NEC TAMEN CONSUMEBATUR

FREE CHURCH WITNESS

Published by the Free Church of Scotland (Continuing)

January 2026 £2.50

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Correspondence relating to the magazine and copy for inclusion in the magazine should be submitted to the Editor; the deadline for copy is the beginning of the month before publication.

Subscriptions
Annual subscription rates (including postage) for the *Free Church Witness* (which includes *The Explorer* for young people) mailed to one address are:

UK £33.50
Europe (Airmail) £35.00
Overseas (Airmail) £40.00

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We encourage churches to take out bulk subscriptions at the lower rate of £30.00. The *Explorer* may be ordered separately for Sabbath Schools for the cost of the postage.

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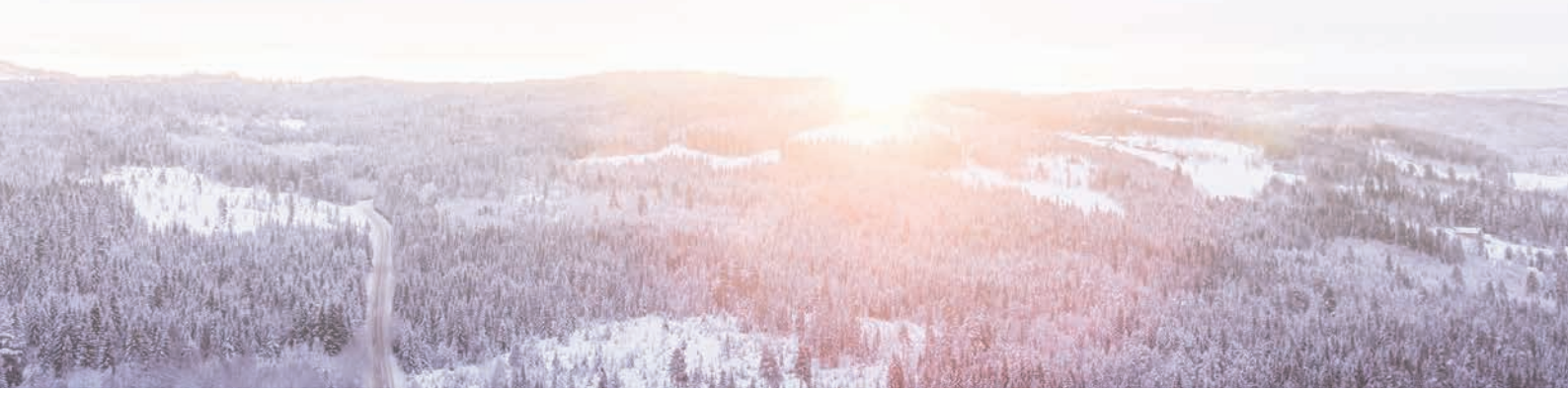
ENCOURAGING OURSELVES IN THE LORD



At the close of every year, it is appropriate for us to pause and reflect. We thank God that He spared us over the past year. Others finished their course in 2025, and among them were godly men and women who fought a good fight and kept the faith. As believers who remain on the battlefield, we envy them in a way. We are struggling to maintain our ground, with few signs that the kingdom is advancing, and they are resting from their labours and rejoicing before the throne! Even so, understanding that it is not the Lord's will that we should lay down our weapons yet, we seek grace to continue in our warfare.

When done from a Biblical perspective, reflection on the events of the past year is a profitable exercise. It will naturally focus upon things in our own lives and in our family circles, but it may also include matters in the church and nation. There will be things that cause us to praise God, and things that convict and humble us. God wisely appoints us our lot in this world. Believers know dark days as well as bright days, but God uses both for our good. "To every thing there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven" (Ecc. 3:1). If we are the Lord's, what is bitter will be made sweet by His saving grace in Christ.

There is also a benefit for Christians in thinking about the year *ahead*. This too must be done in the light of Scripture. When it is, we will find encouragement for 2026.

Decline

It must be said that there are few *obvious* things to encourage us at present. For many years now, religious observance has been in decline in our country and immoral behaviour has been increasing. Former generations understood what our leaders, academics, and other experts refuse to acknowledge, namely, that these two things are inextricably linked. When there is little fear of God, there will be little fear of doing what God forbids – especially when the law of the land has been changed to allow it. Tragically, it is young people, so many of whom nowadays lack a Biblical foundation, who are especially prey to harmful behaviours.

Some believers are finding encouragement in reports in the Christian media of a "spiritual awakening". Recent surveys have shown that Church attendance has been rising among young adults in the UK, the USA, and indeed globally. There are predictions that a major revival is coming soon. This excitement is no doubt fuelled by a natural desire of believers to see such events. Ultimately, a revival of God's work is the only answer to the plight of the church in Western nations, and to the problems these nations face. May the Lord grant it! Yet the truth is that no one can say with certainty that such a revival will occur this year, next year, or even in our lifetimes.

Life

We learn from David the kind of encouragement that believers need most of all. In a time of great personal difficulty, David "encouraged himself in the Lord his God" (1 Sam. 30:6). This is something we can all do. Our problem is that we tend to give our time and attention to the world instead. It is right to be wary of 'New Year's resolutions', but we do believe that a definite change is required in our lives. Christians ought to be *less* taken up with the world and *more* taken up with God. It is in Him that we "live, and move, and have our being" (Acts 17:28). Our life is a gift from God, and all our times are in His hand. Soon we will depart this world and go to the place appointed for us in the world to come. We should give more thought to "the shortness of life and length of eternity" (Thomas Watson).

God blesses His people with the gift of a *new* life. We are to devote that life to God, trusting Him wholly, obeying Him fully, and serving Him gladly. We come very far short of that and are unworthy in every way! Yet listen to what God says: "I am the Lord, I change not; therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed" (Mal. 3:6). Why does He call His people "sons of Jacob"? Jacob was a godly man, yet his old nature was open to view

at times. Grace alone made him to differ from profane Esau. In this, Jacob is a model of God's people. Like him, we have many faults, and yet like him we also have great comfort. God is faithful to His covenant with His people: He loves them with a love that never wavers and will preserve them to life everlasting.

Blessings

David was among the sons of Jacob. He was a man after God's heart, but with self-evident flaws. Yet he enjoyed the comfort of the covenant, as he recounts in Psalm 23. David owed everything to the Lord as his Shepherd, and as the Lamb who sacrificed Himself for his sins. The Lord nourished him with the rich pastures of His grace and refreshed him with the still waters of His promises. The Lord restored him when he strayed into sin and led him back into the right paths. The Lord made every provision for him, body and soul. He overcame his foes and his joy overflowed. One day, David would go through the dark valley of death, but he would not be afraid. He had the assurance that God's goodness and mercy would follow him to his last breath, and that God would comfort him by His word and Spirit.

God's goodness *always* follows His people. He goes after them, just as a shepherd does his sheep. He pursues them when, careless about their souls, they depart from Him. He warns them of the danger they are in and leads them to repentance. God's mercy also follows His people continually. When we trust in Christ, God clothes us with the Saviour's obedience, the "robe of righteousness" (Isa. 61:10), pardoning all our sins and accepting us as righteous in His sight. As we walk with Christ, and confess the sins we commit, He washes us with the Saviour's blood, removing their stain. Do we sometimes feel ourselves to be failures as Christians? Remember that in Christ we have a standing with God that can *never* change, and a promise of cleansing from *all* unrighteousness!

Fellowship

David's place in God's house was never empty by choice. His heart was very much there, and he rejoiced when others said to him, "Let us go into the house of the Lord" (Ps. 122:1). For believers, the Sabbath is a foretaste of the perfect world that will soon be theirs. Each new week begins with worship and fellowship, and this will be our great occupation in glory. Our desire is to praise God together and to hear the gospel. We delight also to be at midweek meeting, to hear the prayers of the brethren and unite ourselves with the petitions made to our heavenly Father. At death, believers must leave God's house on earth, but they enter His house in heaven, which they will never leave.

The Psalms show us how much David valued fellowship with the Lord. If you have family or close friends, you wish to spend as much time with them as you can. The Lord Jesus Christ is the Friend who sticks closer than a brother (Prov. 18:24). The union between Christ and His people is an intimate one. When we read the Scriptures, the Lord is speaking to us, and we ought to listen carefully to what He is saying. In prayer, we enjoy the privilege of speaking to the Lord, and we may be sure that He is listening carefully to us! Is it not wonderful to have such a loving, kind companion along life's journey?

