

# IN TOUCH

Summer 2023

## THE STRENGTH OF WEAKNESS

“For the foolishness of God is wiser than human wisdom, and  
the weakness of God is stronger than human strength”

1 Corinthians 1:2

 St John's Lindow

[www.saint-johns.org.uk](http://www.saint-johns.org.uk)

# SIMON'S SCRAWL

by Simon Gales

What qualities do you look for in a leader? Many would summarise in a single word: strength. Great leaders must be strong, forceful and tough. They should be bold in action, able to get their own way, nothing feeble or wimpish about them.

The apostle Paul wrote a letter to the church at Corinth who, as we might, had formed their ideas of Christian leadership from models in their surrounding culture. In Greek society a spiritual person was to be a superior sort, projecting an image of health and vigour, with a strong and dynamic personality. But Paul was being heavily criticised - his whole image and persona were just too ordinary!

He was forced to defend himself, not just because they were damaging his reputation (he didn't mind too much about that). Rather they were distorting Christianity itself. Under the cloak of being very spiritual they were offering people a false Jesus - a Jesus who no longer suffered, no longer carried a cross.

So when Paul lists his achievements (2 Corinthians 11:23-28) he mentions none of the things they were expecting - his preaching successes, his famous letters or some influential friends. Instead he lists his persecutions, his trials and struggles!! As he says 'If I must boast, I will boast of the things that show my weakness' (11:31). He turns upside down the image of the strong Christian they had - a spiritual superman striding over all the difficulties. By contrast he doesn't despise weakness - in fact, he'll boast of those things that show his weakness. He realises that God had given him a 'thorn in the flesh... to keep [him] from becoming conceited' (12:7). He'd

pleaded with the Lord to take it away 'But he said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.' (12:9a). As a result, others would take note, not because Paul was impressive and dynamic, but because God's grace could be seen at work in him, especially because of his weakness.



Real Christianity looks ordinary (see page 4), it looks weak, even as Jesus looked weak and ordinary as he lay in a manger and hung on a cross. And so Paul says 'Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me. That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses . . . for when I am weak, then I am strong.' (12:9,10)

A Christian delights in weakness because it's only in such acceptance and confession that we find the supernatural grace of God flowing to meet our need. Lean on Christ, and in your weakness (real as it is) you will be empowered to keep going, established in true comfort and joy. Only when I am weak, am I strong.

