

Life on the Frontline Transcript

Session 1 – The Frontline Call

Meet Anne. Anne always thinks of herself as fairly ordinary: just an ordinary, single, middle-aged mum with an ordinary tiring job. She navigates through the ordinary dramas of life but at the end of the day she just gets on with it. Nothing to shout about, nothing to write home about – at least that's what she feels. But the truth is, Anne doesn't get too much time to think about all this because Anne is busy. She has lots of people making demands on her: she has children that need to be taken to school, to friends, to shops and often feels like a taxi driver. But she's not a taxi driver, she's a teaching assistant in a challenging school. She supports the teacher, puts up displays, and works with small groups of children, at times acting like a cross between a sheep dog and a NATO peacekeeping force.

Anne enjoys her job, most days. She gets home really tired just in time to put on her taxi driver's hat on again. So to keep fit, she goes to her aerobics class twice a week. To keep sane, she makes sure she has time for friends who can share the good times and bad times with her. At the end of the day, she winds down in front of the telly whilst talking to her parents on the phone, feeling slightly guilty she's not seen them for a while. That's Anne.

One other thing about Anne. A few years ago she became a Christian and since then she's lived with a question that won't go away: How can I be used by God? She's looked around church but it's not so easy to know what she can offer. She can't play musical instruments, doesn't want to get involved with children's work, hasn't enough experience to lead a small group and would only be asked to sing if she was the last person on earth. However, she's part of the crèche rota and because she has a nice smile she's part of the welcome team. But to her, it all feels too little.

She's fallen into the trap that loads of us have fallen into - thinking that God only wants to use us in activities that are linked to church programmes. But the reality is that Anne has frontlines all around her - places where she spends much of her time, where God has already placed her and where He is using her to make a difference: at work, at home, in cafes, in her aerobic classes. She's surrounded by people that God loves and she can pray for, drop in the odd encouraging word, continue to love in practical ways and really make a difference. This is her mission field. These are the strategic places where God has placed her. This is her frontline.

So here's the question: what would she feel about her life if she realised in fact this ordinary life is no ordinary life at all?

She'll still be the taxi driver for the kids on the back seat, but she'd see that her calling as a parent goes far beyond caring. She'd realise she's the best teacher these kids will ever have, about how to live the unnatural life as a Christian: unnatural forgiveness, unnatural grace, unnatural mercy – all need to be seen to be believed. But when seen, they'll never forget the power of this memory. Used by God.

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At work she might not feel hugely important: after all she's not running the school. The truth is, she is far more significant than that. She's an agent of the Kingdom, the Kingdom whose King rules the universe. As she works diligently, she's already demonstrating the difference that being a Christian can make to life. When some of the big questions of life come up, as they do from time to time, she's got real wisdom to share. Used by God.

When she's with her friends, she talks about her life and faith with humour, honesty and a welcome sense of normality, and she's praying her friends join her in her faith with Jesus. Used by God.

Whilst her aerobic classes is no place to be singing 'shine Jesus shine' whilst desperately fighting for breath, it continues to do her good. She feels just a bit more alive at the end of each session and goes home with just a touch more resilience, as she mediates between children wanting to watch different channels on the same TV. Used by God.

And Anne wonders how God can use her? Anne look around you, this is your frontline - the frontline that God wants to use you on. The one he has placed you in. The frontline that he is using to form you into the shape of Jesus. It's the frontline unique to you because there is no one exactly like Anne. Is there? Except Reg who retired years ago and Beth who's at college having a great time and Kwame in the bank and Nicola who's looking for a job and Graham and Elaine who's just had a baby and Sharon and Zoe and Matt and Danielle and Susan and Toni and Paul and...and...you!

[Neil Hudson - Imagine Project Director] If you ever get the chance to come to London, you need to come to Primrose Hill. It's a brilliant panorama and suddenly you begin to see how the whole city fits together, and it works because you're close enough to the city to be in it but just distant enough to get an idea of the big picture. We hope these sessions that you're involved with together will do exactly the same for your own life. That actually you'll understand together, what it means to be a whole-life discipling church. That together, you might be able to encourage one another and support one another on your own frontlines where God has already placed you, that you might be able to make a difference for Him there.

