

Winter is past, and we need to be ready for ‘Revival Springtime’

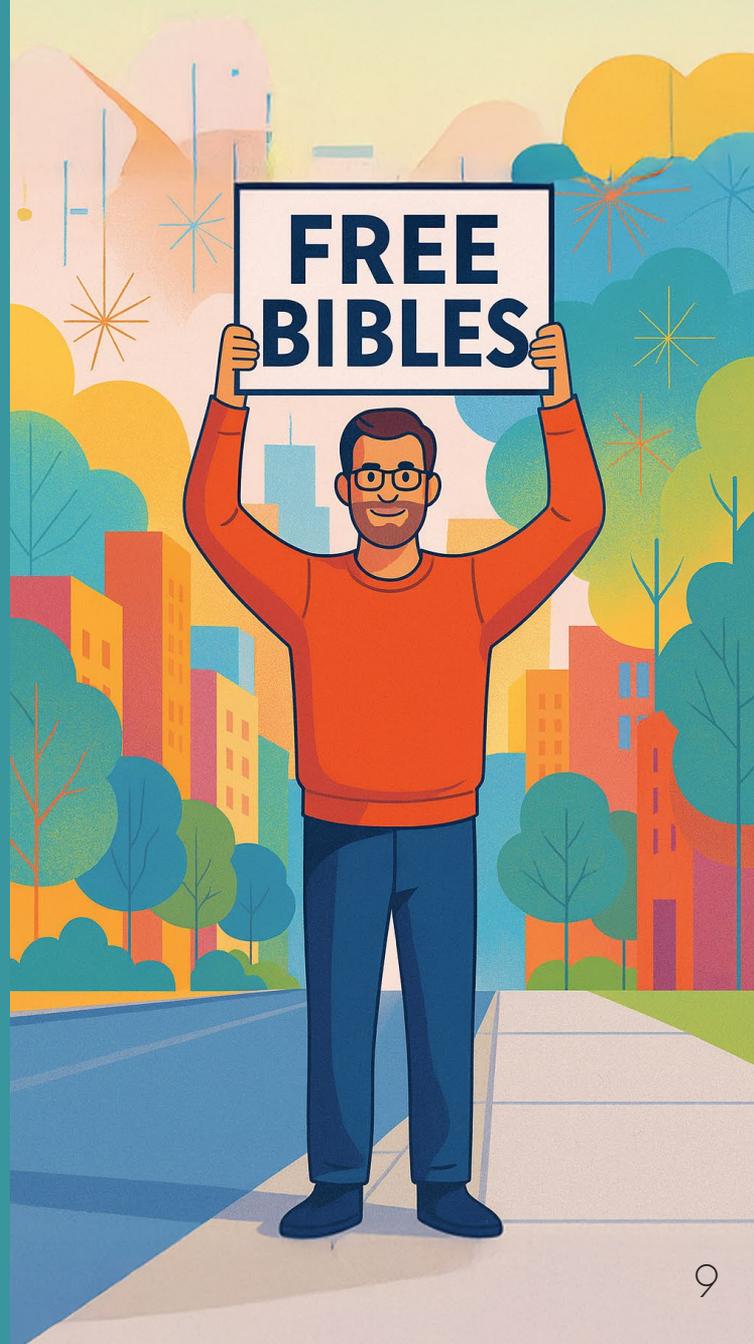
RACHEL JORDAN-WOLF

Rachel Jordan-Wolf considers the call to respond to the Quiet Revival, with stories of simple and fruitful ways to act now.

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Have you ever watched the film 'Narnia'? In the film, the mythical land of Narnia is frozen under the wicked rule of the White Queen; literally the land is snowbound, cold and dark, and they never have Christmas or reach springtime. Years of winter rule under the White Queen have passed with no change, until one day the true King of Narnia, Aslan, a lion who represents Jesus Christ, comes to save Narnia.

As Aslan moves in to reclaim Narnia, the winter thaws, the grip of frozen darkness recedes, Christmas arrives and new green shoots emerge. Spring is coming! This is what is happening in the UK right now!

