

SPOTLIGHT

Offington Park Methodist Church Magazine



September 2025

In this issue

Joy's Letter	3	"Follow Me"	19
Church Family News	4	A Closer Look at...Deborah	20
The Lighthouse Report	5	Bible Heroes: the Sinful Woman	21
FBWC Cemetery Tours	6	Money Matters	22
To be a Pilgrim	8	Holy Nonsense (& Sacred Sense)	24
Mental Health in the Bible	10	JC's Little Nuggets	25
Spare a Euro, Guv?	11	Great Christian Hymnwriters	26
Remembering John Sandles	12	Remembering Pauline Dockree	28
Bee Nice to the Environment	14	Route 66: Malachi	31

Cover Picture - Knepp Castle

This Grade II listed medieval ruin in West Sussex was constructed in the 12th century by William de Braose as a hunting lodge. Royal visitors included King John, Henry III, Edward II, and Richard II. King John confiscated the castle in 1208 and ordered it destroyed in 1215 and again in 1216 during the First Barons' War.



The Castle fell into disuse in the 14th century and by the early 18th century it was largely demolished. Much of the stone was repurposed in the 1720's for the Horsham–Stevington road (now the A24). Since 2000, the current owners have transformed around 3,500 acres of former farmland into **Knepp Wildland**, a pioneering lowland rewilding site.

The estate now hosts rare and returning species including turtle doves, nightingales, purple emperor butterflies, barbastelle bats, nocturnal slow-worms, beavers (the first in Sussex for centuries), and notably, the first white storks born in the wild in England for 600 years!

Visitors can follow several walking circuits, two of which pass the ruins. Just off the car park, the Wilding Kitchen and café serves meals and estate produce, and the shop offers local gifts and meat from the free-roaming herds. Knepp is a little Sussex gem and well worth a visit.

Dear Friends,



What an amazing summer we have had, with lovely hot weather (too hot for some!) and not enough rain for those who wanted it for the garden. It begs the question, "are we ever satisfied?"

Has the summer been a time of relaxation as you set aside your normal activities? We have had a very busy time at church this summer: the Lighthouse has been full of youngsters having a great time, with several extra activities being put on to entertain them; Zach's cafe has been full to overflowing some days and thankfully being able to use the playground has eased the congestion. We are very grateful to those who have continued to serve our visitors throughout August.

September approaches and that means new beginnings. It is the start of a new Methodist year and different people are taking up certain roles. I come to the end of my time as a Church Steward, which I have been for the past six years. As I look back we have come through so many things in that time, one of the most significant being Covid. That was a challenge to the Stewards team and how grateful we were when we could get back to normal - what ever that is!

As Stewards and Leadership we have been part of the planning and instigation of the soft play and the developing of Zach's café in the church. We had a year of celebrations for our 90th Anniversary with church lunches, fairs, quizzes, concerts and coffee mornings. We have had planning weekends on the boat in Bosham harbour and we have tried new ways of worship.

If you think that being a Steward means opening the church on Sunday, putting water out for the preacher, reading some notices and then locking up afterwards, I can tell you it is all that and so much more. It has been a privilege to be part of all this (*cont'd*)

(continued) and I am going to miss it, although I will still be part of the leadership team.

Is Stewarding or other means of service something you are being called to do? There are so many ways to serve in the church and at the moment so many vacancies. Let's pray that this year we will recruit a wide range of willing volunteers so that we can further the amazing work already happening and the new things to come. We want to reach out into the community and share the love of Christ. Let's do it together.

This new church year sees the very welcome return of our minister, Dawn, following her sabbatical. We pray she has had time to reflect, rest, and maybe try some new things too! We will look forward to hearing about it in the next few weeks.

Every blessing,

Joy

CHURCH FAMILY NEWS



RUBY WEDDING ANNIVERSARY

Sue and John H

THANK YOU FROM CHRIS & LIZ

A big thank you to everyone who supported our Tea in the Garden event. We raised the amazing sum of £480 for Christian Aid.

OFFERTORIES		
Month	Cash & Cheques	Standing Orders
June	£472.00	£5,848.33
July	£489.70	£5,793.33

THE LIGHTHOUSE @ OFFINGTON PARK

the lighthouse
@ Offington Park

**Fancy swapping some spare time for smiles,
FREE soft play sessions and maybe cake?**



SOFT PLAY AND CAFE

We're on the hunt for cheerful volunteers to help in our soft play & café! Here's a few questions we've been asked about volunteering.

Q: Will I have to climb through tunnels or go down the slide?

A: Only if you *really* want to! Your main job is making families feel welcome, serving drinks and snacks, and helping keep the place fun and friendly.

Q: Do I need to be a soft play expert?

A: Nope! If you can smile, press buttons on machines, and make a sandwich or cut a cake, you're perfect.

Q: How many hours are we talking?

A: Whatever you can spare – even a couple of hours a week is amazing. We'll work around your schedule.

Q: What's in it for me?

A: Endless gratitude, the warm glow of doing good, meeting new people, and possibly becoming a Duplo stacking champion.

Q: How do I sign up?

A: Easy! Just contact Tess or Ashley (the ones wearing yellow shirts) at the Lighthouse!

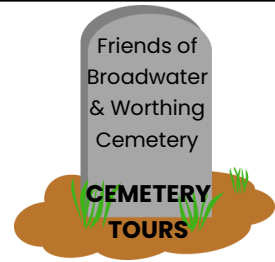
OK, the Q&A is light-hearted, and yes we did use THAT WORD. Volunteer. It can strike fear into the heart of anyone, but it's not a thing to be afraid of. Be honest - when you hear "volunteering," do you picture being roped into something from which you can't escape? That's so not it.

