The EXPLORER

FREE

MARCH 2025

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EDITORIAL

Dear Fellow Explorers

One of my favourite characters from the Bible is Mephibosheth. His father Jonathan was the son of King Saul and a close friend of David. Mephibosheth probably didn't remember very much about his father as he was only five years old when Jonathan died. Jonathan was killed in battle, fighting against the Philistines. King Saul died at the same time, in what was a humiliating defeat for Israel. Because the nation had been so badly defeated and the king and his son killed, there was great panic and confusion. Trying to get to a safe place, aged five, Mephibosheth was too young to run fast or far, but he was also too heavy to be easily carried by his nurse, and she dropped him. He must have landed awkwardly because he was badly injured. Probably the bones were broken and not set right when they healed. As a consequence, Mephibosheth became permanently lame, and for the rest of his life had to dress the calloused sores that developed.

This injury meant that Mephibosheth was never able to perform any great physical activity. He could not work, he could not serve as a soldier, throughout his life he was dependent upon the kindness of others. This is what makes the account of Mephibosheth so appealing to me. It is not so much what he did, but what was done for him, or even, why it was done for him.

Once David had become king, he was occupied for many years with organising the kingdom and subduing his enemies. But one day, when the kingdom was more settled, he was thinking about his good friend Jonathan. Many years before, Jonathan, who was Saul's heir, and next in line to the throne, had spoken of such a day. Jonathan said to David, you will rule, and I will be beside you to help. But Jonathan was dead, and David missed him greatly. Calling his servants, David asked if any of Saul's family were still alive. He couldn't be with Jonathan, but perhaps a close relative could be found, and for Jonathan's sake, David would show that person kindness.

This is when Mephibosheth was rediscovered. Since the time of his injury, he disappears from the Bible narrative. But now he is found and brought into David's presence. Mephibosheth would remember little about his father, and probably nothing about David, other than that David was now king, and he, Mephibosheth, belonged to the house of Saul, who had tried to kill David. Never having pledged allegiance to the king, he was clearly terrified of this summons to the royal court. Mephibosheth fell upon his face, expecting to hear words of condemnation. But how amazing, rather than condemnation, David said, "fear not Mephibosheth, I will show you kindness for Jonathan your father's sake."

This is one of my favourite passages because it reflects what happens in the gospel. As sinners we are fearful to stand before a holy God, expecting to hear words of condemnation. But rather than this, there is a declaration of God's great love, "fear not", the Father says to us, "I will show you kindness for Jesus' sake."

Therefore, don't run away when God calls you. Come humbly into His presence.

This month there is an article about a fund-raising event held to support Miss Jansie's Preschool in Sri Lanka. There have been other contributions made also. Thank you to everyone who has supported this appeal. There is still time to get involved, either as an individual or a group from your congregation. Every contribution will help make a big difference.

God bless you all,
James MacInnes

SUMMER CAMP

FRIDAY 11TH – FRIDAY 18TH JULY

Want to race down a mountain on custom-made go-karts? Or perhaps mount a full-scale assault against the enemy forces in laser-tag? Not forgetting the crazy water sports, the mountain bike course, the luxury lodges, thousands of calories of home baking, brilliant food, last-night barbecue, and of course the infamous pond! All that and more last year at Junior & Senior Camp! What awaits this year's intrepid campers? The only way to find out is to book your place now! But as ever the best parts of camp are the times of fellowship and bible teaching, and dorm discussions, and beginning each morning with camp worship. Meet old friends, and make new ones, all in the beauty of the Cairngorms and the comfort of Badaguish Forest Lodges.

Booking forms are out now and can be found online at freechurchcontinuing.org

CHRIST THE DOOR FOR THE SHEEP

John 10:9 "I am the Door"

Jesus Christ chooses and numbers His flock, He brings them all to heaven by way of the Door, which is Himself. The phrase 'I am' is a title that belongs to God (as in Exodus 3:14). His sheep follow Him alone by faith alone.

Christ is the Door out of slavery for the sheep. There is only one way out, and He brings them through it. He is also the Door to a happy future with Himself. He brings them through the wilderness, and then He brings them in - He is the Door opened to heaven. Those who follow Christ are convinced by the Spirit that He is this Door, especially that He is the Door to another, better world (Revelation 4:1).

So, Christ is the Door out, the Door through and the Door in.

