MOSAIC

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INTRODUCTION

"Whoever dwells in the shelter of the Most High
will rest in the shadow of the Almighty.
I will say of the Lord, "He is my refuge and my fortress,
my God, in whom I trust." (Psalm 91: 1-2)

The stories from our network this season are full of creative ideas: engaging with the local community, supporting worthwhile charities, caring for isolated farmers, growing churches and the smells of delicious food shared in community.

What really stands out is the centrality of Jesus. Again and again, we see people readily praising him, thanking him for all he does, asking for prayer, and recognising that they are embedded in the story of God.

That story beckons us to join God's grand narrative, one that holds hope, relationship, pain, suffering, joy, restoration, reconciliation and love. We are all on this journey together, discovering the love of God for ourselves and for our communities. This missional journey, however, is not all sunshine and rainbows and there are inevitably tough moments, difficult decisions, and times when we are walking with God 'out of season'. Mission is not valued by how busy or successful we have been over the last few months as mission is not an activity we do but something we join in with as we follow a missional God. As Durrington Community Church, Wiltshire, puts it: "But despite all the plans and activities, we are also actively praying and seeking God as to what He wants us to do, rather than do a lot of stuff and hope God will bless it."

Which places discernment and spirituality at the heart of mission. Among the articles in this edition, you will find several on spirituality, that Christian word which simply acknowledges that we are on a spiritual walk and develop ways to connect with God along the journey. Spirituality encompasses our whole life as Christians, and is both the place of quiet prayer and a life lived out in the Spirit amid our rural communities. See Jon's article for practical tips to help us keep in step with God, and mine for a deeper look at a specifically missional spirituality.

Whatever season you are in at the moment, I hope that as you read you will find a place of peace, hope and a glimmer of inspiration along your journey with Jesus.

Jo

Jo Allen
Joint CEO, Rural Ministries

Mount Zion Church, Cliviger, Lancashire

Across the Age Spectrum

When Penny the Squirrel visited Mount Zion Little Stars toddler group in Cliviger, it was to thank the youngsters for a Bunny Hop session which raised over £400 for the work of Pendleside Hospice.

"It was amazing to know that the toddlers from this church were able to raise so much for the hospice," said Leah Hooper, Community Engagement Officer at Pendleside. "It will go towards helping the many people who require palliative care for end of life illnesses for whom the hospice cares."

Penny and Leah were delighted to visit the church to meet Janet Kershaw, who runs the Little Stars group, and some of the braver youngsters. She said: "We can accommodate up to thirty children, and lots took part in the Bunny Hop which was in aid of the hospice, a charity which is very special to us as one of our church members and dear friend was in there before she died last year. It was lovely to get a visit from Penny the Squirrel – even though some of the children were a little in awe of such a towering figure. They did enjoy the Bunny Hop around the church some weeks ago and we very much appreciated donations from parents, friends and members of the church."

On a beautiful Sunday in July, four people made a further step on their Christian journey by going through adult baptism at Mount Zion Church, Cliviger. The church was full with church friends and guests of the four.

"It was a moving and lovely witness," said Shirley Ashworth, who is part of the leadership team at the church.

"Like many churches, we are witnessing a growth in people interested in learning more about the Christian faith and I'm sure we will be seeing more adult baptisms in the coming days."

Epping Green Chapel, Essex

Here at Epping Green Chapel in Essex, we continue to serve a small rural community with a deep desire to make Christ known through faithful Bible teaching, pastoral care, prayer, and fellowship. Over the past year, we have seen encouraging developments through our Sunday services, Bible studies, online teaching, and community outreach.

One of the unique aspects of ministry here is helping people engage with the Scriptures through the original Greek language of the New Testament and the historical context of the early Church. As a Greek minister serving within an English-speaking community, I have found that many people become newly excited when they discover the richness and depth behind familiar Biblical passages. Whether during sermons, Bible classes, or conversations over tea after the service, there is a growing hunger for serious but accessible teaching rooted deeply in Scripture.

This year also marks a personally significant milestone, as I prepare for ordination within the Free Church of England. It has been a humbling and encouraging journey, and I remain deeply grateful for the support, prayers, and fellowship of many brothers and sisters along the way.

Alongside local ministry, I have also begun opening opportunities to teach seminars and workshops in churches on subjects such as Biblical interpretation, Greek insights into the New Testament, the early Church Fathers, expository preaching, and understanding the Bible within its original historical and cultural setting. If any churches within the network would ever be interested in hosting such a seminar or teaching day, I would be very happy to hear from them.

In a time when many churches face uncertainty and discouragement, we continue to believe that God still works powerfully through His Word, through faithful local fellowship, and through ordinary Christians quietly serving their communities in the name of Christ.

St. Andrews Community Church, Craven Arms, Shropshire

I am so pleased to tell you that Stephen, our new part-time Pastor, has settled in to his post brilliantly. We in the congregation have definitely felt that God has sent him to us to invigorate us as a church, and lead us into a more dynamic awareness of the power of God. Praise be to God!

Although we have sadly lost a couple of our more elderly family to the Lord, He has brought into the family many new regular folks who have come through our doors to join us as we move forward together with Stephen.

We now have well-attended weekly prayer groups set up in their homes, along with a weekly church drop-in for social time together.

It is so good to see God working in our community, bringing people together for prayer, chat, and questions. Especially as so many people are finding life more and more difficult in this world we live in.

As we continue to expand our outreach, we give our thanks and praise to the Lord, knowing that he is with us always, and that it is His plan that all our endeavours here at St. Andrews are following.

Praise be to the Lord!

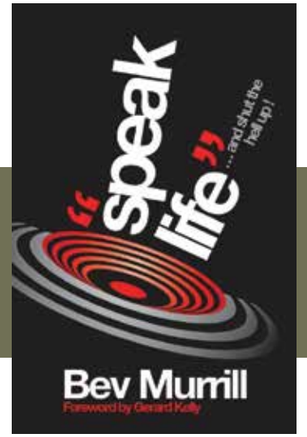
Autumn Book Review

Speak Life ... And Shut The Hell Up

By Bev Murrill

Reviewed by Ruth Leigh

Bev Murrill



First things first. What, exactly, in the context of the Christian experience, is speaking life? According to its author, it is, "...a way of harnessing and discipling language as a servant of the purposes of God." In the twenty-first century, bombarded with bad news, AI slop and divisive language, it's more important than ever for followers of Jesus to change the way they speak, to invite the Spirit in daily as they engage with others and to stop trying to do everything in their own strength.

Over twelve chapters, Bev uses a mix of Bible stories, personal anecdotes and spiritual wisdom to unpack this concept in a refreshingly honest way. She refers to the story of Elijah, Ahab and the prophets of Baal, an unbeatable example of a flawed human trusting in God and changing the spiritual atmosphere. Elijah was living in a society run by evil rulers who practiced devil worship. "Elijah challenged the spiritual climate by calling for a duel: he and his God versus the prophets and their gods. Elijah was not intimidated by the fact that there were hundreds in the opposing party. He knew that any one person plus God is a majority."