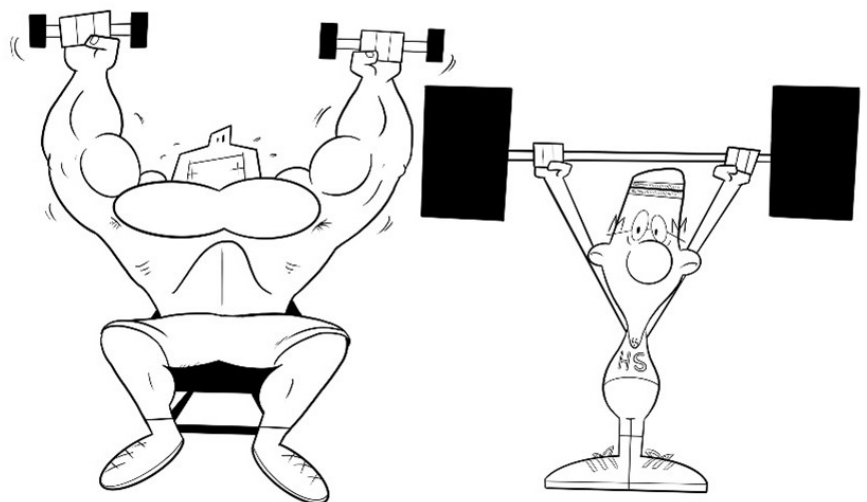
Yours,  
Simon

***"The spirit helps us in our weakness"***

***Romans 8:26***

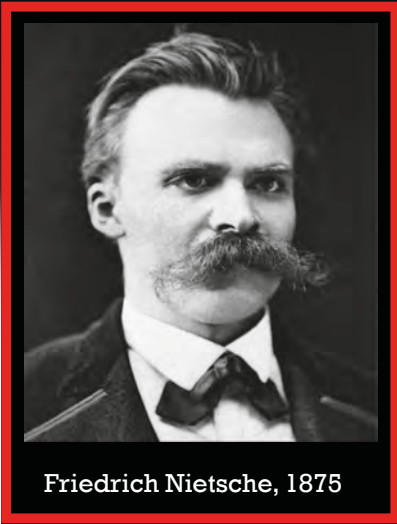
***Sketchy theology***

***By Ben Hollinshead***





# WHEN **STRENGTH** BECOMES AN IDOL



*“Weakness must be hammered away. I want a brutal, domineering, fearless, cruel youth. There must be nothing weak and gentle about it. The free, splendid beast of prey must once again flash from its eyes. That is how I will create the New Order”.*

*– Adolf Hitler*

High on the hillside above the cultured city of Weimar stands Buchenwald, the largest Nazi concentration camp within the borders of Germany. Prisoners came from all over Europe and the Soviet Union - Jews, Poles and other Slavs, the mentally ill and physically disabled, political prisoners, Romani people, Freemasons and prisoners of war. There were also ordinary criminals and sexual “deviants”.

When the allied troops liberated Buchenwald in 1945, they compelled the citizens of Weimar to tour the camp to see what had taken place in plain sight. To this day, there is an awful atmosphere: it is as if hell had erupted upon earth. I visited the camp alone one afternoon in 2011. As I was leaving, another visitor hurried over to me with a request: “Please can you direct me to the gas chambers?”

Nazi deathcamps and the Holocaust are amongst the most extreme crimes perpetrated by Adolf Hitler and his followers during World War II, although they are far from unique. The terrible thing is that they were committed by a people that historically had been profoundly influenced by Christianity, including the Protestant Reformation. What had gone wrong?

The ‘Age of Enlightenment’ or ‘Age of Reason’ was an intellectual movement in Western Europe, in the 17th and 18th centuries, with global

influences and effects. The Enlightenment included a range of ideas centred on the value of human happiness, the pursuit of knowledge obtained by means of reason and the evidence of the senses, and ideals such as natural law, liberty, progress, toleration, fraternity, constitutional government, and separation of church and state. Many of these idealistic aspirations were potentially consistent with Christian faith and practice, but were undermined by a pervasive atheism and a naïve view of human nature.

The ‘enlightenment’ philosophical writings of Friedrich Nietzsche (1844 – 1900) had a profound influence upon Adolf Hitler (1889 – 1945), questioning the basis of good and evil, advocating the concept of Superman (*Übermensch*), the death of God and a general despising of Christianity for its defence of the poor and the weak.



Forced Labour in the concentration camps

Nietzsche spent the last 11 years of his life in total mental darkness, first in a Basel asylum, then in Naumburg and, after 1897, in Weimar in his sister's care. His madness has been attributed to tertiary syphilis, although medical experts dispute this. More certain is that his consistent atheism meant that, without belief in the Christian God, the world and his own life ceased to have meaning.

**BY DAVID WATTS**



## Visit from UFM mission partners

# Michael and Steph Baldwin

In June we were visited by Michael and Steph Baldwin, our UFM mission partners in Eurasia.

Here is a summary of the sermon Michael preached, **'The glory of the ordinary'** which fits well with the theme of this magazine.

Do you find it hard to see how the mundane things in life contribute to the kingdom of God - the rule of God that broke in when Jesus arrived? In Luke 13:18-21 he told 2 parables, the mustard seed and the yeast, which tells us:

### 1. The kingdom has a beginning more ordinary than you expected

It won't arrive with a mighty army - it's more like a tiny mustard seed hidden in the ground, or a small amount of yeast hidden in a batch of dough. The people of the kingdom are very ordinary - but worshipping an extraordinary King. We expect Jesus to be born in a palace but he's born in a feeding trough; we expect him to ride into Jerusalem on a war horse, but he arrives on a donkey; we expect him to vanquish Israel's enemies, but he allows them to vanquish him on the cross.

