend calls generous gifts, large or small, "sacraments of the heart".

We both agreed that there is something compelling and transformative about such generosity. Like the young boy who entrusted his bread and fish to Jesus: what else was shared, what else happened in heart

and hand that day? In that wonderful story we are told that Jesus took, blessed, broke and gave bread to his disciples - and they in turn gave to a hungry people what they had received. What was given to them.

Good giving begins with good receiving. Everything we have comes into our hands as blessed and broken for good giving, generous living. What is received from Jesus is shared with others.

That's the generosity deal: freely you have received, freely give.



ACT 4: AFTER YOU

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Rosie is an award-winning broadcaster and journalist. She co-presents the weekday breakfast show on Premier Christian Radio 7–10am and can be found reviewing the papers on BBC Radio London. She's a lifelong Londoner, the eldest of four girls, a gospel singer and lipstick lover!

Putting ourselves first comes incredibly easy to our culture – just think about a group of strangers jostling to get on a train. Today, we're taking a firm 180 on that me-first tendency, and finding a couple of practical ways to put others first. Expect surprising results.

Green: Whether you live in a bustling city or somewhere more low-key, take the time to say 'Good morning!' to people you meet today, letting them go first through the door, or in the queue.

Amber: At home or work, do someone's chores before they do. Put them first by getting there first.

Red: Are you in a situation where your desires clash with someone else's? Prioritise their wishes above your wishes, even (especially!) if they aren't in line with yours. Budge on the stubbornness. Make the sacrifice.

***"Be devoted to one another in love. Honour one another above yourselves."
(Romans 12:10 NIV)***

My six-year-old sister summed up our trip... "I'd rather be at school!".

I was 11. On a family trip to see puffins on the island Skokholm, we arrived to find the weather too bad to make the crossing. Instead, we visited neighbouring island Skomer.

This rapidly proved a bad decision.

The rain was heavy and relentless; looking for birds was comically futile. Instead we spent half the afternoon sheltering in a bird hide. I don't recall seeing any puffins...

Having exhausted any wavering enthusiasm for birdwatching (admittedly mine was never super high) and desperate to get home, we joined the queue of sodden walkers to wait for the ferry back. Stood on the exposed slope down to the jetty, it's hard to describe the sheer volume of rain. No waterproof would have been sufficient. There wasn't even sugary relief! It was so wet that the colours had run in the tube of Smarties that was in the depths of Dad's rucksack.

Hooray! The boat came back. But aah – problem. The queue in front of us looked just longer than the number of passengers allowed. Two short for our family of five. Nightmare. That meant another forty five minutes shivering in the rain, while the little ferry made a round trip.

Then something surprising happened: seeing my parents' attempts to rally their cold daughters, the couple immediately in front of us turned around, and waved us through, giving up their guaranteed seats for a long, cold wait. We'd never met them before and they didn't know anything about us but they showed our family love in its simplest form: they put us first.

Without much debate, exceedingly thankful, we hopped on board.

Later, we dried off in the car, chatting about that couple. As a family we've revisited that rainy weekend many a time and admired the pair who toughed it out. The value of them going second was far more than a quicker journey home: it was a life lesson in sacrificial generosity that stayed with those three shivering girls. In a 'me first' world, there is an alternative – to put others first. Jesus modelled it and invites us to do likewise.



ACT 5: FAVOURITE

CONTRIBUTOR

KAT SHUTTLEWORTH

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Kat Shuttleworth lives in Pittsburgh, where she leads the women's ministry at Christ Church Fox Chapel. She is also currently leading two Bible studies and supporting a shelter for homeless veterans. Prior to that she lived in

London and New York where she worked as a social worker with vulnerable children and in prison ministry. She is married to Alex, a pastor; they have two children, Ben (9) and Hannah (8), and a smelly dog, Rugby (3 – which is 21 in dog years).

What are your favourite things? Favourite film? Favourite coffee shop? A view where you go to be alone? Get ready to fly in the face of your impulses – and give those personal favourites away. Give away the novel. Pass on the scarf you think someone would look fantastic in. Share the introvert hangout spot.

Green: Share a favourite. Think of a favourite book, film, piece of music, or recipe. It might seem small, but sharing your own enthusiasm is part of the fun.

Amber: Share an experience. Think of a favourite walk, bike ride, or local hangout. Take a recipe you've loved cooking for years, and make it for someone else.

Red: Share sacrificially. Share a favourite restaurant, or tickets to your favourite artist/show/sports team with someone. Push past expectations and pick up the bill.

***“You will be enriched in every way so that you may be generous on every occasion, which is producing through us thanksgiving to God, because the service of this ministry is not only providing for the needs of the saints but is also overflowing with many thanks to God.”
(2 Corinthians 9:11–12 NET)***

My eight-year-old daughter Hannah constantly gives her stuff away. Seriously, we can't stop her. Generosity is something we have tried to instil in her from the get-go. But nowadays, the whole generosity issue has become a bit... well, love-hate for us.

'Hannah, darling, where is the new dress Mum got for you last week?'

'Oh, urm,' she replies, 'well, Mom, Rileigh really loved it and I'd already worn it once and I'm thankful that you got it for me. Really. But Rileigh just looked so pretty in it, and, well, see... I gave it to her.'

My children – products of a solicitor-turned-vicar and a counsellor – rarely give short answers when they feel they need to provide 'submissions'.

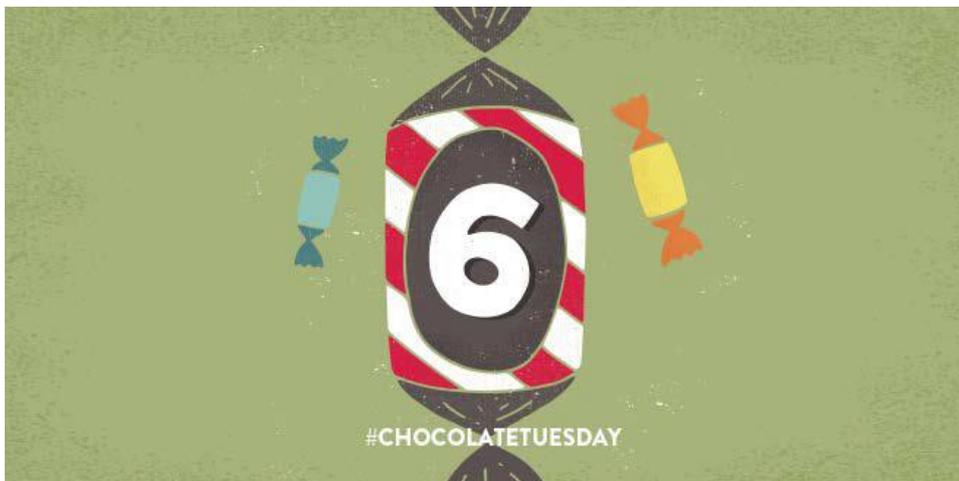
Han gives away anything and everything: to friends, church members, and... in spite of some bewildered looks, has even happily given things to total strangers in the past. Beautifully unaware that this is #awkward.

Bear in mind, we're probably one of the least financially robust families within our community. Her friends don't NEED her clothing, toys, jewellery, etc. They just like them, or 'look pretty' in them. Hannah recognises this and acts accordingly.

And... it's catching on. Her friends have started reciprocating. Clothes, jewellery, shoes, you name it. Some of Han's friends who are a bit more flush have begun just handing out cold hard cash – of the 'pocket money' variety. And my kids are only too happy to accept. I keep coming back in from playdates, handing my mates \$1's and \$5's with a knowing look: 'They're at it again.' On one level it's not necessarily appropriate but on another level it's sweet to see because what we're really witnessing is that generosity is contagious.

As adults, we can think about generosity purely in terms of money. But generosity is far richer and more personal than that. Hannah and her friends are on the way to learning that.

One of my favourite things is a 'giving key' necklace. The purpose of the necklace is to pass it on. But I love it. I'd rather buy a new one for someone than part with my own. Selfish much? The **WHOLE POINT** of this jewellery is to **GIVE** it away. It's **IN** the actual name. God enriches us in so many ways to be generous, we just need to respond. As for my necklace – I know what Hannah would do.



ACT 6: CHOCOLATE TUESDAY

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Scott is part of the Bread of Life team. Bread of Life is a personal ministry involving 9 people. We all attend the same church in Cullompton in Mid Devon, although this isn't a ministry run by the church. We operate around Exeter city centre and serve the homeless community wherever we find them, trying to demonstrate the love of Jesus that we have all experienced in our own lives.

Giving away chocolate. Maybe it sounds a bit less radical than the last few days. But small, overlooked acts of generosity achieve big things. Today, take a bunch of chocolate bars with you wherever you go – five, ten, or twenty – and fling them, carefree, to anyone you come across.

ONE OPTION:

Share a favourite. Think of a favourite book, film, piece of music, or recipe. It might seem small, but sharing your own enthusiasm is part of the fun.

“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 took me in...” (Matthew 25:35 NIV)

Turn back the clock to Chocolate Tuesday last year.

It's funny but there was no grand plan at the time, just a fleeting thought. Remembering the 40acts challenge I'd simply put a bar of chocolate in my pocket 'just in case'.

It started when I came across somebody selling the big issue in Exeter. We chatted and I offered him a coffee, a pasty and gave him the chocolate. Before I left I prayed for him.

It could have ended there but I decided to share the story with two other people I pray regularly with and said I felt that we should be doing much more.

So the following Sunday morning we headed out armed with a bag full of chocolate, some hot sausage baps and a bunch of socks and just went looking for anyone sleeping rough so we could share what we'd brought and pray for them.

We have now been doing this every Sunday morning since last April, serving well over 120 individuals numerous times. As we saw the needs, we expanded the range of what we give out. As well as the chocolate and socks, we now offer hot food & drinks, water, raisins, cake, tissues and wet wipes, dog food and treats for dogs too. We have handed out sleeping bags, water proof clothes and coats. We have also helped a lady with buying her big issue sellers jacket and started her off with the first magazines to sell and bought magazines for another big issue vendor.

Our original team of three has now grown to nine people. We've set up a Facebook page, opened a bank account and are working towards becoming an official community project.

We love what we do, we're blessed to be a blessing.

And it all started with one chocolate bar.



ACT 7: BRAND NEW

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JO SWINNEY

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Jo Swinney is an author, speaker and Director of Church Communications for CPO. She is the editor of *Preach* magazine and Bible Society's *Lyfe Journal*, and writes regularly for LICC, *Daily Bread*, *Premier Christianity* and

Christian Today. Her latest book is *Home: the quest to belong* (Hodder & Stoughton). Jo lives in Surbiton with her American vicar husband, their two little girls and a very chatty cat.

When was the last time you stepped into something new? Wasn't it a little terrifying – make you feel inexperienced and maybe a little insecure? Well, we'd bet that right now you know a few new parents. Or someone in a new job, new to church, moving into a new house. Think back to what would have helped you, and offer it to them.

Green: Strike up a chat with that person. Ask them how their new thing is going. If they're new to the area, offer them your number or email address..

Amber: Offer help – or a coffee. Ask them if they need any practical help in their new phase, or want to meet up for a drink.

Red: Cook up a few days' worth of meals and take them over to a new person's house. Or, freeze some meals for when you know someone new – and ask a few people at your church to be a ready-to-go meal train for when it's needed.

***“Blessed are those whose strength is in you, whose hearts are set on pilgrimage.”
(Psalm 84:5 NIV)***

By the time I was in my mid-20s I had lived in five countries on three continents in so many houses I find it hard to count them. And then I moved with my husband to a Buckinghamshire village and stayed there for an unprecedented nine years. We put down roots, had two children, and bumped into people we knew every time we left the house. It was a novel and mostly very positive experience of stability and belonging and I didn't want it to end.

But the time came when it was right to move on. I packed boxes with eyes blurry with tears, said melodramatic goodbyes (we were only moving a few junctions down the M25) and geared myself up to start again.

Walking into the new kitchen I saw a large bag on the counter. It was bulging with goodies – wine, chocolate, tea bags, tissues, washing up liquid: a treasure trove of treats and thoughtfully chosen necessities. The card was signed by my husband's new colleagues, but it felt like God's welcome to us.

