



ACT 1: Pledge

CONTRIBUTOR:

Stewart McCulloch

<http://www.stewardship.org.uk>

@STEWARDSHIPNEWS

Stewart joined Stewardship as CEO in August 2018. He is a Chartered Accountant who spent the early part of his career in management consulting, before leading a number of

insurance businesses through significant change.

Prior to joining Stewardship, Stewart was Global Insurance Director for VisionFund, the micro finance operation of World Vision, where his focus was on creating innovative solutions to help ensure that the lives of over one million vulnerable families are more resilient to sickness, bereavement, crop failure and climate shocks.

Every generous act matters. Every moment of generosity moves your community forward, whether an inch or a mile. Imagine if you took the plunge and dedicated each of the next 40 days to generosity, no backing down, even when it gets tiring. And, imagine if everyone who signed up to 40acts this year did, too.

Green: Set a reminder for each of the next 40 days to prompt you into that day's act.

Orange: Get an accountability partner who'll keep you to your word (and your acts).

Red: Write a post on social media for each day's act. Alternatively, start a daily diary or blog. Boldly let the world know what you're doing.

"Day after day, in the temple courts and from house to house, they never stopped teaching and proclaiming the good news that Jesus is the Messiah." (Acts 5:42 NIV)

I used to be a bean counter. Literally.

When I worked with World Vision, I was part of a team in Northern Tanzania getting alongside a group of bean farmers. Our goal was to help them to grow more and find markets for their produce.

One day, a generous group of Americans came to visit the project. They were almost all business owners, many from rural communities themselves. They got what the bean farmers were trying to achieve and soon realised that they had more in common with the farmers than charity and more gifts to offer than just money. God had put them in relationship as a group of Christian business owners; they were brothers and sisters in Christ.

These Americans ended up buying the farming company and investing heavily, and they are now in business with their friends in Tanzania. They had listened to God's prompting to give generously, taken a big step and, as a result, they found themselves in a new, transformational relationship.

See what generous opportunities come your way today as you prepare to live in generous community and get ready to open yourself up to what God has in store for you.

And finally, as you start your 40acts journey, remember this:

Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously. Each of you should give what you have decided in your heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. And God is able to bless you abundantly, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work. (2 Corinthians 9:6–8 NIV)

Are you ready?



40act: 2. People Watch

Thursday 7th March

CONTRIBUTOR: Jackie Kaines Lang

Jackie is a writer who loves hearing people's stories. She lives in England's northernmost town, Berwick-upon-Tweed, with her husband, one child who's yet to fly the nest, and a hen that sits on the nest but doesn't lay eggs. She is a community fundraiser for local charity Hospice

Care North Northumberland, which is a nurse-led provider of hospice-at-home services, drop-ins, bereavement counselling and patient, carer

and family support for those with life-limiting illnesses such as cancer, Parkinson's, MND and advanced dementia.

Ever feel like you've gone through the whole day and missed any chance to be generous? Often, we actually just miss that first step: noticing the people around us. So today, it's no phone out, no headphones in. Newspapers away. Eyes on the crowd. Notice the person struggling with a heavy bag you might not have seen, the person looking for a seat on the train that you'd miss otherwise.

Green: Watch for needs. Get rid of usual distractions – the paper, or your phone – for the length of your commute, or for a long stretch of time when you'll be around others.

Orange: At midday and 3pm (or two other times if these don't work), spend five minutes actively looking for an opportunity to be generous.

Red: Put your phone on airplane mode for 1–2 hours (or as long as is practical). When you go to reach for your phone, let that moment be a prompt to think up a generous act for someone.

**“Jesus said to him, ‘Receive your sight; your faith has healed you.’ Immediately he received his sight and followed Jesus, praising God. When all the people saw it, they also praised God.”
(Luke 18:42–43 NIV)**

The woman was flustered – blown in by the wind and a kind of wild energy. ‘Here – here,’ she said, ‘it’s, er, money.’ We had a brief exchange, the door closed behind her. It was almost as if she had never existed. Except the air rippled with her presence and I held the brown envelope she’d given me.

This happened many years ago in a church bookshop in London where I used to work. But it’s stuck with me. Before the woman went, leaving her envelope of four £20 notes with me, she said that she’d ‘come into some money’. She said that she’d once heard someone saying you should give away 10% of what you receive to a good cause. ‘I’m doing it now,’ she said, ‘before I...’ and then she was gone.

It struck me later that this woman had had an immediate urge to give, perhaps before she changed her mind or forgot. It made me wonder how many times I’d seen someone I could help or thought of something I could do or give, and then let the moment go.

Jesus had it in his power to make the lame walk and to restore the sight of the blind – and that’s just what he did, often in an immediate response to need. Miraculous giving with miraculous results. But, hey, that’s Jesus for you.

But, before you move on...

See that person wrestling the pushchair up the stairs? Ever been in the queue with someone who’s 50p short on their shopping bill? What about the person in the café who starts to chat with you and makes you feel a bit uncomfortable? Or the person you know whose life would be transformed by something they can’t afford – but you can.

Every day is full of potential mini miracles – and sometimes immediate action is the best way to find out what a mini miracle might turn into.

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Author Website: <http://jaxkaines.wordpress.com/>

<http://www.hospicecare-nn.org.uk/>

Author Twitter: @jaxkaines



ACT 3: Period Poverty

CONTRIBUTOR: Rachel Jobes

Author Twitter: @rachej

I'm a thirty-something Geordie, working for a management and leadership training organisation here in the North East and loving it. I'm really active in my local church and basically love 'the church' in general.

I'm passionate about many causes and charities and have had the privilege of visiting places like Tanzania and Mumbai, working for one of my favourite charities, volunteering at black tie events in The Savoy and working in two very different churches. Basically, I want to do what I can, where I can, and hopefully have fun doing it!

It's International Women's Day. Here in the UK, 137,000 girls regularly miss school because they can't afford sanitary products. When we think of poverty, we usually think food or shelter, but this just-as-devastating need goes almost totally unseen – and that only perpetuates the problem. So today, we're choosing to focus our generosity on period poverty.

Green: Spend some time looking into local groups that give free sanitary care to schools.

Orange: Go shopping. And drop off a package in a donation box in your local area.

Red: Do your bit to educate. Get the word out on social media – even though it's awkward.

"...A large crowd followed and pressed around him. And a woman was there who had been subject to bleeding for twelve years. She had suffered a great deal under the care of many doctors and had spent all she had, yet instead of getting better she grew worse. When she heard about Jesus, she came up behind him in the crowd and touched his cloak, because she thought, 'If I just touch his clothes, I will be healed.' Immediately her bleeding stopped and she felt in her body that she was freed from her suffering." (Mark 5:24–29 NIV)

There's a hidden, secret kind of poverty in the UK in 2019 which needs to be addressed, and today we're shining a light on it.

Many young girls are missing school on a regular basis because they're suffering from period poverty. On average, it costs £13 a month to buy sanitary products, and for some hard-pressed households, that's just too much. Food or heating has to come first. The stats are shocking. According to Plan International UK, 1 in 10 girls can't afford sanitary products and over 137,700 children have missed school because of period poverty; 40% have used toilet roll as a substitute.

Imagine the shame and stigma of living like this. As if hormones, spots, mood swings and dealing with changes in your body aren't enough, many girls are being robbed of their dignity because of this issue. Missing school for several days every month impacts on girls' educational achievements and sets up shame and low self-esteem at a time when they already have so much to deal with.

Jesus cared for the woman suffering from bleeding in the bible. He told her, 'Daughter, your faith has healed you. Go in peace and be freed from your suffering.' Issues which we might find shameful or embarrassing are not to him. He cares about us so much that he longs for this stigma to be brought to an end. How can you help today? Ask your local foodbank if they need sanitary products and add them to your monthly shopping list. You can click on the links below to find out what else you can do to help.

Things that seem small to us can be huge to others. Today, spending an extra £13 per month on your shopping bill (that's just over 43p a day) could be the difference between misery and shame, and dignity and self-care. If we all work together, by this time next year, period poverty in the UK could be consigned to the history books, where it belongs.

www.friendlydevelopment.co.uk

<https://www.freeperiods.org/mission/>

<http://redboxproject.org/about/>

<https://plan-uk.org/media-centre/plan-international-uks-research-on-period-poverty-and-stigma>



ACT 4: Cash Stash

CONTRIBUTOR: Chloe Lambert

I am Chloe! I play many different roles in my life but some of my favourites are wife,

teacher, auntie and sometimes baker. I love my family and friends, children, doughnuts, organisation and Jesus, so they take up most of my life and the rest is filled with food and sleep!

Generosity should cost us. Often our imaginations fail us when it comes to finding ways to be generous at a cost to ourselves. So today, we're getting our resources ready to move into truly sacrificial generosity – that generosity that's terrifying, wildly fun, and, if we're ready to let it be, transformative.

Green: Make a pot of money – a Giving Account, or a literal pot of cash – for you to use only on generosity.

Orange: Decide to give a weekly chunk of cash into that pot. Even if it's only a couple of pennies.

Red: Decide to give an amount of money, into that pot. Get specific: redirect money you would spend on every Tuesday's coffee, for example

"One person gives freely, yet gains even more; another withholds unduly, but comes to poverty." (Proverbs 11:24 NIV)

At 18 years old I turned to my boyfriend and said, 'If we want to get married one day, we should probably start saving now.' I'm not sure what is more shocking, the fact that I was thinking about marriage at 18 or that he agreed.

I love meeting up with my friends for food or coffee, but in that season I had to say no to some invites or suggest more affordable plans. Once we were sure that getting married was what we wanted to do we made it a number one priority, which called for a major shift in our attitude towards our money.

Cinema trips turned into movie nights at home and dinners out turned into dinners in. As much as I didn't always like it in the moment, I knew that's what I had to do.

When farmers plant a crop they don't just throw seed and hope for the best. They know how much they will sow and when they will sow it. Whether it's a wedding, a car, a house or a holiday that we want, the truth is if we sow into our savings we'll reap the harvest of being able to pay for the things we desire.

What if we saw generosity the same way? What if being generous was a venture to save for?

Let's be intentional about generosity. Why not set aside that extra bit of time and money each month to not just sow into our own futures but to sow into someone else's?

I used to fear generosity because I thought it always had to be a spontaneous sacrifice that threw off my budget or plans. Yes, being generous is often a sacrifice, but it's something we can and should plan for.



ACT 5: Bless the Boss

CONTRIBUTOR: Jeremy Marshall

Jeremy Marshall was CEO of the UK's oldest private bank, C Hoare & Co, until he was forced to retire in 2016 due to incurable cancer. Since then he has been in treatment, mainly chemotherapy. He is chair or trustee of various Christian charities and speaks and writes evangelistically.

Today, we're turning our generosity loose on bosses, managers, pastors and head teachers. Our culture doesn't always bless upwards. But generosity goes all ways. We often only think to focus our generosity on those in dire straits, but when we bless upwards, we discover something that changes us, too.

Green: Thank the boss. Take a moment to start the work day letting them know they're appreciated by those around them (specifically you).

Orange: Leave them a nice note – and talk to one of their friends and see what kind of gift card you could slip in there too.

Red: Take them out for a meal, bake them a cake, or give them a voucher for a meal.

“So Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up...” (Ephesians 4:11–12 NIV)

When I was a boy, my father was pastor of a small, poor and obscure independent church. We all lived in the manse, a rambling Dickensian wreck and a complete firetrap.

The congregation loved my father. They had such affection for him that they decided to give freely and enthusiastically from their limited resources to build a brand-new four-bedroomed house on spare land next to the church. In doing this, they were demonstrating real love for their pastor and honouring God at the same time. Our neighbours were intrigued. ‘How can such a tiny church afford to build such a nice house?’ they enquired. But build it these lovely people did and it’s still serving God’s work today.

My father had no money. When I started work, I was on the princely sum of £7,000 per year. At 22 I was making more than he did aged 53. Like his congregation, I had huge respect and love for my father. Some years later, when I was established in a very successful career, I asked him if he’d like some money. ‘I’ve got everything I need,’ he told me, although he didn’t own a house and drove an old rust bucket of a car.

He instructed me to give the money to mutual friends of ours to whom we used to smuggle Bibles behind the Iron Curtain. These people were persecuted for their faith and often in jail. I did exactly what he told me.

Generosity is about much more than money. It’s about what the Bible calls our heart: our attitudes, desires, and behaviours. We may think of being generous to those who we view as ‘below’ us, such as the poor, but what about those who are placed ‘above’ us, such as our parents, pastors or bosses?

Today, let’s be generous with our time, talents and thoughts to all those who are placed ‘above’ us, whoever they may be.



#chocolatetuesday

40act: 6: Chocolate Tuesday
CONTRIBUTOR: Andre Spence
Andspence.com
Author Twitter: Instagram @AndreSpence

Most (87%) Millennials want to find a life full of meaning. That was exactly Andre Spence's case after spending 10 years within the entertainment industry finding youth fame on a reality show on MTV, presenting and blogging for MOBO, and

organising events which brought together global brands and world class talent in support of charity. He pursued validation through possessions, positions and power.

Now Andre Spence 'The Purpose Coach' is an advocate for seeing young people discover their purpose and win in life, through coaching, speaking and founding Purpose Leaders and The purpose experience.