Over the last few years, we've worked with loads of churches who want to become whole-life discipling churches. Churches that want to take seriously the call to equip people to make a difference where they already are. And we've met hundreds of people like Anne. People who know God could actually use them where they already are but they just long for some support and help to equip them further. We trust that is what is going to happen in these sessions. That together, your conversations, your bible readings, your bible studies and your prayers will actually enable you to make a difference when you're not together, when you're living your life on your frontline. Our intention is that together, we grow as whole-life disciples. We trust you'll enjoy the journey, that it's provocative, that it enables you to hear from God in new ways and that you will be faithful, so that whatever you do, in word or deed, you'll do it for the glory of Jesus and for the sake of His Kingdom.

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Session 2 – The Frontline Commission.

Have you ever been on holiday? Relaxing in the evening warm, having enjoyed a day of sun and sand and you've thought: 'If only we could stay'. Maybe you've walked down the street and you've seen the adverts on the billboards and they've promised that it could be you, you could win, and you've thought: 'If only we could win. If it only it was us, it would change everything.'

Maybe you've been watching daytime TV and you see stories of people who swap houses or find cash in their attics or find antiques that are worth thousands, and you've thought, 'If only it could happen to us, our lives could be different!'

Maybe you've even looked at your own family and thought, 'If only they were different then I'd be a better Christian to be honest!' Or 'If my church was more dynamic or inclusive or more relevant or more...' you fill out your own blank. 'If the church was different, I'd be a better Christian'. 'If these things change then I would be different'. If only.

If only I could be somewhere else.

What do you do if your hopes of 'If only' are not answered? If the prayers for a different way of life are not granted. What happens then?

Let me introduce you to Ed. I met Ed on a Sunday morning, he'd been leading worship and I'd been preaching. We were chatting at the end of the service about what he'd been up to, and what his hopes and dreams were. He explained what he really wanted to do was to go to Bible college to learn how to lead worship even better, because the job he was in he hated. It was a job that he was over-qualified for, he was demotivated and it just wasn't where he wanted to be. He explained to me that he had been praying for two years for God to get him out of the situation, and he asked me to pray for him.

I started to think and wonder about whether this would be really the right thing to do. So I said to him, 'If you have been praying for two years, maybe the reason you're not out of your job is because God wants you to stay'. One of the things I reminded Ed about was the story of Jeremiah, where the people of God were effectively saying the same thing as Ed. They were saying that they were in the wrong place with the wrong people at the wrong time, having to do the wrong things: we're in exile. Jeremiah the prophet had to remind the people that actually where you already are, you might be able to make the biggest difference. I suggested to Ed, maybe that was his role and his calling at the moment. We continued to talk more and then left each other.

Three months later, we met up again. And he said 'Do you remember that conversation about work, about my frustration about being in that job? Well what I decided to do was to simply go to work a few minutes early. So I went early, met the lads, got involved in the conversations, listened to their jokes, listened to what was going on and got to know them. And they got to know me. Bit by bit they realised I was a Christian. And one or two of them began to ask whether I would pray for them and shared some of the things that were going

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on in their lives. I still feel I'm in the wrong job; I hate my job really. It's just that now I've found a bigger purpose for it'.

So what had Ed missed? Well, he clearly missed the fact that God might be at work in that situation. He missed the fact that although he hated his job and was bored silly by it, that actually he could find some fulfilment and excitement in the mission that he carried as a Christian. Perhaps linked to that, what he missed most of all was his identity. That actually, God wasn't playing hide and seek with him or had abandoned him. God had placed him there as one of His agents - an agent of the Kingdom.

You see it is that idea that really what God wants to do, is to use us in the ordinary areas of life. The areas of our life that are not that exciting. Now, that doesn't come as good news to some Christians because what they want to believe is that when you sign up to follow Jesus, life gets exciting and he takes you to exotic places and suddenly this adventurous life begins. Well, there might be moments of that in our Christian life but it's probably more normal when it's in the ordinary, and sometimes the ordinary is not that exciting.