The latest research from the Bible Society, the 'Quiet Revival', shows this early spring growth and the promise of a new harvest in England and Wales of people coming to faith in Jesus Christ - in greater numbers than we have known for many decades. Other research commissioned from the Iona Institute in Northern Ireland witnesses this too, and research from the US and Europe are all echoing this new day - there is a true sense that King Jesus is on the move. Spring is coming.

The numbers in the Quiet Revival report speak clearly. In England and Wales, about 12% of adults attend church every month. Two million people have joined churches in regular attendance across England and Wales since 2018; a remarkable sign of growth. Among 18-24 year-olds, the engagement and openness is high, with 16% of this age group attending church regularly. Astonishingly, 21% of young men aged 18-24 are now regularly attending church, more than the young women in this age group. Amongst students, a Savanta survey commissioned by Fusion found that 33% of non-Christian students in this age group would be interested in reading the Bible, especially with a friend.

The Iona institute in Northern Ireland also commissioned a survey and found similarly hopeful data showing a rise of positivity about faith and religion in particular amongst Gen Z in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. This, along with research from the United States and stories from across Europe paint a picture of a new generation, behaving differently from their parents, and who are exploring faith for themselves. The church is witnessing a shift that we prayed for and hoped for, for several decades.

As I have travelled across the UK this year, I have heard stories of this hungry generation turning to faith in Jesus Christ. Just this morning, a pastor was sharing how he is now holding a regular Bible study with young men who have brought themselves to church. This phenomenon is not just limited to certain towns or places, but is



happening widely across the UK. King Jesus is moving in this new generation and we as a church are living in a new hope-filled time. What should be our response?

It is time to return to the simple outreach practices that we abandoned in the years of freezing winter - as they were deemed ineffectual and outdated. In the new openness we are seeing that simple and authentic outreach works.

In the village of Southwater, two ladies decided to try the Bible table idea that is part of the Hope Together 'Great Gospel Give Away'. They could only spare one hour - they weren't really expecting anyone to be interested, but they thought they would give this a go. They took a table out into the street near the cafe and shops. They had a cardboard box on it with a sign saying 'Free Bibles' then they waited. Within minutes people were approaching the table for the beautiful gospels that were placed upon them. Faith conversations took place and in one hour, the ladies had given away 32 gospels. They were staggered by the interest and reception. Southwater shows that what began as a renewal of openness in Gen Z, is impacting other generations as well. Spring is spreading!

Evangelism needs to be clear and visible. People are ordering camping tables as they take to the streets to share the Good News with the beautiful gospels from Hope Together. Others are putting the gospels in cafes, food banks, at toddler groups, or in open churches. These gospels can be given to friends or neighbours or left in a book swap phone box!

Another easy outreach is 'Adopt a Bench' which is as simple as it sounds. A gentleman called Frank who heard about 'Adopt a bench' and has now adopted two benches. He sits on one bench on a Wednesday afternoon and another on a Thursday afternoon. Each time he prays and waits for the Lord to bring someone along for a divine encounter. He has so many testimonies of encounters with all the people he has met on his benches. This idea is based on how Jesus met the woman at the well (John, chapter 4). Jesus was sitting where people naturally came as part of their daily tasks of drawing water from the well. It was there that he encountered the woman of Samaria bringing her to new life! In this season of spring and openness, why not consider how you might 'Adopt a Bench'!

Churches are returning to door-to-door evangelism. One church said that two new families have joined their church because they simply went door to door. Heading out might seem daunting, but it's a new era and most people are pleased to meet the local church

at their front door. The wonderful offer of prayer at the front door is quite staggering: two out of three of those who don't currently go to church would like to receive an offer of prayer! An invitation to church from door-to-door visits shows that one in three of those who currently don't attend church would love an invitation. Furthermore, the offer of a gospel at the front door shows that one in four of those who currently don't attend church would be interested to read the Bible!

