

# Special edition Preach.

Where the world meets the Word.

Volume 1

## THE BEST OF PREACH Volume 1

INTERVIEWS  
WITH PHILIP YANCEY  
& JOEL EDWARDS

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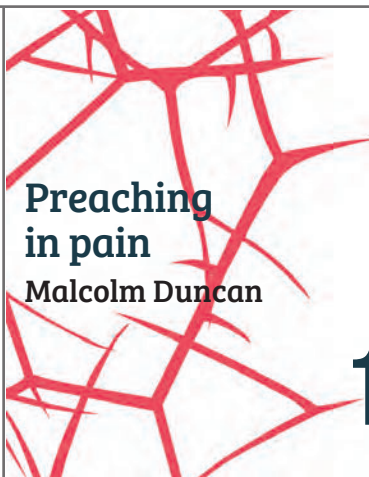
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# From your editors...



“  
ONCE AGAIN I'LL GO OVER  
WHAT GOD HAS DONE...  
I'LL PONDER ALL THE  
THINGS YOU'VE  
ACCOMPLISHED  
”

**W**e're excited to share this special edition of *Preach* magazine, highlighting a sample of what members can access in the *Preach* archive, via our website.

There are times when it is right to look back and see what God has done in our lives and through other people. Psalm 77:13-14 declares, 'Once again I'll go over what God has done, lay out on the table the ancient wonders; I'll ponder all the things you've accomplished, and give a long, loving look at your acts' (*The Message Version*). Launched in winter 2014, *Preach* has had the privilege of speaking into the lives of its readers, who have spanned the full spectrum of church traditions.

As we carefully read through the past magazines, the riches they contained became apparent – interviews, articles, columns, book reviews and so on. With too much content to select from, it became obvious we needed to restrict this special edition to the first 10 *Preach* issues, dating from winter 2014 to Spring 2017, and even then, we have only skimmed the very thickest of cream from the top.

Under the wonderful editing of Jo Swinney, the first 10 issues became the foundation of what we read today. With writers who have given their best to ensure you, as readers,

feel equipped and supported as you preach and lead in your local contexts, from the platform to small groups, this edition of *Preach* seeks to dive into wisdom from the past, which is just as relevant today.

As each article is in its original layout, the writers' biographies are unchanged. We especially want to highlight and honour Joel Edwards, Jenny Hawke and Bex Lewis, who have died since their articles were published.

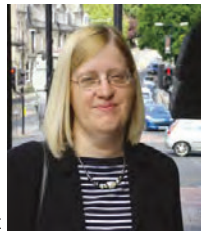
Our hope is that this edition would be a blessing to you. We'd love to hear what you think, so please do email us with your thoughts and if you think we've missed one of your favourites!

Every blessing,  
Emma and Ali

**Emma Beaney**  
Editor  
editor@lwpt.org.uk



**Ali Hull**  
Book Editor  
bookeditor@lwpt.org.uk



## EDITORIAL BOARD

### Bob Bartindale

Officer for Worship and Local Preachers,  
The Methodist Church [methodist.org.uk](http://methodist.org.uk)

### Dotha Blackwood

Chaplain and tutor at Spurgeon's  
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## Preach.

### Volume 1

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or digital, at [preachweb.org/membership](http://preachweb.org/membership)

### Editor

Emma Beaney

### Book Editor

Ali Hull, [bookeditor@lwpt.org.uk](mailto:bookeditor@lwpt.org.uk)

### Advertising

Michael Welch, [ads@lwpt.org.uk](mailto:ads@lwpt.org.uk)

### Marketing and Membership

Ken Gibson, [membership@lwpt.org.uk](mailto:membership@lwpt.org.uk)

### Design

Adept, [adeptdesign.co.uk](http://adeptdesign.co.uk)

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### Editorial office

The Leaders of Worship and Preachers Trust  
Unit 14, Orbital 25 Business Park,  
Dwight Road, Watford, WD18 9DA

T 01923 231811

E [lwptoffice@lwpt.org.uk](mailto:lwptoffice@lwpt.org.uk)

W [preachweb.org](http://preachweb.org)



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## YOUR BLOGS

We have a number of blogs and book reviews that you, as readers, have written for *Preach*. Visit our website here: [preachweb.org/book-reviews](http://preachweb.org/book-reviews) or [preachweb.org/blog](http://preachweb.org/blog)



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## MENTORING MATTERS

Do you have a question or subject you'd love a mentor to help with? Rick Lewis, a highly experienced mentor to church leaders across the globe, is writing our new *Preach* column called Mentoring Matters.