But are you a sheep ? If you read John chapter 10 it will tell you the marks of Christ's sheep. In this world the shepherd marks his sheep, they belong to him, and are separated from others. The Saviour does the same with His sheep; they belong to Him and follow only Him. They have found Him to be the Door out, through and into heaven. He still has more sheep to bring Home (John 10:16).

Remember, it is not enough to know all about this Door if you stay outside, and do not enter in! Perhaps you have made prayers but have not had a saving experience. Remember, Christ alone can open hearts and doors - He has the keys (Revelation 1:18), so keep knocking. There is nowhere else to go; Samuel Rutherford offers great encouragement to those who are seeking, "We must lie at the Lord's door knocking, until we die there. However, no-one ever yet died there!"

WASHING THE DOG

Mum had said, "that dog smells bad."

Over a couple of days, she said it quite a few times. It was true, the dog did smell, but I think everyone else in the family just accepted it. When mum said it in front of dad, he tried to dismiss it by saying, "she only smells like a dog." Which seemed to me to be a reasonable argument. But mum didn't give up. "That dog smells and she will need a bath, and last time it was too much for me. I tried before and she ended up soaking the bathroom." With neither enthusiasm nor commitment, dad simply said, "oh." And then he changed the subject.

A few days later it was raining hard, and dad had come home from walking the dog. As he dried off and put on the kettle for a hot drink, mum said, "the smell of wet dog is even worse, she really needs a bath." Dad tried to concentrate on making his coffee and replied, "hmmm", which is a different sound from oh, but (as far as I can tell) means much the same. But mum wasn't going to be put off this time, and so she said again, "that dog needs a bath."

Now there are times when it is obvious that mum expects an immediate response, and this was one of them. "Oh", said dad. "Well, I suppose with a bit of help," at this he looked over at my brother and I, "we could scrub her down outside. It'll be easier than trying to keep her in the bath."

"I'm not so sure," said mum, "I think it will be difficult and messy." But dad said confidently, "I'm sure it will be fine, we will wear waterproofs." And so that's what happened.

After filling buckets with warm water, my brother and I, dressed in waterproofs, stood ready for action. Dad put the dog on the lead and held her still. My brother gently poured water, and I began scrubbing in the dog shampoo. She's a great dog, and likes being petted, and so for a little time she seemed content and peaceful. But then she started to squirm and pull away. Maybe it was the smell of the pink apples and watermelon shampoo - which seems a strange smell for any dog. We were all trying to calm her down by speaking softly, when suddenly she pulled back with a sudden tug and slipped from her collar. Perhaps being covered in shampoo made that easier. Dad shouted to mum to close the kitchen door, a moment earlier she had been standing watching us, but mum was no longer there, and the dog dashed into the house. I rushed in to help, but by then she had crashed through the kitchen and up the hallway where she collided with mum. She leapt and bucked as she ran, desperately shaking off soap suds in an attempt to dry herself. It's hard to catch a slippery wet dog with no collar, but eventually mum and I managed to box her in and I pulled her back outside. But only after she broke free again to ran around the hall one final time. Mum followed behind me making sure she couldn't again break free. Not that it would have mattered much by then because she was already almost dry, and mum and the house were already soaking wet.

Dad tightened the collar and with a bit of coaxing managed to refasten it around her neck. He held her very firmly, though I don't think that was necessary anymore. It was as though she had had her fun, and so, she stood quite happily, as my brother and I finished scrubbing her and rinsed out the soap.

We were all hungry, but lunch was delayed until mum had cleared up the mess inside and then changed into dry clothes. "I had a funny feeling that it wasn't going to work out well," commented mum as she served out the food. "Hmmm, yes," conceded dad as he started to eat his lunch, "But at least she now smells like pink apples and watermelon. And we'll know to keep the door shut next time."

"I was thinking," said Mum "our dog, much as we love her, is just like a hardened sinner. She didn't want to be made clean, probably she didn't even know that she needed to be made clean, but now that she is clean – she is as happy as can be."

At this, almost as though she knew we were talking about her, our dog got up from where she was sleeping in the corner and came over to sit between my brother and I. She sat there, all clean and fresh, clearly expecting that she would be able to share a little bit of our lunch.

ADVENTURES IN AFRICA 5

Butterworth

Mrs Marion Fraser writes...