We see it every year. Giving out free chocolate is an uncannily sure-fire way to inspire even more generosity and gratitude. So, hit the commuters in line at the station, the postman you only ever get thirty-second chats with, the students running between classes – free chocolate, everyone, everywhere.

One option today: buy a bag of chocolate bars, and joyfully distribute them everywhere you go!

"...Love your neighbour as yourself..." (Mark 12:31 NIV)

God ultimately wants us to be his hands and feet on this Earth in order for us to reveal his good news to hurting people. Sometimes that is easier said than done. As a purpose coach I've counselled and consulted many people. Although people often appear to have it all together, we live in a world that is riddled with people who feel anxious, tired and unhappy.

One evening I was speaking at an event when I spotted someone I knew and decided to catch up with her after. We did the classic 'Hey how are you?' thing but when I looked into her eyes I could see something wasn't right.

I could have pretended I didn't notice, but instead I said, 'To be honest it doesn't look like you are alright. You look a little sad.' Bold perhaps, but she then revealed that she had just broken

up with her boyfriend. I could clearly see it had knocked her and I said that it would be great to meet up.

We met a few days later and she opened up some more. I got to tell her about how amazing Jesus is and even got to pray with her! She was so delighted she said, 'I think I need to try this Jesus thing a bit more!'

You may not be as bold as I was in that moment, or maybe you feel that you don't have the time. Solution? A chocolate bar!

Next time you spot a person that looks that tad a bit down, seize your opportunity to break down the facade. You could say, 'I just wanted to give you a chocolate – you look like you deserve it.' That moment could open the door to sharing God's love with someone else.

You know your world, the people around you and the areas you go in. Ask God to give you the opportunities to give, to share your life and to love your neighbour. Who knows what conversations could open up?



ACT 7: Joyful Joyful

CONTRIBUTOR: Christina Johnston

Christina Johnston is an internationally renowned coloratura soprano. She won a scholarship at 18 to the Guildhall School of Music and Drama and made her operatic

debut in 2012. Christina regularly sings with various conductors and orchestras all over Europe and has sung on numerous solo tours with orchestras around Czech Republic, Slovakia, China and South America. Last year she was nominated for a Classic BRIT Award for the Sound of Classical Poll.

Joy is the gigantic secret of the generous. But it's hidden in plain sight, and easy to reach. How? Simply, find those generous acts that you know bring you and other people joy, and then do them more. Is it cooking meals for friends? Is it picking out the perfect gift for an acquaintance who'd never see it coming? Find the joy that sustains your sacrificial kindness.

Green: Do something that costs you nothing but brings someone else joy: a walk, a view, a book.

Orange: Think of a fun evening plan that will bring someone else joy as well as you. Plan it, and get inviting.

Red: Give something that costs you, and isn't particularly joyful, but brings joy to someone else.

"Each of you should give what you have decided in your heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver." (2 Corinthians 9:7 NIV)

As a professional opera singer, I'm blessed to be able to see the effect the music I perform has on my audience. People are often touched, tearful, rapt, their spirits lifted. I watch their faces as I sing and it gives me a warm feeling.

The Lord delights in giving to his people and, in turn, I find joy when I give. I believe that generous and cheerful giving changes our mindset. The more you do it, the happier and more joyful you become.

In my career and my Christian life, I've found that the key to living generously and joyously is in having a heart that delights in the Lord. When we find our purpose and joy in Christ, we begin to open our eyes to what real joy is, what the Lord wants from us and how he delights in seeing us joyful and helping others.

God richly provides everything for our enjoyment. It isn't his desire to withhold or diminish our pleasure. In fact, he wants us to experience true pleasure. He wants us to experience the joy of being rich in goodness and generosity. In this Bible verse, Paul echoes the sentiment so prevalent throughout the scriptures: giving joyfully of ourselves now is an investment in eternity.

My challenge to you today is to go out and immerse yourself in the joyfulness of giving. Give your time to a friend who hasn't seen you in a while, surprise a loved one with a spontaneous gift or try volunteering.

See how joyful you feel afterwards and make it a habit – cheerfully and joyously.



ACT 8: Bring Life

CONTRIBUTOR: Linda Hodges

Linda is part of our team here at Stewardship - for the last 12 years leading

on Human Resources and keeping our office running smoothly. She worships at St Peter's, Aldborough Hatch and spends her spare time travelling up and down the UK supporting her basketball team!

Today is a chance to, quite literally, bring life to someone. Giving blood is such a potent image of generosity, because it's giving away something so critical to ourselves – our actual lifeblood! And that can train us into sacrificial generosity in other ways, too.

Green: Find out about giving blood at www.blood.co.uk and make a one-off trip.

Amber: Start giving blood regularly.

Red: Give blood as often as you can.

**"Give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be poured into your lap. For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.
(Luke 6:38 NIV)**

Twice a year for 35 years, I sat down in a chair, extended my arm and invited a complete stranger to stick a needle into it and take some of my blood. 'Why would you do that, Linda?' I hear you ask. Let me take you back to when I was in my mid-teens and I heard God prompting me to give something I had in abundance to those who needed it.

I started giving blood at the age of 18 when I went to university in Southampton and I've never looked back. Five years ago, I got my Gold Award. I gave blood continuously for 35 years, only taking breaks when I was having my children.

To me, giving blood is a wonderful way to show generosity. It's only an hour of your time and it can be the difference between life and death for someone you'll never meet. It wasn't all plain sailing, though. The first few times I gave blood, I felt quite ill afterwards, but I persevered and it got better. I had to have a break when my iron was too low, but I always started again when given the all-clear. My husband is terrified of needles, but I encouraged him to join me and he did it for many years, until a health condition forced him to stop, and my youngest child has followed in my footsteps. I'm quite evangelical about blood donation!

I could have stopped at any time, especially when I wasn't feeling great. I never did, though, because I felt it was so important. I wanted to give as much as I could, a full measure if you like. I'd encourage everyone to look into giving blood. I appreciate that it's not possible for everyone, but you can be sure you're making a huge difference to somebody else in need. I'm so glad I listened to God's prompting all those years ago.

To find out more about blood donation, visit www.blood.co.uk.



ACT 9: Be Present

CONTRIBUTOR: Catherine Durant

Catherine works in Content (which means mainly writing and editing) for Stewardship. She loves, art in all its forms and anything French, especially cheese.

'Being present for someone' might conjure up images of therapeutic chats and tissue boxes. But really, all it means is intentionally putting yourself in the presence of others, for their benefit. It's giving the best of your time and the best of your attention to make someone feel valued. Maybe today that's someone who you've overlooked, or who doesn't usually get invited out.

Green: Spend some quality time listening to a friend or family member. Why not have breakfast or lunch together today?

Amber: Strike up a conversation with a colleague or classmate who you haven't ever sought out friendship with. Make sure the first three questions are about them.

Red: Be present with quality listening. If someone has shared their worries with you recently, follow up with them and try not to jump in with advice before it's due. If you're up for it, take some courses (like this one) to help you get better at listening.

"Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ." (Galatians 6:2 NKJV)

If you're in need of comfort, there's nothing better than a deep and meaningful chat with a friend – old or new. Give me a safe space and someone I trust and I can monologue my life story for a good while, as I'm sure my friends would vouch...

It doesn't matter whether it's a cosy coffee shop, a soulless service station or an increasingly cold and condensation-filled car; sharing problems with someone who will listen without judgement and pray is something I value so much whenever I'm struggling.

Over the past few years, I've seen more and more advice that encourages cutting negativity out of your life, mostly directed towards getting rid of 'negative people' who 'bring you down'. Of course, that's healthy in cases where someone's hurting you, constantly gossiping or putting you in danger. But this culture of dropping people who drain you goes completely against the Bible's teaching about how we look after each other.

'Bear[ing] one another's burdens' totally flips this idea of self-preservation. It involves a cost.

People who are hurting aren't always capable of giving us their best. I'm so glad that I've had friends who've stuck around at times when I haven't been laughing and smiling, though that isn't always the case. We're all capable of letting each other down, but as a body of believers we know that if one part suffers, we all suffer (1 Corinthians 12:26). Helping others through suffering involves understanding where they are and walking with them to carry the weight of it.

It might feel daunting, but we can bring those burdens with our friends to Jesus, who understands everything we go through and carries all our sorrows. We can entrust them to him, knowing that he loves and takes care of our friends far more than we ever could.



ACT 10: Drop Everything

CONTRIBUTOR: Kezia Owusu-Yianoma

I'm Kezia. I like laughing, talking, dancing, adventuring, day-dreaming and night-dreaming (a.k.a. sleep – I like to sleep). I'm also the campaign's manager person here at Stewardship.

How do you view the resources you have at your disposal? Are they there for your benefit only or the benefit of those around you? Today we're dropping our personal intentions for things we own and using those very things as generous gifts for someone else.

Green: Think of an everyday item that's in good condition. Find a recipient and give it away. Umbrellas, handcream, etc.

Amber: How do you get around? Can you give a friend a lift too?

Red: Just like Mary with her alabaster jar, what can you give away that you can't undo? Maybe it's a bottle of perfume, or a favourite jumper. Bless someone else with something that means something to you.

"While he was in Bethany, reclining at the table in the home of Simon the Leper, a woman came with an alabaster jar of very expensive perfume, made of pure nard. She broke the jar and poured the perfume on his head. Some of those present were saying indignantly to one another, 'Why this waste of perfume? It could have been sold for more than a year's wages and the money given to the poor.' And they rebuked her harshly. 'Leave her alone,' said Jesus. 'Why are you bothering her? She has done a beautiful thing to me.'" (Mark 14:3–6 NIV)

Not long after I passed my driving test, I got Lisa: an 11-year-old Nissan Micra. Like most 18-year-olds, I had been dreaming of this day since I first laid eyes on my provisional licence.

Most people wouldn't ask for a car like Lisa. (I didn't; I wanted a Fiat 500 to drive around and look cute in.) But, when it was time to say goodbye, I was shocked at the number of people who were sad to see her go!

As it turned out, I didn't end up spending that much time driving around in my car, doing whatever I wanted. Instead, every Friday Lisa and I would drive young people home from whatever food spot we had ended up in after youth. Every winter, Lisa would carry a group of us to a youth leader's weekend away somewhere. And more often than not, Lisa would be there to transport my mentees and me to a coffee shop somewhere so that I could talk, pray with or encourage someone through a difficult season.

Lisa ended up serving a way bigger purpose than just my convenience (and vanity); she was a real blessing to the people around me.

Did Mary have to break the jar to pour such an expensive perfume out? Surely she could have just opened it and poured out a little bit.

Mary could have kept some perfume for her herself, but instead she used it all as a generous gift for Jesus. She had no idea that this simple change in perspective was going to be remembered 'wherever the gospel is preached' (Mark 14:9).

How often do we see what's precious to us as a generous gift to someone else? I had no idea my little Nissan would be cherished by so many. I'm sure you have an incredibly generous gift sitting right under your nose. Maybe you haven't seen it that way because it serves you so well. Who knows how many people you could bless by choosing to share that very thing?



ACT 11: Hidden Heroes

CONTRIBUTOR: Wendy H. Jones

Wendy H. Jones is an award-winning author of Scottish crime fiction, young adult

mysteries and the Bertie the Buffalo children's picture book. She is also the president of the Scottish Association of Writers, the webmaster for the Association of Christian Writers and the secretary of the Society of Authors in Scotland.

Think of the sorts of people we only notice when things go wrong: the waste collectors after two weeks of rubbish piling up, the sound team when a church service goes wrong, the handyman uncle when a car disaster hits. Do we notice them at any other time? It might just take a thank you, or a gift card. This is an easy and really noticeable way to make a difference to someone.

Green: Drop a small card to a hidden hero, just to let them know they're noticed.

Orange: Show up with a cup of coffee or a fizzy drink as they work.

Red: Figure out a creative fix that would make their job easier. What small solution would help them out?

"We who are strong ought to bear with the failings of the weak and not to please ourselves. Each of us should please our neighbours for their good, to build them up." (Romans 15:1–2 NIV)

What's the worst thing that could happen to the person who delivers your post? Trapping their fingers in your letterbox? Having their ankles nipped by a dog? Did you know that five British Postal Workers died whilst running the Post Office on the Titanic?

In all weathers, our posties continue to deliver our mail without complaint and often when advised not to go out due to risk of life. They walk, drive or cycle their allotted route to ensure that letters and parcels get delivered. It's not until the mail stops coming that we notice postmen and women at all. In 1971 a general postal strike lasting two months brought the country to its knees. A few years ago, here in Scotland, there was a postal strike just before Christmas. This was when the country sat up and took notice – what would happen on Christmas morning when the kids didn't have their presents? However, the next part of this story is why I think those who deliver our mail are hidden heroes. When the strike was over the

postmen and women delivered the backlog of parcels, mainly in their own time. They wanted to make sure no child would be disappointed at Christmas.

As we go through Lent, spare a thought for those who are out, day after day, ensuring that letters and parcels from loved ones arrive safely. Instead of complaining that mail is late and berating those who deliver it, build them up by praying for them. Spare a thought for them when they deliver in the direst of weather whilst we who wait are tucked up warmly inside. They truly are hidden heroes.

Wendy H. Jones is an award-winning author of Scottish crime fiction, young adult mysteries and the Bertie the Buffalo children's picture book. She is also the president of the Scottish Association of Writers, the webmaster for the Association of Christian Writers and the secretary of the Society of Authors in Scotland.



