



# NEWSLETTER

DECEMBER 2025

## LOVE CAME DOWN AT CHRISTMAS

by John Stott, (1921-2011) Pastor, theologian and leader of the worldwide evangelical movement



There is something extremely attractive in the story of the shepherds in Luke's Gospel (Luke 2: 1-20). Apart from Jesus Himself who of course was the very centre of the Christmas story, flanked on one side by Joseph and on the other by Mary, it is surely the shepherds who are the most popular characters, and they are always featured prominently in every nativity play.

For myself, I am so glad that God did not choose to announce the birth of Jesus to the Roman emperor, Augustus, who is mentioned in verse 1 as part of the background to the story (I doubt if Augustus Caesar ever heard of Jesus). Nor did God announce the birth of the Saviour of the world to Quirinius, the governor or procurator of Syria at that time (verse 2), or to King Herod the Great (pompous fool that he was), although of course Herod came to hear about the birth later and did his best to destroy Jesus. Moreover, it was not announced either to the high priest or to any of the other priests in the hierarchy of the temple in Jerusalem.

And it was not even announced to those mysterious magi, although they, too, heard about it and came later. No, the wonderful thing is that God chose to announce the most stupendous news that the world has ever heard to simple shepherds, to ordinary folk like us. Isn't that marvellous? The shepherds were going about their everyday business, making sure that the sheep had adequate pasture. At night, in particular, they had to be on the alert because wolves were around. But those shepherds had no expectation whatsoever that anything out of the ordinary was going to happen that night. In fact, when the vision of the angels and of the glory of the Lord around them appeared, they were at first filled with terror, not joy. The joy came later.

So, the question I want to ask and try to answer is this: what did the shepherds do after the angels had gone back to Heaven and the glory of the Lord had disappeared? What did they do after the first Christmas carol had finished and the darkness and the silence had descended on the fields again, and after everything had become normal once more? What did they do, and what should we do?

I think the answer to this question may be found as we consider the implications of Luke's account - a story of how love came down from Heaven at Christmas, and how the shepherds responded to the love that came.

## EXAMINE THE EVIDENCE



The first thing we are told is that the shepherds went to Bethlehem to see for themselves. They said to one another: "Let's go see" (verse 15). I love that. They were not content with hearsay but determined to go and find out for themselves if what they had been told was true, and what it all meant. So, they neither laughed it off and dismissed their experience as hallucination, nor accepted it without critical investigation. They hurried off

and found exactly what they had been told they would find-Joseph and Mary, and the Baby lying in a manger.

Dear friends, I pray that we can learn from those shepherds that the right response to the Christmas story is neither credulity nor incredulity, for neither of those extremes is right. The correct response is an open-minded, unprejudiced inquiry as to whether these things might be true. I wish there were more of this "Let's go and see" mentality among us today. And I wish there were more willingness to move away from agnosticism into investigation.

Now, of course, we cannot go to Bethlehem as the shepherds did. Or at least, we could go, but it would not help us very much. Oh yes, we could find there are fields outside Bethlehem and we could sense the atmosphere, but we would not find the Jesus we were seeking.

So, where shall we look for this Jesus in order to find Him today? He is not in a manger cradle now, so where is He? Martin Luther, the great German theologian reformer at the beginning of the 16th century, said,

**“Scripture is the cradle of the Christ,”**

which is a beautiful phrase describing the Bible as a kind of manger in which the Baby Jesus is lying. Here then lies the answer - if you want to find Jesus, you must pick up the Bible and read it, for I think I can say without fear of contradiction that the major, if not the overriding, purpose of the Bible is to point people to Jesus Christ. The Bible - Old and New Testaments alike, and especially the New - points us to Jesus Christ. He is the centre of the biblical revelation, and the Bible is God’s book about Christ. So, I am distressed by the number of educated - I am tempted to say otherwise educated-people who have condemned Christianity unheard. They have not read the New Testament since they were kids, nor ever investigated the credentials of Christianity; they have never read the foundation documents, the Gospels and the Epistles, and they have rejected them unheard. That is not intellectually honest.



Maybe this Christmas somebody will be challenged to get that book down and read especially the Gospels that tell the story of Jesus. There is plenty of evidence there on which to base a rational conviction about the truth of Jesus Christ. For example, there are the stupendous claims that Jesus made. Here was a simple peasant from the carpenter’s shop in Nazareth on the outskirts of the Roman Empire, who said that He had the authority to forgive sins.

Moreover, Jesus claimed that He was going to be the central figure of the Judgment Day, that He would come back and sit on the throne of His glory and that all the nations would be gathered before Him, and He would separate them from one another as a shepherd separates sheep from goats, and our final destiny would be revealed (Mathew 25:31-46).

Consider next the beauty of His moral character, for Jesus never sinned. His was a life full of love, humility and gentleness that have been the envy and admiration of the world. And then, there is plenty of circumstantial and historical evidence of the literal resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. But I fear that often we make up our minds before we have investigated the evidence. The shepherds did not do that - they said: “Let’s go see; let’s find out.”

One final thing to consider is the promise Jesus made in the Sermon on the Mount: “Seek and you will find,” He said (cf. Matthew 7:7). So, everybody who seeks will find what they are looking for. I wonder if the reason you may not have found Jesus Christ is because you have never sought Him?

## LIVE THE TRANSFORMED LIFE

Thirdly, the shepherds returned to the fields near Bethlehem. From verse 20, we see that when they went back they were glorifying and praising God for everything that they had seen and heard. In other words, they worshipped as well as witnessed.



I like those words – *‘they returned’*.

The shepherds did not spend the rest of their lives in the stable. They returned back to their flocks, and back in due course to wife and family and home. But they went back different, for the shepherds returned to their old jobs and to their old homes in a new spirit. They had been changed by meeting Jesus, and the spirit of wonder and worship had entered into their hearts; they had heard the angelic choir praising God, and now they wanted to praise God themselves.

We, too, have to return to the same spouse, the same kids, the same home and the same job. But not in the same old way! The discovery of Jesus can change our lives, for it is a transforming experience. As Billy Graham has often said throughout his ministry, “Christ will put a new spring in your step and a light in your eye and a smile on your face.”