Where we first lived in Umtata was surrounded by many beautiful flowers and plants. I delighted to see these but was concerned about what I maybe couldn't see. What if there was a snake? One day little Alexander came in from playing in the garden, as he came toward me, I screamed when I noticed a red creature coiled up in his hand. Shaking it from him, I snatched him into my arms. Later we discovered it was a songololo, a hard-shelled millipede. Not a venomous snake, but still with the capacity to cause burns to delicate skin. We gave thanks to God for keeping us safe.

On scorching hot days there was the strange high-pitched screech of many Cicadas, a type of beetle, or Son Besie (sun bug), as the Afrikaners called them. So many new things to discover, and new exotic words from new languages to learn. English was the principal language, but many people spoke Africaans, a language developed through the influence of early Dutch settlers. Then there was the native language, Xhosa. Most unusual to western ears, the 'X' of 'Xhosa' is pronounced with a click, unlike any sound in English.

We knew these first three months in Umtata was temporary. Soon Rev. & Mrs Sliep would return from furlough, and we would move on to our own assigned Mission. This was to be based in the busy town of Butterworth, one and a half hours' journey further south, still within Transkei. Transkei, founded in 1976, was a homeland where the Xhosa people governed themselves. In these days, throughout the rest of South Africa, there was apartheid, which segregated society according to race. This meant that people with different coloured skin were compelled to live in distinct communities. It resulted in an artificial division and tensions in society, very different from what was envisioned in the gospel which brings people together, Galatians 3:28 "ye are all one in Christ Jesus."

Finding a house in Butterworth for a British family was not easy, but our friend Basil Frew spied a vacant flat. It was the top floor of a three-storey block, owned by the Transkei Development Corporation. Basil lost no time in contacting Mr Jansen the manager. The Mission Board paid the rent, and so now, from January 1978, we had a three-bedroomed home of our own. I remember feeling very happy because three floors up, snakes and songololos were out of our way!

Right away we had good friends in Basil & Lorna Frew and their five children. They were in missionary work too. They, and a family of Oosthuyzens, ran a Bible School, at Kentane, half an hour's drive outside Butterworth. We would get to know that place well. We also learnt much from their total dependence upon the Lord; the Bible School had no source of income, and they would ask God to provide for all their needs.

It was near the Wild Coast where the waters of the Southern Ocean and Indian Ocean would meet, and upon which huge waves would come rolling in. The remains of at least one shipwreck could be seen there. A daughter of one of our church families was sadly drowned there. It was a school outing, and when the bus pulled up by the beach the scholars were extremely excited. Africa is such a huge country; some had never seen the sea before. The children charged out of the bus and into the water. She had never learnt to swim, and a huge wave came and drew her into the depths.

I had discovered just how easily this could happen when my sister and mother visited from Scotland. We were standing in the shallows facing the beach when an enormous wave struck the back of my head. We started to run with the wave, trying desperately to get to shore. My mother who was sitting higher up on the grass, was calling frantically. The surge from the wave was so great that it reached her, throwing her over backwards. We were shaken by the experience but not hurt. It was one of the many times we felt preserved by the prayers of mission supporters from our home church. On a Saturday night in particular, we would feel the prayers surrounding us.

The floods, O Lord, have lifted up, they lifted up their voice;
The floods have lifted up their waves, and made a mighty noise.
But yet the Lord, that is on high, is more of might by far
Than noise of many waters is, or great sea-billows are.
Psalm 93:3,4

Butterworth was a fascinating town. It was industrialised to make the new Transkei self-sufficient. We could eat the food we were familiar with from Scotland. They even had bacon in the shops and far more fruit and vegetables than at home. To settle into our new flat, we retrieved our goods which had arrived from Scotland. Packaged in crates and two drums; these had arrived at the local hospital where fellow Scotsman, Dr Hector Livingston, had them stored.

From Butterworth we had responsibility for congregations in Ngincwane, with its lovely old church building, and with recent heathen converts, near the Wild Coast in Macibe and Godidi, where the meetings were held in mud huts.

Polycarp

The Lord promised that, by His Spirit, Christians will be given wise words with which to answer their accusers (Matthew 10:19,20). The history of Polycarp affirms this to be true. As a young man Polycarp was a friend of the Apostle John. He lived in Smyrna, which today is in the nation of Turkey. For many years Polycarp served the church teaching others what he had learned. During his lifetime hostility against the church increased. After a long life of faithfulness, he was brought before an angry crowd and challenged by an aggressive Roman governor who threatened him with death. Polycarp stood faithful and was given a wise answer. What he said reveals not only the Lord's enabling, and a personal courage, but also a resilient humour whereby he exposed the unbelief of his opponents.

