



The Torch

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Welcome!

Welcome to this special edition of THE TORCH.

There's been a long gap since we sent the Christmas edition. I am sorry for that. It is, in part, a result of us taking the opportunity to reflect on Torch's range of magazines and to refresh it for the future.

Before explaining the changes, let me remind you of the importance of THE TORCH.

In 1959 when Torch Trust's co-founders, Ron and Stella Heath, were searching for Christian reading in braille for the blind young people who came to their home, they discovered THE TORCH. The Trench sisters had felt prompted to start it in 1931 when their driver lost his sight. Then it was a half-page-size publication, but with a growing

international readership. The sisters offered THE TORCH magazine into the care of the Heaths, who included its title in the name of the charity they founded, Torch Trust.

THE TORCH is unique!

Astoundingly, THE TORCH has been published in braille continuously for 86 years. Over time, we added large print and audio editions and most recently developed a web version. With a worldwide readership, THE TORCH remains by far the largest circulation of anything published in braille.

THE TORCH is unique – and not just because its audience is blind and partially sighted people. I am not aware of any Christian magazine in standard print produced and distributed to a worldwide audience.

Most readers of THE TORCH live outside Europe and North America – something we bear in mind when writing, selecting and editing articles. We are aware that experiences of life in the West may not always be relevant to many readers, and that English is not the mother tongue for many of you. We pray that God will lead us to prepare content that will bless our global readership.

I've recently returned from the beautiful country of Malawi – my fourth trip to Africa. I recognise that African Christian thought and teaching has its own particular flavour. And when I compare the life of churches I've visited in Africa with what I know of church in England, it's plain that it is the English Church that needs to learn from the African.

Refreshing the content

Going forward, we plan to seek out more non-Western Christian voices for THE TORCH. Although, this magazine comes to you from the UK, we aim to link you to what God is doing worldwide with blind people through the ministries of Torch. But we also want to reflect more of the rich diversity of Christian experience in the continents where most of you live.

In reviewing our magazines, we noticed that almost everyone who reads THE TORCH also reads TORCH TIMES. So we have decided to combine these magazines. Starting with this edition, THE TORCH will be a little larger than before. It will be published quarterly and sent to all readers of THE TORCH and TORCH TIMES.

Torch produces other Christian magazines in braille, large print and audio formats, so if you feel this new-style magazine doesn't meet your needs, then please ask us about changing, using the contact information given.

THE TORCH is where it has always been – at the heart of Torch's ministry. It remains a magazine of Christian experience and thought, linking Christian blind people together around the world.

On my travels, I have met many people who greatly appreciate THE TORCH. I know how important it is to many of you, and perhaps to your ministry in the church. We are committed to continuing the magazine as a channel of blessing, inspiring you to continue to love and

serve our Lord Jesus.

**Gordon Temple, Chief Executive, Torch
Trust**

2017 – Torch Trust’s Year of Building Together

**Ephesians 4:1-7 (NIV) – Unity and
maturity in the body of Christ**

‘As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to one hope when you were called; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.

‘But to each one of us grace has been given as Christ apportioned it.’

Gordon Temple, Chief Executive of Torch Trust writes:

When the word ‘church’ is used, I wonder what comes to mind. Is it a building? Perhaps you imagine the building your local church meets in? Or perhaps a great, ancient cathedral building? Or maybe you think of a ‘sea’ of people – the brothers and sisters you gather with? Or perhaps you think more of that special feeling of care, community and belonging?

Paul offers us another picture of the local church. Three passages in his writings compare the Christian

**community to a body: Romans 8,
1 Corinthians 12 and Ephesians 4.**

Although a body has many parts, they hold and function together as components of the complete body. They do not exist alone. A hand is useful because it is on the end of an arm which is, in turn, attached at the shoulder.

United in one body

Reading the whole of Paul's letter to the Ephesians, it would be reasonable to assume that this was a deeply divided and fragmented church (Jew and non-Jew; master and slave, etc). To this community of God's people Paul declares there is one body, and each of us is part of it. We are united in this one body with one Lord, one Spirit, one Father.

