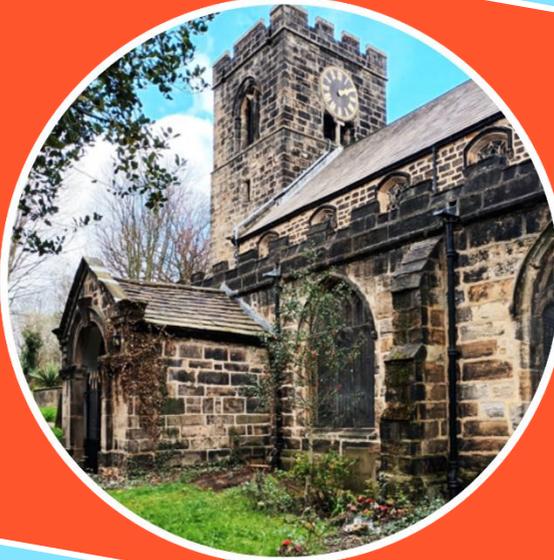


FEBRUARY 2026

IN TOUCH

£1



Otley Parish
CHURCH

Key Information

VICAR

Revd. Aaron Kennedy
01943 462240
vicar@otleyparishchurch.org

CHURCH ADMINISTRATOR

Sarah McCormack

CHURCH OFFICE

“The Chestnuts”, Burras Lane, Otley LS21 3HS

OFFICE HOURS

Tuesday - Thursday, 9.30am - 3.00pm
(hours may vary occasionally)

OFFICE TELEPHONE

01943 465927

EMAIL

info@otleyparishchurch.org

CHURCH WEBSITE

www.otleyparishchurch.org
*see our website for details of Church services
and a link to our streamed services on YouTube*

FACEBOOK: @otleyparishchurch

X (TWITTER): @otleyallsaints

CHURCH BANK ACCOUNT DETAILS

Account name: Parochial Church Council of Otley

Account No: 10088811 **Sort code:** 20-37-13

Gift Aid: *if you are a tax payer, please consider signing a Gift Aid declaration which is available on the Church website or from the Treasurer, Tony Pike.*

IN TOUCH

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Our Vision

Otley Parish Church
is:

*“A Place
for Everyone,
with Christ
at the Centre”*

Our vision as a church is to see the healing, grace and salvation of God come to the town of Otley and beyond! We believe that with Christ at the centre of our personal, family and church life, we will see his Kingdom come in the world around us.

All are welcome!

Otley Parish Church

Kirkgate ● Otley ● West Yorkshire ● LS21 3HW

Vicar:

Reverend Aaron Kennedy

Registered Charity Number 1153498

DEAR FRIENDS

Letter from Jackie



Now we are in February most New Year resolutions will have been well and truly broken!

Are you someone who makes them? Maybe I will be knocked down in the rush of people keen to assure me that they are still jogging up the Chevin every morning before breakfast, or haven't so much as glanced at a biscuit since 1st January!

I don't make resolutions myself, but I do take the opportunity of the passing of the old year to review what has been. It's good to pause and reflect on the challenges faced and joys experienced. It's good to consider what we have learnt and how we have grown.

It's also good to consider what we could have done better. If that leads us to be convicted of sin, then we have a God who is waiting with open arms to forgive

us when we confess. But if we find that leads to a feeling of crushing condemnation, then beware, that is not God! We all get things wrong and learning from our mistakes is maturity which leads to growth.

Instead of making resolutions I have started choosing a theme for the year. This is something I want to focus on throughout the year, to give more time or thought or attention to. It can just be a word – like fear, trust or gratitude. One year it was friendship. That year it was a reminder to give more care and attention to existing friendships and take opportunities, as they arose, to develop new ones, saying yes to chances to connect when I might previously have been tempted to say no. Perhaps

others might find this a useful practice.

One area of the annual reflection is how I have grown spiritually in the past year. We can be tempted to measure that by external measures like how often I read my bible or pray or attend church. Whilst these are all good things to do, using them as a measure can lead to legalism. So, what is a useful measure?

What did Jesus identify as the most important thing – the greatest commandment? *“Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind” (Matthew 22:37).*

The second commandment was, *“Love your neighbour as yourself” (Matthew 22:39).* So, I ask myself, am I loving God more and loving my neighbour more? What can I do to grow in those areas?

As I move through the New Year these are what I want to concentrate on – loving God and loving my neighbour more. In 2026 what does the Lord require of me? What do I want to keep in the forefront of my mind? *“He has shown you O mortal, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly, to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God” (Michah 6:8).*

JACKIE HIRD - Licensed Lay Minister

CHRISTMAS TREE FESTIVAL 2025



One of the visitors to our Christmas Tree Festival commented that it was really nice that the Parish Church organised such a lovely event for the town. This led me to think about the festival as a community event.