And it is true - we go back to the same old context but in a brand-new way. Do you understand now why I find those shepherds so attractive? I am very grateful to those shepherds, for I have learned a lot from them. I admire the sequence of events in which they were caught up - first they went to see for themselves, then they went to tell, to spread the word, and then they glorified and praised God. What is the common denominator of those three things? It has to do with their eyes. First, they said, “Let’s go see.” When they got there, they saw Jesus, and as a result of what they saw, they spread the word. But they could not have spread the word if they had not first seen for themselves. Then they glorified and praised God for all that they had seen and heard.

We cannot see Jesus with our physical eyes today. But the Bible has a great deal to say about spiritual eyesight, the need to have our eyes opened to see truths to which otherwise we would be blind. The eyes of our heart can be enlightened, as the Bible says again and again. And this is the essence of being a Christian. Being a Christian is not just about believing certain things in the creed, important as that is. Nor is it about coming to church, although it is important to belong to the community. But you can come to church and still not be a Christian. And finally, it is not just a question of being baptised, or even reading the Bible and praying.

So, how can we define being a Christian? When you boil it down to its essential ingredient, it is knowing Christ - it is coming to know Him personally.

So, I urge you to do business with God today, and whatever the resolution you need to make, make it now, for the glory of His great name.

**Rev. John Stott was curate of All Souls Church, Langham Place, London (1945-50) and rector (1950-75). Billy Graham described him as ‘one of the greatest spokesmen of the evangelical Christian world’. During a long life of unsparing service and witness, John won a unique place in the hearts of all who encountered him, whether in person or through his many books. He was a man of rare graciousness and deep personal kindness, a superb communicator and a sensitive and skilled counsellor. This article is adapted from a sermon he preached at All Souls on 17<sup>th</sup> December 1995. We have been granted special permission by the Langham Partnership to publish it here. ©2011 JOHN STOTT’S LITERARY EXECUTORS.**

## PREACHING PLAN



**PREACHING PLAN**  
January to March 2026

Bishop with oversight for the UK: Bishop Keith Cowart	
Free Methodist Church UK National Leader: Rev. John Townley	
Wiltshire Foundation Pastor: Rev. George Nuttall	
Wiltshire Leadership Team	
Pastor	Rev. Derek Balsdon derek@balsdon@gmail.com 07958 549146
Treasurer	Philip Boulton boultonphilip@hotmail.com 01793 764292
Leader	Lou Ashford louashford231@gmail.com 01793 201703
Leader	Glenys Baker glenysbaker@ntlworld.com 07837 825971
Leader	Elizabeth Joy Payne mrs.e.j.payne2018@hotmail.com 01793 692700
Leader/Trustee	Andrew Fleet aft@fleetfamily.co.uk 01666 846247

Freedom Church Wiltshire is part of the Freedom Church Network – a Charitable Trust [Charity Commission No. 1195962]

The Preaching Plan for the next quarter is now published. As you will see we are embarking on a series of services in which the preaching theme will be the ‘Miracles of the Bible’.

We will be reminding ourselves that, though we live in a natural world, we worship a Supernatural God, who in Jesus did supernatural things and who, by the power of the Holy Spirit, continues to invite us into the spirituality of His Kingdom. Signs, wonders and miracles arise as signals of God’s personal engagement with us and to bless our relationship with Him. He uses miracles

in many ways, not least to alert us to His promise that through our trust in Jesus we will grow in His Kingdom and, beyond death, rise to be with Him in eternity.

In January we have our joint Covenant Service which this year is at St. Michael’s and All Angels’ Brinkworth where Derek will preach. We also welcome **Sarah Sedgewick** as one of our speakers. Sarah is the author of the book: “Transformed by God’s Love” which tells the story of how she left her lesbian relationship in repentance to pursue a relationship with God. It is a story of God’s compassion and grace.

In February we are delighted to welcome back Rev. **Mike Cocklin** for our year 4 Church Anniversary and in March **Rev. Dr. Chris Blake**, former Principal of Cliff College, will be our guest preacher. A lot to look forward to and a lot to thank God for together as we worship Him and savour His presence with us, day by day and week by week.



## ENCOUNTER TOUR

Bristol Saturday 7<sup>th</sup> February 2026

*Our Pastor encourages us to get Involved....*

In February 2025 I experienced the 'Encounter Tour' for the first time, and I thank the Lord that I was able to attend. It was a wonderful opportunity for vibrant worship, biblical teaching, church growth workshops, hearing testimonies of what the Lord is doing in the UK, Europe and Africa, and enjoying fellowship (and good food) with brothers and sisters in Christ. There were also opportunities to receive prayer to be refreshed by the Holy Spirit.



As you are probably aware, Freedom Church Wiltshire (FCW) is part of the Free Methodist Church UK & Ireland (FMCUK&I). It is an exciting family of churches to be part of. The Holy Spirit is bringing about multiplication within the family, and in the past few years the number of churches and church plants has grown from around 30 to nearly 50. One of the ways in which FMCUK&I seeks to encourage and support local churches is through its annual **Encounter Tour**.

**The Encounter Tour** is a great opportunity to encounter more of the Lord, to encounter fellowship with one another, and for us to encounter fresh ideas to help us enable more people to encounter Jesus Christ. It is aimed at anyone who already has a leadership role within a local church, and those who are sensing God's call to leadership.

A leadership role is not just those who serve on the church leadership team, but anyone who has responsibilities within the life of the church. Annual events, like Christmas, can provide us with opportunities to enjoy friendship with other family members who we live quite a distance from, and in a similar way the Encounter Tour provides us with a wonderful opportunity to develop friendships and enjoy fellowship with our wider church family.

The word 'Tour' in its name is because this event tours across the UK during January and February, so that people in different geographical regions are able to attend one relatively near to where their church is, and our nearest venue is Bristol. I'm looking forward to the 2026 Encounter Tour, and I invite you to join Hilary and I (we can provide a taxi service). It will be at Freedom Church Bristol (Kingswood, Bristol) on Saturday February 7<sup>th</sup> 9:30am – 4:00pm.

**Derek Balsdon**

## **LADIES CRAFTY COFFEE CHAT**

Some of our lovely ladies met for our first 'Crafty Coffee Chat' on 5<sup>th</sup> November. This was suggested as a slight alternative to our regular monthly Coffee Chats in various cafes around the area and was held at my home. The idea was that we meet in a home atmosphere (not public as our regular meetings are) and bring some craft to work on whilst we chatted.



