



Let's pray:

July 2023

How can we pray well as we head into this new month?



Scattered

The start of July means school summer holidays are firmly on the horizon – in some parts of the UK, they'll have already begun.

Thinking of school conjures up a mixture of memories and emotions for me. Perhaps that's true for you as well. One of the more pleasant memories that comes to mind, particularly on a summer's day in July when the sun is shining (hopefully!), is that of standing on the edge of the school field waiting for permission to go onto the grass. Up until now, all the students had been constrained to the tarmac area of the school grounds.

In summer months, a teacher would check whether the grass was dry and suitable for the hundreds of children to play on. This meant that every lunchtime, almost every child would line the edge of the field, eagerly waiting, inching forwards, ready for the signal that the field was open for business. It sounds silly, but I still get butterflies in my stomach as I remember the sense of anticipation and excitement knowing that once the signal was given - the charge - would begin!

Describing those moments shortly after the field was declared open for lunchtime as a charge is, I think, the most suitable description. Utter chaos would be another way of describing it. It's hard to put into words exactly what would happen. Picture, if you can, a cross between a herd of stampeding buffalo together with a colony of ants heading out for a day's work in every direction imaginable. Have you got that picture in your mind's eye? Well, then you might just have a glimpse of what it was like.

My friends and I would race to the fence on the far side of the field. On one occasion, the teacher even raced with us. We all lost. Gutted! But from the slightly elevated far-side of the field, I would turn around and look back across the entire school grounds. What was once empty space was now covered with children playing. Each group had been scattered. Each group had found their place on the field. The charge had worked wonders again. And in a funny old way, there was a purpose in the charge, as hundreds of children were now scattered across the field.



'Those who had been scattered preached the word wherever they went.' Acts 8.4

In the New Testament, as the first Christians began to experience persecution, they were scattered throughout Judea and Samaria 1. Throughout the Bible, time and time again, we see God take that which is intended for evil and turn it into something beautiful 2. On this occasion, what was intended to put an abrupt end to Christianity, resulted in its rapid expansion and influence. The persecution led to a scattering, which in turn enabled a widening reach and many more opportunities for the good news of Jesus to be preached.

Following this rapid spread came the establishment of the earliest churches, where God's goodness and mercy flowed out of many individuals, families and communities. A new, more radical form of hospitality was taking hold of these communities. In the ancient Roman era, acts of hospitality were reserved for people in high office or for those from whom one could expect something in return. But over the first few centuries AD, Christian communities built a reputation for extending hospitality to all, including the most vulnerable in society.

Fast forward from that first scattering of God's people in the middle east, through to 21st century Britain where there are around 50,000 churches across the UK and as many as 3,000,000 regular church goers. Suddenly, the scattering of those first believers has taken on a whole new meaning and purpose. The scale and locality of the Church today means she is uniquely placed to take collective action in response to the needs of thousands of children in the care system. The Church has the potential to be more than Sundays. It has the potential to use its scale and locality to bless the nation with the same radical hospitality that defined the early Church.

At Home for Good, we know the difference the Church can make to the lives of children and young people as well as their parents and carers.



“Belonging to a community of faith was genuinely an extension and probably more real in being a family to me at the age of 18 and 19 onwards. That belonging was hugely significant. That early year investment and faith community investment and belonging was huge.” - Care-experienced adult 3

We hear many stories from across our network of God's Church in action, not only empowering and equipping congregations through Sunday worship, but also through individuals, couples and families opening their homes to care for children and young people through fostering, adoption and supported lodgings.

“The children's and youth leaders at our church were trained by Home for Good in 2016. Since then, they have been able to take some steps to make groups more inclusive for children with experience of care. They are much more mindful of how a child's behaviour might be masking their attachment issues, anxiety or their inability to access what's happening... Leaders at the church were understanding of these needs and were very careful with the children. This meant that 'S' and his sister were able to relax and be themselves in church. The training has permeated the culture of our church and people are generally much more aware of the issues facing looked after and adopted children and how to support them” – Emma, Foster Carer 4

While there is much to celebrate, at Home for Good we long to hear more stories of the Church stepping up to support those caring for children and young people. Going back to my memory of school, where I looked across the field and saw children playing in groups of friends, each with their own place, their own home on the field, I can't help but imagine standing on a very big hill, looking over the proceeding landscape, seeing the Church scattered across the UK. In this picture, I see each church full of people responding to God's call to radical hospitality and restorative justice. I see children and young people who have found the security of loving homes through fostering, adoption or supported lodgings, and are being supported by trauma informed churches.

It's a picture I long to see become reality.
Sam Lomas, Policy and Research Officer





Points for Prayer

As we pray, let's remember that while the scale of need within children's social care is great, the Church is well placed to respond to the thousands of children and young people in need of a loving home.

- 1.** Pray for the Church across the UK. Ask the Lord to inspire more individuals, couples and families to come forward to foster, adopt or become supported lodgings hosts.
- 2.** Pray for church leaders. Pray that God would raise up more church leaders who are passionate about enabling their church family to care for children and young people through fostering, adoption and supported lodgings.
- 3.** Pray for peer-led support groups. Ask the Lord to bless all the individuals, couples and families connected to the many Home for Good peer-led support groups across the country.
- 4.** Pray for your local MP and the hundreds of other members of parliament. Pray that there would be an openness to the work of Home for Good and a recognition of the huge potential the Church has in playing its part in caring for children in need.

References

- 1) Acts 8:1
- 2) See Genesis 50:20 and Romans 8:28
- 3) More than Sundays Report (2022)
- 4) Ibid.



Reflective prayer idea

Let's pray creatively. The Parable of the Sower is a famous story-based teaching of Jesus in which a farmer scatters seeds over their land. Jesus uses this story to illustrate how the Gospel spreads. The imagery conjured up by this parable can help us to pray creatively.

Why not collect a handful of seeds or small stones? Taking these in your hand, go out into the garden or to a local park and begin to scatter the seeds, one by one. As you sow the seeds or stones, I want you to think of the Church scattered across the UK. Imagine that each seed or stone that you scatter is an individual Church, or a community of believers, or an organisation involved in caring for children e.g. your local authority.

As each seed or stone leaves your hand, say a prayer. In the Parable of the Sower, the seeds land in four areas. And so, as a starting point, use the four topics listed above as you pray. But after your initial scattering, allow your imagination to bring to mind the many different connections that are made through fostering, adoption and supported lodgings. As these different people or organisation or topics come to mind, say a prayer and scatter another seed or stone.

Finally, take a moment to look at the seeds or stones you have scattered. See how they have spread all around you. Take courage from knowing that just as these seeds or stones have been scattered, so too God's church has been scattered and, as such, has huge potential to sprout fruit across our nation.