The planning for the festival is done by a team from the church, but it couldn't happen without the involvement of a huge number of helpers from the community. We got a fantastic turn out of people from the church and the organisations who had trees, and throughout the festival representatives from the charities turned up in considerable numbers to serve as stewards. I always feel that the event which really links the festival with the town is the opening ceremony by Terry Ford, Otley Town Bellman, in his own inimitable style.

Each year, forty organisations take on the task of decorating a tree, but we now have contact details of fifty-eight organisations to whom we send invitations to have a tree. It always amazes me that Otley has so many groups working

voluntarily to promote a wide variety of causes and, especially, to help make life better for people facing challenging circumstances. Each year we learn of new groups who are keen to have a tree. This year, Christian Aid, Mary's Meals and Let's Light up Otley for Christmas, had trees for the first time.

One of the aspects of the festival that I particularly enjoy is the musical groups that come voluntarily to perform. All the schools in Otley take part and we have contributions from a range of other choirs and music groups. We have a number of regulars such as Guiseley Brass, Early Byrds, Otley Action for Older People, Singing for Pleasure, the Chippendale Singers, Crooked Willow, The Courthouse Choir, the Wharfedale Male Voice Choir and Martin Campey on the organ. But we also get new groups coming forward each year. This year we welcomed for the first time Wharfedale Wind, Concordia, the Fairfax Singers and Pop 'n' Rock. The final musical item in the festival, was, appropriately our Parish Church Choir. Just as I am impressed with the number of charitable organisations we have in Otley, I think it is great that we have so many people of all generations making music in such a variety of ways and who are willing to give up their time to perform at the festival.

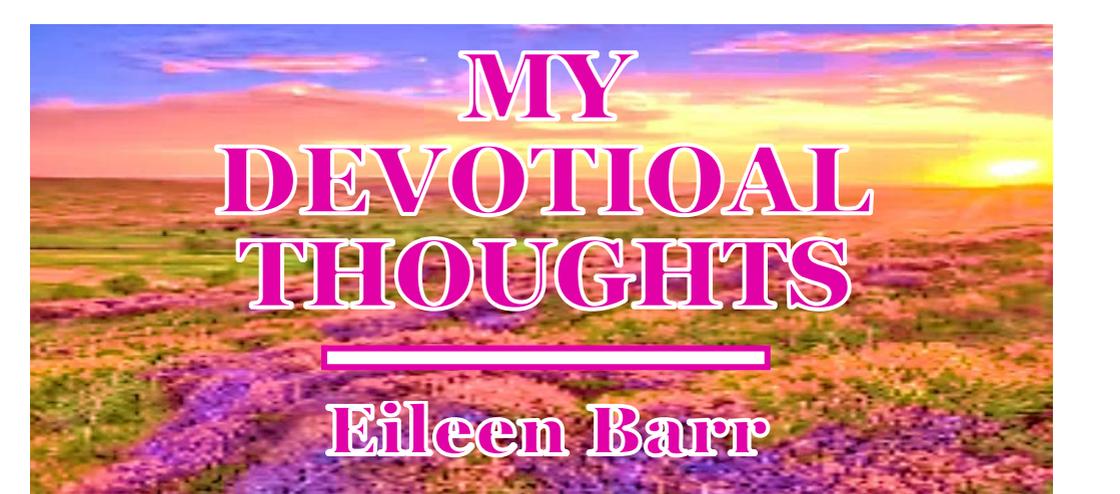
For the first time, we have also been able to make a stab at measuring visitor numbers. There are some caveats though about putting total trust in our measuring apparatus – it will tend to count people entering side by side as one person and it can't distinguish between people visiting for the first time and people who are returning – but it gives us a reasonable idea of attendance. The total for the four days of the festival was 3,278 with the biggest attendance on Saturday 13th at 1,149 and, indeed, the Saturday did feel busy both in the church and in the café!

The groups which decorate the trees have told me that they do it primarily because they really enjoy being part of it and they welcome the opportunity to be able to let people know what they do. The money raised may not be the most important thing for the charities but, in economically challenging times, any financial help is welcomed. I am delighted that the combined total of cash raised at the festival in the charities collection buckets was £4,796.11 – quite a bit more than last year, which is very heartening.

I referred earlier to the team from the church who organise the festival and it is a marvellous team. Sarah in our office starts the ball rolling by sending out the invitations to have a tree and receiving back the responses. Barbara, Rusty, Margaret, Beryl, Stephen and I then take it forward in a variety of ways, and Jackie brings it to an appropriate close with a friendly and informal carol service. But the importance of the team is not just the individual tasks we all do, but also the support we give each other. This is the essence of teamwork.

It will be good to have a few quieter months, but I very much look forward to organising another festival in 2026.