Well, there was plenty of chat amongst those of us who met! There was also a wide range of crafts that folk brought to do. This included knitting, sewing, crocheting, and Cricut designing on a laptop (ask



Sharon if you want to know what this is!). As well as enjoying seeing what others were working on, we were able to help one another where necessary; for example, Debra was keen for some guidance on her crochet and left feeling much more confident & ready to make something for her Grandson.

When, in our conversations, places/people in need cropped up, we paused to pray for those situations together. We included a light lunch (home-made soups and desserts) and had a great time of fellowship together.

We are thinking that we will repeat this every so often, maybe 2-3 times a year, so keep your eyes peeled ladies for notification of the next one (probably sometime in April or May 2026).

**Hilary Balsdon**

# NEWS FROM OUR NETWORK

Freedom Church Wiltshire is part of 'Freedom Church Network' which is a charity comprising Freedom Church, Bristol; Freedom Church South Lincolnshire; and ourselves. Plans are underway for further churches to be planted in our region.



## FREEDOM CHURCH BRISTOL

*November update from  
Rev. Dr. David Hull and  
the team:*



The Lord continues to reveal his plans and purposes, and we do our best to keep up! Our vision is bold - how could we aim for anything less? - to give every one of the 10,000 people in Kingswood & beyond a meaningful opportunity to encounter the good news of Jesus so that they can make a meaningful response.

We believe our unique revival heritage here in Kingswood is central to our mission: in biblical imagery, to re-dig the wells, rebuild the walls, and rekindle the flame in our own day, not simply by looking back to the past, but by longing and living for a great reshaping of life today by the good news of Jesus, in the power of the Spirit, to the Father's glory.

### **PRAISE:**

#### ***People***

The life of the church is continually renewed. Some have left for new pastures through marriage, work, or other life changes, and we have celebrated their time with us, entrusting them to the Lord's care as they journey on.

Newcomers have arrived, seeking to know more of the good news of Jesus within a strong sense of community. New members have joined us, coming ready to serve with their gifts and passions. It has been particularly encouraging to see many stepping into new leadership and ministry roles. A group of Younger Adult Leaders has been appointed to work with the Leadership Team, bringing delightfully fresh vision and energy.

Earlier this year we celebrated a joyful baptism, marking public commitment to Christ. We continue to uphold in prayer those recovering from surgery or taking periods of leave and rejoice in the blessing of new babies on the way.

Throughout it all, the Lord provides leaders and helpers to cover, support, and develop new initiatives.

### ***Proclamation***

A new Outreach Events Team has been established, organising family fun days, vintage tea afternoons, a women's conference, an Easter children's holiday club, and our continued pattern of Have a Cuppa on Us alongside Easter and Christmas community engagement. Our summer American Sports Camp led directly to the launch of a new youth group, and we give thanks for the seeds being planted in young lives.

### ***Pastoral Care & Communication***

A new Pastoral Care Team has been formed, meeting monthly and praying systematically for the whole church family, with everyone now having a designated pastoral carer. The response has been wonderfully warm, and there is a real sense that the team has been formed 'for such a time as this'. There have been tremendous strides in communication with a new website ([www.findfreedom.org.uk](http://www.findfreedom.org.uk)) and our new digital newsletter, 'This Week in Freedom Church', alongside a developing social media presence. We are grateful too for our developing Operations and Administration Team, for those who have joined the Sunday set-up team, and for the new developments in the work of the Safeguarding Team across the Freedom Church Network.

Thanks be to God!

### **PRAYER:**

Each week, we are reminded how utterly dependent we are on the Lord, and we are so grateful for all who join with us in prayer for the work here in Freedom Church Bristol:

**Proclamation:** our outreach events for different age groups, our evangelistic ministries, and the development of gospel presentation through our unique heritage, enabling new generations to discover afresh the good news of Jesus.

**Propagation:** our children's, youth, young families, and young adults ministries, that seeds planted this year will grow strong and bear eternal fruit, and that the groups will flourish in faith, friendship, and freedom in Christ.

**People:** growth amongst all who look to Freedom Church Bristol as their church family, in discovering the good news of Jesus, deepening discipleship in Him, and sharing in mission & ministry.

Please also pray for our Pastoral Care Team, our developing preachers, and for wise, gracious and godly leadership across the church.

**Premises:** for clarity, provision, and wisdom regarding the next steps for our meeting place as our congregation grows, enabling us to flourish fully in our mission to the Father's glory. On our fuller Sundays, we are close to standing room only, and there are inevitable restrictions and cost implications with renting premises. Please also pray that our congregation will continue to grow!

**Passion, Power, Protection & Provision:** that, above all, Freedom Church Bristol remains faithful and fruitful in mission and ministry, empowered by the Holy Spirit, exalting our Lord Jesus Christ in every way.

We delight to know you are praying for us and rejoice to pray for you. Let's continue to 'travail in prayer' for renewal and revival - a fresh outpouring of the Spirit here in Kingswood, across our Freedom Church Network, and throughout the land!

**Michaela Golding**  
**Operations Ministry Leader**  
**Freedom Church Bristol**

Freedom Church Bristol currently meet on the site of the original Kingswood School, built by John Wesley for the sons of local coal miners.



## FCW CHURCH CHRISTMAS CARD

Last year we produced a Church Christmas card that everyone signed and everyone received.

We are aiming to do the same again this year. Our suggestion is that, should you wish to, you make an extra donation to our mission appeal "Pennyhooks Farm" using the box on the table.

Many thanks **Lou & Mike Ashford**



"I don't care if it's cheaper than sending Christmas cards."  
"But, dear, it's more personal and original!"



## FREEDOM CHURCH SOUTH LINCOLNSHIRE

*November update from Keith and Christine  
Rowbottom*

Dear Friends at Freedom Church (Wilts), it is nearly 12 months since our last update so here's what's been going on in South Lincolnshire.

Over the past year the way we have seen God working has continued to be **“One heart at a time”**.



Whilst, sadly, the newly married couple that joined us in Nov'23 have now left, (partly due to the fact that they have a place in France and spend up to half the year there, plus their involvement with a small Baptist church with which they have had connections for many years and which is currently without a pastor), **God has brought other people into our fellowship**.

