

What Next?

We hope that you have been challenged through reading and reflecting on these passages and on the four themes of *Our Calling* : to increase awareness of God, learning and caring, to challenge injustice and mission and evangelism.

The themes are again explored in this way but through other writers in the *M:Guide Other Voices 2*.

Other *M:Guides* available are:

Worship
Lost in Space?: Mission in A Plural Society
Other Voices 2
Priorities for The Methodist Church

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The **Methodist** Church

M:Guides

Other Voices: 1

An exploration of *Our Calling*  
through contemporary Christian  
writings

The M:Guides are a series of study packs produced by the Training & Development Officers in the London, Nottingham & Derby and Lincoln & Grimsby Districts

## INTRODUCTION

This *M:Guide* sets out to help you hear Christian voices that have spoken during the last twenty years with integrity, charm, power and challenge.

The brief extracts from their writings obviously limit how well we can understand them, but the hope is that their words will strike a chord, spark a thought or open a new insight that will encourage you and your church to face the challenges of today more wisely and joyfully.

The ‘*Other Voices*’ each reflect one of the themes of ‘*Our Calling*’.

Having listened just a little to these ‘Voices’, we hope that you will develop an enthusiasm for discovering more about them, the churches and communities from which they speak.

Each section includes a range of questions and suggestions for thought or discussion. You do not need to feel under pressure to deal with them all. Select the ones that are most stimulating. It does not even matter if you do not use any of them, just so long as you work at giving the different voices the opportunity to speak to you. If the voice immediately appeals or not, stay with it and always try to identify a positive and practical response to its challenge.

Every member of the group should have a copy of this booklet and try to read the passages through before the meeting.

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Acknowledgements

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Legacy: An Anthology in Memory of Jillian Brown
Edited by Anthony G. Reddie Published by Methodist
Publishing House (2000)

The Orthodox Way
Bishop Kallistos Ware Published by A.R.Mowbray
(1979)

Truth and Social Reform
Vishal Mangalwadi Published by Spire (1989)

Tell Us Our Names
C.S.Song Published by Orbis (1984)

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*in relation to the cross and the resurrection. This is Christian mission in its deepest sense Christians in Asia and Africa must hear in order to gain deeper understanding of the Christian faith. There are many, many names we need to know to have a better grasp of God's mission in the world."*

**Reflection:**

- How far do you agree with C. S. Song that we need to 'know people's names' if we are to be true evangelists?
- How can we make sure we hear people's names, understand their lives and cultures (at least to some degree), and not get caught up in our own busyness and efforts 'to feed them'?
- What factors make us the people we are?
- What experiences and changes have shaped our church, and the communities to which we belong? Try to do some recent history, and recall painful times in national, local or personal life that have left experiences of unresolved suffering, and 'the clamour of grieved ghosts'. Only talk about what you feel comfortable sharing with others.
- How far do you agree with the implication of the concept of *han* that experiences of pain can build up over generations
- What lessons are there here for our mission and evangelism?

**Bible:**

- 'The clamour of grieved ghosts' is a very evocative phrase, with its suggestion of cries of pain echoing down the generations. Jesus moved amongst noise as much as silence. Read Mark 4:35 –5:43. What sorts of 'clamour' did Jesus encounter? How did he deal with it?
- Each of the people and situations Jesus dealt with carried pain. What understanding does Jesus show of the various aspects of *han* he met?

**VOICE ONE: ...TO INCREASE AWARENESS OF GOD...**

**JILLIAN BROWN**

We start with a part of one of Jillian's sermons. It is about becoming aware of God and God's love in a way that made sense to her as a young British black woman, and to her people. The two poems that accompany it express the passion that she brought to her vocation. Jillian died in 1999, aged 31.

*"Sculptors for hundreds of years imagined Jesus as having blue eyes and long hair. He was also very meek and mild, always so very gentle. I have reflected on the effects that such an image might have had on me. One possibility is that it caused me to not ascribe to Jesus the authority that God ascribed him.*

*A second was that Jesus (and God) was not interested in me because he never interacted with anyone like me: a woman of colour. And no one had ever related Jesus to me in relation to my reality because my reality was not important.*

*Jesus was full of compassion and love...*

*But as I reflected on this love and the picture of Jesus that I had, I began to challenge a love that was presented to me as a sentimental love, not an active love. A love that wasn't really concerned with what was going on 'in here' or 'out there'. Well, not concerned enough to do anything significant about it. In a sense Jesus was an advocate of the status quo. And I struggled to understand who I was, or what my purpose was in the light of this conflict.*

