China earthquake relief

AFTER an earthquake measuring 7 on the Richter scale hit China’s Sichuan province last month, Salvation Army personnel in the region carried out an assessment with a view to providing food and bedding. At least 200 people lost their lives in the disaster, with more than 11,500 injured and some 1.5 million left homeless.

In the city of Ya’an – the epicentre of the quake – Salvation Army personnel met with officials of four townships. Few buildings survived the initial quake or the aftershocks. Relief operations have been hampered by heavy rain.

Lettuce pray

THE Church of England in Lancashire has published a prayer for farming communities after severe weather caused damage to crops and led to thousands of sheep and cattle being lost.

The prayer – written by the church’s National Rural Officer, Canon Dr Jill Hopkinson – focuses on ‘all those who grow and produce … food in the most difficult conditions’ and asks God to ‘bless the work of all those who care for [the] land and animals’.

The Blackburn Diocese Rural and Environmental Project Officer, the Rev Chris Halliwell said: ‘The Church is here to support and help all our communities, urban and rural, and we encourage all parishes across Lancashire to use this prayer collectively in their regular services as well as individually in personal prayer.’

ANTI-TRAFFICKING organisations met last week at the London School of Economics to learn more about local and national priorities for supporting victims of human trafficking. Hosted by The Salvation Army, the Anti-Human Trafficking 2013 conference offered a mixture of keynote addresses, lively panel discussions, activity sessions and networking opportunities.

Minister for Victims Helen Grant, MP, opened the one-day event, explaining the Government’s role in dealing with the issue.

‘Over the last few years, good progress has been made in tackling and combating trafficking,’ she said. ‘Last year, we identified 1,186 victims. There’s still an awful lot more to be done. Prosecution, conviction rates and data-collection still need to be improved to gain a better understanding of the problem.’

The minister also shared her personal perspective:

‘Human trafficking is abhorrent and inexcusable. Every time I meet a victim or hear about a bad incident it brings a tear to my eye. It gets me. I want that to continue because if it gets me, it gets you and that’s how we are going to deal with it.

‘Each of us,’ she said, ‘can do more to identify the cause and prevent human trafficking so that perpetrators know that they have absolutely nowhere to hide.’

HISTORY OF PRACTICAL SUPPORT APPLAUDED

MP visits elderly care home

LABOUR MP Bob Ainsworth chatted to staff and residents at Youell Court, a Salvation Army care home in Coventry which provides help to 40 older people, including several with dementia.

During his visit to the home – which boasts a garden, orchard and hair salon – the MP for Coventry North East said: ‘The Salvation Army has a long history of offering practical support to those who are most vulnerable. It also has a history of empowering them to support themselves and live with dignity.’

Centre manager Tracey Furey added: ‘Not only do we offer a programme of engaging events and activities for all, we ensure older people are treated with respect, recognising and valuing the tremendous contribution they make to their families and communities.’

Becoming a Christian

There is no set formula to becoming a Christian, but many people have found saying this prayer to be a helpful first step to a relationship with God.

Lord Jesus Christ,
I am truly sorry for the things I have done wrong in my life. Please forgive me. I now turn from everything that I know is wrong.
Thank you that you died on the cross for me so that I could be forgiven and set free.
Thank you that you offer me forgiveness and the gift of your Holy Spirit.
Please come into my life by your Holy Spirit to be with me for ever.
Thank you, Lord Jesus.
Amen
JUST when they thought it was safe to go back on the beach, visitors to Weston-super-Mare seafront may encounter a scene from *Jaws*. Tourists and locals who head for the Weston Sand Sculpture Festival are also set to see representations of *King Kong*, *The Lord of the Rings*, *Star Wars* and James Bond films, as well as stars such as Audrey Hepburn, Marilyn Monroe and Robert de Niro and director Alfred Hitchcock. This is because artists have been turning sand into cinema.