This is powerful stuff and we ignore it at our peril. It's easy to get distracted by the noise of the world around us to and to forget that words, when infused with the Holy Spirit, really can change everything. Bev gives the example of a church office where one volunteer was causing huge problems with her attitude. The office manager prayed every morning, taking authority over the issues causing problems and breaking the spiritual powers of control and other spirits. She called on the power of the blood of Jesus to cleanse the office and to bind anything not of God. It wasn't long before the atmosphere changed and the volunteer causing the issues left.

It's important to note that in this story there weren't any meetings, or joint prayer sessions, or whispered consultations by the photocopier. Just one woman of faith praying to God to change the atmosphere, which He duly and powerfully did.

Bev understands the issues we face as flawed humans.

"How often we rail at the circumstances we find ourselves in, without any comprehension that God has seeded us into that place because it needs a strong Christian presence."

She reminds us that God spoke the universe into being and that we only have to speak out His words to see change coming. She digs into what faith actually is and how we share it. There are some lines which made me smile.

"The trouble with a lot of Christians is that they have been trained to think that the joy of the Lord is a serious business."

Indeed. The tone of this book is uplifting, practical and encouraging, just what a follower of Jesus needs. I found Chapter Six, "The Devil Knows Your Language" particularly helpful. "The devil deliberately learns the language that our hearts will listen to and respond to." He preys on our weaknesses and tries to deceive and mislead us. All we need to do (and this is hard!) is to speak truth into his lies every single time. Chapter Eleven is full of the most remarkable testimonies about speaking life into seemingly intractable issues.

This is an engaging, Scripture-based read, full of great advice and uplifting stories. Bev is most certainly filled with the spirit of encouragement. I closed the book with her last words ringing in my ears.

"Go on. The world is waiting for you. What are you waiting for?"

Broadgrace, Norfolk

Sunday 6th September will mark the final service of Broadgrace Church. In the kindness of the Lord, we will be multiplying into Broadgrace Buxton and Broadgrace Coltishall from Sunday 13th September. Thank you for praying with us over the years – we can testify to the ongoing faithfulness of our Father in answering those prayers.

Planting a new church in Buxton (the Norfolk village rather than the Peak District town!) gives us an opportunity to reflect on the Lord's kindness over the years. This is so good as it both moves our hearts to faithful praise and also fills us with hope for the next season. Since the Lord planted our church in 2010, we have seen some saved, many others growing in faith and a warm and close church family develop.

This means that multiplying into two churches will be painful as we face the reality of not being together week by week. There is excitement at the opportunities of sharing the good news of Christ more widely and so we feel a mix of emotions. The promise of ultimately being together again in the New Creation is something we are trying to prefigure with plans for joint prayer meetings and other gatherings. Alongside this hope, we also have the prayerful expectation that the Holy Spirit who has worked such love and unity among us will do so once again.

This is the nature of Christ's kingdom – an expanding goodness as his love goes out. He paid a great cost to save us and we are sure that he will finish the work He has begun for our joy and His glory. Please do pray with us as we step into a new season with our Shepherd guiding us all the way.

Fenlands Tydd Gote, Lincolnshire

The church is increasingly seeing new visitors as it continues to preach and teach the Word. A new series on the many aspects of relationships is currently in progress, as is a Sunday focus on the Book of Genesis.

The fellowship has also hosted the area's Churches Together Prayer Evening, which was well attended. The theme of unity was at the heart of the gathering. In another outreach to the community, a Taster Day was held with music, games and food, opened up to the local community. Our movie night, now becoming a regular feature, was very successful, with the showing of "Risen", a great movie around the resurrection.

The ongoing work of local Church in the Home continues, with encouragements to reach our local communities, through involvement in local events alongside our own activities. Alongside this our older YAP (the older youth group) continues to grow.

Authors in our community continue to publish their books. New blogs and studies on the church website (www.fenlandschurch.co.uk) have attracted many visitors as they build up faith and encouragement in the Scriptures.

Not only is the spiritual building up of the church increasing, we have also received a grant from Grange Windfarm Community Fund that enabled the installation of new windows, for which we are very grateful.

The Place by the Water, Shottisham, Suffolk

Over the years we have been joined by a variety of puppet friends, at events, services, schools and storytelling. They bring a real joy to children (and adults) alike.

This summer, we ran workshops to enable people to 'have a go' or build on existing skills. We also made pizzas to ensure that everyone had a great time.

Puppetry is a great skill for people in ministry as it builds confidence and can shape stories and narrative. When children work with puppets, it allows them to shape stories and scripts and can reassure and calm them in certain situations.

With the success of these summer puppetry workshops, we may well be doing them again. The people who attended learned how to work with puppets, to write scripts for them and picked up some really useful basic skills.

Watch this space!

Rural Mission Hubs

Rural Mission Hubs aim to support and encourage pioneers, practitioners, and permission givers, as well as those looking to explore pioneering rural ministry and mission. They are an opportunity to share stories and encouragements, pray together, explore ideas, and listen to God together. It is a gathering of like-minded explorers with an open door to anyone seeking a safe place to be, and as such, invites you to join us on the journey.

Future Rural Mission Hub dates:

16th September: N E & Borders
St Cuthbert's Centre, Holy Island, Northumbria

17th September: East Midlands
Launde Abbey, Launde, Leicestershire

30th September: East Devon
Pippins Community Centre, Axminster, Devon

1st October: East Anglia
Clare Priory, Clare, Suffolk

5th October: Northern England
Scargill House, Nr Skipton, North Yorkshire

8th October: Thames Valley
St Mary's Convent, Wantage, Oxfordshire

For the latest details on all Rural Mission Hubs go to www.ruralministries.org.uk/rural-mission-hubs

Bawtry Community Church, South Yorkshire

"Building Bridges, One Puzzle at a Time"

At the time of writing, the event I'm describing has not yet taken place. However, by the time you read this, it will already be over, and I hope we'll be able to look back and see how God was at work through it.

Each year, our town hosts a community festival, with local groups and organisations running a wide range of activities. This year, our church has joined in by hosting a puzzle room event. While some might call it an escape room, it is really a series of puzzles and challenges that participants solve as they move from table to table.

At first glance, it may seem unusual for a church to run an event that is not overtly Christian. Yet our aim is to create opportunities for relationships. We want to provide a welcoming and enjoyable environment where church members can invite friends, neighbours, and colleagues. We hope people will become more familiar with the church and discover that Christians are ordinary people who enjoy friendship and community.

A great deal of work has gone into preparing the event, particularly by one dedicated member of the congregation. We have used a mixture of online resources and AI tools to help with the planning. Attendance has been limited to sixty people aged fifteen and over, making this one of the few events we have run specifically with older teenagers and adults in mind.

Please pray that this event will bear fruit. Whether through conversations, new friendships, or future opportunities, we trust that God can use even simple community events to build relationships and advance His kingdom.

"In service of the King of Kings"

Parkview Chapel, Botesdale, Suffolk

As Church, we are always considering the different ways in which we can reach the people in our community. We know that this means individually as 'Church' we want to have opportunities to share the good news with our friends and neighbours. But also it means corporately thinking of ways we can bring folks in our community together. Since the last edition of MOSAIC, we have held three different events to attempt to do this.

Our annual, 'Fish & Chip Quiz Night,' was very successful. One hundred and sixteen people, forming eighteen teams, meant an awful lot of fish and chips … the following morning's service did smell like we were in the local chip shop! This was about quizzing, food, and building relationships with those that come. Given that three-quarters of those in attendance were not churched, it was a fantastic opportunity which we didn't waste.