Let us know what you'd find useful for Rick to unpack. We're sure it will encourage others in need of similar support. Please email [editor@lwpt.org.uk](mailto:editor@lwpt.org.uk)

## PREACHING WORKSHOPS





Did you know we've launched a new online preaching workshop initiative? Each bite-sized workshop is designed to encourage you to hone your preaching skills, no matter how long you've been preaching.



Alongside the workshop, you can also download a useful note-taking guide. To access the content, visit our website: [preachweb.org/workshops](http://preachweb.org/workshops)

## STAY IN TOUCH!

Look out for interesting new content from *Preach*.

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## PREACH ARCHIVE IS ONLINE FOR YOU

The whole digital archive of every *Preach* magazine ever published is now accessible to you! There are currently 38 magazines with Bible-based articles, opinions, book reviews and preaching ideas, relevant to everyday life and our contemporary context. Members of *Preach* can access the members-only page through our website: [www.preachweb.org/preach-archive](http://www.preachweb.org/preach-archive)







# In Conversation with Philip Yancey



Interview by Jo Swinney

*Preach* issue 1, winter 2014







## PHILIP YANCEY'S

father died of polio when Philip was one year old. His church had convinced him to come off life support in faith that he would be healed. This is only one of the reasons Yancey speaks about being in recovery from a form of Christianity that almost killed his belief in a good God. His Southern American childhood was spent as part of a 'toxic' church: racist, judgemental and joyless.

Since a cautious rediscovery of beauty and goodness led him to get to know God for the first time, his life has been about communicating grace to anyone who will listen. And apparently there are quite a few of us, if his book sales are anything to go by. He lives with his wife Janet, a social worker and hospice chaplain, in Colorado, and writes for a living.

In an age of nauseating self-promotion, Yancey is refreshingly publicity shy. I was delighted to have the rare opportunity to put some questions to him on behalf of *Preach* magazine.

### PHILIP IN FIGURES

-  Author of over 20 books
-  15 million of them in print around the world
-  Translated into 35 languages
-  13 gold medallion awards from Christian publishers and booksellers

**JS** Do you think the sermon is still a valid way to communicate the gospel? Why or why not?

**PY** The sermon is certainly valid, but it has limited range. For committed believers, the sermon remains a primary way of communicating the good news, by conveying theology and biblical truth and making practical applications to life. Yet sermons are normally delivered in churches or places of worship, which means that the audience self-selects to hear them.

Even for the uncommitted who happen to visit a church, the sermon presents certain barriers, namely the strange and perhaps threatening religious environment. When do I stand up or kneel? How do these people know what page to turn to? What is this Eucharist thing all about?

**JS** Those are significant hurdles. Are there ways to get over them?

**PY** I can think of two ways. The first is simple friendship which can lessen that intimidation factor and present church as a welcoming experience. Think of visiting a museum or historical site with a friend who shows you around – when we invite people to church, we can serve that same function. The second would be transparency from the pulpit, revealing the preacher as a fellow human with struggles and temptations, rather than an authority figure who speaks from on high.

**JS** You mentioned people who just happen to visit a church, but who are essentially unconvinced. This may not happen often but it does happen. Can a preacher disarm cynics, or is it only the pilgrims, artists and activists who can smuggle truth to the unconverted?

**PY** Most preachers I know don't have much experience in disarming cynics – from the pulpit, at least. In a hospital room, in prison, in personal counselling: in those contexts they

can indeed engage the cynic effectively. Again, the church provides a kind of ‘captive audience’, and preachers understandably focus on feeding the sheep in the fold, rather than attracting new ones.

A clergy friend of mine tells me of the enormous difference in the way people treat him when he wears a collar. They don’t tend to initiate conversation, they feel awkward around him, and some even try to avoid him in light of all the clergy scandals they’ve heard about.

Of course, a new breed of seeker churches has a different approach, with varying degrees of success. In my country, such churches usually meet in buildings that don’t look like churches, emphasise entertainment through music and drama, and direct some services with an uncommitted audience in mind. By doing so, however, they rely on the same style as pilgrims, activists, and artists. They tend to present truth indirectly, rather than directly, which often is the most powerful way. After all, the vast majority of the Bible expresses itself in the form of story and poetry, not propositions.

**JS** You are very concerned with faith making a visible difference. Can a preacher’s words have power if their life doesn’t mirror what they teach?