It can sometimes feel like the only constant in life is change. Even if we live in the same house for decades, our neighbours will move, our children will grow up and out, jobs will come and go, our churches may become unrecognisable under new leadership. Change, even if it is positive, can be unsettling and stressful. A tangible reminder of God's constant love in our new situation can make all the difference.



ACT 8: I CAN

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Yvonne is a creative life coach as well as an actor. She has a passion to help people live their best life in the here and now, and enjoy every single moment of life. Coffee is one of her morning rituals and she likes to laugh VERY loudly.

Don't think your side hobby/ability is a gift? Take another look. It comes easily to you. There's not much pressure or effort around it. When you step out with it, things happen faster than you expect. Sound like it might be a gift from God? And if it's something that God's put in your hands, then it's something for you to give away.

Green: You can find your gifts from God. Ask God to make your gifts clear to you, if they haven't been immediately obvious.

Amber: You can find your gifts in community. Talk with your 40acts buddy, or church leadership. Ask them what they think your gifts are, and how you could use them to bring life in and through your church.

Red: You can pass on your gifts. Find a way to pass onto someone else what comes naturally, excellently to you.

***“But someone will say, ‘You have faith; I have deeds.’ Show me your faith without deeds, and I will show you my faith by my deeds.”
(James 2:18 NIV)***

OK, real talk: how many times have you had the thought ‘Nah, I can’t’, or ‘I can’t do that I’m just little old... (insert your name)’, or ‘I have nothing to offer, I’m only a (insert the thing here)’? If you’re a human being I can guarantee you’ve said one if not all of these at some point in your life. Trust me, I know, I struggle with this feeling of having nothing to offer. It looks like everyone else is changing the world and you’re struggling to see your purpose or what you can do in the everyday.

During the various stages of my life I was always questioning and doubting my talents or what I had to offer. But when I became a life coach I suddenly noticed that I had the opportunity to change my perspective on how I see myself and the world. And you can too.



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So the question is 'How did I do this?' The honest answer is I took a small step and entered into a process of becoming more curious. And I asked questions.

As a coach I have a habit of asking questions of myself, my clients and God. I find the simple questions work best! So if you're looking to find out what you can do with what you have, ask! Lord, what can I do? But be ready to hear the response. It could be as simple as make your colleague a brew, look up from your phone and smile at person or share your lunch. Because what if God was using you in that moment to change that person's day?

Let no moment be wasted.



ACT 9: STREETS

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Fraser became a Street Pastor in 2012, and took on the role of coordinator for the Perth initiative in 2014. He grew up in rural Perthshire and now lives in the city of Perth working as chaplain in the local Salvation Army Lifehouse and studying theology with the Highland Theological College, a constituent of the University of the Highlands and Islands. Seeing local churches reach out beyond their four walls is his passion.

How much do you notice when you're out and about? The walk to work, to school, to the shops can become an adventure in generosity. Step out of your 'bubble' and pay attention to the people and places you pass. Spot those opportunities to offer a helping hand, be a friendly face or offer a listening ear.

Green: Allow extra time and look out for simple ways to be generous – help someone carry a heavy bag, offer directions, acknowledge passers-by, make a note of things you might pray about.

Amber: Take a chunk of time to chat to someone you might not usually 'see': the street vendor, the window-cleaner, the station attendant, the homeless person who sits in the doorway.

Red: Prepare for an adventure and start to build relationships with the people you meet. Watch 40activist Martin's story for inspiration – <https://40acts.org.uk/martins-story/>

“Suppose a brother or a sister is without clothes and daily food. If one of you says to them, ‘Go in peace; keep warm and well fed,’ but does nothing about their physical needs, what good is it?” (James 2:15–16 NIV)

One question can save a life.

Zam, walking down the main street in the city centre, passing one of the most popular night clubs. Out of the crowd a man approaches with a story he’d like to share.

A decade ago John* had been in a very low place. Close friends had committed suicide, his family home was falling apart, and his own mental health was collapsing. One night, amidst this depression, John stood on this very same spot taking a break outside the night club. Seeing that he was standing alone and looking low a Street Pastor approached to ask if he was okay. John quickly dismissed them saying he was fine, speaking little more than a sentence in reply. As the Street Pastor moved through the crowd down the street John watched them go, watched them checking others who looked upset, giving flip-flops to girls with broken heels, and offering water to those who were a bit worse for wear.

This was the moment John shares with us. This was the moment ten years ago when he was at his lowest ebb, closest to breaking point, when John felt hope again. Watching strangers offering unconditional care to others, having a stranger show care for him, brought hope back in to an otherwise black world. Ten years ago, one question saved his life. A decade later he stood in the same spot and thanked the Street Pastor who asked if he was okay.

So be aware of those around you, keep an eye out for those who look lost or a bit down. Say hello, ask if they’re okay, we all have the power to show we care. You never know, one day your question might save a life.

**Name changed to protect confidentiality*



ACT 10: PROMPT

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Andy is the director of Share Jesus International. He lives with his wife, Jo, and two young kids in London and loves all kinds of adventure.



Faith is everything. In fact, if you look in the Bible, the only two things that amaze Jesus are people's faith – or people's lack of faith. So today, act in faith. Ask God how you could be generous, and listen for his prompt. But be ready: faith like this might mean a bit of waiting, and a bit of risk-taking.

ONE OPTION:

Purposefully walk slowly and prayerfully today. Ask God to show you what he sees and ask him to lead you into an act of generosity – 'Lord, what do you want me to share today? How do you want me to share it, and who with?'

"Show me your ways, Lord, teach me your paths. Guide me in your truth and teach me, for you are God my Saviour, and my hope is in you all day long."
(Psalm 25:4–5 NIV)

When it comes to the big decisions in life, many of us want to know God's leading. There are huge questions like: Who should I marry? What should I study? Where should I live?

We can often live with a mindset that God only cares about the big decisions. We can begin to think that he isn't too bothered about the many hundreds of small decisions we make each day.

But here's the thing, I believe that those small decisions actually shape who we become and that God is more interested in the little decisions than we realise. I believe that in the small things, we have this great opportunity to discover God's leading and his prompting, which actually helps us learn to discern how we sense God's leading for when the big decisions arrive.

And so today's challenge is about making yourself aware of God's prompting. I'm pretty certain that for most of us there will not be a burning bush or an encounter with the angel Gabriel. But as you go about your day, I dare you to become more God-aware. Today's passage of scripture is a reminder that God wants to show us, teach us and guide us.

Over the years, I have tried to make myself open to God's prompts. Just this week, I intentionally sparked a conversation with a couple of strangers on the train. They were visiting the UK and I was able to welcome them to the country. There was no great opportunity to share my testimony, but as I left them I simply said, 'May God bless your trip.'

We can feel foolish, breaking the cultural norms of what is expected, talking, sharing and praying with strangers, but today's passage also reminds us that we have a hope in God, all day long. Not just in our devotional time but as we go about doing life. Our generous God wants to lead us into simple acts of generosity, so let's look out for God's prompting today.



ACT 11: FAIRTRADE

CONTRIBUTOR

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Jonty Langley is a writer and columnist, and works for a Christian mission agency.

Generosity doesn't always feel dramatic and hopeful, particularly when we can't see the effects, and we aren't at the centre. But the generosity that shifts the course of history isn't just spontaneous – it's strategic, and structural. It's the first day of Fairtrade Fortnight. Jump in, buy fair, and help bend the arc of history towards justice.

Green: Buy Fairtrade. Scan your shopping list and see what you can switch out (look here to see what products can most commonly be swapped). Make it a personal value, and your life will always be inspiring change in others.

Amber: Go to Traidcraft's online shop and buy gifts for people you don't ordinarily buy gifts for. Spend five minutes and as much money as you've spent on drinks in the last week.

Red: Join a campaign that aims to change the world and make economic justice a reality. Traidcraft and Christian Aid have some wonderful campaigns.

***"Look! The wages you failed to pay the workers who mowed your fields are crying out against you. The cries of the harvesters have reached the ears of the Lord Almighty."
(James 5:4 NIV)***

I once saw a man kick his girlfriend in the back, knocking her sprawling onto a pavement. They were leaving a nightclub, I was arriving. He was shouting at her. And as she fell to the ground, he made for her in a purposeful, decided way that dropped my stomach through my body with horror. He was huge, and violent, and I was not. I intervened anyway, running up, shouting, 'I rebuke you in the name of Jesus!' I was young and far more comfortable with pomposity then. Praise God, he stopped. And, chin up, staring bravely at the middle of his chest, I said, 'You need to repent.'

When he had calmed down, I told the guy, who thought himself a Christian, what he was doing was unacceptable. He agreed. I dropped his girlfriend home. I don't know if I made a long-term difference. My

motives had more to do with wanting to feel heroic than helping, I suspect, and I never thought to call the cops or get him psychological help. But I think it was the right thing to do. And it makes me think about James, and about Fairtrade Fortnight.

It's easy for those of us who have embraced the Fairtrade ethos to think we're heroes. We have, after all, done something. We're not like the people James despises, who wish the poor well without helping. We've taken steps. But we know the economic system that our world idolises means most people won't. That paint and petrol, smartphones and steel aren't commodities that can be tamed with a logo and consumer choice. That even chocolate and coffee are likely to be made by slaves if companies can get away with it. We need to stand up to them with more than our purchases. And doing so is scary.

It means picking political sides. It means giving our voices to campaigns that are not always popular. It means spending our money on Fairtrade products, yes. But it also means supporting the charities and movements that are challenging the economic systems, the political vested interests and the rulers and principalities of this dark world that oppress, exploit and enslave.

It's not good enough to watch a person being kicked to the ground and say, 'Thank goodness I don't do that.' We have to intervene. We have to try to stop it happening to anyone. As James might say: if our concern for justice is kept safely in our pockets, what good is it?



ACT 12: FLING THE DOORS

CONTRIBUTOR

MAYA LAURENT

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Maya and her family live in London as missionaries serving a local church community. She's passionate about empowering women of all ages to see their beauty and know they're a masterpiece God created.

Hospitality, the real thing, can be a blast: joyful, freeing, and hilarious. But it can also be a sometimes-painful sacrifice: of private space, of our priorities, of our food budget and schedules. Today we're embracing both sides. The joy of hosting guests, and the pain of some stranger's socks in the washing machine. Open your hands, open your doors, open your home.

Green: Inventory. Review your living space to see what you can do to make it more hospitable – is it welcoming?

Amber: Invite. Grab a cuppa. Share your lunch. Have people over tonight. If you have plans you can cancel this evening, do, and see what you can throw together to practise hospitality at short notice.

Red: Invest. Post on Facebook that you'll regularly open your doors one day every month/week, and cook a meal for whoever RSVPs.

***“If you really keep the royal law found in Scripture, ‘Love your neighbour as yourself,’ you are doing right. But if you show favouritism, you sin and are convicted by the law as lawbreakers.”
(James 2:8–9 NIV)***

After just over a year, we call London home. We're not sure when the switch of calling Indiana home and now referring to London as home happened, but it did. It's not an easy switch of reference to the place you call home when you move across an ocean to a new city. How does it become home?

It became home with opening our doors. When it seemed so easy to say no to an opportunity to hang out, when you'd rather not have the effort of trying, when you just miss the comfortable relationships you had... we forced ourselves to say yes. Yes, we'll meet up with you for a picnic. Yes, we will attempt to meet in that part of the city (even if we get lost on the way). Yes, you can come over, we're in pyjamas still, but come over. Yes, our home is open to dinners, lunches, breakfast, and tea. It is a yes to kids running in and out and neighbours stopping by to ask a question.

Through saying yes, it has become home. We still say no occasionally as we need devoted family time or just need to rest, but our yeses have been more than the nos. Looking back, we see how saying those yeses has not only caused this new city to become home, but has created a safe place for people to enter.

We saw a doormat the other day that said 'Come as You Are' and I'm now saving up to get it. This is what this year has taught us. Whether it's someone from church, a neighbour or a new friend we've made from the school, we want everyone to know they can just come as they are and our home will be welcoming. It has opened up beautiful conversations, times of laughter that hurts your stomach and comforting hugs as tears flowed.