Volunteering is about being part of something bigger than yourself. It's about meeting people you'd never normally meet, discovering skills you didn't know you had, and having moments that genuinely make your heart feel about three sizes bigger.

Yes, you might end up serving drinks and stacking chairs, but you may also help kids have the best playtime ever and find yourself laughing so hard with your new team that you forget it's "work" at all. And the best bit? You get as much out of it as the people you're helping - sometimes more.

It's not about giving up your time. It's about swapping a little of it for purpose, fun, and maybe even a few slices of cake. So, what are you waiting for?

"100 YEARS ON" TOUR
Saturday 5 September 2025
@ 11:00 am



Our September tour takes us back 100 years to look at the lives of some of the people buried in the cemetery during 1925.

Join us to hear about jeweller and goldsmith Thomas Crouch, and to follow the many and varied occupations of Augustus Pardo, from police constable to theatrical director!

We will also delve into the aristocratic world of Patrick Emilius John Greville Nugent and the incident that saw him committed to trial.

The tour starts at 11 am by the Chapels in South Farm Road. Hot and cold refreshments (including delicious cakes) are available for a small donation towards cemetery upkeep. Please help the environment by bringing your own cup.

Thank you.

We invite anyone, grumpy or not,
to join us at 10:00am on
Tuesday 9 September to discuss



Is the UK a moral wasteland?

Scandals and failures, lack of care and accountability, loss of Christian ethics, nobody brave enough to speak out.

We'll be meeting in the Quiet Room (after coffee and cake in Zach's Café). Do come and join us at this event.



MUSICAL MEMORIES

Offington Handbells

invite you to a concert
and refreshments

**on Saturday 20 September
at 10.15am**

Free entry but donations gratefully received.

Further details available from the

Church Welcome Desk

offingtonparkchurch@gmail.com

01903 205722

TO BE A PILGRIM....

Were you one of the millions who watched the BBC's 'Pilgrimage' programmes? This follows the story of celebrities from various faiths and none, trekking together, dealing with the challenge of long and rugged walks, all while learning more about themselves in the process.



Did you know that the UK is crisscrossed with pilgrim routes, and new ones are constantly appearing, linking sacred sites of all kinds? Many of the popular routes form part of wider long-established networks such as the Walsingham Way and the long-distance Camino Way, but there are many others. In the Church of England, Parish pilgrimages are being revived as a way of helping connect communities with their environment.

Traditionally, many churches have walked round the boundaries of their parishes on certain days, ostensibly to bless agricultural tools and the land. Recently there has been renewed interest in parishes taking part in these small community pilgrimages, and the depth of interest reflects the massive growth in pilgrim numbers all year round. The number of pilgrimages undertaken throughout the world is unknown, because many people regard it as a very personal activity.

The British Pilgrimage Trust lists more than 250 routes and more than 700 potential destinations, ranging from healing springs to cathedrals. Pilgrimages focus on healing, food, farming and bereavement, and there's also an 'Ancients' pilgrimage which involves Stonehenge.

It is not just adults taking part; schools, animals and objects are equally involved. One dog-owner is making a pilgrimage to every dog-friendly cathedral, while Kenneth Wilson, known as the Highway Cellist, is cycling 2,000 miles around the UK, intent on visiting all 42 Anglican cathedrals to perform a 50-minute meditation on the seven last words of Jesus integrated with the Bach Cello suite as a personal offering.

In the north of England, there is a cherished tradition known as Whit walks, with groups of churches coming together to form long processions complete with brass bands and drums.

Whit walks are embedded in northern culture, linking with colliery band tradition. It is a way of celebrating faith publicly. It shows a faith that is active and alive, encouraging people to get involved and is usually ecumenical. Typically, people will line the streets as churchgoers walk from cathedral to town centre, hold an act of worship, then process back to the cathedral.

On the Isle of Man, the annual Praying the Keeills walks involve ecumenical pilgrimages around sacred sites including the remains of ancient hermitages, springs and remote churches.

In St Albans, the cathedral organises an annual Alban pilgrimage involving the entire city in a dramatic procession involving 12ft puppets, community groups and countless children dressed as Roman soldiers, lions, and rose windows. Parishes come from all over the country to take part.

Now, if you're not so good on your pins, fear not! There are even virtual pilgrimages which can be undertaken by people who might not otherwise be able to embark on a trek. These range from organised resources such as a Lindisfarne pilgrimage, involving a 24-page guide with photographs and information to prompt spiritual experiences, to a simple virtual discussion between two or more folk as they follow a Google Maps route!

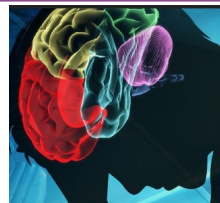
Rosemary Clarke from the Isle of Man diocese reports receiving comments from participants such as "I feel close to God. There are a lot of 'thin places' and I feel God is walking with us," "It's good to take time out, to reflect on God in a freer way, hearing stories and learning more from those who know."

Those who take part commonly respond that the pilgrimage helps them reset the balance in their life, and puts today into the perspective of the past. Even virtual ones can be about health and wellbeing. Pilgrimages help people connect with the wider community, with the environment, with eco awareness. It is a sustainable activity, because there is little car use (or none if you do a virtual pilgrimage) and it increases people's connection to nature.

Here's an idea: what about creating a virtual pilgrimage for folk at Offington Park? A simple beginning - a PowerPoint show, but interspersed with a carefully woven together mix of images, music, songs, poetry and Bible readings to help participants reflect on their own life's journey. **Anyone up for the challenge?**

MENTAL HEALTH IN THE BIBLE

This month in our series following the men and women in Scripture who battled with their mental health, we look at



Hannah, the barren wife who got trolled

From behind the anonymity of a username, trolls spit venomous comments out of their keyboards. Anyone can become a victim of their bullying.