Do you feel your ordinary life can't possibly serve God's kingdom? Jesus spent years in obscurity, so there is infinite worth in our obscurity for his glory; Jesus was a carpenter, so there is infinite worth in your everyday work for his glory. Learn to glory in the ordinary, by doing it for our extraordinary King! God chooses to grow his kingdom through ordinary people doing ordinary things.

### 2. The kingdom has a middle more delayed than you desired

The Jews were expecting a complete and instantaneous coming of the kingdom, but Jesus said there was going to be a gap between his first coming and his return as Judge. There is a 'delay' from when the mustard seed is put in the ground

to when it appears, from when the yeast is put in the dough to when it rises. Jesus ushers in the kingdom but it won't be completed until he returns.

Our daily lives often have 'delays', seasons of waiting - but with these parables Jesus prepares us. In God's kingdom things often take longer than we expect but don't despair - the mustard seed is growing, the yeast is spreading!

### 3. The kingdom has an ending more glorious than you ever dreamed

The tiny mustard seed grows to a glorious tree! We see the kingdom growing now - a little hint of the glorious ending. The *'birds of the air perching in its branches'* is a reference (Ezekiel 31:6) to the nations coming into the kingdom. It's not just for Wilmslow, not just for people like us, it is for all the nations of the earth, so welcome the nations God is bringing to us here in the UK. One day God's kingdom will be glorious - a wedding banquet where Jesus is the groom, and the church is his bride, and on that day it will be all worth it! Do the ordinary things for God's glory, and let the delays teach you hope, because one day the ending will be more glorious than you ever dreamed.

# CHAT FROM THE CHAIRS

*Marc Hollinshead talks to: Ian Lawrence*

**Marc: What was life like before Wilmslow?**

Ian: I lived in Edinburgh for three years which is where I met my wife Margi. The company I was working with was opening an office in Wilmslow so that I could work there.

**Marc: And what was it that you did for work?**

Ian: At that time I worked for a Scandinavian paper manufacturer for newspaper printing in a technical services role. I left that industry in 1990 and worked for a specialist chemical company from the late 90s until retiring in 2014. I was involved with those little packets of silica gel you might see when unpacking a new phone; they absorb moisture while the product is boxed up!

**Marc: I always wondered what those were for!. So where did Christianity fit into all of this?**

Ian: I didn't become a Christian until the late 90s. I was invited by a neighbour to a Bible study at the vicarage and was led by the Holy Spirit to say yes. Looking back, I can see that was God guiding me.

**Marc: That's a great way of coming to faith. Were there any Christian influences in your life growing up?**

Ian: My parents went to a Church of England church that had a sung Eucharist (communion service) every Sunday. My brother and I were servers at the Eucharist; earlier we both sang in the choir. As a youngster, I was familiar with the liturgy, but as I look back, I think we were expected to understand the gospel simply by being exposed to it through the liturgy!

**Marc: So how does St John's compare to your experience of church earlier in life?**

Ian: It was a real pleasure to read the NIV Bible translation; previously, I only knew an older, less accessible translation. This helped to open my eyes



fully to the gospel, and one of the best things at St John's is the clear Bible teaching. Coming to faith was a slow burn for me but I can now see God's hand at work throughout my life.

**Marc: God definitely helps us even when we don't know it! How has he helped you in other parts of your life?**

Ian: The toughest time in my career was in the 90s as I found it difficult to settle into a suitable job. Although this was before I became a Christian, I think I was being disciplined as the Lord prepared me to come into his kingdom. Margi and I have been blessed with our children, Alexander and Olivia and our grandchildren, Harrison, Freya and Pippa. My immediate family as well as my church family are very important to me.