Allan Boddy



MY DEVOTIONAL THOUGHTS

Eileen Barr

MY VERSE

1 Peter 1:3-9 NIV

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead...

MY THOUGHTS

Peter encourages us to praise God for all that we have been given in Christ. We've been promised so much, not just for the future but for the here and now too. It's our inheritance and it's precious.

A monetary inheritance, even if invested wisely, is not guaranteed to last. Jewels, no matter how precious, can be lost. However, the inheritance described here is on another level. It can "never perish, spoil or fade". It's "kept in heaven". No variable interest rates there! "Through faith we are shielded by God's power", now and into all eternity.

There's no promise that our lives will be trouble free, but we are promised a "living hope" that can sustain us through the worst of times. Through our faith in Christ, we can rejoice in this hope now, it's not just for heaven where it will be made perfect.

We often trust in things that can fade away. These verses remind me that through faith we can love Jesus, the one who gave his life to redeem us and brings us to that inheritance, reserved for us in heaven. That's something we can "rejoice in with an inexpressible and glorious joy" right now!

MY PRAYER

Father God, thank you for all that fulness of faith in Jesus gives me. Whatever 2026 brings please help me to be more focused on what lasts, that inheritance in Christ Jesus my Saviour. When I'm tempted to wander from your ways Lord, please remind of what really matters; I really have been born into a new and living hope. Praise you! Amen.



Many thanks to the 17 of us who turned out for our pruning party towards the end of last year on Saturday morning, 22nd November.

Slim and nimble, Sou was sent behind The Chestnuts to dispatch a prickly rose bush which was part obscuring the window. On the other side of the wall, part Viking Brenda led the charge on ivy and bramble to reveal four graves from 1759, just 14 years after Bonnie Prince Charlie led the Tartan Army to Derby.

Others including my daughter, Miriam, over from Canada, our guest American couple Elizabeth and Destin, also Rosemary and Simon, trimmed more ivy and bramble to forge ways around the graves not trodden for years. Flowering ivy was left for the bees, birds and insects. It was full of ladybirds too.

Further North in the churchyard, Dave was Leaf-lift master for the day, assisted ably by Ruth, Chris, Val, and Mark. They part-filled a builders bag, rescued from Askwith Moor, many times to build a leaf pile the height of Cader Idris.

Barry pruned a cherry tree and cut log piles with his chainsaw on a pole, before serving excellent coffee, biscuits and mince pies with Glynis to sustain the troops. Stephen J. had already cut up the birch tree with his chainsaw which had fallen from next door, but was now away on a reunion. Likewise, Tom, our Churchwarden and Leaf Master Regis, just had time to trim a cotoneaster over the south path before being sent to watch Matilda his Granddaughter. I planted some forget-me-nots, taken from the Vicarage, near the wildflowers along the South wall.

Afterwards, I said a Prayer in the Celtic tradition to give thanks for our Churchyard now coming into balance between God's Nature, Heritage and safe amenity. If anyone wants me to repeat the prayer, I will!

KEITH, Man of the Forest, Wilson - Leaf Master General (Self-appointed)

How I Found **MY FAITH**

Trevor Bailey

HOW did I find my faith? I was born in Otley hospital in August of 1970. I remember going to the Methodist church in Otley with my grandma where my uncle also attended. I was a choir boy at OPC when I was 11-ish with a friend. The main reason was for this was to earn some pocket money! This was the time you got paid to be in the choir. My uncle also took me to another church in Rawdon. I think this was a bit of a ploy as I was “going off the rails” a little!

My first love while growing up was cricket. I trained at Otley Cricket Club, Headingley cricket nets and Otley Town cricket grounds. I played for the Otley cricket team, Pool Mills Cricket Club and was in the Yorkshire boys cricket team.



I met the England cricket team, and was excited to meet the well-known players such as Sir Ian Botham, Mike Gatting, Bob Willis and Mike Atherton, to name just a few! I had a promising career until I hurt my back after a night out on the beers. This was the time I started going out more into Otley drinking. Girls, mates and drinking became my main focus aside from work.

Although I had been in and out of church and enjoyed my time at the Methodist church and the church in Rawdon. I didn't meet Jesus until

2009, when Lindsay (my then girlfriend and now my wife) and I were invited to a morning service at a church in Bradford. After attending for a few weeks, I went along to an evening service. There was a call to receive Jesus and “be saved”. The Holy Spirit moved and without realising, my hand was in the air and I left lighter.

God took me on a journey in the years to come and Jesus helped me to face and be healed from some difficult seasons in my past - past mistakes, past trauma, relationship failures and my own sense of inadequacy. He made Himself real to me and He has helped me navigate a multitude of seasons from then on.