Peninnah and Hannah were both married to the same husband. Because Hannah couldn't have children, she got constantly trolled by Peninnah. She used similar tactics as today's trolls; bombarding Hannah with comments, but under the radar so their husband never understood what was upsetting Hannah. Like anyone who suffers abuse from trolls, Hannah was miserable. She would cry bitterly and couldn't eat.

But then one day Hannah took her pain to God. She prayerfully poured out her soul through body-heaving sobs. She was in such a state, the nearby priest initially thought she was drunk! Then he encouraged her: "Go in peace."

From that moment, Hannah looked brighter – and actually ate something! Even though God gave Hannah a child later, nothing changed immediately after her prayer. She was still barren and Peninnah was still trolling her. But within Hannah, everything had changed. Peninnah's voice was no longer defining Hannah's worth.

Now Hannah had someone much mightier and more impressive. As the Bible explained many years later, when we bring our burdens to God, His peace "guards our hearts and minds".

Are trolls attacking your sense of identity or worth? Copy Hannah and make God's voice the loudest. He only speaks the truth about you; and that truth is amazing.

PUT YOUR SPARE EUROS INTO ACTION (for children)

Action for Children is the children's charity of the Methodist Church. It was founded in 1869 by Methodist minister Revd Thomas Bowman Stephenson in response to the poverty and danger faced by vulnerable and destitute young people living rough on the streets of London.

Today Action for Children has grown to become a leading children's charity running over 500 projects and working with more children and young people affected by poverty, disability and abuse than any other UK charity.

The Action for Children Covenant

*Every child has the right to live,
to be safe and to be loved.*

*Every young person has the right to be
housed, to have enough money to live
in dignity and to have enough support for the future.*

*Every young person has the right to justice, to realise
their potential and to be given the space to become
independent. In an often cruel and imperfect world, we
uphold the work of Action for Children with children
and young people in danger, in need and at risk. We
support the growth of this work and the pursuit of
these rights for the young, the discounted and the
vulnerable. We make this covenant with Action for
Children for the sake of all God's children. Amen*



Have you been on holiday and returned with a pocketful of Euro coins? Do you have a secret stash from years ago? If so, perhaps you'd like to give them to a really good cause?

Steve is our *Action for Children* representative and he would be really happy to take them. Steve takes low denomination notes as well!

REMEMBERING JOHN S

John was always smart and presentable and a man who always had a clear idea of what he wanted. He met Jean through friends when they were both living in Wallington, Surrey. They used to do many things together, and one day they went to Box Hill and John said, 'We are getting married!'



They chose a date – 5 January 1952 - and were married at St Mary's church in Beddington Park. John was a devoted and caring husband for the seventy-three-and-a-half years of marriage that they shared. They were known around Broadwater as a very loving couple, always together and often walking along holding hands. When they first had a motorised scooter, they even sat in it together, which caused some amusement.

John worked in the building trade, as a buyer for a plastering company. He worked hard and loved his job. One day his boss tossed him the keys to his Rolls Royce and he took Jean out for the day. They were gone so long that his boss was worried – but they were just having a good time.

After John was made redundant they moved a number of times, and tried different things including running a tea shop in Bramber for five years. They made a lot of friends, especially over those five years. In the 1970s they developed a particular love of Bournemouth, and enjoyed a number of holidays with Jean's brother Alec and his family.

John and Jean were loyal attenders of this church and the Tuesday Lunch Club here, where they were avid players of Mexican Dominoes. The volunteers at the lunch club recall that they never left without John saying 'thank you'.

In his younger days John served in the Royal Navy for three years, on escort and minesweeper duties, which included clearing mines in preparation for D-Day. As one involved in the liberation of France in June 2019 he was awarded the Legion d'Honneur by the French Government. A great honour indeed.

It will come as no surprise to those that knew him that John left detailed instructions about what he wanted to happen at his funeral. Those instructions offered some insight into the man that he was...and some surprises.

It was a surprise that a 98-year-old would request a track by Leona Lewis, but the lyrics to that track - *Footprints* - were absolutely perfect for his funeral, a day when inevitably we come together with hearts full of sadness.

The song *Footprints* refers to a poem based in Christian beliefs and describes an experience in which a person is walking on a beach with God. They leave two sets of footprints in the sand, representing stages of the narrator's life. At some of the lowest and most hopeless moments of the person's life, the two tracks dwindle to one and the narrator questions God, believing that the Lord must have abandoned him during those times. God explains to him, "My son, during your times of trial and suffering, when you see only one set of footprints, it was then that I carried you."

That's the promise that Jesus offers - that he will be with us always, and the more so when our hearts are filled with sadness; may the footprints remind us of that promise and be a blessing to us today and every day.

John particularly asked that the following short prayer be included in his funeral service. This prayer says much about John's private reflection on his life.

Rosemarie C

Gracious God, in the busyness of our day we sometimes forget to thank you for all that is good in our lives. Our blessings are many. For the ability to love and be loved, we thank you. Amen



Faith
is the substance of things hoped for,
the evidence of things not seen.

BEE NICE TO THE ENVIRONMENT!



Following on from our summer challenge to create a minibeast hotel, here's another chance to put your carpentry skills to the test by creating a bee hotel just like the one on the opposite page. Why not have a go?

In a nutshell, you're aiming to make a box or container stuffed full of different-sized hollow tubes, each with a dead end, roughly 15cm or so long. Just make sure it's robust enough for several years outdoors!

Of course, if you don't feel up to the task for whatever reason, the easy way is to buy a ready-made bee hotel. The objective is to help the environment. If buying ready-made, choose one with several different sizes of tubes – different species of bee like different diameter tunnels.

