



UK AND IRELAND

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# transform

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2026

Langham Partnership News

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# Letter from the Editor

**This edition of Transform focuses on “The Power of One”.** By God’s grace, the power of ONE scholar in Ghana could shape policies and change the nation (p 4-5); the power of ONE Langham book in Ukraine is encouraging the Church during the devastation of war (p6-7); and the power of ONE Langham preaching trainer is equipping pastors in Madagascar to faithfully teach God’s Word (p9).



These individuals are part of Langham’s wider ministry, which has ballooned under God since it all began with our founder John Stott. **355 Langham Scholars** are serving globally; **302,305 books** are distributed annually around the world; and **15,782 pastors and lay leaders** were trained last year. Hallelujah!

Yet I’m reminded of this key verse written by the apostle Paul:

**“Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us”.**

(Ephesians 3:20, NIV)

As ever, we are so grateful for your prayerful and financial support – I hope you enjoy reading about Langham’s global impact in this edition of Transform.

Every blessing,

**Victoria Marsay**

Media Producer, Langham Partnership UKI

## Langham Partnership’s Vision and Mission

**Langham Partnership’s Vision** is to see churches in the majority world equipped for mission and growing to maturity in Christ through the ministry of pastors and leaders who believe, teach and live by the Word of God.

**Our mission** is to strengthen the ministry of the Word of God through:

- nurturing national movements for biblical preaching (**Langham Preaching**);
- fostering the creation and distribution of evangelical literature (**Langham Literature**);
- enhancing evangelical theological education (**Langham Scholars**), especially in countries where churches are under-resourced.

# Leave a legacy to impact future generations

Visit [uk.langham.org/donate/gifts-in-wills](http://uk.langham.org/donate/gifts-in-wills) to find out more



Email Simon Foulds, LPUKI's Legacy Manager, in strictest confidence: [simon.foulds@langham.org](mailto:simon.foulds@langham.org)



**Leaving a gift in your will** is a significant way of ensuring Langham’s work not only continues but grows for generations to come. By remembering Langham when you make your will, you’ll enable people in the future to experience the teaching of the Bible for themselves.

# Reflections from the National Director



## The world needs Langham more than ever

Many reading this 'Transform' will have contributed generously to our 2019-24 Magnify Campaign. The invitation to participate was based on Ps 34 v3, 'O magnify the Lord with me, and let us exalt his name together' (ESV) and the underlying objective was 'to double Langham's global impact over 5 years and then sustain this activity for a further 10 years'. The response was outstanding and Langham's mission and ministry did indeed double during that time, and then continued into the start of this financial year. **Thank you and Hallelujah!**



Credit: stolpic from Pixabay

“ Langham relies on the generosity of its supporter group, at no time more than the present. ”



Programme and expense reductions can be made and of course, this would hurt the momentum already achieved. Indeed, we feel 'the world needs Langham' more than ever, and there are testimonies in this 'Transform', on Langham Live and on our website which share the evidence.

Hence this new invitation: would you participate in 'Magnify+'? Langham relies on the generosity

of its supporter group, at no time more than the present. **The impact of our partnership is set out in the enclosed leaflet, 'The Power of One'.** Would you be 'one of the Ones'? Allow me to commend this to your prayerful consideration and hopefully, for your generous response.

With thanks and Christian greetings, as ever,

John Libby  
National Director,  
Langham Partnership UKI

I want to share with you the problem of sustaining Langham's mission and ministry at that level for the next 7 years. Gifts were made both by donations and pledged legacies and we did not receive the full amount necessary to cover the gap between the two, and there has been some financial 'indigestion', probably due to the current challenging international and economic situations.

**Would you now help Langham sustain our vital mission and ministry?** We are currently going through an exercise in seeing where

## The Power of One Appeal

Please take a look at the **Power Of One Appeal leaflet included with this Transform, or check out this dedicated webpage: [uk.langham.org/appeal](http://uk.langham.org/appeal)**





# Scholar Samuel urges ‘live out their faith’

**Ghana, West Africa, is home to over 34 million people, 71% of whom are Christians. It transitioned to a multi-party democracy in 1992 and is rich in natural resources, including oil, gold and cocoa.**

**B**ut Ghana is facing major challenges, such as government corruption and dangerous levels of pollution due to destructive mining activities.

So is the gospel influencing “every sphere of life” in Ghana? Are Christians living out their faith when it comes to these challenges?

