

# Belong

HEAVEN  
ON EARTH



BEING WILLING  
TO LISTEN

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GIFT OF  
PLACE SHARING

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REMAIN GOSPEL  
FOCUSED

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## GIFT OF PLACE-SHARING



BY CEEJA MALMKAR  
info@gracecom.church

“Place-sharing” has become a common topic of conversation recently and I couldn’t be happier about it. I think that sometimes we get caught up in all the things we don’t have or the things we can’t do. Sometimes we get stuck in our small numbers on Sundays and our increasing ages. Friends, we cannot get stuck there. We are the bride of Christ, and every day is an opportunity to step into that identity. The church is a hospital, not a hospice. We have life, and as his bride, we are called to “be the Church.” Jesus has always worked through relationships, and he still does. He invites us to join him in a way that we are all capable of participating in, and that’s through place-sharing.

Place-sharing means we experience life with others. We experience joy with them, and we suffer with them. Place-sharing is not manipulative, and it’s not superficial. Place-sharing is not about making people our “projects” that we can project our judgments and beliefs on. God does not call us to try and fix people, because only he can change hearts and minds. He calls us to place-share with them. He calls us to love them authentically. He calls us to build friendships and join him as we share life together, sharing our joys and our burdens and opening our hearts.

I have learned that by place-sharing with people, we share with them what Jesus is sharing with them. Jesus is constantly sharing

**“PLACE-SHARING  
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THEM”.**

with all of us through the Holy Spirit. If we can individually begin to seek out the broken, the hurt, the sick, and the lost, and open our hearts every single day to an identity of worship that requires humility, authenticity, compassion, love, patience, intentionality, trust, and courage, we may find that our churches will start looking more like hospitals again.

There is so much sorrow in the world, so much hurt, and a general feeling of not belonging, because the enemy has planted lies in our society. Lies that tell us that God is not for us. Lies that tell us we are too far gone. Lies that tell us we are not good enough. Lies that tell us we do not belong. Jesus speaks truth to us, as the church, so that we may speak that truth into others in action and love. That truth is that Jesus Christ died once for all people (2 Corinthians 5:15), and that it is his desire that all of us are in relationship with him (2 Peter 3:9). Therefore, we all belong. None of us have “gone too far” or done anything that Jesus holds against us. In fact, our biggest mistakes, he washes away, separating them from us “as far as the east is from the west” (Psalm 103:12).

If that is the kind of attitude and love that Jesus has for us, then that is the attitude we must have towards our neighbours and community. God’s call for us to love others is audacious. He calls us to put others ahead of ourselves and to love people we may not necessarily like. He calls us to get to know strangers, to meet people in their pain and to share it, to befriend them, to hang out with them, and to help them. He calls us to share our hearts, our love, and our lives with them. He calls us to share our resources and friendship generously. It may not be easy, but it is who we are called to be. The kind of love that God is asking his Church to display is a love that forces us to grow, because it is a love beyond what humanity can grasp. It is a love that changes every one of us. We cannot love others with the love of Jesus without our own hearts changing.

What a beautiful opportunity we have, to live out the New Commandment every day by walking alongside our neighbours that God has placed right next to us. Every day is an opportunity to meet them, to get to know them, and to let them get to know us – in the good, the bad, and the messy. By place-sharing with people, we share with them what Jesus is sharing with them. It’s in that authentic



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friendship and sharing of life that those outside the church walls begin to truly relate with those who attend inside those walls. Suddenly “walls” begin to break down, and the Spirit begins to move in ways that we can’t imagine. It’s an incredible experience and one that Jesus has for all of us regardless of our age, our size, or our location. Because before the events, before Bible studies, before the growth, must come relationship. Place-sharing is where real discipleship starts.

To access more resources on place-sharing please visit <https://resources.gci.org/media/placesharing>

*Ceeja Malmkar, Ministry Training Centre  
Coordinator (MTC), Surrey Hills, Oklahoma*

# HEAVEN ON EARTH



BY CHERILEE NAMEE  
info@gracecom.church

SEP was always Loch Lomond to me. Loch Lomond was where I was baptized, as well as many of my friends. It was, to me Heaven on Earth, a place I could be my real self, no pretence. I could talk openly about God and Jesus without any funny looks. When I was a camper, all campers were from church. I then returned on the staff team for a few years and every staff member was from church. It was a God-hub of people finding who they were, away from the stresses of home, school or work.