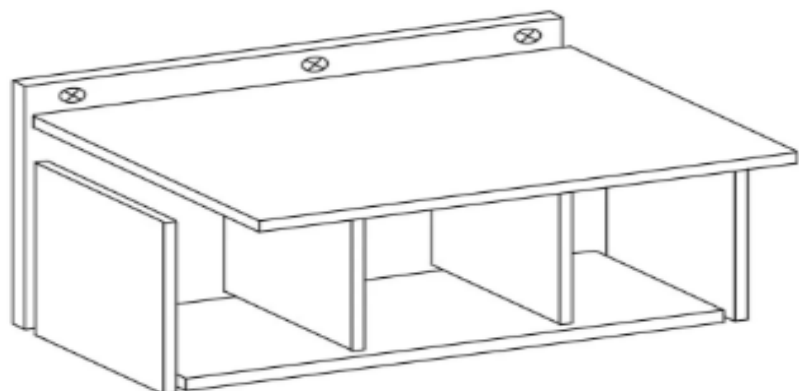
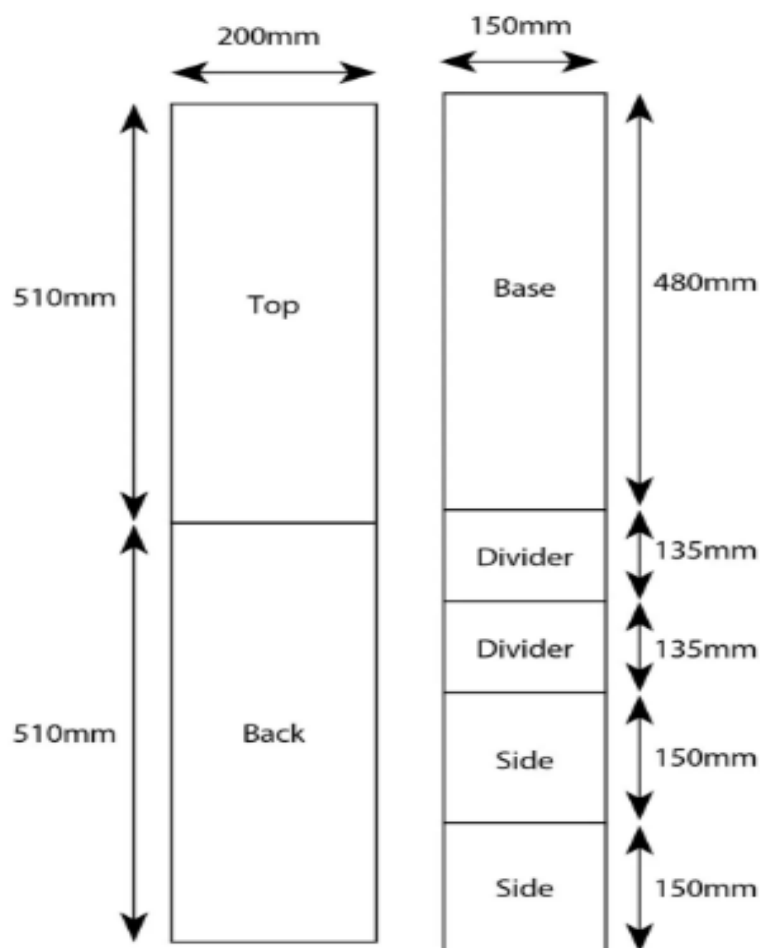
To create the nesting tubes, either buy bee tubes or simply use bamboo canes, and the dead stems of hollow plants and reeds. Cut your various tubes to 15cm in length. You can also drill deep holes between 2mm and 6mm in diameter into blocks of wood and logs, again about 15cm deep. Make sure to angle them slightly upward so rain doesn't get in).

Then, fill your box with your tubes and blocks of wood. Squeeze all the tubes in together so they stay put. You'll find it's easier to wedge things into a box divided into compartments.

Fix your box firmly at about waist or chest height (bees don't want to wave around in the wind), maybe on a fence or wall. Very importantly, place it facing south in a sunny position, near your bee-friendly flowers and shrubs. Then sit back and watch.

Adult female bees will visit the nest holes on sunny days in spring and summer. You'll know they're nesting if you see them flying in with pollen (some carry it on their bellies), blobs of mud to create cell walls along the tube, or with bits of leaf (these are the leaf-cutter bees).

You'll be able to see if any of the holes have been used because the holes will be blocked with plugs of mud or leaves. The mother bees will lay eggs in those cells, leave them a supply of pollen and nectar for food, and then their work is done. The bee grubs will grow up in their tubes and hatch the next year to start life's cycle over again.



WHAT'S ON - SEPTEMBER 2025

Mon	1	6:15pm	Offington Bells	
		11:00am	Bible Fellowship	
Thu	4	2:00pm	Knit 'n' Natter	
		7:30pm	Thursday's	Social Group
Sun	7	8:00am	Rev Richard Tanner	Holy Communion
		10:30am	Rev Dawn Carn	Café Church
Mon	8	2:30pm	Offington Bells	
Tue	9	10:00am	Grumpy Old Men	Is the UK a moral wasteland?
Thu	11	11:00am	Bible Fellowship	
Sun	14	10:30am	Rev Dawn Carn	Holy Communion
		3:30pm	Messy Church Team	Messy Church
Wed	17	10:30am	Mid-month Communion	
Thu	18	11:00am	Bible Fellowship	
		2:00pm	Knit 'n' Natter	
Sat	20	10:15am	Offington Bells Concert	Musical Memories
Sun	21	10:30am	Breakfast Church Team	Breakfast Church
		10:30am	Mrs Pam Frost	Morning Worship
Mon	22	6:45pm	Offington Bells	
Tue	23	12:00pm	Tuesday Lunch & Social Club	
Thu	25	11:00am	Bible Fellowship	
		2:00pm	Knit 'n' Natter	
Sun	28	10:30am	Rev Dawn Carn	Harvest/Parade
		12:00pm	Harvest BBQ	
Mon	29	6:45pm	Offington Bells	
Tue	30	12:00pm	Tuesday Lunch & Social Club	

OFFINGTON CAMEO
Friday 12 September:

CAMEO

"Sing a Song"

Enjoy a morning of music with Nicola Disney

We meet in the Allan Fletcher Hall,

Friday 26 September:

"Worthing 1925"

An illustrated talk by local Historian Chris Hare

This is an **OPEN MEETING** which will be held in the church.