That's why the passage in Jeremiah 29:4-7 is so important: *'This is what the Lord Almighty, the God of Israel, says to all those I carried into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon: build houses and settle down; plant gardens and eat what they produce. Marry and have sons and daughters; find wives for your sons and give your daughters in marriage, so that they too may have sons and daughters. Increase in number there; do not decrease. Also, seek the peace and prosperity of the city to which I have carried you into exile. Pray to the Lord for it, because if it prospers, you too will prosper'*. Then later on in verse 11 it says: *'For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future'*.

These people of Israel have been taken out of Jerusalem, taken out of their own country, taken away from all they knew and from the temple. They felt they were in a place they didn't relate to and couldn't understand how this new place worked. Babylon! Not only a new place, but the enemy. Not only a new place but one that was hostile to their own faith. Not only a new place but one where they would have to learn what it meant to worship and to follow Yahweh, Jehovah, in a new place.

From Jerusalem to Babylon is a long trek. But from understanding life in Jerusalem to life in Babylon, that's a massive journey. But it's in Babylon that they put into practice everything that they've learnt in Judea. It's in Babylon that they live out what it really means to be God's people and it's in Babylon they live it out for the sake of Babylon. They are called to pray for the peace and the blessing of Babylon, that it may prosper.

I suspect that there's loads of people like Ed. I bet there are people like that in your church. It might even be you. People who feel that this isn't working, that they wish they were somewhere else. I suppose the question for all of us is: can we get a big enough vision of the lordship of Jesus that enables us to believe that God can use us – even when we feel like we are in the wrong place?

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Session 3 – The Frontline Community

For some people, they think the Christian faith is all about being safe. They see that their faith protects them from all the things that would bring them harm. And for some people, they then think church is there as a safe place, but I'm not sure Jesus ever intended it to be like that. I think actually these borders that we keep quite high, stop us from being used by God wherever He has placed us, the place we call our frontline. I wonder if this protection, these hedges, actually stop us from seeing people who are around us. Let me tell you about three women I knew.

One was barely mobile, living in a sheltered dwelling and shuffling along with a zimmer to make sure she stays stable. The other two are in their mid-sixties and it would have been easy for them to think that actually this is the time of life to just sit back and relax, let others do stuff. They've done their bit. They've worked, been involved in children's work, church life and family life. It could have been easy for them to think now is our time to sit back. But they didn't think like that. If you would have over-looked them, you would have been much mistaken and you would have missed a great story.

Alice was the barely mobile one, but she recognised that the house group that met in her home could actually do more in the place where she lived than just meet as a house group every week. So one year, they offered an Easter service and invited all the residents to come along and some came. Then there was a mother's day service that came later and a Christmas service followed. The house group knocked on every door and invited all the residents. Pat and Shirley were part of this group and they came to the services, but they then realised they could do something here with Alice perhaps every week, maybe something more than just a special occasion service and more long term.

So they started really gently. They baked scones, brought some music and chatted to people every Wednesday afternoon. Occasionally they'd ask one of the church leaders to come along and share a thought with people. After a while, they realised they didn't really need the church leader to come and over the next five years or so, they developed the scones and tea time into a place where prayer was offered, some hymns were sang and people were encouraged. They were there when one of the residents died. When the family asked Pat and Shirley to do the funeral their response was 'we're not ministers'. Then the reply came, 'You were to my mum'. During those years, Alice died but the services continued and they still do. Pat has just moved into a retirement apartment so this has become her primary frontline. But she'll get help there because there's another team from the church coming who will do the lunch and the hymns. So the mission continues.

So what sort of communities produces people like that? Well, it's communities like your own. Church groups like your own. House groups like yours. Made up of people with different personalities, different giftings and different experiences. But groups who will say we have one mission: to enable people to live well on the frontlines for Christ and to make a difference there. This is not new news of course, it's what we were always supposed to be doing.

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We see it in Paul's letters to the early Christians in the first century. He's trying to explain to them just what they're supposed to be doing and what he wants for them. Let me read a little part from his letter to the Colossians. I'm reading it from the Message version and so it's a kind of a paraphrase that tries to take the meaning and put it into contemporary language.