Early in 2025, at the invitation of one of our members, a 92-year-old gentleman joined us. He lives with his daughter and family in the village. During the summer and early Autumn we held an **Alpha course** that he attended and through which his faith has been re-ignited. A lady in the village also joined Alpha and she became a Christian during the course. Then, a couple of months ago we were contacted via Facebook by a lady asking about the children's work at the church. Following a home visit, which was one of the most heart-warming that Chris and I have done in recent years her husband expressed a real desire to 'do his family right' by wanting God to be at the centre of their lives; they and their 5-year-old son, who is severely autistic and on the whole non-verbal, have become regular attendees. A really delightful family and everyone has fallen in love with their precious son. Indeed, such is their commitment that after their first week they went out and bought new Bibles for themselves bringing them along on their second visit. More recently the lady who became a Christian during Alpha has also purchased a new Bible and was excited to show it to me. How lovely when people want to engage with God's Word!

As for the **children's work**, I said last year that Freedom Kids had become somewhat spasmodic. This did not improve and earlier this year it was agreed that the way forward was to make Freedom Kids a monthly weekday after school activity.

Although not ideal it does mean that we are still having some contact with these children from a formal Christian education standpoint. As they live in the village we do see them informally as well at other times. Sadly, the occasional family services that we agreed would also take place have not been successful. This remains a concern and a matter of prayer.

Following Alpha we have created **a new homegroup**. As well as those who attended Alpha and others of our fellowship, it includes a housebound couple at whose home we are meeting. Chris and I have been visiting this couple for some while, going for coffee when we are invited, usually about every couple of months. Our first contact was when we were delivering our seasonal greetings and publicity. Being housebound they link up with Ely Cathedral on a Sunday morning (they are by tradition Anglicans).

Over the months our conversation has become more spiritual, and they had been praying for our Alpha course. On asking about the outcome, we shared with them that we were looking to start a new homegroup. It became clear that they were interested so we asked whether holding the homegroup at their house might be a possibility, to which they readily agreed. So, another couple more closely linked to Freedom Church (S Links) – one heart at a time. Thank you, Jesus. If all attend, then we would have 11 people at the group.

One matter that continues to be a concern is the health of those in our fellowship including all those newly joined. Previously I have mentioned the **spiritual battle** we sense we have faced and continue to face. We long for a breakthrough in this matter and continue to pray about it. We would appreciate your continued prayers also.

One result of this is very rarely having all our congregation attending Sunday worship. Sometimes numbers are very small. It can be quite discouraging getting texts on a Sunday morning from folk saying that they do not feel well enough to come to worship. Despite that we have had some lovely moments when we have felt the Spirit of God present with us and always, at our pre-worship prayer meeting, we pray that God will be present and those attending will have encounters with him. Over the year we have had series on Foundational Doctrines, ‘Opening their Minds to Understand the Scriptures’, ‘ABC of the Holy Spirit’, ‘Parables of the Kingdom’ and currently ‘Psalm 23’.

Throughout this year we have continued our **outreach with Easter greetings** throughout the community with palm crosses and this year the “Why Easter?” booklet on the back of which we held our Alpha course; the Good Friday Hot Cross Bun and coffee event and also the showing of the film “Heaven, How I Got Here” on Maundy Thursday.

We have also shared in the leading of the **Act of Remembrance** and distributed a Remembrance Card with a prayer for peace on it, will be having a stall at the **Christmas Fair** and delivering Christmas greetings across the community advertising our carols@thecrib and Carol Service together with the possibility of a UCB Bible reading booklet. In addition, we have just delivered 28 shoeboxes for **Operation Christmas Child** filled by both those from the church and community. Everyone in Freedom Church (S Lincs) is also involved in many other aspects of village life and share in the lives of many others offering practical help and support in many and various ways. So, the love of God keeps flowing and the Gospel shared in word and action.

On a personal note – thank you for all your **prayers for Matt, our son**, over the months. He completed his second course of chemo in August following a major 3<sup>rd</sup> operation in January when he underwent open surgery and the surgeon had a “good rummage around” to quote him!! More cancer was removed than was expected and as part of this operation he was given a chemo-wash all around his peritoneal area. He has now had two scans since August and both have been clear. So, **we give thanks to God for answers to prayer and for the skills of all the oncology team** that have cared for him. Matt will have another scan in January. And one other piece of good news – **Matt & Claire got married on 18<sup>th</sup> October**. It was a wonderful day, everything went so smoothly, a lovely Christian wedding and enjoyable reception.

We pray that they, together with Josh and Noah, and now Eli (Claire’s 3-year-old), will be able to experience God’s blessings in their lives together.

## **FOCUS FOR PRAYER**

*Please give thanks to God for:*

- Those who have joined Freedom Church (S Lincs) this year;
- The lady who has become Christian and gentleman whose faith has been re-ignited;
- God’s promise to grow His Kingdom one heart at a time;
- Matt’s ‘all clear’ of cancer.

**Please pray for:**

- Effective, **spirit-filled outreach** leading to more people being drawn to Freedom Church (S Lincs) and those not yet Christians coming to faith;
- **Effective children’s and young people’s work** through Freedom Kids
- **Breakthrough in physical and mental health** of those involved with Freedom Church (S Lincs)

- **The new homegroup** that it will flourish and be the means for spiritual growth and deepening faith.

Thank you for your interest in us and your prayers for us. It is much appreciated. We continue to pray for you on a regular basis. May you experience the fulness of God's Kingdom in your midst, now and throughout 2026.

Every Blessing

**Keith Rowbottom**

**Pastor, Freedom Church (S Lincs)**

## **FREEDOM CHURCH FROME VALLEY (FCFV)**



*Set Free ....  
Living Free....  
Bringing Freedom....*

*We have been praying for Peter and Kate Kernaghan who know God's call on their lives to plant a church in the Frome Valley. Here is there encouraging news of what God is enabling them to do.*



### **Frome Valley Freedom Church Stories**

**The past year** has been both thrilling and challenging as we've sought to build God's Kingdom in the Frome Valley. Regular prayer walking, our weekly house gathering and Freedom Fridays, continued throughout the year, with new people joining us. Likewise, South Glos' "Filling Station"—our inspirational event—welcomed ten incredible Christians, including Simon Guillebaud, who ministered in the heart of our community through the power of the Holy Spirit.