At a recent Men's Breakfast, we had twenty eight men come and enjoy all the works (cereal and toast, followed by a full English, along with tea, coffee and fruit juice.) We also invited a speaker from the 'Mission Aviation Fellowship' to come and share about their work and why they do it. Half of the men that came were not Christians, so to eat with them and talk about our faith was special.

We then held a Beetle Drive, new to many of the attendees. It's simple – you have to build a beetle by rolling a dice, and, depending on what number you roll you add a part of the beetle until someone has the whole thing. This was a fundraiser for one of our young people, Emily, who is going on a mission trip to Croatia this summer. But once again people came, whether Christians or not, to support her. And as a Church, it was another opportunity to spend time with folks.

What we call Church is not about events and numbers *per se*. But for us, it is about relationships and being the 'Church For The Community' that our sign says we want to be. Do pray that these relationships built will bear fruit.

ReBorne Community Church, Sherborne, Dorset, and Milborne Port, Somerset

It has been a joy to continue to deepen roots into the community on both sides of the Somerset-Dorset border in recent months.

The new building in Milborne Port, Somerset is now being well-used with after-school children's clubs drawing an enthusiastic following. The coffee shop is open five and a half days a week and continues to attract locals as well as church members. Evening services once a month at the site and midweek prayer meetings are now regular features of worship at the heart of the village.

Over in Sherborne, Dorset, the gospel is being communicated regularly in care homes. The Abbey View Care Home is the venue for a weekly outreach, "Truth Be Told", in which pre-school children join in to share the Good News through intergenerational storytelling, as residents, mums and children mingle. "It is a privilege to share the love of Jesus in this way," one of the helpers reflects. At The Hayes, ReBorne has the privilege of bringing God's word and wonderful old hymns into this local council care home. The services take place once a month on a Sunday afternoon. There are a few regular attendees and often extras with family members, who are most welcome.

"It is well known that community singing is great for our mental health," another helper shares. "There are folk there who struggle with speech but are able to sing, and it is a joy to watch their faces. I love to read from the Bible and ask that the Holy Spirit will make His word relevant to our current circumstances."

We pray that in both homes the truth of the Word will indeed be real to many and provide an awakening that draws them to a relationship with the Lord.

Spiritual Practices in Community

by Jon Timms

July 2026 marks ten years since my family left our home on the north coast of Cornwall and moved to southeast Scotland. We moved to start a church community that came to be part of the 24-7 Prayer network. From the outset, what brought us together wasn't simply what we believe, a clearly defined, black and white statement of faith. The question was always, how do we cultivate an ecumenical, Jesus-centred community, where all people can belong even if there are differing theological opinions and doctrinal beliefs? It may have been a little naïve, but we hoped those from different streams and experiences of the Christian faith, and those who might be simply curious about this Jesus fella, could exist together, learn together, worship together, break bread together, and grow in community.....despite the differences.

Truth be told, sometimes it was magical, sometimes it was like walking through treacle, and other times it was really challenging and relationships were fractured.

One thing that we learned quite early in our journey as Discovery Church Dunbar was that this exploration of community needed spiritual practices at its core. They can offer an invitational, inclusive, and expansive place to explore and encounter Jesus, for all willing to participate; like a container that holds us all. And it doesn't matter if we're arriving with the joy of the Lord, or deeply troubled, or at the edges of our faith, at the end of the line – we can all come, lay down the burdens we carry and sit with others and turn our gaze towards Jesus. Like the old adage suggests, we journey 'alone-together'. God meeting with us exactly where we are, as we learn to keep company with him.

The question was always, how do we cultivate an ecumenical, Jesus-centred community?

For me, I feel close to God when I'm outside and therefore it makes sense to make a regular practice of spending time with God in prayer whilst walking on the beach or in the woods.

It's worth noting at this point that mastering spiritual and contemplative practices isn't the point here. The desire that motivates us might be to live and walk in freedom, close to the heart of God. Practices are simply a pathway to that end, a route to explore and experience more of God. Hopefully, a practice that's meaningful to you as an individual or a community, in the end, brings you closer to deep and rich union with God, Jesus, and Holy Spirit, and effects lasting transformation.

A great resource for exploring spiritual practices is a book by Adele Ahlberg Calhoun called Spiritual Disciplines Handbook (does what it says, really). Regarding transformation she says, "We simply desire....we bring our ache and our longings. Then we keep company with Jesus by making space for him through a spiritual discipline. Our part is to offer ourselves lovingly and obediently to God. God then works within us doing what He alone can do. God is free to come to us in spiritual disciplines as He wills, not as we demand. But unless we open ourselves to Him, we might miss Him altogether."

Through the centuries, the Church has implemented routines of practices and disciplines that most denominations and streams share. The obvious ones are prayer, the eucharist, reading and study of scripture, worship, fellowship, fasting, confession and giving. These are used as ways to develop communion with Jesus and to grow in relationship with Him. However, if these become performative or are done for the wrong reason and motivation, they fail to bring transformation.

The aforementioned practices could be called classical practices. But there are others, more unique to an individual or community that we could call non-classical. An example of this could be getting out into nature. For me, I feel close to God when I'm outside and therefore it makes sense to make a regular practice of spending time with God in prayer whilst walking on the beach or in the woods. The same could be said of a Forest Church or church eco group. Maybe as an artist or musician, painting or playing your instrument could be a practice of encounter and worship and therefore much needed intentionality to cultivate a routine. What about prayer? We can easily get a bit stuck with our personal or denominational practice or understanding of prayer. We might like to try lectio divina, visio divina, centring prayer, meditation, prayer walking, or using other creative pursuits as a way in which to connect with God and each other.

The beauty and joy of spiritual practices is how they are outworked in community. We are shaped by those around us, hopefully for the better, and encouraged by those further on the journey of faith with God than we are. Walking with God is not a linear path. There are many twists and turns, even U-turns! The path of becoming is often twinned with the path of unbecoming. And this is much better if we have companions and others who help us to see things from a different perspective, or who can bring their experiences and stories that broaden and stretch us; companions help us when we tire and need picking up, and then in turn we can help others when they are in need.

There is an ebb and flow to community that is truly humbling and glorious when the love of God, a genuine love for each, and a culture of willing forgiveness are all present.

A community of shared practice will look different depending on the context and the unique charism of each community. Larger congregations will have to adjust and take a very different approach to a small new monastic community or house church. Whatever church you're in, when you're looking at new practices, it's good to begin with your core values. Then you can look at how you outwork those values through practices. For example, you may have a value of 'one-anothering' in your church. If so, what practices could you introduce that enable you to cultivate a culture where the 'other' is seen, witnessed, listened to, cared for, loved, and encouraged to thrive? When we first began Discovery, we centred around Intimacy, Creativity and Purpose. Intimacy with God, Jesus and Holy Spirit as individuals and in community; creativity in all we do and in our approach to life, relationships, mission, and community; and to live Christ-centred with intentionality and purpose in our choices, our endeavours, our families, and our church.

