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This is what the Lord says: "Stop at the crossroads and look around. Ask for the old, godly way, and walk in it. Travel its path, and you will find rest for your souls." ~ Jeremiah 6:16 NLT





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Thank you to all who have contributed articles for this edition of Life magazine. Please note that the **deadline** for submissions for the **December/January** 2021/22 **edition** will be **12th November 2021.**

Submissions are emailed to: editor@ccbedford.org

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Vicar's Letter

Dear friends,

He's my favourite Bible character, outside of Jesus of course. He's wise, humble, hard-working, diligent, full of integrity, ever gives God the glory, and lives a long life of serving.

Daniel is one of the early exiles. When the king of



Babylon, Nebuchadnezzar, first attacks Jerusalem in 597BC, he takes captive many of the royal family and nobility (Dan 11-3). Daniel was one of those taken into captivity and exile. But Nebuchadnezzar drew around him those who could best serve the Babylonian court, and Daniel was one of those so chosen.

He entered royal service, probably around 20 years of age and continued through to at least 539BC, the first year of king Cyrus (Dan 1:21), some 60 years of working for a foreign ruler. He was, over those decades, mostly in favour and always faithful in serving the foreign king. That's pretty tough – to keep faithful when all around you think and worship differently, and to be a godly man of integrity, whose integrity and ability are both denounced by your rivals and yet recognised by the kings.

I like Daniel because he kept faithful in serving God. He held to that vision or understanding of the Lord that he had brought from Jerusalem. He kept the vision of being faithful and of serving righteously, even within a foreign royal administration.

Near the end of his life, in great age, he is described as still worshipping God: *"Three times a day he got down on his knees and prayed, giving thanks to his God, just as he had done before."* (Daniel 6:10). He never lost his spiritual vision.

Our vision as a church is explored in this issue. It's rooted in knowing God personally and serving Him faithfully. Our vision is: <u>to enable everyone to be</u> <u>maturing followers of Christ, who experience and live out God's love in every</u> <u>part of their lives'</u>. We value being people who are Generous, Real, Accepting, Compassionate and Encouraging.

Daniel modelled this too. He grew in his faith, maturing and growing spiritually, and in placing his faith central to his daily life and daily royal service. His story and the visions he received is briefly recorded across 12 chapters. It reveals a person generous to others, real in his dealings, accepting of those around him, compassionate to those struggling and encouraging time and again.

From his faithfulness, I learn the importance of maturing and living my faith. I catch the vision that Daniel had: to serve our Lord is the greatest gift we give ourselves *and* we give to those around us. In so doing, fulfilling our goal of making new disciples, deepening our faith and transforming our community becomes more likely and effective.

Daniel – he's a great example. In good times and tough times, he kept the faith and served our Lord. He held to the vision that our Lord is always and only worthy of worship and serving.

And you too can be a Daniel today – right where you are: faithful and serving.

Every blessing,





ALAN COTTENDEN'S

Vision, now and then

When Erinna, our editor, told me she had chosen "vision" as the theme for this edition of the magazine I was both intrigued and challenged. But not as

challenged as my interviewees looked when I invited them to share their understanding and experiences! Read on for my summary of what they told me, prefaced by a brief overview of what the scriptures have to say on the subject.

What does the bible have to say about vision?

In the bible, the word "vision" is most often used to describe an overtly supernatural experience that conveys a revelation from God. Think God calling Abraham to leave his home, armed with the promise that - though currently childless - he would become the father of many nations (Genesis 15:1-6). Or Peter's vision of the sheet of unclean animals which God used to impress on him that the gospel is for gentiles as well as Jews (Acts 10:9-23).

But sometimes the bible describes God-given vision without labelling it "vision" and without it having obvious supernatural accompaniments. Think God envisioning Nehemiah to rebuild the broken walls of Jerusalem (Nehemiah 2): although he could speak of "...what my God had put in my heart to do for Jerusalem..." (v2), he mentions no divine visitation. Or the *Council of Jerusalem* in which the embryonic church grappled prayerfully with how gentile and Jewish Christians should be incorporated into the one church (Acts 15:1-35). After careful consideration – and, as far as we know, no overt supernatural signs – they reached a conclusion which "seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to them" (v28) and it provided a glorious God-given vision to guide the growth of the early church. As the stories of Nehemiah and the Jerusalem Christians unfold, you sense their growing conviction that they have grasped what God has to say to them, making their visions every bit as supernatural – in that most important sense - as those of Abraham and Peter with their more spectacular experiences.

In all four cases - with or without overt supernatural experience – God gave these envisioned people something to believe, to grasp and to act upon. And if it had been fashionable back then, they could each have easily adorned their business cards with a pithy *vision statement* that captured their God-given objectives and priorities, and provided a tool for assessing current activities, planning the future and evaluating new opportunities. If you read through the book of Acts from chapter 9 onwards you can see Paul putting this into practice as he lives out his vision in his planning, prioritising,

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working, praying and explaining. Interestingly, in defending himself before King Agrippa, he first describes his visionary encounter with the Lord Jesus on the road to Damascus and follows with, "So then, King Agrippa, <u>I was not disobedient to the vision from heaven</u>. First to those in Damascus, then to those in Jerusalem and in all Judea, and then to the Gentiles, I preached that they should repent and turn to God and demonstrate their repentance by their deeds." (Acts 26:19&20). I think St Paul would have liked Eugene Peterson's paraphrase of Proverbs 29:18 in *The Message*: "If people can't see what God is doing, they stumble all over themselves; but when they attend to what he reveals, they are most blessed."