The overwhelming, unconditional love we know of Jesus in our lives is what we hope to show others as they enter our home. We hope they leave knowing there is something different about us, our home and the meaning behind how we do life. We pray that eventually they ask questions as God prompts them and prompts us to share our faith.



ACT 13: INSIDE

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John Lawson is a former: violent criminal, manager of London's largest brothel, member of a biker gang, bouncer and bodyguard to the rich and famous before working as an enforcer for gangsters. It was whilst serving five years for extortion that John surrendered his life to Christ. Since 2007 John has been in full-time faith-based ministry and has shared the gospel in over 25 countries. He is director of Escape Ministries with a focus on reaching the lost with the gospel and training Christians to share their faith. He is also the author of *If A Wicked Man*, which reaches those who wouldn't normally pick up a Christian book. He lives in East Sussex with his wife, Carolyn, and their children.

Jesus is the original chain breaker. Freedom's high on his agenda. So, that changes how we look at those stuck in physical captivity. How can you help those in a local prison? These are people who are often given up on. Can you extend hope to them – those furthest from most people's kindness list?

Green: There are broken people behind bars today that need your prayers. From a place of gratitude and love spend time praying for those in a physical prison. Why not sign up for weekly 'Pray with Us' prayer emails with Prison Hope throughout 2018?

Amber: Take a little time to search for prison ministries and get in touch to ask if there is something you could do to help. Perhaps you could commit to writing an encouraging letter to someone in prison regularly? Take a look at Prison Fellowship's letter writing scheme.

Red: How about asking the Lord to open a door for you to share your faith in local prisons? Contact your local prison chaplain and offer to pray for them. Offer yourself in service and speak to your pastor about starting a prison ministry. Take a look at Escape Ministries (founded by today's writer, John Lawson) to find out how you could become better equipped for this type of ministry.

"[It is the Lord] who executes justice for the oppressed, who gives food to the hungry. The Lord frees the prisoners." (Psalm 146:7 NLT)

'You don't have to be behind bars to be in prison' has become my tag line when I get invited to share my testimony.

I've just been on mission to South Africa where I shared my testimony and the gospel in the notorious Pollsmoor Prison, a place so dark that Ross Kemp in his 'Gangs' documentary said, 'It's the only place

that still gives me nightmares.'

It is such a humbling experience to step inside a cell crammed to the rafters with gang members, all of them in for murder, and yet hear them weeping at the end of the meeting during prayers.

It was while I was behind bars – serving five years for extortion – that Jesus reached into the depravity of my life and set me free. My mum had become a Christian around 15 years earlier and I thought she had gone mad with her new so-called faith. She prayed for me for all those years and at times it seemed like her prayers weren't answered; in fact it seemed that the more she prayed, the worse I became.

When I went to prison, she prayed for God to send people who would lead me to Him. The first person was a Nigerian prisoner who convinced me to go to a Bible study. I only agreed because I heard they had good coffee and biscuits.

The second was a pastor from a local town who visited every Thursday for years bringing the good news of the gospel to prisoners. He shared the gospel with me; I repented and surrendered my life to Christ. I felt free behind bars.

When I moved to an open prison, God didn't stop answering my mum's prayers: there was the lady who ran Prison Alpha, a Salvation Army Major and others who encouraged me in my new faith.

All those people helped to transform my life. Since being released from prison in 2007, by His grace I've travelled to over 25 countries sharing the gospel with some of the toughest prisoners on the planet, as well as with schools, colleges, churches and communities, and all of this by faith.

Whatever your situation you can still respond to His call and be the person that someone is waiting to hear from. You can pray, volunteer or partner with others waiting to be sent into those dark places bringing the light of life.



ACT 14: HOMEGROWN

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Dr John Tucker Mugabi Sentamu is the 97th Archbishop of York. He was born in Uganda in 1949, the sixth of thirteen children. Dr Sentamu was nominated Bishop for Stepney in 1996, Bishop for Birmingham in 2002 and Archbishop of York in 2005. He is Primate of England and Metropolitan, a member of the House of Lords and a Privy Councillor.

It's far easier than you'd expect to find a great local cause, and so worth it – this day has some amazing opportunities for you to connect in to your community in a way that sticks. Find out how generosity is already breaking out in your neighbourhood and get involved. You're already where you need to be.

Green: Acts435 is a genius initiative that directly connects you with people who are in need, local to you. Give to those people here.

Amber: The Do It Trust connects you on the spot with a volunteer opportunity near you. Find a way to instantly bless your community here.

Red: The vInspired project helps you source money for your dream. Thinking up a way to bring life to your community, but can't find a way forwards? Pitch it and find funding here.

“There were no needy ones among them, because those who owned lands or houses would sell their property, bring the proceeds from the sales, and lay them at the apostles' feet for distribution to anyone as he had need.” (Acts 4:34–35 BSB)

We can quickly feel overwhelmed when we look around at all the people struggling to make ends meet: the homeless, children in poverty and isolated individuals without support around them when they need it most. It would be easy to look away.

Mother Theresa invited us to think differently. She said, 'If you can't feed a hundred people, then feed just one.'

Like the lady who came into the Acts 435 project in Shildon, County Durham, extremely distressed, having been given notice at work with only a couple of days left to her six month probation. She didn't qualify for any housing costs due to her circumstances and was in dispute about receiving her pay from the employer. The following week she would have no food in the cupboards and no way of paying for her daughter to travel to college. How would she cope? The project stepped in and helped towards her living costs. Her sense of relief was written all over her face.

In Truro, Avril, an Advocate at the All Saints Acts 435 project, recalls 'an elderly gentleman who had no heating except a small electric fire. His cottage was damp and he was struggling financially, so didn't turn the fire on very often. Through Acts 435 we were able to give him money for his electric key meter. When I visited to give him the donation he was suffering from bronchitis. He was so cold and damp, it had made him ill. He cried with relief and gratitude for the donor and for himself.'

What would happen if we stopped being overwhelmed by the big issues and concentrated on what's in front of us? Look at what's happening on our own doorstep and how might we respond to those needs?

What if there was one person for whom we could make all the difference? After all, isn't that how Jesus treated the people He met?



ACT 15: IMPACT

CONTRIBUTOR
KATO NKHOMA

Kato is a missionary in the sub-Saharan country of Botswana. He is also an **author** and freelance writer whose cyber mission is to eliminate mediocrity in web copy. A Christian market freelance writer extraordinaire, he loves turning lacklustre websites and blogs into enthralling spectacles through hypnotic content that turns visitors into subscribers.

Is there a verse or passage that's transformed you? Got you through a rough patch? A song that gives you a bit of hope every day? Share that with someone. Even at our low points, we always have something to give away. Jesus takes that as a given: in fact, he said he's already 'blessed us... with every spiritual blessing in Christ.'

Green: Share a bit of scripture that's changed you. Or, if you're reading through a Bible-in-a-year app, tell someone else it's not too late to get started, and offer to read together..

Amber: Share a Christian book that's made a difference in your life. If you have a copy, why not just give it away, without expecting a return?

Red: Red: The vInspired project helps you source money for your dream. Thinking up a way to bring life to your community, but can't find a way forwards? Pitch it and find funding here.

"In all things I have shown you that by working hard in this way we must help the weak and remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he himself said, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'" (Acts 20:35 ESV)

Tears streamed down my face as I walked home, clutching the envelope tightly in my hands. My family and I were safe after a dramatic encounter with a superhero. Yes, a real superhero.

Let me rewind a bit.

Our rent was weeks overdue and the landlord was threatening eviction. As a missionary in a small African village, I had no one to turn to. In fact, many a time, it was me that members of our small church (and community) would run to for help. This time, the helper was helpless.

I was sweeping when he came in. We were having a service that evening and our sanctuary needed cleaning.

He was no stranger to me; in fact, he was a regular in our meetings. With a big smile on his face, he walked over to me, stretched out his hand and said, 'This is for you, pastor.'

I curiously peeped into the envelope. And, as I realised what it contained, excitedly ripped it open.

The exact amount of money I needed to make rent!

Walking home to prepare for the service, this verse filled my mind:

"In all things I have shown you that by working hard in this way we must help the weak and remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he himself said, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.' (Acts 20:35 ESV)

That day I understood the true meaning of that verse.

I will never know how he knew about my plight, but remembering the smile of joy on his face, I realised another hidden, yet powerful, blessing in giving: what greater blessing is there than to be someone's superhero?

By telling this story, I hope I can inspire you to be somebody's superhero too. Not just by giving physical things. At that point I did not have money to spare, but I could still give by sharing that verse and what I learnt that day.

What story or verse can you make a gift of today?



ACT 16: INDIFFERENT DIFFERENCES

CONTRIBUTOR
JEANETTE BAIN-
BURNETT

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Jeanette Bain-Burnett works in regional government as head of the Mayor of London's Community Engagement team. She lives in North London with her husband Jonathan and two 'spirited' children. Jeanette is an active leader and occasional preacher at her home church St Barnabas, North Finchley.

Awkward small talk. Just not your kind of person. Today we're making an effort to challenge our perceptions. Most of us imagine we're not the sort of people to make snap judgements or assumptions,

just that, you know, we'd get round to talking to them tomorrow... or the next day. Well, today's that day.

Green: Take time to reflect on whether you're making your mind up about people based on flimsy evidence. Challenge yourself to put those thoughts aside and take people as you find them.

Amber: Is there someone you tend to avoid? Strike up a conversation with them and see where it leads.

Red: Go one step further and find a way to build connection: invite them to join you at an event or include them in your circle.

“Suppose a man comes into your meeting wearing a gold ring and fine clothes, and a poor man in filthy old clothes also comes in. If you show special attention to the man wearing fine clothes and say, ‘Here’s a good seat for you,’ but say to the poor man, ‘You stand there’ or ‘Sit on the floor by my feet,’ have you not discriminated among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts?” (James 2:2–4 NIV)

I met Ruth shortly after I moved to the UK from Jamaica 15 years ago. After I relocated I depended on the kindness of strangers to welcome me into a new community.

I experienced a lot of rejection in those early days because people didn't take time to get to know me. Sometimes the rejections came in questions or comments that revealed wrong assumptions – ‘Wow, you speak such good English’ (English is my first language) or ‘How come you have such fashionable clothes?’ (we have shops in the Caribbean).

I don't remember ‘becoming’ friends with Ruth. Her friendship was a matter of fact. At a time when all the variables in my life had changed, her presence reassured me that God knew, loved and fully accepted me, even if many people I encountered didn't understand me. We are from different backgrounds but quickly found that we had a lot in common.

Ruth's acts of friendship were practical. She included me in social gatherings, made an effort to remember my birthday and invited me home to spend Christmas (and Easter!) with her family.

I will always be grateful for her openness and generosity.

Now that I have a family of my own, a home of my own and a strong community around me, my daily challenge is to follow my friend's example of inclusion and selfless giving. I won't be close friends with everyone but when I meet someone different or new, I try to park my assumptions so I can be open and generous too.



ACT 17: STICKS + STONES

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Luke is the Creative Coordinator for Essential Christian. He looks after the creative programme and teams for Spring Harvest, and the production of the primary school collective worship resource Big Start Assemblies. He is a filmmaker, speaker and author and has just released his debut older-children's novel, *The Mirror and the Mountain*.

Ever caught yourself saying something that sounded nothing like you? Then stood shocked as you thought, 'Did I really say that?' We get over-familiar with our words, and sometimes miss the impact they have on people. So, we're doing a review. What words do you find yourself using more than you realise? How can you flip the vocabulary table over to generosity?

Green: Take time to reflect on whether you're making your mind up about people based on flimsy evidence. Challenge yourself to put those thoughts aside and take people as you find them.

Amber: Set a target to encourage everyone you talk with today. Everyone. This might actually be easier than you think – if you just choose to prioritise encouraging words whenever you speak to others, it will come naturally.

Red: Take a difficult check on your own language. Look for moments where your words or tone aren't generous. Ask those around you, or your 40acts buddy, to review how you speak, encouraging them to be completely honest.