These are issues that **Samuel Sarkodie-Addo** is seeking to address, having graduated with a PhD with support from the Langham Scholars programme. Now he urges Christians to “bring the Bible into everyday practice” in Ghana and across Africa.

### **Extremely important Langham support**

Samuel first heard of Langham while working for the Ghana Fellowship

of Evangelical Students (GHAFES). In 2009, Langham Preaching began training the GHAFES staff and he went on to become a trainer of trainers.

So when he completed his Masters – focusing on the stewardship of resources – the GHAFES leader suggested he apply for a Langham Scholarship.

“This was a key and a major, motivation. It gave me peace not to be worried about bills and school fees. It was such a huge relief. It gave me peace of mind. **It was extremely important to receive that support from Langham.**”

A Scholar Care Coordinator was also assigned to Samuel, which gave him and his family encouragement and support – not just academically. This was alongside regular progress reports and “check-ins”.

“I cannot emphasise how important these were to help me finish my PhD on time and to finish successfully.

“It has been more of a holistic thing in my life, not just the money or the monetary aspects, but being part of a bigger family in terms of research opportunities, ideas, getting to know what is happening in other places. I’m being challenged too, and my story is being heard by others.

“It’s been such a wonderful family and journey with Langham”, Samuel said.



*Samuel with his wife Ruth, twin sons Ayeyi (Praise) and Aseda (Thanksgiving), and youngest son Animounyam (Glory).*



### **Bringing faith to bear**

Samuel’s PhD looked at whether the Christians in politics had brought their faith to bear on the governance and the politics of the nation, focusing on the stewardship of resources, policies and fighting corruption.

He shared that having a PhD (from Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology in Ghana) means he can have a much bigger impact.

“In Ghana and in Africa as a whole, we seem to value titles a lot. And especially if you have a PhD, if you are a doctor, a professor, it’s the kind of respect that people have for you and

# Christians to in Africa

the fact that people are ready to listen to you. The PhD gives you a platform” he said.

Samuel is seeking to change national attitudes and shape policy in his country, which needs to begin at the grassroots level.

He broadcasts on the radio, uses social media, and is invited to speak on these issues.

He said: “We are also looking at individual’s own responsibility in building their country with or without policy changes. Individuals have a lot to do, and it is when the individuals are able to have these values, that will help shape their policy.”



“It’s been such a wonderful family and journey with Langham”.

He said that once the leadership realises that the general population is concerned about these issues, it is easier for politicians to change policies. There is a lot of responsibility on them to shape policies.

One exciting development is Samuel’s recent induction into membership of a national body called Ghana Young Academy. This comprises scholars and researchers - all PhD holders selected through a rigorous process after application - who are in their early to mid-research career.

### Only through God’s power

But Samuel recognises that all this is impossible without God’s blessing:

“We understand the centrality of the Word and the power of the Holy Spirit. We have a prayer team. We are constantly praying that it is the Holy Spirit and the Word of God that gets into the heart and the mind.

“When the heart and the mind are transformed by the Spirit of God, we see the change. It seems a very huge

task, but I know that with the spirit and the power of God, all things are possible. And that is our inspiration and motivation”.

Samuel is just one of 355 graduated Scholars who are serving God in 95 countries around the world.

Please prayerfully consider financially supporting the Langham Scholars programme so that other leaders like Samuel will be given the platform they need to build God’s kingdom.

### SEE MORE

Watch clips of the interview with Langham Scholar Samuel Sarkodie-Addo: [uk.langham.org/get-involved/videos/](https://uk.langham.org/get-involved/videos/)



## Join Langham Live

You’re very welcome to join our monthly Langham Live Zoom calls, featuring Langham family from around the world. We hear from a guest for around 20 minutes, then break into small groups to share and pray together. People from all corners of the globe gather each month for this special time!

The calls are on the last Thursday (7pm) and Friday (10am) each month.



Visit [uk.langham.org/langhamlive](https://uk.langham.org/langhamlive) to register.

# ‘Vulnerable God’: Testimony from the

**A**t the end of the day, the crux of the matter is this: our longing for home and the ongoing journey homeward. I think each one of us can recall exactly where we were on the morning of 24 February 2022 when the news of the war broke. My husband and I were still dozing in bed. In the next room, Bohdana, our daughter, was sound asleep. Then my phone rang. My mother’s voice sounded sharp and short, like staccato. My husband rushed to the vet to make sure our dog’s vaccinations and papers were up to date, in case we had to cross the border. My daughter and I made sure we had a sufficient supply of water.