How does vison work for us?

But all of these people lived a long time ago: what about us? How does vision work for 21st century Christians? I asked some fellow Christ Church members to share with us their understanding and experience of vision (personal and / or corporate).

David Gundry: Well, I've never experienced a spectacular vision like St Paul had on the Damascus Road and I'm not sure I've ever really thought much about having a personal vision, as such. But your questions have reminded me of one vision that I <u>do</u> have, although I don't think I've ever thought of it in those terms. Right from my upbringing I've had a particular heart for the dispossessed, the marginalised, and the outsiders, and always felt drawn to help. From guite an early



age I came to understand this as God-given, as something God wanted me to particularly focus on amid all the other worthwhile things I might do. Perhaps that's the essence of vision from God. Anyway, I can certainly look back on many decades of projects and ministries with this same theme running through them. Having that focus has helped me to avoid trying to do everything, helping me to decide which new opportunities to pursue as well as to assess what I'm currently doing.

My strongest memory of corporate vision comes from when I was appointed as HR Director for a shipping company, in the days long before mission statements and straplines were in vogue. Over lunch the chairman of the board told me that company policy was to look after the staff, confident that the "bottom line" would then take care of itself. I don't think he used the word "vision" and I can't claim that God gave it to them, although it's certainly consistent with his character and I was very happy with it. Most importantly, it wasn't just a catchy phrase – shallow "window dressing" to project an image - but an accurate description of how the company worked, prioritised and made decisions. The senior people in the company worked hard to explain and promote it so that employees owned it, too.

Carolyn Barnes: It's interesting that you should be tackling this topic as it's a particularly relevant one for me just now in my role as musical worship coordinator at Christ Church. Over the period of the pandemic, we had many months when we weren't able to gather together in church to lead live worship together as a group. In January I began thinking and praying about how we could start to meet together again as a team and to seek a renewed vision from God regarding our musical leadership. This involved praying, reading and talking with individuals as well as meeting online at virtual worship team breakfasts



with as many of the Christ Church worship team as could join us so that we could think, and pray and discuss together. We began by sharing our experiences of worship during lockdown and reflected on who we are as worshippers and what we are called to do and that worship is simply our response to God; our response (as the passion translation of Romans 12:1 puts it) to his "marvellous mercies".

Catching hold of God's vision for us in this ministry is an ongoing process but in the light of the things which we have prayed and talked about over the last few months my prayer is that we would be a team-who "know ourselves to be God's beloved who, from the foundation of our relationship with God and each other, seek to worship in spirit in truth and be equipped to love and serve our congregation through sung worship". I am keen that we are recommissioned for this ministry as we emerge from the pandemic period and, by the time this article is in print, that should have happened in one of our morning services. No doubt we'll continue to refine our understanding of God's vision for us and that as we do this it will shape both what we do now and how we plan for the future.

Steve Gardner: I'm a semi-retired accountant and I suppose I've mostly come across corporate vision in the context of the various companies I've worked for in the UK, Belgium and Switzerland. They've all had a vision statement and, in some companies, it has worked really well while in others it hasn't. At the poor end of the spectrum, it amounted to little more than a statement of how they would like the world to see them, and didn't really relate to how they did business. But at the good end of the spectrum, it was well thought-through, thoroughly promoted and practiced – especially by the senior people in the company – and brought a great team spirit,

a coherence, and a sense of value in what we did. It can be almost tangible. I can think of occasions when my company bought other companies and the staff coming in from outside would rapidly pick up our vision and enthusiastically own it for themselves.

I've been particularly aware of personal vision over recent years following my retirement from mainstream accountancy. As I began to explore what God had for me in this new season, I soon became aware of his prompting to use the skills I had acquired over years working for companies - where the focus was largely on the "bottom line" - to help enterprises like charities (YMCA, Bedford Open Doors, Asylum Seekers) where they need those skills just as much in pursuing their noncommercial objectives. I'm thoroughly enjoying it!



Sandra Gardner: I think I first really became aware of having a personal vision when I was working in Personnel Management at Silsoe College and began to grasp that this was the path that God had for me. It's great when you feel you are doing what you were "made to do". I began studying for Personnel Management qualifications which, of course, helped me to become more effective at what I was doing.

I'll be retiring before too long and lately I've been thinking and praying about what God might have for me next. I love God's promise through Jeremiah: "For I know the plans I have for you,' declares the Lord, 'plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future." (Jeremiah 29:11) Wonderful to know that God has plans and purposes for me: what an encouragement to find out what they are! A few years ago, I broke my ankle badly which meant I suddenly had a lot of "immobile time" on my hands. But, of course, it didn't affect my ability to pray and prayer became my main "ministry" for that period. I wouldn't be surprised if prayer features heavily in the new vision God has for me post-retirement.