Hollywood is this year’s theme for the annual festival, which has previously offered displays based on Great Britain – with depictions of Shakespeare, the Beatles and the Mini – and jungles.

The festival traces its origins back to 2006 when two sculptors from the Netherlands created a giant King Kong from 30 tonnes of sand on Weston seafront. Since then, it has hit the big time. This year, more than 20 artists were on the team which set about making use of 4,000 tonnes of sand. They are also holding a festival on Brighton’s coast, with the theme of music.

One of the team is Nicola Wood. She tells *The War Cry* that she discovered the art of sand sculpting seven years ago while travelling in Australia. Fascinated, she volunteered to help out and was later given a job.

‘To start with, I was detailing other people’s sculptures,’ she says. ‘Then I was trusted to have my own block of sand. I got addicted very quickly. After that, I started entering competitions.’

Nicola enjoys working with sand because it is ‘a forgiving medium’. She says: ‘It is temporary, so you don’t have to be perfectly accurate all the time. You are just making a statement or suggesting something.’

But is there a sadness connected with the temporary nature of sand sculptures? ‘A little bit,’ she admits. ‘I used to find it devastating when a sculpture I had worked so hard on was bulldozed or destroyed by rain. But now it is my favourite part of sculpting. The fact that it is temporary teaches you a lot about letting go of things and that nothing lasts for ever.’

There is more than a grain of truth in suggesting that sand is associated with transience. In the Patsy Cline song, love letters in the sand are washed away and symbolise a broken vow. Sand passing through an hourglass has given us the phrase ‘the sands of time’. The phrase ‘built on sand’ refers something that is destined to collapse – a phrase which comes from a book that Hollywood has adapted many times.

This book acknowledges the gritty reality that relationships can go wrong, good intentions can crumble and life itself always comes to an end. But the book – the Bible – also insists that something lasts for ever. In it, Jesus encourages people to realise that the foundation of their lives can be ‘built on rock’, rather than sand, by putting their wholehearted trust in God’s unchanging love (see Matthew 7:24–27).

Things never stay the same. But the Bible’s message is that when life hits us hard we can find hope, when we make a mess of our lives we can be forgiven, and when we look to the future we can allow it to be shaped by a love that lasts for ever.

By PHILIP HALCROW

Helena Bangert from The Netherlands works on a sculpture of King Kong

*Front page:* Radovan Zivny from the Czech Republic works on a sculpture of Gollum
Despite our technological age, when appliances of science fill our offices and homes and science stories dominate the headlines, many people are fearful of science. Phrases such as ‘blinded by science’ and ‘scientists playing God’ suggest that some people (scientists) have power over the rest of us (non-scientists) and that we are powerless to resist. These images are reinforced through fictional images of megalomaniac ‘mad scientists’.

In reality, science is rather more mundane.

Science is based on a number of self-evident, unprovable assumptions – or axioms – without which it cannot work. They include:

- The world is intelligible
  The world can be understood. Something that works in one part of the world will, under similar conditions, work everywhere else. The world can be trusted.

- The world is ordered
  The world is not chaotic. The world has constants. The world is inter-connected. For example, the climate affects food production, food affects health, health affects economic prosperity.

- People are rational
  Not all the time, maybe, but people are capable of making sense of what they see and of making logical thought-processes based on present observation and past experience.

Science, says the 1995 Concise Oxford English Dictionary, is ‘a branch of knowledge conducted on objective principles involving the systemised observation of and experiment with phenomena, esp. concerned with the material and functions of the physical Universe.’

The elements of knowledge, objective principles, systemised observation, experiment, material, function and physical Universe not only tell us what science is; but they also tell us what science is not.

- Knowledge. Science is about understanding how things interact and work.

- Objective principles. By building knowledge, based on the repeatability of a process, science describes principles. These can be expressed as ‘laws’, as in Boyle’s Law, or as
‘theories’, as in ‘String Theory’. Such principles, though, are open to modification or complete abandonment on the basis of new knowledge. For example, until the 17th century, it was believed that the Sun and planets revolved around the Earth.