I encourage you to explore spiritual practices/disciplines further in your church. Begin with where you are at. You're probably doing more than you think already. Is there a unique charism upon your community? How are you committing to nurturing and sustaining each other? What is it like for others to enter into your space? Are they welcomed and accepted, could they find belonging among you?
A final word from Discovery. In the early days we began using the phrase Limping Pilgrims, Curious Explorers. It perfectly encapsulated who we were and still are. It was invitational. Bring your limp, your wound, your doubts and your fears; and be curious and willing to explore. God wants to show us the depths and breadths of the Kingdom, to taste and see! I encourage you all to do the same. It's a truly wild and transformational ride!

Maybe as an artist or musician, painting or playing your instrument could be a practice of encounter and worship and therefore much needed intentionality to cultivate a routine.

Our inspiring feature shines a light on selected missional partners in each edition.

Joy Dimond, Missional Listener

I've been a Missional Listener, originally in Stow-on-the-Wold and now Tetbury, for seven years. When I moved to Tetbury, my connection with Rural Ministries colleagues, the Northumbria Community and God himself reassured me. My place had changed but my calling had not.

I was invited to join the Commons Cooperative Discovery Tables, which I found extremely encouraging. I applied for a job as a Festive Colleague in Tetbury's one and only supermarket. This was a wonderful opportunity, teaching me so much about the community. It wasn't a permanent role so I had the time to attend a leadership conference where I met with two of the regional ministers from my new Baptist network at WebNet.

Invited to join the leadership days, I could worship with others, pray for them and dwell in the word, a huge blessing. My first grandchild, Oliver, was born prematurely in February. He's thriving, covered in prayer by Rural Ministries, The Commons Cooperative and WebNet, who now consider him 'part of the family.'

I'm now the Community Champion at the supermarket. I haven't been back long, but I have seen several random acts of kindness, including a young man paying for an elderly gentleman's shopping and a lady taking a foreign visitor back to the fuel pumps to pay for his fuel when his overseas credit card wouldn't work. I was also hugely encouraged by a comment from a lady passing by who said, "You're doing the Lord's work. I'm not religious, but I can see what you are doing by helping these customers."

I learned about a project called Empty Chairs. I realised that God was nudging me to host a table in Tetbury! I approached my local pub who offered me a weekly table. As host, I simply turn up in an orange hoodie and wait for people to join me. The Empty Chairs Instagram and Facebook group share the locations and events daily. Conversations flow, we have several Christian regulars and whilst we are not setting out to 'convert' anyone, we can share stories together and support everyone that comes along.

I am so grateful to God for all the opportunities and connections in my new home and community – I look forward to more!

NETWORK SPOTLIGHT

Life Centre (Wychwood Baptist), Oxfordshire

Jesus said: 'I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.' (John 10v10).

Keep on running ...

This time last year, our article focused on our Fun Run. We give thanks for another successful run this year, our third. Despite the rain, one hundred and fourteen (of one hundred and sixty who booked) turned up to run either 2.5k (children's), 5K or 8K. It's proving to be a great community event. Please pray it helps us develop relationships.

Kingdom builders ...

Over the summer we had another Holiday Club outreach. Please pray that the seed sown bears fruit in these young lives, and that it leads us to opportunities to share the gospel with parents/guardians.

As we head into September, we look forward to the return of our NGage Youth group and meeting the (usually high influx of) new year 7s. Amongst all the fun activities, we share the gospel each week and would value prayer for us in this. Pray too for our older youth. Last term we started a new group, meeting two or three Sunday evenings a month, doing 'Vox' – the Youth 'Christianity Explored' course. We hope to continue the group over this new school year.

Mission & more ...

During October the local gospel partnership are involved in a mission, with various outreach events. Please pray for us as we consider how best to be involved in this. Also, as we head into the Autumn / Winter, please pray for other outreach opportunities we will be involved in – from Harvest celebrations to Light Parties, and a number of Christmas events.

Do pray with us that all we do may give us opportunities to point people to Jesus.

From Where I Sit

Rachel Oatridge is a Missional Listener and Enabler in Lincolnshire, along with her husband Jonathan. They are Co-Principals of The Light College & Collective (training, equipping and connecting disciples for mission), and as qualified coaches, they run Oatridge Coaching. They also parent two amazing daughters.

Where are you in the UK?

We live in a village in North Lincolnshire, but the College which we lead is nationwide – meeting virtually and in-person for residential weekends – so we travel to various locations across the UK with that role.

'Loving relationship and radical obedience are the path to fulfilment and joy.'

Who or what has had the biggest impact on your faith?

Aside from Jesus, I think it would have to be my parents. They brought myself and my four brothers up in a house where faith was an everyday, whole life practice. My Mum instilled the Word of God in us through her example of reading the Bible and praying every morning and in teaching about how to obey it through daily occurrences. My Dad helped me to think about my faith, expanding my understanding through questions and discussion of different views. They both live out what they believe in everyday life and I'm so very grateful for them being in my life.

What do you know now about Jesus that you didn't ten years ago?

Lots of things that I've learnt in the last ten years are aspects of Jesus that I thought I knew, but which I have come to understand at deeper levels. One of these is Jesus' radical obedience to his Heavenly Father. Jesus spent time with his Father and then lived out what He commanded Him to do and say. As a disciple of Jesus, I'm also called to this. The path of listening obedience isn't glamorous, easy or rich in monetary terms, but it's exciting, adventurous and fulfilling. It's also the path of incredible liberty – dwelling in Jesus' presence and living out of this relationship means I don't need to worry about results or proving something. Loving relationship and radical obedience are the path to fulfilment and joy.

Tell me your favourite story about connecting in your community.

I had a conversation with someone in the business community who does renewable energy assessments for organisations (which often include churches) and is a self-confessed atheist. He observed that many people in church seem to "worship the building", and as I shared my own understanding of Church being a community of people, he became increasingly curious. This led to a conversation about whether or not it mattered whether Jesus was just a good teacher or the Son of God. The next day, he said in passing that I had, "made him ask himself existential questions." I love that! We don't need to force the gospel on people, just have conversations that relate faith to a person's everyday life.

What does pioneering where you are look like to you?

How long have you got? For me, mission or pioneering is not an event, it's a lifestyle. It's about dwelling in God and recognising that He dwells in me wherever I go, and immersing myself in the community that God has called me to which, at the moment, is the business community in our region. Currently, that's being intentionally physically present, immersing ourselves in the business community (of which we are a part, as we run our own business growing people through coaching and training), sensing where God is at work and curating our diary so that there are margins where we are available to love and listen to people in the business world.

If you're not at work, where am I most likely to find you?

In the wild! Jonathan and I both love being in nature so we try to get into the hills, mountains and to the coast when possible. I especially love borrowing my parents' camper and just roaming around Scotland. It brings me an incredible sense of freedom and perspective and I've learnt it is essential for my spiritual wellbeing.

RM Zoom prayer

30 minutes to connect and pray with others in rural ministry

Monthly: 1st Tuesday 10am

Diary Dates:

1st September ☑
6th October ☑
3rdNovember ☑
1st December ☑

Scan to join, or go to the link on the home page of our website.

www.ruralministries.org.uk

Meeting with God in a Quiet Place

by Ruth Leigh

Finding space in which to reflect and pray is a Biblical principle. Again and again in the gospels, we see Jesus walking away from the crowds to find a quiet place to pray and to restore Himself.