> ***"For believers, the Sabbath is a foretaste of the perfect world that will soon be theirs."***

Hope

It was David's hope that he would dwell in the Lord's house forever. He died in faith and went to the Father's house of many mansions. In heaven, believers enjoy a continual feast of worship and fellowship, with nothing to spoil it. There is "no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away" (Rev. 21:4). God's goodness follows His people there: the Lord still feeds them, and leads them to "living fountains of waters" (Rev. 7:17). God's mercy also follows us to heaven: for all eternity we shall not be receiving the punishment we deserve for our sins.

In the Lord's house above, the worship and fellowship is that of the Lord's spiritual family, united as one. All who trust in Christ for salvation belong in this family: they are His brethren, and in Him they are brethren one of another. The family ties we have on earth are eventually broken by death, but the ties that bind the Lord's family extend beyond the grave and through eternity. By grace, David belonged to this blessed family, and by the same grace he ran the race of life, looking unto Jesus (Heb. 12:1,2). Having endured, he entered his rest in heaven, joining the multitude at the throne who praise God and the Lamb.

In this new year, let us encourage ourselves in the Lord!

LEAH: MARRIED, BUT UNLOVED

REV. JAMES CLARK

"And he loved also Rachel more than Leah"
(Genesis 29:30)

Leah was married, but her husband did not love her – he loved Rachel. It was not Leah's fault. Her father Laban abused his authority and arranged the marriage, dealing deceitfully with Jacob. He wanted another seven years of labour out of him. After Leah's wedding week (Gen. 29:26,27), a sad one for her, Jacob and Rachel were wed. Years of misery now began for Leah. Rachel was beautiful, but her character did not match the beauty of Leah's. Jacob assigned no blame to Leah; he did not verbally or physically abuse her. He blamed Laban only.

The Contrast between the Two Sisters

"Rachel remains one of those women with nothing to recommend her but outward beauty...and her hatred is now directed against her sister Leah" (H.V. Morton). Leah, however, saw the Lord's sovereignty in her life and prayed to be submissive to God. She turned to the Lord, who does not judge by outward appearance, but looks on the heart (1 Sam. 16:7). "He saw in Leah a heart He alone appreciated, a precious heart, broken and lovelorn, reaching out to Him for help. He defends the despised and downtrodden, especially unloved wives. cf. v.31" (Cheryl Ford, *Healing for the Heart*, Crossway, 2001, p.134).

Leah continued to live in a loveless marriage and the rivalry begun by her sister caused many tensions in the marriage(s) (Gen. 30:15). Leah's whole life had now changed, but she was not to blame. She did not bring this misery upon herself. How often does something said or done by another person, especially a parent, bring lifelong misery upon us! However, despite the circumstances, Leah suffered no domestic abuse from Jacob.

Leah's Place in History

Leah was a wife faithful to God and loyal to her husband. From her son Judah came the tribe of Judah – Boaz, Jesse, David – and later Jesus Christ, the promised Messiah. The blessing would come through Leah and not Rachel. Rachel died on the journey back. Leah lived on. Did Jacob now see her worth when she was alone with him in the marriage? She was buried with Abraham and Sarah, Isaac and Rebekah; Jacob was buried beside her also. Many women have suffered like Leah, and a few men also. But God is gracious, and, for those who trust in God, all will work together for their eternal good (Rom. 8:28).

Lessons from Leah

1. *There is an innate desire in human beings "to love and be loved"* (Augustine). Sometimes a person will say, "I no longer love you". But God never says that. He says, "I have loved thee with an everlasting love", and this is why you are "drawn" to Him (Jer. 31:3). His love is unchangeable: it is saving and you cannot lose it if you have it (Ps. 89:33; John 13:1).

2. *In a trial like Leah's, a person can harden their heart or take their heart to God for healing* (Ps. 34:18; 147:3). Pour out your heart to your true Friend. Such trials stir up prayer like never before, whereas the complacent hardly pray at all. But it is also true of our life with God here that "the path of true love never did run smooth". The Lord loved David, but what a tempestuous life he had.

3. *The believer's Maker is her Husband* (Isa. 54:5). "Human love may break down and fail us, but His does not" (Ford, p.145). Rutherford said that the believer should be often on the shore of this world looking out for the return of her Husband. Do we indeed yearn for Him? (Rom. 8:18,19 – see Octavius Winslow, *No Condemnation In Christ Jesus*, on these verses.)

4. *Our culture today prizes external beauty, but God does not* (1 Pet. 3:3-5). "Our self esteem does not come from who we are and what we have or have not done, but from *Whose* we are and what He has done" (Ford, p.147). Leah did not focus on what might have been nor what she had lost, but on what she was with Christ. This is not a natural focus and must be prayed for (Ps. 103:2).

Happily for Leah and those like her, her Husband always thought of her and prayed for her. She was loved, and she believed Him, and she does live happily ever after! ■

CHRISTIAN JOY (1)

REV. KENNETH MACDONALD

(This address was given by Mr Macdonald at the 2025 School in Theology and has been edited for publication. This is the first of two parts.)

The Christian's joy is what is theirs in Christ. The Epistle to the Philippians is full of the Apostle's sense of joy. Even when Paul was writing from a Roman prison, it is obvious that Christ was *still* the source of his joy, not his circumstances. That is a lesson to us. While Philippians is the book we generally think of as bringing out the concept of "joy" or "rejoicing", the theme is found time and again throughout the Scriptures.

In the Old Testament, Jethro *"rejoiced"* for all the Lord's goodness (Exod. 18:9). We learn that *"joy"* comes in the morning, after the night of weeping (Ps. 30:5). We are told that believers shall have *"everlasting joy"* upon their heads (Isa. 35:10). In the New Testament, we find that Luke uses the word 'joy' or one of its derivatives sixteen times. In 1 Thessalonians, a book we may not usually think of in connection with joy, it is mentioned five times.

In John 15:11, the word "joy" is used not only for our joy but also the Lord's joy. It is the same Greek word for both. So, the believer is someone who has the joy of Christ, the joy of being *in* Christ, not only in this life but also when he or she enters glory. Then the believer will know *"fulness of joy"* (Ps. 16:11) or, as Adam Clarke puts it, *"a joy that shall not be diminished"*.

1. CHRIST'S JOY

Where do we find the best example, and indeed the only example to follow, when it comes to joy in our lives? Surely in Christ Jesus our Lord! But, it may be said, was He not a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief? Indeed He was, yet we also read that even as He drew near to His awful crucifixion, on the very night before His death He said to His followers: *"These things have I spoken unto you, that my joy may remain in you, and that your joy may be full"* (John 15:11).

What an astonishing truth we have here. Christ doesn't say that His people will have a joy *like* His; they will actually have *His* joy! We read that *"for the joy that was set before him, he endured the cross, despising the shame"* (Heb. 12:2). The cause of His joy, which moved Him to bear the cross, was that those in whom He joyed would be redeemed, and brought to glory. He rejoices in their salvation, and will present them to His Father at the last day with a holy joy.

> ***"Christ's joy in the New Testament is clearly connected to the work of the Holy Spirit in salvation."***

We also read in Christ's parable that when the shepherd finds the lost sheep, he lays it on his shoulders, *"rejoicing"* (Luke 15:5). We see Christ in that. When the seventy disciples returned with joy because the devils were subject to them, Jesus *"rejoiced in spirit"* that the truth was being revealed (Luke 10:17,21). The Lord's joy was so great that it is compared elsewhere to an 'anointing' of gladness. *"God, even thy God, hath anointed thee with the oil of gladness above thy fellows"* (Heb. 1:9, quoting Ps. 45:7).

Christ's joy in the New Testament is clearly connected to the work of the Holy Spirit in salvation. In relation to the return of the seventy, John Gill says: *"his heart was filled with joy, (not so much at the success of the seventy disciples, and the subjection of the devils to them), as in the view he had of the spread of the Gospel... and particularly at the sovereign and distinguishing grace of God towards the elect, whose names are written*

in heaven; upon the mention of which his soul was so affected, that he broke out in an exulting strain, into thanksgivings to God."