Principles are not based on personal opinion or prejudice but on objectivity. So, for example, if we let go of a book it will fall. No matter how much we cherish or loathe the book; no matter how much we disbelieve it will fall; no matter how much we long for it not to fall, the law of gravity, without fear or favour, says it will fall. And if we try it, we find it does precisely that.

- Systemised observation. Scientific inquiry is pursued through methodical observation, recording and experiment. An insight of personal inspiration – an Archimedes-like eureka moment – has to be tested by systemised observation before it can be verified and become scientific fact.

- Experiment. School science lessons with their aim-method-results-conclusion format tell us that an idea, or hypothesis, is verified or falsified through a series of experiments, in which conditions are varied slightly in each round. In general understanding, experiments are how things are scientifically shown to be true or false.

- Material. Every branch of science focuses on one or more of the four states of matter: solid, liquid, gas and plasma.

- Function. As well as gaining knowledge, science seeks understanding. Science helps us understand how and why the world works.

- Physical Universe. Science deals with things contained in the Universe. One idea floated by some scientists is that there is more than one Universe – the multiverse theory. Critics argue that such an idea is not scientific because it falls outside the definition of science.

For all the width, diversity and wonder of the way in which science unravels the mysteries of the Universe, it has, by definition, limitations. Science does not deal with fantasy, fiction or matters of personal faith. Science does not test non-material elements such as emotions, ideas, opinions and beliefs.

Science cannot quantify or explain values such as altruism or heroism.

Science doesn’t handle meaning.

Science cannot explain whether and, if it does, how life has an ultimate purpose.

Science is good at answering the physical how? In certain areas, however, particularly those of philosophy or religion, it is not designed to answer the who? or the why?

So, while science can tell us that the Universe is 13.77 billion years old, whether we agree with the calculation or not, it cannot tell us why the Universe exists or if, indeed, a reason for its existence exists.

On a personal level, science cannot answer perhaps the most fundamental existentialist question of all: Why am I here? For that answer, we must look elsewhere.

- Next week: How science works
Comment

Financial package

BANKERS, says the Archbishop of Canterbury, ‘are not nearly as bad as one hoped that they would be.’ They do not, he says, appear before the Parliamentary banking standards commission on which he sits ‘with horns and a tail, burning £50 notes to light large cigars’.

The Most Rev Justin Welby – a former oil executive – made his comments during a debate in Westminster organised by Bible Society. His analysis of the banking crisis was that banks had made two ‘slightly unsophisticated’ errors – borrowing short and lending long, and lending ‘very, very large amounts of money to people who could not pay them back’.

Consequently, he said, Britain was not in recession ‘but essentially in some kind of depression’, the root of which was a lack of confidence and the effects of which could affect a generation.

In response, BBC business editor Robert Peston wrote: ‘the UK’s economic malaise shows no signs of being fixed any time soon by the supposed experts in the Bank of England or Treasury, so there may be a case for looking elsewhere for wisdom – and it is no longer eccentric to argue that what went wrong in the financial system was as much ethical as technical.’

Investment

Ethical investment, although a recent financial product, is not a new concept. The Bible has long offered a portfolio that focuses on the ethical investment of bankers and consumers alike, including: ‘act justly ... love mercy ... walk humbly with your God’, ‘you cannot serve both God and Money’, ‘the love of money is the root of all evil’ and ‘where your treasure is, there your heart will be also’.

There is no spiritual virtue in poverty. It is the love of money that is a vice. Ultimately, we will leave it all behind – to the kids or the cats’ home. The challenge, meanwhile, is not to let wealth or lack of it define who we are or determine how we behave.

Stars consider Mary

BROADCHURCH actor Andrew Buchan (pictured) and Jenny Agutter will read texts inspired by the Virgin Mary on Radio 3’s Words and Music tomorrow (Sunday 5 May 6.30 pm).

