



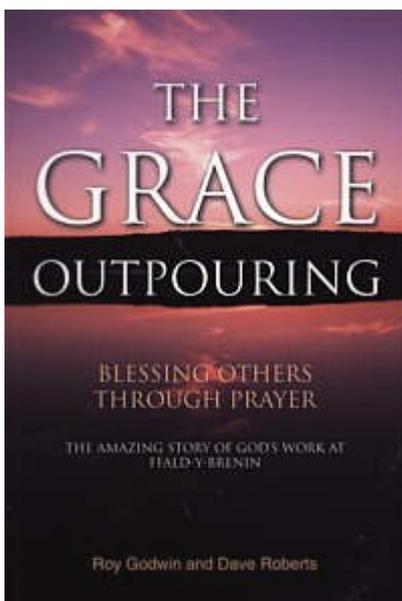
MARCH NEWS EASTER 2014

Dear Friends and Family,

As we continue to seek God regarding our future some pieces of the puzzle seem to be falling into place. As Sharon and I have read, as we have prayed and talked and shared with friends, it seems to be becoming clear that our future is probably back in the UK rather than in France.

There are two things that have particularly sparked our interest, have given us the 'buzz' that has often indicated to us that God is showing us something that is to be significant for us.

The first of these is the Fresh Expressions movement. For those of you who have not yet encountered this, it is something of a follow-on, or a widening of the approach to rethinking evangelism which led to the ALPHA course in the past. Fresh Expressions seeks to encourage churches to rethink how they do church; how to create authentic Christian communities in which discipling and missional activity are undertaken in contextually appropriate ways.



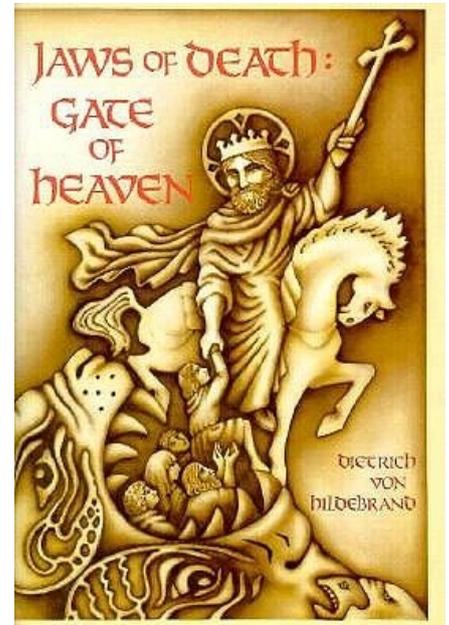
The second thing that has really spoken to us is the book 'The Grace Outpouring' by Roy Godwin, a wonderful book in which he recounts the recent remarkable activity of God in South Wales, where a Christian community has responded to God's invitation to pray his blessing on people.

We believe that our experience in the wider church is also a key element God has put in our lives, and will continue to be a part of our future. As yet we are not sure how or where these all fit together, and there may even be other pieces of the 'puzzle' that need to fall into place, but we are currently pursuing opportunities that are in line with these as we seek God's will for our future.

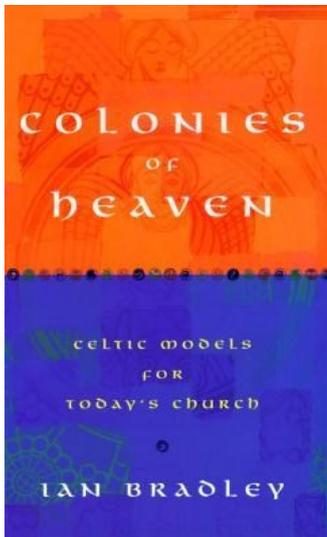
Just as an example we recently investigated an opportunity in a multi-church project on a new housing estate in Devon and we have also been in contact with a Christian retreat centre and community. As yet no doors have opened definitively. Please continue to pray for God to bring us the invitation that will open up our new direction. Waiting is hard!

At the same time we have noticed that God seems to be closing down things for us here in France. The ALPHA course Stephen had agreed to be a part of only attracted 6 guests, therefore only a small team was required. So, guess who was no longer needed!! In fact, we view this as positive – one of the team members is Michel, who was a guest on the very first course we led at Sombernon! So Stephen finds himself 'out of a job' despite his best efforts! In the parish too, another young family have arrived and look set to take on significant roles.

Stephen continues to read and study. Apart from his Fresh Expressions' reading (e.g. "Mission-Shaped Parish" and "Ancient Faith, Future Mission") he has also read von Hildebrand's "Jaws of Death – Gates of Heaven" a fascinating and helpful book which considers the Christian theology / philosophy of death. It has been a challenge to see how Christian orthodoxy has always held in tension the Christian optimism of the resurrection and the joyful anticipation of our full union with Christ with the holy dread of the final judgement.



"The holy sobriety of a soul filled with the light of Christ is joined to the victorious intoxication of love"



Stephen has also really enjoyed "Colonies of Heaven" by Ian Bradley, a book which considers the Celtic model of missional communities and how that might be rediscovered today – brilliant! The title of the book has a particular poignancy for us as it used to be a phrase Sharon's Dad used often in his preaching.

Roland Allen's "Missionary Methods : St Paul's or Ours?" has also been an inspiration, a book Stephen has finally managed to read after having learned about it some 10 years ago! Also Glenn Myer's "Paradise – A Divine Comedy" has impressed him – a more recent book that approaches C.S. Lewis and G.K. Chesterton in its invention and allegory. So much mental and theological stimulation!

Stephen's faith-based blog sjmarch.wordpress.com continues to attract readers (nearly 800 so far!). The French version plusdunefoi.wordpress.com has had more modest success (200 readers).

The translation of Jonah into French has reached the half-way point and it is hoped a completed manuscript will be ready by summer. The print-on-demand publication of the English version is just awaiting the completion of the cover art which is being done by a photographer friend. Then people will be able to buy it!

Family News:

The boys continue to do well. Again, we see things 'coming to a natural end' in many ways.

Ben has settled in to life in Strasbourg. He is enjoying his final placement and is hopeful of being offered a full-time post at the end of it. He has passed all of his exams and only needs to validate this final placement to receive his Diplôme d'Ingenieur (equivalent to a British Master's degree).

Joshua will also complete his degree in June. He has submitted two applications for further study; one for a Masters course at the University of East Anglia, and the other for a Doctorate in psychology at Stirling, for both of which he is currently seeking funding. He has made it through Stirling's first selection process and will make a presentation to the grant awarding panel on 11 April – please pray for this.

Caleb is completing his first year of law. He has passed both the entrance exam and the physical fitness tests for the French Police and has an interview on 8 April for the post of Police Cadet.

It would be great to see them all settled should we be moving on.

Stephen visited his mom for a week in March and was able to do some DIY jobs for her around the house which she appreciated. They both enjoyed their time together.



Lovely spring weather has meant we are able to benefit from the lovely countryside around, and last weekend saw us manage an 8-mile round trip in the valley!

Lent has proved to be a time of reflection and spiritual encouragement so far, despite the fact that our circumstances (including financial ones) have yet to change. We feel we should be like Abraham, to whom God said 'leave' before he said 'go to the land I will show you....'

We pray that Easter is a time of great blessing to you and those you love, and would ask for your help and support as we continue to think about our future,

Stephen, Sharon, Benjamin, Joshua and Caleb