Our focus on serving the community to build bridges and make disciples included **events** like "**Christmas Leftovers**" and a similar "**Easter Bonnet**" family party, where crafts and food fostered relationships and we shared the Christmas and Easter stories. Throughout the year, tip runs, electricity top-ups, and food parcels helped build lasting friendships with those in social housing. We are privileged to call many with vulnerabilities our friends. At times, they have been a balm to us—Kate's dad passed away before Easter (a man who came to faith wonderfully late in life and was baptised at age 70!), and we spent time processing that loss.

**At Easter**, we offered free VIP tickets for families to join us in watching Angel Studios' King of Kings, which proved to be a key moment—a local mother came to faith and later joined us at New Wine in the summer.



Then came trial and difficulty: Adele, a regular and one of our own, passed away. We were honoured to visit her in hospital, read Scripture, pray with her family, and lead her funeral in June.

During the summer term, we ran **the Christianity Explored course** on Friday nights. A man named John joined us to read and discuss Mark's Gospel—while also sharing stories about the army vehicles he was repairing and enjoying pudding!



**Kate and I** continue on the leadership track and made the long trek to Lancashire for the Wesley Weekend. Increasingly, we've been drawn into the life of Freedom Church Kingswood, and it's been a joy to bring our people to worship there.



In July, we volunteered as **Village Hosts at New Wine—Go Green 9!** It was a wonderful way to support Lee, Hannah, Tahalia, Damien, and others as they engaged in worship, prayer ministry, and transformation.

Late August saw us organise a **canoeing trip on the River Wye** in Monmouthshire. Adele's partner Lee and son Luke joined us (Luke could even paddle straight after mile 9!). The following morning at Freedom Kingswood, **Lee came to faith** and shared his testimony with everyone. Please pray for him and his son Luke.

Late summer, our friend **Hannah—who came to faith**—was exuberant in sharing the thrill of her encounter with the living Christ. She's now writing Christian songs with her daughter and using AI to record them—our worship team is growing! In her newfound enthusiasm, she's started "Worship Wednesdays" for her friends and neighbours. Please pray for her faith to grow as she considers baptism.

August Bank Holiday brought our **summer party**, with around 70–80 guests following local leafleting and invitations. The barbecue and slip-and-slide were highlights! I shared faith with a young Rastafarian who told me he had seen a spacecraft. Damien, a Polish friend, found our quiet corner and was thrilled to discover a Nicky Gumbel book in Polish in our free Alpha library—he's since been joining us on Friday evenings.



September saw the relaunch of **Freedom Fridays, Filling Station**, and planning for our Bonfire Party Outreach. My work in the secondary school continues—teaching RS, English, Geography, Citizenship, PSHE, and more. Last year, **a young man came to faith** during a lesson, and this term we've started an Alpha course. **Please pray for our work there and that our bi-vocational ministry remains appropriately “work-life unbalanced!”**

Kate, alongside her paid work as a care assistant, regularly leads worship at Kingswood, helps lead local and national **Know Your Bible groups**, participates in **Open the Book assemblies**, volunteers as a counsellor in the secondary school where I work, and supports all our detached social action work. This includes supporting those with vulnerabilities and, at times, liaising with the police. **Please pray for Adam, a young ex-army man, that he would know release, freedom, and Jesus.**

**Bonfire Night** was our biggest event yet—over 70 people enjoyed fireworks



(accompanied by the 1812 Overture, of course!), sparklers, hot dogs, soup, hot chocolate, bonfire marshmallows, and heard the Gospel as David Hull shared. The goodwill and openness were thrilling. A colleague from work, neighbours, and many people we barely knew came. Luke helped set off fireworks, and Lee lit the bonfire.

**Luke brought his friend Alex—please pray for her. They both came to church the following morning, and she wants to return.**

Guests left with party bags filled with glow sticks, sweets, Christian literature, and invites to Freedom Fridays, Kingswood, and our New Year's outreach party. Please pray for God's blessing and our continued hunger to share faith with the Frome Valley and beyond.



Looking ahead, please pray for our upcoming **Carol Service at Wetherspoon's Pub** in Kingswood on 21st December—tunes @ spoons? Carols @ Collieries? Christmas Bangers? **Pray for Frazer, the manager there, and for the renewal of Kingswood's revival heritage**—may the tavern tunes and Wesleyan theological lyrics be rediscovered by the 10,000 people in the area. 2026, here we come! Every Blessing,

**Peter and Kate Kernaghan**  
**Freedom Church Frome Valley / Kingswood**

## **KINGDOM MINISTRIES CHURCH PLANT**

You will notice from our new year Preaching Plan that we are welcoming our old friend **Mike Cocklin** back to preach at our Church anniversary in February.

**Please continue to pray for Mike** as he seeks to explore with God his call to pastoring and juggles his work and family commitments and his father's recent illness. May he know the wonderful power of the Holy Spirit, leading and strengthening him each day, bringing blessing to his family and discernment of the direction in which Jesus is leading him in 2026.



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## **FCW MISSION AND MINISTRY**

It was great to welcome visitors to our **Harvest Service** at Brinkworth on 26<sup>th</sup> October. A big 'thank you' to everyone who donated food to the grand display which was passed on to the Malmesbury and North Wiltshire Food Bank. The emergency food provision has risen sharply over the last five years. The Trussell Food banks in the community across the UK distributed 2.9 million emergency food parcels last year and this year is likely to exceed that number.



 Malmesbury & District  
**Foodbank**  
Together with Trussell

Feeding people in crisis across North Wiltshire

**Thank you**  
**Freedom Church Wiltshire**  
**for your generous support of the foodbank.**

We continue to see new people reaching out to the foodbank on a regular basis, and your contributions will help to provide the support they need over the winter months.

*Richard Gray* Operations Trustee

Heavenly Father,  
We offer our heartfelt thanks for the volunteers who selflessly serve in foodbanks across our nation. They are the hands that feed the hungry and the hearts that bring hope to those in need. We ask Your blessing upon them, that they may continue to serve with love and compassion. In the name of Jesus who told His followers: “Inasmuch as you have done this to the least of these, you have done it to me.” Amen

## THE CHRISTIAN INSTITUTE



The Christian Institute is a non-denominational charity that exists for the furtherance and promotion of Christian belief and practice in the United Kingdom. It is founded on Biblical truth and has campaigned and represented Christian teaching and values on a wide variety of issues including abortion, assisted suicide, drugs, extremism, gambling, marriage and the family, medical ethics, religious freedom and sexual identity. It provides Christians with news, views and resources on contemporary ethical issues and has increasingly had to represent Christians in court cases and in the press where the freedom to express and to live out Christian teaching has been challenged by the secular world.