"With the tongue we praise our Lord and Father, and with it we curse human beings, who have been made in God's likeness. Out of the same mouth come praise and cursing. My brothers and sisters, this should not be." (James 3:9–10 NIV)

There's a lady called Janice who has had a huge impact on me in a way she has probably never realised. I never heard her utter a bad word about someone. I've never heard gossip or cruelty cross her lips. In fact, when others spoke ungenerously about a person, Janice would still be able to turn the conversation in a way that highlighted the value, strengths or a positive aspect of their character. She has always been able to speak hope and positivity in a way that refreshes anyone with whom she speaks. Janice models generous speech.

I remember asking her if this was something that came naturally. I was surprised by her response. She told me 'no'. It had been an active choice which had grown more natural over years of practice. One day she had made a decision to try and only speak generously at all times. As well as the words coming more naturally and authentically with prolonged use, her life shines the same generosity towards others that her words model.

James 3 talks about taming your tongue. I've just written a children's adventure novel that weaves the wisdom of James into a fantasy story. In it, the main characters meet a dragon (spoiler alert!) whose tongue burns, setting her words on fire.

In the story, it takes the help of others to tame her tongue. Who can help *us* to retrain ourselves towards generous speech? For the dragon, it also takes ongoing vigilance and action to maintain control. Like Janice, actively choosing to be a speaker whose words build up others isn't a one-off decision – it's a lifelong journey but one we can start today.



ACT 18: PERSIST

CONTRIBUTOR:
EMMA SCRIVENER
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Emma Scrivener was born in Belfast, but now lives with her husband and daughter in the south-east of England. She is the author of several books, including *A New Name* and *A New Day* (IVP). She blogs about identity, faith and mental health at emmascrivener.net

You've been praying. Hard. But you're tempted to give up. Instead, push in. Rally yourself to pray gutsy prayers. What if today's the day when your sixth lap of Jericho turns into a seventh, and the walls come down?

Green: Take time to reflect on whether you're making your mind up about people based on flimsy evidence. Challenge yourself to put those thoughts aside and take people as you find them.

Amber: Be willing to share disappointments. Maybe an unanswered prayer, or a personal failure – can you share your story with someone currently journeying through disappointment?

Red: Is there something your church community cares passionately about – justice, the poor, a neighbourhood no-one's reaching – but isn't doing anything for, yet? Be the catalyst. Set up a prayer meeting, or a prayer WhatsApp group.

***"Elijah was a human being, even as we are. He prayed earnestly that it would not rain, and it did not rain on the land for three and a half years. Again he prayed, and the heavens gave rain, and the earth produced its crops."
(James 5:17–18 NIV)***

Ever feel like you're shouting into the darkness?

Give me victory over this struggle. Take me out of this situation.

Please, Lord, help. Please, Lord, hear.

You pray and you pray and you pray. But the situation doesn't change. And the sadness remains.

I've been a Christian since I was a child; and that's when I started praying for my loved ones to know Jesus. Today I'm a mother myself – and I've yet to see them come to faith. So why bother? Why keep going?

Here's why: the Lord loves my family more than I do. He hears me and He cares. He will help me – but in His time, not in mine.

Think back to the Israelites, enslaved in Egypt. They cried out to God, and He rescued them. But it didn't happen overnight.

Some prayed to be led out of Egypt; and saw their tyranny increased.

Some prayed for a promised land, but saw only desert.

Yet still, they prayed. They trusted that God would hear them, and He did.

'The Lord said, "I have indeed seen the misery of my people in Egypt. I have heard them crying out because of their slave drivers, and I am concerned about their suffering. So I have come down to rescue them..."' (Exodus 3:7–8 NIV)

God helped the Israelites, but not in their time and not as they had expected. Instead of lifting them out of the desert, He came down and joined them in it. When they were watching and waiting, He was doing the deepest work of changing their hearts (Deuteronomy 8:3).

This God is the same God today. He hears our prayers, just as He heard the prayers of the Israelites. And He answers in the same way. Not by beaming us up out of trouble. But by joining us in the furnace.

So, whatever we are facing, however long we've been praying, let's keep going. God hears us. God is concerned for us. God came down to join us, and He will lead us out.



ACT 19: WHINGE TIN

CONTRIBUTOR
ADRIAN
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Author of over 30 books, Adrian Plass is a writer and speaker who lives in Sussex. Information on his current projects can be found on his website.

Complaint attracts complaint. Put a moaner in a workplace and by the end of the week they'll have befriended every gossip in the office (and the lunch room will know about it...). So how do we do the opposite, and spread infectiously generous language? Try a simple first step: the swear jar model...

Green: Make a whinge tin. Every time you complain, drop a coin in. At the end of the day, donate the cash. (You could also make the fine something else, like running another person's errands.)

Amber: Don't just settle for paying the fine – make a conscious effort to cut the whinges altogether, opting for positivity in its place.

Red: Make your whinge tin public. Tell your team at work, your family, or church community that you're going to start one, and ask them to join you.

***“Likewise, the tongue is a small part of the body, but it makes great boasts. Consider what a great forest is set on fire by a small spark.”
(James 3:5 NIV)***

Moaning, eh?

A memory springs to mind. It concerns a friend, now removed (mainly by his own volition, I should add) to cheer up the inhabitants of a distant country. I shall call him Jim. Jim developed an annoying habit. During group debates or discussions, he would ask the rest of us a question, tell us how we were going to answer it, and then tell us we were wrong. An example: 'What do you lot think is the fundamental problem with our church? Yes, I know you'll say it's something to do with outreach, but it's not. I'll tell you the main thing that's wrong...'

Jim's wearily hectoring tone, and his total exclusion of us brain-dead ones from the discussion, became seriously infuriating. At first, we tried to be Christian about it. Patience, forgiveness, grace – all that sort of stuff. Eventually, however, it became an unstated but indisputable fact that, if something didn't change, we would probably have to kill him – in love. Fortunately, this less-than-spiritual solution to the problem was avoided by one of us, wiser than the rest, taking Jim aside and explaining, firmly but gently, that his habitually moaning dismissal of other people's opinions was unpleasant and unhelpful. Jim listened, and he changed – most of the time.

We are lucky to have the example of Jesus. He could be very direct, but often when someone asked an important question – something like 'Who is my neighbour?' – His reply came in the form of a story. Why? Well, we don't like being moaned at. We don't listen. Why would we? We love stories, though. They create space and opportunity for us to work out answers for ourselves, and those, as Jesus knew full well, are the answers we are happy to own. Moaning doesn't work.



ACT 20: OUT OF THE BLUE

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Amy is a writer, performance storyteller and ventriloquist. She has written three books about puppetry and storytelling, published by Kevin Mayhew, and provides scripts and materials for GenR8, a Cambridgeshire charity running Christian assemblies and events in schools.

Show up out of the blue. Reconnect with an old friend you haven't seen for a while, or an acquaintance you still have on Facebook, and encourage them. Don't limit your imagination: the impact could be way more outsized than you think.

Green: Right now, send a quick encouraging text, out of the blue.

Amber: Spend time crafting an intentional message telling an old friend about their impact on you. What might you write on a really sincere thank you card to a good friend? Send that.

Red: Go way back – an old youth leader, teacher, or friend. Tell them how your life's different because of them. Arrange to meet up if they live near.

“May the Lord show mercy to the household of Onesiphorus, because he often refreshed me and was not ashamed of my chains. On the contrary, when he was in Rome, he searched hard for me until he found me.” (2 Timothy 1:16–17 NIV)

Four verses near the beginning of 2 Timothy tell a sweet story. Paul, imprisoned for preaching the gospel, had been deserted by many friends (2 Tim 1:15) but he remembers Onesiphorus, an old acquaintance, who searched diligently until he had found and visited him. The comfort of a friendly face showing up out of the blue was immeasurable for Paul.

These days, rather than diligently searching for old friends, we only need to key their names into social media. On the one hand, it's a blessing: long-lost friends can be contacted with one click. On the other hand, how often do I actually click? I'm more likely to be lulled into thinking that I can keep that relationship without contributing anything.

A while ago, I found a card in our local shop that reminded me so much of an old school friend that I decided to send it to her. I had to go online to ask for her 'snail mail' address. I wasn't prepared for the flood of fond memories as I wrote it – the pictures we used to draw to send each other over the summer, how excited I used to be to see her handwriting on an envelope, how we used to plan what we would do when term started and we could see each other again. All that richness replaced by a photograph I hadn't clicked on for months. I went back to the shop and bought a whole pack of notecards and stamps.

The phrase 'in touch' takes on an ironic sound when we consider how distant and artificial online links can be. Paul says of Onesiphorus 'he often refreshed me', recalling that his friend brought both physical and spiritual comforts to him in prison when he was lonely. Sometimes our screens and routines imprison us. Let's diligently seek each other out.



ACT 21: ACTION

CONTRIBUTOR
RUTH AWOGBADE

Ruth Yimika Awogbade is passionate about innovation and creativity and works with organisations to help them engage new audiences, particularly through various forms of communication. She is the founder and editor of MAGNIFY – a women's faith and lifestyle platform. She has been featured on the BBC, in The Huffington Post, Marie Claire and the Mail On Sunday due to a recognition of her work as an influential young woman redefining faith and feminism. Ruth also currently serves as a board member with the Evangelical Alliance.

Three weeks in – we're halfway there! By now, generosity is probably sinking a little deeper into our lives. It's a great time to put action behind our words. Think of moments when you've read or heard about something generous and thought 'that's a nice idea', but never get around to doing it. Now's the time.

ONE OPTION:

What act have you put off over the last few weeks? What sounded like a good idea at the time, but you never got around to doing? Put it at the top of today's to-do list.

"What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can that faith save him? If a brother or sister is poorly clothed and lacking in daily food, and one of you says to them, 'Go in peace, be warmed and filled,' without giving them the things needed for the body, what good is that? So also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead."
(James 2:14–17 ESV)

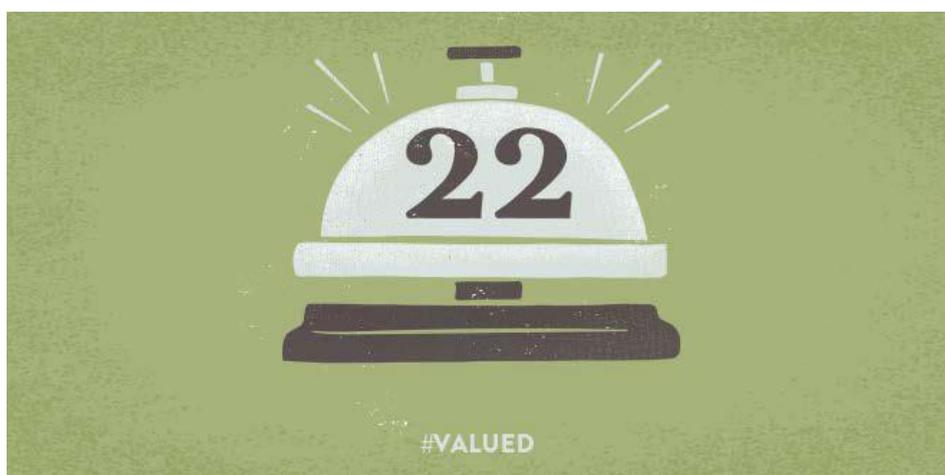
Growing up, I often heard the phrase 'actions speak louder than words' used repeatedly. I particularly remember my parents using this phrase in response to regular parents' evenings where teachers would note how 'talkative' a child I was, I would then promise to be quieter in school moving forward, and my parents would end up repeating the same phrase next time – thinking about it now, they had a lot of patience!

In the world we live in, where problems seem to occur or be brought to our attention on a daily basis, I find myself challenged to take action. By our actions and how we use our resources (of time and money), we really see what we value and where we want to enact change.

We also live in an age where social media gives us the opportunity to get involved and instantly feel like we are part of global or local communities. While undoubtedly this has so many benefits, it's important we don't reduce taking action to just reposting or tweeting a trending hashtag about a situation.

As Christians, I believe we have an incredible opportunity in our society to be advocates of change. We have the privilege to show generosity and supplement our heartfelt sentiments with our resources so that action can be taken.