I know this. I've been a Christian over half my life. I'm aware that taking time for oneself is vitally important.

I'm just not very good at it.

In my forties, I loved going to Sizewell Hall, a "thin place" on the Suffolk coast for our church weekends away. With three children to look after and lots of activities, you couldn't call it a retreat, exactly, but I could see what people meant when they spoke about finding God in a place, or resting with Him.

I'm not very good at resting either.

Fast forward to today, where I now have the privilege of acting as the Editor of MOSAIC magazine and working with the incredible people at Rural Ministries. RM run regular Rural Hubs all over the country and I can now, finally, say that I have learned the benefit of retreating.

For me, attending an RM retreat hub is both instructional and revelatory. Yes, I'm there armed with a notebook and pen to meet people, to chat, to find stories for future editions. But I'm also there as someone who needs to get away, to reflect and to spend time on a guided retreat with God.

In May this year, I headed to Launde Abbey in Leicestershire for an RM hub. It had been a busy year and I knew that I would benefit from spending time on a guided retreat run by Sam, our Director for the East of England.

Leaving the A14 behind, I found myself driving through chocolate box villages with thatched cottages and stone walls. The sun was shining, the sky blue, nature resplendent in all its glory. It was easy to thank God as I drew nearer to Launde and I felt a sense of anticipation as my satnav told me I had almost reached my destination.

As my car rattled over the cattle grid at the entrance, the road dropped down into a valley so green that any self-respecting writer would struggle not to be inspired. It was dotted with wild flowers and sheep grazed peacefully on the sloping grass.

Originally a twelfth-century priory built by Augustinian Canons, the retreat house offered hospitality to pilgrims for four hundred years. Like so many others, it fell victim to Henry VIII's rapacity for money and property and he handed it to Thomas Cromwell in 1539. His son lived there modestly, keeping his head down politically and dying safely in his bed. From the mid-seventeenth-century to 1957, it was a private estate owned by a succession of wealthy families. Cecil and Lilian Rawlins Coleman returned Launde to the church when they gifted it, along with its four hundred and fifty acres of woodland and land, to the Diocese of Leicester so that they could use it as a retreat house and conference centre.

As I walked into my bedroom with its views of the lawn and the woodland and fields beyond, I felt completely at peace. Dusk fell as I gazed out of my window until the owls began hooting and the stars started to twinkle and it was time for bed.

'I was able to focus on the here and now, to really listen out for the Lord's voice and to calm the busyness in my mind.'

Next morning, the sunshine-coloured napkins, light oak furniture and friendly staff in the breakfast room welcomed me. Any guest who wants a silent retreat wears a special lanyard and there was a sense of peace as we all helped ourself to breakfast, without any of the chitchat you normally get over the muesli and the Full English.

Our morning was guided by Sam and I loved every minute. My phone was turned to silent and I was able to focus on the here and now, to really listen out for the Lord's voice and to calm the busyness in my mind.

As a writer, every time I visit somewhere new, I see it as walking into a room full of stories, and this was no exception. I finally got to meet two amazing ladies who I had interviewed for MOSAIC, along with the other hub guests who were delightful. We enjoyed lunch together then had a couple of hours of free time.

I love chatting to other people, but on this particular day, I knew that I was meant to walk in the grounds by myself and to listen out for God. The weather was glorious, blue skies with fluffy white clouds, warm sunshine and the grass and trees a shouting emerald green. I found the Quiet Garden and having walked around it and admired all the wild planting, I sank on to a bench and closed my eyes.

The Augustinian Canons who once lived here would have seen much the same view and heard much the same sounds. Birdsong was everywhere, the heady scent of blossom and flowers in the air and with no cars or planes, I could have been in any century. Who knows how long I sat there, my face raised to the sun, but I heard His voice and saw a picture of a jug of living water, sparkling and shining as no earthly water ever could.

That vision has sustained me since I came back from Launde. I don't know what it means or how it will play out, but I do know that I was enormously blessed by the retreat. What a privilege it is to spend time with other people of faith in a thin place, seeking the Lord's voice.

If you would like to book a place on an RM hub, just check out our complete list on page 13 or scan the QR code:

Pinchbeck Baptist Church, Lincolnshire

We are very blessed to be increasing our membership numbers. Angie joined us last year and has brought her kindness, gentleness, humour and faith to our midst. Here is her story....

'One day not so long ago, my dear friend Trudy invited me along to a Monday morning Tea, Coffee, Toast at Pinchbeck Baptist Church and little did I know what the Lord had planned for me!

My faith is deeply rooted in both my heritage and my belief in Jesu (Yeshua) as the Messiah. As a Messianic Jew, my identity reflects how I worship and how I understand scripture. I am now firmly rooted at Pinchbeck Baptist led by Pastor Sue.

It is a place where my faith in God and Jesus come together in a meaningful way. My church has given me love, support and friendship, and Pastor Sue's sermons have helped me understand the Bible deeply, and through a Messianic connection to the New Covenant.

Attending Pinchbeck Baptist has been an important part of my spiritual journey. I have grown in faith, serving others through helping with communion, serving tea and coffee, weekly prayer team and reading the Word in front of the congregation. I feel encouraged and strengthened, which is a very important part of my calling, and helps draw me close to the Lord. I am able to worship openly and my background gives me a unique perspective which has been embraced by my church family.

My parents, brother, aunts and uncles all disowned me when I came to faith. But my Pinchbeck Baptist Church family, my walk with Yeshua, the mentors I have who listen to and answer the still confusing questions I have with patience and love, all reflect my belief and knowledge that I will never be forsaken again.

My wonderful church has given me my family in our Messiah.'

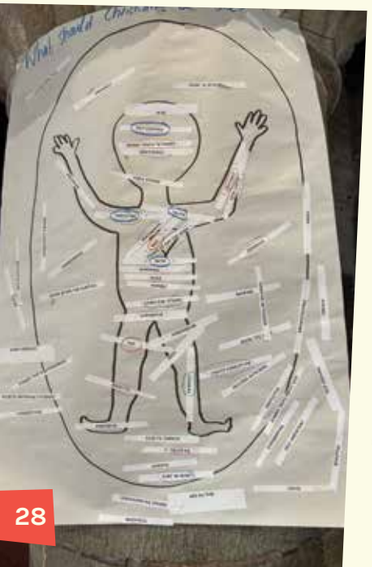
Abbeydore Deanery, Herefordshire

"Getting rooted in faith with Abbeydore Teens"

This term in Abbeydore Deanery, we've started a new youth group for eleven to sixteen year olds called Rooted (inspired by the Scripture Union resource of the same name). This is currently in a monthly after-school format, meeting in Kingstone Church from 4.00 – 5.30pm, which gives the young people enough time to finish the school day and make the short walk from the school to the church (and anyone from further afield the time to make their bus journey!)

Rooted is intended to help build up the young people's self-confidence, develop reflective and leadership skills, and aid them in exploring faith from a Christian perspective. We've aimed our sessions at young people with an emerging interest in faith questions, as well as those who have previously participated in Messy Church during primary school.

Each session explores a question set by the young people themselves, there is an ice-breaker and snack, creative discussion space (making a poster together), journalling time, and prayer. The questions explored so far have been: 'What are the five most important characteristics for a Christian to have?' and 'Can you be a Christian and not follow all the rules of the Bible?'