**Marc: That sounds like an amazing blessing! God is always there when we are at our lowest.**

Ian: Definitely. Some people find it hard to accept the supernatural but I know that there is someone to whom I can say 'thank-you' for all the blessings that I've received

**Marc: What a brilliant truth to end on. Thanks Ian for sharing with us.**



# WE ASKED SOME MEMBERS OF ST JOHN'S TO SHARE WITH US THEIR EXPERIENCE OF GOING THROUGH DIFFICULT TIMES....

## On losing Tom - Liz Kelly

There is an unrelenting, raw pain on the death of one's child. A numbness that shuts out God. The only way I coped was to keep working - Anything to distract from the nightmare of life at that time. I thank God for the care and prayers of others when I was helpless.

There is healing with time. One learns to trust God again and to believe he has our best interests at heart, even when we don't understand.

## When life seems to be out of control – Phil Edgington

How does God 'sustain us' though our weaknesses? Recently, I've experienced a couple of periods of sustained weakness, both mental and physical. Both emerged suddenly, both brought reactions of 'this doesn't happen to me'. I wanted to understand what God was teaching me - so I could learn it quickly and move on! But just knowing God is in control is a bedrock when life seems totally out of control. In truth the daily love and support from those close to me and those who offered the odd word or assurance of prayer was also a deeply felt 'sustaining' gift from God.

## Overcoming physical pain – Ben Wood

I suffered a back injury during my work as a gardener. I had to cut back on work and was in constant pain. This was a week before a 35 mile running race! I sensed God saying he would heal me. He gave me the passage in Isaiah 40 verses 29-31. Whilst I was only praying that God would heal me for my work, I sensed He was saying that He would also enable me to do the race. He drew my attention to Isaiah 40 verse 31 - 'They shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint.' Against all human reason, I came second to last but finished the race! He truly gave me His strength.

## Challenges within the family – Simon and Dede Gales

As many will know our daughter Sarah was severely anorexic from the age of 10½ into adulthood. It was a very difficult time for us as a family - every mealtime a battle, periods of residential treatment and the future very uncertain.

It made us cry out to God in a way that we wouldn't have done otherwise. Most of the time we didn't know how to pray and it didn't seem as if our prayers were being answered, but we had someone to call upon!

It was a great comfort to know that ultimately our heavenly Father was in control. Often it seemed as if the illness had taken control of Sarah (and the rest of us!), so it was helpful to know a bigger picture. It was a real help to know that the church family were praying for us - we were not alone.

It's only looking back we can see some good things that have come out of it:

- our marriage is deeper and closer than it would have been.
- we are more understanding of parents and children with challenging behaviour than we might have been otherwise.
- it has made us so much more thankful that today Sarah is trusting Jesus, married with a child of her own.

## Struggling with family anxiety – Andrea McConchie

For a child with autism, daily living is often confusing and overwhelming. It's often described as being like a coke bottle. Lots of stressful things happen during the school day to shake up the coke bottle and by the end of the day when they come home from school, the anxieties all become too much, and the bottle explodes! My daughter was nine years old when she was diagnosed and while I now thank God for the amazing progress she has made (now at university and living independently), there were many dark days during her school years, where she struggled to control her anger and we walked on eggshells!

I was at a loss as to how to help her and felt an enormous amount of guilt about the impact this was having on our son. I am so grateful that the Holy Spirit had led me to St John's two years earlier and that a chance conversation while on holiday led to her diagnosis and ultimately the support she needed. Knowing that I didn't need to have the answers, that I could just trust that God was in control, brought a huge sense of relief. As I reflect back, I am thankful to God for teaching me patience and for sustaining me through many good relationships; a strong marriage, close family, supportive friends and my church family. I have also had the great joy of being able to meet many families in similar circumstances and being able to help them. It has been a particular blessing to see how my daughter has helped others by sharing her experiences and coping strategies.



## Weak or **STRONG**?

Who would win in an arm wrestling contest between:



## Versus



## Versus



Did you think the stronger one of each pair would win? We think being strong is important. But let's see what God says.

Can you fill in the missing words from the verses – they are talking about Jesus!

