

Annual Newsletter and Prayer Update January 2022



From - Stephen & Carole Baker, Liverpool

Looking Back

It is good habit to stop and reflect on how things have gone from time to time. As a family we are very grateful for the Lord's preservation over the last 12 months. Carole and I feel that we have avoided contracting Covid for a second time on a number of occasions. We are very aware that this could still happen, despite being fully vaccinated, but we are extremely grateful to the Lord for good health up until now. Carole's mum continues to be happy in Faith House, Belfast but it has been hard for Carole at times when she has not been able to get across to see her. Emily and James are well as are our grandchildren, Amelia and Malachi who are growing up very fast and give us great joy. Abey and Helen have now been married for over a year - a high proportion of which was in lockdown - an accelerated way to settle into married life. We are grateful that they are all well. Emily's family have just come out of Covid but Abey and Helen have avoided it to date.



The focus of our 'day to day' service for the Lord has been local due to travel restrictions and a significant amount of time has been spent on online evangelism and Bible teaching. Our local assembly in Huyton was keen to continue to preach the gospel on Facebook when we couldn't use the Hall. This has continued, on a Lord's Day at 4 pm, since we have returned to physical meetings in the hall. We also had Drive-in gospel meetings in September with Paul Jenkinson. No locals came but there were unsaved people brought along by believers.

Children's work continued online during lockdown but since we were able to meet again we had 70 plus children come to a week of children's meetings in August 2021.

Many of these children originally were brought to our Parent & Toddler Group, we also have two Syrian refugee muslim families who are bringing their children. As a result we decided to have a monthly Saturday morning children's outreach. We have had numbers in the mid twenties in October, November and December. Please pray for the parents and the children as this has given us a lot of contacts in the community.

The weekly parent and toddler group continues to be an effective method of reaching people in our area. Please pray for the parents with whom we have had a number of good conversations. Carole also volunteers for a local charity (Homestart) which supports families in crisis. This has been a great way to get to know and help needy people in our community.

We had two weeks of Gospel Outreach running up to Christmas. During this period we distributed calendars in the community, had a number of Carol Services including one in Costa Coffee and one in a community hall about two miles from our assembly hall. We were also given permission to sing carols and preach in Huyton Town Centre. Many of the contacts from the children's work came to sing carols and hear the gospel? Please pray for their salvation.

Last year I had to cancel two trips to Pakistan but the bulk of the work of supporting the saints in Pakistan has been through weekly online Bible teaching and sending funds to them as the Lord has provided. We, and they, are extremely appreciative of the generosity of individual saints and assemblies who have supported them through this period of increased poverty and medical needs. In the last year we have been able to get one Bible Teaching book on the epistle of Titus translated into Urdu and 1000 copies printed. This was well received and felt very beneficial to the believers.

The work of the Lord in Uganda has been really encouraging. I had a series of online meetings with elders in one church/assembly where they have moved from recognising one 'pastor' to accepting that a local assembly should be led by a group of elders. Sanya, the brother I have been working with, is a keen evangelist. The weekly 60 minute Bible teaching/gospel program on a local Christian radio station continues. This has been a great channel for teaching the word of God and preaching the gospel. As a result a healthy number of people (about 8) have professed faith in the Lord and have been baptised. We have worked through the gospel of Mark and are currently looking at the Epistle of Paul to the Romans.

I was also privileged to be involved in a number of other regular online Bible teaching sessions with believers in China, India and various parts of the UK. Thankfully a lot of 'in person' meetings have started again so it has been good to help other assemblies in the UK.

School work changed shape quite a lot in the last 18 months. I was visiting 6 schools before Covid hit us but that has been pulled back to 3 at the moment. One of the benefits is that I'm now allowed to go and speak to classes in all of these schools. I was invited before Christmas to talk to all of Year 5 in one school (Evelyn Street Primary) and answer their questions about Christianity. This was a great opportunity to make the gospel very relevant to the issues they raised and to answer the questions they asked. In another school (Tower College) I was invited to speak at their Prize Giving and Speech Day. It was a great thrill for me to speak to over 250 pupils plus teachers and parents. Please pray that these doors will remain open.