ACT 12: Prayer Circle

CONTRIBUTOR: Shira Gamey

Shira Gamey currently works for GOHOP (Greater Ontario House of Prayer) as the

Prayer Room manager. She finds great delight in following life's mini adventures and loves when those adventures take her outside.

An invite to be generous hides behind every door in your neighbourhood. The first step is to go and find it. Today, we're prayer walking around our community, choosing to focus on those nearest us. Walk, think about who's behind each door, and pray. Lay some groundwork for extraordinary moments of kindness.

Green: Prayer walk. If you've not done this before, it's as simple as just walking, slowly, around your neighbourhood, noticing what's around you, and praying: for peace, for problems in the community, for community relationships. If you're feeling bold, pop a card through a neighbour's door to let them know you're praying for them.

Amber: Print out one of our lamppost signs, asking what people in your neighbourhood need prayer for, and stick it up locally. Check back to see what people have taken and use it to guide your prayers over the next few weeks.

Red: After your prayer walk, draw up a 'generosity map' of ideas: a map of your neighbourhood, with notes pinned on specifying where and how you can be generous.

"The word became flesh and blood, and moved into the neighbourhood. We saw the glory with our eyes..." (John 1:14 MSG)

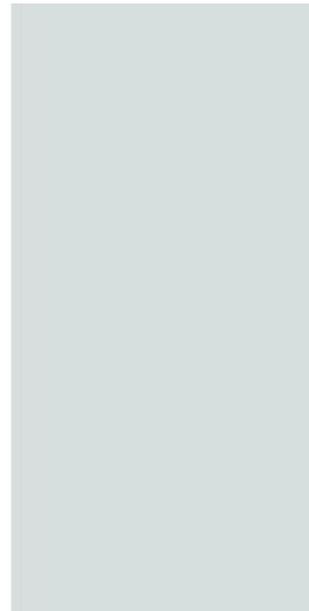
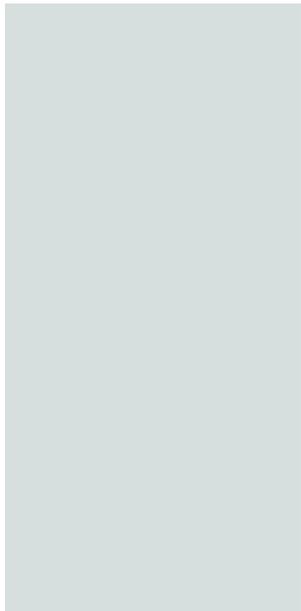
Last year all of us at the Greater Ontario House of Prayer (GOHOP) in Canada found ourselves having to vacate our usual basement prayer room – part of a busy community hub at 541 Eatery and Exchange. Some urgent repair issues came to light and we were told it was going to be messy.

So we packed up our stuff and asked God what he was doing. And God was quick to answer – and reveal he had a plan. The picture we got was of a dandelion gone to seed, and the breath of God blowing the seeds of prayer to new places in our neighbourhood. So we took this as an invitation to bring prayer in a focused way beyond the walls of our regular prayer room. The new question became 'Where would you like us to plant our seeds of prayer?'

We began going for prayer walks, and praying in neighbourhood parks. One staff member booked a study room at the local library and incarnated God's prayers there. Others prayed in church sanctuaries, people's living rooms, and the upstairs of our basement prayer room – a café full of people drinking coffee, grabbing some breakfast or on their lunch break. The sense of God's presence in each of our prayer meetings – whether on our own walking through the neighbourhood, or in a living room or church – was profound.

The repairs to the prayer room were completed and once again we can welcome people into our space. However, from our time outside of our usual basement, we've learnt that as Christ's ambassadors, God invites us to incarnate his presence and our prayers everywhere we go.

No matter how small we feel, our prayers bring light and life into every community we find ourselves in. So today, pray wherever you are: it makes a beautiful difference.



ACT 13: Needs Must

CONTRIBUTOR: Chine McDonald

Chine heads up the media team at Christian Aid. Prior to that, she was at World Vision and director of communications at the Evangelical Alliance. She read theology at Cambridge

University before training as a newspaper journalist. Chine is a regular speaker and writer on race, faith and gender and a regular broadcaster for BBC Religion & Ethics programmes such as Thought for the Day, the Daily Service, Pause for Thought and Prayer for the Day. Chine lives in London with her husband, Mark, and their young son.

Crumbs on the counter. Grime in the mugs. Someone else's dishes in the office sink for days. What an opportunity for day-to-day, ongoing generosity – dull, grey acts of kindness that don't get you any 'points'. Make no mistake, taking responsibility for someone else's mundane problems is generosity that makes a difference.

Green: Clean the office sink (or staffroom sink, or church sink).

Orange: Take responsibility for an undone chore where you live, at church, or at the workplace.

Red: Take responsibility for an undone chore for the entire month.

"...[W]hoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many." (Mark 10:43–45 NIV)

There is a cheeky sign above one of the kitchen sinks in my office which always makes me laugh: 'The maid is off today. So please do your own washing up.' I agree that it's infuriating to see dirty crockery and cutlery in the sink at work. I can't believe that anyone would think such behaviour was acceptable – to leave items in the hopes that someone else can do your dirty work. On the days when I arrive at work already shattered from having successfully got a toddler dressed, fed and off to the childminder before commuting in, the sight of these abandoned plates and mugs makes me despair. But on my most generous days – when life feels a little less

hectic – I might take the time to quietly wash these dishes rather than huff and puff and think bad thoughts about my colleagues.

Doing small, good deeds like this without ceremony and without thanks is not only the kind thing to do, but it feels good too. But this is not about being ‘holier than thou’ – a saintly washer-upper. Instead, I would like to think that someone would do this for me. It reminds me that I too – literally – mess up sometimes. For all have sinned and left their washing up in the sink. I am no better than anyone else. Christ’s suggestion that we should be servant-hearted in this way is what makes the Christian faith so radical. What a wonderful thing it is to think about others more than you think about yourself, and to reflect the radical generosity of our Creator God.



ACT 14: The Green One

CONTRIBUTOR: Chris Gaisie

Chris was born and raised in London where he now works for Tearfund as the digital content editor for the youth and emerging

generation team. He spends much of his time creating content for the We Are Tearfund online magazine and producing a monthly podcast. Outside of work, Chris is a rapper and spoken word artist, and often performs around London.

It’s far from the token green day. As we act to protect our environment, we’re acting generously for those not even born yet, helping to create a world that can keep on giving and sustaining people, beyond the limit of our own lifetimes.

Green: Ever had an environmental charity stop you in the streets, only for you to breeze right past them? Look up their website. See what they actually do.

Amber: See how many times you can use one plastic bag this week. Once you’re done, pass it on to someone and ask if they want to continue the challenge!

Red: Go meat-free at least one day a week. Skipping meat and dairy is the single biggest way you can personally cut your environmental impact. (Vegans and vegetarians get an amber day!)

**“Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others.”
(Philippians 2:4 NKJV)**

I never thought one of my favourite dining experiences would be eating a vegan burger at a cold, street food site in Budapest.

While on holiday with some friends and checking out some local music, a couple of them disappeared in search of food. One returned with grand tales of the best burger he'd ever tasted, while the other insisted it was a waste of time. It felt like a present-day retelling of the Israelite spies scoping out Canaan. Intrigue eventually won out and we all left in search of this legendary burger.

If you're anything like me, the idea of a vegan burger might sound crazy. But I assure you it was delicious! We all stood in wonder of the rich flavours and textures, and just the surprise that vegan burgers could be so good! Who knew that being environmentally friendly could taste so rewarding?

When it comes to making greener lifestyle changes, many of us simply don't imagine we can. We envisage that using a KeepCup in a coffee shop is awkward, that getting around without a car is too hard, or that vegan food is boring. But the benefits to the planet and to our own lives are great, if not crucial.

According to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), we have 12 years left to stop climate change destroying the planet. Our lack of care for the environment is leading to an increase in extreme weather, which in turn pushes more people into poverty. As believers we are called to 'look out not only for [our] own interests, but also for the interests of others' (Philippians 2:4). So, let's all try something different and live more sustainably. The result could last longer than you think.



ACT 15: Leg Up

CONTRIBUTOR: James Doc

James works for The Globe Church as their Digital Ministry Developer and co-leads Kingdom Code, a group seeking to equip technologists to change the world for Christ.

Real generosity leaps into action to bless others, even when it comes at a cost to us. Give away something that you could charge real money for. You may not think you're particularly great with technology, but if your granny really needs to know how to use a computer, then you can do as good a job as any at showing her. Teach a beginner some guitar chords. Do bike maintenance for kids on your street. Share your skills, at a cost to yourself.

Green: Look over your teachable skills. If you can, schedule a lesson with a newbie today.

Amber: If you usually charge for teaching a skill, today do it for free.

Red: Take on a new client or student, long-term, for free.

"Wealth and honour come from you... In your hands are strength and power to exalt and give strength to all... [W]ho am I, and who are my people, that we should be able to give as generously as this? Everything comes from you, and we have given only what comes from your hand." (1 Chronicles 29:12-14)

When I became known as the kid that was good with computers, it took about five minutes for the news to spread. As a teenager, my parents' friends and our neighbours would always be in touch – 'James, I've got this problem with my email...' Fifteen years on, I'm still being that person.

I know that my skillset comes from God. In the same way, David learnt from a young age that all his gifts came from the Lord. So when the time came to build the temple, he gave abundantly. In 1 Chronicles 29:12-14 he prays: 'Wealth and honour come from you... [W]ho am I, and who are my people, that we should be able to give as generously as this?'

David is clear in his mind – everything that he has comes from God. It's not limited to money. Read it again: wealth and honour, status and strength come from God – that's what David prays.

The stuff that you're good at has been given to you from God. It's his gift to you.

I co-lead Kingdom Code, a group of technologists exploring the intersection of Christianity and tech. This is one of the challenges we consider: how can we take this God-given skillset of coding and design and use it to serve our churches and local communities? A group who have taken this on board give up a couple of evenings each month, working to build a mobile app which helps their church to know the local community better.

This isn't something only for the tech world. At my church, there is someone who shares his love of vinyl at a local meetup for people in his neighbourhood. There are people who cook a meal and meet with men in a local homeless shelter. With both, they are starting to build relationships. What could it be for you?



ACT 16: Dirty Hands

CONTRIBUTOR: Graham Miller

Graham Miller is Chief Servant at London City Mission. He lives in Wandsworth with his wife and two children, whom he tries to persuade to follow Liverpool Football Club.

Here it comes. The one we all dread – but also, the one with some real reward. Find a grotty toilet, take a bag of cleaning equipment, and make that thing shine. Walk straight into the inconvenient, the uncomfortable, and the grimy. Serve low today.

Green: Don't avoid the blocked up public toilet; give it a flush and a brush!

Amber: Get in touch with a friend you know has a busy schedule. Offer to go over and do their washing up.

Red: If there's a student village or area near you, find a street and go door-to-door offering to clean kitchens. If not, ask a local family.

"Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." (Matthew 5:3 NIV)

Here I am, knocking on doors on a wet Saturday in South London...

Surely there must be some more strategic way to serve the Lord, some better use of my talents?

I hope that this next place doesn't have a dog. I hope they don't start swearing at me again. I could really use a cup of tea.

Maybe Olga at number 43 will be in. She always offers me a cup of tea, with lipstick marks on the brim. Then there are the dog hairs all over her old sofa; I hate dogs. I'll keep knocking.

Oh good, Stefano is in. I did some shopping for him last week because he can't get out anymore. Great, he's inviting me in out of the rain, and he's made me a cup of tea.

He asks me to help unblock his sink and whilst I set about unblocking we get to talking about the faith he left behind as a kid, and why I still believe in Jesus.

We open up the Bible and I show him how it is reliable, how lots of the prophecies about Jesus really came true. I talk about God's personal love and suddenly he is crying and asking me to pray for him.

Before he died Stefano invited all of his friends from the estate to our local church and he told them his testimony. At his funeral there were enormous numbers of well-wishers who were deeply impacted by the faith Stefano had found in the months before his death.

My idea of what is strategic and what isn't strategic is different to God's. We trust in a saviour who left heaven to be a carpenter in Nazareth to save us.

Sometimes, knocking on an elderly neighbour's door in the pouring rain is the most significant action we will take this year.



ACT 17: Mission Accomplished

CONTRIBUTOR: Joel Leakey

Over the last two years, Joel was a missionary in southern California with @commonwealth_sd, learning what it looked like to take the gospel to a fast-moving and 97% unchurched city.

Do you know a Christian on mission? Maybe they're in a far-flung country, or they're close to home (and worked to the bone). Often, Christians who choose to live on mission take a real hit on their own personal comforts. Think of one you know, and give them the gift of your time, your skills, or your money.

Green: Video-call a missionary, or text your youth worker, with no motive beyond encouraging and cheering them on.

Amber: Give a one-off or monthly gift to a missionary, youth worker, or church intern.

Red: Give your services to a missionary. For example, can you help them build a website?