At the start of every year, Torch Trust chooses a theme and a verse for the year. This year our theme is a ‘Year of Building Together’ and the verse comes from the same Bible chapter quoted above: ‘FROM HIM [JESUS] THE WHOLE BODY, JOINED AND HELD TOGETHER BY EVERY SUPPORTING LIGAMENT, GROWS AND BUILDS ITSELF UP IN LOVE, AS EACH PART DOES ITS WORK.’ EPHESIANS 4:16

Here the illustration of the community of the Lord’s people is developed. Ligaments are the tough bands of tissue that hold our joints together and our organs in place. Without them we would be a bag of disconnected bones and organs! Our muscles could not control our arms if there weren’t ligaments at the shoulder, elbow and wrist.

In the body of the local church each person has a part to play, and every link or ligament is vital. In this togetherness there is both strength and resilience.

Christ-centred

Torch is a Christian organisation and we seek to be consciously Christ-centred in everything we plan and do. In our daily prayers we often affirm this. It's all too easy to get so used to doing what we do in Christian service that we forget for whom we are doing it. And we need to constantly check that everything we are doing is indeed flowing from him.

It's significant that Paul chooses not one but two more metaphors to illustrate the fruit of a healthy body that pulls together around Jesus: growing and building.

GROWING makes us think about things organic. Plants, animals and children grow. Growth happens as a result of being alive. If we think about farming, we can do a lot to set up conditions favourable to growth but we ourselves

can't make the growth happen. We have to be patient as we cultivate growth. It's not under our control and not every plant comes up the same.

So it is with God's Kingdom. Paul observed that he planted the seed 'but God has been making it grow' (1 Corinthians 3:6).

BUILDING, on the other hand, suggests organisation – a plan and predictable progress. Building a house requires many trades to cooperate, contribute their skills and coordinate their activities. Without this togetherness, progress is slow and quality poor.

If we are to build the Church in strength, then we must do it together. We need to be committed to the unity of the body. Love, which comes from Jesus, is the glue which holds the body together.

Diversity and interdependence

Our verse for 2017 concludes: ‘ . . . each part does its work’. Each one of us is vital. There are no spare limbs or organs in the body which is the Church. Diversity of skills and experience, even our strengths and weaknesses – everything is essential to the whole. We need and depend on each other. We are interdependent.

We are together because we have been drawn together by God. Together we commit ourselves in service to him.

We all need each other

[Some thoughts on interdependence from Winston Childzambuyo of Malawi, retired Chairman of the Zambezi

Evangelical Church who has served Torch Trust, both as trustee and administrator. Winston was also principal of the Evangelical Bible College in Blantyre for many years.]

Disability such as sight impairment is a world-wide problem, experienced in Bible times as well as modern times.

My grandmother was blind in her old age, while my sister, the second-born girl in our family, could not walk from the age of five. I was told that whenever they were going to the maize field my grandmother would carry our sister on her back. Often she used to ask our sister what she could see ahead of her, in order to know how far they had travelled and how close they were to the field.

This is what we call ‘interdependence’. In this world we often depend on each other – in other words

‘interdependence’. This can be physical or spiritual dependence and, whether we like it or not, we can’t grow in life without it.

Even when I became a pastor, I can remember my mother telling me I shouldn’t do or say this or that to the congregation, despite the fact that I was a trained pastor and she was just a church member.

Both sight-impaired people and sighted people learn from each other. We depend on each other whether we are sighted or sight-impaired. Refusing to help the needy is acting in a very unchristian way. We are all going in the same direction and we have to work and help each other as much as we can.

The Christian life is interdependent. We need to recognise that we are all part of the one body – the Church – and so we have to help each other both in spiritual

and physical ways. Let us always consider each other.