So, while Christ was indeed a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief, the ultimate result of that is that He could rejoice, knowing that we one day, as His people, would experience what John records: *"God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes"* (Rev 21:4). Is that not the perfection of joy – no more tears and seeing our Saviour *"face to face"*? (1 Cor. 13:12) As David says, *"in thy presence is fulness of joy"* (Ps. 16:11). So, in essence, Jesus' joy stems from His deep, personal relationship with His Father, but also in seeing the work given Him to do in the eternal plan of salvation bearing fruit. *"Christ's own joy and glory are increased... by his showing grace and mercy"* (Thomas Goodwin). Yet His greatest joy is in abiding in His Father's love (John 15:10).

2. CHRISTIAN JOY

We can sometimes find it difficult to differentiate between 'joy', 'happiness', and 'blessedness'. Happiness is usually linked to beneficial external circumstances, which is very different from Christian joy. Yet we see the same original word translated "joy" also translated as "blessed", and we have the words "happy" and "blessed" used in Scripture in a way which can be *very near* the same meaning as having this joy. For example, *"Happy [blessed] is he that hath the God of Jacob for his help"* (Ps. 146:5). The words "happy" and "blessed" are often used interchangeably in the Psalms.

It is similar in the New Testament. The same Greek word, *makarios*, is translated both as "blessed" and "happy", as is seen from the following examples: *"blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed"* (John 20:29); *"If ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them"* (John 13:17); *"If ye be reproached for the name of Christ, happy are ye"* (1 Pet. 4:14). I think we can see that blessedness and happiness have more to do with our *state*. Joy, for the Christian, is more to do with, amongst other things, *knowing and being assured of* the grace of God.

The first answer of the *Westminster Shorter Catechism* teaches us that *"Man's chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy him forever"*. C.S. Lewis rightly said that *"joy is the serious business of heaven"* for the believer, but surely no less for the Saviour. That is when and where the ultimate joy will be, yet having the real joy that comes from enjoying God is not something experienced only in heaven. It is what we can experience now.

In Acts 13:52, we read that *"the disciples were filled with joy, and with the Holy Ghost"*. As the commentator Adam Clarke put it: *"Though in the world they had tribulation, yet in Christ they had peace...The happiness of a genuine Christian lies far beyond the reach of earthly disturbances, and is not affected by the changes and chances to which mortal things are exposed. The martyrs were more happy in the flames than their persecutors could be on their beds of down."*

> **"To have Christ, here now and then in Glory, *that* is joy in all its fulness."**

Believers are indwelt by the Spirit. We live each day in light of our hope for eternity. When *"the former things are passed away"* (Rev. 21:4) we will have the full, 'felt' sense of the joy of the Lord. Christianity is a religion of joy already in this life. It comes from knowing and loving the Lord who has conquered us and liberated us from eternal death, and therefore from much sadness. We have joy in Christ because He has poured His love into our hearts. Paul says that *"the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us"* (Rom. 5:5).

Again, we are to remember it is *Christ's* joy that we have as believers. In other words, we have Himself! To have Christ, here now and then in Glory, *that* is joy in all its fulness. Was there not something of this joy with those disciples whom the Lord met with, and later they exclaimed, *"Did not our heart burn within us, while he talked with us by the way, and opened to us the scriptures?"* (Luke 24:32) I believe that every Christian can have occasional moments, if not seasons, of this personally.

So, this joy of the believer comes directly from the Lord. Looking within ourselves, we feel little joy. Our need is to go outside of ourselves and to the Saviour. Without Christ in our lives, true, meaningful joy is not possible for us. People seek after lasting joy, but they look for it in the wrong place – in the world. As believers we have joy because Christ saved and secured us by redeeming our souls, and He sought and found us through the Gospel. We cannot have this joy apart from Christ, because it doesn't exist anywhere else or with anyone else.

What an astonishing truth we have in Isaiah: *"the Lord delighteth in thee...as the bridegroom rejoiceth over the bride, so shall thy God rejoice over thee"*! (Isa. 62:4,5) ■

(to be continued)

THE LIFE OF FAITH DEPICTED IN THE PSALMS

REV. JAMES CLARK

"...on thee do I wait all the day" (Psalm 25:5)

Many think the Psalms are out of date, that they belong to an ancient culture, with a different kind of human nature. But nowadays human nature is, if anything, worse. Evil is more sophisticated. Some question whether the abundance of enemies highlighted in the Psalms is relevant to today's church. But the true church will always have enemies (Matt. 16:18), inside it and outside it (Ps. 41:9). The true Christian will have enemies too: false religions, ungodly governments, Satan, and those who "do the deeds of [their] father" (John 8:41).

The Psalmists Lived in a Hostile World

In this world there are strains, threats, problems, provocations and challenges for which we need God, if we are going to overcome them. The Psalms show us how. They have different authors, including David, Asaph, Solomon and Heman, yet there are elements which are common to all the Psalms:

1. *Calling upon the Name of the Lord* (Gen. 4:26). In the Psalms there is a consciousness of the One spoken to, an awareness (of varying depths) that God has spoken and we can speak to Him! It is not a trivial matter, that God's very words have come to us. God's Name signifies all that is in Him, His character and attributes. Is it not a great wonder that God is there for me? I cannot make it on my own, but I belong to Him.

2. *A description of the trouble* (2 Cor. 7:5). The affliction can be in mind, or body, or both. There can be opposition, loneliness, ostracism and sometimes a fear of Divine desertion. Note that, even when we think God is absent, we call to Him as present (Ps. 22:1)! The Psalms are mostly prayers of people who needed help; their experiences were as real as ours are today. The sufferings are expressed in words and brought to God – a good example for us. We are on good ground if we use their prayers ourselves, or sing them when we cannot pray. We would like to be in control of our lives, but that is not the human condition; things 'happen' to us. We also are sinful, limited and make mistakes; this also adds to our troubles. We cannot be at ease living in this world. As it has been expressed: "Through the storm, through the night...Take my hand...Lead me home".

3. *The cry for help.* "Hear me, help me" is the pattern of the Psalms. The Psalmists are usually not specific in the kind of help they seek; they do not dictate to God what He should do. It is usually taken for granted that if God hears us (because of our relation to Christ) He will help us. We gradually learn to distinguish our desires from our needs. Our need is God Himself (Ps. 42:2; 73:25). "He asks too much for whom God is insufficient" (Anon). We pray according to God's revealed character, purpose and promises, with a conviction of His faithfulness, power and care (Ps. 56:9). We set the Lord before us (Ps. 16:8). There is an element of trust in this. The Biblical information about God shapes our mind and affects our prayer life (Ps. 116:10). It is not easy to translate our feelings into words, but the Psalmists help us in this matter.

4. *A conclusion with praise and thanksgiving.* Often this comes after an event, an intervention, an escape, but sometimes it is given in anticipation (Ps. 30:5). This is because we know the reality of God and that all shall end well because of His faithfulness. Of course, this waiting upon the Lord will be tested by God sometimes, and also sometimes made into a temptation by Satan. Hope is faith looking forward; we shall thank Him again (Ps. 42:11). Is there enough thankfulness in our prayers? There is much in our Psalms.

But does not Psalm 88 conclude with David still in darkness? Yes, but although that Psalm was finished, David's life was not! If we pray and sing the Psalms frequently, we shall know God and ourselves better. They remind us daily of reality, that we live in a hostile world, but God is for us (Rom. 8:31)! The Psalms set the Lord before us as we go out into the world each day. ■

"I have been accustomed to call this book, I think not inappropriately, 'An Anatomy of all the Parts of the Soul'; for there is not an emotion of which any one can be conscious that is not here represented as in a mirror. Or rather, the Holy Spirit has here drawn to the life all the griefs, sorrows, fears, doubts, hopes, cares, perplexities, in short, all the distracting emotions with which the minds of men are wont to be agitated."
(John Calvin, Preface to Commentary on Psalms)

WHEN THE PULPIT FALLS SILENT: UNDERSTANDING VACANCIES (1)

REV. RAYMOND A. KEMP

A twofold issue faces the functioning of today's church. Without a minister, many pulpits are empty; but sadly, many occupied pulpits have empty ministers. We address the first, as the latter demands its own space. All denominations face a vacancy crisis, providing neither comfort nor a cushion. A vacancy is not a mere administrative gap, but a spiritual period revealing God's providence, the church's health, and the need for true revival. Hence, we must view this spiritually, theologically, and providentially.