Then write **W** for weak or **S** for strong in the little box after each sentence

Luke 22v43 An angel from heaven appeared to Jesus and s\_\_\_\_\_ him



Luke 22v61 Peter d Jesus – he is all alone



Luke 22v63 The guards began m \_\_\_\_\_ and b \_\_\_\_\_ - Jesus



Luke 23v9 Jesus gave no a



Luke 23:21 The crowd shouted c\_\_\_\_\_ h\_\_\_\_\_

Luke 23v35 The rulers s\_\_\_\_\_ at him

10


Luke 23v39 One of the criminals shouted "Aren't you the C\_\_\_\_\_? S\_\_\_\_\_ us!"

Luke 23V46 Jesus takes his last b

10

Luke 23 v52,53 Joseph took Jesus' b\_\_\_\_\_ down, w\_\_\_\_\_ it and put it in the

10

t  Count up your W s and S s. Does the cross make Jesus look W or S?

## Pigpen Cipher

Diagram showing four 3x3 grids. The first grid has letters A through I. The second grid has letters J through R. The third grid has letters S through U. The fourth grid has letters W through Z. Each grid has a diagonal line from the top-left to the bottom-right, and the letters are placed in the cells of the grid.

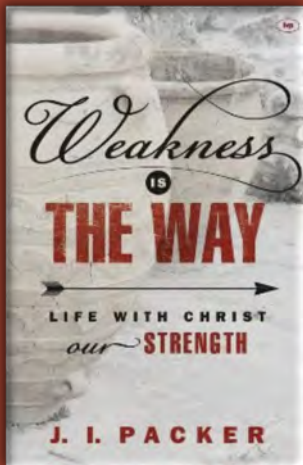
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# BOOK REVIEW

## Weakness is the Way - J. L. Packer

Reviewed by Alex Choi



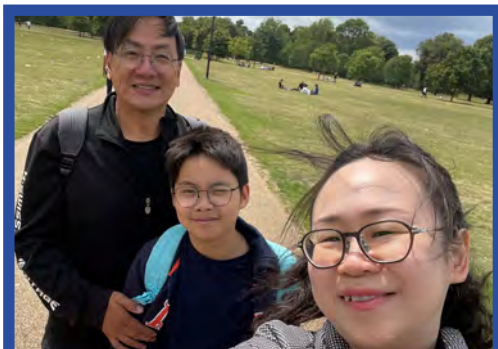
Have you ever felt inadequate? Inability or weakness in terms of physical condition, intelligence or financial situation? These weaknesses always make us feel sad and frustrated, especially so living in a highly competitive society. If you are facing any of these situations, you will definitely find this book very helpful. J. I. Packer uses Paul's second letter to Corinth to show the way for a Christian to recognise weaknesses and how we could respond to those feelings.



First of all, when we feel our disabilities, our first response maybe to deny it. However, Packer suggests that we should admit our weaknesses and respond by leaning on Christ, that we may become truly strong in the Lord. *"My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness ..... For when I am weak, then I am strong."* (2 Corinthian 12:9-10).

Second, he states that fallen human nature puts money as the supreme source of security, and even many Christians appear to have bought the view that the world is a place where the rich count and the poor don't. Packer reminds us that Christians are managers of God's money; money is given to us by God in order for us to help the needy and to spread the Gospel. If we think money could help us banish our weaknesses, we are fooling ourselves!

Lastly, (which to me is the most important part) as a Christian, we have hope in our future. Although we may face many difficulties in the world, we know that one day we will be reunited with Jesus Christ in a new world. At that time, we will enjoy wonderful things and happiness with Christ. This life on earth is temporary, but the life in the new world with Christ will be eternal. Thus, our weaknesses are temporarily experienced, but our happiness and enjoyment with Christ is eternal. For those of you thinking 'I am weak and suffering,' this book could bring you a new perspective to life.



## NEW FACES

Hi everyone, we are Danny , Desen and Sam. We first came to St. John's a few months ago. We are enjoying the friendliness of the church family, and learning the Bible at St. John's.



Hello it's Pancy from Hong Kong. I came to the U.K. with my daughter Sharlet in 2021, and settled in the northwest about year ago. I am so blessed to be part of St John's. It's not easy to leave my hometown and restart all over again, but I am thankful that have settled in quite well professionally and personally. I am now working in a British personal care company, specialising in the Asian market where my roots are. It gives me a pathway for further career development in the U.K. Although there are headwinds in-life, with God's guidance, I never feel lonely.