Christians were at that time called atheists. That sounds strange to our ears because we know that an atheist is someone who claims that there is no God. The reason that Christians were called atheists is that they refused to accept all the Roman gods. Brought into the arena where he would later be martyred, Polycarp was challenged to say, "away with the atheists." The Roman authorities thought that by this phrase Polycarp would be forced to speak against his fellow Christians.

So, Polycarp said, "Away with the atheists." But of course, he was meaning the true atheists, those who refuse to believe in the living God, and the way he spoke made this clear. When the Roman Governor realised that he had been outsmarted by Polycarp his anger intensified. Next, he demanded that Polycarp blaspheme against Jesus Christ and make an offering to the Roman Emperor or be burned alive.

In response Polycarp answered, "eighty and six years have I served him, and he has done me no wrong." Perhaps this means Polycarp was 86 years old. Or maybe, if he was counting from the time of his conversion as a child, he was now in his nineties. We can't be sure about his age, but what is very clear is that Polycarp wasn't a weak old man and nor was he fearful of the threats made against him. He continued, "How then can I blaspheme my King and Saviour? You threaten me with a fire that burns for a season, and after a little while is quenched; but you are ignorant of the fire of everlasting punishment that is prepared for the wicked."

Rather than respect the courage and dignity shown by Polycarp the Roman Governor gave orders and a large fire was quickly built around the old man. Without further delay the fire was lit. It is disturbing to think about such cruelty, but the peaceful composure of Polycarp clearly shows that the Lord was there with him. He was given grace and courage, peace and comfort. Very quickly thereafter he passed from this world with all its troubles and trials into the near presence of the Lord whom he loved. Polycarp served the church throughout his long life. But perhaps his greatest service was in the way that he died. He demonstrated that there is no need to fear those who oppose the gospel, because God is faithful, and will provide for us in our times of greatest need.

COFFEE & CAKE

"Jesus said, Suffer little children, and forbid them not, to come unto Me: for of such is the kingdom of heaven"

On Saturday 1st February Catherine, Coinneach and I organised a Coffee and Cake afternoon to raise money for Miss Jansie's preschool (Sri Lanka). A preschool is a place children go to learn before they start primary school. The preschool is in a small building in a village called Selvanagar, most of the children come from Hindu homes; Explorers and their families had already raised money to pay for a toilet and there was enough left over to build a swing. But recently there has been an appeal to raise money to buy more for their playground.

We wanted to help, so with help from our mum and some other people in the congregation; Catherine, Coinneach and I had a coffee afternoon at our church. We made lots of cakes and asked the congregation and some of our other friends to the fundraiser – Catherine wore a traditional Sri Lankan dress, Coinneach and I wore Sri Lankan cricket tops and he wore a sarong. There was a good turn out and friends from other churches came along too.

Recently my father had the privilege of being able to go and visit Sri Lanka. He gave a talk and a slide show on the preschool and the church there – it seems a very bright and colourful country. The children look like they love their time in the preschool. We enjoyed hearing the stories about life there. Thanks to the event, we made £780.81, people were very kind and willing to help.

By Seumas MacInnes, Lochalsh & Strath

Shaking & Squeezing

An experiment to do at home

Experiments are fun. Trying and testing, waiting to see what will happen. Sometimes there might be a science professor in a white laboratory coat, surrounded by an array of glass bottles and tubes, mixing different coloured liquids, some of which are bubbling and from which clouds of gas appear. The experiment I would like you to try at home is not like that. There are two parts to your challenge. Have you ever heard of a thought experiment? This is what you will do in the second part. It is when you use your mind to imagine, whilst taking account of all the information that you have, what could happen.

But the first part is hands on, or if you like, it is hands in. What you require is a collection of Lego pieces. It can be a mixture of all the blocks and shapes you can find.

You should place all the Lego together. Either in a heap on the floor, or in a large bag - a pillowcase will be ideal. Now do everything you can to shake, jostle and mix the pieces for at least one minute. Have you ever noticed when raking through or shaking a heap of Lego it makes an almost musical noise? The edges of Lego blocks can be sharp, so the next bit is tricky, but try to apply pressure. Maybe you could use a cushion to protect your hands. Push down upon the blocks for a few moments and then shake, jostle and mix the pieces again. After a further minute, apply more pressure.