Prayer and Praise

We really appreciate your interest in the work of the Lord and the assurance that you pray for us regularly. I would like to highlight some items that we would love you to pray about mixed in with a number of things that we can praise the Lord for. It is so good to serve a faithful God and yet we are sure that you agree that there are often hard lessons to be learned in our walk with God. I am so glad that Paul wrote to the Corinthians (in 2nd Corinthians 3:18) that as we 'behold the glory of the Lord' that we 'are being transformed into the same image' (being made more like him) 'from glory to glory'. I think the encouraging lessons that I learn from this verse are:

1. If we spend time looking at the Lord and seeing His glory we will become more like Him,
2. The change is a process, so it doesn't happen over night (which is very encouraging when you feel that you are not making much progress),
3. The Lord, the Spirit is one who is making the change, our part is to focus on the Lord.

We have had a lot to thank the Lord for in the last twelve months and continue to have a lot to pray about. The believers in Pakistan have been a great encouragement to us. When I first was introduced to them there were 3 assemblies, there are now believers meeting in 11 different locations and even now Sohail is praying about a new work on the outskirts of B'wala. Ten souls were saved a couple of weeks ago and as a result of ongoing conversions they are regularly baptising and teaching new believers basic truths for Christian living. They constantly face poor health due to their living conditions. This year has seen a severe increase in deaths as a result of Dengue as well as Covid. But, despite their hardships they continue to serve the Lord and rejoice in salvation. They really appreciate the fact that believers in the rest of the world think about them, pray for them and send them relief. We have also had the privilege of facilitating the repatriation of 40 Pakistani believers who had been stranded in Afghanistan after the Taliban took control of the country. This was a costly and dangerous operation but the Lord provided and protected His people on the difficult journey home. Many of these dear souls, especially women, will be scarred for life as a result of the violent and oppressive way they were treated before they escaped.

We are extremely grateful to hear of souls saved regularly in Uganda, Pakistan and on a lesser scale here in Liverpool. Please pray for wisdom to be given to the elders and workers in Uganda and Pakistan as they shepherd, teach and strengthen these saints. We would also appreciate you praying in particular that the Lord will continue to develop workers in these countries to preach the gospel, teach the saints, shepherd and care for the people of God.

My role (and I didn't go looking for it) has been to help them see the importance of understanding what the scriptures say and then obeying it in all areas of life (assembly life, personal living, work life etc).

Please pray for the assembly in Huyton. We are not able to use our hall at the moment due to a very high wall collapsing and damaging the building. Someone reminded me of Psalm 62 verse three, 'a bowing wall . . . and as a tottering fence'. We definitely got one of those in Huyton. As a result, we had to find alternative premises for all of the Christmas outreach mentioned above (we were very grateful for the use of various venues) and for a number of weeks broke bread on Lord's Day's in our house. We are seeking to find a resolution with the builder whose wall caused the damage. They have accepted responsibility but we have had to wait for the opinion of the Insurance Company's Loss Adjuster and the Structural Engineer before the builder can start repairing the building. This affects many of the activities that we normally have each week. We are not sure how long it will take to repair the building so things are a little uncertain at the moment. We would appreciate your prayers for this.

To summarise here are a number of things we would appreciate prayer about.

1. Please pray for L. He listens each week to our gospel messages on Facebook and he got in touch with me last week. I met him this week and he says that he has trusted the Lord and is showing a real interest in the word of God.
2. Please pray for these Facebook gospel messages which go out on a Sunday afternoon at 4 pm. We boost them in the following week according to the Gospel Hall postcode and have had on average 100 people listening to 75% and more of the message.
3. Please continue to pray for the magazine articles which go out each month to around 100,000 people. We trust that this method of getting the Gospel before people will bear fruit in due course.
4. Please pray for the problem that we have with the damage to the Gospel Hall in Huyton.
5. Please pray for M, J and N. These are all parents who come to our Parent & Toddler Group who have shown an interest in the gospel. J and N are Spanish, from a Catholic background, we have had some good chats with them and in December they came to one of our Carol services.
6. Please pray for the work in schools.
7. Please pray for Radio Work both here in the UK, South Africa and in Uganda. Pray that the UK opportunity will continue and that the programs will engage people. The program is broadcast on Sunday morning from 8 to 9. Please remember the monthly gospel radio slot I have on a South African radio station. This has been a great opportunity to present the gospel to many people in that part of the world.
8. Pray about potential trips to Pakistan and Uganda.
9. Thank the Lord for the progress made in new believers lives. C, who has been saved for just short of one year (through the open air work on a Tuesday) was baptised recently and P continues to make good progress. It is always encouraging to see growth in believers.

Thanks for your fellowship in the gospel.

Stephen & Carole