Churches urge inclusion of disabled Africans

[In this article by Reuben Kyama, a journalist from Kenya, Dr Samuel Kabue challenges African development to include disabled people in their plans. Samuel Kabue is a long-standing friend of Torch. He is the Executive Secretary of EDAN: Ecumenical Disability Advocates Network of the World Council of Churches (www.edan-wcc.org). This article is reproduced by kind permission of VOA (www.voanews.com).]

According to the United Nations, more than one billion people – about 15 per cent of the world's population – live with some form of disability. A million of them live in Kenya and many of them

live in rural areas. Compared to the rest of the world, these Kenyans not only have to manage their disabilities, they manage them under conditions of poorer health, lower education levels, fewer economic opportunities and higher rates of poverty.

But a new campaign led by a Nairobi-based global advocacy programme of the World Council of Churches aims to integrate persons with disabilities in development activities.

The Ecumenical Disability Advocates Network (EDAN) recently voted to extend its efforts to encourage the training and hiring of disabled people to all parts of East Africa. They seek to include disabled people in the development process. For the next two years, the network will run a series of forums and other activities in Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania about how to accomplish that.

‘The main thing with this inclusive programme is to convince development planners that people with disabilities can be part of the mainstream activities,’ says Dr Samuel Kabue, the group’s executive director.

Include the disabled in daily life

He says if people with disabilities are made part of the mainstream development process, you set an example.

‘That’s one way we feel inclusion will be achieved,’ he says.

Kabue says experts believe that including persons with disabilities in development helps eliminate barriers and enables them to contribute effectively to the community.

‘Even in education,’ says Kabue, who is visually impaired, ‘if you are blind and you go to the same high school with other people who are not blind, they grow up knowing that you are a student like any other.

‘You go to the university, you study with people who go out looking for jobs like you and when you get a job, people know you went through the same system. This is the biggest value of inclusion,’ he said.

Pay attention to the constitution

Dr Kabue appeals to local leaders to be mindful of the welfare of the physically-challenged by providing them with equal opportunities and rights to

access in accordance with the constitution.

‘We have seen people with visual impairment going into teaching and law in this country,’ Kabue says. ‘Say somebody is in a wheelchair . . . there is no reason why he cannot be an accountant, an administrator or a chief officer of a company.’

‘Attitude is one of the biggest problems that we are facing,’ says Dr Kabue. ‘[a wrong] Attitude leads to abuse of your rights through discrimination.’

The government has a big role

‘We call upon the government to streamline and speed up the registration of persons with disabilities,’

says Alice Munala, a programme coordinator of the Methodist Church in Kenya. She says there is need for ‘the government and other stakeholders to review the current statistics of persons with disabilities in Kenya to help in planning and decision making.’

Kenya’s churches have long been involved in the rights of people who are physically challenged. They were instrumental in helping to get the views of disabled people into the 2010 constitution. That document says the government has adopted a number of laws and policies protecting people with disabilities, including their right to productive and decent work, and basic services including public transport.

Churches are also involved in efforts to develop rural areas, including agricultural and livestock farming activities, schools and the provision of healthcare services.

Are you living with a ten-verse Bible?

[This article from Christian Today website: www.christiantoday.com, was written by contributing editor Martin Saunders and was first published by Torch Trust in Christian Today Digest December 2016.]

What are your ‘go-to’ Bible verses? Everybody has some: a short list of scripture quotes which seem to become relevant to daily life again and again. Depending on your church background, the actual verses will vary, but we’ve all got a little list stored somewhere in the back of our subconscious, ready to be referred to at a moment’s notice.

A few verses are particularly common on these lists. For example, try talking to a Christian who cares about justice . . . without them bringing up

Micah 6:8 (NIV): ‘He has shown you, O mortal, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.’

. . . We return over and again to certain verses because they help us to crystallise and sum up our theology in just a few words. It’s only natural that we find ourselves quoting them, reflecting on them; allowing them to shape our thinking.