P

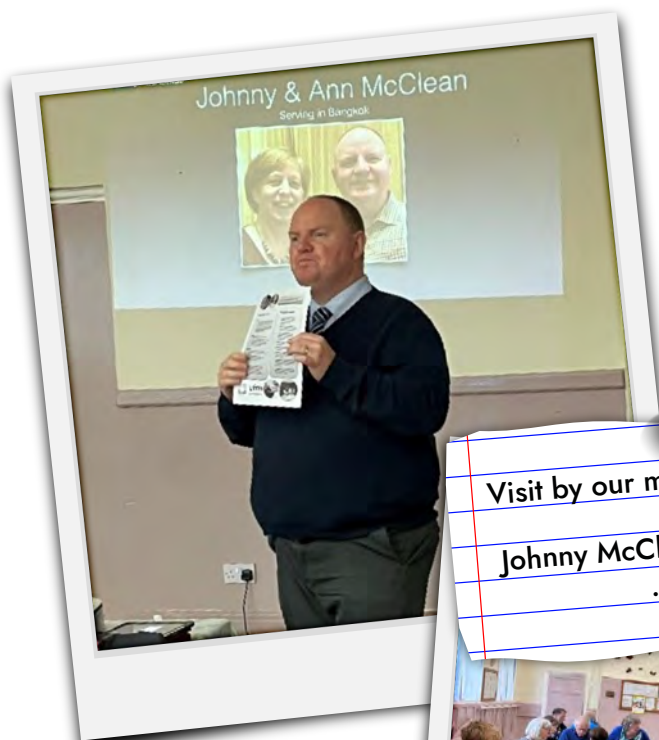
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Visit by our mission partners,  
Johnny McClean...  
...and the Baldwins



Home group  
Summer Socials!





### The Strength of Weakness

A common question asked at a job interview is 'what is your greatest weakness?' And there are all sorts of clever answers, like 'perfectionism' or 'I am too eager to please'. Of course, those are not really weaknesses at all. All too often when we think about 'the strength of weakness' we can think in these terms. An apparent weakness, which in actual fact, turns out to be a hidden strength. Our culture loves these kinds of stories - the underdog team whose dismal prospects lead to camaraderie, as they are written off yet win the cup!

It is easy to think that is how the Bible understands strength and weakness; after all wasn't Jesus' victory at the point of his greatest weakness?

But this is not how the apostle Paul understands his weakness. For Paul weakness is not some secret strength, but real weakness! *"Therefore, I will boast in my weakness, so that Christ's power may rest on me."* (2 Cor. 2:9b) The contrast is between power and weakness, but the possessors of the power and the weakness are different. Our culture says that when we feel weak, we must look for strength within. But for Paul, weakness does not expose an inner strength, but directs us to an external power – a power from God which can work in our weakness. *'My grace is sufficient for you, my power is made perfect in weakness.'* (2 Cor. 2:9a) The fact that God's 'power' here is linked with his 'grace' underlines that God's power is not something that we deserve or earn, but a free gift. The strength of weakness is that it leads to dependence on the One who is strong.


Jesus doesn't become weak (2 Cor. 13:3) but 'he was crucified in weakness'. He was willing, despite his power to do otherwise, to submit himself to

death on the cross. Yet this act of submission was followed by, and rewarded with,

resurrected power. And it is that power that now works in our weakness.

This demonstration of 'power through weakness' is something our world does not recognise. *'But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of this world to shame the strong.'* (1 Cor. 1:27) The world looks on Christ on the cross as foolish and weak. But *'God chose the weak things of this world to shame the strong.'* Christ's death on the cross, which seems weak, is, in the end, God's means of bringing victory shown through the resurrection. The very things that the world views as weakness is actually the demonstration of God's power. We see the strength of God in his rescue, through Jesus' death on the cross.