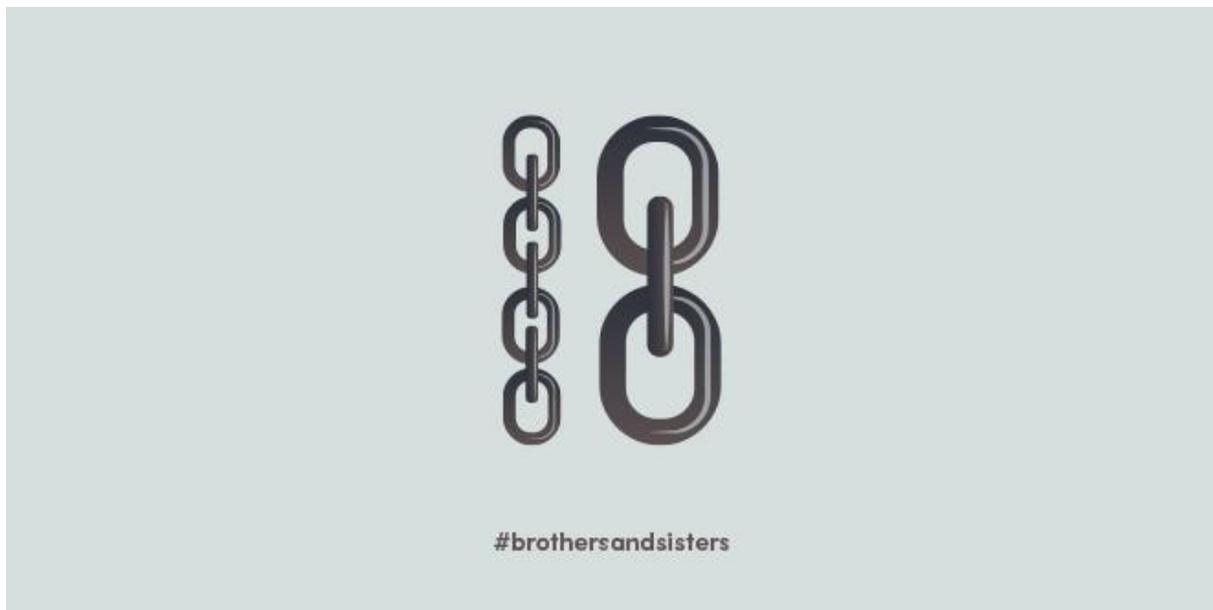
“All the believers were together and had everything in common. They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need.” (Acts 2:44–45 NIV)

Every believer has the incredible privilege of doing the works of God wherever we go, getting the gospel and the full life of Jesus beyond the walls of the church and into our cities and towns. But today’s act talks about one particular group – those that do this in a way that means letting go of regular, steady finances and resources. That includes Christians on mission, but also church staff who’ve felt the call to give up a regular salary to work within the local church, or young interns who’ve been homed with a church family.

I know a few people who lived like this for a while, laying down comforts and rights, laying down expectations of a regular career path and often a pension, for the sake of building the local church. And yet God was able to meet their needs using radical, everyday generosity.

A friend of mine felt called to live on mission for a few years. With no income, she said ‘yes’ to her first trip overseas. That week, an anonymous bank deposit brought her balance up to the exact figure of her plane ticket cost. As she paid it off in gratitude, she realised she had no money left for food. At the end of that week, her mission leader came to her and told her that another anonymous giver had paid her ticket. All the money she’d paid, she could have back for food!

Acts 2:44 says the believers had ‘everything in common’. They shared their money and skills and time with each other. We can be that envelope-of-cash-in-the-post story for someone who really needs it, or maybe you can send someone an encouraging letter to help them persevere when the going without gets tough. In whatever way you can, find a way to encourage and support those doing good.



ACT 18: Brothers and Sister

CONTRIBUTOR: His Eminence Archbishop Angaelos

His Eminence Archbishop Angaelos was enthroned as the first Coptic Orthodox Archbishop of London on 18th November 2017, having served as General Bishop of the Coptic Orthodox Church in the UK since

1999. He is recognised for his extensive advocacy work, and was conferred the honour of OBE for services to international religious freedom. He was conferred the Lambeth Cross for Ecumenism by the

Archbishop of Canterbury and the Coventry Cross of Nails for Reconciliation. Archbishop Angaelos also specialises in national and international youth ministry.

If the church is a family, we have a lot of brothers and sisters living in desperate need of our help. Persecution is real, and the stories are alarming. It can feel like there's no way to help, or that these are people beyond hope. But with a God who is powerful, we have access to the most effective, destiny-making help we could bring: contending in prayer.

Green: Read some stories from the persecuted church. Look up Open Doors or Release International – their websites are full of stories that will motivate you to pray.

Orange: Come up with a plan for how you'll pray for the persecuted, daily, for the next few months.

Red: Look into taking a mission trip with a persecuted church charity.

"We are hard-pressed on every side, yet not crushed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed – always carrying about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body." (2 Corinthians 4:8–10 NKJV)

As Christians, we sometimes struggle to grasp and feel the joy that we intellectually know we are promised by our Lord Jesus Christ in John 16:22: 'your joy no one will take from you'. This is especially the case for many of us when we focus our attention on the struggles of our brothers and sisters in the Middle East and beyond, who often pay the ultimate price for their faith in the same Lord who promises us unchallenged joy. Suffering, however, is certainly not the end of the story, and the joy promised by our God is not mutually exclusive with the reality of struggle.

In looking at the birth, life, death and resurrection of our Lord, we see that challenges and struggles were ever-present throughout, and yet formed only part of the journey. The pain of the cross was ultimately a vehicle to the joy of the glorious resurrection, and a promise to us all of life after death. We also hear Saint Paul resolutely convicted of the glory of the cross, in Galatians 6:14: "But God forbid that I should boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ". Coptic Orthodox Christians in Egypt will often proclaim their faith in a similarly bold and courageous way, viewing martyrdom as something that is of course painful and yet, in the end, something to be immensely proud of, through which they come to a greater comprehension and appreciation of the strength of their faith and witness.

So, what can we do in witnessing the persecution and suffering of others? Firstly, we do all we can to alleviate their immediate suffering and need, and become their advocates. We then pray for God's will, and his hand to be upon all suffering tribulation, victims of persecution, and even perpetrators, so that their hearts and minds are changed. Lastly, we learn from that faithful witness that, even if we undergo trial and tribulation, we are by no means defeated by it, for the promise of resurrection is real to all who believe it.

The number '19' is rendered in a bold, yellow, metallic font with a 3D effect. Each digit has several small, dark screws or bolts attached to it, giving it an industrial or mechanical appearance. The background is a solid, dark green color.

#nextdoor

ACT 19: Next Door

CONTRIBUTOR: Gordon Watson

Gordon Watson is planting Hope Church Sittingbourne with his wife Natalie, three children (and dog!) and a growing number

of local friends. Gordon longs to see the church awakened and mobilised in its everyday mission to the world, living life in the power of the Holy Spirit and believing God's Word to be right and true in our generation.

Green: How often do you say hi to your neighbours? Take that moment where you meet and spend time getting to know them a little more.

Amber: Invite a neighbour you don't know over for coffee or dinner.

Red: Tell them, 'I'm taking part in this daily generosity challenge called 40acts; is there anything I could help you with this week?'

"...Love your neighbour as yourself." (Matthew 22:39 NIV)

At the end of our garden stands a huge green wall masquerading as a hedge.

We'd recently moved our family home to pioneer a new church plant and after a few months in our new home we realised this huge green monster at the end of the garden needed cutting back. Our next-door neighbour had kindly offered to lend us his electric hedge trimmer, so I gratefully accepted. And one hot summer's day I started the mammoth task of trimming back this imposing wall of branches, twigs and leaves. Things escalated – I ventured in and out of our neighbour's garden to trim his side of the hedge, I borrowed his ladder, we passed things back and forth over the fence and we laughed together, joking about the size of the job.

I then visited our other next-door neighbour. She is well into her 90s and lives alone. I offered to trim her side of the hedge too. So now I was roaming across two gardens and borrowing several neighbours' garden waste bins to dispose of the cuttings.

Just as I was near finishing the job, disaster struck and the hedge trimmer gave up. Clearly overwhelmed by the enormous task, it just sort of died! What would I tell my neighbour?

There was only one thing I could do. I went online and found a replacement electric hedge trimmer. I decided it would be nice to upgrade it to a more powerful one. This decision certainly wasn't convenient, nor cheap, but as I completed the purchase I felt a genuine joy within at being able to give my neighbour a brand new trimmer to replace the one he'd entrusted to me.

It was painful to tell him that his hedge trimmer had died so I was relieved to hand him the upgraded replacement the next day. He was genuinely overwhelmed and decided that this new model would be ours to share.

It started with an overgrown hedge and now we have a communal neighbourhood hedge trimmer and a shared story of struggle, teamwork and generosity.



ACT 20: Close to Home

CONTRIBUTOR: Hannah Whitehead

Hannah works at St James Church Muswell Hill as Head of Community Ministries where

she runs the winter night shelter and a community café, coordinates the soup kitchen and seniors' group, and assists people with learning disabilities and mental health.

Today we're championing local causes. And if we don't do it, who will? The only people who'll raise a banner for local causes are locals, so let's be the ones who'll rise to that challenge. Imagine if people talked up your neighbourhood as a place where people are kind.

Green: Start chatting to people in your area, whether that is an isolated elderly person, your next-door neighbour or a homeless person.

Amber: Take part in a volunteer day. You can look up local causes, care homes or schools.

Red: See if you can volunteer frequently for a local cause you love.

“Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbour as yourself.’” (Matthew 22:37–39 NIV)

Muswell Hill’s a bit posh. You can get a bit caught up with the beautiful double-fronted Edwardian houses, green spaces and artisan shops, but take a closer look, and you’ll see it’s not all paninis and Pilates.

One day I came out of Sainsbury’s and started chatting to a homeless lady outside. I’ll never forget what she said to me: ‘I want to go to the soup kitchen to eat, but I don’t know where it is.’ Later that same week, I was chatting to an elderly lady who told me that when her seniors’ group didn’t meet in the holidays, she only saw her daily carer, and had no one else to speak to, leaving her feeling lonely and isolated.

I realised that I could help both these ladies and connect them to our community. I now have a weekly chat on the phone with my elderly friend and I researched the soup kitchen and passed on the information to my homeless friend.

My work at St James Church Muswell Hill has shown me just how much there is on offer in our neighbourhood. Now I know about the food bank, soup kitchen, winter night shelter, community café and seniors’ group, there’s no stopping me.

Today, try making some connections close to home. Check out the needs in your community and try matching them up to help and support on offer. A big homeless community? Have a chat about the soup kitchen, night shelter and charities like Home Into Action. Lots of lone parents? Signpost the toddler group, Make Lunch and similar groups. You might make some new friends and you’ll definitely transform your community.



#fromyourseat

ACT 21: From your seat

CONTRIBUTOR: Alison Wale

Alison has lived in a small village in central France since 2005. An independent English teacher, she is also a Licenced Lay Minister,

worshipping with the Episcopal Church in Clermont Ferrand. She has followed 40acts for four years and tries to follow the idea that '40acts is not just for Lent'. Married, with four cats, she enjoys reading, zentangling and blogging.

Sometimes life throws up obstacles that come between our generous intentions and our actions – anything from an overflowing to-do list to a life-changing diagnosis. Even in the toughest times, we always have opportunities to give. How can you be generous today, from right where you sit?

Green: Offer up your seat or send a positive text.

Amber: Use your phone to be generous. Give online to a cause. Encourage some friends on a messaging app. Get on your Stewardship account, and put aside generosity money.

Red: Pray. All day. Whenever you can. Even when you're hurting, or needing a break, focus on others. It sounds easy, but it's not.

"For I am the Lord your God, who takes hold of your right hand and says to you, "Do not fear; I will help you." (Isaiah 41:13 NIV)

In November 2017 I had just come back from a national church weekend away convinced that God was about to call me to face something big and exciting. He was. A week later, I was diagnosed with breast cancer.

I have followed 40acts for about three years now and blogged about my failures and my little successes. By the time Lent rolled around in 2018 I had already had my lumpectomy and chemotherapy was about to begin. 'Why should I get involved this year?' I thought.

The opening sentences of the first act reminded me why: In the most extraordinary act of generosity the world will ever know, God offered His son, Jesus, as a gift to all. We need only say thank you.

God is good. God is loving. I believed that before my cancer diagnosis. I believed it no less after it. But how could I repay that generosity to others in my situation – going back and forth to hospital, spending a week in bed and two weeks feeling fairly lousy again before the next chemo appointment rolled round?

In a beautiful coincidence, God had given me the verse from Isaiah that you see above. This verse was – and still is – my touchstone. He used this verse throughout my treatment to remind me that he is always there, to hold my hand when I reach for him. And to help me to be generous.

Through 40acts 2018 I learned that being generous is possible even when debilitated. I realised that generosity is a conscious act of focusing on others, rather than myself. I couldn't always follow the acts themselves, but I could still be generous. I recognised that even the smallest things could make a difference – not complaining to the district nurses who found it unbelievably difficult to get any blood out of my veins each week was an act of generosity in my book!

Holding others up to God, even just repeating their names while dropping off to sleep, was sometimes all I could manage, but I knew that he would honour my intentions.

Just as he will yours, this year. Do not fear: he will help you.



ACT 22: Open Invite

Tomorrow is Mother's Day, a day of celebration but also a difficult reminder of grief for many. Think carefully and creatively about how they might best receive generosity. It could be inviting them to the party, or offering a more low-key and quiet recognition of how they're feeling.

Green: Give a card to cheer up someone who's struggling today.