Credit: Sonia Dauver on Unsplash

“ By April, our naïve thinking had been bruised and battered, and a more realistic, albeit horrifying, realisation settled in: this war might go on for years. ”

to hope that this senseless, wicked war was about to end and that justice and peace would reign. By April, our naïve thinking had been bruised and battered, and a more realistic, albeit horrifying, realisation settled in: this war might go on for years. And no one knew for sure how it would end. Maya, the owner of the cosy wooden chalet that became our temporary home, visited us occasionally on weekends.

We packed a small suitcase: documents, handwritten family letters, warm clothes, and a small stack of our most cherished books. We spent the night on the floor in a hallway, listening to the warning wails of air-raid sirens. The next day, my daughter, our dog and I set out for a small mountain house in Poland, where a family friend had invited us to stay and wait out this brutal attack. My husband stayed at home in Ukraine. At that time, we still hoped for an imminent no-fly zone over our skies and a decisive stop to our deranged neighbour’s actions.

The evacuation train was packed. Elderly people, women with children, pets, suitcases, and only a few young men – those holding infants. At our stop in Lviv, the last one before the

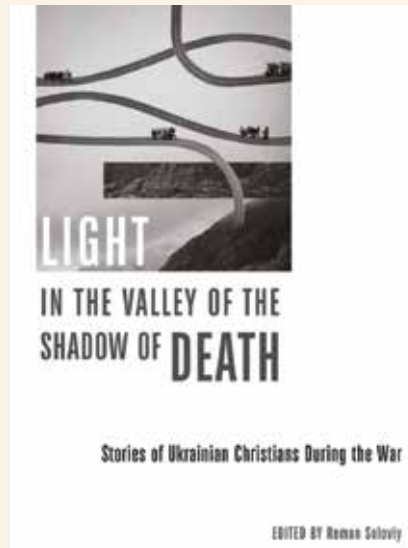
border crossing, all men were asked to get off the train, and the weary mothers were left cradling their babies. The train was delayed for many hours. The light was dim, and the air was stuffy. Children grew fussy. Adults’ voices were hushed. The days of apprehension and petty concerns were over. The following days, weeks, and months blurred together, and we were swept up by endless torrents of time. We were frantic, pulled in all directions, scrambling to subdue the evil with our bare hands. We flooded the Western media with calls for NATO to close the sky over Ukraine. We helped evacuate those who couldn’t take up arms and fight off the enemy – and tried our best to equip those who could. We wrote to just about anyone and everyone, prayed hard, and still clung

One Saturday, she arrived with an origami set for Bohdana and news for me about [soldiers with defective armour]. We sat in a snowed-in wood-and-stone house [in Poland], my kiddo quietly transforming pieces of paper into colourful birds, while we, peaceful ladies with minds far from military matters, sipped hot tea and talked about armour ratings and options for timely deliveries across the border. Maya left as the night quietly settled among the spruces outside our window. I stood by the window and watched her go. Suddenly, a movement in the dusky woods caught my eye – three roe deer heading down from the mountain towards our yard. Our dog sensed their coming and barked, spooking them. But the feeling of wonder remained, along with an

# Ukraine War

aching sadness, for this delicate, gentle majesty felt unfathomably immense. I gazed at it, and it took my breath away, yet I could not fully accept this gift. It was a bittersweet moment indeed: the raging war, my faraway husband, unprotected soldiers, defective armour, and heart-breaking news. And our wide-open, wounded, unwanted sky that no one seemed to care enough to cover. It felt as if the world itself was too cruel to protect the entrusted beauty from its crippling ways.

The next morning, I woke up with a sharp pain. The ambulance took a while to arrive. As I suffered a miscarriage so far from home, I cried for the first time since the beginning of the full-scale



spoken to them feels weak and, at times, almost hypocritical. As we look upon the place of God's greatest vulnerability – the cross of Christ – we, as believers, have the firm confidence that this is not the end but, rather, a momentary yet great affliction that will be followed by the revelation of great glory. In this, there is another assurance for us: our present troubles are not the final chapter of our story. Even though we do believe in the final victory of light and eternal joy, right now, we are still here in our own Calvary moment, caught in the tension of our affliction. **Some of us are crucified with Christ. Some are standing with John and Mary.**

Sometimes I think that the only way we can stay true to the image of Christ crucified is by caring for our neighbour, especially one who is in unbearable, hopeless pain. In a time of great expectation, while Christ's hands are nailed to the cross, we can extend the touching warmth of his love to others. Words are not always necessary – but sometimes, they still are. As much as we sit quietly with those close to us, we must also speak up – loudly and persistently – to those far away. I long for this piece to bring hope, to carry at least faint overtones of optimism (and a sense of Christmas, no matter the time of year), but I also want it to be honest.