*Well, my journey took me back to my prayers and then back to my books and back through my history and to my sisters and brothers in other parts of the world who were challenging this image of a 'comfortable' convenient Jesus. I would like, briefly, to share some of these perspectives with you, some of which will be part of our own personal testimony.*

*One of the ways of understanding Jesus in Africa is as the personal saviour and personal friend of those who believe in him. Jesus desires to accept us as we are and meet our needs at a very personal level. They have come to accept Jesus as the friend of the lonely and the bringer of wholeness to those in need.*

*Whilst some cynics would argue that this idea is one of a privatisation of Jesus to fit into whatever context we want it to fit, or that it is pretentious, it is an image of Jesus which helps them to bear their grief, loneliness and suffering.*

*A second views Jesus as a divine co-sufferer, who empowers in situations of oppression. For Christian African American women of the past Jesus was a central point of reference. He was able to identify with them in their sufferings. There was mutual suffering. Just like them, Jesus suffered and was persecuted undeservedly.*

*A third perspective regards Jesus as equaliser. The crucifixion was for universal salvation, a salvation for everyone. Jarena Lee in the last century said: 'Is he not a whole Saviour, instead of a half one? As those who hold it wrong for a woman to preach would make it appear?'. The story of the encounter with the woman at the well, for me illustrates Jesus as equaliser. Conversing with a woman who was forced to come to the well to draw water at a time in the day when no one else was around because of the reputation that she had. Jesus converses with the woman without any pretentiousness. He is genuinely interested in her.*

*Jesus the liberator presents us an image of one who empowers. As one whose earthly existence was bound up with the oppressed of the land. As one who identifies himself with the poor, with the marginalised, with the oppressed. The significance of his birth is emphasised. He was not born in a palace but in a stable. He had to flee his home. His Messiahship of which Peter speaks means that he is one of the humiliated and abused.*

### **The Trinity**

*"As Christians get to know their own "native" names and the names of their own peoples, they begin to hear stories and sounds, see symbols and images, grasp feelings and longings, that have been theirs since they were born and have never ceased being theirs even after they became Christians. In Korea, for example, some Christians are hearing a strangely familiar sound from the depth of the history of the Korean people – the sound of han. What is this sound of han? It is "a feeling of unresolved resentment against unjustifiable suffering". Perhaps the poetic language of Kim Chi Ha, the much tortured and much imprisoned Korean Roman Catholic Christian, can tell us more vividly what han is:*

*This peninsula is filled with the clamors of grieved ghosts. It is filled with the mourning noise of han of those who died from foreign invasion, wars, tyranny, rebellion, malignant diseases and starvation. I have wanted my poems to be the womb of the sounds, the transmitter of the han and of a sharp awareness of the historical tragedy.*

*How deep-rooted in Korean humanity this han is! And how profoundly the history of Korea has been affected and shaped by it! If this is what han is, can Christians who have not heard it communicate the gospel in Korea? Can Christian mission that does not comprehend the sound of han speak to the hearts of Koreans? Can a theology alien to the feeling of han carry on discourse on God, history, and salvation with a Korean audience? Do we not hear a tremendous sound of han from the mouth of Jesus on the cross? "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?"*

*The Christian faith without han cannot address the han of the cross to the Korean masses. Christian mission short of han will not understand the history of a people tormented with han. And a theology deprived of han cannot encounter the God of love who overcomes the han of despair, anger, and revenge. It is encouraging that Korean theologians have heard the sound of han, identified it with their own han, and begun to wrestle with it*

culture in which we live? Are there things that we might need to do about it as a church?

**Bible:**

Vishal helps us to see Jesus' miracles might be understood not just as personal experiences of healing, but as vivid ways of challenging injustice in society. Make a list of the healing miracles that you can remember and check to see if any others challenge injustice or 'the way things are done'.

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VOICE FOUR...EVANGELISM...

C. S. SONG

C. S. Song is a remarkable theologian from Taiwan. He is a Presbyterian, now working in the USA. This passage is from his book about mission, 'Tell Us Our Names'. He begins with a folk story from Angola, about a young bride whose responsibility it is to feed her husband's brothers. She prepares the food, but they will not eat until she tells them their names. She does not know the names and so the food is wasted. A little bird in a nearby tree sings their names day after day, but the girl is too busy preparing the food and too angry about the waste to listen. In the end she stops for a moment, hears the bird's song, learns the names and everyone can eat.

Using this story as a parable of mission and evangelism, Song emphasises the importance of truly understanding people – 'knowing their names' – if we are to share the Gospel with them in any way.