Providential Dealings

There are negative reasons why a pulpit falls vacant. Certainly, the Lord may withdraw the settled preaching of the Word because of a congregation's indifference, poor attendance, or unfounded murmuring – all indicators of little desire for an established ministry (2 Kings 14:25; Jonah 1:2). To break the contract of the Call signed to a minister is a serious matter, and such a congregation should not expect the Lord's blessing through another pastor soon. Again, the pulpit may be silent because of doctrinal conflict, desertion, or moral failure – all suggestive that such a man was a poor choice in the first place (cf. 1 Tim. 5:20), and the congregation is better vacant. It is *not* better to have a hireling than no shepherd.

Other reasons exist:

Ministers may retire, die, or demit their charge because of illness or a new theological outlook. These are natural and personal reasons, but at the same time they are God's providential dealings. Of course, ministers in retirement will still preach, and ministers who fall ill, either physically or mentally (2 Cor. 4:1), may assume duties again.

The sovereign God may call a man to engage in the work elsewhere. Although disappointing for some, the wider church is greater than any one congregation.

The Lord is Building His Church

We have known real dangers during vacancies – the devil sowing tares, flocks becoming lazy in attendance, contentment with pulpit variety, and, with absent pulpit leadership, the Diotrephes spirit arising among those wanting power (3 John 9,10). But Christ's promise to build the church holds good during vacancies (Matt. 16:18). To believe otherwise is man-centred, not Spirit-dependent. Sadly, many gripped by this unbelief have forgotten the Holy Spirit; to the church "belong the Lord's gracious promises of preservation, continuance, protection, and final glory" (J.C. Ryle, *Holiness*, chapter 13).

There are several inferences:

The sovereign God will pull down and build as He pleases. Bithynia was closed to Paul; the call came to Macedonia – a turning point in the spread of Christianity (Acts 16:6-11).

Pastors are given to keep believers together. Building the church is both the kingdom's deepening and expansion.

All reformers and second Reformation theologians noted the scandal of vacant congregations: these should be temporary, with pastors being appointed quickly. Translations were regarded as part of the church's building.

We believe the signing and acceptance of a Call to be of the Lord, and this can also build the soon-to-be pastorless saints. It is easy to depend upon a pastor, yet a strengthened and exercised faith enables our faithfulness in small congregations, knowing the Great Shepherd Himself cares for His people. Vacancies after 1900 lasted decades, but there were few deserters.

Ministerial Calling and Vacancy

John Calvin notes that, though Christ presides and is conspicuous in the church, He "does not dwell among us in visible presence", for He appoints ministers, "making them, as it were, his substitutes...doing his own work by their lips" (*Institutes of the Christian Religion*, IV.3.1). The Dutch Reformed theologian Petrus van Mastricht (1630-1706) concurs that this dignity is because God Himself (2 Cor. 5:18) and Christ Himself (Eph. 4:11) gave the ministry by "sheer grace" and Christ exercised it (Matt. 4:17; Rom. 15:8) (*Theoretical-Practical Theology*, vol.5, pp.416-7).

This demands the following:

Prayer that the Lord, as Samuel Miller says, will provide an "able ministry" where a man has piety, talents, competent knowledge, and is "active, diligent, and persevering in the discharge of his multiplied and arduous duties" (*Holding Fast the Faithful Word*, pp.197-207). Undoubtedly, the church's vacancy crisis is a spiritual problem in both pulpit and pew.

Prayer that men would inquire whether they themselves have a call to the ministry. It is not enough to understand a pulpit's falling silent; we will need to examine our responsibilities and duties in such situations. ■

CHANGE

KEVIN N. MACDONALD

The arrival of a new year reminds us that life never stands still. For many young people this year will be significant, as college and university are potentially on the horizon. This will often mean new accommodation, independence, and unfamiliar surroundings. Others may be starting new jobs, changing careers, or even starting families.

Change is often necessary. After all, you're not meant to stay eighteen forever! With each passing year comes greater responsibility and, hopefully, maturity. Change can be a good thing (as God ordains it), but it can also be unsettling. Moving to new surroundings is more than just moving furniture or postcodes. In seasons of transition, it is more important than ever to know what doesn't change – and to hold on to it.

1. The Unchangeable God

One benefit of living in a monarchy is that it illustrates continuity. Governments change every few years, but we knew King Charles would succeed Queen Elizabeth, and we know, God willing, who his successors will be according to the family line.

While the world around you constantly changes, God does not, nor does He have a successor. "I am the Lord, I change not" (Mal. 3:6); "Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and today, and forever" (Heb. 13:8). This is a wonderful truth giving solid ground for Christian stability. God's character remains consistent, even as you experience necessary changes in an ever-shifting world. His unchangeableness means His promises are not temporary. His truth does not 'adapt' to the culture, and His presence is not lost because you have moved to a new address or job. This is a vitally important reality to which you must anchor yourself in seasons of change. God is faithful.

2. Unseen Pitfalls of Change

Change, while necessary, can subtly shake your spiritual routines, convictions, and even your view of God. He does not change, but you have had to leave behind some things you did not realise were a help in your spiritual life. Many young people leave home and then quickly understand how much they relied on the spiritual example and habits of their parents, or the structure of their regular church. Shared patterns like these are often taken for granted; they are big helps for personal discipline.

It is not uncommon for young adults to drift in their walk with Christ, simply because they underestimated how much their spiritual lives were shaped and encouraged by their immediate environment. The devil does not always need a crisis to make you fall; sometimes, he just needs a simple change of routine! Take note of these realities and prayerfully prepare for them.

3. The Value of Continuity

You need more than just a place to live, a course to study, or a job to do. You need a church! Of course, not just *any* church. You need a church that preaches the Bible faithfully, feeds your soul, and helps you follow Christ fully. While many options are open to you for study or careers, this is non-negotiable. You need a faithful church that is a solid ground of the truth (1 Tim. 3:15) in a confused world. When it comes to choosing a church, it should not just be about feelings or finding people your own age. It is about finding somewhere where you are actively discipled, encouraged, and reminded of eternal truth.

In addition, a biblical church should provide the very thing we have mentioned that we take for granted: spiritual continuity and familiarity of surroundings. The church you attend should be the closest experience to 'home'. It should be your 'home from home'. When everything else in your life changes, hearing the same Word preached, singing the same psalms, partaking of the same sacraments, following a familiar format, and spending time with people who share a love for the same Saviour, will go a long way to keep your heart grounded.

4. What Should I Do?

Here are a few simple instructions, with a memorable acronym, GRIP:

(i) *Gather with God's People.* Centre your choice of location on a biblically-rooted church.

(ii) *Remember the Sabbath Day.* It is not just a tradition from your homeland but a gift from God to help preserve your soul (Exod. 20:8).

(iii) *Invest in Wise Fellowship.* Don't limit your spiritual life to your own age group. Be sure to spend some time with experienced Christians who can provide help, example, and prayer.

(iv) *Pray and Persevere in the Word.* Christ said, "watch and pray" (Mark 13:33). Little compromises, left unchecked, become big regrets. Be watchful and spend time with the Lord, your personal Shepherd and the Rock of your faith. ■

CHURCH NEWS

Southern Presbytery Family Conference

(Rev. Graeme Craig)

In a day when many are fixated on outward beauty, it was good to be reminded of the beauty that matters at the fourth annual Southern Presbytery Family Conference. Over seventy people gathered in Partick Free Church (Continuing) on 30th November to hear Rev. David Campbell, of North Preston Evangelical Church, speak on 'A Beautiful Christian Life Outlined' and 'A Beautiful Christian Life Illustrated'.

Basing his remarks on Galatians 5:22-26, Mr Campbell began by noting that even without grace, there can be something of beauty seen in people's lives. There is magnificence in man, but it is the magnificence of a ruin, for something is missing. Man in sin lacks holiness, which is our greatest beauty. He needs to be renewed by the Spirit of God and to experience the Spirit's work of removing the ugly works of the flesh and sin and replacing these with the beauty of holiness. There is a great deal of work to do!