During the programme, the actors will present passages from the Gospels, as well as poetry, prose and other texts by authors including Thomas Hardy, Carol Ann Duffy and Ben Jonson. The programme will explore the biblical narratives, starting with the annunciation of Mary. Music will include works by Bach and Massenet.

Archbishop’s daughter speaks out on illness

THE Archbishop of Canterbury’s daughter has described her ‘unbearable’ bouts of depression on a blog, challenging the Church of England to ‘eradicate the stigma’ surrounding the condition, reported The Daily Telegraph.

According to the paper, Katharine Welby – daughter of the Most Rev Justin Welby – wants the Church to accept that life is ‘not always rosy’, and for many it is ‘complex and frightening’.

She wrote on her blog: ‘This is the time for change ... I have a hopeful depression ... I know that at times it will be unbearable, but I know in it all I am not alone. I look forward to the time when this hope is shared by the Church and all those in it suffering quietly.’

The paper went on to say that last year, a sermon written on behalf of the Church Archbishops’ Council and the Time to Change mental health campaign suggested that ‘Jesus Christ may have suffered from mental health problems, alongside St John the Baptist and St Paul’.

Ely hosts concert broadcast

THE Choir of Ely Cathedral and the City of London Sinfonia present Fauré’s Requiem on Radio 3 Live in Concert next Monday (6 May 7.30 pm).

The concert – broadcast from Ely Cathedral – is part of the Fauré Requiem Tour, during which the City of London Sinfonia perform with some of Britain’s leading cathedral choirs.

During the interval, presenter Martin Handley will speak with conductor Stephen Layton and some of the choristers.
May this month be colourful

MAY is my favourite month. As we look skywards, stunning tree blossom takes pride of place. Who can mistake the heady perfume of the wonderful lilac bush (Syringa), which thrives equally as a large shrub or small tree.

Now, at last, hedgerows across the UK come alive with insects feasting on the blossom of hawthorn. Although it is usually white, a pale or deeper pink blossom is not uncommon.

Along the ground, look out for bluebells and forget-me-nots as they carpet woodland and gardens everywhere.

Damp patches of land are ideal for setting a bog garden. Rather than trying to drain a naturally wet area, go with the flow and choose the right plant that will thrive in these conditions. Bog gardens work well close to ponds.

Plants such as Astilbe will also grow in damp herbaceous borders. One of my favourites is the Mimulus, also known as the monkey flower. It will grow in borders and rocky areas, however it will give its best in moist conditions. Hostas and Primula are ideal for damp, shady areas.

The big daddy of them all, however, for the larger garden has to be the Gunnera. This rhubarb-like plant can produce leaves of 1.5m across and 1.8m high, which means they’re great for shelter during a downpour. Towards the end of May is the ideal time for half-hardy bedding plants to be planted outside after the risk of frost. Allow two weeks to harden-off or to acclimatise your plants rather than plunging them straight outside, as this could result in a serious check to growth.

It is a good idea to sharpen your pruning tools regularly, using a sharpening device or a carborundum stone. Simply draw the stone across the blades of the pruners at an angle of around 25 degrees. Mini sharpening pencil-like ‘steels’ are also handy for sharpening secateurs. Clean cuts are essential to avoid leaving snags of wood or misshapen wounds that may lead to infection or disease.

Asparagus

Continue to harvest asparagus from established asparagus beds until early June, when it is time to stop picking. This allows the plants to grow in preparation for cropping next year. Feed the beds with a balanced granular fertiliser or, even better, some well-rotted farmyard manure.

As strawberry plants start to produce fruit, cover them with netting to stop hungry birds having a feast.

Potatoes

Some early varieties of potato will be ready for harvesting at the end of the month. Scrape away the soil, rather than dig up the plant completely to allow the remaining tubers to grow larger.