He then moves on to Korea for inspiration, and encourages us to explore the concept of *han* as a way of understanding people's lives. As you will see from the extract, the *han* in people's lives is the unresolved experiences of suffering and pain that, over generations, shapes them as people.

His eating with tax collectors and sinners was not an accident, rather it is an expression of the very being of God and thus a part of Jesus' purpose for being born. Our thinking of our understandings of Jesus, however, challenges us to rethink our actions, how we view the world, the people and the structures within in."

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**I Choose**

I choose to use my creativity creatively  
To recognise, respect and utilise  
Those gifts that the Creator has given me;

I choose to make time for me  
So that I may excel in all I do and am  
So that I may be at peace with myself;

I choose to say no to those demands which  
Diminish my sense of integrity and worth;  
I choose to let you know when things are not OK  
And I need a shoulder to rest on;

I choose to take risks for the sake of growth.  
I choose to let go of relationships in which  
I am neither respected or affirmed.

I choose to uncover the depths of the Black woman  
That I am, in all her glory, with all her flaws...and  
All her dreams.

I choose to live.

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For The Love of My People

For the love of my people
I will study myself
To discern who I have become
I will see how my mind has been influenced
From the moment of my birth

For the love of my people
I will examine myself
For the visible and invisible
Scars of the past
I will see how I have learned
To view myself with disdain

For the love of my people
I will open a book
And read of my legacy
As testified by the pens of my
Sisters and brothers
And spoken from the minds of
Those who have known

For the love of my people
I choose to recognise, respect and utilise
Those gifts that the Creator has given me
So that I may excel in all that I do and am
So that I may be at peace with myself

For the love of my people
I will challenge myself
Promise myself to change
To uncover the depths of the
Black woman that I am
In all her glory
With all her dreams

was so well organised that in no time the Jewish authorities (vs, 10) knew that this little, unknown man had dared to break the Sabbath rule; he had picked up his bed and was walking. An on-the-spot inquiry began. How efficient. But that was precisely the problem. An establishment which didn't care for a man for 38 years was so prompt in caring for its own stupid rules. The sick man had complained to Jesus that his problem was not that he was sick or that treatment was not available. His problem was that the society had no compassion.

It was not by mistake that Jesus asked him to take up his bed and walk on a Sabbath. Jesus asked him to challenge this inhuman society by a deliberate act of defiance of its rule. God had provided the stirred-up pool of water for the healing of this man. It was the social pool of a stagnant, selfish society that needed to be stirred up for the healing of men like him. This was precisely what Jesus did. He not only healed the man; he asked him to break the Sabbath rule, which led to an attempt by the establishment at Jesus' life (John 5:18)''

Reflection:

- What sorts of things make you most angry? How justifiable is your anger? How valuable an emotion is anger? What do you do about the things that make you angry?
- Vishal understands that Jesus is dealing with muddled priorities in his society. Where do you see muddled priorities in society today?
- Part of the problem for the people of Jesus' time must have been that they had become so used to one way of doing things that they could not see what was wrong. How can the church guard against this danger?
- How do you think the church might best set about stirring the 'stagnant pools' of our society?
- Vishal does not mention this point, but in John 5:7, (and in Verse 4 according to the footnotes in some Bibles), there is fierce competition to be first in the pool! In what ways might this have contributed to the neglect of the man? What do

- What hymns, old or new, echo this theme of revealing God’s glory, and what can we learn from them?
- After reading the passage about the Trinity, what implications are there in it for the development of our Christian lives, our church life together, and our mission in the world?

Bible:

- Take a look at Ephesians 1:3 – 14. What echoes of the themes discussed in this session can you find in the passage?

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**VOICE THREE ... CHALLENGING INJUSTICE...**

**VISHAL MANGALWADI**

This voice from India is a passionate commentary on a Bible story, the ‘Healing at the Pool’ in John 5:1 – 18. In this session we listen to the strength of Vishal’s anger and think about the questions he raises. It would be all too easy to respond with a list of complaints about today’s world, but to hear Vishal’s voice (and Jesus’ too) we also need to ask what we do about things.

