



**BRISTOL
CHRISTIAN
FELLOWSHIP**

EQUIPPING CHRISTIANS
TO BUILD CHURCHES
TO CHANGE OUR WORLD

BCF NEWS

January 2011

Alive to the unexpected

Tim Groves

In thinking about the new, which waits for us with all its hidden possibilities and trials, I am reminded of the many advantages to not knowing what lies tucked within the folds of a new year. It evokes a sense of mystery, and speaks a language of invitation.

At the heart of our Christian faith is the requirement to follow after God, yet you would think for all our talk and years of following, that we'd know the road and indeed the direction of travel. But God will let us have none of it. Much remains in the dark, and much waits unannounced. Time and again the people in the bible experienced God as surprise. Yet while God maybe mysterious, as the quote below reminds us, God is always



close at hand (Mk 1:15).

'To say 'God' is to say that at the heart of the world we live in, the world of people and things, there lies an unfathomable mystery; when the scientists, philosophers, theologians and artists have said all the profound things they are able to say, there remains something unsaid – and unsayable.' (Cyprian Smith)

Why speak of mystery, I hear you ask. Quite simply because it is my deepest prayer that this year will catch us all unawares. While we anticipate the launch of a new 20:20*, plan for baptisms, look to rediscover the delights of sharing company one with another; I remain hopeful and alive to the unexpected, be that a conversation with a stranger, neighbour or loved one, which moves us both. There is nothing more rewarding, more uplifting than touching the heart of another. Nothing that is except being touched by the mystery and affections of God. What I love about mystery (and there is plenty to loath about it too) is that life is recast into an adventure. Therefore I say this day, together with the psalmist, 'Awake my soul!' To God, to mystery, adventure, and to each other.

In making the best use of mystery, consider this year an amnesty. This year let us give up on all those ideas we hold of our faith and indeed of church, which have proven too plodding, propositional, static and barren to sustain life; and turn instead to the creative, subtle, fertile, and humble side of ourselves. Let's unleash what Brueggemann famously calls our prophetic imagination.

I don't know what this new year will hold for us. I hope and strive towards a renewed sense of togetherness across the network. I yearn for a fresh impact of the Spirit in our lives and gatherings. But let the very mystery of God turn church once again into an act of surprise.

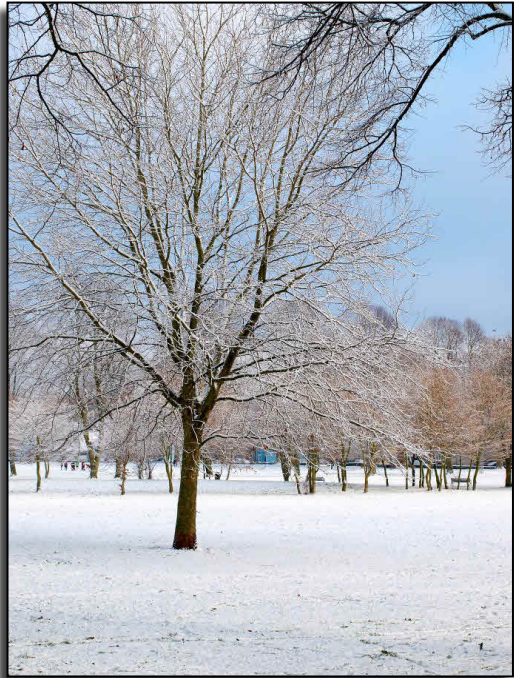
In light of all this I thought it appropriate to start the year *together*, and this in prayer and worship. Can I therefore encourage each one of us to put aside the 8th and 9th of January 2011 to seek God afresh and partake in Stepping Beyond, a worship event which will be nothing without you.

* For those who didn't see it before, 20:20 was a devotional aid we produced last year taking 20 minutes a day for 20 days. You can see the original on the BCF website here <http://www.bcfnet.com/community/20%3A20> and the new version will be available later this month.

Let it snow, let it snow, let it snow!

Pete Osborne on trusting God whatever the circumstances

I write this from Wisconsin, where a good foot of snow sits on the ground. Last weekend we had a near blizzard, that dumped snow on top of freezing rain, creating treacherous driving conditions. But the ploughs and gritters come out; the snow-blowers appear in each driveway seemingly pushed by a bundle of clothes. And things carry on. It's not as though life isn't affected – it certainly is, and things can and do stop – but it's accepted as being what winter is like. Just after the snow fell, it was -29 C one morning. Again, cold, but you dress appropriately and carry on.



Lest you think this is another rant about the failure of Britain to deal with snow; my point is this – the circumstances we find ourselves are not the only things that shape our lives. More often our attitude and expectations are the crucial factor. I often worry about things – have I done this? Will this work? And so on. My way of avoiding stress and worry is to eliminate the things that cause them – get super organised, or stop doing certain things. My mindset is often to create a space in which I don't have to worry. Yet, reading Paul in Philippians, I see a different attitude:

I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation,

whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. I can do all this through him who gives me strength. (Phil 4:11-13)

He doesn't first try to change his circumstances; but 'by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present [his] requests to God' (v 6). His aim is to seek and honour God, not merely to find a lifestyle that is less challenging or stressful. He trusts that as he does this God will deal with those things. I want to live like this – less altering of circumstances, eliminating stress and worry; more trusting God. Snow or no snow.