It’s okay to have favourite Bible verses, of course. That only becomes a problem when we don’t actually know much more of Scripture beyond them; when that little list of favourite verses becomes the only Bible we really know. I have a sneaking suspicion that many of us are operating with a ten-verse Bible.

Just think for a moment. What are the passages of Scripture you’d turn to if

someone asked you about the character of God, or the reasons for your beliefs? Where would you go if you needed to respond to a question about the mission of the Church, or about God's plan for our lives? The chances are you'd return to the same short list. I certainly would. I know I've become comfortable and familiar with a handful of helpful proof texts [passages of the Bible used to support a particular argument or position] which . . . sum up my theology in nine or ten handy bites.

Over 31,000 verses – all there for a reason

. . . The thing is, God didn't give us ten verses. He gave us over 31,000 of them. And they're all there for a reason; all designed to help us to process and

understand the story of God and the meaning of our lives. When we reduce that to just a tiny percentage of the total, we're missing a phenomenal amount of the bigger picture . . .

This might not resonate with you at all; you may have devoted your life – and already a significant portion of today – to reading and studying Scripture. You may be the sort of person who knows the Bible inside out and mostly off by heart. If that's you . . . the Church needs your wisdom, and it needs you to encourage the rest of us to fall as deeply in love with God's Word as you have.

But if talk of a ten-verse Bible feels annoyingly close to home, then see that realisation not as a rebuke, but as a prompt to do better. If we seek to truly know God, then the surest route, tried and tested over the generations, is to truly know His Word. The Bible is rich and complex enough to sustain

a lifetime of daily study; by merely focussing on a few proof texts which back up our worldview, we don't only do the book itself a disservice, but we miss out on a rich and unquenchable tool for encountering God.

Are you being carried?

[THIS PERSONAL EXPERIENCE IS RECALLED BY MICHAEL STAFFORD, WHO WAS A MISSIONARY IN AFRICA BEFORE SPENDING MANY YEARS SERVING TORCH TRUST, INCLUDING NUMEROUS VISITS TO MALAWI.]

In Nigeria some years ago, along with a senior missionary I travelled to the monthly Bible teaching conference being held in a remote village in the Bassa tribal area of the Benue River Valley.

We drove most of the way along a very rough road, but eventually the road

finished and we had to continue our journey on borrowed bicycles. This sometimes entailed difficulty, as the bicycles had no effective brakes and there were several hills – some of them leading down to streams which had to be crossed by rickety bridges, sometimes no more than a tree trunk.

We arrived in the village and received the usual warm welcome and an evening meal which I felt somewhat doubtful about.

All went well with the meetings that evening and the following morning, but on the Saturday afternoon there was a wedding at which I was a spectator rather than the speaker. During the service I felt increasingly unwell, and eventually was violently sick and had to lie down. The night that followed was very unpleasant, and my colleague felt he had to abandon further involvement in the conference and take me home.

But how? I certainly was in no state to ride a bicycle!

The answer to the problem was provided by four strong men who put me in a kind of deckchair slung between two poles, in which I was carried through the bush.

Ashamed – but grateful

Still a young man, I felt quite ashamed to be dependant in this way, but grateful for the help. I felt like Dr Livingstone being carried by bearers through the African bush many years before!

Recently I was reminded of this event when I read a verse in Deuteronomy: ‘In the desert . . . you saw how the Lord your God carried you . . . all the way you went until you reached this place’ (Deuteronomy 1:31). There are many references in the Old Testament to

being carried by God, especially in the book of Isaiah.

In Isaiah 46 we read about idols which were worshipped in Babylon and which, sadly, some of God's people in Israel also worshipped. Isaiah mocks them, saying how they had to be carried, and were a burden rather than being of benefit to the people. Then Isaiah reminds God's people of how he had carried and sustained them through many years, and would continue to do so, even to old age.

Isaiah continues by reminding them that God cannot be compared with any other so-called 'god'. The big difference is that God is alive and active on our behalf whereas idols are fixed and unmoveable and totally unable to help anybody.

What does this say to us today?