Perhaps in your own life, there are situations or environments where you know you feel passionately about making a difference. Are words enough or, maybe starting with this year's Lent season, there's an opportunity for you to give your time or money to make a difference? It could be with a community group for school kids in your neighbourhood, or it could be with a local missions charity in your city seeking to make the name of Jesus known. Whether big or small, what we do is important and has the power to effect change.



ACT 22: VALUED

CONTRIBUTOR
KEZIA OWUSU-
YIANOMA

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Kezia is the Social Media and Campaigns Assistant at Stewardship. She's 5'5½" and loves to dance. If she's not dancing, she's napping. When she's not napping, she's either with friends or with family. If she's not with them, she's probably at church serving the youth or leading worship. And if she's not doing any of that then she's definitely at home watching *My Wife and Kids*.

Today, a guaranteed way of making a difference. Talk up a service staff member. It's such an easy chance to make a difference in someone's day – but ask any service staff member, and you'll hear how rarely it happens. Don't let fear of insincerity put you off. A simple 'You're amazing, thank you for that!' goes a long way when it's well meant.

Green: 'Thanks for that. That really helped.' 'How's your shift? People treating you well today?' 'You're doing a great job, keep it up!' Drop a sincere thank you on a bus driver or till assistant (or steal one of the above).

Amber: Go online – Yelp, Trip Advisor, or something similar – and leave a positive review for a local business.

Red: Get the name of someone who's doing a great job, then find the email for customer service (most businesses have them online). Let the business know how great they were, or go into the business and tell the manager about them.

“Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves...” (Philippians 2:3 NIV)

I spent three years working in various retail roles. I was a receptionist at a leisure centre for two years and a sales assistant in two different shops. So I've seen what it's like to be on that side of the counter.

Shoppers might spend anywhere from five minutes to one hour in a shop unaware that the staff may be working anything up to 10 hour shifts. As you can imagine it gets very tiring.

One particular shift sticks in my mind. It was nearly time to go home and out of the blue a customer threw a hanger at me in the fitting room because I wasn't putting the clothes away fast enough. Now of course it's fair to say that I wasn't sure what kind of day she was having and the pressure she was under, but I felt less than valued. Experiences like that stay with you. The way people sometimes treated us as staff made us feel like the clothes we sold were more valuable than us as people.

Those kind of negative experiences are pretty common but every once in a while customers would start a real conversation with me at the till, or pay me a compliment. Those moments would immediately brighten my day, make me a happier sales assistant and make me feel appreciated.

I worked as a receptionist whilst I was doing my A levels. I needed the money but I also needed to study, so, sometimes, I'd be doing a past paper behind the desk. Every Wednesday before the tide of swim school parents came in, one mum would make sure to come over to the reception desk and ask me how my studies were going. I always appreciated that she saw past the service I provided and remembered that I was a person with feelings, goals and dreams.

Jesus always saw the person beneath and went out of His way to make sure they felt valued, even when others regarded them as having no status. But then as pointed out in Philippians, He understood only too well what it was to be a servant.



ACT 23: ATTENTION

CONTRIBUTOR
SAM GIBB
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Sam is a London-born, Midlands-raised church pastor, desperately clinging on to his 20s while planting a church in Central London. He loves telling people the glorious gospel of grace revealed in the pages of scripture. When not planning church planting and preaching Sam enjoys decent beer, reading Asterix comics and watching YouTube videos of Alan Shearer. He is married to Charlie, and has promised to give her his complete attention when she comes home from work tonight.

The pace of life rockets up year by year. As it goes up, our ability to observe what others need tends to go down. So, offering people your absolute full attention is a gift that's only going up in value. It's a good time to invest. Let's take some of the biggest attention-drains from modern life and knock them on the head.

Green: Today, take a break from phubbing (that's 'phone snubbing' – ignoring others in favour of your phone).

Amber: Respect people's time if you're a chronic late-arriver. Show up on time, or make sure you don't hold them up if they need to get away promptly.

Red: Know someone under pressure? Help them get done what they need to get done. Do some tasks for them, take a responsibility off their hands, or keep them caffeinated.

“Who is wise and understanding among you? Let them show it by their good life, by deeds done in the humility that comes from wisdom.” (James 3:13 NIV)

'You're not really listening are you?'

The shift in tone of my wife's voice lifts it over the general hum of the other 'stuff' vying for my attention. She's right. I'm not. I mean, I kind of am. I'm uber-tasking. At the same time as hearing my wife download her day, I'm ping-ponging out humorous gifs to my WhatsApp prayer group, selecting this weekend's Fantasy Football team, and watching last night's episode of *Detectorists*. As the apostle Paul probably wouldn't say, 'I've become all things to all apps'.

Imagine ordering a full-English and ending up with half a German sausage and six baked beans (the worst!), yet that must be how my wife feels when my attention is less than lackadaisical. I'm constantly distracted and distraction destroys depth. She shouldn't have to ask for my attention. I should willingly give it to her out of joy, love and a recognition of the responsibility of relationship.

You see, hearing is about vibrating eardrums, but listening is about going deeper than the noises and attempting to understand. Hearing is science; listening is relationship. And relationships require attention.

The best model of this is Jesus Christ. In Mark 10 Jesus is surrounded by a huge crowd. Yet, in the midst of the gig-like chaos he hears a blind beggar calling out and, we are told, 'Jesus stopped'. He stops, the crowd stops and Jesus listens. He *properly* listens.

And Jesus' attention-giving finds its climax at the cross. At 33 He had plenty of 'time' left yet He allows it to be cruelly cut short so that ours might be eternally extended. On that awful yet awesome day Jesus gave His full self.

As well as being eternally thankful, I think that's a good reason for me to stop, down my apps and give someone my full attention.



ACT 24: STATEMENT

CONTRIBUTOR
ARCHBISHOP
JUSTIN WELBY

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The Most Revd and Rt Hon Justin Welby has been the Archbishop of Canterbury since 2013. He has three main priorities for his ministry – Evangelism and Witness, Prayer and the Renewal of Religious Life, and Reconciliation. Before he began training for ministry in 1989, Archbishop Justin worked in the oil industry for 11 years. He is married to Caroline and they have five adult children and three grandchildren.

Evangelism won't look the same for everyone, but it should look like something. Spend some time with God: praying, reading a chunk of the book of Acts – something to open up hope in you before you introduce it to others.

Green: Look out for opportunities today to say what you yourself have witnessed first-hand of the love, grace and faithfulness of God.

Amber: How does what you have witnessed of Jesus translate into your actions today – is it in forgiveness, goodness or loving kindness?

Red: Who do you most hope would experience the love of Jesus? Pray for them and get in touch. Be bold and invite them to witness Jesus first-hand for themselves.

“But in your hearts revere Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect...” (1 Peter 3:15 NIV)

The best thing that anyone can do with their life is to be a witness of Jesus. This means encountering Him – witnessing Him – first-hand for themselves. Then giving witness to Him to others.

The problem is most people haven't witnessed Jesus. Not really. They might think they don't need to because they already know all there is to know. But often this Jesus is the one of story books, a nice man in a white dress; or a cosmic Santa figure you can petition when you really need something; or the human face of an angry God, ready to strike when you don't follow the rules.

The real Jesus is much bigger, much more exciting, and, maybe, much more scary. And He does not want people to know facts about Him, but to witness first-hand His grace, His forgiveness and His love. But how do we help others meet someone who is invisible and does not always talk back? Well, this is where we come in – you and I. We are living witnesses to the God we love. Along with every other Christian – because we are all witnesses. God chooses to show Himself to others through his relationship with each and every one of us. Through what we do, through our choices, actions and priorities, and through our words. Words matter.

Often when we experience something amazing we want others to witness it. We want others to see and enjoy what we have. A Christian is someone who has witnessed God's love in the face of Christ. It has changed our lives, and so we long for it to change every life. Each of us has a different story to tell, a different way in which God's love has brought revolution to our lives. All we do as witnesses is wait for the opportunity and give testimony to that – simply say what we know. No two people witness in the same way, because each of us has witnessed first-hand something unique. Truly the most generous thing we can do in any of our days is simply take the God-given opportunities to witness to the truth of what we have experienced. And let Jesus take it from there.



ACT 25: ONE WAY

CONTRIBUTOR
EMMA
SIMMONDS

Brighter Bristol
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Brighter Bristol is an initiative (of Severn Vineyard Church) aiming to contribute to the social renewal of the city, making Bristol a brighter place to live and work. We have an amazing team of volunteers who facilitate our various projects and aim to make a difference everywhere they go.

The most profound gifts are gifts without any expectation of a future return. Each of us has a toolkit of gifts that are pretty specific to us – and, needed by someone else, who couldn't repay like for like. It could be financial. It could be a particular talent that's unique to you. Use it and give it away to someone who can't repay it.

Green: Know what somebody needs but can't get a hold of themselves? Maybe they're an older person, or less mobile. Go out of your way to help get it.

Amber: Know someone who needs a listening ear, some advice, comfort? Give them the gift of something they couldn't give themselves.

Red: Know an in-demand skill that could help someone? Even if it's something you'd usually be paid for – DIY skills, building, or cooking up a feast? Give it away for free.

“Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God's grace in its various forms.” (1 Peter 4:10 NIV)

'There's no such thing as a free lunch' – right? But what happens when we offer a no-strings-attached gift to someone? A simple something-for-nothing gesture, a reassurance that someone cares, that there

are those in the community willing to offer help without payment, love with no expectation of reciprocation?

The initiative – Brighter Bristol – works with various agencies to offer help to vulnerable individuals and households. They may be refugees, victims of domestic abuse, or those struggling with physical or psychological challenges. They are often very isolated and in desperate need of help and encouragement.

While we can't begin to directly address these complex and varied needs, we can make a difference by offering practical support in the form of children's clothing, furniture and equipment, and also by coordinating teams of volunteers to visit homes and put their DIY or gardening skills to good use.

Our hope is that these practical responses, which show love and care, open the door to longer-term, deeper relationships.

When we visited one family 18 months ago who live around the corner from us, the initial brief was to strip and paint a bedroom, which we did together with the kids whose bedroom we were decorating. This led to a strong relationship with not only their family but their cousins. With seven kids in each family it meant a good deal of noisy, messy and boisterous fun! Both families came along to our church's summer camp – delightfully shaking up our middle-class order! The kids have regularly come to church and to a youth camp, we've been to their birthday parties and fireworks night, they've been to a baptism, we take their kids to school some days and so on – we're just doing life together.

The point is, by offering a little one-way help, with no strings attached, the door can be opened to a relationship that takes root, grows and flowers over time.



ACT 26: PACKAGE

CONTRIBUTOR:
PAUL OXLEY

[@oxotweet](#)

Recently voted 4th most important person in his house, Paul is married to Laura and is wrapped round the fingers of his two daughters. He planted St Mark's MK a few years ago, is a Pause for Thought regular on BBC Radio 2 and clings to fading delusions of sporting grandeur.

Create a care package for someone. These can be lifesavers for some, or, at the least, incredible signs of kindness. If you've ever been on the receiving end, even when you didn't 'need' one, you'll know the impact.

Green: Hate finding yourself caught without an umbrella, or a pack of tissues? Pack some to have on hand for when others are. Watch this [video](#) to see just how big an impact something even this small can have. (<https://www.facebook.com/40acts/videos/vl.412068242493068/1577596848918338/?type=1>)

Amber: Treat someone, just because they're there and you can. Think of someone specific, and think of the things they love. Then get a hamper and fill it up.

Red: Care for someone who needs it. Make a care package for someone in need – a rough sleeper you often pass, or someone you know who could really do with some essentials.

***“Once safely on shore, we found out that the island was called Malta. The islanders showed us unusual kindness. They built a fire and welcomed us all because it was raining and cold.”
(Acts 28:1–2 NIV)***

In our spare room my wife has a cupboard in which she keeps all kinds of twine, ribbon, gift-wrap, and presents... something for every occasion. Need to thank a teacher at the end of term? We've got something. Sorry to see someone leave? Grab something from the 'farewell collection'. Just had a baby/operation/driving test/60th birthday? You'll find an appropriate card and gift in that cupboard!