The cost is **£2.50** and everyone is welcome

Both meetings: **10:15am** for a **10:30am** start

Margaret H



Once again we will be sending filled shoe boxes to Moldova for disadvantaged children. Mustard Seed Relief mission will collect boxes in early November.

We were so pleased that last year we had some contributions from the Lighthouse and from Zachs.

The leaflets will be available later this month, but if you want to get started by buying a few things, each box will need stationery, toiletries, gloves, hats, and a soft toy. Thank you so much for your continued support for this much appreciated outreach project.

Margaret H

LADIES THAT BREAKFAST

Saturday 25th October from 9:00am to 11:00am

Southwick Methodist Church Hall, Manor Hall Road



Enjoy a continental breakfast with tea or coffee and hear speaker

Emily Ansell talk about **F.E.B.A. Radio -**

reaching people in hard to reach places with the message of Jesus

Minimum donation **£5.**

Contact Romy P or Mollie B for more information and to book

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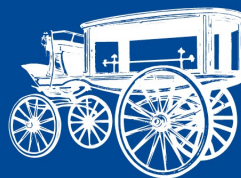


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"FOLLOW ME"

(a reimagining of St. Peter's First Steps)



The sky over Galilee was beginning to burn with the soft colours of morning when I first saw Him. It was an ordinary day: the kind of day filled with nets, sun-warmed wood, and the smell of fish clinging to skin and beard. My brother Andrew and I had just returned from a long, unprofitable night of casting and hauling – more casting than hauling, truth be told, but the fickle sea had offered nothing.

We were cleaning the nets, our knuckles raw with salt, when the stranger stepped into our world. He walked the shoreline with no urgency, yet every step felt like it knew where it was going. People followed Him like birds drawn to a silent wind, no shouting, no fanfare. Just something in His presence—quiet and immovable, like a mountain that had decided to walk.

I barely looked up. Just another preacher, maybe, calling for repentance, or worse, another Roman spy in disguise. I had no patience for men with clean hands telling me about God.

Then the Man spoke. Not to the crowd. To *me*. "Simon", he said. I turned, squinting. "Do I know you?" The Man smiled – not wide, not forced. Just enough to feel like sunlight.

"Follow Me, and I will make you a Fisher of Men."

I was stunned. I'd heard strange things before, and I'd seen zealots and mystics. But this – this was different. The words didn't land in my ears like commands. They didn't strike like orders or thunder like prophecy. They were a hand held out in invitation.

For one terrifying moment, I wanted to laugh. *Fishers of Men*? What did that even mean? Was it metaphor? Madness? Magic? But then something deeper than understanding moved in me. A stillness. A knowing. As though every storm in my life – (cont'd)

the debts, the failures, the nights of silence on the water – had just hushed. I looked down at the nets in my hands. This was my world – knotted rope, tired arms, little reward. And yet here was this man, asking me to leave it all without explanation.

I opened my mouth to speak – some joke, some protest, anything to hold on to the moment a little longer. But the only thing that came was silence.

I dropped the net onto the sand with a dull thud, stood up and glanced once at Andrew – who nodded without hesitation – and I followed.

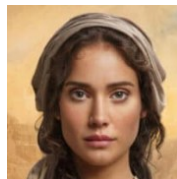
That morning, with the air smelling of sea and unspoken promises, I didn't need theology or certainty. I just needed that voice that said, "Follow Me."

And that was enough to start walking.

A CLOSER LOOK AT.... DEBORAH

ruler, warrior and prophetess of Israel

Amongst a sea of male Bible characters, Deborah stands out as an exceptional figure; a wise and fearless woman of faith who led God's people to victory.



Gifted with wisdom, insight and an unwavering commitment to God and His people, Deborah acted as a judge and ruler at a time when Israel did whatever was 'right in their own eyes.' One day, God gave her a message: command Barak to gather 10,000 warriors and go conquer an enemy king. Barak said he would only go if he could bring Deborah. She agreed but warned him that the honour would go to a woman, not him. Barak didn't mind, as long as they won. And they did!

At a time in history when women were often marginalised, Deborah broke the mould. Her agenda was not to destroy patriarchy, but to glorify God by liberating His people from their enemies. Whatever leadership responsibilities we have today, or whoever may be looking up to us, Deborah gives us a wise and inspirational example to follow.

If she was trying to prove anything, it's that Israel's hope should not be in men — or women — but in the Lord!

Follow the story in Judges 4-5 and Hebrews 11:32-34

BIBLE HEROES

The Sinful Woman



A world-renowned artist paints his most impressive painting yet. And then, to your amazement, he gives it to you as a gift. You feel like you must do something in return, so you pat down your pockets and give him all the money you have...but it doesn't really matter how much you offer - £10, £200, £1,000 - it cheapens his gift by putting a value on something that's priceless and precious.

But isn't this what the sinful woman did when she took an expensive jar of perfume and poured it on Jesus' feet? Was she trying to pay Jesus back for his forgiveness? Jesus explained to the onlookers, "Her faith has already saved her. She is doing this because she loves me".

Faith not only receives Jesus' forgiveness but trusts that the debt of our sin is fully paid. How should we respond to such a priceless gift? By letting our hearts grow in love for our Saviour.