In regard to spiritual fruit, it was noted that the various aspects of fruit mentioned in Galatians 5 are not uniquely Christian. Mr Campbell referred to love and joy, both of which are displayed by the unregenerate. The Spirit, however, takes these qualities and redirects them into a new channel in a unique and spiritual way. Thus, the believer now loves God, and this love expresses itself in serving God, delighting in Him and worshipping Him. He now loves other believers with a prayerful and practical concern for them. His love is enriched with new objects and ways of expression. Similarly, there is now a joy in the Lord, in salvation and in the progress of the Kingdom of God in this world.

Reflecting a pastoral concern, Mr Campbell observed that when we examine ourselves, we will often find uneven fruitfulness, with some fruit 'riper' than others. Through time the believer should become more like Christ. After all, this is the goal of our sanctification (Rom. 8:29; Eph. 4:16). Christ, whose human nature was filled with the Spirit, was always showing and bearing all the fruit of the Spirit throughout His life, bearing it to perfection at each stage of His development and service.

In applying this challenging outline, we were encouraged by being reminded that, for the believer, this beauty is attainable, pleases God, adorns the Gospel, and will one day be perfected. As the ruin of Eilean Donan Castle was rebuilt in the early twentieth century into the beautiful building we see today, so one day believers shall appear gloriously renewed and perfected. Then the Lord will rejoice over us as He sees His gracious work completed in us (Zeph. 3:17).

Rev. David Campbell (front row, third from left) with members of the Southern Presbytery (courtesy of Rev. Andrew Allan)

After lunch, fellowship, and a time of Psalm-singing, Mr Campbell illustrated a beautiful Christian life from the life of James Gilmour. Born in Glasgow in 1843, Gilmour set out as a Missionary to Mongolia with the London Missionary Society. His life was full of trials, difficulties and disappointments. He experienced great loneliness in his work, and knew little success for his labours. Yet, he persevered in his calling out of love to God and the people he had come to serve. Through it all Christ gave him the victory, despite apparent non-success. In a day when the Church is struggling and we often feel defeated, it was good to be reminded that our life is not a failure if we are patient and faithful to the Lord.

Both addresses are available on the Partick FC(C) SermonAudio page. Next year's Southern Presbytery Family Conference is scheduled for Saturday 28th November 2026 in Partick Free Church (Continuing) (D.V.).

Southern Presbytery Colloquium

(Rev. Andrew Allan)

The next Free Southern Presbytery Colloquium is due to take place at Knightswood FC(C), 361 Fulton Street, Glasgow, G13 2SP, on Saturday 31st January 2026 (D.V.).

The meeting begins at 10.00am and the addresses are as follows: Rev. Graeme Craig – 'Unity and Uniformity'; Rev. Andrew Allan – 'Evangelism'; Rev. E. Trevor Kirkland – 'Thoughts on Preaching'. After each talk there will be a Q&A session. All men are welcome.

It is expected that the lectures will be live-streamed on Zoom. Meeting ID: 213 686 0897 Passcode: 2709

Spring 2026 Youth Conference *(Angus Nicolson)*

The organising committee for the Conference are pleased to announce that the next FC(C) Youth Conference will be held from Friday, 27th

February to Monday, 2nd March 2026, at Ratagan Youth Hostel. The speaker for the weekend is Rev. James MacInnes (Lochalsh & Strath) and he will speak on the subject of 'The Great Commission'. The conference will worship with the Lochalsh & Strath Congregation on the Lord's Day.

The Hostel is located at Ratagan, Glenshiel, Kyle, Ross-shire IV40 8NP. Public transport is available by bus to Shiel Bridge, and by train to Kyle of Lochalsh. Follow-on transport to the Hostel can be arranged following booking. The Conference has exclusive use of the Hostel for the duration of the weekend.

The conference is for those aged 16 to 30. The cost of the conference is £60 for the Employed and £50 for the Unemployed. All catering will be provided, and prior booking is essential. To book, please contact the booking secretary, Miss Suzanna Macdonald (suzymacd@outlook.com).

Further information will be available on the Church website closer to the time. All these arrangements are God willing.

Subscriptions

A reminder that subscriptions to the magazine for 2026 are now due. Details of the annual subscription rates, which are unchanged from last year, are found on the inside front cover. Subscribers should have received subscription renewal and gift subscription forms with their December issue, and if you have not yet done so, we encourage you to renew your subscription to the magazine and also to consider taking out a half-price gift subscription for one or more friends. The cost of a gift subscription is £16.75. *Please note that half-price gift subscriptions can only be taken out for individuals who have a UK address.*

If required, further forms may be obtained from the Subscriptions Secretary, whose contact details will also be found on the inside front cover.

Distributor

Due to unforeseen circumstances, Anne Macaulay has had to relinquish the role of Distributor for the magazine.

We are grateful to Katrina Mackay for her willingness to return to the role on a temporary basis. Her contact details are found on the inside front cover.

Pokot Bible Translation Project

(TBS Media Newsletter)
Location: Kenya, Uganda
Speakers: 700,000
Project Status: New Testament

In 2014, TBS commenced a new edition of the Pokot Bible. The Gospel according to John was published in 2021 and feedback thus far has been very positive. Lord willing, the New Testament will be translated by the end of this year, with review work commencing in 2026.

This new translation is primarily from the TBS Greek New Testament with secondary reference to the Authorised (King James) Version. Our lead translator also refers to the first edition TBS Pokot New Testament of 1967, as well as the Pokot New Testament published by the Bible Society of Kenya and other extant African language translations.

"His name shall endure for ever: his name shall be continued as long as the sun: and men shall be blessed in him: all nations shall call him blessed" (Ps. 72:17).

How to pray for this project:

- Pray for the continued health of the main translator who is quite elderly.
- Pray for the translation team as they continue their translating and proofreading work.
- Pray for the distribution of the printed copies of the Gospel according to John.

Thought for the New Year

"Let the cross of Calvary be the object of our daily contemplation – the ground of our constant 'glorying' – and the world will then be to us as a 'crucified' object (Gal. 6:14). Let us not forget, that we are looking forward, and making a progress towards a world, where none are strangers – where all are children of one family, dwelling in one eternal home."
Charles Bridges

Leave a Legacy

Please prayerfully consider the ongoing work of the gospel by leaving a legacy to the Church. A helpful information leaflet is available on request. Ask your local treasurer for a copy or email: **generaltreasurer@fccontinuing.org**

SRI LANKA CYCLONE APPEAL

REV. JAMES MACINNES

Please pray for the work of Reformed Protestant Mission, Sri Lanka. There are many demands made upon the mission workers for practical and spiritual help. Recently, an appeal was launched by the Sri Lanka Deacons' Court, with the support of the Home & Foreign Missions Committee, to raise funds to help following the damage caused by the recent cyclone.

State of Emergency

Monsoon rains are a regular feature of life in Sri Lanka. Due to weather patterns in the Indian Ocean, the southwest of the island is impacted between May and September, while in the northeast (where most of our mission work is located) the worst rains are between October and January. Flooding and temporary inconvenience are expected during these monsoon seasons.

However, at the beginning of December, Sri Lanka was hit by a devastating cyclone, named Ditwah, which brought high winds and increased rainfall to the whole country simultaneously. Flooding and landslides overwhelmed basic infrastructure, so that one third of the nation was without electricity or running water. In the hill country, many homes were destroyed. With more than 600 deaths nationwide, the government has declared a state of emergency.

Further heavy rains are anticipated in the mission district over the next two months, which will both hinder recovery and place further pressure upon the fragile infrastructure. Low-lying and poor-quality housing is particularly vulnerable, both to damage from high winds and pollution from flood waters which overwhelm primitive sewerage systems, and compromise drinking water in local wells. While there is much to be done by emergency services, many day labourers struggle to find paid work when farmland is underwater and construction work must cease.

Vavuniya

Current government advice is for households to remove to higher ground. This is not easy when many roads are impassable, when it means leaving home and livestock behind. The church in Vavuniya is on a gentle hill, which protects it from flooding, but access to the main road is frequently cut off when rains wash mud and grit from the many dirt tracks into roadside drains. These dirt-track lanes, unsuitable for a car, are negotiable by foot or motorbike, allowing members of the congregation to find shelter at the mission when flooded out from their own homes.