Chris Burrows: It's ironic that the most immediate consequence of St Paul's vision on the Damascus Road was a temporary lack of <u>physical</u> vision: he was struck blind for three days! Interesting, too, that he seems to have had a gap of several years between preaching the gospel in Damascus and starting to work closely with the apostles in Jerusalem (Acts 9:19b-30), a period scholars think he spent in Arabia (Galatians 1:17) grounding his faith and refining his grasp of the mission God had

given him. I really relate to that because I've known God's call to train for the ordained ministry for some years now but there's been a period of sifting and refining that I sense has been very important for me in clarifying God's vision for me. No doubt that process will continue in the training I'm just starting. My point is that vision isn't always born fully-formed!

I'm also reminded of St Peter quoting the prophet Joel in his sermon on the first Day of Pentecost: "In the last days', God says, 'I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your young men

will see visions, your old men will dream dreams." (Acts 2:17). Great encouragement to expect to see visions from God as part and parcel of our living for him in the power of the Holy Spirit. Exciting stuff!

Katherine Davies: I have to admit that, before you contacted me, I'd never thought about having a specific vision! It's made me research, pray and ponder. I've become quite excited about the possibility of having a vision for what God wants me to do in various aspects of life like: my prayer life, my work, my relationships, my home group. Steve and I lead a home group and we plan to spend some time with them exploring together what vision God might have for us as a group. Workwise, I've always thought in terms of being the best person I can be for God there and that's generally the direction of my prayer as I drive to work. I'm quite excited by the possibility that God may have something more specific for me to focus on within that wider context. What's God's vision for me

there?

Steve Davies: I'm also intrigued by the idea of having a vision for different aspects of life although, of course, you'd expect there to be coherence across the whole: a sort of patchwork quilt, maybe. One important idea came to me whilst considering my response to your question: the encouragement that could result from knowing something of how God

sees me. Just lately, Katherine and I have been reminded afresh of an idea we had a few years back to invite our neighbours for monthly Sunday morning breakfasts





(rather like Chris and Gilly Nixon have in their village) and we've been wondering if it isn't time to pick that up again: maybe there's a fresh vision forming there!

I work as a dentist in the NHS which is an organisation well-acquainted with vision statements and strap lines. But it's such a large organisation and there's a real danger – I find – of becoming quite cynical about the latest catch phrase or directive. Of course, in and of themselves, they achieve absolutely nothing, unless they are owned and put into practice. But actually, I see a widespread vision among my colleagues for treating our patients competently with compassion and respect even if it doesn't derive directly from an official statement. Interesting how a vision can be powerful even if not formally stated!

Helen Russell: My first real experience of vison was when, aged 11, I realised that I wanted to be a Physiotherapist. My Dad worked in a hospital as a Medical Physicist and that's where I first came across physiotherapy and Physiotherapists. That provided me with a tremendous sense of direction and motivation as I navigated school, deciding which subjects to focus on and what experiences to seek out. These days I'm responsible for teams of other Physiotherapists and envisioning them is a big part of the role, developing skills, growing confidence and building personal qualities.

Andrew Russell: Vision is a big part of my life. I'm a real planner and it's hard to plan effectively for the future of anything without a vision. Somebody has defined vision as a "compelling picture of a desirable future that inspires commitment": I like that! If you don't know where you're heading, how are you going to get there? And if you don't find it desirable and compelling, you're going to lack



enthusiasm for the journey. Visionary leaders can see that picture and communicate it effectively to others so they can see it, own it and want to work to make it happen, too. People with a common vision make wonderful and effective teams; engaged in a common task whose significance they share; they enjoy a great sense of belonging and mutual commitment. Without vision, things drift aimlessly. Biblical vision is all of the above, plus it's inspired by God!

I like to try to catch God's vision for the different parts of my life, whether it relates to the family, to where I work, or to Church – belonging to the general Christ Church community or helping to lead an Alpha group, for example.

Thank you, everyone!

- Alan Cottenden

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Living for Eternity

How do we live for the future as we are called to place our eyes and hearts on eternity?

Time, as C.S. Lewis once pointed out, is the most finite commodity on earth. Everyone's time is running out. From the beggar to the billionaires experimenting with cryogenics, blood transfusions and transplants, no one has yet found a way to cheat death. Most of us don't know how long we have: all we know is that life is finite.

At the same time, stress and worry aren't helping us to live well. Jesus asks, "Which of you can add one cubit to his stature by worrying?"¹ Instead, he tells us to commit each day to Him, and to "Let tomorrow will take care of itself."² This encouragement to leave the future in God's hands is profound and important, but it should not lead us into a place of passivity. We only have to look at the accounts of the travels of Peter, Paul and Jesus himself to see that they regularly planned and took action. The Bible is very clear on this point: "Those who know their God will stand firm and take action."³ Christians are not called to be fatalistic or passive. We are called to be intentional, active and committed: "Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with all your strength."⁴

How to balance these two great truths? I believe that the answer lies in two closely related themes: confidence and hope. Hope enables us to face the doubts and inevitable struggles of life knowing that God has good plans for us, "plans to give us a future and a hope."⁵ Hope in the biblical sense can be defined as a confident expectation of the future based on the goodness of God's character. It is not just feeling that we would really like something to happen, like winning the lottery, nor is it about clinging to dogma. It is based on the personal character of God Himself: "Behold, the eye of the Lord is on those who fear Him, on those who hope in His steadfast love."⁶ There is something about relying on His character of mercy that calls forth God's attention and favour towards us. He responds to our trust in his character. Paul refers to this hope as the "helmet of the hope of salvation"⁷: a protection for our minds, even in times of danger and conflict. Hope stabilises our

¹ Luke 12:25

² Matt 6:34

³ Daniel 11:32

⁴ Ecclesiastes 9:10

⁵ Jeremiah 29:11

⁶ Psalm 33.18

⁷ 1 Thessalonians 5:8

lives, so that Hebrews describes hope as an "anchor"⁸ that keeps us secure even when the world around us in flux.