Then, after a break of probably more than 10 years, I returned to SEP. This time it wasn't in Loch Lomond, but in Wales. Same five-hour drive though.

The campers weren't all from church backgrounds. And SEP is now hosted in Morfa Bay, an outdoor adventure centre, and the centre staff are not from church backgrounds. There were, however, twenty SEP staff members, all of whom were Christians. Nevertheless, on my journey to Wales, I was asking myself, will SEP still be the same? My question was soon to be answered. As I drove through the gates I felt 'still'. The God-hub I remembered was alive and well and I hadn't even said hello to anyone yet.

I immediately felt at home, just as though I had never been away. God was definitely working with our small team and we noticed some pretty important changes as camp progressed.

First of all, the campers had changed. There was a total of 70 boys and girls, aged between 12 and 17. Of those, perhaps 20 had no connection to Christianity. I was part of the Christian Living team and I noticed at the beginning that several of those did not want to participate in any "Christian" activities such as reading out scriptures, praying or singing hymns. But as time went on, they were all willing to give it a go. Also, in the second week, we held an all-camp 'Kingdom of Heaven' evening of



worship and prayer, and at the end we invited any campers who were interested in finding out more or having staff members pray for them, to stay behind. We were surprised to see as many as 15 or 16 remaining seated after the event had finished.

Then there were the not-yet-Christian staff members. Some admitted they had a negative view of Christianity prior to our arrival, but their attitude completely transformed over the two weeks we were there, as relationships developed between SEP and the Morfa Bay staff. Some were interested in finding out what we believed, although one lady jokingly added, "Not that I am going to come to your church, mind!" I felt in our vulnerability and admission to not being perfect, we were able to show them God's perfect love, and they felt they had the space to respond.

Another milestone for me was to see the power of prayer in action via a group of dedicated SEP staff getting up early each morning to pray together. One morning, a group of campers happened to be in the room where we prayed and so we invited them to join us – and they did!

I feel blessed to have been a part of SEP 2023. It was everything I remembered about the SEPs of the past, yet somehow taken to a different level.

# MY SEP EXPERIENCE



BY AUDREY SIPKO  
info@gracecom.church

I do not know where to begin to describe my life-changing experience at SEP UK. Over the years, I have formed some of the strongest friendship bonds, completed activities that I had never dreamed of trying, and grown tremendously in my spiritual walk with the Lord. I attended my first year of camp when I was only twelve years old, with my best friend Kayley, who invited me to go with her and her cousins. This was my first time out of America and I was truly awed at meeting so many new people and experiencing different cultures! In my first year I fell in love with the atmosphere of SEP.

I never forgot the rich experiences of camp and the feeling of love that every camper and staff member showed me. Not even the two-year break for COVID could make me forget! My second year was after the COVID break and I was sixteen years old. Bringing another friend along with us, Kayley and I had the best camp experience yet! The local adventure of coasteering, which is essentially jumping off cliffs into the frigid waters of west Wales, has encouraged me to try new things, even back home in Houston, Texas. So many life-long friendships were created that year and it was a joy coming back this past year and seeing my international besties again! The campers from all walks of life have shown me that true beauty shines through the people that I have the privilege to meet and love.

This year I was even inspired by my Spanish friends to attempt to learn Spanish and I am currently practicing for next year! SEP has been such a life-changing experience for me. I am forever grateful to the incredible people who make this camp possible and fun for campers like me! Although this was my last year to be a camper, I fully intend to come back and be an activity leader in the coming years!



SEP 2018: Audrey far left



SEP 2022: Audrey middle



SEP 2023: Audrey second left

## REMAINING GOSPEL FOCUSED



BY ANTHONY MULLINS  
info@gracecom.church

During my time as pastor of Grace Communion in North Carolina, USA, my wife, Elizabeth, (who served as our Love Avenue champion) would give a “Neighbourhood Update” talk to the congregation during the Sunday worship gathering. It was a chance for her to share how we, both as individuals and collectively as a church, could be a blessing to our surrounding community and neighbours. One Sunday she caught my attention with this profoundly thoughtful statement, and I paraphrase, “Yes, we want to give bread to those who are hungry, but we also want to alert them to the Bread of Life.” Amen! As a congregation, we certainly wanted to serve people who had immediate physical needs but not without alerting them to Jesus, the ultimate provider. It was our attempt to be gospel-focused with our participation in God’s mission to the world.