These are all the positive statistics from the Quiet Revival and show that whether its door to door, simply conversing with a friend or neighbour, or chatting to someone at the gym or in the bus queue is fruitful. To find out more about door to door and the Great Gospel Give Away, check out the Hope Together website: hopetogether.org.uk

New Christians are coming to faith fast, most of them in under a year. This is what was found in the Finding Jesus research, commissioned by the Evangelical Alliance. When I was out on a busy Sunday with our Bible table this year, I got there for just half an hour. In that half hour, I stopped one young man, I invited him to church that evening, he came and gave his life to Jesus - the most worthwhile half an hour!

Why are we seeing such hunger? One of the reasons is the power of the online world. The digital generation are starting their search online. Many are finding Christian influencers and some non-Christian influencers are even recommending the Bible and Christianity to their followers! Here in the digital space Gen Z are discovering so much about faith and then they are coming to church after doing online searches. We need to encourage our young generation Christians to inhabit the online space for good and use it as digitally native Christians to share their faith.

What can you do? Start by praying, and gather others to pray with you that spring shoots of people coming to faith where you are can happen.

Make sure your church has an evangelism team - people who are ready to talk about their faith with others. You



could use the Talking Jesus course to help them. Do something - don't spend all your time planning. Why not follow the example of Frank and adopt a bench, or like the ladies in Southwater order some gospels and grab a camping table and see what happens where you are!

In 2 Corinthians 5:20, it reminds us that we are Christ's ambassadors; he is making his appeal through us and has entrusted us with the message of reconciliation: to invite all to be reconciled through the life and sacrifice of Jesus to be reconciled into the family of God.

The window of spiritual openness is real, but it is not guaranteed to stay wide forever. We are called to act now – with courage and simplicity. Let our churches burst out with an invitation to all. Let's not spend forever planning, but do something! Try simple ways to witness and point to Jesus. We are called to be ambassadors to tell our stories – of the genuine encounters with Jesus that impact hearts and minds; stories that travel through social feeds, classrooms, and kitchens alike.

Spring is here and simple acts – a table, a bench, a Bible, a prayer – can unlock a generation for Christ.

DR RACHEL JORDAN-WOLF

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PRAYER FOCUS

The tide is turning: Give thanks for this move of God creating an openness to the gospel message in the population; pray for people to take up the challenge of finding simple ways of reaching out to local communities; for motivation and an excitement to pray regularly for revival, especially for those who live close by, those using church premises for different activities (Isaiah 43:18-19; Colossians 4:2 & 5-6).

FOCUS ON THE CHURCH

The Methodist Church: The President and Vice President of Conference, Rev Richard Andrew and Mr Matthew Forsyth; Secretary of Conference, Rev Dr Jonathan Hustler; for all presbyters, deacons, Local Preachers, and Worship Leaders to be set on fire by the power of the Holy Spirit, bringing the word of God to congregations in new and dynamic ways (1 Peter 1:13-16; Acts 1:8).

FOCUS ON THE NATION

National Leaders: Integrity and justice, wisdom and strength for the Prime Minister, Sir Kier Starmer and all cabinet members; a return to God at the centre of

Government and the formulating of godly policies; courage, wisdom and discernment for Christian MPs; the Royal family (Psalm 2:10-12; Deuteronomy 28:1-2).

Sanctity of life: Pray for the upholding of the sanctity of life with regards to abortion and the assisted dying bill currently being debated in the House of Lords (Psalm 139:14-16; Genesis 4:8-10).

FOCUS ON WORLD ISSUES

Ukraine/Russia: Pray for President Volodymyr Zelensky in the volatile situation he faces; for Ukraine to receive the necessary resources they need; for a de-escalation of the war and a fair solution for peace to be found acceptable to Ukraine; the threat of increased espionage across Europe from Russia: the influence of President Donald Trump (Psalm 33:13-16; Psalm 46:8-11).

Disaster areas of the world: Flooding in Asia; fire in Hong Kong; hurricane affected areas, especially Jamaica; pray for people who have lost everything; aid to reach those most affected; re-building of shattered lives; for victims to find their hope in Jesus (Acts 20:35; Galatians 6:2).