Orange: Have a catch up with a friend who isn't able to spend time with family, or will find tomorrow a painful day.

Red: Prep a Sunday lunch, and invite as many as you can!

"Paul lived for two years in his rented house. He welcomed everyone who came to visit...His door was always open." (Acts 28:30–31 MSG)

Motherhood. Whatever the word invokes we all have a natural reaction to it. 'Mothering Sunday' is typically known as a happy, love-filled day, but that isn't the case for everyone.

I've seen many people sharing on social media about their difficulties with this day. Each time I see a new post, I catch myself in mild shock, thinking, 'I'm so sorry. I had no idea you experienced that.'

The truth is, we may never truly know what someone has been through or is currently facing – even those closest to us. Occasionally they might drop the veil and let us see their own private battle, but in general we tend to catch the highlights.

Maybe the man you're sitting next to on your morning commute is silently grieving the loss of his mother, whilst battling with voices in his head that say 'pull yourself together'.

Maybe the couple at church who dedicate their time to teaching Sunday school has struggled for years with infertility.

Maybe the lady at number 31 who always smiles when she sees you is struggling as she remembers the abortion she never wanted to have.

Perhaps you know someone dealing with the grief of losing a child.

All true stories. And that is why an open invitation is so vital.

I've been horribly guilty in the past of assuming everyone else is fine, that I'm the only one with struggles, or that my particular hardships must be worse than most people's. I've even assumed that if life is going well for me, then all is well with everyone else, too.

A lot of people don't feel like their despair is welcome in the presence of other people's happiness. Today's the day we get to give them an open invite. Invite them in to your happiness from whatever place they're at. No need to change; come as you are.



ACT 23: Grin

CONTRIBUTOR: Tom Lister

Laughter is the best medicine – it even says so in the Bible (Proverbs 17:22). How often

do we see it as a gift to be given? Whether think you're a comedian or not, share something today that will make someone smile.

One act today: It's April Fool's day but forget the mean practical jokes – your aim is to make everyone around you laugh or smile today.

"Dear children, let us not love with words or speech, but with actions and in truth." (1 John 3:18 NIV)

Arthur Ashe said, 'Start where you are. Use what you have. Do what you can.'

Recently, I was doing a show in the West End. I'd been away from home for months. I came into my dressing room one day to find someone had stuck a Post-it note on my mirror. It was just an encouragement to say that someone cared and had noticed my smile had faded a touch over the past few days.

Little did they know I was having a really tough time. I was struggling with working away from my family and close friends and living on my own in London. That Post-it note lifted me out of the place I was in. I felt I was under a dark cloud and just knowing that someone noticed and wanted me to know made such a difference to my whole week!

The Bible says 'the world of the generous gets larger and larger' (Proverbs 11:24 MSG) and it is so true. My wife is one of the most generous people I know. She loves to bless people by picking up the bill at a restaurant, or taking someone flowers if they need cheering up. To make someone smile, there's no need to spend lots of money. Mowing the neighbour's lawn or offering to wash their car could make their day and let them know they're valued.

When I first heard about 40acts, it reminded me of a book by Paul Scanlon called The 15 Revolution. The book challenges its readers to walk out into the world on a daily basis, lift their faces out of their phone screens and see if they're willing to inconvenience themselves by giving 15 minutes of their time to someone, to make their day. God lavishes his attention and love on each and every one of us. Today, you can do the same. It's easy, habit-forming and transformational, and it could change a life.



ACT 24: Lost Signal

CONTRIBUTOR: Georgia Tennet

Georgina Tennant lives in Norfolk with her husband and two boys and is a part-time secondary school English teacher. In the rare spare moments she finds, between

church life and being a 'swimming mum', she blogs for the Association of Christian Writers' blog (More Than Writers) and writes about her journey of grief and loss on her own blog. She has had poetry and articles in ACW-published anthologies for Lent and Christmas, as well as in their

quarterly magazine. She also writes the 'Thought for the Week' for the local newspaper from time to time.

It can feel like nobody loses touch any more – old friends live on in your Facebook or your address book, without real conversation or connection. What if we moved differently in this world? What if we took the time to get in touch with long-lost friends or family and make them feel loved, or re-forge a real connection that's been lost?

Green: Scan through your inbox – the phone inbox and the (dreaded) email inbox. Who haven't you replied to?

Orange: Got a friend you can feel yourself losing touch with? If it's a friendship you'd rather keep – have the awkward chat, and schedule a get-together.

Red: Draw up a list of contacts who might appreciate an out-of-the-blue catch up. Text or call one a day this week.

"Gracious words are a honeycomb, sweet to the soul and healing to the bones." (Proverbs 16:24 NIV)

I had been writing the 'Thought for the Week' for the local newspaper for some time and wondered if anyone noticed it nestled between pages of advertisements and birth announcements. One Sunday, as I rushed around church, trying to locate my son's missing shoe before worship started, a friend commented that an old man from the church opposite had popped in to let me know how much my recent 'Thought for the Week' had blessed him. He disappeared before I could meet him, but I will never forget his unexpectedly generous encouragement – that he had taken time out of his day to give, to a complete stranger.

Proverbs 12:25 (TLB) says 'a word of encouragement does wonders', and I certainly noticed, that day, the spirit-lifting effect of his heartfelt words. The New Testament uses the Greek word for 'encourage' (parakaleo) 109 times in total – surely enough to convince us of how vital it is for us to encourage and be encouraged. Hebrews 3:13 reminds us to 'encourage one another daily'.

But what if we took this even further than our immediate reach, past the friends and family we 'do life' with, to long-lost friends – people who influenced our lives, but with whom we now have only distant contact? I can list several: my first deputy head, who pushed me to believe in myself; my landlady in my teacher-training year, who gave me courage to face Year 10 for the first time; a youth camp leader, who made me feel like I belonged. Imagine the effect on them if I contacted them, telling them of an impact they had on me, which they've probably never imagined. 'Gracious words,' says today's proverb, 'are a honeycomb, sweet to the soul and healing to the bones' (Prov 16:24). Make it your aim to serve some up today.



#roadworkahead

ACT 25: Roadwork Ahead

CONTRIBUTOR: Carolyn Skinner

God has generous gifts for people outside of the church, for businesses, for those in

our workplaces, and for our schools. And the phenomenal thing is he wants to give them through us. So today, live church outside the building. Get out into the streets, and be the encounter between God and those who have never met him.

Green: Ask God to show you the opportunities around you today, and simply be more prayerful and intentional in the places you go to.

Amber: Pray for a colleague in the workplace. Or, sit in a coffee shop and ask God what he might like to say to someone else in there – then go and tell them.

Red: Find a stranger in the street! Ask them, 'Is there anything I can pray about for you?'

**"Let me tell you why you are here. You're here to be salt-seasoning that brings out the God-flavours of this earth. If you lose your saltiness, how will people taste godliness? ... Here's another way to put it: You're here to be light, bringing out the God-colours in the world."
(Matthew 5:13–14 MSG)**

I often say that I love to be in places where people are least likely to expect a God encounter. I've had some of my best faith conversations in some of the most unexpected places! One of my favourite places to start 'God chats' is at my local gym. I remember one person who appeared to be very independent, confident and feisty – impossible to keep up with in a CrossFit class! The kind of person I was nervous to approach and pray for.

One day, after a class, I felt prompted to offer to pray for her. In accepting the offer, she looked at me and said, 'I don't know how to pray.' to which I replied, 'You don't have to do anything! I'll just talk to God.' This encounter then led to deeper friendship and openness

I happen to serve at my gym as a chaplain. As I go there prayerfully and intentionally, I find myself taking time to listen to people's stories. It's easy to assume people won't want prayer in a place like that when really we're often more scared of offering prayer than people are of receiving it.

We don't need to fear as we step out of our church buildings to share our faith. God is already present in every part of our world; there is no place where he is not. He is waiting for us to join him.

Our job is to help people taste and see the goodness and generosity of God. Our role is to enhance his presence, to bring out a distinctiveness, to make the God-flavours and God-colours even stronger and brighter.

One of the most compassionate things I think we can do is to offer to pray for someone. This opens up a faith dynamic, invites Jesus into the situation, and demonstrates the kindness of God. I've prayed with people in changing rooms and cycling classes, and every time there is a hunger for more.

Think about where you will be today; remind yourself that God is already there. Look for opportunities to listen, love and offer a prayer. Bring out the God-colours and God-flavours where you are today.

Carolyn is CEO of Third Space Ministries, a charity which seeks to demonstrate the love of God outside of the church. She loves to take the fear out of evangelism and see people embrace the everyday opportunities around them. She can often be found running in Richmond Park, having a natter with friends over a coffee, catching some live music, or sitting in the sun with her flip flops on!



The crisis isn't over. Refugees are still in drastic need of help. The good news is there are many ways that we can get involved. But first, we need to choose to love without borders.

Green: Look up the Welcome Churches website and send the link to your church leader.

Amber: Donate to a refugee charity or a local program that helps refugees find work in your area.

Red: Serve with a charity helping refugees. You can sign up to a volunteer trip online, or serve in other ways (like spreading the word at home).

“He has shown you, O mortal, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.” (Micah 6:8 NIV)

What does the Lord require of you?

Immigration. It’s almost become a dirty word in today’s world. And the debates aren’t just kept to Westminster; we can find them in our churches as well. Who should we let in? What about the housing crisis? How can you be sure they really are refugees anyway? Don’t we need to look after ‘our own’? These are all questions I’ve been asked as I’ve travelled round the country, speaking to churches about how they can welcome refugees and asylum seekers into their communities.

These are all worthwhile debates to be had, and I don’t envy the politicians who need to make the decisions on such big issues. But, for God’s church, I think they miss the point. As the well-known verse in Micah 6:8 sums up so nicely: ‘[W]hat does the Lord require of you?’ (emphasis mine). How can you, as a follower of Jesus, demonstrate the culture of his kingdom to your community?

At Welcome Churches, we believe that every local church has a responsibility to play a part in welcoming refugees and asylum seekers arriving in the UK. As we do this, we have the privilege of getting to know incredible people from across the world who have faced severe injustice. We have the opportunity to give justice back to them and to show mercy. Our lives are changed as we look beyond ourselves to the needs of others. And we are humbled in our walk with God as we get to know a ‘refugee’ by name. What does the Lord require of you today?

Emily is responsible for Welcome Churches’ operations and church training. She has a wealth of experience in supporting churches who are welcoming refugees and knows first-hand of the pressure this can bring. Emily is passionate about seeing the UK church being at the forefront of welcoming refugees. She has an MA in Conflict, Development and Security where she specialised in European citizens’ response in the current refugee crisis.



ACT 27: Disappearing Act

CONTRIBUTOR: Claire Musters

Claire Musters is an author, speaker and editor, mum to two gorgeous children, pastor's wife, worship leader and school

governor. Claire's passion is to help others to draw closer to God and be all that they can be in Him. Her books include Taking off the mask: learning to live authentically. On her blog, Claire writes about marriage, parenting, authenticity, worship and other discipleship issues.

Today, take yourself out of the picture. Act generously for someone else without them noticing, and leave no mark that it was you. See what completely anonymous generosity does when you take yourself, your goals, and your self-image off the stage.

Green: Leave change taped to a car park meter or vending machine.

Amber: Give a generous gift to someone you work with or volunteer with. Leave it on their desk while they're on lunch and no one's watching.

Red: How easy is it to hide an elephant? Not very. Think of a large gift and try and deliver it undercover.

"Be careful not to practise your righteousness in front of others to be seen by them. If you do, you will have no reward from your Father in heaven. So, when you give to the needy, do not announce it with trumpets, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and on the streets, to be honoured by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full. 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 6:1–4 NIV)

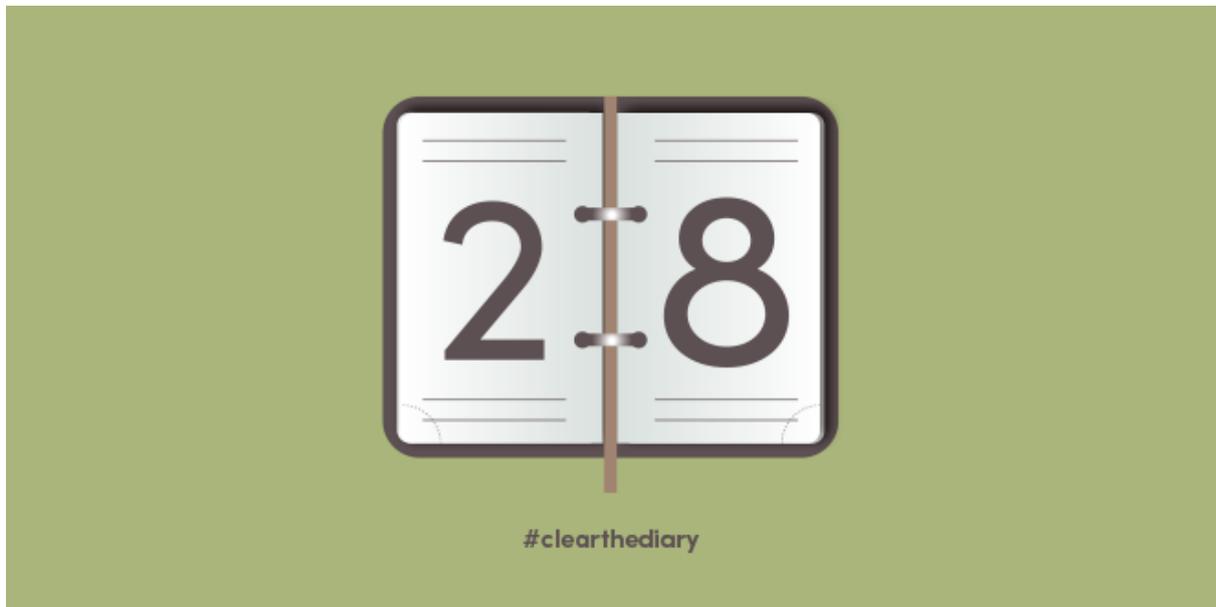
When my husband and I were first married, we had to account for every penny we spent (I did a huge clear-out of my office recently and we smiled over an old notebook that reminded us of all the furious adding and subtracting I used to do). We simply didn't have money left over for

anything fun or frivolous. But God still challenged us to be generous with both our money and time.