Since we have been sent in the power of the Holy Spirit to bear witness to Jesus and his emerging kingdom (Acts 1:8), we would do well to be vigilant to remaining gospel-focused in our missional efforts. I recently read the book *The Shape of Practical Theology* in a Grace Communion Seminary course. The author, Ray S. Anderson, made a bold statement when he wrote, “There are forms of ministry which appear to be comforting and even reconciling, but if they do not reveal Christ, these ministries are not of God.” From the author’s perspective, God has acted decisively in Jesus Christ for our salvation and continues to act in the world, by the Spirit, and through his witness-bearers (you and me) by revealing Jesus Christ in word and deed. There are many therapeutic efforts and random acts of kindness being done in the world, but Anderson argues that unless they point to Christ, it is ultimately not God’s work. That’s a challenging thought for me because I do believe being gracious and kind to people is an act of God, and yet I appreciate Anderson’s assertion to remain gospel focused.



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What does it mean to be gospel-focused in our missional efforts? I came across the following quote recently that effectively articulates a gospel-focused approach.

The gospel is not an idea.  
It is not a belief.  
It is not a favourite verse.  
The gospel does not live in your church.  
It cannot be written down in a simple message.  
And it is not the sinner’s prayer.

The gospel is not a what.  
It is not a how.  
The gospel is a Who.  
The gospel is literally the good news of Jesus.  
Jesus is the Gospel.

– Carl Medearis, *Speaking of Jesus*

Jesus is the centrality of the good news, so to be gospel-focused is to fix our gaze on Jesus, to speak the life-giving words of Jesus, to embody the mercy and compassion of Jesus; it’s all about Jesus!

This is why gospel-declaration and gospel-demonstration flow together and support one another. It’s the word and deed, act and being together. So friends, let’s share bread with the hungry, let’s break bread with neighbours around our dinner tables, but let’s not forsake alerting people to the One who ultimately satisfies – Jesus, the bread of life!

## FIRST MEETING OF WEST HAMPSTEAD, LONDON



BY BARRY ROBINSON  
info@gracecom.church

On Sunday 3 September 2023, 29 people gathered at the Sidings Community Centre for the inaugural meeting of the West Hampstead congregation. It was a joyous occasion of worship, and Communion, coupled with the excitement of a new beginning.

During the service, Regional Pastor Barry Robinson thanked the outgoing Pastoral Councils of Camberwell and London for their dedication to faithfully serving their congregations over many years.

The leadership structure for West Hampstead will follow the *Team based, Pastor led* model, and we are



pleased to announce that the following people were commissioned to serve the congregation:

Pastor – Gordon Brown.  
Assistant to the Pastor – Kofi Assirifi.  
Hope Avenue Champions Geoff Stilwell and Vanessa Garcia with a focus on worship.  
Faith Avenue Champion Barbara Wilkinson with a focus on discipleship.  
Love Avenue Champion Sue McGowan with a focus on outreach.

## THANKS TO IAN SMILLIE AND WELCOME TO JAMES MCIVOR



BY JAMES HENDERSON  
info@gracecom.church

Before and since his ordination in 1996 Ian Smillie and his late and much-missed wife, Ann, lovingly served the Glasgow members and contacts.

On Sunday 3 September, in appreciation of Ian’s dedication to the ministry of Jesus Christ, Julie Dickson led the congregation in presenting him with the gift of a statue engraved with the words, “A man in thought for God” (see photo right).

After the presentation Ian was delighted to join in as Gavin Henderson, accompanied by Pete and Jackie Mill, commissioned James McIvor as the new pastor of the Glasgow congregation. Afterwards the church gave James a copy of the NIV Study Bible.

Support for these servants of God was tangible on the day.





## ADVENTURE CAMP GONE IN A FLASH



BY SINEAD HENDERSON  
info@gracecom.church

We start planning Adventure Camp a year in advance. In fact we had a meeting during camp this year for next years camp! All the hours of meetings, processing forms, risk assessments, schedules, staffing, accommodation planning, kitchen prep and food shopping, getting the right equipment, technology and more.... and then it's just gone, in a flash.