I know that somewhere close to me is a bleeding, vulnerable God, who became homeless so that each of us could begin our journey to the home that no one can take away, destroy, or leave without light. Frankly, this is the only thing that gives me hope: the light of his birth in our midst.

■ **By Nadiyka Gerbish**

*This is an edited extract from 'Light in the Valley of the Shadow of Death', (Langham Global Library, 2025). It's a collection of moving essays written by people of all walks of life who are living through the devastating Ukraine war. Visit [langhamliterature.org](http://langhamliterature.org) to buy the book for £19.99.*



Credit: Madara on Unsplash

invasion. **There was nobody by my side in the hospital room – nobody but broken-hearted Jesus.**

We returned home after a few weeks. I'm trying my best to hold on to hope – to sow hope... to make hope preserves for winter, to exercise hope, to regain hope, to dig deep for the hidden springs of hope, and to recharge hope like one would a power-bank. I keep telling myself that wars are finite but love is eternal. I repeat this as many times as it takes for me to calm down and reach out (or rather grope) for an antidote to day-to-day despondency. Sometimes, I succeed in finding it. But the truth is, this newfound hope doesn't last long. It's like manna that needs to be gathered daily. Except on the day of

rest – then yesterday's hope will last, provided you gathered a little extra. On the other hand, I must admit that when we returned home, we were able once again to take a deep breath. We decided to put down roots: we built a small house outside town, drilled a water well, and began exploring alternative energy sources. We sent our daughter to a different school – one with a better basement.

The daily news from Ukraine and around the world relentlessly reminds us that... not everyone has had, or still has, a chance to make it through. As a Christian raised in a caring church, **I want to tell them the good news that God loves them. Yet far too often, I don't know how to do so.** Right now, every word of hope

# Supporters' Page

## Encouraged and inspired in Carlisle!



■ We were thrilled to open the doors of our international Service Centre in Carlisle to over 70 people in March. Supporters spoke to staff, visited the warehouse with thousands of Majority World books and enjoyed fellowship at the VUE cinema. They were treated to seeing Langham's frontline work played out on the big screen: a moving moment. Chris Wright spoke, and two current Scholars from sensitive countries

shared about their PhD studies in Scotland and their hopes to serve God afterwards. Lina Toth, Director of the Langham Scholars programme, interviewed the Scholars. One of them said: "I'm not just reading theology, I'm reading realities." Supporters were heard to say they "thought they knew what Langham did before they came; but discovered at the event, that Langham does so much more." They were grateful to attend and saw Langham as a huge blessing from God.



## Understanding Mission 'on tour'

■ Earlier this year, Langham held a series of joint events in Northern Ireland, featuring Rev Dr Chris Wright and his new resource 'Understanding Mission'.

The gatherings brought together several organisations with a shared commitment to the gospel, including Mission Action Partnership (Global Connections), Tearfund, Crown Jesus Ministries, and Cedar and Circle Bookshop. Each of them are involved in mission in different ways—through theological training, development work, evangelism, and the provision of Christian resources.

At each event, Chris spoke on God's whole mission and the Church's response to it. Drawing from the broad sweep of the biblical narrative, he highlighted how the gospel calls the Church not only to faithful proclamation but also to lives shaped by discipleship, justice, compassion,



*Rev Dr Chris Wright speaking at an event hosted by Crown Jesus Ministries.*

reconciliation, and care for God's creation.

You can still access the Understanding Mission course, which includes a study guide and eight well-produced videos, presented by Chris. Visit [understandingmission.org](http://understandingmission.org)

## A new way to help equip the global church!

We're excited to share that we are now offering the opportunity for you to support Langham's work through Payroll Giving — this is a simple, tax-efficient way to support our mission of strengthening the global Church.

By choosing to **give through your salary**, you can:

- Give before tax, making your support go further,
- Provide steady, reliable funding for Langham's ministry,
- Make a lasting impact with a gift that fits seamlessly into your monthly budget.