Colossians 3:9-17: 'Don't lie to one another. You're done with that old life. It's like a filthy set of ill-fitting clothes you've stripped off and put in the fire. Now you're dressed in a new wardrobe. Every item of your new way of life is custom-made by the Creator, with his label on it. All the old fashions are now obsolete. Words like Jewish and non-Jewish, religious and irreligious, insider and outsider, uncivilized and uncouth, slave and free, mean nothing. From now on everyone is defined by Christ, everyone is included in Christ. So, chosen by God for this new life of love, dress in the wardrobe God picked out for you: compassion, kindness, humility, quiet strength, discipline. Be even-tempered, content with second place, quick to forgive an offense. Forgive as quickly and completely as the Master forgave you. And regardless of what else you put on, wear love. It's your basic, all-purpose garment. Never be without it. Let the peace of Christ keep you in tune with each other, in step with each other. None of this going off and doing your own thing. And cultivate thankfulness. Let the Word of Christ—the Message—have the run of the house. Give it plenty of room in your lives. Instruct and direct one another using good common sense. And sing, sing your hearts out to God! Let every detail in your lives—words, actions, whatever—be done in the name of the Master, Jesus, thanking God the Father every step of the way.'

What Paul does is talk to the Christians in Colossae (southern Turkey area) and he says to them: 'You have the chance together to learn a whole different way of life'. This way of the kingdom is not natural. You need to act in ways that don't always come easy. Things like forgiveness, things like love, things like humility, things like discipline, things like compassion even, they don't come naturally often. We need one another to help us. We need one another to remind us of the bigger story. We need people around us who are going to encourage us to walk that way. And Paul said get these attitudes at the heart of who you are.

Now the really good thing about this is it's not us trying harder to turn over a new leaf or summon up all our energy to better people, of course the Spirit is involved in this. But so are the people in your group. It's not the Spirit alone, it's the Spirit and working through the lives of the church, the people. The people you're sitting with tonight.

It's when we stop thinking of church as just being there to protect us. It's about ensuring that it's not about safety, it's not about protecting ourselves. It's not about keeping these hedges high. But it's actually about allowing all that's happened inside our groups, inside our church, inside us as individuals, to spill out into the everyday, into our frontline. To actually take what we've learnt here and make a difference in the world around us, on our frontlines, wherever they may be.

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Session 4 – The Frontline Concern

So you know you have a frontline. You know God wants to use you there. You know God can really make a difference where you are. But what do you do? Maybe the problem is, sometimes there is just too much to do, too many opportunities, where do you even begin? Or maybe it's difficult because it's really hard to spot what God might actually want you to do. Or maybe it's because life is really busy. And actually, surviving is good enough.

Maybe what God actually wants you to do is to be aware of his Spirit, be aware of the nudges, be aware of the everyday and actually to discern what He might be saying to you in the very ordinary stuff of the frontline of life, just the ordinary everyday encounters. We're called to make a difference there.

It's an ordinary day for Peter and John. They were going up to the temple around the time of prayer to pray. It's what they did, it was just an ordinary day. And for another man, it was an ordinary day. A man who was crippled from birth who everyday was laid by the temple gate to beg. An ordinary day.

The account is in Acts 3, it's a story you probably know really well. But listen to how Luke tells the story: *'A man crippled from birth was being carried to the temple gate called Beautiful, where he was put every day to beg from those going into the temple courts. When he saw Peter and John about to enter, he asked them for money. Peter looked straight at him, as did John. Then Peter said, "Look at us!" So the man gave them his attention, expecting to get something from them'*. Just an ordinary day.

'Can you spare some change, can you help me?', and Peter stops and looks and John looks. Peter says to the man 'look at us!' and the man gives them his attention. It's that look that kicks off everything else because they explain to him that there is healing available to him and life can be different. From that moment, when the man is healed, all manner of things begin. The man is ecstatic: leaping, dancing and singing, he's joyous. He can't believe his luck. And Peter has to explain to the crowd what has happened so he explains actually it's not Peter and John who have done this but it's because of Jesus that the man is healed. Peter and John are carted off to the Sanhedrin, they have to give an account of what's gone on, and they put them in prison overnight and they're left there. The next morning they come out and they have to explain again why this has happened. The leaders tell Peter and John 'you're not to mention this man Jesus because He causes too much trouble'. They say, 'Well, we can't promise that'.