In that flash though – in what was a moment in time – we really did fit a lot in. The days were filled with activities such as Archery, Conservation, Christian Living, Lego, Zumba, Tie-Dye and Prayer-craft. Each activity was just an hour in length but so full, rich and joyful. The evening activities were very messy games which included the egg smash, the flour chain, word games with alphabet spaghetti, and the foam and cheese puff challenge! We also enjoyed a movie night, a disco, and a campfire sing-a-long. All were just a few hours in length but memories that will last forever were made during these evenings.

The mornings started with a worship service – engaging and interactive – introducing Jesus, for the first time to some of our campers, and reminding others of how much God loves them and wants to be a part of their lives. The kids lifted their voices in worship and some gave prayers. Our hopes and prayers are that these small interactions with Jesus will have a deep and lasting impact on these children that will stay with them every day of their lives, as it does with us.

The feedback from the kids was very positive, and the biggest request is that camp is longer. One suggested camp could be six weeks long! However fleeting Adventure Camp may have been, we know that the experiences, the opportunities, the friendships, the interactions and the introductions have left deep impressions and that the memories they have won't be fleeting, but will last a lifetime.

Adventure Camp will be back next year. If you have any questions please contact the team on [adcamp@gracecom.church](mailto:adcamp@gracecom.church)

## BEING WILLING TO LISTEN



BY JUNE BURROWS  
info@gracecom.church

*Because he bends down to listen, I will pray as long as I have breath! Psalm 116:2 (NLT)*

We live in such a hectic, busy world, and it's so easy to be distracted by one thing or another. Often we give people only half an ear when they speak to us. However, I feel that everyone needs to be heard and validated as never before.

Every day we rub shoulders with those who are desperate, hurting, and lonely. We may not even be aware of the dark road they travel – just needing someone to notice, to slow down, to lend an ear, to care. I have been in situations where I have seen someone alone and distressed but I have not stopped to ask whether I could help. On the other hand, I have been alone and distressed myself and there has been no one to turn to. Being heard can be a starting point for someone's healing. We don't need to be a professional in this capacity. A listening ear and a caring heart is often all that is needed.

Jesus was always willing to listen and understand another person's perspective. In Luke 24 we have the story of Jesus meeting two people on the road to Emmaus. Notice how Jesus asks inquisitive questions to learn what was important to people. He entered into a conversation with them and they urged him to stay the night and share a meal. It was only then that his identity was revealed to them. There are, of course, many other examples of Jesus' interacting with people.

It's part of our discipleship to look out for others, and to meet them where they are in their lives, just as Jesus met us right where we were to bring us into relationship with him. Sometimes it's we who need to talk, and we have a wonderful God who is more than willing to listen. As we read in the header scripture, our God doesn't listen from afar. He bends down so to speak. He gets close. He is intimate and



Photo kool99, istockphoto.com

compassionate. Even when he seems distant, he is not.

It's important to give people our time and full attention when it's needed, even, or especially, in our busy world.

Because that's what Jesus did.

*Prayer - Loving Father, thank you for the intimate and compassionate way you deal with us. You are always attentive to our prayers. Help us to move this forward into our relationship with others in a world where people are longing to be heard. In Jesus's name. Amen.*

This article is from our daily Word of Life devotional. To access them please visit [wordoflife.gracecom.church](http://wordoflife.gracecom.church)



## GALWAY CELEBRATION



BY NANCY SILCOX  
info@gracecom.church

*If you ever go across the sea to Ireland, then maybe at the closing of your day, you can sit and watch the moon rise over Claddah, or watch the sun go down on Galway Bay - Bing Crosby*

23 of us met in the Salthill Hotel, overlooking beautiful Galway Bay, from 7-11 September 2023. There we had four days of worship, fellowship and sharing time together – whether walking the Promenade along the Bay, having fish & chips in the Galleon Restaurant or enjoying a real Irish lunch at Padriacin's on the Wild Atlantic Way.

At the traditional Irish House Party we entertained ourselves with charades, tongue twisters and everyone contributing their 'party piece'. (Keep an eye out for this at Paignton in October.) We had a service each day with inspiring worship, sermons from Pete Mill, David Stirk and David Silcox, and we shared Communion together on the last morning. These days of Celebration brought us closer to each other as well as closer to God.

This was the last time the Galway Celebration will be held at Salthill in Galway and next year will be at a new location: Mount St. Anne's Retreat and Conference Centre, Killenard, Portarlinton, in Co. Laois, from 13-16 September 2024. Look forward to seeing you there!