There were three deaths on the outskirts of the town, where a car crossing a newly-constructed bridge was swept into the river. This new concrete bridge, without restraining parapets or rails, replaced a notorious wooden structure that bore the hazard sign, "warning – dilapidated bridge".

Puthukudiyiruppu and Kilinochchi

The rains are worse, and flooding more extensive, further east in Puthukudiyiruppu (PTK) and north in Kilinochchi. Two families in PTK spent two days in the church building, as it was unsafe to remain in their own homes after storm damage. One of these homes, the mission house, was struck by a falling tree that broke through the roof and damaged the well. It is impractical for families to relocate to the church in Kilinochchi, as the whole area is low-lying.

Ra-annan Farm
Sand had been purchased for mixing concrete at Ra-annan Farm, near Mullaitivu, where there is a need for a boundary wall to keep out foraging wild pigs. But most of the sand has now been washed away. The wind uprooted some of the banana trees at the farm, just as they were nearing the time of harvest. It is disappointing to see these plants develop and fruits form, only for these fruits to be lost with only a few weeks to go. However, approximately 90% of the bananas survived and it is hoped that these will be harvested soon.

Immediate Needs
Following the cyclone, the Mission is increasingly being asked for help. The immediate need is for basic food supplies for the poorer families, and also tarpaulins that can be used to secure temporary roof repairs. Thereafter, support will be required for more permanent house repairs. The hope is to provide for families connected to the mission work, whether they are worshipping within the congregations, supported by Karis Care, or with children attending preschool.

Prayer
Please pray for the mission workers: Rev. Partheepan, deacon Beni, the evangelists Jaykomar and Jesuthas, and the administrator Jayram. Ask that they would be given wisdom in distributing practical support and be able to convey the hope and comfort of the gospel.

Gifts
Gifts to support this vital work can be sent directly via the main Church account. Details for making a bank transfer are available from the Financial Administrator, Mrs Donna Norris, at:

financialadministrator@fccontinuing.org

Alternatively, gifts can be made via your local congregation.

Further Prayer Points

1. Thanksgiving
Give thanks for God's faithful care and provision as the Mission has developed over the past eleven years. By God's grace today there are weekly services in Vavuniya, PTK, and Kilinochchi, and occasional Bible studies are arranged in other locations. Ten families with disabled children receive regular spiritual and practical support through Karis Care. Two Preschool facilities provide support for children aged 4-6, and their families. Ten men are being prepared for further ministry through Melville Theological Institute (MTI). Ra-annan Farm is developing, with the expectation of a first harvest of coconuts within the next year. Regular outreach work is undertaken, and support given to a network of local pastors, who would otherwise be poorly equipped – both theologically and practically.

2. Protection in the current extreme weather
Pray for God's continued protection and care, and that support can be provided and distributed appropriately.

3. Spiritual growth of the church
Pray for growth in the spiritual life of all the church members, with grace to live as true witnesses within the local community. Also for the students of MTI to mature in the faith and develop in their theological understanding. Pray for those serving in ministry and for God's blessing upon their families. Also, for the men teaching the students at MTI. Many of these classes are delivered live, while others are from the UK or USA using teleconferencing facilities, with a live translation in Sri Lanka. This facility works well – though it obliges students and lecturers (being in different international time zones) to sometimes work at unusual hours.

4. Kilinochchi building project
Pray for God's guidance, provision, and the successful completion of the project. Wonderfully, funds have been provided to purchase the Kilinochchi building. Architect plans have been prepared for the development of the facility, and we wait upon the Lord to provide the resources to undertake this work.

5. Quarterly magazine
Pray for the planning, preparation, and publication of the upcoming quarterly magazine, *Pērigai*. This is an ancient Tamil name for the drum used to sound out royal proclamations. The pounding of the drum would carry the king's message far through the jungle terrain to the distant communities. *Pērigai* will carry the message of the King of kings, with articles prepared to encourage and strengthen the local church.

COMMENT

THE WHIRLWIND

Sin punished by further sin

One way in which the Bible shows itself to be the Word of God is that even its briefest sayings are of significance. A few inspired words are all that are needed to teach us principles of great relevance to our lives. In a familiar example, the Lord says concerning Israel, "they have sown the wind, and they shall reap the whirlwind" (Hos. 8:7). This is a proverb with a moral lesson. Its language is idiomatic: taken literally it makes no sense! Yet, when the meaning of the proverb is understood, its lesson is all the more memorable because of the striking way in which it is conveyed.

Broadly, the proverb is a warning that when faith declines, people tend towards idolatry, and their worship becomes an empty show that invites God's judgement. As a whirlwind begins with a swirl of dust on the ground, and then intensifies until it ultimately destroys all in its path, so it is with divine retribution for sin. At first, judgement comes upon a sinful nation in the way of afflictions such as war, famine, plagues, earthquakes, and floods. Then, if there is no repentance, God gives people up to further and grosser sin. Finally, He gives them completely over to sin (Rom. 1:24,28). Sin of a progressively more destructive kind is committed with increasing ease, until all moral sense is gone.

The UK is in danger of experiencing this whirlwind. Its Christian character is gradually being destroyed. The initial harm was done in the nineteenth century, with attacks on the inspiration of Scripture and acceptance of the evolutionary theory. In the twentieth century, liberalism caused much damage in the church, as secularism, materialism, and pleasure-seeking did in the nation. In the 1960s, parliament enacted various items of legislation that together created the 'permissive society'. They included the decriminalisation of homosexual acts in private and the legalisation of abortion under certain circumstances.

The consequences have been devastating. We now have lewd 'gay pride' marches in our towns and cities and the mockery of 'gay marriage'. To criticise homosexuality publicly can get you into difficulties and even lead to the loss of your employment. Shamefully, during those sixty years over ten million children, including more than half a million in Scotland, have been killed by abortion. Praying near an abortion site can result in an unlimited fine and a criminal record. There is pressure for the full decriminalisation of abortion throughout the UK.

Our Christian culture is in peril and only the Lord can save it. "O Israel, thou hast destroyed thyself; but in me is thine help" (Hos. 13:9). ■

TRUTHS ABOUT DEATH

A subject not to be ignored

It is quite common to meet people who do not take death seriously. At one end there are those for whom death is a 'taboo' subject. If they mention death at all it is to make light of it. They shut out from their minds even the least thought of death, as though by ignoring it they can make it go away. When death is not mentioned, the devil is delighted. At the other end are people who are willing to speak about death, but for the reason that they think it is nothing to be worried about. They believe that death is final and there is no 'afterlife'. When death is misrepresented, Satan also rejoices.

In the middle are the many who say, "How can anyone know what happens at death?" This is really just a means of avoiding the matter, and again the devil is pleased. As with the question of man's beginning, it is obvious that we can only know about man's end if it is *revealed* to us. If there is a God, then we would expect Him to inform us about such an important matter. God has done that in the Scriptures. He has told us what death is and where it leads. There are three truths that ought to be remembered.

First, death is a *separation*. Death clearly separates us from our family and friends: the ties we had with them are broken and they are left to mourn. Yet death itself is a separation. God made man body and soul (Gen. 2:7), and at the time He has appointed for us, He undoes the mysterious tie between the two. The Lord said to Adam after his fall, "dust thou art, and unto dust shall thou return" (Gen. 3:19). Our mortal remains will go into the grave and rest there as in a bed, until the resurrection when Christ returns to judge the world.

Second, death results in a *translation*. When Paul was aware that his life was drawing to a close, he said, "the time of my departure is at hand" (2 Tim. 4:6). He would be moving from one location to another, from this world to the next, from time to eternity. For every individual, at the moment of death "the spirit shall return unto God who gave it" (Ecc. 12:7). The spirit or soul will not cease to exist, neither will it sleep; it will be fully conscious.

Third, death brings us to our *destination*. Christ spoke of two places only for departed spirits: heaven and hell. Lazarus went into "Abraham's bosom" or heaven, and was comforted. The rich man went to hell, and was in torments (Luke 16:22,23). These are final destinations: it is either "life eternal" or "everlasting punishment" (Matt. 25:46). The one is to be forever with Christ, the other is to be forever without Him. We must repent of our sin and put our trust in the Saviour *now*. When we die it will be too late! ■

"HOW MAY TRUST IN GOD BE SAID TO BE PERFECT?"