Vegetables

Harden off all tender veg, such as courgettes, sweetcorn, runner beans and French beans now before planting them out towards the end of the month.

by LEE SENIOR

IT is a good idea to sharpen your pruning tools regularly, using a sharpening device or a carborundum stone. Simply draw the stone across the blades of the pruners at an angle of around 25 degrees. Mini sharpening pencil-like ‘steels’ are also handy for sharpening secateurs. Clean cuts are essential to avoid leaving snags of wood or misshapen wounds that may lead to infection or disease.

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BBC-sitcom writer Paul Kerensa tells Claire Brine about life on the comedy and church circuit.

Funnyman Paul Kerensa is in the business of making people laugh. And business, it seems, is booming. Not only is Paul a successful stand-up comedian, regularly performing across the country, but he also writes gags for the BBC sitcoms Not Going Out and Miranda.

‘Sometimes in Not Going Out Lee Mack will make a joke and my wife will turn to me and say: “Is that one of yours?”’ But usually I have no idea,’ says Paul, who lives with his wife and young family in Guildford. ‘It’s hard to remember all the jokes I write for the programme – especially as I submit them about eight months before they may or may not be shown on TV.’

Paul has been writing for Not Going Out...
and *Miranda* since the sitcoms started. He describes his job as ‘great fun’.

‘When I get sent the script, it reads a bit like a soap opera at first,’ he explains. ‘So it’s my job to go through it and put in some more jokes. Basically, I have to come up with a new and funnier version.

‘Occasionally, I also work on other BBC television and radio shows. I receive pilot comedy scripts and am asked to add in a few extra jokes. Some of the programmes end up on air and others don’t.’

When Paul isn’t writing gags for other people, he spends time writing for his own act. He does four to five stand-up gigs a week.

‘When I’m on stage I love to deliver silly, old-fashioned jokes,’ he says. ‘I enjoy a punchy gag and a good bit of wordplay.

‘I used to love Bob Monkhouse because whatever gig he did, it would always contain some new material. If he was booked to do a corporate show at a sugar company, for example, he would make sure he wrote loads of jokes about sugar beforehand. He was a master craftsman of the gag.’

Paul has been crafting his own gags since he was seven years old.

He can remember the first time he made an adult laugh.

‘I told a joke, she laughed and I thought: “I like that feeling.” After that I got into writing silly poems and things.

‘In my teens I wrote some radio sketches with my friends and we recorded them. We sent them to the BBC, suggesting that we could be the new Monty Python. We received a reply which said: “Thanks and good luck!”

‘Bizarrely, the junior programme assistant who wrote to us went on to become one of the top bods of BBC Comedy. Over recent years, I’ve worked with him many times, and not long ago I showed him that letter from the early 1990s. I said: “Look at this letter – it’s me!”’

After leaving school, Paul went to Nottingham University to read theology. He took his studies seriously, but let his hair down by performing in the student theatre productions.

‘I discovered my love of comedy acting, so towards the end of my degree I
applied to drama school,’ he says. ‘I got in. During our training, the teachers told us how to make the best of our CV. They said: “If you can dance, choreograph or do stage combat, write that down.” But I couldn’t do any of those things.

Then one day I noticed an advert in the canteen for stand-up comedy classes. I decided to go along, thinking that I could put my new skills on my CV. When I went, I absolutely loved it.’

After completing the course, Paul hit the open-mike circuit. He often worked for free, doing five-minute comedy spots in different clubs.

‘A year later, I entered ITV’s Take The Mike comedy competition. I didn’t expect to do particularly well, but I won the show. The prize was an agent – which was a bit bizarre because it meant I suddenly had to start giving away 15 per cent of my earnings. But it was great. And the show really helped get my career going.’

And it shows no signs of slowing down. In fact, Paul’s career is expanding into new territory.

‘This year I am spending a lot of time on the road, promoting my book, So A Comedian Walks Into a Church… It’s about the church and comedy club circuit,’ he explains.

‘I’m a Christian, so when I’m away from home on tour I like to go to church. Usually, I try to broaden my horizons by finding a church which is a bit different from what I’m used to. So the book is about some of the experiences I have had when visiting different types of comedy club and different types of church.