I remember a young family that struggled to make ends meet. In the run-up to Christmas, when we were saving hard to buy presents for our families, God told us to give that family some money anonymously. I was a little taken aback; after all, I'd done my budgeting and it didn't allow for a generous gift! But he was very clear.

So, we made arrangements for the money to make it to them safely without their discovering the source. Soon after, we were travelling up to the Millennium Dome to enjoy the Christmas festivities and the wife of that same family came with us. She was overflowing with excitement as she shared the story of receiving money that was exactly the amount they needed. I had not been prepared for how full my heart became when I heard the impact that our small step of obedience had. I was literally overwhelmed with such gratitude and love... and had a hard time keeping it in.

I know that generosity often reaps its own rewards, but, as Matthew 6 suggests, our God does indeed bless those who do it in secret.



ACT 28: Clear the diary

CONTRIBUTOR: Roy Crowne

Roy Crowne is executive director of HOPE. He is based in Rugby and spends much of

his time travelling to encourage and support Christian leaders around the country. He is married to Flossie and they have two adult sons. In his spare time he enjoys a curry, a game of rugby and swimming with his grandsons.

Wipe your schedule so that you can serve others. Take a break from your own to-do list, and let other people's needs drive your day.

Green: Wipe your schedule for an hour to serve someone at home.

Amber: Wipe your schedule for part of the day: message someone and say, 'I'm free between X and Y and I'm happy to help with anything you need to do.'

Red: Wipe your schedule for a whole day! Fill it entirely with others' needs (one person or lots of people). See how much serving you can fit in!

"...Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me." (Matthew 25:40 NIV)

Some years ago, the town of Preston in Lancashire suffered disastrous flooding which caused huge amounts of damage and disruption. Over 200 volunteers from local churches cleared their diaries for five days to help those affected.

The teams completed 25 projects in those five days, cleaning, decorating, gardening, litter picking and doing whatever they could to demonstrate the love of Jesus to their neighbours. For one flood victim, it was a life-changing experience. Working as part of a joint Preston church project, the team helped him to renovate his damaged home so that he was able to move back in again. Breaking down in tears, the man explained that he had felt he had no way out of the situation, but that the generous actions of the church team had turned his life around.

Preston is one of the cities where churches are part of HOPE, a charity working together to make Jesus known through their words and actions, a catalyst that brings churches together to transform communities.

Sometimes we need a prompt to clear the diary and help others in need. Crises such as fires, floods and natural disasters do happen, but it shouldn't take one of these rare events to remind us to drop everything and help out. There will always be needs in our communities and neighbourhoods, needs which we can help to meet with a bit of time, effort, love and compassion.

As we look towards Easter and the amazing hope we have of Jesus' resurrection, today's a great time to plan what we can do with others from local churches to serve our communities, doing whatever it takes.



ACT 29: Anything Else

CONTRIBUTOR: Alex Eleasser

Alex Elsaesser recently retired from working in a children's charity for disabled children.

He and Renie have nine children, the youngest having Down Syndrome. He enjoys cycling and helping out with disabled skiing

As Jesus said, 'Whenever you did one of these things to someone overlooked or ignored, that was me – you did it to me' (Matthew 25:40 MSG).

Today we're looking at going that extra mile to change someone's life. What can you do to lavish generosity on those who ask you for something? Matthew 5:40–42 tells us that if we're asked for our shirt, we need to hand over our coat as well, and if we're asked to go one mile, we should go two. Today's challenge could change your life as well as someone else's.

There's only one action today. How far can your generosity go? Is there anything else you can do?

"May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit." (Romans 15:13 NIV)

Last year, I signed up for 40acts. I was looking forward to finding out how I could become more generous. The first few challenges were fun. I was really enjoying myself. Then one morning, I read the reflection about following the leading of the Holy Spirit. Several days later, as I was getting ready for work, I heard God's voice telling me, 'Give away one of your kidneys.' This was certainly one step beyond what I was expecting.

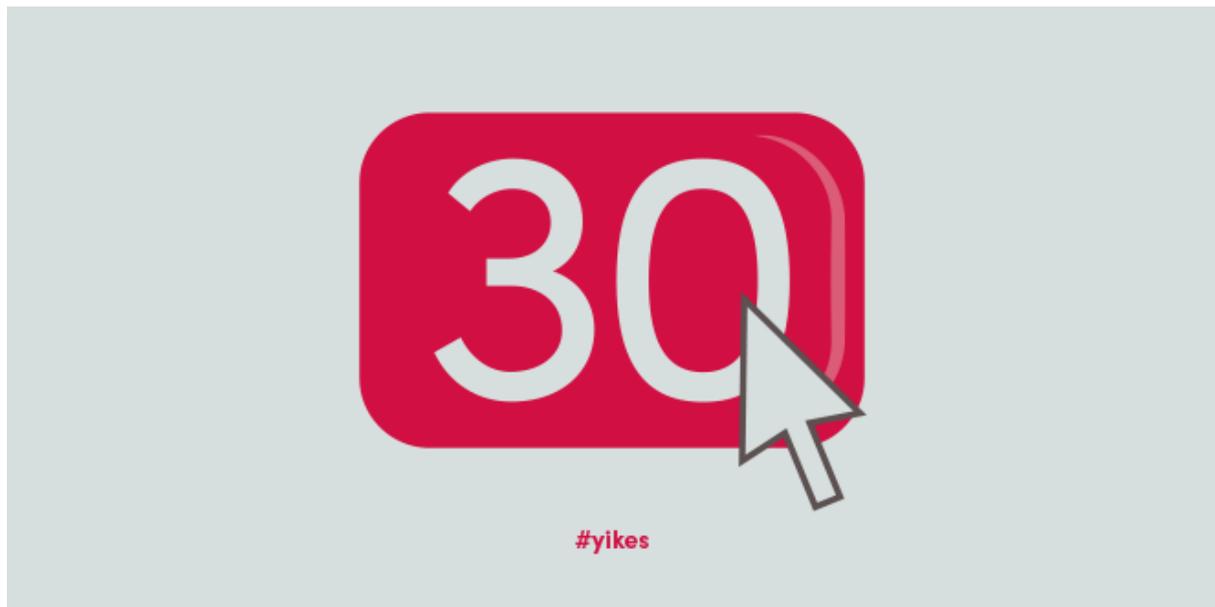
It's not the kind of thing one usually hears, so, shaken, and not knowing if this was even a possibility, I googled 'kidney donation'. I found there was a special category of donation: 'Altruistic Living Kidney Donation', a way of giving a kidney to a stranger anonymously.

I duly followed the leading of the Holy Spirit, as encouraged by 40acts. I contacted the Renal Live Donor Co-ordinators at Morriston Hospital near Swansea. After a multitude of blood tests, I had a two-hour interview with a clinical psychologist. She wanted to know if I was in the right mental state to proceed. You may be asking the same question!

I passed all the tests, but I was feeling a bit wobbly. I then found out that someone we knew had donated a kidney to his mother. You'd never guess that this six-foot, healthy sportsman in his early 50s has only one kidney. He's a great ambassador for the experience.

My story took an unexpected twist in early February. My transplant surgeon told me that he and his team felt because of a previous operation for appendicitis, the risk of the surgery was too high. I should not proceed. I confess I was disappointed and am still trying to process the news.

However, the fact remains, God asked me to give a kidney and I was obedient to him. This experience has taught me that it's more important to obey God than to understand why he asks us to do something for him. I'm in awe of our Creator God who has a perfect plan. Whatever the future holds, I'll continue to follow where he leads me and to trust in him.



ACT 30: Yikes

CONTRIBUTOR: Ruth Leigh

Ruth Leigh is a writer, poet, inspirational speaker and caterer. She lives in the

beautiful Suffolk countryside with her husband, three children and ten chickens. She makes her own jams and chutneys, has a morbid fear of fresh tomatoes and loves nothing more than curling up with a good book in front of the fire.

That sharp intake of breath as you decide to do something truly generous, as you click donate, as the notes leave your hand. Maybe you're getting used to that feeling this month. But what if that wasn't just a one-off moment? What if it was an invitation into a sacrificial lifestyle? Today, take the hit. Gulp, and click donate – on a monthly direct debit or pledge that takes some real sacrificial giving.

Green: Renew an old giving pledge that you let go by the wayside.

Amber: Look at causes or people you already give to. Can you increase your giving by 1, 5 or 10%?

Red: Make a brand-new sacrificial gift.

"In the midst of a very severe trial, their overflowing joy and their extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity. For I testify that they gave as much as they were able, and even beyond their ability. Entirely on their own, they urgently pleaded with us for the privilege of sharing in this service to the Lord's people. And they exceeded our expectations..." (2 Corinthians 8:2–5 NIV)

Sitting in church one day, I was listening to our vicar telling us that we needed to raise quite a chunk of money to pay the wages of our new youth worker. I had a vested interest in this, being the mother of three children, one of them a teenager.

Since becoming self-employed, I hadn't exactly been overburdened with cash, so in the pause while we were all encouraged to search our hearts, I was more than a little surprised at God's leading. The conversation went like this.

Me: Oh Lord, guide me in this decision.

God: You need to give really generously, Ruth.

Me: OK, what sort of sum were you thinking of?

God: Somewhere in the hundreds. Dig deep.

Me: You what?? You're an all-seeing God; you know the state of my bank account! Are you quite sure about this?

God: Yep. Trust in me.

With shaking hands, I reached into my handbag, digging through the layers of used tissues, half-chewed sweets and random plastic objects (like I said, mother of three children). I took a deep breath and wrote a cheque for an amount I really couldn't afford. As I dropped it into the collection plate, I hung on to the words 'trust in me' as a drowning man clutches at nearby floating objects.

The cheque duly cleared. We hired the youth worker. He started transforming lives. I don't know what effect his work and the work of our current youth worker will have in the long term. I don't need to know either. I trusted and I gave more than I could afford because God asked me to.

All I needed to do was listen and obey. That was it. You should try it – who knows where it might lead?



ACT 31: Hope for the Homeless

CONTRIBUTOR: Ed Walker

After nine years working in war zones, Ed Walker came back to England and set up Hope Into Action, an award-winning charity

which enables churches to house the homeless. It has over 60 partner churches and together they run over 70 homes for the homeless. In 2017 it was awarded 'Best Housing Project in the Country' by The Guardian.

How do we handle our hearts with those who are homeless? If we live in cities or towns, it can become all too easy to blank out the same faces we see day after day. And the question nags at us: surely there's more we can give than 50p here and there? Today, we're looking into the more that's possible.

Green: Give to a local or national homeless charity.

Orange: Contact a homeless shelter and ask what they need. Then meet it.

Red: Invite a homeless person to your church, or to a local soup kitchen. Go along with them. If they need a lift, offer to give them one.

"What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if someone claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save them? 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? In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead. 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 2:14–18 NIV)

You walk past a homeless person on the way to work or while shopping. If you do nothing about his physical needs, or only say to him, 'God bless you,' then your faith is dead, according to James 2. That feels quite harsh but let's look at it in a different way. Instead of walking past, you could transform the life of a homeless person, working with your church as a generous community. Food, shelter and support could turn someone's life around and you have the power to do it.

It's significant that the theme of the Feeding of the Five Thousand (Matt 14:13-21) was this: Jesus saw the crowd and had compassion on them. The early disciples said, 'Send them away.' But Jesus says to the fledgling church, 'You give them something to eat.' It's all too easy to leave the issue of homelessness to charities and our local councils. However, churches can model the love of God by reaching out and offering practical and compassionate support to the vulnerable and homeless in their communities.

Nine years ago my wife, Rachel, and I asked ourselves the question, 'How can we help?' We'd received an inheritance of £30,000 which we used to buy a house in Peterborough. We partnered it with our church and, to this day, it's still being used to house homeless men, now leased through Hope Into Action.

It's my belief that every church in the UK can make a difference to the crisis of homelessness. It starts by answering this question from Jesus: 'How many loaves do you have?' and then obeying his command, 'Go and see.' Jesus could be asking your church to see how much capital you have in your reserves and collective savings account, then asking you to bring it to him. Liaising with your local homelessness charity, speaking to Hope Into Action and starting the ball rolling by making relationships with the vulnerable and homeless in your neighbourhood can transform lives. Why not use a Sunday morning service to address this issue and talk seriously about what you and your church can do? You'll be surprised to find how much help you can offer.