Ask your employer about setting up Payroll Giving today. If you or your employer needs further details please contact us: [uk@langham.org](mailto:uk@langham.org)

# Reaching places of potential in Madagascar

**Madagascar is a massive island nation off the coast of Southern Africa. Almost 40% of its population is under the age of 15, according to the latest United Nations data.**

**T**his young population is wrestling with chronic poverty, corruption and inequality. Last autumn, that discontent came to a head when power and water supply issues sparked protests led by Gen Z. The protests led to a coup and a military takeover.

While the conflict has settled, systemic issues remain, issues leading the country's young population to search for hope and change. There's an enormous opportunity to reach this next generation with faithful teaching of the Word.



*Attendees of the inaugural Langham training seminar in Antananarivo, Madagascar.*

## A search for hope

"Church is the last hope to give them a real life," says **Jeriah Rakotoson**, a pastor in Antananarivo, Madagascar's capital city.

The island is predominantly Christian, but much of that Christianity is cultural, confined to Sundays or tied to the false promises of the prosperity gospel. Many church leaders have never had formal training and don't know how to understand let alone teach Scripture. As a result, the power of the gospel can get lost or diluted, and many people miss its transformative power.

Jeriah is one of the church leaders who have launched a new Langham preaching movement in Madagascar, hoping to change that. These

preaching movements are locally led and give pastors the foundational tools they need to preach the Word clearly, faithfully and relevantly.

**"We were all excited about what we received and excited to put into practice the study and the delivery of the Word of God,"** says Hari Josoa, another pastor who is spearheading the new preaching movement.

## A young movement

Last year, 38 preachers and other church leaders, many of them young, attended the inaugural Langham training seminar in Antananarivo. They formed five preaching groups that continue to meet regularly to practice what they learned, even amid the political instability.

"They were very interested, and their lives are changing," Jeriah says. **"[The training] changed the lives of the young people."**

The movement is just beginning. "I believe that the vision of Langham — of preaching the Word of God in an effective, faithful to the Word, clear and relevant way," says Josoa, "may touch the hearts of many Malagasy people and draw them to faith in Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior."

## Hope for an entire continent

In other parts of Africa, where Langham's preaching movements are well-established, churches have seen this training bear fruit.



*Jeriah Rakotoson and Hari Josoa, who are leading the Madagascar preaching movement.*

In Liberia, pastors eagerly wait for Langham seminars to come to their area. **Matthew Gonkerwon**, a pastor who coordinates Langham's preaching movement there, says, "To see that prosperity gospel is going down the drain [along with] false preachers, because more pastors ... can go in the pulpit and preach biblical messages — that's a joy because we want to see a new generation of pastors and teachers who study the Word of God and preach it biblically for growth in their own context."

For now, the Madagascar movement is focused on the capital city. But Jeriah and Josoa pray that it expands to touch all parts of the country. "Pray for us that this is one of the movements that trains people to do what is true in preaching and preaching the true Bible in our country," Jeriah says.

## SEE MORE

Watch Jeriah in a video about this exciting new ministry in Madagascar: [uk.langham.org/get-involved/videos](https://uk.langham.org/get-involved/videos)



**At the time of going to print, war is raging in Iran and a crisis is unfolding in the Middle East. Please join us in prayer for the Langham-connected church leaders in the region.**

- Pray for Langham Graduate **Hikmat Kashouh**, who pastors a church in Beirut, Lebanon. They shelter hundreds of displaced people through their humanitarian outreach programmes.
- Pray for Langham Graduate **Walid Zailaa**, the Academic Dean of a seminary in Lebanon, which is serving refugees. Pray that the Holy Spirit would guard this ministry.
- Pray for **Rula Mansour**, who leads a peace-building ministry in Nazareth. Pray that God would help her at this time.
- Please pray earnestly for peace in the Middle East; for comfort for God's people; for the light of Jesus Christ to shine brightly at this time.



# Word on the World

Chris Wright seeks a biblical perspective on current events

## The Word and the Widows

**John Stott advocated “double listening” - that is, listening to the Word of God (to believe and obey it), and listening to the world around us (to understand and engage with it). He also insisted that evangelism and social engagement are both integral parts of the church’s holistic mission - like two blades of a pair of scissors or two wings of a bird.**

**T**he trouble is that some churches are good at one or the other but not both. Some preach and teach the Word, but avoid too much involvement in social issues. Others invest heavily in addressing the needs they see in the world around them, but are not known for evangelism or biblical preaching. Why do we so easily polarise in either direction, when the gospel itself surely summons and mandates us to do both?