This hope is what gives followers of Jesus their confidence. Paul tells the Hebrews in exile: "Therefore do not throw away your confidence, which has a great reward. For you have need of endurance, so that after you have done the will of God, you may receive the promise."⁹ Here Paul is connecting four things. First, we need to have confidence in God, which we may well be tempted to throw it way. Indeed, there will be voices, inside and outside of our own heads, encouraging us to do so. Secondly, we need endurance, because the future is inevitably going to involve times of difficulty and trial. Thirdly, maintaining our confidence during these trials is necessary if we are to actively "do" the will of God. Lastly, Paul reminds us that actions arise from trust, and result in eternal rewards. This focus on the eternal enables us to endure temporal suffering: "We do not look at things which are seen, but at the things which are unseen. For the things that are seen are temporary, but the things that are unseen are eternal."¹⁰

What enables us to be consistent, steadfast and act wisely in our daily lives? Our trust in God's character, and the good plans He has for us – both in time and in eternity. When we "commit our way to the Lord," we should also "trust in Him, and He will bring it to pass."¹¹ We should make our plans humbly, acknowledging that ultimately it is His Spirit that will bring His plans to pass.

Here are three practical ways to submit to God each day:

- 1. **Meditate** on God's word. Think hard about small chunks every day. Chew on it, so to speak, so that it becomes food that strengthens us within. This leads to action, and success: "Blessed is the man who meditates on the law of the Lord, who delights in His way in everything he *does*, he prospers."¹²
- 2. **Pray**. Paul tells us to pray "everywhere, at all times, in the Spirit."¹³ We can connect with God anywhere and everywhere just by reaching out. But we can also pray "in the Spirit," learning by practice to be led in praying for God's agenda, not ours. This kind of prayer is active, resulting in practical outcomes in the real world.

⁸ Hebrews 6:19

⁹ Hebrews 10.35

¹⁰ 2 Corinthians 4.18

¹¹ Psalm 37:5

 ¹² Psalm 1:1-3
 ¹³ Ephesians 6:18

3. **Proclaim** God's goodness. Paul tells us: "Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering."¹⁴ Note that it is not enough to hope: we need to say it out loud (*confess*). We can do this by *thanking* God for his goodness, *praising* Him for His greatness, and *declaring* His promises for us.

These three practices will help to equip us to be active, faithful servants, who are living productively in time, but with our eyes and hearts set on eternity.



-James Murphy

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¹⁴ Hebrews 10:23

Creativity and Faith

Creativity affects our lives in more ways than we realise. Watching a drama on TV we are often exposed to different ways of looking at life's challenges, which can make us more empathetic; sometimes, however, the underlying message is utterly nihilistic and suggests that you can only be successful if you abandon your scruples. I have occasionally likened certain soap operas to C S Lewis' vision of hell in "The Great Divorce" - a colourless place where everyone quarrels with everyone else.

There are some exceptions; the 2010 BBC production of "The Nativity" portrayed the characters in a realistic and at times moving way, while remaining faithful to the biblical account. Some of you will also have seen episodes of "The Chosen", a specifically Christian Internet production, which vividly brings to life the account of Jesus and his disciples as they lived and worked in Judaea.

Many people today reject the idea of absolute truth. Individualism reigns supremebut creativity can sometimes break through the barriers. A year after we were married, Susan and I sung in Jimmy and Carol Owens' musical "The Witness" – the story of Jesus as told by Peter. This was produced at various places in the UK, ending with a performance in the Royal Albert Hall. At the time I was temping at Abbey National head office, and invited some colleagues to attend. The next morning some of them came in singing "Born again, you must be born again ...!" They certainly got the message! What they did about it is another matter, but perhaps it sowed a seed for the future.

In Bedford, Richard Tysoe from St Mary's Goldington wrote "The Calvary Road Show", again based on Jesus' life, death and resurrection. I was invited to join in. Not considering myself a thespian I went along reluctantly, but soon found myself arranging the music and playing the accompaniment. The cast comprised many different Christian traditions - Catholic through to Salvation Army. "Open the Book", in which Susan takes part, is another creative opportunity; Bible stories are brought to life for school children by members of Christ Church who dress up in suitable costumes (carefully made by Margaret Baron). These stories are greatly appreciated by the children, and some of them are now being recorded to overcome Covid restrictions. (Recordings can have unexpected effects; having recorded some Christian songs for a school during lockdown, one youth worker in Stafford was surprised to be greeted by children wanting her autograph when she subsequently visited in person!) Susan's creative contribution to lockdown was to make cakes for our immediate neighbours, whom we now know a lot better than we did before. So, creativity is certainly an effective way to communicate, but it is also something that, being made in God's image, we share with him. It is one of the attributes that differentiate us from animals. To be able to appreciate beauty is something that cannot be easily explained by evolution, which evaluates our abilities in terms of whether they give us a competitive advantage. But why does nature or music move us if there is no meaning or purpose to it? I well remember a very cold, damp holiday in the Peak District during which our spirits were lifted by a massive display of rhododendrons in a National Trust property, and the evening when we heard the LSO under Bernard Haitink performing Beethoven's triumphant Fifth Symphony. People often talk of appreciating art, nature or music as a "spiritual experience", and there is a grain of truth in this, because these things actually point to the Creator himself.