Let me introduce you to John. John was an environmental health officer in his city, just an ordinary day doing another ordinary call to an ordinary baker in the city. The bakery had been reported to have had some problems and John found that it had significant issues that needed to be sorted out. It was Thursday and he said 'You need to have this place sorted by Monday otherwise I'm going to have to get you close down, there's nothing else for it.'

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So as he left, obviously the guy was upset and so was John. John went home that day and the guy that he'd met at the bakery stayed in his memory. He was used to this, he did it every day of his life, but this case bothered him. So the next morning, John went back to see the baker to find out why he was so upset. The guy said 'I don't think I can do this, I'm going to have to close down. I've got a family wedding this weekend and if I don't go and the family doesn't go, there's an honour thing, there'll be shame. I can't not go and I don't know how I can do both'. And John said 'I'll tell you what we'll do, give me your keys and I'll be back on Monday to inspect again'.

John went home and rang his house group and he said 'How do you feel about getting involved in deep cleaning a bakery this weekend?'. His house group turned up first thing that Saturday morning and they deep cleaned that bakery from top to bottom. It took them all weekend, but they did it. Monday morning John is there again, waiting for the guy with the keys. And he said to the owner 'I'm here to inspect your premises, but I think you're going to pass'. He gave him the keys, then he gave him the certificate. The man asked 'why did you do that?' John explained 'well, this might sound a bit odd but I've received mercy and I just wanted to offer some to you'.

Well the man understandably wanted to know more about this mercy and so John had a chance to talk about Jesus and he began going to church with him to explore what this faith actually means. With a story like that you would, wouldn't you?

Just an ordinary day for John. But an ordinary day where he took notice of what was happening around him, took notice of the reactions and found in the midst of an ordinary day, a chance for God to reveal something of his grace.

Two men, one in the first century, an apostle, got the attention of someone asking for help and in so doing, something remarkable began. Another man in the 21st century, an environmental health officer who just took the time to notice something different and because of that a brand new story began for him and the man he helped.

The challenge that each of us have to take is to be aware of what is happening around us, realising what God is calling us to do, taking notice of the people around us and then getting to grips with what we're supposed to do.

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Sessions 5 – The Frontline Call

Several years ago I was a governor of a local secondary school and because they knew I was a church leader, when there was a special event like a carol service or a special assembly, they say to me 'Neil, would you come and say a little prayer?'. I used to say, 'what do you mean?'. 'Well just something to start the evening off or to finish the evening. Would you just do a little prayer' they would reply. And I wanted to scream at them...a 'little prayer'?! This is God of the universe we're talking about. The God who holds stars and planets and creates us. A little prayer?

Instead of screaming and shouting at them, I didn't, I just smiled and agreed to say a little prayer. Though as I prayed, I always wondered: what would happen if God answered this prayer? What would it look like around here, what would happen to the school if God answered the prayer? This 'little prayer', something that's not that important, something that doesn't count for much, something to just make us feel a little better, a little prayer just to get us by. Is there such a thing as just a little prayer? I don't think so.

It's interesting that Jesus teaches his disciples how to pray. He doesn't assume you'll automatically know how to do it. He gives them a template, an outline of things to pray about, things to ask their Father for. This is what he said:

'This is how you should pray. Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread, forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors, and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one'.

These are big words. These are huge words really. Hallowed. Kingdom. Your Kingdom come. Your will be done. Lead us not into temptation. Deliver us from the evil one. These are big concepts that Jesus introduces to the disciples who want to learn how to pray. But you need to hear as well that they are subversive words. They are words that long for something different. They are words that say may the beauty of heaven and the truth of heaven, the justice of heaven, may something of the righteousness of heaven be seen here on earth. May you make a difference, may it change. May it change down my street. May it change in my family. May it change in my workplace, may it change on my frontline. May Your will be done. May we see a difference.

This can all sound a long way away from our ordinary lives. We can keep the Kingdom word safe, we can keep it in church locked away safely from the real issues in the real world. Indeed, we might discuss weighty theological matters together, only to finish by saying, '...yeah but in the real world'. And everything is dismissed. Things like God's will and Kingdom get reduced to size.