ACT 32: Better Threads

CONTRIBUTOR: Paige Colthart

I am a Production Specialist on dresses at Ted Baker. I manage the production of a

garment, taking it from a sketch and liaising with suppliers in order to make it into a garment and deliver it in store on time and at the right quality.

Picture this: you're looking at a cheap-as-chips shirt, wondering what on earth happened to make it that cheap, and before you know it, you've gone and bought it. It happens to most of us. But today, we're getting thoughtful about our threads. What's the history behind our clothes? And what makes ethical clothing generous?

Green: Make up a list of places you're happy to shop for clothes, and places to avoid that aren't ethically sound.

Orange: Do an inventory on your clothes. Sort through them and see how many are ethically dodgy. Take anything you don't need to a charity shop.

Red: When you need something new, buy ethically instead, and get a new habit started.

"Be under obligation to no one – the only obligation you have is to love one another..."
(Romans 13:8 GNT)

There are many things I love about working in fashion but one thing I battle with is just how unethical it can be. Visiting factories where garments are manufactured really opens your eyes to the reality of fast fashion and what it's costing our world.

I work for Ted Baker, which is known for its quality and quirkiness. The prices of our products can be quite high for your regular spender, but what I love is that we have an entire team ensuring that all products are produced ethically, called Ted's Conscience Team. It means the factory workers are paid above minimum wage, they aren't doing too much overtime and they work in a safe environment.

When we buy clothes, there's much more to think about than simply the cost to our wallets. Everything we buy has a meaning. It's a decision that can affect everything from the economy to the environment to perhaps someone's life on the other side of the world.

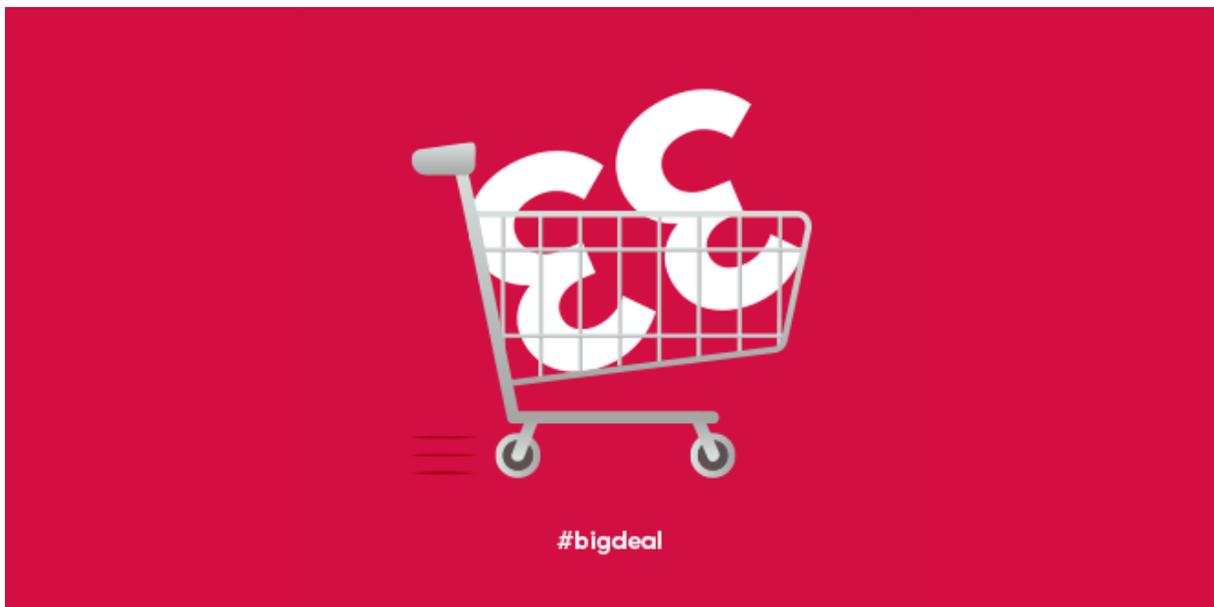
Working in production, I have a good idea of all the factors that contribute to the price of clothing. Some brands have 80% profit margins which means that the other 20% has to include the cost and testing of the fabric, the trims, the packing materials, the freight and then the make price. And somewhere in that 20% is the wage of the person that is making the garment for you.

If you pay £3 for a T-shirt, how much do you think the person making that T-shirt is getting paid after all the other costs have been factored in?

So perhaps next time you need a winter coat, save up and buy one that will last, from a brand that you know pays enough for their factory workers to have the quality of life they deserve. Or you can always buy second-hand at charity shops, or websites like eBay and Vinted.

Jesus taught us to love our neighbours as ourselves and, more than that, as he has loved us – sacrificially. As we know from the story of the Good Samaritan, 'neighbour' means more than just the people we live near. We have a duty to care for even those we have never met.

I've learnt it's all about supply and demand. If consumers want something, the retail world responds to that. If we demand good-quality, ethical products, the higher cost to us can mean a lower cost to someone else's life.



ACT 33: Big Deal

CONTRIBUTOR: Jane Clamp

Jane Clamp is the author of *Too Soon: A Mother's Journey Through Miscarriage* (SPCK) and co-editor of *Merry Christmas*

Everyone (ACW). As an interior designer she has a heart for restoration which she reflects in her writing, appearing regularly on radio and contributing to blogs, devotionals and commentaries. She is a committee member of the Association of Christian Writers.

You've seen the videos: fights over bargains in shopping centres, Black Friday riots, Christmas brawls over best-sellers. Deals don't always bring out the best in humanity. So, flip that instinct. Today, buy every deal that you reasonably can, and then give it to whoever you can. Make your bargains work for someone else.

Green: See some food marked at 50% off? Buy two – one to give away.

Amber: Find a deal on your favourite food, drink, or clothes brand. Give it away to someone you think might love it.

Red: Bulk-buy a necessity – toilet paper, cereal, underwear – and give it all away to a charity who can give it those in need.

"Taste and see that the Lord is good..." (Psalm 34:8 NIV)

My son works as one of those people in the foyer at Tesco who hands out free samples and vouchers. Every week sees a different promotion – dog food, chocolate, a new breakfast cereal – and he's literally got the T-shirt for all of them. You'd think his days would fly by, with queues of customers taking advantage of his generosity, but not so. Fair enough the 'free chocolate' days leading up to Christmas are winners, with customers practically putting on a disguise so they can turn up again and again – like Dopey wanting another kiss from Snow White. But a lot of the time, people are plain suspicious and at times he can't meet either their eye or their expectations.

'What's the catch?' they ask. 'What am I being signed up to?'

Our Bible verse encourages us to 'taste and see that the Lord is good'. As a diner might sample a mouthful of wine before committing to buying the bottle, or a customer might buy something on a promotional offer that later becomes a family favourite, tasting can lead to new experiences, even life-changing ones.

Small generous acts during Lent might feel a drop in the ocean when faced with the hardships of our society, but those little drops are tasters of the heavenly realm. A door held open is a sample of welcome and a sense of belonging. An unexpected gift is a hint of loving grace. A coupon towards some chocolate demonstrates that celebration and a well-deserved treat is within our reach and our budget – for which we can be grateful!

Offering glimpses and tasters might seem insignificant, but what a difference a deal can make. Let's reach out today, connecting the people around us to the goodness of God.



ACT 34: Adopt

CONTRIBUTOR: Euan Johnstone

Euan is on staff with Young Life International, a global youth ministry seeking to introduce teenagers to Jesus Christ and to help them grow in their faith

by going to where teenagers are and building personal relationships with them. Having volunteered with YLI while studying Theology at St Andrews from 2014–18, he is now on staff to set up the ministry in Perth, Scotland, where he lives with his wife, Beth.

Friendships across generations are vanishing – in the UK, libraries, pubs, youth centres and clubs are closing at a shocking rate, with 600 youth clubs shutting down over the last six years. Churches are some of the last places where generations meet. But do we make the most of that chance?

Green: Schedule a meet-up with someone from a different generation.

Amber: Schedule a monthly hang-out, and serve while you do – what can you do to help them?

Red: Find someone in your church (or anywhere) who you know, and decide to ‘adopt’ them. Take them under your wing, and make them a part of your life.

“The Word became flesh and blood, and moved into the neighbourhood...” (John 1:14 MSG)

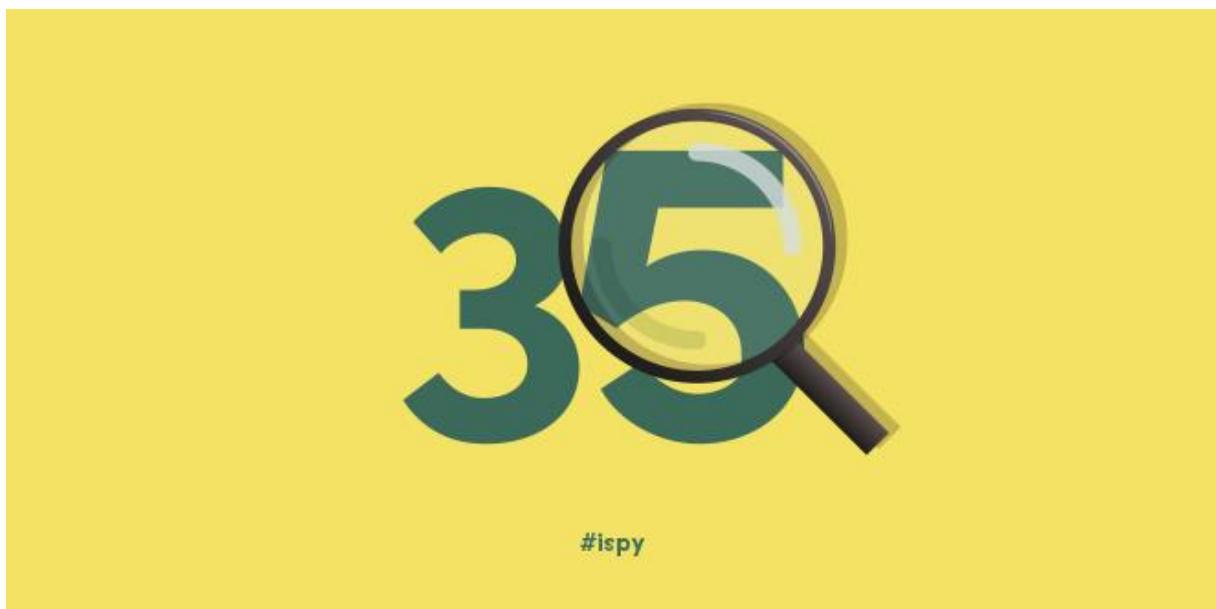
When I first volunteered with YLI, I recall meeting with a group of skater guys, aged 14–16, who wanted to raise funds for a skate park. I walked into their town library, and there they were sitting in their hoodies on these big wooden chairs around a grand old table, chatting about their plans. At first glance you wouldn’t have thought it, but these kids had real dreams for what they wanted to build in their community, and creativity in raising the money for it too!

Together we laid on an extreme bingo event that was a hit with their village. Out of that, we got to know one of those skater guys really well, and he later spent a week at our summer camp, Cairn Brae, where he gave his life to Christ. Even that wasn’t the end of the story because I then began meeting up with him to read the Bible together. Now he’s a YLI leader himself,

encouraging teenagers to share their faith with their friends. And it all started with that unlikely library meeting.

The barriers we create can prevent us building relationships and demonstrating love towards one another. Technology, language, opinions, worldviews, experiences and all sorts of prejudices and stereotypes add to them. Yet, with God, these barriers are not insurmountable.

What might it look like for you to 'adopt' someone who is different from you? Perhaps it starts simply by introducing yourself to someone of a different generation. Amazing things could happen if, in Christ's strength, we set aside the barriers that stand between us: think of what a powerful witness a multi-generational community of believers could be to the divided world we live in today; think of what we could learn from one another; think of how God could use you to speak into someone else's life; and above all, think of Jesus, who overcame all barriers to save us.



ACT 35: I Spy

CONTRIBUTOR: Abby King

Abby King is a teacher and writer living in Birmingham. She writes to find light in the

dark, beauty in the chaos and peace in the storm. She teaches to change the world, one little life at a time. Her work is regularly published in Teach Primary Magazine.

By now you've probably caught on – a startling amount of living generously is simply noticing people. We often only realise people are lonely when they actually tell us. But there are plenty of lonely people who never say a word. Today, put those people-watching skills to good use.

Green: Watch for lonely people this week. At church, look for those at the sidelines. At work, look for those who eat lunch alone.

Orange: Make a point of connecting with someone you know, but have avoided spending time with because they're a bit socially awkward.

Red: Strike up a chat with someone you don't know – at the bus stop or café maybe - who looks a little sad.

“When Jesus saw her, he called her forward and said to her, ‘Woman, you are set free from your infirmity.’” (Luke 13:12 NIV)

Loneliness can feel like a dirty secret sometimes, like acknowledging that you're somehow deficient and defective. It's as though you didn't get invited to the party or picked for the team, like everyone is playing the game while you watch from the side lines. It feels shameful to say the words out loud – I'm lonely – so we mostly don't. It hurts to admit that you feel unwanted and invisible.

These are the nagging questions underlying the pain and the shame: Do I matter? Does anyone see me?