We currently have a small core group of four, with hopes to develop into a regular group of six to eight (with plans to draw these young people in to help plan and lead some of our big festival services). This is currently a small-scale project (with a team of two leaders and a limited budget), but we have long-term plans to further develop this space as we recruit more leaders. Our vision is to begin with a general drop-in youth café (which Scripture Union call Rooted Hubs), before breaking away for the discussion group.

Millom Baptist Church, Cumbria

During the summer, Millom Baptist Church enjoyed lots of fun seasonal activities. As the building is quieter during the summer months, we organised some movie nights on the big screen and some family and all age services. We simply love welcoming visitors to our beautiful corner of the UK.

The new porch is being built as I write, and we anticipate a much warmer welcome as we can leave our main doors open and be seen through the windows – no draughts, a beautiful entrance and the chance for passers-by to peep through the glass and see what is happening – hopefully enticing them to come in and join us. This should be the last of the major structural projects, which have made our space warmer and more welcoming. Currently groups meeting include a dancing school, a choir, a toddler group, food bank and even classes on how to fall over safely!

Please pray with us for opportunities to share Jesus in words and action through all that we do.

Durrington Community Church, Wiltshire

Here at Durrington Community Church, we had a delightfully busy summer with two baptisms in July. They were two people who came to faith independently, including one who did Alpha with us last year. At the beginning of the year, we chose Romans10:13 as our verse for the year: "For whoever calls on the name of the Lord, will be saved."

We also had a stand at the annual Durrington Vehicle Show. We offered visitors an opportunity to rest in the shade of our gazebo, to add a prayer to our prayer box and to chat amid the bustle and the noise.

Our Lego-themed holiday club for children was a great success. These holiday clubs are always popular with around twenty children attending. And it wouldn't be the summer holidays without our traditional teddy bears' picnic which we held in the last week of August.

We have completed a six-week sermon series on Galatians. We are all signed up for the Global Week of 24/7 Prayer in September. We took part in last year's week and it was very successful.

But despite all the plans and activities, we are also actively praying and seeking on God as to what He wants us to do, rather than to do a lot of stuff and hope God will bless it.

Alnwick Baptist Church, Northumberland

Fifth Sundays occur four times a year, and on those Sundays we like to do things a little differently at Alnwick Baptist Church.

Instead of normal 'gathered worship', we encourage our church family to think missionally and to be innovative.

This could look like having a focused prayer for the persecuted church; holding a picnic for our families and their friends; taking a service in a retirement complex.

For my part, I love anything sport-related so it was great to welcome Al Johnson from The Message for a Sunday morning of seeing his football skills in action, taking part and listening to him speak about how football and faith have been integral in his life.

It was great to see parents and children engage with Al and to encounter his love for Jesus worked out through his football gift.

Beyond the walls of church, God is at work in brilliant ways. We just need to respond to His Holy Spirit nudge and think differently.

A Spirituality of Missional Communities

by Jo Allen

It could argued that every church community is missional by definition, but there is particular potency in those that begin with the primary intention of being missional in their community and, as a result, shape their church life around loving their neighbours. These communities have been given various names, among which planting and pioneering are common. They are not groups of people with of faith which replicate denominational patterns of worship, but seek to contextualise deeply what it means to be church in their setting, many of which are part of RM's beautiful network. These communities particularly find their telos in the missional nature of our God, and so they will be called missional communities.

Much of the uniqueness of these missional communities is found in how they live their lives in light of their faith, and so a missional spirituality becomes important. 'We can think of "mission spirituality" that enables Christians' relationships and lives to become the witness to the gospel toward the world. Mission spirituality is concerned with the spiritual resources from which mission springs.' (Ryu, 2024, p. 305) There are marked patterns of these resources within missional communities that resource contextual mission. Cathy Ross and Jonny Baker have written a wonderful book on this focusing on what they have discovered particularly amongst pioneers, acknowledging that, 'There is no one right way or approach to pioneering spirituality, there is simply great freedom in Christ.' (Ross and Baker, 2015, p. 14) As such, this article is by no means an exhaustive list, but highlights four key areas found in the literature: an understanding of the Spirit at work in the world, discernment, attentiveness and hospitality.

The Spirit at work in the world

This is the theology of the missio Dei. Mission is not something the church does, but the character of God that we get to participate in. This underpins a mission spirituality which seeks to discern the work of the Spirit in each context and respond accordingly (Zscheile, 2012, pp. 7 & 13). It also means that each missional community with a missional spirituality will look different in its own context. There is no cookie cutter.

This understanding turns power dynamics on their head. In mission, the church can easily say, "we have something to give you," but when we lean into the missio Dei, the church gives the power in mission back to God by asking, "where is the Spirit at work and how can we join in?" This should shape the actions of a missional community around discernment, listening and humility. A mission spirituality is fundamentally one that looks outwards, beyond oneself, to discover and follow Jesus (Ryu, 2024, p. 305). The theology that the Spirit is at work in the world deeply shapes a missional church community to give of themselves to their community.

> 'This kind of engagement may involve a subversive approach and will take us to the margins as we encounter injustice and strive to defeat it.'

Discernment

Discernment is needed if a missional church community is to seek out the work of the Spirit in the world. In Rural Ministries we call this 'missional listening.' This is a spirituality because it is not a one-time action at the beginning of a missional adventure, but a constant way of life that asks the missio Dei question, 'What is the Spirit doing and how can I join in?' Keifert and Rooms have written some wonderful short booklets on mission spirituality and missional communities, and they say that following

our missional God has an 'ethos of self-limitation and getting out of the way of the Holy Spirit.' (Keifert and Rooms, 2014, p. 14; Rooms, 2019; Rooms and Keifert, 2019). Discernment requires us to acknowledge that we do not know the programme, the service, the kids' group or the shelter that will display the love of Jesus in a particular context, but God does. As such, our task is not just to be God's love in the neighbourhood, but to discern the love that the Spirit is engaging in in our local community, and to join in. Discernment requires us not only to listen but to truly hear the other. The instinct is often to defend what already exists, whereas a missional spirituality, by contrast, receives these words honestly and asks how God may be calling the community to respond. Missional communities have a spirituality of deep listening and ongoing discernment.

Attentiveness

The word attentiveness is a huge buzz word in the mission and spirituality community. We may find that word helpful or irritating, but either way it has gained attention for a reason. We live in a busy world, with plenty of distractions, obsessed with success and growth, which can sadly be replicated in our Churches (Bradbury, 2024, pp. 164–166). Attentiveness is in antithesis to growth and acceleration in our time. A missional spirituality, shaped around attentiveness, provides the church community with an antidote to the chaos of the world, and creates patterns that allow each community to slow down and genuinely hear God, each other and their community. Attentiveness in Christianity, put simply, is paying attention to the move of God in ourselves, our communities and our world. Baker and Ross link contemplative practices like lectio divina* and the examen with attentiveness as helpful for this kind of spirituality (Baker, 2015, p. 397; Ross and Baker, 2015, pp. 11–12). Paul Bradbury's description of some core values of such communities as 'Small, slow, simple, sent, serving', captures a similar attentive spirituality. A spirituality of attentiveness allows each community to listen and notice where God is at work in order to join in.