*Forgiven, restored and thankful, the woman gave her heart and her possessions to Jesus, not to pay a debt, but to show her love. Worship with the forgiven woman and be reminded that **faith simply loves Jesus**.*

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MONEY MATTERS

Do we *really* give our first fruits to the Lord?



In every age, money has been more than currency - it is a reflection of our values, our priorities, and our trust. Scripture challenges us regularly to consider how we handle our resources (not just our money, but our time, our gifts, our influences even). One of the recurring biblical images is the offering of **first fruits**: the practice of giving the very best and first portion of our harvest back to God. But in today's world, where money replaces crops as our means of living, a pressing question remains: *Do we really give our first fruits to the Lord?*

First Principles

In the Old Testament, Israel was commanded to bring the **first and best portion of their harvest** to God (Exodus 23:19, Proverbs 3:9). This wasn't about giving God a token of thanks; it was a declaration of trust. By offering the first fruits, farmers were essentially saying, *"Lord, we give You the best now, trusting that You will provide the rest."* First fruits were an act of worship, not just obligation.

That level of trust wasn't always easy. Harvests were uncertain. Giving away the first portion felt risky. Yet it was precisely in that risk that faith was exercised.

Today, though most of us are not farmers, the principle still applies. Our "sheaves of grain" or "baskets of figs" is our income (salary, investment returns or pension), our time, and our energy. We should still be giving God the **first and best**, not the scraps. To give our first fruits is to give God the *best portion* of what we receive - before we allocate it to debts, bills, wants, and other demands.

The Temptation of Leftovers

Many of us fall into the pattern of giving God what remains, rather than what is first. We budget for necessities, save for goals, spend on pleasures - and if anything is left, we offer it to God. This approach turns generosity into an afterthought. It flips the biblical model upside down. Instead of putting God first and trusting Him with the rest, we put ourselves first and hope that He'll understand. Imagine if ancient farmers had done the same: keeping the best

of the harvest for themselves and bringing only a basket of bruised fruit or shrivelled grain to God. Would that have been an act of worship, or of convenience?

Money as a Spiritual Mirror

Jesus spoke plainly when He said, *“Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also”* (Matthew 6:21). In other words, our spending patterns reveal what we value most. A quick look at our bank statements often shows the truth. Do we invest more in personal pleasures than in eternal purposes? Does giving to God feel like a priority or like an obligation?

For many of us, the barrier is fear. “If I give first, will I have enough left to cover everything else?” That fear is not new - Israelite farmers faced it too. The difference was this: they were called to act in faith, believing that the same God who provided the first crop would provide the rest.

A Story of Trust: The Johnson Family

A few years ago, Mark and Sarah Johnson found themselves in a difficult financial season. Mark’s job had been downsized, and Sarah was working part-time while also caring for their two children. Every penny mattered, and every bill felt heavy. When their church launched a series on biblical stewardship, the Johnsons were challenged to give their *first fruits* - to set aside their gift as soon as their income came in, rather than waiting to see what was left at the end of the month. At first, it felt impossible. But after prayer, they decided to trust God and begin giving right away.

The first month, they were nervous. Yet somehow, their bills were covered, and they even found unexpected savings in places they hadn’t noticed before. Over time, their fear was replaced by joyous expectancy of their payday — not because of what they would keep, but because of what they could give. It wasn’t about the money. It was about trust and putting Him first.” Their story is far from unique. Again and again, true believers discover that God honours those who trust Him with their first and best.

A Call to Examine Ourselves

So, at this time of Harvest, do we really give our first fruits to the Lord? Or do we give Him our leftovers? It is a question worth asking not only of our finances, but of our time, our talents, and our devotion. The principle of first fruits is not about loss - it is about aligning our hearts to trust God more deeply and to experience the move from fear to faith and the joy of generosity.

HOLY NONSENSE (AND SACRED SENSE)

On Sunday we gather, the faithful, the late,
Some south of the railway, still stuck at the gate.
The Welcomer smiling, saying 'morning to you',
(Like Moses, she claims she's on "holy ground" too).

The notices are read, but not everything's fine,
Shouts someone, "the BBQ's NOT at that time!"
The first hymn we mumble, we don't know the tune
But Mrs McNeil still comes in too soon.

The preacher stands steady, sermon in hand,
But his glasses are missing - ah, that wasn't planned!
He squints at the text, then he chuckles and sighs,
"Just walking by faith, not by sight with these eyes."

The offering plate's passed to all near and far,
(And one little child drops in his toy car).
Like loaves and like fishes, our gifts seem so small,
But God multiplies gladly the hearts that give all.

The sermon is moving, the Spirit is near,
Yet old Mrs Jones still can't hear the words clear.
She whispers (too loudly), "What did he just say?"
The minister smiles and keeps preaching away.
Then comes the blessing - "Now go forth in peace!"
But no-one is hurried; the chatter won't cease.
Like Paul's long goodbyes that could stretch with no break,
We linger with tea, coffee, biscuits and cake.

And so, refreshed, we depart to our homes
Some happy, some sad, some with usual moans
But Sunday by Sunday when all's said and done
We're a family of faith – all different, yet one.



JC's LITTLE NUGGETS

“Take it to the Lord”

based on Psalm 35,v 2-5 and v 16-23



The Psalm tells of King David being overwhelmed by troubles. How many times have we felt like that?

One such time for me started with a car crash and my wife, Elaine, being rushed into hospital for an emergency operation.

My new job was not going well (I know what you're thinking - YOU had a job?) and to cap it all, the car was making funny noises (no, it's not the same car although it may look like it). The garage mechanic advised that the greater the noise the greater the cost of repair. No change there.

