

# Our Pessimism and His Power: Remember to Forget, but Never Forget to Remember!

DAVID HULL

*MET:Revive's new Ambassador, David Hull, updates us on his work and reflects on why it is essential to remember the Lord's mighty acts in our revival heritage whilst forgetting our human weaknesses and failings.*

It is a great delight to have begun the new role of MET:Revive Ambassador, with its focus of 'on the ground' ministry around the Connexion. In my travels to Methodist churches across the UK, I've been struck by our deep spiritual thirst. I long for us to 'redig the wells' (Genesis 26:18), rediscovering what the Lord has done in the past as we look to what he might do in our future.

I'm sometimes met with a warning when I speak of looking back to the great revivals of the past. Some point me to Isaiah 43:18-19: 'Forget the former things; do not dwell on the past. See, I am doing a new thing!' It leaves me deeply concerned that we might have misunderstood Isaiah's message and be missing the profound hope he offers to Christians desperately longing for renewal in our own day.

No one is suggesting, of course, that revival will look exactly like John Wesley on horseback preaching to miners in fields! What I do believe, however, is that the pattern of the Lord's saving work remains consistent throughout history. Understanding this pattern is crucial for our churches today.

## OLDER THAN TIME ITSELF, YET FOREVER NEW

To understand what Isaiah really meant by 'forgetting the former things,' we need to read these verses in their wider context, including the verses immediately preceding and following:

*'This is what the Lord says – he who made a way through the sea, a path through the mighty waters, who drew out the chariots and horses, the army and reinforcements together, and they lay there, never to rise again, extinguished, snuffed out like a wick: 'Forget the former things; do not dwell on the past. See, I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up; do you not perceive it? I am making a way in the wilderness and streams in the wasteland.'*

Isaiah 43:16-19

Though many interpret this as a call to forget God's past great acts in order to embrace something new, it seems to me that this misses the true message of the text. Far from calling them to forget his mighty deeds, the Lord begins by reminding his people of what he has done – pointing back to the Exodus (vv. 16-17). THIS God, who did THAT, is now speaking to THEM.

So, what are the 'former things' they are to forget? Having reminded them of the Exodus, would the Lord then contradict himself? Of course not!

The exiles in Babylon were a despondent people. Every drop of hope had been drained through their years as prisoners of war. These former things – idolatrous disobedience, military defeat, forced marches, and years of slave labour far from home – were what haunted them daily. Surely these were 'the former things' the Lord was calling them to forget.

Notice the deliberate parallel: 'he who made a way through the sea' (v. 16) and 'I am making a way in the wilderness' (v. 19). The Lord isn't telling them to forget how he saved them before because he's now going to do something completely different. Rather, he calls them to remember how he saved his people previously because he will save them according to the same pattern again.

This 'new thing' is the Lord's calling card – his way of acting to save his people that is as old as time itself, yet forever new. The same God who made a way through the sea now promises to make a way through the wilderness. His methods carry his unmistakable signature across the ages, for his old ways are forever new. The exiles needed to forget their pessimism and remember his power. We face the same challenge today.

## THE OLD, OLD STORY NEW TODAY

In my recent travels across our Connexion, I've noticed three consistent themes in our Methodist churches, into which Isaiah's message speaks powerful hope today:

### 1. A Spiritual Thirst for Renewal

Throughout many of our churches, there's a great spiritual thirst and openness to the Holy Spirit. Many of us are asking, 'How do we move from maintenance to mission? From surviving to thriving?' I'm convinced that the answer begins with the same pattern Isaiah taught: forgetting our pessimism and remembering the Lord's power.

The same God who poured out his Spirit in the Evangelical Revival 300 years ago remains unchanging in his character and power today. Wesley didn't see the revival of his day as unprecedented, but as a fresh outpouring of the same Spirit who had moved in apostolic times. He studied church history to discern God's patterns of work – remembering in order to recognise the 'new thing'.

### 2. A Sense of Being Stuck in Mission

Many churches express frustration about evangelism: 'How do we get people to take the next step from regularly attending our coffee morning or toddler group to exploring the Good News of Jesus?'

The Lord's pattern of the 'new thing' reminds us that effective evangelism isn't about novel techniques but about rediscovering timeless truths. Wesley observed in his sermon 'The General Spread of the Gospel' that the gospel typically spreads from heart to heart and home to home – fascinating words to have written in the white-hot days of revival! He reminds us that transformation often happens through growing relationships and deepening conversations.

I've seen this begin to work beautifully in practice. Bathampton Methodist Church – the church in which I grew up – has a thriving Sunday brunch all-age service for young families. Seeking a next step, they started a regular afternoon service a fortnight later. In their large worship area, children and parents explore the same Bible passage separately, with activities for children whilst adults read and discuss Scripture together. Some very new to the Bible are discovering uniquely powerful, life-shaping wisdom they had never encountered before – one step at a time.