I tease Laura about it, but I'm actually a little envious. If it ever dawns on me to be generous or give a last-minute gift, it's usually too late. The shops are shut or the moment has passed. Having planned ahead however, Laura's always able to demonstrate 'spontaneous' kindness and care.

At church we recently studied 'kindness'. I found a verse which I don't remember reading before where Paul, ship-wrecked and washed up on a Maltese beach, is cared for by locals who display what Luke called 'unusual kindness', drying their clothes on fires and providing shelter.

I imagine Paul's boat wasn't the first to run aground on that shoreline. Maybe the locals had a 'shipwreck committee' who planned for such eventualities with torches, canned food and hi-vis jackets?!

Because they were prepared they were able to display seemingly spontaneous care for someone in need.

Today's challenge involves getting prepared for a future act of care.

So get ready now.

Maybe stock your car boot with blankets for street-sleepers next time there's an unexpected frost?

Maybe put some money in your wallet to pay for someone's shopping one day?

Maybe block an evening off in your diary to give late-night hot chocolates to staff coming off the late shift at your local hospital?!

Plan now... and then unleash some unusually kind care into the world!



ACT 27: LONELY

CONTRIBUTOR:

PAUL SINGH

Bethany Christian Trust

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Pall works for Bethany Christian Trust in Edinburgh as the coordinator for Passing the Baton, which supports churches to befriend and engage with people who are socially isolated and lonely in their communities. Since 1997 Pall has worked with CMS as a mission partner and East West Trust enabling churches in Birmingham towards a better understanding of South Asian cultures and working in diverse communities. He also represents the Cinnamon Network in East Scotland as their church engagement advisor and leadership trainer.

Loneliness is something we're all prone to at times. Even those of us in churches can feel it. Often, we assume that someone else, somewhere, is offering generous support to the lonely. But why not just find a way to be that person? The Bible says that God 'puts the lonely into families' (Psalm 68:6): today the way He does that could be through you.

Green: Go for a drink with someone. Take tea to an elderly person on their own, or a new mum. Or grab a coffee with a new student who's still making friends.

Amber: Let someone know you're around. Tell them you'd be up for checking in with regular texts. Or even let them know they can call on you for anything, from having you on speed dial to going along with them to an event.

Red: Make a commitment to a lonely person. Take them under your wing and look out for them. Start today by inviting them to a meal with your friends.

***"Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world."* (James 1:27 NIV)**

What is as damaging to health as smoking 15 cigarettes a day, increases the risk of high blood pressure and obesity, increases the likelihood of suffering from depression and can shorten our lives? The answer doesn't come with a long Latin name. It is as simple as its effects are complex: it is loneliness and social isolation.

The Bethany Christian Trust runs a project called Passing the Baton which equips volunteers to come alongside people who are chronically lonely and isolated. Peter, a Christian from a local church in Edinburgh, was introduced to Mark through Bethany Christian Trust.

Mark was feeling very depressed when he was befriended by Peter. He'd lost his partner, his flat and his car within a year. The situation was so difficult for Mark that he ended up having to resign from his job at Tesco and declare himself bankrupt.

Although he'd moved into a new flat with support from a couple of friends, he had very little connection with the local community and so was quite isolated. It was during this time that he was visited weekly by Peter for a coffee and conversation. Their friendship developed over the course of many weeks and Mark's confidence began to grow as he was encouraged by Peter and helped to pick up the computer skills he needed to search and apply for a job. Peter's consistent friendship and encouragement meant that Mark didn't give up and eventually got a job as a retail sales assistant at Primark.

Mother Teresa once said that loneliness and the feeling of being unwanted is the most terrible poverty. God has created us in his image to be relational and connect with him and one another. In the creation story God says, 'It is not good for man to be alone' (Genesis 2:18). God wants to bring transformation in our communities through friendship; like Jesus He wants us to be the friend of sinners and love our neighbours as ourselves.



ACT 28: PLANET

CONTRIBUTOR:
BRYONY WELLS
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Bryony is part of the leadership team at St Thomas Crookes, an Anglican/Baptism church in Sheffield. She is married to Rich and has two small children. She really enjoys living on the edge of the Peak District but misses the sea (and the East Coast fish and chips that come with it!). Bryony loves writing and speaking about living more ethical, simple and intentional lives.

It's St Patrick's Day, but we'd find any excuse to go green. We're looking at ways to help glue the planet back together a bit. Most of us know the basics: buying those smart lightbulbs, keeping chargers out of sockets. Now we're going to work to make those into actual habits.

Green: Get some steps in – leave the car at home and chose to walk today.

Amber: Buy local – Can you buy locally this week? Milk, bread, eggs or beer! Have a look as to what local suppliers you could support.

Red: Curb the consumption – how about opting to stop buying clothes, or coffee, or even anything new between now and the end of Lent?

***“For in him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through him and for him.”
(Colossians 1:16 NIV)***

When was the last time you made a change and stuck to it? Maybe your new year's resolutions have already been long forgotten, packed up in the box with the tinsel?

A few years ago I decided to make one change for good a month. The question that prompted the decision was 'How am I loving God's creation and people well?'

So I decided to make changes that would enable me to live more ethically and simply, changes that would help me love the world God created. They say it takes six weeks to make a habit so I figured introducing one change a month gave me a chance of actually making lasting change. Also one thing a month seemed slightly more manageable than trying to change everything all at once!

I started by changing my shampoo. A small change but once I really looked into what was lurking in my regular bottle I was convinced of the difference I was making. Since then I've changed my energy supplier, started buying locally produced milk and learnt lots more about the wine I choose. I've changed which shops I buy clothes from, what baby wipes I use and even reviewed my excessive cotton wool usage!

Making one change a month has enabled me to create lasting habits – habits which are now part of my daily life. It's been said that 'how we spend our days is, of course, how we spend our lives' (Annie Dillard). Small changes add up, they make a difference, they have the potential to be world changing.

I started my journey with a big question – on the face of it, quite overwhelming. But with each small change I make and habit I pursue I know I'm edging closer to answering that question.



ACT 29: WASTE NOT

CONTRIBUTOR:
MATT LONG

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Matt is passionate about planting places of prayer and seeing the scraps of the empire used to reveal beauty in broken places. He does this through Forest School, edible gardens, outdoor cooking, micro poetry and Long life.

Hold on there, as you head to the bin with those overripe bananas and unwanted tins of tuna. There's a way forwards here. Talk yourself back from the brink, and have a look at what you could do to make that unwanted waste a generous resource for your neighbour, for the street, and even the community.

Green: Educate yourself on a few local food-waste initiatives (lovefoodhatewaste.com or fareshare.org.uk are good places to start).

Amber: Make a banana cake and gift it to a neighbour or friend. Or, if you're not a banana eater, find something else that's going off (going-off avocados make a great chocolate cake – google 'avocado mug cake'!).

Red: Make an event out of it. Invite friends over for a green dinner. Explain the premise: not salad, but a dinner made up of leftover bits and pieces. If they're stuck for ideas, googling 'what to do with gone-off ____' is a good place to start, and it'll inspire creativity, too.

“They all ate and were satisfied, and the disciples picked up twelve basketfuls of broken pieces that were left over.” (Matthew 14:20 NIV)

The story of the feeding of the 5000 is one of the most well known in the Bible. It is a story of incredible and miraculous provision. A story that characterises God's generosity and the obedience of a small boy willing to give up his picnic. But have you ever stopped to ask the question 'What happened to the twelve baskets of leftovers?'

There are inevitably a bunch of really smart theological answers and interpretations that answer this question. But for a moment let's just imagine the disciples getting a little bit creative. Maybe they made fish soup and bread and butter pudding? Maybe they redistributed bread to those in need? Maybe they fed the ducks and birds?

What do you do with your leftovers?

Thanks in part to campaigns such as 'LoveFoodHateWaste', activists such as 'The Real Junk Food Project' and TV programmes such as 'Hugh's War on Waste', the issue of food waste has become a hot topic in the UK. Statistics from the Waste and Resources Action Programme (WRAP) show households in the UK waste 7.3 million tonnes of edible food each year – that's £13 billion worth of food!

So what can I do? To borrow a phrase from a well-known supermarket, 'every little helps'. Millions of people are already doing their bit to use more of the food they buy each week. Preserving, freezing, composting and gleaning are becoming popular pastimes.

Back to those overripe bananas... there's something about the process of transforming waste food into tasty meals or mushy brown bananas into a moist loaf of bread or leftovers being given new life that speaks of God's upside-down kingdom. A kingdom where nothing is wasted, the left out are included and all things find their proper place in God – wonky veg included!



ACT 30: COLLECTIVE

CONTRIBUTOR:

EMILY LEE

Stockton Soup

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@stocktonsoup

Emily Lee is a foster carer from Stockton-on-Tees. In 2016, with the support of her friends and inspired by other SOUP events, she established Stockton SOUP. To date they have given away over £6000 to local community projects.

Something powerful happens when giving becomes a plural thing. People notice, the word gets passed around faster, and eventually momentum brings others on board. So, get your kids/friends/neighbours to jump in on today's generous act. Go beyond what you could do alone and push the generous limits of a group.

Green: Remember your 40acts buddy? Join forces with them. Club together financially to donate to a cause you both care about.

Amber: Do a community clean up that makes an impact – email your friends and neighbours with some suggested dates and times, and see who responds!

Red: Don't break what isn't broken. There's a reason the classic bake sale or sponsored walk is still alive and well today. Take the skills and resources you have and throw together a fundraising event.

“Even so the body is not made up of one part but of many.” (1 Corinthians 12:14 NIV)

As we anxiously and ambitiously set out 40 chairs for our first event, knowing we would be over the moon if 20 people came, we did not expect an hour later to have over 70 people crammed into the space with standing room only! Oh the joy of watching a community come together.

I help run a community event in the north-east of England called Stockton SOUP. Originating in Detroit, but now all over the world, SOUP is a simple concept. People turn up and make a suggested donation which gets them a bowl of soup, roll and a vote. After some live music, four people pitch an idea to improve the local community. They may only talk for four minutes, and when they have finished everyone votes for their favourite. The donations are then split proportionally according to the vote. It is crowd funding that comes directly from the crowd.

As I reflect on that first stuffy, cramped space full of people from all walks of life, backgrounds, faiths, ages and genders – amazing, diverse people who turn up time and time again with one common goal of making their community better – and then consider the theatre we now see filled regularly, I am reminded of 1 Corinthians 12:14: ‘Even so the body is not made up of one part but of many.’ There is something so special about seeing a community come together to celebrate and support people stepping out to make a difference, or seeing people who regularly attend the events to cheer on their community heroes. Thanks to this collective body working as one we have seen ideas planted and grown, and more established projects go from strength to strength. It is amazing what can be achieved when we all get together and work together for the common good.

When all the admin has been done, the room laid out, and the mic checked, I get to sit back and watch – watch someone's dream get cheered on, believed in, and encouraged by their own community! The money is a bonus; that support is life changing. Teamwork really does make the dreams work!



ACT 31: PLAN

CONTRIBUTOR
ALISON JONES

Alison works in community cohesion in a primary school in Tower Hamlets which has six white British children and 440 from another 24 ethnic backgrounds. Alison specialises in setting up projects to enable the school community to give to others and also to understand others. Alison and her husband have lived in the same inner city area for 36 years. They have four adopted children.

God's vision for generosity goes way beyond spontaneous, off-the-cuff giving, as fun as that is. When we plan ahead and get a bit smart and strategic with it, we unlock a whole new area of generosity, and find it's more surprisingly freeing than we'd expect.

Green: Plan for the spontaneous. Make sure you have change on you for when you pass Big Issue sellers. Or, buy some hats and gloves to help rough sleepers in winter.

Amber: Plan to give often. Look over your finances, make a place for new ways to give regularly, and set up a giving account here to help you stick to it.

Red: Plan to make sacrificial giving part of the fabric of your life. Follow today's writer Alison's example and do your own leisure tax, whether it's 100% like for like, or a smaller percentage.