**PV** My first instinct is to answer ‘No’, because I think of Christian leaders who are involved in scandalous situations and the negative impact that follows in their wake. However, I have often seen God ‘override’ a preacher’s failures by using the words to reach people despite the speaker’s personal flaws. I’ve experienced that myself. I’ve left a hotel room torn up over a very tense family situation, delivered what I felt was a flat and perfunctory sermon, only to find it had a deep effect on someone in the congregation or audience. I write books about grace, and yet I don’t always show grace to people who irritate me or treat me wrongly. And the Bible contains many examples of spokespersons used by God despite their personal failings.

**JS** If God could only use perfect people we’d be scuppered, wouldn’t we? Speaking of perfect people, Jesus – the only one ever – clearly made his message ‘compelling to a jaded society’, but he was also sometimes deliberately obscure, made people work to dig out his meaning, and didn’t hide the fact that entering the kingdom of heaven was a costly and difficult business. How can we balance the desire to share the gospel in a way that attracts outsiders in to take a closer look with a commitment to stay true to communicating the whole picture (some of which is frankly not attractive, a ‘stumbling block’ even)?

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THINK OF VISITING A MUSEUM OR HISTORICAL SITE WITH A FRIEND WHO SHOWS YOU AROUND – WHEN WE INVITE PEOPLE TO CHURCH, WE CAN SERVE THAT SAME FUNCTION.

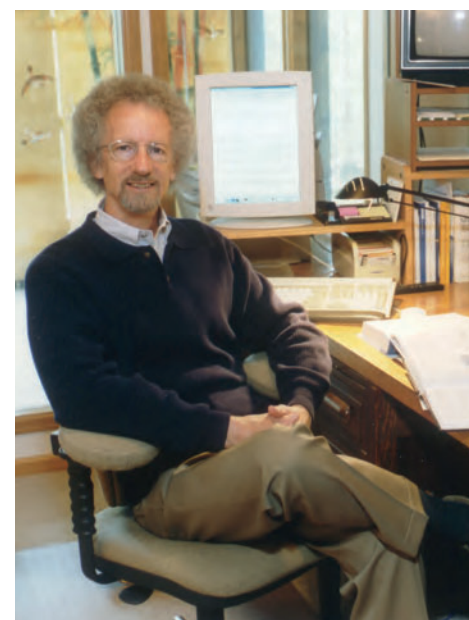
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**PV** Ooh, that’s a wonderful question! You are hitting at the central paradox of the gospel. The statement Jesus repeated more often than any other in the Gospels (six times) was that we find life by losing it. I believe firmly that Jesus offered the life most abundant, most full. Yet it is not abundant in the sense that our self-indulgent culture promotes.

The principle is counterintuitive. Parents learn that the most important relationships on earth come out of sacrificial love: nursing a child through illness, patiently helping with schoolwork, sharing and bearing the burdens of your children. Surveys show that most personal and spiritual growth occurs in times of suffering and hardship. The most rewarding experiences in life – think of Olympic athletes, mountain climbers, research scientists – come with cost, not cheaply. The more investment, the more reward.

A shallow, materialistic culture proclaims the opposite: weight loss without sacrifice, sex without love, prosperity without work, health without discipline. Sadly, some branches of the church reflect that shallow philosophy rather than the deeper truth that Jesus taught. A poor marketer, Jesus never put a gloss on his message; neither did he downplay the promised rewards. ‘For the joy that was set before him he endured the cross.’ Those of us who follow Jesus dare not discount the personal discipline involved in holy living – which includes caring for the vulnerable, giving generously, keeping pure in a sex-saturated culture, and sacrificial service – but we should do so in a way that demonstrates Jesus’ paradoxical principle.

In my writing I love to highlight Christians who serve in out of the way places, without much acclaim, because I have found them to be the most deeply fulfilled people I know.



**JS** Can you tell me about a time you experienced grace through a sermon? What was it about and why has it stayed with you?

**PV** I attended a Christian college that held a chapel service every day. In truth, I can only remember a handful of them. Only one stands out.



**JS** That is quite a statement in itself. I wonder how many of us would say the same thing. Tell us about that one sermon that made a lasting impact.

**PY** A board member of the school, very wealthy, owned a large orange juice company that was later sold to Coca-Cola. Each week one of his trucks pulled up and we students would unload crates of orange juice, which he provided free to the school. We practically worshipped this man, our source of fresh orange juice, so when he spoke in chapel that day we paid rapt attention.