I have also had the privilege of serving Him in many ways. One of my most memorable times was on a trip to Uganda where both me and some friends helped to build a local school.

On my journey I have experienced many aspects of the Lord at work - emotional, physical, and spiritual healing. I have also been blessed to see these things in others along the way and continue to see Him restore others around me.

My main reason for sharing this with you all at OPC is that, whether it's the really big things like when I had a nervous breakdown, or when my eldest son with my first wife took his life whilst studying at university during covid.

Of the smaller things I like meeting celebrities or having opportunities to travel and meet some amazing people. God has been steadfast and faithful. He has been my anchor, and He has held on to me when it was painful to hold on to Him. He is true to His word, and He has literally saved my life.

How did YOU find YOUR faith?

It would be lovely if you would consider writing about how you found your faith. Please give it some thought and maybe pray about it too. Then, if you'd like to, please contact our Editor, Stephen Hey, stephenhey01@gmail.com and let him know. He will then get back to you with a few simple guidelines.



What a wonderful journey this has been so far! It's exactly 10 years since "Hug on a Tray" started, and it's gone from strength to strength thanks to the fantastic support of every one of you who has donated through the years.

It's just over 4 years now since we opened our shop in Manor Square here in Otley. We said then, "if we raise enough money to cover the next 5 years of free TV for all the patients on Wards J88 and J89 in the Bexley Wing at St James's Hospital in Leeds, that would be great!"

It's wonderful that we can now tell you that, through kindness and generosity, that you've enabled us not only to achieve that amount, but also raise extra so that every TV unit (40) on the wards have been upgraded to iPad computers which can access many other channels, including Netflix.

Now, to fast forward! The lease for our shop runs out this year (2026). So, partly because of a change in personal circumstances (and also because age is catching up with us!), we're looking to free up some time by closing the shop in March and focusing on how best we can interact with patients on the wards. Decisions have had to be made so we could still continue, but without the full-time commitment of running the shop.

We are very pleased to say that we will now officially be part of the registered charity, "Friends of the Leeds Centre for Leukaemia, Lymphoma, and Myeloma" (FLCLLM) or 'Friends' for short! This was established in 1979. To date, we have been working alongside the Friends charity in order to fund and provide TV on the wards. Hug on a Tray and Friends both care and support the same groups of patients in different ways, so it makes sense for us to amalgamate. We will be joining as their official fundraising initiative so giving Hug on a Tray official charity status whilst retaining our brand and website. This will also enable us to

promote events on their 'just giving' page. Please be assured that like us, none of the trustees of the Friends charity are paid a salary. Everything is completely voluntary. I will also be joining the Friends as a trustee.

All this will help us to continue with personal interaction in the hospital, along with continued fundraising opportunities in the community, and giving talks etc. This will enable us, with the Friends, to give the very best support and more quality time to all haematology patients and families. I am currently in discussion with the training section in the hospital, and they have agreed that some of their existing volunteers will help to keep the outpatients department

topped up, alongside two new volunteers who are former patients who have also offered to give out the goodies we provide. It's a new chapter for Hug on a Tray, but with a much lower commitment which also benefits our volunteers, some of whom are ready to step down or to pursue charities nearer to home. Some will retire and become 'Ladies who Lunch!'

We have made some amazing friends and have wonderful memories here in Otley since we opened, but we aim to officially close on 28th March 2026. Until then we're opening on Fridays and Saturdays from 10am to 12 noon as a "warm space" where complimentary hot drinks, scones, biscuits etc. will be provided as a special 'thank you' to all our supporters. We didn't just want to put up a 'closed' sign on the door before people had an opportunity to bob in, so we could personally thank them all for their kindness, friendship and generosity since our Grand Opening in 2021. The famous "Prize Every Time Tombola" will be ongoing, not every day but popping up around town like we did before! Watch this space!

I would just like to add that in everything we have been blessed every step of the way. Hug on a Tray could not have grown in this way and helped so many people over the years without the love of God being present. We give Him the glory.

Lesley Noble (*Member of Otley Parish Church*)
Founder of 'Hug on a Tray'



**Hug on a Tray charity shop
at 15 Manor Square, Otley**

What's Your Favourite Hymn?



“WHAT A FRIEND WE HAVE IN JESUS”

Verse 1

What a friend we have in Jesus,
all our sins and griefs to bear!
What a privilege to carry
everything to God in prayer!
O what peace we often forfeit,
O what needless pain we bear,
all because we do not carry
everything to God in prayer!

Verse 2

Have we trials and temptations?
Is there trouble anywhere?
We should never be discouraged;
take it to the Lord in prayer!
Can we find a friend so faithful
who will all our sorrows share?
Jesus knows our every weakness;
take it to the Lord in prayer!