“This service that you perform is not only supplying the needs of the Lord’s people but is also overflowing in many expressions of thanks to God. Because of the service by which you have proved yourselves, others will praise God for the obedience that accompanies your confession of the gospel of Christ, and for your generosity in sharing with them and with everyone else.”
(2 Corinthians 9:12–13 NIV)

It all started with thinking about tax. Yes, tax.

The idea came to me that, unlike some people, I was able to afford the luxury of leisure – the kind of treats that aren't essential but bring me and my family a lot of pleasure. When the children were younger it was swimming or football; for me (or my husband) it was coffees and meals out, visiting the cinema or theatre, buying a new book or my particular favourite: luxuriating in a massage.

So my idea went like this: what if we were to self-impose a tax on our leisure for each of the 40 days of Lent?

I decided to make a list of everything we spent on leisure and 'taxed' it. It was a hefty tax rate at 100% but each time I spent money on one of life's pleasures, I matched it pound for pound, ready to give it away at Easter.

In the past, we've sometimes given cinema or restaurant vouchers to families who were on benefits or, as last year, left it to someone else to decide how it should be spent.

By the time we got to Easter last year we'd accumulated £181. I was quite surprised that I'd spent that amount on leisure during the six weeks of Lent.

Then came the joy of giving it away.

I knew that my friend Kolsuma was going to Bangladesh with her husband (an Imam) and children at Easter and so handed it over to her to spend on whatever cause might benefit from it during their visit. It turned out that it paid towards a much-needed photocopier at the school in their home village. It also sparked a lot of discussion about giving and the Christian faith which was priceless.

So, once again, we've taxed our leisure and by week five it's building up nicely. Who knows what God's got in store for it but we can't wait to find out.



ACT 32: MULTIPLY

CONTRIBUTOR:
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www.craigborlase.com

Craig Borlase is an author, ghostwriter and editor of Stewardship's SHARE magazine.

Take a humble one pound coin. What could you turn it into? What's the most generous possible outcome? A bucket and sponge from the pound shop for washing your neighbour's car? A stamp for posting someone a kind letter? Get creative and multiply its potential for generosity – you might not see a one pound coin in the same way again.

Green: Take £1 and get creative. For example, buy a stamp and envelope and write an encouraging letter OR put it towards cleaning products to give someone's car a wash..

Amber: Take £5 and buy food for someone homeless. Take the time to ask them what they would like before you go off and buy it. Then take even more time to chat with them when you hand it over.

Red: Take £10 – or more – and invest it in a charity you want to support.

See how the farmer waits for the land to yield its valuable crop, patiently waiting for the autumn and spring rains. [James 5:7]

That's how it all started.

My mum wasn't a visionary. She was just a forty-something housewife whose breast cancer was in remission and whose compassion was spiked every time she came out of church and saw the handful of homeless men and women sitting on the bench, drinking.

To her, it all seemed so simple. She had read her bible and knew what it said about the poor, the sick and the outcast. She knew what needed to be done.

And so she did it. With the help of a couple of friends and plenty of prayer, she started to get to know the men and women on the bench. She knew little about their world - and even less about the complex, often lethal cocktail of problems that attach themselves to homelessness - but she had a house and a kettle and a good stock of biscuits. So she invited them around for tea.

I was 16 at the time. Most afternoons I'd come home from school and find the kitchen full of cigarette smoke and easy laughter. I'd join the likes of Dublin John, Billy The Glue, Tommy Busby and others sitting around the table. I'd watch as Mum smiled and listened and showed love in the simplest of ways.

Almost three decades later, that generous compassion has been multiplied in the most wonderful way. Mum and friends established a charity which has grown to become an award winning provider of support to homeless people. It is no exaggeration to say that thousands of people have been helped, rehomed and seen their lives transformed.

And it all started with tea and biscuits and the grace and love to open a door and invite people in. But mainly tea.



ACT 33: RELEASE

CONTRIBUTOR
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Matt works for Tearfund in the UK Campaigns Team. He is married to Hazel and they have two children. He loves curry (the food, not himself) which is a good thing living in Southall in West London. He is part of St John's Church in Southall and loves music and cycling and supports Norwich City Football Club.

The 'stuff' that accumulates and clusters in corners and cupboards – time to take action and tell it who's boss. Realistically, what do you actually need? What could go – and go to someone else?

ONE OPTION:

Cut ruthlessly into the pile. Keep it simple: don't let second thoughts get in the way, and start with an idea of who you'll give it all away to. While you do, think 'What things has your inner attitude been to holding onto tightly? How has 40acts changed that attitude?'

“Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moths and vermin destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moths and vermin do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.” (Matthew 6:19–21 NIV)

Last year I turned 40 and as part of a whole year of celebrating (why not?), I set myself a series of challenges. One of these was to play a game as a family of four devised by 'The Minimalists' <https://www.theminimalists.com/game/>. On the face of it, the game is easy. On day one we had to get rid of one thing each, two items on day two and three on day three and so on. At first it felt good to start having a clear out, getting rid of all those moth-eaten, so-called treasures that were just clutter but it got more and more difficult as we went along and eventually we all hit the barrier of reluctance. Some things felt too precious to let go of.

I thought we might get to day ten and then back away and give up. However as we stuck with it and gathered momentum I was amazed to find that we'd managed to get to the end of the month. What started out as a challenge eventually became liberating as we gradually learned to let go.

You might not be up for the full-on challenge of the game, but could now be the time to clear out that wardrobe, tackle that room you've been putting off or root through those kitchen cupboards?

What could you give up and give away? How will that feel? How might it release you and free you from being too attached to your stuff? How might it be a blessing to others? Could less in fact be much, much more in God's economy?



ACT 34: EXTRAVAGANT

CONTRIBUTOR
PHILIP SUDELL

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Philip Sudell is the minister of Grace Church, Muswell Hill.

Extravagant. Overblown. A bit much. We're going extravagant today. If someone mentions that they'd like something a little over the top, why not just go for it? (And go all-in, too – if you need the excuse to go big, consider this it!)

Green: Give something small but thoughtful – like adding a biscuit when you bring someone tea.

Amber: Give something big and thoughtful – like a three-course, all-paid-for meal, or a year's subscription to cinema tickets, not just a gift card.

Red: Give something absurdly, radically thoughtful – like Philip's unexpected car donor, what can you do to step into truly sacrificial generosity?

“He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all – how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?” (Romans 8:32 NIV)

Extravagant generosity can catch you by surprise.

I had been speaking at an outreach weekend at a church in a different part of the country and as the weekend came to an end there was one couple hanging back just waiting for a moment to catch my attention. I could see them out of the corner of my eye and I was imagining what they might want to say or ask. But it turned out that none of my guesses was anywhere near the target!

We had been struggling along for a few months with an impractical and temperamental car. For reasons best known to itself, the vehicle in question chose not to start if the weather was even a little damp, let alone wet. As I was introduced at one of the talks, the story of our temperamental car happened to come up but I thought nothing more of it at the time. It seemed that this couple had been listening and discerned God at work prompting them to act.

And so a day or so later, rather than making an expected comment about the talk, the service, or something similar, they greeted me with the words, 'It may not be quite what you were hoping for, but we do have a car that we have been wondering what to do with. And we'd like to give it to you.'

This was a first! Truly extravagant generosity! I didn't quite know what to say. Here was I, having talked about God's generous grace, and having encouraged people to accept it, finding myself very much the undeserved recipient of somebody else's extraordinary generosity, and struggling to take it in.

Wonderfully, the couple graciously persisted with their offer and a little later in the day my wife and I not only had a chance to take a test drive, but also fixed a time that I might come back and pick it up from them.

As I look out the window writing this and see the same car in the drive some two years later, I continue to be struck by how wonderfully God has provided for us.

Why not be the agent of God's extravagant generosity to someone today? Pray that He might show you who and how and don't be surprised if the recipient is more than a little overwhelmed to begin with!



ACT 35: WITNESS

CONTRIBUTOR
TIM
BECHERVAISE
[@TimmyBech](#)

Tim Bechervaise is a graduate in theology and currently works at a residential care home. Writing, photography, speciality coffee shops and donuts tend to keep Tim content. Tottenham Hotspur sometimes does.

As Christians, the kindest, most honest thing we could do for our friends who don't know Jesus is simple: telling them what he's done for you. Do you know someone who's been on the edge of faith for a while now, and you've been putting off sharing your testimony with them? It can feel slightly vulnerable, or weirdly intense, but that shouldn't put us off. Introduce them to Jesus – and deepen that friendship.

ONE OPTION:

Humble yourself today to meet a friend, a family member, or even a stranger where they are at. Allow your openness and honesty to deepen your relationship with them, and use any opportunities to share your faith in Jesus.

“And pray for us, too, that God may open a door for our message, so that we may proclaim the mystery of Christ...” (Colossians 4:3 NIV)

The morning spring air was fresh and the streets a gentle hum of activity: students making their way to lectures, shops and stalls opening, commuters striding to work, tourists warming up their cameras.

Another day in Cambridge had begun.

I am not from the area so I had arrived early to explore the city before meeting with friends later. Walking around looking for somewhere to have breakfast, I prayed. 'Lord, use me as you wish today,' I offered (with more than a hint of trepidation), 'and may there be opportunities to share your love with others.'

That afternoon I was in a pub reading over a beer when a man, perhaps in his 60s, entered. I looked up and offered a smile. To him it must have been an invitation to talk as he walked towards me explaining that he was waiting for a bus. He then went on to tell me more about himself, and along the way we got talking about church and some of the reservations he had over Christianity.

I tried to answer his questions, nervously wondering if it made any sense. And then it dawned on me that the best thing I could do was share my testimony. The power of the gospel is revealed by the depths it goes to redeem and I didn't want to make light of my propensity to mess up. So I opened up a little. I then looked into his eyes and told him that God loves him too. Everything began to feel very weird and, being honest, I was consciously trying to keep my voice down so as to not draw attention.

I expected the man to brush off my words, pour cold water (or beer) over them, or change the subject. But he didn't. He seemed moved, like a chord was struck. A few minutes later he went to catch his bus. Watching him leave I was overcome with gratitude – for God answering prayer, bringing us together, and giving me a few moments' bumbling courage to share my faith. The results I can only leave to God. But I am hopeful our encounter did something good.

Paul's prayer in Colossians 4:3 is one we should repeat regularly with expectancy and excitement, for God is so eager to answer, often in the most surprising of ways. As for us, we just need to be ready for those opportunities, receptive when they arise, and responsive by making the very most of them.



ACT 36: SERVANT

CONTRIBUTOR:
PAUL THE
APOSTLE

Paul the Apostle. Originally known as Saul of Tarsus, Paul learnt the family business of making and repairing tents. After a dramatic conversion on the road to Damascus, he spent the rest of his life spreading the good news about Jesus. His many letters form part of the New Testament.

Do the most unpleasant or scary clean-up job you can think of. That could be literally cleaning something that isn't particularly pleasant. Or it could be helping someone who you know is drifting from God – not always a nice or easy thing to do.

Green: Do some literal cleaning. This will work best if you find somewhere that's personally important to you (like your street) or to your community (like a local school or a care home garden).

Amber: Most likely, there's a scenario you'd rather not serve in – today, do it. Do the whole office's sandwich run. Clean all the sweaty gym equipment.

Red: A huge, intimidating, profound act of service: think of a friend or family member who is drifting away from faith. Think about how you might call them back – well and sensitively.

Romans 12: 3–16

Because I'm bursting with gratitude to God for His gracious gift to me I just want to share some pearls of wisdom with you that have been helpful to me:

- Don't think of yourself more highly than you should. Be modest in your thinking, and don't think you're bringing your goodness to God – no – because it's God who brings it to you in the first place.
- Remember, we all have a different part to play in the body of Christ and God in His grace has given us gifts to share.
- Whatever our gift is, we should use it for the benefit of others, in an open-hearted, open-handed way.
- Remember to love one another warmly and sincerely as Christians, and show respect for one another.
- Work hard and don't shirk. Serve the Lord with a heart full of devotion.
- Let your hope keep you joyful, be patient in your troubles, and remember to pray at all times.
- Share your belongings with fellow Christians in need, and open your homes to strangers.
- Ask God to bless those who persecute you – yes, that's what I said – ask Him to bless them, not to curse.
- Stay connected: be happy with those who are happy, weep with those who weep.
- Have the same concern for everyone. **Do not be proud, but accept humble duties and be prepared to roll your sleeves up.**

Lastly, never think you're better than anyone else and have all the answers.