Firstly, we must avoid the worship of anything that stands in the place of God. This may be money, position, power or possessions. We must always be good stewards of the things God has blessed us with, but not become servants of them. The apostle Paul said ‘everything is permissible for me . . . but I will not be mastered by anything’ (1 Corinthians 6:12).

Secondly, God carries and sustains us through all of life – even through the hard times. Perhaps you have come across the well-known story of a man who had a vision of walking along a beach with the Lord. At the end of the walk he looked back at the footsteps and saw how most of the way there were two sets of footprints but at times there was only one set. He asked the Lord, ‘Why did you leave me alone at those difficult times?’ The Lord said, ‘I

did not leave you alone, my child. Those were the times when I carried you’.

The Great Commission

[This article was written by Eddie Arthur, formerly the executive director for Wycliffe Bible Translators. It is reproduced, with permission, from his website site: www.kouya.net, where an ebook on the Great Commission can be found.]

As Christians, we can get very hung up on activities; on doing stuff. There are literally hundreds of plans for world evangelisation and strategies to reach all of the nations for Christ. Don't get me wrong, I'm not saying that doing stuff and making plans is wrong, but the way in which we do things can often be far more important than the actual thing we do. You can sweep a floor to

the glory of God and you can preach a sermon to your own glorification: it all depends on your attitude.

This is why I believe that John 20:21 needs to be taken as the key text for mission at our point in history: ‘As the Father has sent me, so I am sending you.’ (NLT)

This verse doesn’t tell us what Jesus is sending us to do . . . but it does tell us how he is sending us. He is sending us in the same way that the Father sent him.

. . . I’d like to highlight three (related) ways in which the Father sent Jesus and in which Jesus sends us.

Humility

The Son of God, who was intimately involved in every aspect of creation,

came to earth as a baby and was laid in a manger. He lived the life of a wandering teacher without wealth or status and was eventually executed as a common criminal. He befriended outcasts and the marginalised and was routinely shunned by people in authority and influence. Even in his teaching he did not push his own agenda, but spoke the words given to him by his Father.

And this is how Jesus sends us out into the world: as humble servants, not as rulers and conquerors. We are not sent to build empires or to extend the reach of our denominations or our personal projects. We are sent to serve and to proclaim the Good News of Jesus. It is a sad fact that the message of Jesus has been distorted around the globe because missionaries have tended to come from the rich and powerful Western nations. This means that the message of the humble, suffering

servant has come tied up with the trappings of economic and political power. We need to find ways to de-couple the gospel of Jesus from the cultural baggage that so often comes attached to it and we need to learn to be servants as Jesus was.

Sacrifice

Jesus was sent to give himself for us. The whole of his life, culminating in his appalling death, was a demonstration of his love and sacrifice for us. He did not retain the comfort, the majesty, the position or ultimately the life which was rightly his: he gave them all up freely for us.

Mission is a call to sacrifice ourselves for Jesus. It involves giving up comfort, status, time, money – everything.

Whether we are called as church-planting missionaries . . . or as school teachers . . . God calls us to lay our lives on the line for him. There are times of great joy as we follow God which make all the sacrifices worthwhile. But there are times when it is hard, tough and seems to lead nowhere – but our call is to stick with it and to continue to follow.

Triumph

Jesus came in triumph, but it was a strange upside-down sort of triumph. His cry on the cross, ‘It is finished’ (John 19:30), had an element of triumph and victory – the sense of a difficult job accomplished against all the odds.

There is a triumph in mission too, but it isn’t found in the spectacular

pronouncements of the TV preachers or the building of ecclesiastic or mission empires. Triumph in mission is seen in Henry Martyn burning out for God in Central Asia bringing the Scriptures to Muslim people. Christian triumph is seen in the quiet life of Liang, a Chinese believer who helped plant a church among the Li people on the Chinese island of Hunan, despite the fact that the Li had martyred her husband . . .

Jesus sends us out in the same way that he was sent out and victory is only won at a price.