*“In John, Chapter 5, Jesus healed a man who had been sick for 38 years. He was lying near a pool of water. When the waters of the pool were stirred, they carried therapeutic powers. This was not a superstition but something a man had witnessed who had been lying by the side of the pool for decades. He was sick. The treatment was free and within his sights. Yet he could not get to it. Why? He explained to Jesus that his problem was that he did not have anyone who could put him into the water when it was stirred. No one cared for him.*

*Jesus asked him to pick up his mat and walk. He did. And it was a Sabbath. In Israel you could forget whether it was Tuesday or Thursday, but no one ever forgot that it was Sabbath. Their society*

For the love of my people  
I want to experience my life  
As a beautiful Black creation of God

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Reflection:

- In the sermon extract, what are the ‘perspectives’ on Jesus that Jillian shares? Which do you most strongly relate to, and why?
- How far can you identify with or understand the struggles and possibilities that Jillian mentions in the first part of the extract?
- In what ways do the two poems give further insight into these struggles? How do you react to Jillian’s response to them in the poems?
- How far does Jillian’s voice help to increase your awareness of God, others and yourself?
- Can you describe a recent occasion when you became aware of God or God’s love in a fresh way? How easy is it for you to develop such an awareness of God? What helps you most of all in doing that? What hinders you? What lessons are there for our worship?

Activity:

- Why not try writing your own version of ‘I Choose’.

Bible:

- The story of the Samaritan Woman is a very familiar passage, but take another look at John 4:1 – 30. Discuss the reactions and the possible feelings of Jesus and the woman.

VOICE TWO: ...GROWING, LEARNING AND CARING....

BISHOP KALLISTOS WARE

The voice of the Orthodox Church is increasingly heard today. It brings an approach to faith that may sound highly unusual, but also reminds us of aspects of Christian belief that have been neglected. In these two passages, the one about salvation gives a special emphasis to the Incarnation, and the one about the Trinity, a vision of Christian living and mutual care.

Salvation as Sharing

“The Christian message of salvation can best be summed up in terms of sharing, of solidarity and identification. The notion of sharing is a key alike to the doctrine of God in Trinity and to the doctrine of God made man. The doctrine of the Trinity affirms that, just as man is authentically personal only when he shares with others, so God is not a single person dwelling alone, but three persons who share each other’s life in perfect love. The Incarnation equally is a doctrine of sharing or participation. Christ shares to the full in what we are, and so he makes it possible for us to share in what he is, in his divine life and glory. He became what we are, so as to make us what he is.

As Christ said at the Last Supper: ‘The glory which thou hast given to me I have given to them, that they may be one, as we are one: I in them and thou in me, may they be perfectly united into one’ (John 17:22-23). Christ enables us to share in the Father’s divine glory. He is the bond and meeting-point: because he is human, he is one with us; because he is God, he is one with the Father. So through and in him we are one with God, and the Father’s glory becomes our glory. God’s Incarnation opens the way to human’s deification. To be deified is, more specifically, to be ‘christified’: the divine likeness that we are called to attain is the likeness of Christ. It is through Jesus the God-man that we are ‘ingodded’, ‘divinized’, made ‘sharers in the divine nature’ (2 Pet. 1:4) By assuming our humanity, Christ who is Son of God by nature has made us sons of God by grace. In him we are ‘adopted’ by God the Father, becoming sons-in-the-Son.

So far from being pushed into the corner and treated as a piece of abstruse theologising, of interest only to specialists, the doctrine of the Trinity ought to have upon our daily life an effect that is nothing less than revolutionary. Made after the image of God the Trinity, human beings are called to reproduce on earth the mystery of mutual love that the Trinity lives in heaven. In medieval Russia St. Sergius of Radonezh dedicated his newly-founded monastery to the Holy Trinity, precisely because he intended that his monks should show one another day by day the same love as passes between the three divine persons. And such is the vocation not only of monks but of everyone. Each social unit – the family, the school, the workshop, the parish, the Church Universal – is to be made an ikon of the Trinity. Because we know that God is three in one, each of us is committed irrevocably to a life of practical service, of active compassion. Our faith in the Trinity puts us under an obligation to struggle at every level, from the strictly personal to the highly organised, against all forms of oppression, injustice and exploitation. In our combat for social righteousness and ‘human rights’, we are acting specifically in the name of the Holy Trinity.’

Reflection:

- What are your reactions to the passages? Is there anything that puzzles you or strikes you as unusual or difficult to understand? Anything that you strongly agree with?
- How do you react to the notion of us being ‘christified’.... becoming Christ-like and sharing in the glory of God? Where do you see the glory of God revealed in Christ-like life today? Are there glimpses of that glory in your own life? Or, probably easier to spot, in the lives of others? In individuals or in communities?
- How far do you think we should be able to glimpse the glory of God in others (and in ourselves)? What qualities do you think make up that glory?
- What might we do as a church to play our part in helping the glory to be revealed?