ACT 37: DEBRIEF

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Nell studied theology at Durham University and is now a writer at the London Institute for Contemporary Christianity. Her first book, *Musings of a Clergy Child: Growing into a faith of my own*, was published by BRF in June 2017.

The game is gratitude. Without gratitude, you'll never be content with the things God's given you. And, because sometimes we need to run life a little slower in order to see what we can be grateful for, we've made today's act a little simpler...

ONE OPTION:

Run back over the last month of 40acts. What have you seen that's surprised you? What's been tough? What's cheered you up the most? Who have you been grateful for – and can you thank them today?

***“...give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.
(1 Thessalonians 5:18 NIV)***

When I was asked to write about gratitude I was, if I'm completely honest, stumped. Lots of people far wiser than me have said insightful things about gratitude and I didn't have anything new to add.

And so, I nearly bailed on writing this. The only thing stopping me from doing so was my overwhelming sense of duty.

But then it hit me. So often, that's our attitude towards thanksgiving as well. Our 'attitude to gratitude', if you will. We figure that if we don't have anything groundbreaking to say, we might as well not say it.

We will, for the most part, say thank you for elaborate gifts, or surprise visits. We have no qualms about writing a thank-you letter when we've been to a wonderful party. But when it comes to the ordinary, everyday things of life, we forget. Or, quite possibly, we decide it's probably not worth it.

This attitude frequently spills over from my everyday life and into my prayers as well. If it wasn't a miracle, an incredible answer to prayer that I want to tell everyone about immediately, I will often pass on thanking God for it. If it's just the ordinary things of everyday life which someone has probably already thanked God for, I tend to avoid mentioning it in my prayers.

Except this isn't how this is supposed to work. Prayer – and life in general – was never meant to be about saying the most impressive thing.

What if we started to look for reasons to be grateful in our everyday, ordinary lives? The colleague who brings us a cup of tea every morning, the neighbour who stops mowing their lawn to ask us how we are, the cashier who we see every week but still know nothing about.

Perhaps, as we look back over the past five weeks, we can spot both the extraordinary encounters and the ordinary occurrences for which we can give thanks.

Take the time today – either by reflecting on the last few weeks, by recognising the significant things or by concentrating on the ordinary things in front of you – to offer distinctly dull thanks. Distinctly dull to you, perhaps, but possibly groundbreaking for the one who receives it.



ACT 38: UNKNOWN

CONTRIBUTOR:
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Ben Cooley, CEO of anti-trafficking charity Hope for Justice, has a vision to live in a world free from slavery. The organisation he helped to create in 2008 is today fighting trafficking all around the globe. Hope for Justice has rescued hundreds of victims and helped them into new lives in freedom, thanks to a team comprising former senior police investigators and detectives, lawyers, social workers and policy experts. Ben has chronicled the outstanding growth and success of Hope for Justice and the role of his Christian faith in his new book *Impossible is a Dare*.

The UK police and authorities estimate that there are tens of thousands of victims of modern-day slavery living among us in this country, hidden in plain sight, trapped in exploitation – unknown. There are 25 million people in slavery around the world. Everyone can play their part in God’s mission to ‘rescue them from oppression and violence, for precious is their blood in his sight’.

Green: Pray for the victims of modern-day slavery, that investigators and specialists can find them, rescue them and restore them to new lives where they can walk in hope and freedom. Pray for breakthroughs in anti-trafficking operations around the world, and for a shift in public attitudes to create a culture, a society, a country and a world free from slavery.

Amber: Get educated to become part of the anti-trafficking movement! A great place to start is the book by today’s author and Hope for Justice CEO, Ben Cooley, called *Impossible is a Dare*. Or go to the Evangelical Alliance, where they have a comprehensive list of the other Christian anti-slavery groups based in the UK.
<http://www.eauk.org/current-affairs/politics/modern-slavery/anti-slavery-groups.cfm>

Red: Could you organise an event in your own community to raise awareness and inspire your audience to get involved? They can learn to spot the signs of modern slavery and how best to report it, how to campaign against it, and other ways to support anti-slavery organisations. These charities have ‘ways to get involved’ and ‘book a speaker’ on their websites and always need more volunteers and fundraisers.

“For he will deliver the needy who cry out, the afflicted who have no one to help. He will take pity on the weak and the needy and save the needy from death. He will rescue them from oppression and violence, for precious is their blood in his sight.” (Psalm 72:12–14 NIV)

It’s an extraordinary thing, to help set free another human being. I have sat with rescued victims, and looked in their eyes as they contemplate a new life in freedom.

But I’ve also been undercover in brothels in Cambodia and seen rows of raked seating with young women sat there, no name nor even number, men just given a laser pointer to pick the one they want. Stripped of their humanity.

You may not believe it, but slavery is a reality in our modern world, here and around the globe. Traffickers are active in every community, profiting from human misery and hiding their crimes from society. Lives trapped in domestic servitude, in forced labour, in sexual exploitation. Millions of victims, suffering and unknown to the rest of us.

I was just in Ethiopia, sitting in a mud hut with a mother who is part of one of our self-help groups. Since they started, she told me, the practice of FGM, female genital mutilation, no longer happens. The mothers know not to turn to loan sharks, and not to trust the false promises of people who claim to be able to find work for their daughters and sons in the Middle East or Europe, but who really work for the traffickers. We’re giving these mothers the tools they need not only to survive but to thrive, and to teach others.

For me, this is what justice is. This is what mercy is. Jesus exists for all of them: for the least, the last and the lost. For the hurting and the marginalised. From the teenage girl in Cambodia to the family in Ethiopia.

Let’s be with God to deliver those who are needy and the afflicted who have no one to help. We can’t do it alone, none of us can. But together, and with God, we can do all things.



ACT 39: MERCY

CONTRIBUTOR:
ANTHONY
DELANEY

<http://anthonydelaney.com/>

Having formerly been a police officer for 10 years, Anthony went into church leadership in 1995 and now leads Ivy Church, a movement gathering in community centres, an arts centre, a nightclub, a warehouse and even a church building. Anthony's books include *Rough Diamonds*, *The B.E.S.T. Marriage*, *OMG* and *Work It Out*. At Westminster Theological Centre, Anthony lectures to graduate level on transformational leadership. Anthony is married to Zoe. They have three grown-up children and four grandchildren.

Mercy is being let off the hook. Mercy is when you're not given what you deserve. Mercy triumphs over judgment. Today, we're taking others off the hook. We're offering mercy to people who are especially difficult, hard to remember fondly, or who just grind us down. The first person to extend that mercy to might be yourself.

ONE OPTION:

We don't get to choose when and where we're called to show mercy – in the mundane or the extraordinary. Today, whether you're cut off in traffic, or insulted, or taken for granted, find your mercy. Is there a situation past or present where you're struggling to let mercy triumph over judgment? Commit it to God and ask him to help you overcome it.

“Speak and act as those who are going to be judged by the law that gives freedom, because judgment without mercy will be shown to anyone who has not been merciful. Mercy triumphs over judgment.” (James 2:12–13 NIV)

How many times have we heard someone about to receive the offering in church encourage us using the words in Luke 6:38 'Give, and it will be given to you: good measure, pressed down, shaken together, and running over will be put into your bosom. For with the same measure that you use, it will be measured back to you.'

I was recently challenged that we often misunderstand that verse because, while giving includes money, it is so much bigger than that. Looking at the verse in context, Jesus is not talking about giving money at all, but giving what is often a lot more costly – mercy.

I lead a church in Manchester. In the wake of the terrible bombing in our home city last May I spent the day struggling with so many hard questions about what had happened and yet there were so few answers.

I prayed: comfort for the people affected, wisdom for the police, strength for the paramedics. And for the perpetrators – justice and mercy.

I'll be honest. I struggled with the last bit. At the time my hands were still clenched fists. I'd been a police officer here for 10 years and the fists tend to clench before I can move them into prayer when I hear about cowardly attacks like this. I was angry. For me it was all about justice and mercy – well, that's hard. I later wrote on [my blog](#) about how we have to make the choice for mercy, and no, it's not easy!

In the previous verse, Jesus said, 'Judge not, and you shall not be judged. Condemn not, and you shall not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven.' No mention of money. This is about giving forgiveness, not finance. What we are really challenged to give is mercy. If I give judgment to others I'll get it back – with interest!

The parallel passage in Matthew 7:1–2 makes the point more forcefully: 'Judge not, that you be not judged. For with what judgment you judge, you will be judged; and with the measure you use, it will be measured back to you.'

The Bible says in James 2:13 that 'Mercy triumphs over judgment.' But that's not an automatic transaction. It's a choice. Again, reading the whole verse demonstrates this forcefully: 'For judgment is without mercy to the one who has shown no mercy. Mercy triumphs over judgment.'

Who do you need to withhold judgment from? Who do you need to release mercy to – even if it costs. Today we will all have opportunities as to what we give, and what we receive.



ACT 40: DELIVER

CONTRIBUTOR:
ROY CROWNE
Hope Together
[@roycrown](#)

Roy became HOPE Together Executive Director in March 2010 and was previously the National Director of Youth for Christ in Britain for 12 years. Roy has written and edited a peer-to-peer evangelistic training course, called 'The Art of Connecting'.

Today's act counts maybe even more than the last 39, because it's the launch-pad into leading a generous life. Be bold with generosity today. Shun the it's-nearly-over apathy. Take a risk. And let open-handed, openly-visible generosity spill over into your future.]

Green: Drop an Easter egg and a card at your neighbour's door, or all the doors on the street. Our culture might not have many Easter traditions – but let's make the ones we have wildly generous..

Amber: Don't worry about being a little over the top. Go all out. Take someone a breakfast basket, or a fully-prepped meal (with all the Easter trimmings, hot cross buns and all), or a whole week of shopping.

Red: Stand outside a busy place – or outside your church – and hand out Easter eggs and cards for people going by.

***Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says.
(James 1:22)***

D.L. Moody, the American evangelist and publisher once said, 'If a man is stealing nuts and bolts from a railway track, and, in order to change him, you send him to college, at the end of his education, he will steal the whole railway track.

Education is good, but we can tend to think education answers everything. Education doesn't change heart attitudes. We need to put theory into action. As we were reminded at the very start of our studies during 40acts, James, put it this way. He wrote: 'Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says.' James 1:22.

Love is a verb. It is something to do. Just as what we think about can influence what we do, it can work the other way too - our deliberate actions can change the way we think and feel'.

When relationships hit rocky times, loving actions can help put those friendships back on track. You might not feel positive towards a colleague, spouse or housemate. But setting your heart to love and serve them in practical ways, even when you don't feel like it, can change the situation. 40acts has challenged us to make a difference, and that doesn't have to end now we've reached the end of Lent.

I heard a story about a woman working in an open plan office. Everyone grumbled about the state of the shared space. Angry notices appeared regularly about clearing up. Emails arrived repeatedly on the intranet. But nothing changed, until one woman began to make a difference. Every day she spent a couple of minutes clearing up, watering the plants, making the place pleasant for everyone. She didn't make a song and dance about it, and didn't complain when she had to tidy up all over again the next day. Gradually her small actions began to change the atmosphere in the office. It became a more cheerful place to work, because she had sown seeds of love instead of inaction and indifference. Indifference – doing nothing – is the opposite of love.

Love is caught not taught. To teach his disciples the way to live, Jesus showed them how to live and how to respond to the needs around them. He fed hungry crowds, hugged people with leprosy, treated women and children with respect, healed all who came to him, and wept when his friend died.

The cross was the ultimate lesson in love.

When Jesus went to the cross, he was motivated by love: God loved the world so much that he gave his one and only Son, so we can have life with him eternally. Jesus' sacrificial action changed everything.

When he puts his Spirit in us, he gives us the power to love as he loves.

This Easter, let's ask God to fill us with his love.

Let's go on putting his love into action. Let's change the world!