‘The quest behind my writing is to encourage comedians that there is more to church than they perhaps think there is, and similarly to encourage Christians that there is more to the comedy circuit than they might expect. I do find that a lot of comedians have an ambivalent view of church or they resent it because of the negative press it has received.

‘I wanted to paint the picture that church is not a nasty place. There are nice people who do a lot of good things.’

As well as entertaining readers with his stories, Paul is also hoping to teach them a thing or two about church. In each chapter, he includes a brief history of the particular denomination that he has visited.

‘I’m a bit of a geek,’ he says, ‘so I wanted to insert a few text boxes here and there which would give people a bit of background. I wanted to explain the basic differences between Methodists, Baptists, Anglicans and so on.’

Over the Easter period, Paul appeared on the BBC One programme Are You Having A Laugh?, which explored the relationship between comedy and Christianity. While he has no problem with shows such as The Vicar of Dibley and Rev, describing them as ‘pretty good-hearted and not malicious’, Paul says he is becoming ‘more narked at the comedy circuit for, at times, being verily anti-Christian’.

‘Comedians usually say what they want in their act and I defend their freedom to do that, but at the same time I want comedians to understand that certain things they say will have an effect on people. I think some comedians are becoming a bit glib, thinking: “Oh, I can say what I like about Christianity, because let’s face it, we are all on the same page with our thoughts about it, and there won’t be any Christians in the audience, will there?” But we don’t all think the same things, and often there are Christians in the audience.

‘I don’t have a problem with people who want to dismantle Christianity intelligently and creatively, as long as there is room for response. But some comedians don’t allow that. They just want to swipe religion away for a cheap laugh, and while that doesn’t offend me, I do feel wounded.’

Paul has also felt his faith being stung when he is working with teams of writers on television scripts.

‘I don’t have a problem with swearing – to me, they’re just words – but I don’t like to hear Jesus’ name taken in vain,’ he says. ‘I don’t like this idea that you can’t swear on television before 8.30 pm, but you are allowed to say “Jesus Christ” in a swearing context at any time.

‘I’ve been in writers’ rooms where we have needed to come up with an exasperated exit line for a sitcom character. The team says: “Well, it’s too early for the s-word or the f-word, but we can use ‘Oh, God’. Let’s put that in.” I don’t think that’s right.’

Sometimes Paul has voiced his views and the potentially offensive line is removed. But more often than not he tries to come up with an alternative solution.

‘I look at the character’s exit and try to come up with something funny for them to say instead,’ he says. ‘Resorting to religious swear words is just lazy comedy.’
Countless times I have prayed to God on the stage, saying: ‘Help! What do I do now?’

Whether he is writing or performing, Paul makes no secret of his Christian faith. He explains how it helps him in daily life.

‘I think of God as my co-writer – and I need to credit him. My faith also represents a moral compass. Millions of people watch Miranda and Not Going Out, so I want my jokes to be as inclusive and funny as possible, without offending people.

‘But sometimes I get it wrong,’ he confesses. ‘Although I try to make sure my comedy is clean and good, occasionally when I’m doing stand-up a heckler will get the better of me. Once or twice I have answered them in a way that I later regretted.

Countless times I have prayed to God on stage, saying: “Help! What do I do now?”

Knowing how to respond in those moments can be really difficult. That’s why I admire my friends, Christian comedians Milton Jones and Tim Vine. They inspire me because they never lose their rag. Milton is a really mature Christian and I often go to him for advice.

Once or twice a year we all meet up, along with about 30 other Christian comedians, for a drink and chat. The world of stand-up can be lonely, so it’s nice when we all band together because we understand what each other is going through.’

Despite making the odd mistake, Paul continues with his efforts to make people laugh. His diary is filling up with stand-up work and he is waiting to hear from the BBC about more sitcom writing. He is also planning to write another book, taking in more churches and comedy clubs.