Many books of the Bible, such as Psalm and Proverbs, are written in a creative genre; some of the prophetic books are highly symbolic. Jesus himself was creative (and sometimes humorous) in his use of parables – remember the one about the plank in the eye? Psalms in particular have been the inspiration for many hymns and worship songs from at least the time of Isaac Watts ("When I survey the wondrous cross") and his German contemporary, Joachim Neander ("Praise to the Lord, the Almighty" – Psalm 150 and "All my hope on God is founded" – Psalm 16). Watts suggested adapting psalms as hymns, but with a New Testament flavour, a tradition that worship leaders like Matt Redman have continued (e.g., "Bless the Lord O my soul" - Psalm 103). Any potential songwriters want to take up the challenge?

Of course, there are many other ways to be creative; perhaps like Bezalel and Oholiab in Exodus 36 you have abilities in craft, design or embroidery (or, to bring it up to date, computer graphics)? God can use anything which expresses his creative nature to reach out to those around us.



-Andrew Maltby

Vision – The Church of England, The Diocese and US.

Simpler, Humbler, Bolder!! That's the vision of the Church of England. To 'adapt and put its trust in God and become a simpler, humbler, bolder church that is Jesus Christ centred and Jesus Christ shaped.' This means a simpler church, both in governance and structure, and also in the way we live and share the Gospel; a humbler church, which recognises its failings and works with others to serve the common good; and a bolder church, energised and enthused by the good news of what God has done in Jesus Christ and sharing that with everyone.



At the centre of the C of E vision is the aim to be centred on Christ and the Five Marks of Mission: To proclaim the Good News; To teach, baptise and nurture new believers; To respond to human need by loving service; To seek to transform unjust structures of society, to challenge violence of every kind and to pursue peace and reconciliation; To safeguard the integrity of creation, and sustain and renew the earth. There is a wealth of material on the Church of England website explaining this in greater detail, but what does this mean for us? How does it fit into the Diocesan vision, and into our own MAP priorities? Let's have a look and see...

The vision of the Diocese of St Albans of which we are part (just in case you didn't already know) is Living God's Love. This has the three main aims of: Going Deeper into God; Making New Disciples; and Transforming Communities.



We can all proclaim the Good News wherever we are, whoever we are with, but we will always be more effective at this when we ourselves continue to deepen our own knowledge and understanding of God, and what it means to be in relationship with Him. We do this through listening to sermons rooted in scripture, by reading scripture and studying the Bible for ourselves in our quiet time or within our home groups, by exploring further study through 4 Counties, the Gold Group, and the Foundations for Ministry courses among others, and by conversation and debate with others.

So, we Go Deeper into God.

This helps us to Make New Disciples and Transform Communities. We become able to teach and nurture new believers, welcoming them into church, perhaps encouraging them to join an Alpha course, a Home Group, or some other activity that will help them grow and explore their faith, hopefully leading them to baptism.

But much of the impact we have comes when we seek to transform communities. This doesn't mean going out and making them just like us! It's about reaching out and helping others wherever and whenever we can. We do this at Christ Church through things like Food Bank, Lunch Club and so on. We do this by offering a safe space to come and sit, to talk, to pray, whenever the church is open. We do this through our own individual witness to others – helping those in need, not for any reward but because we can.

At Christ Church, our vision is 'to enable everyone to be maturing followers of Christ, who experience and live out God's love in every part of their lives.' We do this by GRACE, by being Generous, Real, Accepting, Compassionate, and Encouraging. Do we get this right all of the time? Of course, we don't – we're human after all. But this is our vision. This is how we want to be known.

We want to see every one of our church members going deeper into God. It's one of the reasons we try to encourage everyone to be part of a Home Group; one of the reasons we provide age appropriate Youth and Children's work, employing a Youth Minister and a Children's Minister to facilitate the spiritual growth of our younger members; one of the reason we have a wide range of ministries for people of all ages; one of the reasons we try to include regular testimony and mission slots in our services – so we can hear encouraging stories of what God is doing through others at Christ Church.

We offer enquirers courses throughout the year, inviting you to offer personal invitations to people you know to come and join one of our Alpha courses, Explore Groups, Grow Group and other activities as we run them, so that we may help the Kingdom of God grow not just deeper but wider too, and I encourage you to continue praying for those five people you started praying for earlier in the year, those five people you desperately want to see come to faith.

As part of our vision to see our community transformed, we launched a sustainability initiative at our APCM, as we look to what we can do as a church but more importantly as individuals to reduce our carbon footprint. We hope to be able to rebuild our links with Castle Newnham this coming year with Open the Book, and perhaps once more being able to offer lunch clubs and support to staff and students alike. Many of our thoughts and ideas stagnated during the last eighteen months for obvious reasons, but we hope to get things moving again so that we can 'enable everyone to be maturing followers of Christ, who experience and live out God's love in every part of their lives' with simplicity, humility and boldness.