On the one hand, it is said (and sadly true) that churches which become active in social projects of various sorts can easily lose their passion for evangelism (if they had any) and slide into failing to preach the gospel. But that is *not* holistic mission and such churches need the rebuke and correction of the Holy Spirit and his Word. But on the other hand, there are churches also, whole denominations sometimes, well known for evangelistic zeal, but lacking any apparent concern or action in relation to issues of deprivation and injustice in their own environment or globally.

But doesn’t the book of Acts show that the early church prioritised the preaching of the Word over social issues, when a conflict between them surfaced in chapter 6? That’s the story of the dispute between widows of different language groups and how the apostles responded to it. You hear that argument quite often: the

church’s priority is the ministry of the Word and it should not be distracted by material needs - check Acts 6. But that is a misunderstanding of Luke’s intention in Acts 6, which I think needs to be corrected. Look at the context.

### Church growth by Word and works

Luke has already shown twice that the early community of Christ-followers has been characterised *both* by fearless preaching by the apostles of the good news about the crucified and risen Jesus, *and* by a very scriptural commitment of all the believers to generous care for the needy. When Luke says that “there were no needy persons among them” (Acts 4:34), he is quoting (intentionally, I think) the Greek version of Deuteronomy 15:4. And Luke emphasises that the

church was growing exponentially in the wake of *both* those characteristics - evangelism and costly social compassion (Acts 2:42-47; 4:32-35).

Then come the threats to this doubly embodied gospel witness. First, there is the devastating impact of intentional lying and deceit within the community in relation to the financing of their social compassion, lying in fact to God’s Holy Spirit (5:1-11). This was dramatically confronted by the Apostle Peter to show how seriously God treated the matter. And still the church goes on growing (5:14). Then comes the threat from the authorities, including imprisonment and flogging, which totally fails to stop the apostles “teaching and proclaiming the good news that Jesus is the Messiah” (5:17-42). The Word goes forth; the church grows even more.

And then in chapter 6 comes another threat to the *social* harmony of the community, which Luke has so carefully described twice as the life of people transformed by the gospel and filled with the Holy Spirit. The very acts of compassion that were so



Credit: EV at Unsplash

characteristic and attractive (caring for widows), have become a source of division with language of favouritism and injustice doing their ugly work. This is another serious threat to the church's demonstration of the gospel's unifying power and social impact. So what is the apostles' response this time?

### Differing valid ministries

Unfortunately the NIV does not really help us here. This is how they translate the apostles' words in Acts 6:2. "It would not be right for us to neglect the ministry of the word in order to wait on tables." Now that immediately sounds to English readers like a negative comparison. Obviously, being a Bible preacher is more important than being a waiter! (Well, obvious to some, but not really a biblical understanding of work - but that's another matter!)

What the translation obscures is the fact that the Greek uses the same root three times:

- in v. 1, the daily *diakonia* (translated "distribution of food" as an assumption, but simply means "ministry" - it may have involved various forms of material assistance);
- in v. 2, *diakonein* "to minister/serve at tables"
- in v. 4, *diakonia* (ministry of the Word).

In other words - the whole passage is about *diakonia* - *ministry*, in two distinct forms: one the *ministry* of caring for widows, the other the *ministry* of preaching and teaching the Word. Both are called ministries in the text. **John Stott** puts it like this:

It is essential to note that both distributing food and teaching the word were referred to as ministry (*diakonia*). Indeed both were Christian ministry, could be full-time Christian ministry, and required Spirit-filled people to perform them. The only difference between them was that one was pastoral ministry, and the other social. ...It was simply that Christ had called the Twelve to the ministry of the word and the Seven to the ministry of tables.<sup>1</sup>

So we need to understand carefully what the Apostles were saying. They were quite rightly concerned to sustain and protect *their own* Christ-

given ministry - the preaching of the word; they were not prioritising that as the only or major ministry (or mission) for the *rest of the whole church*. "It would not be right for us..." they say. But it will certainly be right for others - not to "neglect the word," of course, but certainly to minister at "tables" - i.e. at the place of practical care and generosity. That was a ministry somebody had to do!