But in the meantime, it's important to know that God places us in the frontlines where we're called to do the most subversive thing imaginable. In the midst of people who think that they are in charge of their own destinies, we pray that God's purposes will be done.

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This is dangerous stuff we're praying with. What would happen if God answered that prayer? What would it look like? What would our part in all of this be?

We need to pray, trusting that God will act in his way. We need to proclaim, to tell people what we know in our own words. We need to practise our faith in ways that make people realise this is a whole way of life. What might that look like?

Let me introduce you to Ruth. For years Ruth had been a stay-at-home mum and as her children grew older and more independent, she decided to go back into the workplace. So she signed on and began working in a college that took some of the most disaffected young people in her town. They worked with these youngsters to try and help them get into employment. It was a whole new world for Ruth. It was a world she wasn't that confident about in many ways and some of these kids were quite damaged and they were quite difficult to deal with, but Ruth knowing she was going back to work and knowing this was the context in which she was working, actually approached her church and said 'will you pray for me? Will you pray that I might be able to just carry something of the light of Jesus there? Can you pray that I'll be able to make a difference?'

Well they did pray. What she found was, after a few months of working there, some of the kids that she'd worked with began to say 'Miss, we've noticed that there's something different about you. You don't seem like the rest of the staff, what is it about you?'. There was one of those girls in particular that she was able to have long conversations with and say well actually the reason I'm different is because I'm a Christian. She told her about faith, told her about Jesus and talked to her about church. And the girl said 'well, could I come to church with you Miss, could you help me understand more' and Ruth introduced the girl to church and to the community of faith there and bit by bit the girl started to get it. To understand what it meant to be a Christian, to be a follower of Jesus

And it began because one lady had prayed the prayer, may Your Kingdom come and may Your will be done on my frontline, through me, where I am. And it meant another young life had heard a better message about hope, that her life might be different than she ever could have imagined.

So in this session, we want to give you an opportunity to think about your own lives. Like Ruth, times when you've prayed that God will use you and that through you, his Kingdom indeed might be made manifest in the world, that the will of God might be done in and through your life. Why don't you think about prayer, the things you pray for and how you pray, your attitudes to prayer, times where you've seen God answer your prayers and the times when perhaps you haven't.

We trust you'll enjoy sharing your own adventures in prayer, praying that the Kingdom would come, praying that God's will might be done – on your frontline as it is in Heaven!

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Session 6 – The Frontline Commitment

This is a situation and an experience you might have had: you might have been new to a church for a few weeks, just settled in and got to know people and actually decide yeah, this is the place I'd like to be. Someone will come along to you and have a conversation that goes a little bit like this: 'We are delighted that you've been part of us, it's great that you're making relationships and you look so comfortable in the church. But, we were just wondering [and they might struggle to finish this sentence, but they'll get there], we were just wondering how we might best use you? Have you ever been involved in children's work? What about young people? Do you play a musical instrument? Do you ever long to make coffee at the end of church? Or dreamt of cleaning the church hall when no one else is there?' And if you say, 'well actually none of that has ever been my dream' they'll say, '...well, you've got a nice smile; would you like to be part of the welcome team?'

Of course what they want to do is make you feel like you belong, they need you to belong. They probably need you to do some of those jobs to be honest, and it's right that you do get involved. But what would a different conversation look like? What if they said to you, 'we are delighted that you've been part of us and we're so thrilled that you are building these new relationships and we were just wondering, where is God already using you and how can we best equip you? Because we know what you're involved in will make a difference to us and our lives together, because what God is doing through you will change the way we have to do things.' That would be a different conversation wouldn't it? That would be a conversation that gives you an idea you're in a different sort of place. That would be a conversation that would remind you that the outside is going to make a difference to the inside.

It would have indicated that it's not just about all the things that we do together, but it's actually about what you're doing wherever you spend most of your time and that actually our life here together in church, the inside as it were, is to help equip you and sustain you, and nurture you for your life on the outside. That actually that's where you're most able to minister for God and our life here is to equip you. Over the weeks, we've spent a lot of time talking about this. It's not just that the inside equips you for the outside but actually the outside should effect the inside.