-John Bell

Our Vision for Children's and Young People's Work

The children's ministry is at an exciting turning point, not just because we are starting the new Autumn term, but also because we have had the chance to rethink children's ministry throughout the lockdowns and restrictions of the last year. We have had to connect with children in ways that were really outside of the box, and we now have a huge library of digital resources at our fingertips. Resources stored on CCB YouTube, but also, all of the digital resources that charities and organizations like Energize and SpeakLife have updated.

Not only have we stretched our skills by doing groups virtually for a while, when back in person, we have been dodging hurdles created by restrictions and have created a bank of socially distanced games, and new ways of making the best out of a bad situation. Now, we have the hope of a fresh intake of children who, in the last year have been pressured by being stuck at home. There is excitement in the air at the prospect of being able to meet the new people who have moved into our parish and also to blend our digital resources into our sessions.

My vision is that we would reach people, and meet people where they are. After a difficult year, we should expect that things may not fall neatly into place, but instead we should be ready to give the children what they need to be spiritually, emotionally, and physically nourished. We are to be the hands and feet of Jesus for these children, and most importantly, share the good news of Jesus with them, so they can have their own faith. As children come into our setting, my vision is that we make church and their church groups, not a religious studies classroom, but in fact their spiritual home, where they can connect with others their age, experience joy,



and experience their faith in Jesus bubbling up, growing and solidifying. The vision is to incorporate those on the outskirts, those who are falling through the gaps, and to overall, make the ministry inclusive and diverse.

-Ruth Hulme

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<u>YOUTH</u>

Our vision for the youth ministry is-

- To **accompany** young people as they grow in relationship with God
- To disciple young people in an authentic life with God
- To equip young people to experience the joy of God's family
- To empower young people to make a positive difference in the world

We would like to-

- **Provide** opportunities for young people to be a part of, and feel a part of, the Church community (e.g. Sunday Services).
- **Empower** young people and help them grow in confidence (in all things, not just faith)
- Walk alongside young people to help them know Jesus and make Him known.
- Meet for 1-2-1's and building safe relationships
- **Provide** a safe space for young people to come and be, to ask questions without judgement
- Help parents feel more supported (as they have the most influence)
- Have fun!

I'll expand...

First and foremost, the vision for our youth ministry is for the young people to have a **relationship with God**. The lives of young people are just as messy and complicated as our own, and so creating spaces where they can meet with the Holy Spirit, give them the tools to pray, worship, and encounter the Holy Spirit in the everyday is a priority.

Secondly, our youth ministry needs to be **sustainable**. We cannot help any young people if we do not have healthy leaders. The goal of this youth ministry is for it to outlive us, our time here, and their time here. We'd like to see young people go out into the world and not just speak about faith but live it too. Sustainable leadership makes sure that we, as leaders, role models, as individuals that the young people look up to, are healthy and living out our faith too. After all, if we, as leaders, aren't living it, why should they?

Finally, we want to create **safe spaces** for our young people. Although this wasn't the first on the list, this is the most important. Without safe spaces and safe relationships, the young people cannot grow. (For more on this, ask Jess about safety nets and tightropes!) So, in summary, we are aiming for RELATIONSHIPS, SUSTAINABILITY, and SAFE SPACES -Jess Walker

Lee Abbey - Open the door...

I cast my mind back to over 6 years ago. I stepped into my church one Sunday morning and I felt very weary as a single Mum; I longed for a holiday. Much to my surprise that day, Richard Hibbert, the vicar of Christ Church, Bedford, kindly handed me a brochure about Lee Abbey in Devon and suggested it might do us - myself and my daughter, Aqualina - some good to go and visit this place. Little did I know how much we would fall in love with Lee Abbey; thank you Richard. August 16th 2021 marked our return to Lee Abbey for the fifth time!

https://leeabbeydevon.org.uk/

People ask me why I love Lee Abbey so much, and I struggle with detail to verbalise exactly the answer to that. In a conversation with Richard, my vicar, at church recently, he said: "Well, it's God, Susan". Of course, Richard is right and it reminded me of how uniquely brilliant God is in his very personal relationship with each one of us. He knows all about us. He loves us. He knows our



needs. Lee Abbey is sometimes described as: "the thin space between God and his people". Well, that's true. It's a place of invitation to come and be who you are, and just get "away from it all", and this summer was no exception.

I want to sincerely thank the Verulam House Fund Trust, Diocese of St Albans and Christ Church, Bedford in funding my stay at Lee Abbey with my daughter, Aqualina aged 9 years. We had the best time! Aqualina was able to engage with other children in fantastic activities, as they learnt about God, whilst I was at the same time able to listen to Simon Guillebaud's seminars.

https://www.simonguillebaud.com/

Simon spoke about Living Life to the Full in Jesus and his talks were really encouraging, inspiring and in so many ways challenging. The seminars were all about Christ's invitation to us: Come to me if you are weary, dirty, hungry and thirsty. Don't hide your face from me, says Jesus, I see you anyway. Jesus sees us as we are. He offers us His grace. He lovingly died for us, to forgive our wrong doings and reunite us with God. Open the door to me, Jesus says, but there's only one handle and it's on your side. You have to pull the door open. Come on, open the door... it's a daily invite. He dearly wants to share our load and walk our journey with us. When

we've met with Jesus, Simon then reminded us, we need to share God's good news about Jesus with others. Jesus meets us at our points of need, forgives our failings and give us a glorious hope for the future through a personal relationship with God, which is intimately unique. Simon spoke of exciting chances to do this via Jesus at the Door:



https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=08rjLOkxQJI. Jesus at the Door is about introducing people to Jesus on the streets where we live. Please watch the YouTube link in the previous sentence, and there is a lot of other material about this on YouTube. I think this is a great way to reach out and witness to people!