A MINISTER ON THE NATURE OF TRUE FAITH

REV. TREVOR KIRKLAND

The fifth and final article in our series considering some 'letters of note' relates to the subject of faith.

In 1665, a minister received a letter from a friend with a simple question: How may trust in God be said to be perfect? Initially the minister was somewhat puzzled, noting that such a phrase does not appear in Scripture. However, the minister did recall that it was used in a metrical translation of the Psalms by Sternhold and Hopkins. First published in 1562, this Psalter was used in England for almost two centuries. At Psalm 37:5, it reads: *"Cast both thyself and thy affairs on God with perfect trust; And then thou shalt with patience see Th' effect both sure and just."*

The minister then proceeded to answer the question. We give his answer in full because of its practical helpfulness. It has been lightly edited with the language updated.

> "*Perfect* trust can signify only two things; 1. The Truth of it for kind, as a perfect man is a sincere and upright man; 2. The Strength of it for degree, and so it notes not absolute perfection, but an eminent and singular measure of that grace, above what many, or possibly most, attain unto. This the Scripture expresses by trusting in the Lord with all the heart (Prov. 3:5), that is, truly and strongly. Such an eminent measure of this grace, no doubt, had Hezekiah, in respect of which, as well as of other graces, it is said of him, that after him was *'none like him among all the kings of Judah, nor any that went before him'* (2 Kings 18:5).
>
> But when all is done, the most perfect trust attainable by us here is mingled with much distrust; which yet does not deprive us of the benefit of it, otherwise our condition would be sad. *'If we believe not, yet he [God] abideth faithful'* (2 Tim. 2:13). That is, though our faith be weak, though it often fail, and be at a loss, as to the actings of it, yet being true, God is by promise obliged, for *'he cannot deny himself'*. And so, though we trust not, not so firmly, not so constantly as we should, yet where there is any measure of that grace in truth, God is faithful. And yet it must be granted, that the greater measure of faith and trust we can attain, the more we may expect from God. *'According to your faith'* – and so according to our trust – *'be it unto you'* (Matt. 9:29), is his language to us. We impair and lessen our mercies by the weakness of our faith and trust, as Barak did (Judg. 4:9), but an eminent trust and strong confidence in God, always results in some eminent appearance of God for us, according to the proportion and measure of our reliance on him.
>
> Now our Trust may be known to be right:
>
> **(1)** From its *Foundation*, which is some word or promise of God (Ps. 119:42), and that rightly understood and applied, else it is a presumptuous confidence without warrant.
>
> **(2)** From the *Descriptions* of the nature of it, which is excellently represented unto us in a variety of significant expressions. It is described by relying on the Lord (2 Chron. 13:18), resting on him (2 Chron. 14:11), staying ourselves on him (Isa. 50:11), leaning on him (Song of Sol. 8:5), casting ourselves, our cares and our burdens on him (Ps. 55:22; 1 Pet. 5:7), having our eyes on him (2 Chron. 20:12) and having all our expectations from him (Ps. 62:5).
>
> **(3)** It may be known by its *Concomitants* [things inseparably associated with it], which are:
>
> (i) A disclaiming and renouncing of all other props and supports (Prov. 3:5; Hos. 14:3; Ps. 20:7; 2:5,6).
>
> (ii) Frequent recourse to him in every need. A man will be often running to a faithful friend in whom he trusts, in reference to any business of importance. He shall be often consulted with, his assistance often implored, upon occasion of every emergent difficulty. So, if God be our strong tower, in every danger we will be running into it for safety (Prov. 18:10). If our trust be in him, we will be addressing ourselves to him, be acknowledging him in all our ways (Prov. 3:5). We will be committing our works and affairs to him

(Ps. 37), and pouring out our hearts before him at all times (Ps. 62:8).

(iii) Trust in God is accompanied by a care to please him. No prudent man will provoke him, on whom his trust and dependence is for anything which he values. Nor can he have any good ground of confidence in his help and assistance, whom by his daily affronts and failures he makes his enemy. He that has friends, must show himself friendly (Prov. 18:24), and so must he that will have them as his friends for the future, or else in reason he cannot expect to have them long. Hence trust in the Lord and doing good are linked together (Ps. 37:3). This will greatly strengthen our trust (Prov. 14:26), and without this all our confidence is vain (Jer. 7:4,5, etc.)

(iv) True trust in God is attended with the diligent use of such lawful means as God's providence offers. Thus, Paul so trusts in God's promise for saving himself and the rest in the ship, as he no way opposes the use of such means, by which the providence of God was to be served (Acts 27). Neglect of means makes our confidence nothing other than a presumptuous tempting of God.

(v) True trust in God is accompanied with a sense and bewailing of, and a mourning under, our distrust, together with a striving against it, and a stirring up ourselves to hope in God. So David: *'Why art thou cast down, O my soul, and why art thou disquieted in me? hope thou in God'*, etc. (Ps. 42:5) And the man in the Gospel, *'Lord, I believe, help thou mine unbelief'* (Mark 9:24). So, Lord, I trust in thee, help thou my distrust.

(vi) It is accompanied with a sense of our unworthiness of whatever favour or relief we are trusting in God for. So Jacob, manifesting his trust in God by his recourse to him in his distress, acknowledges himself unworthy of all the mercy and truth which God had formerly showed him, and consequently much more of that protection against Esau, which he further begged of him (Gen. 32:10).

(4) This holy trust in God may be discerned by the *Effects* of it, which are such as these:

(i) It quietens the heart, composes the spirit, and frees it from distracting fears and cares, at least according to the measure of it, and at such times when the actings of it are not obstructed by temptations or otherwise. *'Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace'*, etc. (Isa. 26:3)

(ii) It holds up the heart, and keeps it from sinking, yea, sometimes fills it with joy and holy triumph, even when all outward means fail (Hab. 3:17-19). *'Although the fig tree shall not blossom'*, etc., *'Yet I will rejoice in the Lord'*, etc.

(iii) It enables and strengthens the soul to wait God's season for deliverance, yea, though he should seem long to hold us in expectation (Isa. 28:16). He that believes, and so he that trusts in God with all his heart, will not make haste.

(iv) It effectually preserves us from making use of any unlawful means. He that trusts in the Lord need not do it, for he knows whom he has trusted, even one who knows how to deliver (2 Pet. 2:9) and never fails those who trust in him (Ps. 9:10). To reach forth the hand to take hold of any unwarrantable relief would be to renounce his trust in God. Wherefore, in this sense also, he that believes or trusts, will not make haste, as that verse is likewise understood.

(v) Sound trust in God will make us willing, and in some measure enable us to refer all to his good pleasure, to give up all to his disposal, to put all our all into his hands. And thus, much is implied in the phrase of committing our way to him (Ps. 37:5). When we entirely trust a wise and faithful man in any weighty business, we refer all to his wisdom, care, and integrity. They who can thus trust God, do as it were engage him in point of honour not to fail them. And indeed, it is impossible he should fail them, not only on this account, but likewise upon another, namely, that he himself has caused them to trust in him, as the phrase of the Psalmist is (Ps. 119:49). God causes this:

(a) by promises to those who shall trust in him;

(b) by commands and peremptory [authoritative] charges laid on them to do it;

(c) by manifold experiences of his never failing their expectations formerly;

(d) by most sweet and effective encouragements and drawings of his own Spirit, he has induced them, and prevailed with them to trust in him.

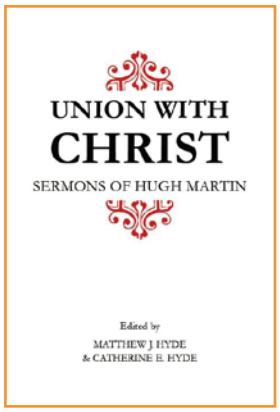
After all this can he fail them, or betray them? The philosopher's good nature would not deliver the poor bird to the hawk, from which it had taken shelter under his cloak, and yet he never allured the bird into that refuge. God has allured us to take sanctuary under his wing, and therefore heaven and earth can sooner pass away, than he fail us. How well also he takes it at our hands that we will trust in him, and the security he has thereupon given us, that one excellent passage (Ps. 91:14-16) abundantly manifests.