An Italian immigrant, he spoke with a thick accent, and clearly had little experience in public speaking. To our shock, he spent that service telling us about his greatest failure as a businessman. After a severe winter in Florida, he cheated by adding sugar to his pure orange juice, against government rules. I've never forgotten that lesson in humility and transparency. We were prepared to idolise him. Instead, we went away convicted by our own natural instincts to 'look good', and conscious of the times we had failed to live as we should.

I'll mention one other chapel service that just came to mind. Perhaps the most beloved teacher in the school stood up and said, 'I have prayed and worked all week, but I'm afraid I have no word from the Lord for you today.' He then dismissed us! Again, a lesson in humility and transparency.

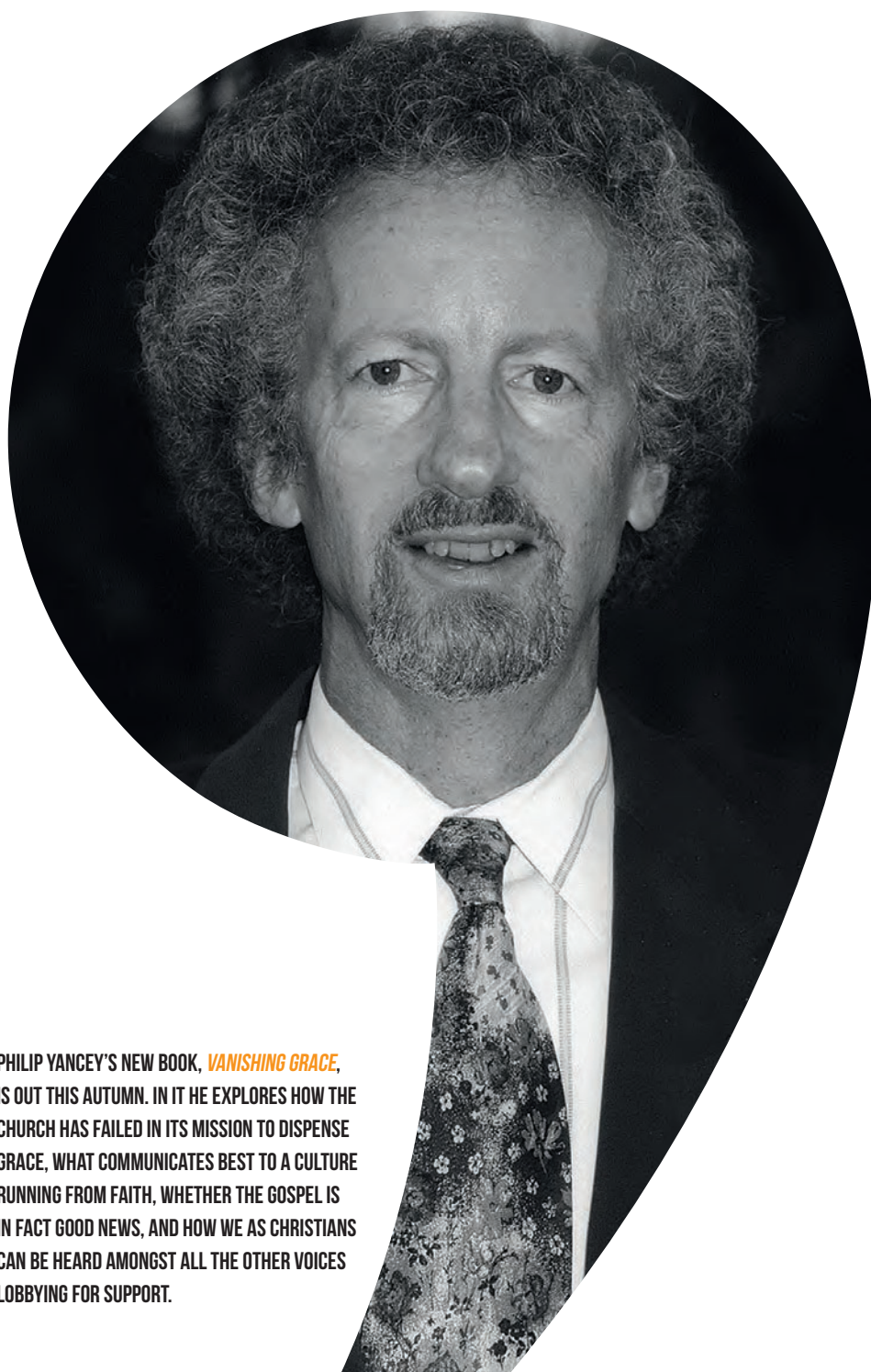
**JS** The cynic in me would say it might have also been a lesson in how to get away with showing up to preach when you haven't prepared... What do you think should be the main goal of a preacher in a church setting (aside from actually preaching, which perhaps isn't a given after all)?