After Simon's seminars this year, we had for those who wanted to attend, a confidential, special time of sharing about what the talks had meant to us, the challenges we'd dealt with and deal with in life, our testimonial experiences of God, our hopes, fears, regrets, dreams and so much else. These were such powerful, special times to just be heard, support, encourage and pray for each other.



Lee Abbey is an awesome place. I do encourage you to visit it on a retreat or just a holiday. At Lee Abbey, Aqualina and I have had such brilliant times. Times of such huge fun! We did the tree top zip wire this year, went to the beach, worked out, played games, visited Lynton and Lynmouth and the Valley of the Rocks, drove over Exmoor, took in Stonehenge on the way home and so much more. We met up with old friends, made new friends, laughed, cried and shared with others. Aqualina really benefitted from the wonderful children's activities. The surrounding scenery is majestic,

and if nothing else does it for you, nature alone there, God's creation, will touch you in a special way. The staff are incredible at Lee Abbey and just make you feel so welcome. They provide great food and as much tea and coffee as a human being can drink!



This was real fellowship. This is the family of God! So,

when you hear God knock, and you will, please open the door ...you don't want to miss out!

-Susan Henderson

The Valley of Vision - Book Review

'The burden of the valley of vision' Isaiah 22:1KJV



The Valley of Vision was compiled and written in 1975 by Arthur Bennett, the father of our Rachel Bennett. It is a collection of prayers taken from Puritan spiritual exercises, meditations and aspirations. I think it could be best described as a handbook to prayer however Arthur Bennett did not intend it to be a prayer manual for 'the soul learns to pray by praying.' The puritan prayers are deep and meaningful and "breath out the same God centred aspiration", but 'it is hoped that their publication will help to redress the neglect of this vast ocean of Puritan Spirituality.'

Times alone praying, pondering, thinking and sometimes just being are the times when we hear God speak. We live in such a busy loud world, God still speaks, but because our ears are 'tuned in' to the maximum we don't hear or perhaps don't listen. Times spent in a meditative silence are more precious than ever. I'm sure God never fails to reach people through this book, with the order of words contributed by people from many different parts of Christianity. For me it seems to hit a nerve and revelations occur.

No matter the season of life, when in prayer and perhaps the words will to your lips not come, the contents of this book combine human emotion, the love of the Lord and praise to our God, meaning it can be used as a springboard for personal prayer. It is a book I reach for most days and it continues to be a best seller on some Summer Youth Camps, which defies all stereotyping of youth! This is a steadfast book that is a perfect base with the Bible for quiet times. It is split into sections of different thoughts or needs, or can be used for morning and evening prayer, but most importantly of all they speak Truth.

A quote which stands out for me is in the section titled Grace Active (pg215). "O what blessedness accompanies devotion when under all the trials that weary me, the cares that corrode me, the fears that disturb me, the infirmities that oppress me, I can come to thee in my need and feel peace beyond understanding" When I read this, as well as other sections, I have the rising feeling of comfort. Peace in knowing that the emotions and trials we feel and experience now have been the same for centuries. For example, words in much loved hymns like "When Peace like a River" speak volumes and is a reminder that things don't need to be shiny and new to be

relevant. The Valley of Vision can put into words what we feel when the words will not come.

This book has challenged me to see God as the creator and sustainer, Lord of all but also God of the 'ordinary'. It has helped me conclude that God brings such blessing in the seemingly mundane ordinary day to day life but we are all desperately in need of rewiring to see the blessings and glory of God before our very eyes, even in this very moment. This in itself begins to develop the lost sense of Wonder.

'I thank thee for the temporal blessings of this world- the refreshing air, the light of the sun, the food that renews strength, the raiment that clothes, the dwelling that shelters, the sleep that gives rest, the starry canopy of night, the summer breeze, the flowers' sweetness, the music of flowing streams, the happy endearment of family, kindred, friends.' (Evening praise pg.225)



-Erinna Pilbeam

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Super Somerset & a Happy

Holiday



Another wonderful Christ Church Bedford happy holiday: 30 holidaymakers enjoyed Somerset and Weston-super-Mare, staying at The Grand Atlantic (*pictured*).

Our five days away together, in mid August, gave us refreshment, fellowship, fun, good food, great trips out, comfortable coach travel and much more.

We had adventures, surprises and excitement. Read on to know what our guests thought of our time away

together. For our trips out, we enjoyed riding a steam train, visiting Cheddar Gorge, admiring Wells Cathedral and cruising across the amazing Bristol Docks. Then we added the beautiful seaside town of Clevedon and the impressive Victorian Gothic Tyntesfield House (National Trust). And not forgetting rides on the Big Wheel and competitive Crazy Golf (winner: Richard) on the Weston super Mare promenade! So much to see, so much time to enjoy – relax, rest and refresh.

With a comfortable coach and steady driver, what more could we need to make our travelling from place to place any better? Clive is a wonderful driver and very patient with all.