Then came the final straw: a stiff letter from the bank. The manager was asking us to call in and discuss our account. Those were the days, now there's hardly any banks, let alone managers.

So, to seek solace I went to the seafront, my favourite place in Worthing. I prayed to God and asked for divine help. As I looked out over the sea, I felt calmed by the sea, which is like our Lord, ever constant. He is ever constant with His care, His support and His love.

Our problems didn't magically go away, but having offloaded to Him, I felt in a much better place to cope. So, if life threatens to overwhelm you, take it to the Lord, the One who sustains us and bears us up.

God bless you all.

John C

JOACHIM NEANDER

***Praise to the Lord, the Almighty,
the King of creation!***

***O my soul, praise Him,
for He is thy health and salvation!***

***All ye who hear, now to His temple draw near;
Praise Him in glad adoration.***



Joachim Neander was born in 1650 in Bremen, Germany, the son of a Latin teacher. His grandfather, a musician, had changed the family name from the original German *Neumann* to the Greco-Roman form *Neander*, following the fashion of the time. After the death of his father, he could not afford to study at a famous university. He therefore studied theology in Bremen from 1666 to 1670. At first, his heart was not in it. It was only when he heard a sermon shortly before the end of his course that his beliefs became serious.

Despite dying at a young age, Neander was the first important hymnwriter of the German Reformed Church. In 1674 he moved to Dusseldorf to become a Latin teacher in a church school there. He wrote about 60 hymns and several melodies, many of which reflect the beauty of creation, the majesty of God, and the intimacy of personal devotion.

While living in Dusseldorf, where most of his hymns were written, Neander liked to go to the nearby valley of the river Dussel, to take in the nature and beauty of the place as inspiration for his poems. He also held gatherings and services in the valley, at which he gave sermons in his position as Rector. Such was his influence that the Neandertal valley (originally *Neanderthal*) was renamed in his honour in the early 19th century.

The minister and elders of the Reformed Church had complete control of the school at Düsseldorf. About July 1673 to about May 1677 the minister was Sylvester Lürsen (a native of Bremen, and a few years older than Neander), a man of ability and earnestness, but jealous, and, according to Neander, in later times quarrelsome.

Neander worked harmoniously alongside him at first, frequently preaching in the church and assisting in the visitation of the sick. But he soon introduced practices which inevitably brought on a conflict. He began to hold prayer meetings of his own, without informing or consulting the minister or elders; he began to absent himself from Holy Communion, on the grounds that he could

not conscientiously commune along with the unconverted. Neander also persuaded others to follow this example, and he became less regular in his attendance at the ordinary services of the church.

Besides these causes of offence, he drew out a new timetable for the school, made alterations on the school buildings, held examinations and appointed holidays without consulting anyone.

As a result, he was suspended from school and pulpit on February 3, 1677, but only for 14 days as on February 17 he signed a full and definite declaration by which "without mental reservations" he bound himself not to repeat any of the acts complained of and was permitted to resume his duties as rector but not as assistant minister.

In 1679, Neander became pastor of St Martin's church in Bremen, as his popularity with the common people had caused problems with the church administration in Düsseldorf.

Neander's most famous hymn **"Praise to the Lord, the Almighty"** is still today one of the most well-known hymns of the Christian tradition and is often sung across many denominations. Written originally in German, the most widely sung English version was translated by Catherine Winkworth (1827–1878), a leading translator of German hymns into English, in 1863. The melody is called *Lobe den Herren* (praise the Lord) and is based on a German folk tune. It was first published in the late 17th century and harmonized by composers such as Johann Sebastian Bach.



The hymn is a call to worship, encouraging all creation - souls, instruments, and community - to join in praising God as the Almighty King. Its verses celebrate God's sovereign power in creation, His providential care and protection, His blessings and mercy in daily life and a final doxology, giving all glory back to God.

Praise to the Lord is found in most major hymnals and is often used as an opening hymn in services due to its majestic, processional character and German Baroque style which reflects a joyful, robust faith. It's powerful tune is extremely rousing when sung in traditional organ-led worship.

About a year after returning to Bremen, on 31 May 1680, Joachim Neander died of tuberculosis at the age of just 30. He is buried at the church in the central square.

REMEMBERING PAULINE D

(extracts from the eulogy by her family)



When thinking about Mum, Pauline, one of the first things that comes to mind is her sense of fun and mischief and her generosity and kindness as a person. Her lifelong love of animals and appreciation of nature is something I have valued as an adult, even if I didn't always appreciate being dragged on 'long walks in the rain' as a child. The family have been known to picnic in the snow and in the midst of torrential downpours, but Mum always did these things with great enthusiasm and was determined to have a good time.

That is how she approached life and those of you who knew her well have told me how much you have appreciated her sense of fun over the years. Mum knew how to have a good time, even in circumstances where others would "quite sensibly" have given up and gone home!

I was reminded recently how, at mine and Sarah's wedding, mum took the lead in decorating the 'getaway' car with many random items, including a fake full English breakfast on a plate, which was seen hanging from the underside of the car as we left the reception. Mum went out of her way to welcome both my wife Sarah and Louise's husband, Phil into the family from day one - ensuring they knew all about the Sound of Music and that they were always well fed!

Mum always talked fondly of her childhood in Northwood and Harrogate with her sister, Hazel. She inherited her Dad's passion for bird watching and nature and her Mum's love of dogs. She was an enthusiastic Girl Guide and Guide leader and she took this love of nurturing young people into her career as a teacher.

Mum loved her job as a primary school teacher and in later years managed a unit for children with disabilities. She believed that every child should have opportunities and of course, plenty of fun. She was particularly proud of the ocarina group she started at school and the boccia she introduced to the children who used wheelchairs. One of those children went on to be a paralympic medallist!