**PY** You may have heard this phrase: 'to afflict the comfortable and comfort the afflicted'. I'm impressed by the two-edged sword Jesus used in his own teaching. He pricked the consciences of the proud, the self-righteous, the wealthy. At the very same time, he brought comfort to those who were vulnerable and hurting. If a preacher can do that... well, he or she is following the Jesus style.

“

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PHILIP YANCEY'S NEW BOOK, *VANISHING GRACE*, IS OUT THIS AUTUMN. IN IT HE EXPLORES HOW THE CHURCH HAS FAILED IN ITS MISSION TO DISPENSE GRACE, WHAT COMMUNICATES BEST TO A CULTURE RUNNING FROM FAITH, WHETHER THE GOSPEL IS IN FACT GOOD NEWS, AND HOW WE AS CHRISTIANS CAN BE HEARD AMONGST ALL THE OTHER VOICES LOBBYING FOR SUPPORT.

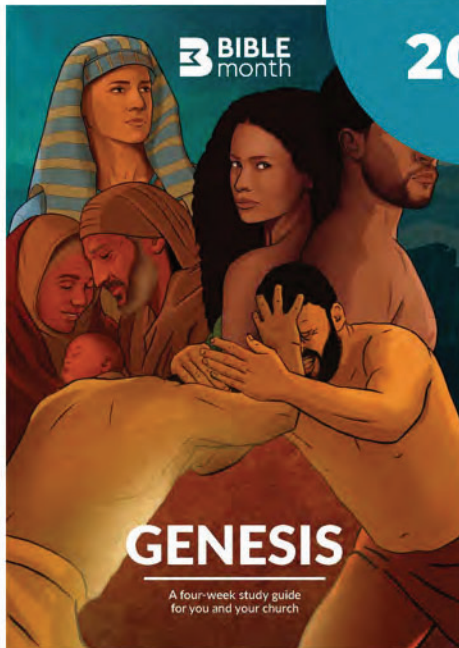


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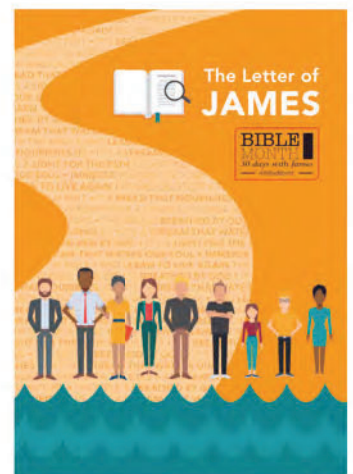
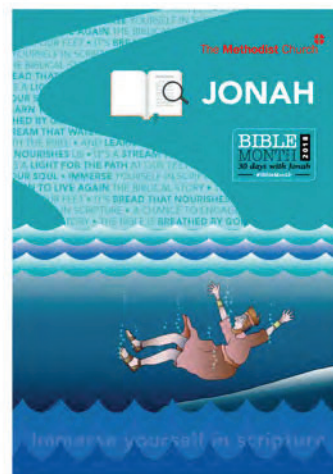
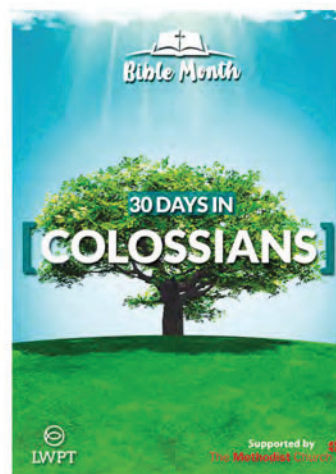
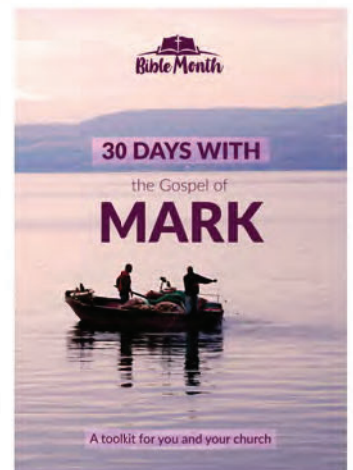
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