

Spiritual Journeys

By Ian Cripps, Breaston October 2017

For me the Mission to Breaston started a year earlier when the proposal was accepted by the Anglican PCC and Methodist Stewards. Over the following 11 months, I visited the village a further 3 times, on training days and a Sunday when Roger Morgan and Richard Scott introduced mission to the congregation and met with the initial mission steering group. By October 2017, I had met many people with a great a sense of humour, a clear heart for growing God's Kingdom and a desire for fresh training and focused leadership.

Missions are Christian endeavours where no one honestly knows what God is going to do. Some of the training was new to me and would take me out of my comfort zone. Stepping out of my regular life of marriage, employment, faith, family, golf and watching rugby, and going straight into mission was a shock of adrenalin and fright. To be surrounded by a combined 'Home and Away team' for 8 days, with complete freedom to think, speak and sing of the gospel is a privilege, exhilarating and joyfully exhausting all at the same time.

Going to Breaston was a fresh revelation to me, as it demonstrated the power of persistent prayer by committed Christians for their families and friends over the 12 months prior to the mission. Both Roger and Richard Scott were inspirational in their commitment to communicate God's truth by door to door visiting, street evangelism, home meetings and public presentation of the gospel.

From the first day the Away team were meeting and eating with members of the congregations, their families and friends, twice a day. Good gentle conversations with opportunities to meet new people, listen, share our life experiences and our spiritual journeys. I was paired with Pete from Coventry and Terry from Barnsley. Both had an irrepressible sense of humour; the three of us were consistently dissolving in laughter throughout the week. Wearing our outsize yellow tee shirts, Terry and I were nicknamed the Terry-Tubbies. Both Terry and Pete have wonderful powerful family based testimonies, which clearly touched the people God intended to reach.

We all worked long days. Terry and I knocked on doors with a questionnaire which led to some good conversations and prayer for personal difficulties. One day as Terry and I approached a house a male Derbyshire accent was heard through the open kitchen window, "Tell them we're out!" Gillian came with a smile to the side entrance and patiently answered the questionnaire, clearly demonstrating an experience of Christian faith. When asked "if you could know God personally, would you be interested?" Gillian replied "I'd ask God, why do bad things happen to good people?" Towards the end of our conversation her frail husband Bill joined us. Gillian insisted Bill answer the questionnaire, and Terry and I were invited in for a cup of tea. Bill asked, "you're sure you're not Jehovah Witnesses?", to which the Terry-Tubbies replied "do we look like Jehovah Witnesses?" More laughter!

After Bill answered the questionnaire, they shared that he is being treated for Hodgkin's Lymphoma. Their great fear after over 60 years of marriage, is the prospect of not dying together. With their permission Terry gently shared his own spiritual journey, the focus of which was his father's life being spared when Terry promised his life to God's work. Bill and Gillian were moved. We told them we could not promise they would pass away together, but we did know that through Jesus they could both be assured of eternal life. I shared the gospel; Gillian and Bill asked if they could say the prayer. Afterwards we also prayed against Bill's cancer. We gave them a copy of Roger Morgan's booklet 'Decision' to read. Two days later we called again. Bill was dressed, cap and scarf against the autumn cold, and weeding his front garden. This time he was pleased to say "Tell them we're in!".

On Tuesday Pete and I were invited to lunch with Rene and her non-Christian husband Chris. We received a warm welcome. Chris was clearly pressed for time but stayed long enough to consume the soup course. Pete and I enjoyed the rest of our lunch listening to Rene and some the challenges her family have faced. We prayed for Rene and her family.

That afternoon I was visiting homes with Methodist minister Arnold. At our very first call, we found the owner tidying her front garden. She politely put down the pruned rose cuttings and secateurs and stopped to complete the questionnaire. From her honest answers it was clear she had absolutely no faith. But she did allow me to tell her what I believed, and standing in her garden I drew the bridge diagram, a visual summary of the good news. Before we left Arnold asked if there was anything we could pray for; there was.



In the evening Pete and I attended a public gathering at the Fintons Café and Bakehouse. Richard Scott was leading the evening on the subject 'Why do bad things happen to good people?'. This was an informed interactive discussion, which certainly helped strengthen my own understanding of sin and its effects on the world, climates and the lives of individuals. There was a lively debate.

On Wednesday we were invited to a home group. We met a lovely group of mostly committed Christians which turned out to be co-led by Rene. Pete shared his spiritual story, which included a point of remaining soreness. When I asked if anyone would be willing to pray for him he was engulfed by 7 willing volunteers! It was an emotional blessing for all. I drew the bridge diagram, everyone contributing with scripture readings that I gave them to go with the drawing. I asked people to share where they were on the bridge between us and God. Most were confident they were already with God. One woman was not and wanted to make a prayer of commitment.



On Thursday night Pete and I arrived at Rene's home. She had invited five female friends for whom she had been praying over the previous twelve months. It was good to briefly talk again with Chris before he set off to the pub to watch the rugby. Pete led the discussion, and I shared how I came to faith. We asked if anyone would like to have a personal relationship with God, and four of the women immediately replied yes please. We prayed for them individually and gave them a copy of *Decision*.

On Saturday morning Rene and I visited two of her friends who had made their prayer of commitment at Thursday's home meeting. They had read *Decision*, accepted the gift of a New Testament Bible, and were happy to read John 3:16 and talk. They could see that God had given them a wonderful present in Jesus and wanted to say their own first prayer of thanks. We encouraged them to set their morning alarms 20 minutes earlier and commit themselves to a daily quiet time of reading and prayer. We also invited them to join a foundation course offered by the church.

That afternoon there was much activity with a family fair and barbecue on the village green. I had to leave a day early. As I made my farewells to the Breaston Christian community, surprisingly I was a bit emotional and tearful, as if something had been left undone. I had to drop off some more New Testaments to Rene for her to complete the remaining follow up visits. I called at her home and had a last chat with Chris. I asked him if anyone had ever shown him the bridge illustration. He said he did not think so, so I asked if he had 20 minutes; to which he said of course. Rene smiled and excused herself. When I asked Chris if he wanted to make a prayer of commitment, he surprised me by saying he could not - because he was not yet a Christian. I was pleased to explain that making the prayer of commitment would enable him to be a Christian. He did. Afterwards their son took a celebration photograph. Rene had been praying for many years for her husband's salvation. As I was leaving their home I was humbled when Chris quietly took my arm and said "Thank you for coming back to save me".

The follow day, at the traditional Anglican early morning service, team member Colin Cooper shared his spiritual journey and invited people to make their own response to Jesus. Eleven long standing members of the Anglican community made their first prayer of commitment.

Since the Mission I have reflected on my week in Breaston. I have a renewed hunger for the word and my prayer lists have joyfully expanded. God is amazing.