We see this in the early church. And it's linked to one of the passages that we dealt with in an earlier session when Peter and John had healed the man at the Beautiful gate- you remember the occasion where just by a look, a whole number of events take place. In this session, I want us to pick it up when they actually go back to the gathered church. The church that has been praying for them and they tell their story about what's happened when they've been away from the gathered church.

We pick it up in Acts chapter 4 and this is how it goes: '*On their release, Peter and John went back to their own people and reported all that the chief priests and the elders had said to them. When they heard this, they raised their voices together in prayer to God. "Sovereign Lord," they said, "you made the heavens and the earth and the sea, and everything in them. You spoke by the Holy Spirit through the mouth of your servant, our*

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father David: "Why do the nations rage and the peoples plot in vain? The kings of the earth take their stand and the rulers gather together against the Lord and against his anointed one. Indeed Herod and Pontius Pilate met together with the Gentiles and the people of Israel in this city to conspire against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed. They did what your power and will had decided beforehand should happen. Now, Lord, consider their threats and enable your servants to speak your word with great boldness. Stretch out your hand to heal and perform miraculous signs and wonders through the name of your holy servant Jesus." After they prayed, the place where they were meeting was shaken. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God boldly'.

They had seen the miracle and they'd had to address the crowds. They had been held by the Sanhedrin and called to the court to give an account of themselves. They'd been held in captivity overnight. And here they were, having told their story to the church and the church prayed. But listen to how they prayed. They didn't pray 'Oh God protect us from those people who want to do harm to us'. They didn't pray 'God guard us from this happening again'. They didn't even pray 'God get them!'. They prayed, 'Lord, consider what has happened and enable us to speak boldly'. In other words, 'Lord you know what is going on here, you know the political situation we are in. You know the tricky scenario we are living in. But Lord will you help us to do what we need to do where we are'. And the Spirit filled them again, the place was shaken and they continued to speak with boldness.

Kind of intriguing, isn't it? That actually as they tell their story about what's gone on on the 'outside', that actually their prayer together on the 'inside' is different. And their expectation of God is different. And their experience of God is different.

Where have you been today? Some of you have been teachers, and you've had to be dealing with the challenges of a classroom, challenges of the expectation of the role of the job and other staff members. I wonder how that is changing your conversation this evening. Some of you will have been in shops and you'll have had to deal with awkward customers or tiresome, boring jobs that just have to be done, and there would have been a challenge to how you do those jobs. Some of you might have been in business and having to work out how do you deal with people with justice and fairness. Some of you will have been dealing with older people perhaps and caring for them, and thinking through how do you do that well?

Wherever you've been, how do those experiences change your experience tonight, as a group together, and the conversations you're having here and now? Sometimes these conversations change a whole church. And a whole church takes on board what's been going on in peoples' outside lives.

Paul and Pearl are fully involved in their local church: they have been all their lives. They're fully engaged in children's work, and they're gifted and they're committed and they're determined that the children in church will have a chance to explore faith in a way that will make sense for themselves and that could be a bedrock for their own lives. But that's not what takes all their time. As well as work and their own family and their elderly

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parents, all these people who need caring for, they also foster young children and they bring those children to church with them. Every new child that comes is introduced to the church and we pray for them. We pray that whatever has been disruptive in their lives, whatever has led them to this moment, that the Lord might really be with them and present to them and care for them.

It's important that the church recognizes that there are new children as part of our church family, at least for a little while. They need to get to know these children, they need to know their names, they need to know who they are. These children might only be part of the church for a very short time, so it's important that the church takes notice of them. Paul and Pearl appreciate the fact that the church wants to get involved in supporting them as they support these young children in this difficult period of their lives. But actually, their life of fostering is changing our life together. And we value that and we want that to happen. Fostering is not everybody's vocation; it's not everybody who would want to be involved with that. But everybody does have a frontline outside. And every church needs to be shaped by it. We need to recognise that the outside will enable our life together to be richer, that actually we will grow together and might even experience more of God and different things of God.

In this final session, we want you to bring together some of the conversations you have already had, and to think through: what will life look like as a small group or as a church as you move forward?

What will you do together?

How will you support one another?

What prayers might you end up praying?

What conversations will you have?

And might you even hear the ripple of a building being shaken as God does something new amongst you?

We hope so, as you continue to live your life as a whole-life disciple.