Verse 3

Are we weak and heavy laden,
cumbered with a load of care?
Precious Saviour, still our refuge,
take it to the Lord in prayer!
Do your friends despise, forsake you?
Take it to the Lord in prayer!
In his arms he'll take and shield you;
you will find a solace there.

Author: Joseph Medicott Scriven (1819 - 1886)

KATIE MAYERS

tells us why this is her favourite hymn

This hymn was written in 1855 by Joseph Scriven. Scriven's life was tainted by tragedy. He lost his fiancée in a terrible accident the night before they were due to be married, and, almost unbelievably, after falling in love a second time at the age of only 25, losing his second fiancée to illness.

He wrote, "What a Friend we have in Jesus" as a poem for his mother, having heard that she was terribly ill back home in Ireland. It is less clear how a private poem became a famous hymn - but I like that there might be some mysteries left in this world.

This hymn has probably been in my life since I was a child, but when I think of it, I am instantly transported to Uganda. I see the warm golden light fall on the green hills, and feel the breeze and warmth of the sun on my face. In the early morning stillness, I hear voices swell in harmony, and the sound fills the small chapel at the centre of Kisiizi Hospital before the working day begins. Starting the day with the reminder of what Jesus offers to us was incredibly helpful to me

as I worked as a very junior doctor in an unfamiliar place, all too often trying to reconcile the horror of suffering as a direct result of poverty with the beautiful, vibrant and culturally rich surroundings.

Now, I find myself singing the words under my breath to my boys as they drift off to sleep (or don't!) and being thankful that someone has put into words what our souls need to hear. I love the gentlest rebukes: "Oh, what peace we often forfeit; oh - what needless pain we bear"... "we should never be discouraged - take it to the Lord in prayer". This hymn doesn't promise a life of ease - far from it - and we only have to look briefly at Scriven's life to know that he knew pain and hardship. But from these words, we can also glimpse a man who dedicated his life to helping and supporting others in need, and grounded himself in his faith. It is my hope that these words might sink into my children's minds and stay there (as they have in mine) as a reminder that we always have a friend in Jesus who waits to share our lives and carry our burdens, knowing us better than anyone else can and loving us anyway.



FAMILY NEWS

AT OTLEY PARISH CHURCH



Phoebe Bonnett, granddaughter of Liz Walker, celebrated her 12th birthday on 14th December. She was born at Harrogate Hospital in 2013.



FINN GANNON

**celebrated his 14th birthday on 21st December.
He's the son of Shaun and Emma and was born in
Parklands Hospital in Durban, South Africa, in 2011.**



Richard and Barbara Bollard of Otley Parish Church are very proud of their 16-year-old granddaughter, Maddie.

Maddie is autistic and hemiplegic, and is a mentor for younger autistic horse riders at Autism Angels. This is a registered charity at a stunning 60 acre farm at Summerbridge, Harrogate, which offers therapeutic coaching and equine therapy. Here is what Maddie's recent achievement has meant to that charity.

"Huge congratulations to Maddie. We have been following the journey of one of our amazing volunteers, Maddie. This year she has achieved something truly incredible. She moved up the podium to take **First Place** at the RDA - Riding for the Disabled - National Championship in the Junior Dressage. Last year she was Second.



"This year entries were submitted virtually as the summer heat made it too hot for horses to travel to Hartpury, Gloucestershire, in July. But that did not stop Maddie from giving an outstanding performance. We are so inspired by her dedication, hard work and passion. Please join us in celebrating this fantastic achievement. *Well done, Maddie!*"



MARGARET TURNER

**celebrated her 80th birthday on 19th December.
She was born in Cheltenham, Gloucestershire, in 1945.**



ALLAN BODDY
celebrated his 78th birthday on 14th December.
He was born in Bradford in 1947.

PRAYER IDEAS

for

EVERYDAY CHRISTIANS

John Simkins

Introduction

Church history shows us that there have been times when a sense of the need to pray has come upon the 'wider church' and the outcomes are well recorded. These have been the most effective when 'ordinary' Christians have taken up God's call: 'people movements'.

In recent years, again, there has been a strong emphasis on the need for the church to rediscover prayer.

Prayer is something for all Christians to be engaged in, and a normative part of their life.

My hope in writing this is to encourage every Christian to embrace prayer as a natural part of daily life; knowing 'God with us' and praying for others we connect with.

I first wrote this in 2013 in response to a request from a leaders' training programme in Devon to speak on prayer. We were about to move from Exeter to Yorkshire. For several years we had been involved in connecting with Christians in the city and helping to steer some united prayer. This is what shaped the substance of what follows, together with some editing after helpful comments from others.

John Simkins
Otley Parish Church

Prayer Ideas for Everyday Christians
is a book of eleven chapters
each of which will feature in future editions of In Touch



4. Thinking through our personal praying

This is to encourage us, inwardly and openly, thoughtfully and vocally, to engage our privilege and right as Christians to both listen and speak to our God.