And so for us, in our weakness? I feel weak as I prepare to preach each Sunday at our small church plant. We don't have some secret weapon of strength within, but our weakness points us beyond ourselves, to the one who, 'in weakness', showed great strength and we trust He will again.



Ben was pastor of an inner-city church in Johannesburg, and on the staff of Johannesburg Bible College. He is now a church planter, at Grace Community Church, in Bury.

[www.gccb.org.uk](http://www.gccb.org.uk)

# AUTUMN/WINTER PROGRAMME

Mornings 10am	SUNDAYS	Evenings 6.30pm	HOMEGROUPS
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3 Sept	<b>Holiday Club Special 'Big Big Top'</b>		Meeting in various homes around the parish during the week (evenings and afternoons) to study God's Word and encourage and support one another.
10 Sept	<b>GOD MADE KNOWN See The Signs John 6:1-15</b>	<b>THE PATH TO GODLINESS An Unfinished Task Titus 1:1-9</b>	
17 Sept	<b>Walking On The Sea John 6:16-24</b>	<b>Teachers: True &amp; False Titus 1:10-16</b>	
24 Sept	<b>The True Bread John 6:25-40</b>	<b>Living The Good Life Titus 2:1-10</b>	
1 Oct	<b>Stewardship Review</b>	<b>Stewardship Review</b>	<b>JOHN : God Made Known</b>  During the autumn our homegroups are linked to our Sunday morning series.  Meeting weekly the groups begin on 14 <sup>th</sup> Sept and finish on 30 <sup>th</sup> Nov. Dates given are Thursdays but some groups meet at other times (full details on weekly notice sheet). One week each half term will be a Prayer Evening (see below).
8 Oct	<b>Harvest All age Parade Food for Life John 6:1-59</b>	<b>Prayer &amp; Praise evening</b>	
15 Oct	<b>Simon Byrne, True Freedom Trust</b>	<b>Why Live the New Life? Titus 2:11-15</b>	
22 Oct	<b>Hard Sayings John 6:60-71</b>	<b>The Original and Best Titus 3:1-10</b>	
29 Oct	<b>Split Reaction John 7:1-13</b>	<b>RENOVATOR'S DREAM Prayer Foundation Nehemiah 1:1-11</b>	In addition a men's fellowship meets at 6.30am Fridays  <b>MONTHLY PRAYER EVENTS (in church rooms)</b>  <b>Sat 9 Sept</b> Prayer Breakfast 8.30-9.45am  <b>Thur 12 Oct</b> Prayer Evening 8-9.30pm  <b>Thur 16 Nov</b> Prayer Evening 8-9.30pm  <b>Sat 9 Dec</b> Prayer Breakfast 8.30-9.45am
5 Nov	<b>Discover The Truth John 7:14-24</b>	<b>Lets Get Building Nehemiah 2:1-10</b>	
12 Nov	<b>Remembrance All Age Parade Jesus The Divider John 7:25-52</b>	<b>A Builder You Can Trust Nehemiah 2:11-20</b>	
19 Nov	<b>Valid Evidence John 8:12-20</b>	<b>Double Trouble Nehemiah 4:1-23</b>	
26 Nov	<b>Repeated Warnings John 8:21-30</b>	<b>Listen Up! Nehemiah 8:1-18</b>	
3 Dec	<b>ADVENT The Lord's King, Psalm 2</b>	<b>All Fall Down Nehemiah 13:1-14</b>	
10 Dec	<b>The Lord's Words, Psalm 110</b>	<b>Brass Band Carol Concert</b>	
17 Dec	<b>Nativity Presentation</b>	<b>Traditional Carol Service</b>	
24 Dec	<b>All Age Christmas Eve</b>	<b>4pm Kids' Carol Service 11pm Midnight Communion</b>	
25 Dec	<b>8am Communion 10am Family Carols</b>		

SPECIAL EVENTS	Sept 17 12.15pm Evergreens Lunch	Oct 29 12.15pm Evergreens Lunch	Dec 3 3pm Evergreens Christmas Tea
	Oct 7 9am Ladies Breakfast, church rooms	Nov 17 Northern Women's convention, Manchester	