

Afterword

Transmission is provided free by Bible Society as part of our mission to equip the church to live out the Bible's message. We also work creatively and with passion to show that the Bible resonates with issues today – and to make Scriptures available where there are none.

Paul Williams
Chief Executive



Just over twenty years ago, the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission began an unprecedented process which gave hope to a broken and fractured country. Out of it came stories of extraordinary courage and forgiveness. During the trial of police officer, Mr. Van der Boek, the mother of a boy he brutally murdered told the court:

'I want, for Mr. Van der Broeck to become my son. I would like for him to come twice a month to the ghetto and spend a day with me so that I can pour out on him whatever love I still have. I would like Mr. Van der Broeck to know that I offer him my forgiveness because Jesus Christ died to forgive.'

Since 1996, stories like these have all but disappeared from our social consciousness. We live in a society where anger, intolerance and revenge are on the rise. In his recently published book, *Ten Arguments for Deleting your Social Media Accounts Right Now*, the computer scientist, Jaron Lanier, lays much of the blame at the door of the big internet giants such as Facebook and Google. He argues that because outrage, anger and intolerance are the most effective means to increase online engagement, computer algorithms are set up to achieve just that.

'Negative feelings come on faster and dissipate more slowly. It's quicker to alienate somebody than it is to build love and trust.' He adds, 'so, since this is a computerised system with very rapid response times, everybody in it is doing whatever will create the effect they desire as rapidly as possible.'

Gradually, it seems, these negative emotions come to dominate not only the digital space, but our increasingly fractious public discourse. How often do we hear forgiveness discussed or reconciliation posited as a response to that which divides us? Christians too can fall into this way of being, engaging in public only in anger and critique.

Yet in 2 Corinthians 5.16ff, the Apostle Paul describes the ministry of

reconciliation – the theme of this edition of *Transmission* – as the centre of the mission of the church. It's a ministry that began with God's initiative to reconcile all things to himself in Christ. It is to this reconciling Jesus that the Bible points and there are many examples of the Bible's reconciling role. The 2015 *Talking Jesus* research found that reading the Bible was one of the most impacting experiences on people's journey to faith. We will all likely know someone who has been reconciled to God, affirmed faith in Jesus Christ, through reading the Bible or hearing its words. One Chinese church leader told me that they estimated that every Bible given by a Chinese Christian to someone outside the church would lead to 2-3 new converts. In the Middle East, Bible Society supports a trauma healing program that uses the Bible to help both Christians and Muslims deal with the legacy of ISIS and find healing through forgiveness. The Bible plays a central role in prison ministries, ministries to the homeless and for refugees. As we approach the centenary of the end of World War One, we've produced a whole raft of resources on our website, which centre on the hope the Bible gave and still gives today in the context of war and the nature of peace. For as we write there: 'peace begins with the healing of hearts, the restoring of relationships.'

All this and much more is true and vitally important. But we must also recognise that the Bible has sometimes been weaponised. We can be so determined to win our argument or prove our point that the very words of eternal life become part of a rhetorical arsenal in a temporal political battle. Often these kind of reactions occur because we feel that Scripture – and our faith – is somehow threatened. This is why at Bible Society we are committed to helping the church recover what missiologist Lesslie Newbigin called a 'proper confidence' in the Bible and the gospel. Part of this involves being reconciled to our time in history and our

place in society. No longer at the centre of influence, Christians in Britain must learn to tread the pathways outlined in this edition: to honestly express difficult emotions; to connect with our culture before we try and correct it; to share our stories of healing and to commence a pilgrimage of reconciliation with those we may consider our enemies. As that South African woman told the court – such counter-cultural responses can only point to Christ.

Paul Williams is Chief Executive at Bible Society. If you would like to email him, you can contact him at paul.williams@biblesociety.org.uk