It was a real privilege to be able to contribute to the work of this charity and we sent £500 from donations and the mission fund in October this year.

**To learn more of the work of the Christian Institute** see their website at

<http://christian.org.uk>

and the YouTube Video at:

<https://www.youtube.com/@christianorguk>

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### CHRISTMAS APPEAL

*This year our Christmas Appeal has focused on the Samaritan's Purse Shoebox giving and the work with Autistic children and young adults at Pennyhooks Farm Shrivenham. We are grateful to **Elaine Boyd** who has organised the collection of Shoeboxes and who is a Trustee of Pennyhooks Farm. Here, she provides further information about these worthy causes we are supporting:*



## Samaritans Purse Christmas Shoeboxes



For the last couple of years, we, as a Church, have been supporting Samaritan's Purse Christmas Shoebox appeal. Shoeboxes are packed with gifts, toys, stationery and toiletries and are labelled up for a boy or a girl for a particular age range. Each year, we have sent in the region of 15 boxes. The mission of Operation Christmas Child is to "demonstrate God's love in a tangible way to children in need around the world"

Our shoeboxes are taken to a local collection point, usually in Swindon, for onward transmission to a central sorting location. Here they are checked by thousands of volunteers and prepared for international shipping. The shoeboxes are sent to over 100 countries around the world but before they arrive, local church and community leaders in the countries they are destined for are trained in how to reach out generously to children with the boxes and also to share the Christmas story of Jesus. The shoeboxes are handed out at festive outreach events in these local communities and, along with the shoebox, the children are offered a Bible story booklet that tells them about God's greatest gift, Jesus. The children are then invited to take part in a 12-session course that teaches them more about Jesus and how to share this with their families. This means that the shoeboxes can have an impact on not only the child they are intended for but also their wider family and community in which they live. Communities can be transformed by a small gift of generosity.

*Many thanks to all who contributed towards the Samaritan's Purse shoebox appeal this year. As a church, we were able to send 12 shoeboxes and a donation of £50, which is amazing. Thank you all so much for your generosity. If you haven't got involved this year, you might like to consider doing so in 2026.*

If you do not wish to fill a whole box, you are always welcome to donate a few items and a box can be made up including those items. Also, if you are a keen knitter, might you be able to knit during the year – perhaps a toy, or hat and gloves in bright colours? If you are a keen woodworker, perhaps a toy? I leave that to your imagination and skills that you have been blessed with!

Thank you for your support in sharing God's love.

## Pennyhooks Farm



**New born Aberdeen  
Angus calf**

Pennyhooks Farm is located on the western side of the A420 between Shrivenham and Watchfield in Oxfordshire. It is a small, organic working farm that has been in the Otter family since just after the Second World War. There is a herd of beautiful Aberdeen Angus cattle, goats, donkeys and chickens. A brook runs through the bottom of the farm and there are 20 acres of rare water meadow. Lydie Otter, who owns the farm, runs it on the principle of the Good Samaritan story in the Bible.

The farm is home to many flora and fauna, including a lizard orchid, otters and a barn owl. The farm also has some interesting history that is currently being investigated by an archaeologist and some school children from Hong Kong who have found some evidence of Bronze Age and Neolithic communities.



**Lizard Orchid**



**Flowerbed planted by students**

On a day-to-day basis, the farm provides a safe space for approximately 40 young adults with complex autism. Many are non-verbal and also have learning difficulties but the farm provides them with a structure to their day and a purpose. Students assist with the daily chores on the farm – cleaning out the animals,

collecting eggs, feeding the animals and taking them on walks. The students also assist with collecting wood, growing vegetables and planting flowers and bulbs around the farm.

They also collect fruit from around the farm to make jams and jellies and have excellent cake making skills. There is a woodworking area where the students make stools, chopping boards, bee houses and other items – these are then sold in the shop on open days.



Many of the students are very artistic and they have worked alongside an international photographer who has captured pictures of the wildlife on the farm – the students then do their own drawings from these photos and these have been applied to mugs, tea towels, cards etc that again, are sold in the shop to raise funds for the farm.

All of these activities give the students purpose to their day, and they can see their end results being of use and benefit to the community around them.

The approach that Pennyhooks has is quite unique and ground-breaking. It challenges and changes decades of practice. One member of staff has recently completed a dissertation on the approach used by the farm and the effect on its students; her work has been described as “innovative, insightful and thorough...”

One of the challenges Pennyhooks face is that a number of the students have been coming to the farm for a considerable number of years. Many of them still live at home and their parents are ageing and are concerned about the future for their children. Many supported living projects are not appropriate for our students to live in and so, faced with these issues, we are proposing to build 6 accommodation units on the farm, to house some of our students. The benefit of this is that the accommodation will be in a familiar setting for them and will be close to their place of work. We are in the process of fundraising for the residential accommodation and currently have a draft design in place. The next step is to discuss this with the planning department and Oxfordshire County Council and to then seek full planning permission.

## **PRAYER PARTNERSHIP WITH BELARUS**

We thank God that faithful Christians from the seven Baptist churches in Belarus persistently pray for Freedom Church Wiltshire and our mission and ministry. We are also privileged week by week to receive their prayer requests.

You may remember that, in the last year or so, we have been praying for the re-registration for these churches following the Belarusian introduction of new regulations under amendments to the “Law on Freedom of Conscience and Religious Organisations.” This required re-registration for religious groups by June 2025 and criminalised unregistered religious activities.

It also restricts churches from engaging in activities which are deemed 'political' by the government.

We thank God that most of 'our' churches were successfully re-registered but were disappointed that one, Liuban church – a small but spiritually vibrant village church, was not.

Why? Did God not hear our prayer for this church? What happened next gives you the answer.



Our Christian brothers and sisters in Liuban were determined to continue to meet and worship the Lord Jesus on a regular basis and so were invited to join Valeika church, some 10 miles away and which had successfully re-registered.

God provided Valeika with a different building, which members of the church, with the help

brothers from other the churches for which we pray, are now refurbishing.