### Differing valid priorities

The apostles knew the missional priority that Christ had given to *them* as authorised apostles, specifically called and sent to bear witness in words and signs to the crucified, risen, ascended and reigning Jesus of Nazareth, Lord and Christ. They were not telling *the church* as a whole that caring for the widows in practical and impartial provision was of secondary or lesser importance, or even worse (as is sometimes alleged), that it was a "distraction" from the "real" work of mission.

On the contrary, precisely because that specific *diakonia* was an integral and vital part of the visible, gospel-embodying, gospel-commending witness of the new community, it must be done and it must be done well with gospel-required impartiality. And for that reason it must become *the priority for those who would be properly appointed and commissioned to carry it out*. (Notice how their "ordination" in Acts 6:6 is the same as for the "missionaries" in Acts 13:3).

The apostles certainly had *their mission* already, direct from the risen Christ, and they were determined to stay focused on it. But the Seven also now had their mission, as part of the overall mission of the church as a whole.

So it seems to me that when Luke concludes this episode by pointing to the word of God spreading and the disciples increasing in number rapidly (6:7), he is not implying that this growth of the church was because the ministry of the word (evangelism) was *prioritised* over social care (as some argue), but rather that *both key ministries* were effectively maintained by wise and godly decisions. They made sure that both were prioritised by those called, appointed and Spirit-filled for each ministry, so that the witness of *the whole church*, in

proclamation and demonstration of the gospel, continued to bear abundant fruit.

And if the objection is raised that Acts 6 refers only to the community of Christian believers, not to social concern and engagement in wider society, it is clear from the earliest records of the church that Christians were notorious for extending their practical compassion to the neediest victims in the pagan Roman world. That was something that was a significant factor in the growth of the church in the empire.

### Gospel-centred holistic mission

In the church today, then, *gospel-centred holistic mission* should mean that any local church community ought to be thinking strategically and comprehensively about the variety of ways in which the gospel can be *proclaimed and embodied*, in their own neighbourhood, in their nation, and in their commitment to God's mission to the ends of the earth. They should ask, are we ensuring that the gospel of God is central *both* to our verbal witness in the preaching and evangelism of the church, *and also* central to our outreach in acts of love, compassion, service and justice in the community?

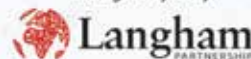
Why do we keep arguing about prioritising, dichotomising and taxonomising - creating tensions that are not there in the Bible itself. After all, the Great Commission is very clear. Jesus did not say, "make disciples... teaching them to obey *what you decide has priority* among all that I commanded you..." No, he simply said, "to obey all that I commanded you," which is pretty comprehensive! But remember - the Great Commission begins with Jesus' statement that he is Lord of heaven and earth. And that - the Lordship of Christ - is at the heart of the gospel and the mainspring of mission. The gospel of God is the integrating centre that holds everything else together. Whatever we do in mission, we do because there is good news - that Jesus of Nazareth, crucified and risen, is the world's true king and only Saviour.

<sup>1</sup> John Stott, *The Contemporary Christian: An Urgent Plea for Double Listening* (IVP, 1992), p. 141.

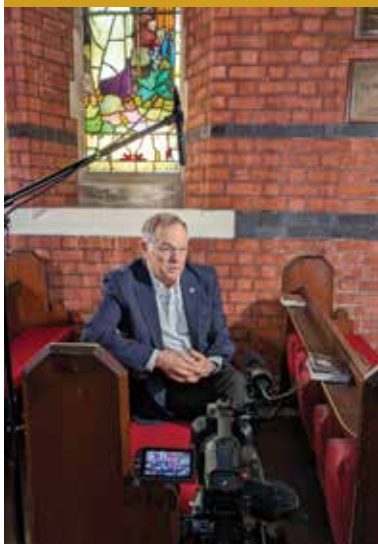


# Understanding Mission

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Course Overview

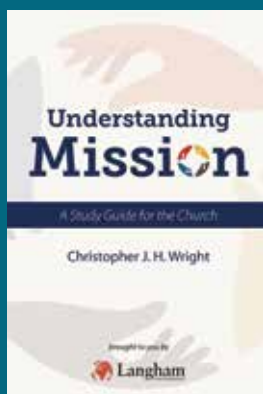


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- Keswick Convention (18th - 31st July)
- Kinfire (12th - 15th August)
- Bangor Worldwide (15th - 24th August)

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