‘Who knows what the future holds,’ he says. ‘But whatever happens in life, there are guaranteed to be plenty of funny moments. I like to think that God has a good sense of humour. If he didn’t, I’m sure we wouldn’t be here laughing today.’

Paul performs at The Comedy Store, London
**Quick Crossword**

**Across**

1. Entice (5)
2. Chin hair (5)
3. Maniac (5)
4. Extravagant outing (5)
5. Passageway (5)
6. Kitchen garment (5)
7. Challenge (4)
8. Oral (6)
9. Dissimulated (5)
10. Pitch a tent (4)
11. Forego (5)
12. Outstanding (5)
13. At no time (5)
14. Correct (5)
15. Darkness (5)

**Down**

1. Proved (6)
2. Reflector (6)
3. Step (5)
4. Avoid (5)
5. Marked (7)
6. Engulf (6)
7. Heavy engine oil (6)
8. Astern (3)
9. Be victorious (3)
10. Annoy (3)
11. Limb (3)
12. Inflame (7)
13. Not as fast (6)
14. Pleasure trip (6)
15. Performing (6)
16. Dilemma (6)
17. Yearn (5)
18. Nickel (5)

**Answers**

1. Clock bird
2. Leg bone
3. Dried grape
4. Dark purple
5. Not level
6. Scandinavian seafarer

**Honeycomb**

Each solution starts on the coloured cell and reads clockwise round the number.

**Puzzlebreak**

**Quick Quiz**

1. Who was the first President of the United States?
2. According to the nursery rhyme ‘As I was going to St Ives’, how many wives did the man have?
3. Who wrote the novel The Day of the Locust?
4. Where is Traitors’ Gate?
5. What type of dog was Greyfriars Bobby?
6. What is the name given to the hammer used by an auctioneer?
Finding God

Some parts of the Bible are much easier to understand or relate to than others. The Book of Psalms is a case in point. Many psalms are loved and familiar to people, such as Psalm 23, which says ‘The Lord is my shepherd’. It is often read at weddings and funerals.

A psalm is a sacred song or hymn for use in worship. Many of them were written by David, the shepherd boy who became King of Israel.

The psalms aren’t full of religious jargon, but are honest expressions of feelings, moods and reactions. They cover the whole gamut of human emotions – from great joy and hope, to fear, anger and disappointment.

The psalmist isn’t afraid to tell God exactly how he feels when things aren’t going his way, or when he thinks that God has deserted him. He doesn’t say ‘I’m fine’ when his world is actually falling apart, or pretend that life is all warm and fluffy when in reality he’s battling for survival.

In this series we will be looking at nine prayers of praise, penitence and petition from the Psalms. We start with Psalm 8, a hymn of praise to the Almighty.

Looking at God’s greatness in Creation inspired the psalmist to ask: ‘What is man, that thou art mindful of him?’ (8:4 King James Version). Or, in a more modern version: ‘When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars that you have established; what are human beings that you are mindful of them, mortals that you care for them?’ (8:3, 4 New Revised Standard Version).

Ever tried counting the number of stars on a clear night? It puts things in perspective by reminding us how big and important God is, and how small we are in the great scheme of things. And yet, as the psalmist points out, this same great God also cares for us as individuals.

What we do with that knowledge is our decision. God gives us free choice: we can choose to ignore the redeeming love he offers us in the person of Jesus Christ or join in the hymn of praise. What will it be?
When I passed my driving test. At last, I had mastered three-point turns, reversing and parallel parking. But I wasn’t prepared for what the examiner said to me at the end of the test.

‘Now that you have passed,’ he said, ‘you can learn how to drive.’ What a strange thing to say! After all, hadn’t I just received the piece of paper to prove my success?

But gradually, as I became a more experienced driver, his words began to make more sense. Passing my test meant I no longer had an instructor sitting by my side prompting me, advising me and – if necessary – stopping the car to avoid problems. I now had to make all the decisions for myself. Adverse weather conditions, fellow driver errors and road rage were circumstances I had to learn to deal with.