And, in the last month the trainee pastor Vasily and his wife Zoya, met in the presence of the congregation and senior church leaders for his ordination as their pastor by Leonid Mikhovich, the president of the Theological Seminary of the Union of Evangelical Baptists in Belarus! "God moves in a mysterious way His wonders to perform".

For the people of Liuban God did not answer the prayer we asked; but has done even more! – and we now pray for a thriving community of Christians who meet to worship and serve Him in their new building with their new pastor.



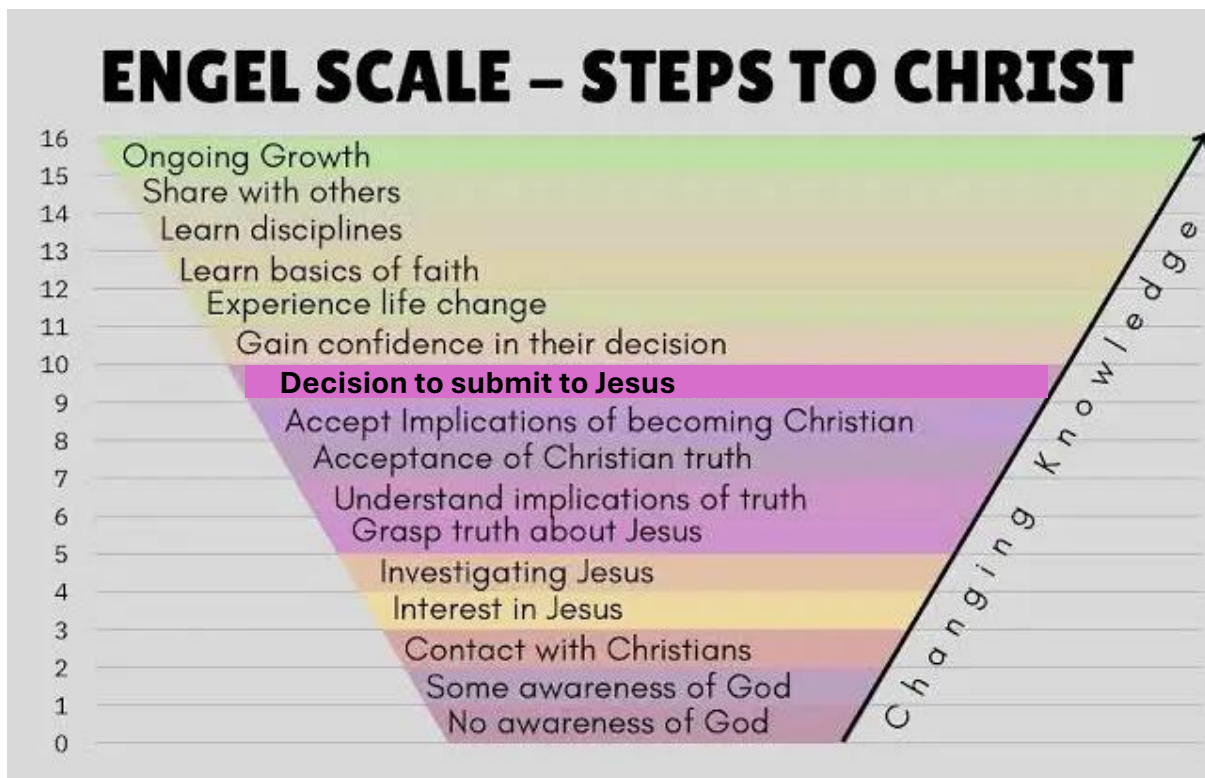
Fiona Fleet

**The Union of Evangelical Baptist Churches of Belarus are members of the Baptist World Alliance. Their President is Leonid Mikhovich (with the microphone) who is pictured in the centre back of the above picture. As you look at the picture, Sergei Litvinka (pastor of Zaslavl church), who we hope will preach with us in 2026, is to his right.**



**Lou Ashford reflects on how God can transport us, stage by stage, from an unawareness of God to a vibrant trust and discipleship in Jesus and how we need to be aware of our part as ‘evangelists’ in this process.**

Some of you may have already heard of The Engel Scale but in case you haven’t may I introduce you to it. “The Engel Scale” originates with James F Engel, from the book *What’s gone wrong with the Harvest?*<sup>1</sup>



<sup>1</sup> ‘What’s gone wrong with the Harvest’ James F Engel 1975 Zondervan Press.

The insight into evangelism that is generally drawn from the Engel scale is that all people go on a ***journey*** or process on their way to conversion and then on into discipleship.

As the Lord continues to encourage us, as a church, to develop our evangelism I think it is useful for us to see this model. We are all called to be evangelists but sometimes that can be quite frightening. When you see this model, I hope you can appreciate that your conversation with someone about church, Jesus or Christianity can help that person to move one or two steps along the process.

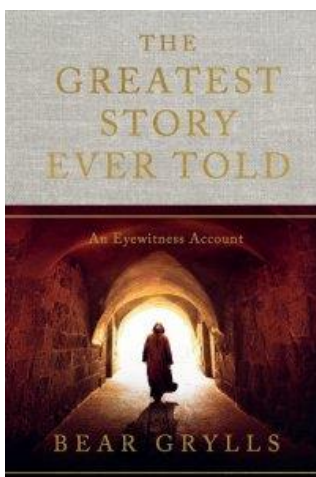
For all we know that person may be right at the bottom of the scale but through our contact and conversation they move from “No awareness of God” to “Some awareness of God”. A few days later they might meet another Christian and have another conversation moving them onto “Contact with Christians” and possibly “Interest in Jesus”. I think this model helps to take away some of the scariness that we might feel about being called to be evangelists and helps us to see, that actually, it’s part of everyday life. We can all play our part without realising it!

Be encouraged we can all be evangelists!