Hospitality

When we think of hospitality, we often think of the person who readily opens their home to others, often involving food. Although this kind of hospitality is beautiful, this is not the kind about which I am writing. The hospitality of missional communities is a mutual relationship, one where the church community readily receives hospitality from others (Ross, 2008). 'To receive hospitality, then, is to overcome our prejudice and our assumptions about others and ourselves. It requires us to suspend, or even let go of, what we think is precious in order to receive what the other has to give us. 'It is not to stand on our culture, but to allow our culture to be open to different ways of thinking, being and doing.' (Keifert and Rooms, 2014, p. 17)Hospitality in this sense is both practical, through being a guest to those in our communities, and ethical, through being a guest in the way we approach others with our words and actions.

Ryu argues that this kind of hospitality is wrapped up in solidarity and the marginalised (Ryu, 2024, p. 311). In allowing those outside our church community to be host, we get to see how our neighbours live, and we gain solidarity through spending time in their world, which often places us amongst the marginalised. As Ross states 'This kind of engagement may involve a subversive approach and will take us to the margins as we encounter injustice and strive to defeat it.' (Ross, 2008, p. 175) However, receiving hospitality from those with less and on 'the margins reminds us of the paradoxical power of vulnerability and the importance of compassion.' (Ross, 2008, p. 172). Receiving from another, especially someone with less, requires a laying down of pride and of control and a picking up of vulnerability and compassion, a sense of 'letting-go' for Jesus (Ross and Baker, 2015, p. 10). A missional spirituality of hospitality allows a missional community to choose the other over themselves, to genuinely listen and walk with, beginning to understand and discover ways that God's love is present and where more of God's love is needed.

So What?

These four aspects of a missional community spirituality cause the Church to confront our own power and control issues, to let go and to be outward facing. It's a deep challenge to take the missio Dei seriously and seek out the Spirit in the world. This type of spirituality is both confronting and releasing, because when we truly listen to God, the Spirit in the world, the lives of our neighbours, we let the light of the Spirit in and we are undoubtedly transformed more and more into Christ's likeness. Practically this may mean fewer services and more community around the table, less volunteering on rotas and more relationships in the community and less responsibility on a single leader and more on the whole church community. These four aspects are not unique to missional communities, many churches display elements of each. However, a brief look at the literature suggests that they are central to a missional spirituality in these communities. They are valuable not only for understanding the ways these faith groups conduct themselves, but also for appreciating our diverse ecosystem of Churches, and learning from a church community whose telos is the missional Spirit.

Conclusion

The spirituality of missional communities is often based around an understanding of the Spirit at work in the world, discernment, attentiveness and hospitality. All four attributes lead to a sense of listening, a laying down of assumptions, barriers and powers that place the church over the community, and invite the church to be part of the community, ultimately joining in with the missional Spirit. Missional communities will all look different and be shaped by the missional activity of the Spirit through deep discernment, but always with the positive assumption that God is at work and we are called to join in. How can we adopt an understanding of the Spirit at work in the world, discernment, attentiveness and hospitality to discover more of Jesus' love in our communities?

A missional spirituality, shaped around attentiveness, provides the church community with an antidote to the chaos of the world, and creates patterns that allow each community to slow down and genuinely hear God, each other and their community.

*Lectio divina is a practice of reading a passage of scripture, sitting quietly and noticing what stands out, re-reading the passage and doing the same again, then journalling or, if done in a larger group, sharing what is discovered. The examen is a prayer at the end of the day which takes you through what has happened and where you have noticed God. Each practice creates the space to slow down, to listen and to notice the Holy Spirit.

A full bibliography for this article is available at the online version: www.ruralministries.org.uk/post/smc

Derbyshire Rural Chaplaincy

Each year we host an Evening on the Farm in Derbyshire where up to two hundred farmers gather together. This year, at the end of June, we were just north of Tideswell on a dairy farm. Those who came enjoyed a hog roast, stock judging, an informative tour of the farm and, most importantly, plenty of opportunity to chat with friends and family.

We host this event as we are aware how isolating it can be for those on small family farms and this is one small way in which we can bless them by bringing them together. It helps to raise the profile of the chaplaincy and gives the three chaplains an opportunity to meet and chat with many farmers and to remind them that we are here to give them pastoral and spiritual support. We finished the evening with lots of 'thank yous' and a prayer of blessing for the farm we were visiting and all the farms which were represented by the folk there.

We were blessed with the most gorgeous weather, beautiful scenery, some meaningful conversations and money was donated to the Ashgate Hospice in Chesterfield and the DRC.

Great Moulton Evangelical Chapel, Norfolk

"For where two or three gather in my name, there am I with them." (Matthew 18:20)

This scripture really emphasises the presence of Jesus among believers when they unite in faith. Bridget Pestell, a faithful member of the congregation at Great Moulton, left Norfolk to travel to South America recently. She took a hundred waterproof string bags filled with gifts, including a prayer card, for the children she met on her travels.

"One of the most significant things I learned about religion in South America was its ability to serve as a unifying force among diverse cultures. The idea of "One Body" in Christ resonates deeply, as it embodies the aspiration for unity among the different groups that populate the continent. Denominations such as Catholicism, Protestantism, and Evangelical movements have created communities that cross ethnic and cultural boundaries. These churches often serve as vital social networks, fostering connections and solidarity among people from various backgrounds," reports Bridget.

"In Brazil, the Catholic Church plays an important role in social issues, including education, health care, and community support. The rise of evangelical Christianity in countries such as Chile and Guatemala has created new religious dynamics, attracting followers from diverse social and ethnic backgrounds. This is the Church, not one culture, but one Christ."

Back at home, the congregation have been struggling with illness within the membership, including such distressing conditions as cancer, dementia and ongoing long-term sickness. However, they have continued to hold their usual coffee mornings and Sunday services and trust in God for everything.

From Norfolk to South America and back again, Bridget has been sharing the good news of Jesus.

"The Lord is my strength and shield, in Him my heart trusts, and I am helped; my heart exults, and with my song, I give thanks to Him." (Psalm 28:7).

Windmill Forest Church, Bottesford, Leicestershire

March and April were really busy months for us here at Windmill. This year our Forest Church sessions are focusing on exploring animals, insects and birds in the Bible. In March, our focus was bees. We looked at Bible verses and stories containing bees and learnt how they have to work as a community to make beeswax and honey. We compared that with how we as a church community can achieve more when we work together, than when we do things individually. There was an agape meal of bread and honey, and then we all made beeswax candles and enjoyed honey cake that our preschoolers had mixed and which we baked on the fire. We were joined for this session by a film crew from The FuelCast who filmed us as part of their 'Hidden Hope' film series.

On Saturday 4th April we held our annual interactive Easter Trail around the village of Bottesford, Leicestershire, which attracted more than three hundred people. The trail consisted of eight stations around the village telling the Biblical story from the Garden of Eden to the resurrection of Jesus through animals, crafts and things to eat! At each station, children collected an item relating to that trail station theme (such as a piece of dried apple or a wooden cross) for their Easter wreath that they then made at the end of the trail. Our most popular stations this year were the Garden of Eden where we had snakes to hold and sugared apples to toast, and our nativity station where miniature donkeys were waiting to be groomed and stroked. It was wonderful to see the children having a lot of fun and learning about Jesus at the same time and we had some fabulous feedback from parents asking us to run the event again next year!