Customising our lives

*Jesus went out **as usual** to the Mount of Olives, and his disciples followed him. On reaching the place, he said to them, 'Pray...'*

[Matthew 22:39-40]

*Now when Daniel knew that the writing was signed, he went home. And in his upper room, with his windows open toward Jerusalem, he knelt down on his knees three times that day, and prayed and gave thanks before his God, **as was his custom since early days.***

[Daniel 6:10 NKJV]

Clearly, Daniel's job situation allowed him to pop in and out from his home and he took these as prayer opportunities. The key thing was that he had developed a *custom* from his youth, and it is wise for us to find the right ways for us.

When entering new software onto our computers we are given the opportunity to do a recommended installation or use the 'custom' facility. Similarly, we can try and model ourselves on others, copying their teachings and habits. Maybe we are hanging on to styles handed down from the past. For a starter this is OK, but it is necessary for us to 'customise' eventually; to reflect on the realities of our own lives and find personal ways of relating to God. How shall I do things? What will work for our congregation?

When pastoring others to pray we will need to bear this in mind. Teach principles and guidelines but don't 'market' techniques simply because they have worked for you!

As a generality I do believe that it is a good thing to have some set aside time and space, as far as is possible daily, to meditate on the Bible, speak to God and listen to God. In this way we train our inward senses and equip ourselves to respond appropriately to God in the midst of the daily 'stuff' that happens. I have held down busy jobs whilst leading church and having family responsibilities. It is possible! When and where we choose to set this time aside has to be part of the customising. I think there is a strong case for the beginning of the day but decide for yourselves!

Communicating in the realities of life

As for me, I call to God, and the LORD saves me. Evening, morning and noon I cry out in distress, and he hears my voice.

[Psalm 55:16-17]

Prayer in crisis is perfectly valid and here is an example of someone who is calling and crying out to God. Talk to God about everything! It's OK – he cares! Family situations, work situations, people distresses, local situations, national situations – bring them all to him as they come into our mind by circumstance, necessity or reminder.

May my prayer be set before you like incense; may the lifting up of my hands be like the evening sacrifice.

[Psalm 141:2]

Too often, though, prayer is *only* taken up in distress.

Here the psalmist uses a particular image to remind himself how to pray always. The picture of daily offerings and incense are used as a reminder

to live sacrificially before God in the midst of ordinariness. In this psalm he records keeping a watchful eye over his own life.

We may have other ways of reminding ourselves but, whatever they might be, let us stir ourselves to pray when things are ordinary or going well, and when our only motive is love for God. Be thankful!

Experience

Faith grows as we experience what we believe to be God working in our lives. Home situations can sometimes be the hardest things to pray about. Prayer in family situations exposes us to the challenge of telling our children we are praying for their problem! Will they see that our prayers produce outcomes?!

Try 'on-the-spot' prayers in pressing work situations. Nehemiah 'shot up' a silent prayer, and expected an immediate answer, in a face to face encounter with his employer, the king [Nehemiah 2:4-5]. As we experience what might be called 'results' this gives us boldness to pray more.

When praying for wider issues, especially when these are what we have agreed to prioritise, such as matters in our locality, it is sometimes good to keep a log; a memo of things that we feel God has called us to seek him about. In the process of time it will be encouraging to see how tides have turned or things have grown and changed as a result.

Keep aware of the idea that 'relationship' with God is as important a part of our prayer as 'results'. In the process of communicating with God our lives are being changed. Maturing understanding of God helps us, if needs be, to grow beyond simply wanting him to solve our problems to loving him for his grace in the midst of them.