Blessings **Lou Ashford**

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## GREAT GIFTS FOR CHRISTMAS

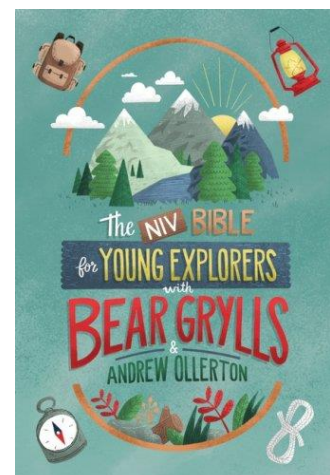


Why not give a friend or family member a copy of Bear Gryll’s best-selling book:

**‘The Greatest Story ever told’?**



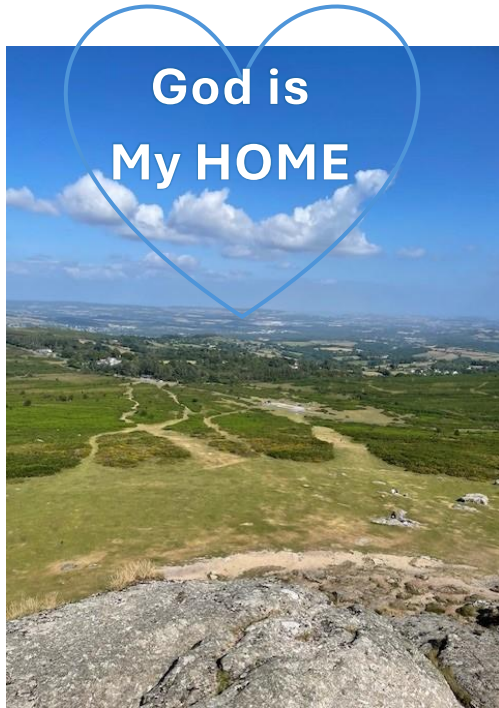
Why not give a child (8-10 years old) a copy of Bear Gryll’s and Andrew Ollerton’s book: **‘The NIV Bible for Young Explorers’?**



# A WORD OF KNOWLEDGE

*It is sometimes good to reflect on how God has spoken to us in the past. In 2022-23 God reminded us on several occasions and in our 'Time for God' how He seeks to make His home our hearts, giving us this Word:*

**"I am in the very presence of God – oh, how refreshing it is! I've made Lord God my home."** Psalm 73:8 [The Message]



*It is easy in our 'enlightened age' to see our hearts as mere physical organs that pump the blood. But the Bible says the heart is the core of our being: **"Above all else, guard your heart, for everything you do flows from it."** Proverbs 4:23.*

*Scientists at the HeartMath Institute in America<sup>2</sup> have recently demonstrated that the heart has its own intuitive guidance system or 'brain' which can operate independently of and in association with our head brain. Their findings are consistent with the 'heart' as described in the Bible. A heart which God seeks to 'soften', 'mould', 'change' and prepare as His home.*

## **"MY HOME IS GOD"**

And now "My home is God", a shelter there,  
God meets the trials of my earthly life,  
God compasses me round from storm and strife,  
He takes the burden of my daily care.  
O Wondrous Place! O Home divinely fair!  
And I, God's little one, safe hidden there.  
Lord, as I dwell in Thee and Thou in me,  
So, make me dead to everything but Thee;  
That, as I rest within my Home most fair,  
My soul may evermore and only see  
My God in all things and everywhere.

**Author Unknown**

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<sup>2</sup> HeartMath Institute is based in California. It explores the "intuitive, wise, and energetic" connection between the heart and the spirit, aiming to foster a deeper connection to one's "true self" through coherence in mind, heart, and emotions. In his book 'Your Heart in Rhythm with God's' Dr. Stephen Brooke aligns this work with a Bible analysis of the heart. 'Your Heart in Rhythm with Gods' by Stephen Brooke ISBN: 9798335726955.

## ATTITUDE<sup>3</sup>

### Life:

An attitude of gratitude,  
A face that's full of grace,  
A heart that's full of love for Him,  
A step that walks His pace.  
An aptitude of fortitude  
that relies upon His power,  
A care for prayer, an ear to hear  
His voice from hour to hour.



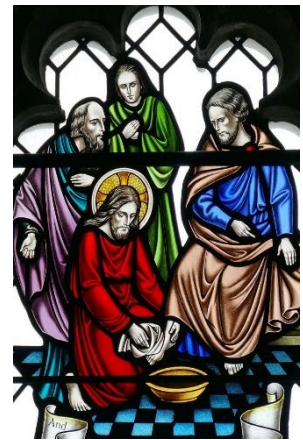
### Power:

A breathing of His Spirit,  
An exhale of His love,  
A joy to overflowing,  
with life force from above.  
An awe from the humility  
that glorifies His name,  
A peace past understanding,  
A zeal that fans the flame!



### Exemplar:

O make me more like Jesus,  
Who counted not the cost;  
assuming God's true nature  
to seek and save the lost.  
Give me that loving, caring heart,  
that He alone can mould,  
then as a chosen child of God  
His wonders we'll unfold.



### Gospel:

'New-life story', never time-bound,  
but a kingdom that's begun;  
ever growing faith in action  
that is modelled on the Son;  
extending through the pall of death  
to rise beyond the tomb -  
New creation brought to birth  
and soon and very soon.

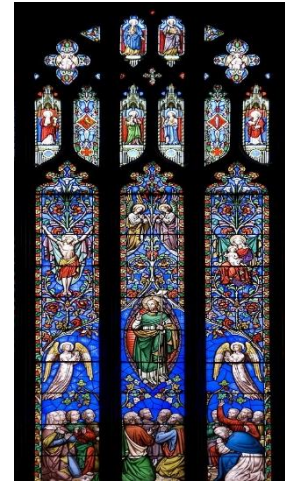


<sup>3</sup> 'Attitude' derives from the latin 'aptus' meaning 'to fit'. Its developed meaning has become: "the way we face, and therefore fit, with an object, concept or person". It encompasses our thoughts, feelings, beliefs, values and behaviours. Here it refers to how we relate to God – our Christian Attitude.

**Worship:**

Hallelujah, Sovereign God  
Who sits upon the throne!  
Hallelujah, for through the Spirit  
we do not walk alone!  
Hallelujah, risen King  
who for us intercedes!  
Glorious and Holy Trinity,  
Who daily meets our needs.

**Andrew Fleet**



“O come to my heart, Lord Jesus, there is room in my heart for Thee”.

**Emily S Elliott**

“Enter then, O Christ most holy;  
Make a Christmas in my heart;  
Make a heaven of my manger;  
It is heaven where Thou art”.

**George Stringer Rowe**



Derek Lou Phil Andrew Glenys Elizabeth Joy

**Leadership Team, Freedom Church Wiltshire**

**December 2025**

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<b>The Engels Scale fig.</b>	Courtesy of The Spectrum Church – San Jose, California, USA
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