### I was there (Mary O'Sullivan)

Last weekend I went, for the first time, to the Galway Celebration and to those of you who couldn't attend I want you to know what a fabulous occasion it was - a weekend of happiness peace and laughter, with my fellow 'Gracecommers' at the seminar showering me with so much love and care that I felt like a queen, I was totally uplifted. I thank you most sincerely for making my weekend so enjoyable. I have been so lucky to have found and joined Grace Communion International and thank you for all the prayers and attention you have given me – I'm still on a high!

## NOT TOO LATE!

Hello to everyone! Do you feel like you've missed out on summer? Why not make a last-minute booking to join us at this year's Paignton celebration 9 - 16 October, or whenever you can make it within those dates? Come and be with us!

The theme is "called to belong to Jesus Christ" from Romans 1:6 (NIV). At the 2023 Paignton celebration we will explore this comforting scripture, so that we can all be assured that we belong to God and are accepted by him.

As in previous years, we will have exclusive use of the Beverley Bay venue for the entire period to host worship services, prayer meetings, social events, children's activities, etc. See more details at <https://gracecom.church/event/celebrations/paignton-celebration/>

When booking, please tell the Beverley Park staff that you are from GCI so that they can apply our



Photo: Thomas Faull, istockphoto.com

discounted rate. Even if you are not booking for the full period, please mention that you are part of GCI so they know how many bookings they have from us. To find out more about accommodation, please phone Beverley Park on 01803 843887 or visit their website: [beverleyholidays.co.uk](http://beverleyholidays.co.uk)

Contact [james.henderson@gracecom.church](mailto:james.henderson@gracecom.church) if any questions.

## FAREWELL FROM THE DADY'S



BY ANTHONY DADY  
info@gracecom.church

After two wonderful years serving as one of GCI's regional pastors for the UK and Ireland, the time has come for me to depart. I have family in New Zealand, so my wife Alison, and I decided to investigate the possibility of us moving there.

The past two years have been a reminder to me to focus on Jesus, and I have been appreciative of the GCI position regarding grace and the certainty of our future. The more we learn of these wonderful truths, the more we want to dedicate our lives to Jesus, and we long for others to know him as we do.

As well as my work with GCI, I have tried to be involved in my community, for Jesus to shine his light in my interactions. He has provided opportunities I never expected, including being a councillor, the mayor, the town crier, and serving on the boards of several local charities. I look forward to becoming part of the community where I will be living in New Zealand, in addition to travelling around the country supporting our GCI congregations there.

Although I won't see you all as often, you're all welcome to visit Alison and me and our daughter Tabitha (and Molly the dog!). Email me at [anthony\\_dady@hotmail.com](mailto:anthony_dady@hotmail.com) if you're coming to visit.

# GOD IS IN THE STREETS



BY HAZEL TABIN  
info@gracecom.church

As someone who does not have a driver's license yet, I am forced to walk or take public transportation. This includes times of waiting – for the bus, for the next stop, and for fellow travelers to get on or off. I am a person who does not like waiting and gets annoyed at the time wasted. In my hurry and frustration, I fail to appreciate what's in front of me.

I wonder whether we have the same approach to God's timing. We have been so used to fast-paced living that we forget our God is not in a hurry. Our Saviour entered the world as a baby. He could have saved us in a second, but he waited twelve years to even start his ministry (Luke 2:49). We also see in creation how God makes beautiful things in his own time through seasons, through towering trees that were once a seed, and through mountains formed by the slow movement of tectonic plates.

*Yet God has made everything beautiful for its own time. He has planted eternity in the human heart, but even so, people cannot see the whole scope of God's work from beginning to end.*

Ecclesiastes 3:11 NLT

May we remember that our God is working in every moment, even in those that might feel futile. May we surrender to our God who holds everything



Photo: ArtMarie, istockphoto.com

together when we don't see what's ahead of us. Lastly, may we be present with a God who is already present with us.

*Prayer: Father, Jesus, and Spirit, we thank you that you are with us. Every breath we take is a gift from you and a reminder of your involvement in our lives. Lead us to be still and know that you are at work. Guide us to rest in you so that we may enjoy your presence as you do with us. Amen.*



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Tel: 01858 437 099  
Email: info@gracecom.church

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