She was known and loved by parents and children alike, who used to tease her for her little phrases, such as “oh bunny rabbits”, among many others.

Mum met Alan when they were both performing in an AmDram version of Trial by Jury at their church in Brighton. From that moment on, they were inseparable and completely devoted to each other through good times and also hard times.

Years ago they were active walkers and climbed Snowdon and Ben Nevis. As a child I remember numerous climbs a third of the way up Ben Lomond, until our smaller legs meant we had to turn around. There were many happy holidays - in Fulking as children with Mum’s parents, several times with Uncle Richard in Guernsey which became a special place for us all. There was a truly special holiday with Dad to Niagara Falls, to Nigeria with Louise and Phil to visit Mum’s sister Hazel and family as well as Sarah and I while we were living there. When walking became a challenge, they had some wonderful cruises around Norway, Britain and Europe.

I have often wondered how Dad managed to keep calm when he heard “Alan, Alan” for the umpteenth time in a day. The answer is simple: they were always each other's rock and companion. When Dad went through various bouts of ill health, or when he struggled to find work, mum never stopped believing in him, and when mum faced her own health challenges across the years, Dad was always there.

Mum always wanted to help others and she constantly put others before herself. She was a feeder who loved to entertain and absolutely loved to feed you. If you left Mum's house without having eaten something from the various items on offer then you were a miracle worker! Even when her declining health prevented her from cooking or preparing anything, she still wanted you to take biscuits, cake etc.

Mum doted on her grandchildren and loved sharing special occasions, both theirs and her own, with them. She enjoyed researching special gifts with Dad, thinking carefully about what interested each of them at the time.

(continued over)

(from previous page) She was an active member of Offington Park for many years, singing, serving, driving the minibus and coordinating the rota so that people could get to church. Mum and Dad both really valued being a part of this community and the friends they made here. Mum's faith was quiet but always a central part of her life. In more recent years, she missed coming to church but loved her weekly dose of Songs of Praise. As she wasn't able to get out as much, she would keep in touch with friends by writing letters and making regular phone calls. She was definitely a people person and continued to enjoy visits from friends and family, and trips out for meals, ice creams, indeed anything good to eat, and to visit the sea, right up to her death. She really appreciated receiving visits and communion from church members and also loved going to the St Matthew's coffee mornings once a month, thanks to Dial a Ride.

I miss Mum hugely but there are so many things I am grateful for. Two of those are that Mum and Dad were able to celebrate their Golden Wedding Anniversary before Dad died, and that Mum was with her granddaughter, Ruth, when she died. They had shared a really special afternoon together the day before doing craft, chatting and enjoying dinner. I am very glad that Mum was able to stay in her own home and receive visits by family and friends, not least Monty the Schnauzer.

Mum missed Alan tremendously when Alan died, but she was determined to remain in her own home and was able to do so. She felt so much joy and pride for her three grandchildren, indeed for all of us and we are immensely thankful that we could celebrate Mum's 81st Birthday in the New Forest at the beginning of May.

We thought having donkeys at the funeral would be a good way to celebrate Mum's sense of fun and her love of all animals (but mainly donkeys). Mum would have been tickled pink I'm sure. We could also have invited the seagull, the fox and the squirrels who Mum would greet by name when they came to the window of her home each day!

There are so many memories of our wonderful Mum. She made us laugh, made us cry, carried us, infuriated us, spurred us on, believed in us and most of all, loved us. Thank you Mum.

A JOURNEY THROUGH THE BIBLE

Malachi



Do you ever find the Christian life disappointing?

You hear amazing stories of God working miracles. You read big promises in the Bible . . . but why don't you see God's miracles, power and joy in your own life?

At the end of the Old Testament, life was hard, boring and disappointing for the people of Israel. Once, they had been a rich, powerful kingdom the other nations looked up to. Now, they were just a tiny country without much money, power or purpose. God seemed distant, and the Saviour He'd promised all the way through their history still hadn't shown up. The people were bored with God, making their lives even more empty and disappointing.

Malachi steps in with words of hope: "Life is disappointing now, but don't give up. Keep trusting God – His King will be here soon!"

We also live at a time when we're waiting for Jesus. It seems like His return is never going to happen. Life slips into the everyday; God's awesome plans are forgotten.

If you want to keep your eyes on Jesus when the world is doing something different, if you want to be ready for His return, then listen to the warnings and encouragements of Malachi. What God says, He does. You can bet your life on it.

O LORD, PLEASE DON'T LET ME BE MISUNDERSTOOD!

A minister asked the children if anyone had memorized a Bible verse. One girl stood proudly and recited, "Do unto otters as you would have them do unto you."

The minister blinked. "Otters?" "Yes", she nodded confidently. "that's what Jesus said about being kind to animals."

NEXT EDITION

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Please submit material for the next edition
to the Editors at:

offingtonspotlight@gmail.com

It all began one Sunday morning when the congregation stood to sing. The organist played confidently, the music group lifted their voices, and the congregation followed along - well, mostly.

Right in the middle of the hymn, one voice stood out. William Thompson, a much-loved gentleman known for singing with more enthusiasm than accuracy, was belting out: "Gladly, the cross-eyed bear..."

Several heads turned. The music group struggled to keep straight faces. Even the organist's hands trembled on the keys.

After the service, someone gently asked Mr. Thompson, "do you realize the hymn says, '*Gladly the cross I'd bear*,' not '*Gladly the cross-eyed bear*'?" Mr. Thompson looked astonished. "Really? All these years I thought we were singing about a poor little bear called Gladly who couldn't see straight. I always wondered why he was in the hymnbook."



From that Sunday on, whenever the hymn appeared, the whole congregation had to suppress a smile. And Mr. Thompson - never one to be embarrassed - would grin and say, "Well, I suppose I did bear the cross in my own way!"

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