'The just shall live by his faith' (Hab. 2:4; Rom. 1:17, etc.)"

A simple question from a Christian that drew an excellent response from a minister. A fitting end to this series on 'letters of note'. ■

(Books for review should be sent to: Rev. David M. Blunt, 17 Knockline, Isle of North Uist HS6 5DT)

Union with Christ: Sermons of Hugh Martin
Matthew J. & Catherine E. Hyde (eds.), Free Presbyterian Publications, hbk, 418pp, £22.50 plus p&p. Available from Free Presbyterian Bookroom, Glasgow.



The genius of Hugh Martin (1822-85) as a minister, superlative theologian, noted mathematician, and profound thinker has increased interest in his writings. Rev. Dr Douglas Somerset's detailed biographical account reveals a man battling mental illness and asylum detentions, which no doubt contributed to domestic fracture. A vast bibliography of Martin's works equally enhances the volume.

The twenty sermons and one 'Speech on Exclusive Psalmody' given to the 1872 Free Church Assembly make a (superior) companion volume to *Christ Victorious* (Banner of Truth, 2019). Many of the previously unpublished sermons were manuscript transcripts in the possession of the late Mr William Murray, an elder in the Brora Free Church (Continuing) Congregation. They are among the finest theological, experiential, and eminently instructive sermons of the period.

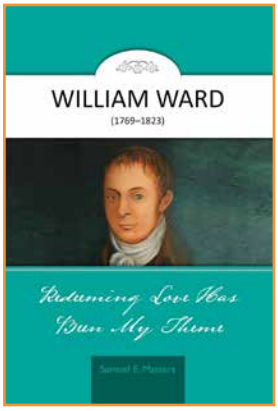
On Romans 6:6, we are given an encouragement. The phrase, *"the old man"* cannot refer to the unregenerate, because *"in this case the principle of sin reigns unbroken, having the whole field, the whole man, to itself and beneath its sway and bondage. It must be displaced from its throne and succeeded by a new man before it can be in a position to be rightly called the old man"* (p.102). The Christian's assurance is the death of the old man, when *"the body of sin may be destroyed – that it may wither and waste, and pine away, and finally vanish for ever. It is the* purpose*, and the* purchase*, and through the Spirit the* power *of the cross to accomplish this. This wasting, however, is progressive – this extinction is prospective'* (p.106). Then the saints are made perfect.

On John 10:16, we have 'Christ's present relationship to these other sheep'. *"They are his...They are not Satan's – he never had a right to them...They are not the world's – they are redeemed out of the world. They are not even their own – they are bought with a price. They are Christ's wholly – bought up by him – their bodies and their spirits are his. They are his sheep...He the shepherd, and the buyer, and the bishop of their souls"* (p.217).

This reviewer read many of these sermons during a recent confinement; the blessing, encouragement and edification received is inexpressible. Not an easy read, these sermons will repay repeated reading. We are indebted to the editors and the publishers for bringing this volume to a wide readership. Highest recommendation possible. ■

Rev. Raymond A. Kemp

Redeeming Love Has Been My Theme: William Ward (1769-1823)
Samuel E. Masters, Ettrick Press, pbk, £5.95 plus p&p



William Carey is certainly well known as a pioneering missionary to India, but those who sacrificed much in supporting him have been largely forgotten. One of those persons, William Ward, is the subject of a small paperback published by Ettrick Press.

The name of William Ward is not well known in Christian circles. He died around 200 years ago, following a life of faithful service to his Lord and Master, Jesus Christ. In the books, you will find details on how Mr Ward, a journalist, printer, and translator, dedicated his life to the service of Christ in a cross-cultural mission.

Ward was a radical, crusading, social activist, and newspaperman in England who became a missionary, labouring in India for twenty-three years. In the mission field, he put his former skills to good use as a printer, Bible translator, evangelist, teacher, and administrator. In the book, you will discover his calling to the mission field, the long sea journey undertaken, and many of the hardships and setbacks he and his family incurred.

This is an easy read suitable for adults and teenagers, which should stimulate all to be more mindful of the church's mission to spread the Gospel far and wide.

Author Sam Masters is to be commended for bringing to life one of Christ's forgotten labourers. Reading the book has reminded me of the immense cost incurred by missionaries in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries to bring the Gospel of Christ to the perishing masses in far-off countries. ■

Rev. Andrew R. Allan

COMMUNION DATES

Communions are held on the following Sabbaths. Visitors should contact local ministers for times of the main services and the preparatory and thanksgiving services. Contact details may be found on the Church website.

January
11 St Louis
25 Atlanta

February
15 Stornoway
22 Harris

March
8 Cross, Hunt County, Portree
15 Glasgow–Knightswood, Pau
22 Inverness–Greyfriars, Mebane
29 Scalpay Harris

CONGREGATIONAL REMITTANCES

	CENTRAL BUILDING FUND YTD 2025 £	ORDINARY REMITTANCES Nov 2025 £	Total to Nov 2025 £	Total to Nov 2024 £
Free Northern Presbytery				
Aberdeen	0	2,640	24,630	23,650
Assynt & Scourie	0	0	17,142	17,602
Brora	6,710	1,000	24,163	22,036
Duthil-Dores	0	1,326	19,800	22,000
Inverness	0	2,000	43,347	33,306
Kilmorack & Strathglass	0	1,300	19,601	21,702
Kiltearn	0	0	0	500
Poolewe & Aultbea	7,150	0	0	9,800
Tarbat	0	1,000	13,545	14,561
Total Free Northern Presbytery	13,860	9,266	162,227	165,157
Southern Presbytery				
Arran	0	800	8,286	8,186
Ayr	0	1,000	15,522	14,445
Ballyclare & Doagh	0	1,200	14,685	14,907
Dumfries	0	0	0	1,010
Edinburgh	0	1,700	26,152	26,131
Glasgow - Knightswood	0	1,650	27,979	27,586
Glasgow - Partick	0	3,000	48,000	48,000
Glasgow - Shettleston	0	800	14,193	12,030
Rothesay	0	0	2,375	6,250
Total Southern Presbytery	0	10,150	157,192	158,545
Outer Hebrides Presbytery				
Cross	0	2,250	23,550	23,650
Harris - Leverburgh	0	1,450	21,703	23,016
Knock & Point	0	1,170	22,401	19,044
North Uist & Grimsay	2,070	1,050	14,924	13,774
Scalpay	0	2,300	32,168	31,972
Stornoway	0	6,627	86,474	88,606
Total Outer Hebrides Presbytery	2,070	14,847	201,219	200,062
Presbytery of Skye & Lochcarron				
Bracadale & Duirinish (Waternish)	0	500	10,814	6,326
Kilmuir & Stenscholl	0	500	8,292	8,542
Lochalsh & Strath	1,060	2,000	26,553	29,110
Portree	680	1,500	23,558	21,853
Snizort	0	1,800	38,673	35,963
Total Skye & Lochcarron Presbytery	1,740	6,300	107,889	101,793
Smiths Falls	0	0	0	995
Total From Congregations	17,670	40,563	628,527	626,553
Other Donations	0	4,195	108,071	38,296
Legacy	0	28,566	145,233	1,000
TOTAL	17,670	73,324	881,831	665,849
Included in the above: Tax	650	0	147,256	143,629
Recovered on Gift Aid Declarations	17,020	73,324	734,575	522,220

Gifts and Donations - Donations and gifts for the Church should be sent to the Financial Administrator:

Mrs Donna Norris
101 Young Road, Dunblane
FK15 0FT
financialadministrator@fccontinuing.org

Cheques / postal orders should be made payable to "Free Church of Scotland (Continuing)".

General Treasurer
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(mobile) 07793 535227

The Free Church of Scotland (Continuing) is a recognised Scottish Charity (SC 030976).

Rev. David Campbell addressing the recent Southern Presbytery Family Conference in Partick Free Church (Continuing) (courtesy of Rev. Andrew Allan)

"But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance: against such there is no law."

Galatians 5:22,23

Published by the Free Church of Scotland (Continuing)