What an amazing place to visit on our way to Weston super Mare and a brilliant tour and sandwich lunch to make it a special stop. Malmsbury Abbey (*pictured*) was certainly a blessed stop on our outward journey. The tour, talk and lunch topped off with an Abbey member pray for us and send us on our way.

The Grand Atlantic Hotel was so welcoming and friendly, all the time, with each evening a

delightful 3 course meal and each morning a satisfying cooked breakfast. There are wonderful views from the front of the hotel of the beach, donkeys, Bristol Channel, Brean Down and of course, South Wales. All the staff and meals were excellent. The hotel was a wonderful find with lovely staff who were so helpful and friendly. Nothing was too much trouble, and the breakfasts were excellent, yummy!

Rachel, with Richard and Sarah, together ensured the holiday went smoothly, so a snooze on the



coach is quite ok! His









Pictures: Bishop's Lydeard to Dunster steam railway



The railway journey included a vintage bus ride (*left*), one of them open-topped, to take the final few miles into Minehead, for a joyful seaside ice cream and prom walk.

Under the high cliffs of Cheddar Gorge (*right*), we stopped to reflect on the hymn writer Augustus Toplady, the cliffs inspiring his well-known hymn, *Rock of Ages*.



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At the heart of Somerset is its Cathedral City and at the heart of Wells is its Cathedral. Divided into three groups (*left*), we were given a special tour of the cathedral, its amazing architecture, strange carvings and amusing tales.

More amusing tales and strange histories were shared on our cruise through Bristol Docks (*right*) – extraordinary to learn of how they influence trade for good, and of course

for much evil in the slave trade. We also admired the SS Great Britain, a game-

changing propeller-driven iron-ship by Isambard Kingdom Brunel, as well as the tiny Matthew, which tried and failed to find a north-west passage to the Far East.



And our guests – their comments:

"What a lovely holiday that was well organised and very inclusive - everything we needed to know, including H&S matters! It was wonderfully organised with interesting excursions and lovely people!"

"We were kept well informed with plenty of information and so nice to have the preholiday tea party."

"Very good attention to detail was given before the holiday."

"Our mid-week visitor, Dr Mark Raiss, gave us a fascinating insight into the world of Concrete, Bridges, Tunnels and ... Jesus!" and "We were amazed at the bridges he has built around the world."

"I only wish we could have spent longer in most of the places we visited!"



"I had a great time, thank you!"

Watch out for future plans for our next wonderful Christ Church Bedford holiday away.

-CCB Holiday makers August 2021

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LET pre-Christmas up-coming delights:

Dates for your diaries Here is an advanced notice of our pre-Christmas events for <u>"Ladies ELEVENSES Time",</u> held on the following <u>Saturdays at 11am</u>:

2nd October – Sandra Gardner to share some thoughts and Sue Templeman a poem or two!

6th November – Ruth Hulme will talk about "The Journey of Working with Children"

4th December – We will hear thoughts from Mary and Elizabeth about their very first Christmas!

These events will give us another opportunity to meet in the church halls, chat & enjoy some refreshments as well as listen to some interesting presentations.

We are aware of COVID safety for our guests and continue to be as careful as we can!

It is helpful to know numbers wishing to come along so please contact Rachel Bennett on 07981918263 or reserve your place through Eventbrite if you are sure you'd like to join us! Keep an eye out for any further information in the CCB News.



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Autumn Term 2021

2.00-3.00pm

Cake and drinks provided. Suggested donation £1

Friday 15 October

The Neno Macadamia Trust

with Andrew, Tim and Nick Emmott

Macadamia nut products will be available to purchase

Friday 19 November

Good News for Everyone

Sidney and Judy Miller

Friday 10 December

Film Afternoon – God's Not Dead

Friday 17 December

Christmas Joy!

Christmas quiz, songs and carols with John Hartup

Ruth Janes will have a stall in aid of the Home of Hope, Malawi

Do come and join us for wonderful afternoons of fellowship, fun and friendship

Journalling Prompt.

The Weaver-"My life is but a weaving Between my God and me. I cannot choose the colours He weaveth steadily. Oft' times He weaveth sorrow; And I in foolish pride Forget he sees the upper And I the underside. Not 'til the loom is silent And the shuttle cease to fly Will God unroll the canvas And reveal the reason why. The dark threads are as needful In the weaver's skillful hand As the threads of gold and silver In the pattern He has planned He knows, He loves, He cares; Nothing this truth can dim. He gives the very best to those Who choose to walk with Him."

Written by Grant Colfax Tullar

Here are some journalling questions to ponder on:

- How does you Christian faith inform your 'vision'?
- What is your 'Vision' for your life and how does this align with God's plan?
- How do we remain confident with pursuing the 'vision' God has given us when it doesn't always make sense to the world around us?
- How can we learn to look beyond our immediate circumstances to focus on the hope and light that God can see, as the 'weaver'?



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SUNDAY SERVICES
9:00am and 10:30am Morning Services
(We request that facemasks are worn at the 10:30am Service)
10:30am Livestreamed on Our YouTube channel
7:00pm Sundays@Seven

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Church Wardens: Kay Berrington 01234 826866 Andrew Turpie 01234 305762

www.ccbedford.org

Join us at Christ Church Denmark street, Bedford