In August, we ran six nature-based sessions for our pre-teen girls focusing on handling big emotions, building confidence in who God has them to be and learning how to calm our bodies through nature. The Bishop of Loughborough is visiting in early September to confirm five members of our community in their faith. More on that next time!

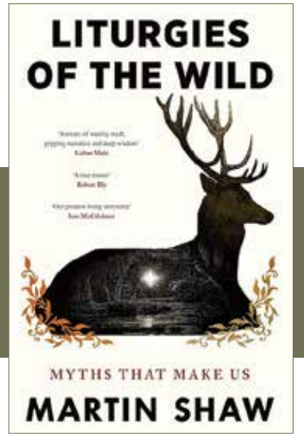
Autumn Book Review

Liturgies of the Wild

By Martin Shaw

Reviewed by Jon Timms

Martin Shaw



Dr Martin Shaw is an author, mythographer, lecturer, and wilderness/rites-of-passage guide. Myths and folklore form the foundations of his creative existence in the Devonshire countryside and around the world. I first saw him speak in Edinburgh as the opening act for Irish singer/songwriter Glen Hansard. So it was with great interest that I picked up his latest book, Liturgies of the Wild, which was released earlier this year and went straight into The New York Times Best Sellers list.

Shaw observes that growth and maturation only happen when *'cloaked in story and place'*. We remain unprepared for the road ahead into life if we are unaware of the stories that shape us, the invitations that call us onto something greater, and without the willingness to leave all that we've known and leave the shore, metaphorically but sometimes literally too.

The book journeys through a vast spectrum of the human experience. Within each chapter, Shaw unpacks key elements, drawing wisdom and insight from numerous Russian, Celtic, Greek, Norse and indigenous fairy-tales and folklore. With the kindness of a sage who bears the scars of hard-fought battles himself, Shaw guides us into our own lives and how these stories can speak to forgotten and neglected places in our hearts.

Mythology carries within it a pattern of *severance, threshold, return*. There is a time when all is well, but introduced is an act, incident, or threat to shatter the peace and harmony. This could be a war, an illness, a scandal, anything to shake things up. Threshold is the call to leave the known and the safe. Essentially, it is the initiation required to grow in wisdom and character. Here we face the demons, the storms, the unknown. This journey *must* unfold in order to return. Think of Paul's writing in Ephesians about putting off the old man and putting on the new. Or perhaps the disciples: many living the life of a fisherman out on the water, before a severing of their expected path through life. They are thrust into an adventure of risk, danger, and the unknown, but ultimately one that brings life in all its fulness. They are now *cloaked in story and in place*, and everything has changed. Bilbo leaves the Shire; Peter, Edmund, Susan and Lucy enter the spare room and the wardrobe; David is called out from his life as a shepherd boy. Examples are found in ancient myths and in modern tales alike, even the farm boy Luke Skywalker is awakened to the larger story and thrust into a threshold adventure against the evil Empire!

The book is continually underpinned with the larger story of Jesus. Are we resigned to the comfort of the Shire in our churches, unwilling to enter the arena of the adventure of Christ?

Shaw ends by asking the question, *'How do we find by will something that we were once gifted by grace?'* In truth, we can't. But we can take heart, we can open ourselves to the opportunities of the soul. He says, *'we can ready ourselves, deepen ourselves, humble ourselves. We have Christ's full attention – let's not waste it. In the end, its surrender to that loving attention that will get us home.....Don't let a chance like this go by.'*

I also love this so had to include it: *(Jesus) was a scandal from beginning to end. He was born a fugitive and died an outlaw, and then had the audacity to come back. He is the most countercultural God of them all. The bravest, the strangest and the most mystical. Don't go anywhere near him if you want your life to stay just-so.'*

"The book is continually underpinned with the larger story of Jesus."

Bootle Evangelical Church, Cumbria

We recently hosted a group of fourteen men from the London area who had come to stay in a small local hotel for a stag night. They found us online, just down the road. They informed us that they had received a warm welcome, an uplifting address and wonderful coffee. Which showed us that our digital footprint is bigger than we thought, as is our website, as we are receiving comments from as far away as Aberdeen, Edinburgh & Selkirk. This month, we say a fond farewell to Angela, the minister of the Church of England Church in Bootle. We wish her peace and blessings in her retirement.

Our usual activities of Keep Fit on a Monday, Coffee Mornings on a Tuesday and Bible Study on a Wednesday are continuing to be well supported.

Looking to the future, we are beginning to plan our Christmas events, the most popular of which are the visit of reception class children from the local school who come to sing Christmas songs, and a Songs of Praise at Christmas time itself.

Community Church Forest and Wye, Gloucestershire

Hello from Cinderford and Ross in the beautiful Forest of Dean and Wye Valley! After moving into our exciting new home in Cinderford last summer (a former sports bar and snooker hall), we have truly established ourselves in the heart of the town. Our new building is ten times larger than our previous space, and it has been a joy to see every area of ministry flourish while welcoming many new people to faith. The additional space has also enabled us to support other local organisations by making our premises available for their activities and events.

As we approach this summer, we are beginning the next phase of our building project. This includes replacing half of the roof to bring more natural light into the church and installing solar panels as we continue to invest in the future of our building and community.

Across both of our sites, we have also run two Christianity courses, and it has been wonderful to see God transform lives. Recently, we celebrated the baptism of five people in Cinderford with very different backgrounds and path to faith from a youth at sixteen years of age to a retired school teacher. We celebrated with a crowd of one hundred and eighty supporting and witnessing, with another baptism service planned in Ross for a further three people.

This summer we launched our Holiday Club which concluded with an all-age service on the Sunday to finish out the week and for the local children to attend with their families.

Coastal Roots Community, Perranporth, Cornwall

We kicked off 2026 with prayer walks and family gatherings around the table with good food and conversations. We've been working more with the other local churches, particularly the Methodist church where we've had some shared gatherings and have joined together to take prayer into the local primary school. The springtime saw weekends of learning, resting and playing, building relationships, praying together and growing as family. We hosted a big spring beach clean with our SAS friends, also hosting a prayer space on the beach at this event praying for global peace and climate justice.

We've been really encouraged to see the development and growth of Roots Kids this year, as a team has come together to gather the primary-aged kids for monthly fun, learning and friendship.

A definite highlight of this year has been our first ever Prayer Space in Schools, where we saw over two hundred primary-aged children come through the outdoor, interactive prayer spaces we set up at the school. The children fed back that they experienced peace, hope and calm and the staff were amazed at how the children engaged and their classroom atmospheres felt different.

We loved making a giant labyrinth prayer space on the beach at a music festival, creating a space for people to try praying. We celebrated more sea baptisms in the summer. It's always a joy seeing people grow in their relationship with Jesus and go deeper into being known, loved and sent by Him.

Please pray that our searching friends they come to discover who Jesus is and how much He loves them as we launch an Alpha course in the autumn. Please also pray for our community to go deeper in prayer and worship, as we go about our daily lives, that we would grow in wisdom and stature and that Jesus would build His church here in Perranporth.

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