Congratulations to Niall and Hannah Dunne - Eden Mari Dune arrived on Boxing Day.



bsocs
Bristol School of Christian Studies



Putting the gospels back together
How we've all misread our central story

A lecture by **Bishop Tom Wright**

Christchurch Clifton Tuesday 11 January 7.30 pm Entry £5

No one ever spoke like this man!

Ian Wilson reflects on why what Jesus taught astonished the crowds who heard it.

At Aardvark we spent some of last year studying the Sermon on the Mount. At the end of it, in Matthew 7:28-29, we read

And when Jesus finished these sayings, the crowds were astonished at his teaching, for he was teaching them as one who had authority, and not as their scribes.

We also read in John 7 that officers sent to arrest Jesus came back without having done so, and when asked why they said

“No one ever spoke like this man!”

I have only recently come to realise how literally true their statement was. So much that may have become familiar to us now was completely new then. For instance, the Old Testament rarely referred to God as a Father. There are a few passages referring to a father-son relationship between God and Israel. But suddenly in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus refers to God as Father all the time. Don't be anxious – your Father in heaven knows what you need. Pray in secret – your Father who sees in secret will reward you. Love your enemies, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven. When you pray say “Our Father ...”.

When you get it that God is Father, it has so many implications. Think of how human parents (at their best) relate to their children, and translate that into God's attitude to us. God loves us. God wants a relationship with us. God wants to provide for us. God knows more than we do. We are part of God's family. God wants us to grow and develop. God wants us to succeed.

This is just one of the ways in which no one ever spoke like Jesus did. If his teaching was astonishing then, it is astonishing now, for those who haven't heard it or really seen it before. And increasingly these days, people haven't heard it before. Yet to know that they have a Father in heaven who loves them is good news. As much as anything, what we need to communicate is the story of Jesus and what he taught, and it doesn't have to be complicated.

Building project update

Cathy Knowles (project coordinator)

Resound Building

The discussions are progressing well with the shortlisted contractor – we have made a letter of commitment to them and they are now looking at more value engineering. But, we will not agree a contract until we are satisfied that this has been completed.

We are pushing them to find some ways of reducing the costs, and they are rising to the challenge! The possible compromise for us in the short term may be that we put on hold some items that can be purchased



later on. The key words really are ‘build in provision for...’ so we can be confident of fitting anything we delaying purchasing till later.

The Trustees are confident that we will be able to place the contract very soon, but it is really important to get the price right – after all it is all money we’ve donated, been given and raised, so we want to be sure we use it in the most efficient way.

A short-term loan will be needed to enable the build to progress whilst the development potential and sale of Severn Ridge carries on. Also, we need to prove to the contractor that we have the funds to complete the project. However, the BCF funds are not sufficiently healthy to cover large loan repayments, and this is where the pledges come in.

The pledges received in 2010 were £36,700 which is wonderful – thank you all!! This has given the bank huge confidence in our project, but they are looking to see this kind of commitment in 2011 as well. We obviously do not want to be giving all our hard earned money to the bank, hence our aim to reduce the build costs as much as possible, sell Severn Ridge as soon as we can and therefore not need to drawn down much of a loan at all.

So, the pledge scheme is being launched again for 2011. (Go to [http://www.bcfnet.com/resources/Forms and Policies](http://www.bcfnet.com/resources/Forms_and_Policies) for the pledge form.) Please pray and consider what you may be able to give. Also you can follow our progress at <http://buildingresound.blogspot.com/>.

Severn Ridge

The plan was for the planning application to the council to be made in December, but unfortunately the snow held this up. Several trees needed to be removed and a tree report carried out before the application could go in. Although the work has started, it became too icy and dangerous to continue, so this will all be finished in January and the application submitted.



Barn Dance
Friday 11 February
@Hanham Community Centre
7.30 pm - 11.30 pm

Tickets £8 (includes food)
There will be a bar throughout the evening

To purchase tickets please email sarahharvey@bcfnet.com or contact the office on 01454 613305
Proceeds to the Resound Community building project



RESOUND



Bristol Christian Fellowship

Office (Monday to Thursday)

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BCF website www.bcfnet.com

BCF Diary January 2011

Sat 8	Stepping Beyond	5.00 pm	The Ark (until 12.00 noon Sunday)
Sun 9	Joint BCF Meeting	3.00 pm	Thornbury Baptist Church Centre
Sun 16	Resound Worship meeting	10.30 am	Barley Close School <i>Emma Duncan</i>
Sun 16	Aardvark	7.00 pm	The Ark
Sun 23	Resound Worship meeting	10.30 am	Barley Close School <i>Cara Medus/Ruth McConnell</i>
Sun 23	Aardvark	7.00 pm	The Ark
Sun 30	Resound Messy Church	10.30 am	Barley Close School <i>Jon Bird</i>
Sun 30	Aardvark	7.00 pm	The Ark <i>Worship evening</i>

February 2011

Sun 6	Aardvark Away Day	10.00 am	Severn Ridge (until 4.00 pm)
Sun 6	Resound Meeting	10.30 am	Barley Close School <i>Tim Groves</i>
Sun 6	BCF South	11.00 am	The Wilsons'

Stepping Beyond Prayer and Worship

Saturday 8 January 5.00 pm – Sunday 9 January 12 noon
with Andy Au
The Ark

Entries for the February Bulletin by 25 January, please.

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BCF News is edited by Ian Wilson.

Read it online: www.bcfnet.com/resources/BCF_News