You might wonder what the purpose of this experiment is. I want you to see what can be built without a designer or a builder. What you are trying to do is to mix up and then squeeze the blocks together, but without choosing which block goes where. You must not join blocks on purpose, simply shake and squeeze. After trying this a few times, you should look to see what has been formed.

If nothing interesting, beautiful, and useful has formed, and if it's raining outside and you have plenty of spare time, you can keep shaking and squeezing all day. Otherwise, this is the time to do the thought experiment. Based upon what you have learnt so far, imagine what will be formed from your blocks after one hundred shakes and squeezes. Imagine shaking with great violence and squeezing with great pressure. What will be formed after a thousand shakes? What will be formed after a million shakes? Do you think something will have taken shape, or will you just have a well-mixed collection of Lego pieces?

Because it is always good to play around with Lego, please try the experiment. But even without trying, I think you will know what the outcome will be. Lego buildings can only be put together on purpose, not by accident. No matter how often a box is shaken, no one has ever opened a new packet to discover the completed design inside. Can you imagine, rather than providing step-by-step building instructions, information on the Lego box saying, shake and squeeze until complete?

If a Lego building needs a designer and a builder, how much more necessary is a designer and builder to form a living creature? Some people want to explain the wonders of creation as the result of a random, meaningless, shaking and squeezing together of everything. It is interesting that these people cannot explain where all the pieces of everything came from, never mind explaining the tremendous complexity of life.

I hope you enjoy playing with the Lego. But more than that, I hope you understand that designs can only be produced by a designer. Buildings can only be produced by a builder, and creation can only occur when there is a Creator.

Life is not the result of a random shaking and squeezing. The Lord has made something which is interesting, beautiful, and useful. He made everything by the Word of His power. He made you, you. Therefore, you are to live for His glory.

Dores Youth Conference

Saturday 22nd March 2025
11:15am – 4pm

The Teenage Christian & Politics

This is a free event for all young people aged 11-18. The speaker is Rev. James Gracie.

There will be time for group discussions, meeting old friends and making new ones!

Please book your place by contacting Rev. Davide Ratti – davideratti@fccontinuing.org

PUZZLES

Which King?

Which king, in the middle of his reign, lived like a wild animal – neither washing nor brushing his hair, and eating grass like an ox? (Daniel 4)

Which king felt so insecure upon his throne that he had all the young boys in a part of his kingdom put to death? (Matthew 2)

Which king was the sole survivor when his auntie hid him from his wicked grandmother? (2 Kings 11)

Which king chose the gift of wisdom rather than power and riches? (1 Kings 3)

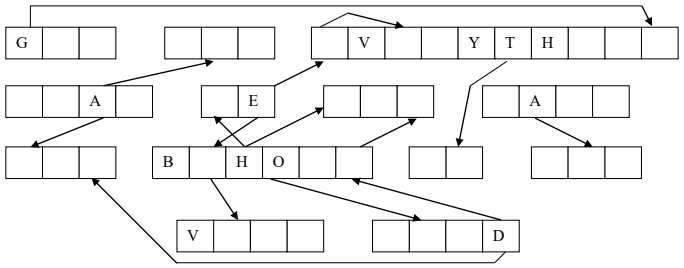
Which king was almost persuaded to believe when he listened to the Apostle Paul preaching? (Acts 26)

Which king had white, green and blue curtains in his palace? (Esther 1)

Which king, descended from David, still reigns today? (Matthew 1)

And God Said

You will find all the information that you need in Genesis 1.
Draw a picture of what God created on each day
(look carefully at the passage to see why day 6 is divided into two)



Prize Puzzlers

1st prize: Abigail Keddie *(Dores)*

Runners up: Chloe Calderhead, Kenny Mackinnon - Partick
Joseph Clarke - Beacon Baptist
Lauren Cormack - Inverness
Abigail Blaney, Benjamin Blaney, Bethany Blaney - Ballyclare & Doagh
Catherine MacInnes, Coinneach MacInnes, Seumas MacInnes - Lochalsh & Strath
Rachel Flynn - Stockton on Tees
Euan Grant - Knockbain Free Church

Joseph Clarke: 40 Entries

Name: .....

Age: .....

Congregation: .....

Address: .....

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PUZZLES & DRAWINGS

Please send a scan or photograph of completed puzzles to: **Miss Anne Macaulay**
Email: macaulayanne@hotmail.co.uk

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(Unattributed articles ought not to be considered the work of the Editor)

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