Similarly, in everyday life, different situations come our way that we have to learn to manage. Some are good, whereas others are stressful, confusing and painful. It’s not always easy to know which path we should take, or how to avoid a collision with another person. That is why it can be helpful to have someone travelling alongside us, someone to guide us.

The Bible says: ‘This God is our God for ever and ever; he will be our guide even to the end’ (Psalm 48:14 New International Version).

When we follow God’s gentle leading, we can find direction and purpose. We need never fear that we are making our journey through life alone, because he is forever by our side. God’s presence can bring us feelings of comfort and security. Is it time we asked him to navigate?

One of my granddaughters is learning to drive. As she gets used to life behind the wheel, she is experiencing many highs and lows. Emotions have ranged from being reasonably confident to feeling totally inadequate.

I remember the elation I felt many years ago when I passed my driving test. At last, I had mastered three-point turns, reversing and parallel parking. But I wasn’t prepared for what the examiner said to me at the end of the test.

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Method:
Preheat the oven to 200C/400F/Gas Mark 6. To make the pastry, place the flour in a bowl, then rub in the butter until it resembles fine breadcrumbs. Add the water, then knead to form a dough. Wrap the dough in clingfilm and chill in the fridge for 30 minutes.

Sprinkle some flour over the work surface. Remove the dough from the fridge and divide into 4 balls. Roll each ball out into an oblong shape, about the thickness of a penny. Place on a lightly floured plate in the fridge.

To make the filling, place the oil in a pan over a low heat, then add the lemon juice and zest, water and lemon curd. Mix together.

Add the red pepper, sultanas, onion and seasoning to the pan and cook on a low heat for 4 minutes. Next add the chicken and cook for a further 5 minutes, turning the chicken from time to time.

Mix the cornflour with a little water and add to the pan. The contents should become stickier.

Remove the dough from the fridge and spoon some of the chicken mixture along the centre of each piece. Crimp up the pastry sides to make a pouch.

Grease a baking tray and dust with a little flour. Place the 4 Wellingtons on the baking tray and bake for 15 minutes.

Serves 4
But there may also be times when we work with lazy, unreliable people who make our jobs a slog. Whether the people we work alongside tick all our boxes or not, we have to accept that working as part of a team is vital.

None of us is the finished article, and that’s why God wants to team up with us and work in us. ‘Anyone who loves me will obey my teaching,’ said Jesus. ‘My Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them’ (John 14:23 New International Version).

Jesus knew that trying to deal with the tough parts of life alone is hard. When we admit our wrongdoing, ask his forgiveness and follow his teaching, he changes our whole way of thinking and behaving. He equips us to deal with anything that comes our way. Allowing God to work on us is a job well done.

WELCOME to the Job Centre, Bab! Set in a West Midlands job centre, ITV’s latest comedy series The Job Lot focuses on the crazy relationships among the staff.

Prim-and-proper manager Trish nervously tries to keep the staff in order while maintaining a positive attitude and plastic smile.

Aware that she can crack at any time, she relies heavily on fresh-out-of-university Karl. Down in the dups about the direction his life has taken, Karl takes comfort in his stash of biscuits and skives off in the loo. He wants to leave but knows his situation is better than being unemployed, plus, he’s the only one Trish can ‘really rely on’.

Then there’s Angela, who Trish sacked a month ago but is now back to the grindstone after winning a tribunal. Angela doesn’t enjoy her job and refuses to co-operate with Trish. Under miserable Angela’s guidance, jobseekers’ chances of ever finding a job are slim to none.

But it isn’t all doom and gloom at the centre. Security guards Janette and Paul brighten up the atmosphere while keeping trouble at bay. The job lot are a mixed bag.

Away from the telly, the world of work can be the same. We might work alongside hardworking, efficient team players who make our load manageable and our days a breeze.