People are often more ready to take the next step than we are to invite them. When we combine intentional prayer for those in our community with intentional conversations that offer clear next steps, we're walking the ancient path of God's 'new thing.' Just as the exiles needed to forget their pessimism and remember the Lord's power, we too need to set aside any discouragement about evangelism and remember how the Spirit has always worked through ordinary believers sharing extraordinary truth, as they depend prayerfully on the Lord.

3. Administrative Overwhelm

There's a widespread sense of being overwhelmed by denominational and legal administration. Leaders ask, 'How do we do what needs to be done whilst not taking our eyes off the Great Commission?'

Though the burdens are real and the weight can be heavy indeed, the Lord's command to 'forget the former things' of despair and hopelessness while remembering his mighty acts offers a powerful reorientation. Like the exiles in Babylon, we are called to seek the peace and prosperity of the places in which the Lord has set us (Jeremiah 29:7) whilst singing the Lord's song for all to hear in powerful testimony of our living hope (Psalm 137:4-6).

We need practical solutions alongside spiritual reorientation. This may include advocating for the simplification of what's asked of local churches and their ministers by connexional officers, while also



praying specifically for the Lord to raise up people with administrative gifts in the local context to help carry these burdens. The early apostles recognised this need when they appointed others to administrative tasks so they could devote themselves to 'prayer and the ministry of the word' (Acts 6:4).

Just as the exiles needed to forget their pessimism and remember the Lord's power, we must reject the despair that can come when administrative demands threaten to overwhelm our primary calling. We are called to remember that the same Lord who organised a wandering group of former slaves into a nation, who established order in the early church despite the growing pains, is still at work today.

NEW EVERY MORNING

I define revival as the rediscovery of authentic Christianity, accompanied by an extraordinary move of the Holy Spirit, resulting in the accelerated transformation of individuals in holiness, the church in evangelism, and society as lives are changed. The extraordinary moves of the Holy Spirit throughout church history – from Pentecost to the Evangelical Revival, from revivals in Wales & the Hebrides, to East Africa and beyond – all seem to follow this pattern of the 'new thing.'

The same Lord who made a way for them will make a way for us, all to his glory. Whether or not we see widespread revival in our lifetime is in the Lord's hands. The wonder of the gospel is that the Lord's 'new thing' is both dramatic and daily. The same God who moved in sweeping revivals also renews us day by day. In the darkest days of Jerusalem's fall into exile, Jeremiah penned words of profound hope: 'Because of the Lord's great love we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail. They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness' (Lamentations 3:22-23).

As we look ahead to the 300th anniversary of the Evangelical Revival, let this be a call to prioritising prayer and deepening discipleship. Let's look to the Lord to do his 'new thing' again in our day – making a way where there seems to be no way, bringing streams of living water to our spiritual wasteland – forgetting our pessimism and remembering his power.

HELP TO HOST THE 'REMEMBER TO FORGET' AUTUMN TOUR!

I am so looking forward to visiting churches across the Connexion again this Autumn. Can you help to host MET:Revive's Autumn Tour? We are dependent upon a network of local hosts who can help to arrange:

- A local venue
- Worship leaders/musicians
- Invitations and publicity to neighboring churches and circuits to make this a regional gathering
- Help from local churches with travel and accommodation costs where possible

Each mid-week visit includes:

- 'Moving in Mission' Afternoon Leadership Workshop - practical sessions for leaders and available church members
- 'Remember to Forget' Evening Celebration - with worship, preaching, and prayerful response
- Resources - materials for ongoing fellowship and prayer

How to help:

Could you offer to be a local host, helping to coordinate these arrangements? - It is no different from organising any other service or special event in your church or circuit! Alternatively, could you speak with your minister about hosting us and put us in touch?

To explore hosting a visit where you are as part of the 'Remember to Forget' tour, please contact my PA, Janet Walker: [janet.walker@metrevive.uk](mailto:janet.walker@metrevive.uk) / 07799 068 539 and we will be glad to begin to make plans. For more information, go to [metrevive.uk/RTF](http://metrevive.uk/RTF)

FOREVER NEW

I do hope I will be able to see you at a local MET:Revive event in the Autumn. Until then, may we all have eyes to see the 'new thing' springing up, hearts prepared to receive it, and voices ready to proclaim it to a world in desperate need of the God whose old ways are forever new.

REV DR DAVID HULL

*Rev Dr David Hull, Lead Pastor of Freedom Church Bristol, serves as MET:Revive's Ambassador and Chair of the Association of Wesleyan Evangelicals (AWE). His ministry with MET:Revive focuses on teaching, preaching, and encouraging evangelical Methodists across the Connexion.*