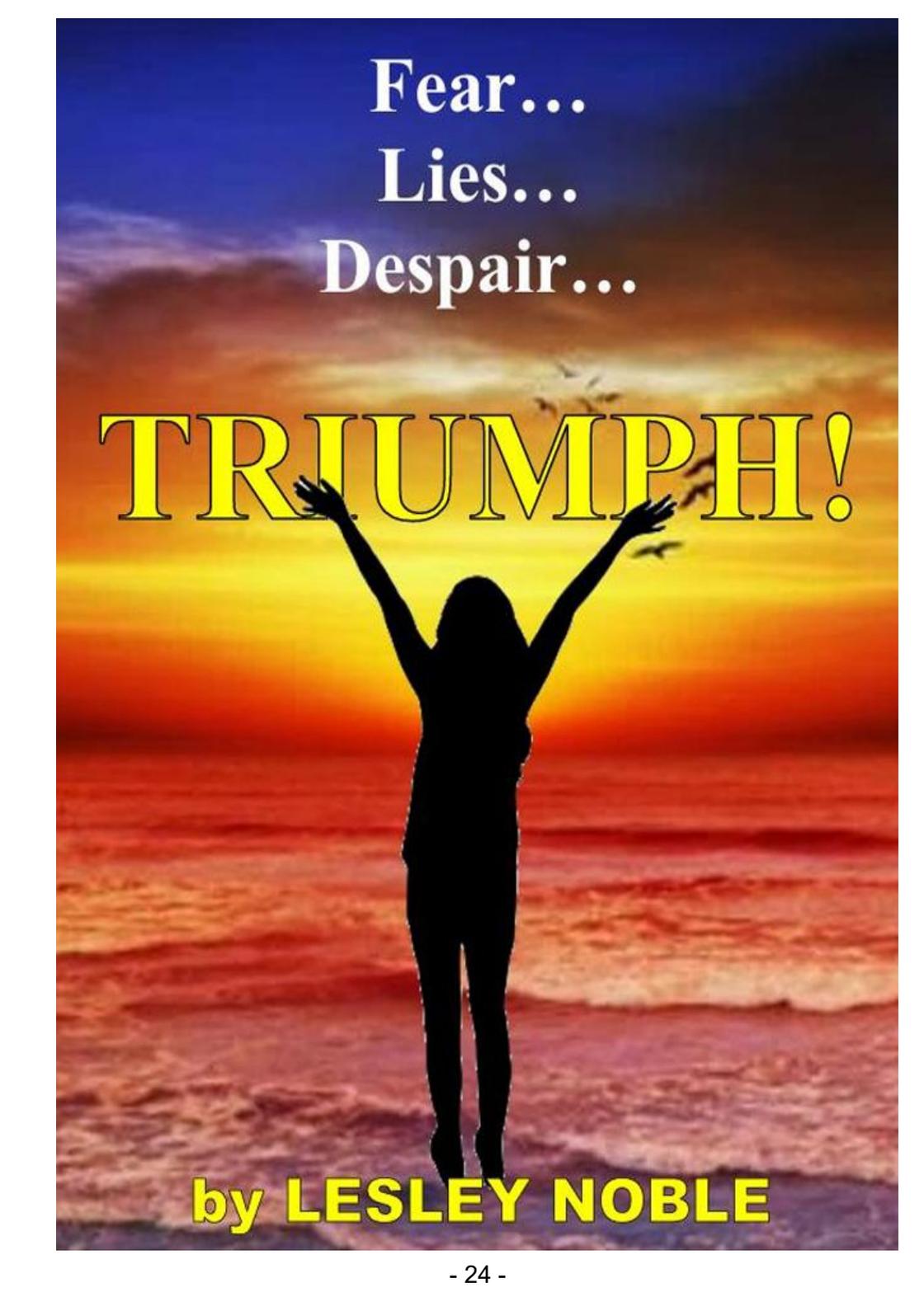
If you were to ask me for a description of what trust, or confidence with God, or hearing God, 'feels like', then I would have to refer you back to ask God! We must trust ourselves to him to teach us what that sense of his Spirit working in us 'feels like' in appropriate ways for our own lives and circumstances.

Conversational relationship

It is healthy to have an appropriate sense of 'chatty' familiarity – 'talking to God' in and through the detail and process of our life. Conversation, of course, implies dialogue rather than monologue as discussed above!

Fear...
Lies...
Despair...

TRIUMPH!

A silhouette of a person standing on a beach, arms raised in triumph, against a vibrant sunset over the ocean. The sky transitions from a deep blue at the top to a bright yellow and orange near the horizon. The person's arms are raised, and their hands are positioned as if they are holding or supporting the word 'TRIUMPH!' which is written in large, yellow, outlined letters across the middle of the image. The ocean waves are visible at the bottom of the frame.

by LESLEY NOBLE



Introduction

I was born in 1949 and had a poor childhood filled mainly with fear, lies, loneliness and despair, which impacted my life in a negative way for the first forty years. Then, between 1991 and 1993 my healing process began.

I feel the need to tell my story with the hope that anyone reading it may be encouraged if they ever thought things would never get better for them in their own lives.

I found it very therapeutic when starting to write this book. One of the main wonderful things is that, in the end, I know that for all my past I've not only been forgiven, but I have also learned to forgive.

A STORY TO BE TOLD... TO ENCOURAGE... ALL IS WELL



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Free and Easy??