In the Gospel stories, we find Jesus over and over again speaking into these deep longings, showing people on the margins that they are worthy of his time and attention, that they matter to him, that he really sees them. The woman caught in adultery, the woman at the well, Mary Magdalene, the blind man, the leper, the crippled woman: Jesus offers his presence to each of them, seeing who they are and meeting their needs.

One of the most generous gifts we can give people is ourselves: our time, our attention, our willingness to care about them. When we show up for people in this way, we become the hands and feet of Jesus. We answer people's deepest questions: you matter, I see you.

It doesn't take very long to look around and realise that all sorts of people are lonely. People with chronic illnesses, or carers. Parents of children with special needs, or singles. Widows, people with disabilities, people who live alone. People whose partner works long hours. People who are grieving all kinds of losses. People with depression.

Recently, I watched my friend instruct her teenage children: 'Look out for the people sitting on their own and go and sit with them.' Who might you look out for and sit with today?



#compassion

ACT 36: Compassion

CONTRIBUTOR: Paula Pridham

Paula Pridham is Executive Director of national charity Care for the Family. She has worked in the not-for-profit sector for 30 years and is also a counsellor and church leader.

The word 'compassion' simply means coming alongside suffering – co-suffering with someone. That can sound a bit daunting, but when you think about it, what a gift to be able to offer someone your presence and the feeling that you're with them. Think of areas where you've suffered in the past, and find a way to share time with someone who's suffering similarly today.

Green: Note down two or three people you know who are struggling at the moment and commit to pray for them daily.

Amber: Talk to someone, even if you don't know what to say. Knowing you are sorry for, and care about, their situation is a good start.

Red: Volunteer with an organisation that comes alongside those who are struggling.

"Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience." (Colossians 3:12 NIV)

Have you ever crossed the road to avoid facing someone who was struggling? I'm ashamed to say I have, even though I can think of good reasons why I did it – reasons like I didn't know what to say, I didn't want to upset them, I felt inadequate. At some point, we all need compassion, so why is it that when we turn to others, we struggle so much to give it out?

A few years ago, 'What Would Jesus Do?' bracelets were popular. The problem with WWJD is that it's often at odds with our natural inclination. Being compassionate is one Christ-like characteristic we might find difficult. Why? Perhaps because it can make us feel vulnerable, hurt or anguished ourselves. We need to put ourselves out, or, truthfully, we just don't know what to do and are fearful of making things worse.

A bereaved dad supported by Care for the Family said, 'Visitors and family came, some from a long way. It's strange that we seemed to be comforting them.' In that instance the person hurting ended up having to be compassionate to others, rather than being comforted themselves. It doesn't have to be like that. At Care for the Family, we work to promote strong family life and to come alongside those facing family difficulties.

It says in 2 Corinthians 1:3–4: 'Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves receive from God.'

The truth is, showing compassion is daunting. It is costly – but immensely valuable to those who receive it. Not only that, but it can be a beautiful and fulfilling expression of God's love flowing through us. Fear or embarrassment about doing the wrong thing shouldn't stop us from doing what God is calling us to do. We are designed to show compassion and to be blessed in blessing others... and there is no shortage of opportunities.



ACT 37: Seek Out

CONTRIBUTOR: Mez McConnell

Mez McConnell is the senior pastor of Niddrie Community Church. He is the director of 20Schemes, a church planting and revitalisation initiative in Scotland. He is

also co-director of the Acts 29 initiative Church in Hard Places. Mez is the author of *Preparing for Baptism: A Personal Diary* (Grace Publications Trust) and *Is There Anybody Out There? A Journey from Despair to Hope* (Christian Focus). He's married to Miriam and has two daughters.

If we're honest, as Christians it's easy to develop blind spots for people who don't fit our categories. One example is people who've left the faith. How often do we find ourselves being generous to those who don't share in our beliefs any more? Find a way to make someone feel loved without holding back the truth of what we believe.

Green: Get coffee with an old friend who isn't in church any more – and hang out with no strings attached.

Amber: Ask that person to tell their story, and just sit and listen.

Red: Don't shy away from talking about Jesus, even if it's awkward.

"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)

If you're a believer, you probably have that friend you look up to in the faith, that person who is your go-to for all things spiritual, who reads every John Piper book and has a heavily used Bible on each night stand and coffee table. Well, your friend may not read Piper or be a bibliophile, but mine was. However, after the death of my friend's mother and only sibling, things changed. The disintegration of their faith didn't happen overnight; it was a slow erosion. Pent-up anger and sadness ate away over months and, before too long, Jesus was an unmentionable and Sunday was just another day to have a lie in.

I was devastated as I watched the death of a vibrant faith despite my attempts to resuscitate it for them. I remember wondering if this meant that I had to annul our friendship since they had annulled their faith. Is that how it's supposed to work? It was a terrifying thought but doesn't the Bible say 'with such a one do not even eat' (1 Corinthians 5:11 JUB)?

How very wrong I was. I had confused the meaning of that verse and how to help someone walking away from the Lord. In dealing with my friend, I'm reminded of Paul in Romans 9:2-3, for I feel the same: 'I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart. For I could wish that I myself were cursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my people...'

We don't know what God's great plan for our lives is and that goes for our friends too. We can pray, love and support, knowing that while we can't make those we love fall in love with Jesus, we can show them his love by continually sharing "the hope that [we] have... with gentleness and respect" (1 Peter 3:15) and continually praying that they will return home to the Father.



ACT 38: Behind Bars

CONTRIBUTOR: Brian Heasley

Brian Heasley is the International Prayer Director for 24-7 Prayer, and also serves at Lambeth Palace as International Ecumenical Lead for 'Thy Kingdom Come',

an initiative of the Archbishop of Canterbury. Prior to this, Brian and his wife, Tracy, pioneered the work of 24-7 Prayer in the party area of Ibiza, Spain, where they lived for eight years, developing rhythms of prayer and mission. His book, Gatecrashing, tells the story of 24-7 Prayer in Ibiza.

Behind bars for good reason or not, people in prison are often locked out of experiencing basic human kindnesses – the simple joys of community life. Today, offer generosity to people who might feel locked out from ever receiving it, and who might never be able to pay it back: prisoners, young offenders, young people in pupil referral units, and so on.

Green: Write a letter to a prisoner. Tell them you wanted to get in touch just to say that someone was thinking of them.

Amber: Send a gift to a prisoner, or help prisoners send a gift to their children.

Red: Visit a prisoner.

'Continue to remember those in prison as if you were together with them in prison, and those who are mistreated as if you yourselves were suffering.' (Hebrews 13:3 NIV)

When I was in prison, many years ago, one of my greatest fears was that people would forget about me. An incredible sense of isolation comes with incarceration: contact with the outside world is minimal and time to think is ample. Often this time for reflection causes your mind to wander down a bunny trail of imagined negative scenarios taking place on the outside world. In prison your mind can become the devil's playground. He takes your fears, anxieties, regrets, desires, lusts and dreams and spins them out of control to the point where you feel like a child on a merry-go-round in the playground, desperately clinging on whilst a cruel older child spins it faster and faster.

For me there were a number of things that could stop this spinning cycle of inward turmoil. The first was visitors: every time someone came to see me, they grounded me. They slowed the spinning and reminded me that the world was still out there, that people cared and that I wasn't forgotten.

The second thing was letters – I know this is almost a lost art. One of the things prisoners can't receive is emails, but they can receive letters. My friend Sally wrote me letters and put little brightly coloured spots on them with the message 'a bright spot for your day'. And believe me, they were bright spots. They shone into my cell and gave me something else to hold on to, something to help me keep it all together and not lose my grip.

Finally, the third thing: prayer. People prayed – they prayed long and hard for me, and at my darkest moments I often felt comforted or helped by some unseen force. I would receive an unexpected good night's sleep or feel better and brighter than usual; moments of hope arose in me and I can only put that down to prayer. People prayed, and I knew that I wasn't forgotten.



#70x7

ACT 39: 70x7

CONTRIBUTOR: Matt Hooper

Married to Clare with three children, Matt has been involved in worship leading and

church leadership for 20 years. He and Clare have just pioneered a new church plant in Manchester called Kingdom Company.

If generosity means giving more than we have to give, then forgiveness can be a deeply generous act. We forgive in the same ways that we're generous: sacrificially, unconditionally, freely. Take a dive into some (maybe) uncomfortable memories: Who might you need to forgive today? What would it take for you to forgive from a generous place? How can God help you with that?

One act today: Read the Easter story in the Bible (Luke 23) and focus on Jesus' words of forgiveness. Ask God to help you forgive.

"Then Peter came to Jesus and asked, 'Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother or sister who sins against me? Up to seven times?' Jesus answered, 'I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times.'" (Matthew 18:21–22 NIV)

It was late one Friday night in Liverpool. The three of us were walking home when a man stopped and asked the time. Nothing unusual there. He walked away, then turned, pulled his collar up over his face and lunged towards us, pulling a gun from his pocket. He shouted and waved the gun wildly around. He wanted our money. Being students, we only had about £20 between us. I gave him 69p and a plectrum – it was all I had in my pocket.

I don't recall feeling scared or angry at the time – I just remember the gunman becoming more and more agitated. Suddenly he jerked to his left, fell backwards slightly and ran off into the darkness, leaving the three of us stunned and silent. As quickly as the robbery took place, it was over. Laughing nervously, we made our way home, trying to make sense of what had just happened.

What I didn't know then was that the trauma of that night would affect me more than I realised. Though I tried to put the incident behind me, I began to feel fearful. I didn't like to go out at night. Then I didn't like to go out at all. I skipped certain lectures. Then I skipped most of my lectures. I started to get panic attacks, long periods of low mood, and dark thoughts.

I made silent oaths that I would never let that happen again. No one would treat me like that again - EVER. I learned to 'stand up for myself', shout people down; fear became the fuel for anger and anger would get me out of bed in the morning. Anger was my unwelcome companion. After a while I made allowances for it. I even enjoyed it at times.

Some 18 years later, by now a worship pastor, I found myself squaring up to someone yet again. But this time I knew I needed help. My feelings around the robbery had never left me – they still played on my mind.

My friend hit the nail on the head: 'What does Jesus think about this guy who robbed you?'

My first reaction was, 'I don't care what Jesus thinks - the guy's an idiot!' Yet I knew I had to forgive him. I just didn't want to. I didn't feel like forgiving him, but I knew deep down I had to make that decision.

We prayed, and as we did I saw a picture in my mind's eye – as if I was looking at the robbery from the outside. I saw the three of us standing with the man pointing the gun at us. I could sense that he was tormented; I could sense the pain he was in. He was afraid. Then I saw that he was flanked by two enormous angels. I instinctively knew that they were there for my protection and were restraining him.

As the scene played out and the man became agitated, I saw one of the angels lean down and gently say, 'That's enough,' pressing his left shoulder, causing him to fall backwards slightly. Then he spun round and ran off. I felt an unexpected compassion for him – something I had never felt before, and I felt God say, 'Your safety was never in question.'

God graciously helped me understand what happened that day. He helped me to forgive, and to put down the anger I had been carrying around all those years. I'm not perfect but I am healed, and it's from a place of healing that I have seen transformation take place in my life.



ACT 40: The Now and the Not Yet

CONTRIBUTOR: Guvna B

Guvna B is a double MOBO award-winning rapper and author from London, known for his positive and inspiring lyricism. His latest album *Hands Are Made for Working* was

inspired by his grief and has been streamed over 5 million times; it is available from iTunes, Spotify, Apple Music, Google Play, HMV and all leading music outlets. In 2017 his debut book, *Unpopular Culture*, became an Amazon bestseller. He has a heart to see young people reach their full potential.

The Saturday between Good Friday and Easter Sunday is a strange place. But it's where lots of us live our lives – caught between mourning and moving on, between pain and joy, grieving everyday losses. If you look, you'll find many around you in a place like that. Offer more than a half-hearted hug today. Help people encounter generosity in places of deep pain.

Green: Text someone who had a really difficult experience some time ago. Tell them, 'I know this happened a while ago, but how are you doing these days?'

Amber: Meet up with a friend who's lost a significantly close partner or best friend and be there to offer a shoulder to cry on.

Red: Think of a news story about a disaster that happened in the past. See what help is needed today, and how you can give.

"The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full." (John 10:10 NIV)

In 2017, I lost my dad pretty suddenly. He passed away after a really short illness and it knocked me for six. That season of my life made me realise that it's quite easy to have faith when things are going amazingly in your life, but it's a lot more difficult when we find ourselves in situations that we can't control.

Romans 8:28 was a verse I heard a lot when I was growing up: all things work together for the good of those who love the Lord. I failed to believe that verse during my time of grief but, once again, the Bible proved me wrong.

A year after the passing of my father, I decided to write music about my journey with grief and how I was learning to trust God through it. To this very day I get messages from people all over the world who've expressed that my being open about my experiences has really helped them deal with their own grief. God used my pain for his purpose and to help others, so I guess all things do work together for good.

Dealing with grief is hard but things do get better. At the start of my grief process, I went off chicken, which is not like me at all! Now, I'm back at Nando's every week!

If life is tough for you at the moment, I'd encourage you to ride the waves. Tough times strengthen our character and give us opportunities to help others who will battle with similar things in the future.

In John 10:10, Jesus promises to give us life to the full. I used to interpret this as an amazing life full of highs, but now I view that verse differently. I think life to the full sometimes means the fullness of joy, and other times it's the fullness of sadness. But know that in any of those times, all things will work together for our good.