IT WAS AROUND THIS TIME when my brother Dave, who was a drummer with a group called “Mamma’s Little Children”, had signed a three-month contract to play at the American GI camps in Germany, but they asked if there were ‘Go-Go’ girls with the group. If so, the pay would be £30 a month! Now, I’ve never been a dancer, more of a wooden top! But for that money in 1967, I was prepared to learn a few moves from our Dave on the ferry going over! Veronica, Dave’s girlfriend was the other dancer who made the outfits, and she could actually dance! Meeting the GIs was quite an experience. They were in the camp just waiting to go to Vietnam. There was tension, especially between the black and white soldiers. If we spoke to a black GI we were frowned on; we also saw the sadness of those who had family back home, and didn’t want to go to war. The freedom of doing what I like felt good, with only myself to think about, so I enjoyed the time we were there. I only needed a couple of drinks to get on the stage!

Tony kept in contact with my dad. He wrote wanting us to get back together, but I didn’t reply. When we came home, I made it clear there was no interest from me, but he didn’t give up easily. At the back of my mind the Ouija prediction always loomed. I became fearful and confused, had mixed emotions. I was very unhappy, and it was around this time I wrote my poem:

Wanting something all the time, never can find peace of mind,
always searching, never free, can’t be happy, cannot see,
always something bars the way, trying harder every day,
living with fear, and love and hate, all the time just sit and wait,
wait for time to pass on by, until it’s too late and then I die.

The next couple of years went by aimlessly, working in different jobs, both in factories and shops. I went out with a few different men during that time, but never really felt happy or content, Tony was always in the background, then he came round one day and told me how much he loved me and wanted to marry me! I thought, rationally, if we marry, this will prove the Ouija board wrong! Also, I'm twenty-one now, I could be left on the shelf, if I don't marry him, what if no one else asks me? So, it was a 'yes' for all the wrong reasons!

I was prepared to marry at the registry office, because Tony was catholic and divorced, but my dad said that would be like going for a job interview. So, the only Church where we had permission granted was at the Methodist Church in Cross Gates. I was working at Redman's grocer's shop in Leeds at the time, and able to ask for a £10 sub from work, and borrow a white wedding dress from the daughter of one of the workers there. I bought my own wedding ring, and we were married in December 1970.

I knew early on that this was a big mistake. We first lived with Tony's mother in Harehills, but the house caught fire and was completely gutted. Thankfully no one was hurt but the Council moved us to a top floor flat in Quarry Hill Flats in the centre of Leeds – a scary place! It was here that Tony's mother later died, and we then moved to a maisonette in Stanks Drive, not far from where I used to live in Cross Gates. My dad used to come up and visit us there, but it always upset me when Tony refused to run him back home in the car – only five minutes away! It hurt me knowing he was having to walk, but dad said, "it's alright love, I'll catch the bus", but I know he never did.

In 1972 I said I wanted a divorce, and Tony said, "if you leave, I'll commit suicide!" He was serious. When we first met, it was from the rebound of a failed first marriage. She had left him and he took an overdose of tablets and alcohol. His mother found him in time to get to hospital where he recovered after four days. So, knowing he was capable I felt gutted, and knew this was emotional blackmail, but I didn't know how to handle it so I had to stay in misery and resentment.

● ***Chapter 7 of "Fear... Lies... Despair... Triumph!" will be published in the April 2026 edition of In Touch.***

Previous chapters of Lesley's book can be found on our church website <https://www.otleyparishchurch.org> under the heading "What's On".

Keep in touch with...

IN TOUCH

We would love you to keep in touch and tell us what you would like to see in **YOUR** monthly Church magazine.

Yes, it is yours!

Please do let us know if you have any suggestions as to how we can make **IN TOUCH** even better than it is already. And let us know if you would like to contribute something.

What about contributing to our popular series of **In the Hot Seat** or **My Favourite Bible Verse** or **An Event that Changed My Life** or **My Devotional Thoughts** or **My Favourite Hymn** or **How I Found My Faith**?

Maybe you'd like to write a poem or a prayer or...

We would also love to hear your family news such as birthdays and anniversaries, or anything interesting; also, to see some of your family photographs.

■ Whatever you would like to share with us please bear in mind that for it to be included in the next edition of **IN TOUCH** we must hear from you no later than:

Saturday

14 February

Please send your articles, thoughts or suggestions to our Editor:

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WHO ARE WE?

OTLEY PARISH CHURCH – the oldest building in Otley – is at the heart of our town and, for over 1,000 years, people have been gathering here for worship and significant family and community events. *“There is a place for everyone, with Christ at the centre of it all.”*

We are a gathering place for pilgrims on a journey of discovery, kindling hope as we go, helping one another to be more fully alive to the wonders, joys and sorrows of life. We’d love you to share the journey with us.

We want to grow in numbers, in spiritual commitment to Christ and in service to our local community.

Join us in worshipping God together on Sundays and in daily life; be with us as we study and discern how to use the Bible in the 21st century; learn with us what it is to be 21st century disciples following Jesus and help us, with the other churches in the town, to bring good news to Otley and far beyond.



Otley Parish
CHURCH