

C O N T A C T

October 2025



Volume 66 - Issue 10
Sawston Free Church

Churches Services and Dates for Your Diary

SFC Services-(also available via zoom) SFC email: secretary@sawstonfreechurch.org.uk,

05 Oct	10.30am : Morning Worship – Ben Palmer 03.00pm : Messy Church
12 Oct	10.30am : Holy Communion – Phil Nevard Brigade Enrolment Service
19 Oct	10.30am : Invitational Service Harvest Festival – Phil Nevard Followed by a Bring and Share Lunch
26 Oct	10.30am : Go4th

The closing date for November Contact is Friday 17 th October

David Nunn is the editor, so please email your items
[to anne.nunn@btinternet.com](mailto:anne.nunn@btinternet.com)

Minister		Tel
Rev Phil Nevard	12 Hinton Way, Gt Shelford, minister@sawstonfreechurch.org.uk	07814920187
Secretary:		
Mary Simuyandi	28 New Road, Sawston secretary@sawstonfreechurch.org.uk	837433
Elders: Sawston		
Jenny Karpuk	5 Prince William Way, Sawston	564121
Rosemary Livings	The Gables, 1a Granhams Road, Gt Shelford	845948
Anne Pegram	2 Brookfield close, Sawston	832597
Beryl Penny	April Lodge, 81 Brewery Road, Pampisford	833635
Mary Simuyandi	28 New Road, Sawston	837433
Treasurer:		
Lynne Hays	Baggot Hall, Station Road, Harston	871800
Assistant: Richard Legg	10 Stanley Road, Great Chesterford	07772170154
Contact Editors		
David & Anne Nunn	10 London Road, Sawston Email: anne.nunn@btinternet.com	832913
Church Bookings	Tony Winsters, 6 Hurry's Close, Sawston winsters355@btinternet.com	837946
Church Website:	www.sawstonfreechurch.org.uk/	
Facebook page:	www.facebook.com/SawstonFreeChurch	

Contact

The monthly magazine of
Sawston Free Church United Reformed Methodist

Minister: Reverend Phil Nevard – 12 Hinton Way, Gt Shelford, Cambs CB22 5BE

Tel: 07814 920187 Email: minister@sawstonfreechurch.org.uk

www.sawstonfreechurch.org.uk,

www.facebook.com/SawstonFreeChurch

Dear friends,

We have recently welcomed a new “member” into our household — a robot vacuum cleaner. It’s set to work in the middle of the night while we’re asleep. Some mornings I come down to find it neatly parked on its charger, job done, floor looking respectable. Other mornings, though, it has staged a full-blown epic.



There was the night it wedged itself halfway under the sofa like a tunnelling mole. Another time I found it perched on the edge of the rug, spinning its wheels like a turtle stranded on its back. My personal favourite was the morning I discovered it triumphantly dragging thirty feet of USB cable wrapped around its wheel — like a knight returning from battle, proudly displaying the python it had slain. You have to laugh: it’s a vacuum with a sense of drama.

The truth is, the poor thing is only doing its best. It bumps into trouble because I’ve left obstacles in its way. Before it can do its job properly, I have to prepare the house — shift the chairs, clear the clutter, tidy away the cables. It feels very much like those days of toddler-proofing a house: making sure nothing gets swallowed, broken, or jammed where it shouldn’t be.

And as I’ve watched it (and rescued it), I’ve found myself thinking about the quiet, unseen ways God works in us. The Bible often reminds us that the Spirit of God is constantly at work, often in the background, sometimes in ways we don’t notice until later. As Jesus said in John 3, the Spirit is like the wind — moving where it will, unseen, yet leaving its mark.

But there's also our part to play. Just as I need to prepare the house for the robovac, we can prepare space in our lives for God. A little clearing away, a bit of tidying up, moving aside the habits or distractions that keep tangling our wheels.

As Hebrews 12:1 puts it: "Let us throw off everything that hinders... and run with perseverance the race marked out for us."

So here's to cleaner floors, fewer midnight battles with cables, and above all, the Spirit of God doing quiet, patient work in us — often while we are fast asleep.

A prayer:

Lord, help us to notice your quiet work within us.

Give us wisdom to clear away what gets in the way,

and grace to trust that your Spirit is always at work, shaping us in love. Amen.



Every Blessing,

Rev'd Phil Nevard

Phil

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Blythswood Shoe Box Appeal

It is that time of the year again for the Blythswood Shoe Box Appeal.

Once again SFC will be supporting the Blythswood Shoebox Appeal. Leaflets are now available at the back of our Church to give guidance of ideas on filling the boxes, which once again will be distributed to UKRAINE and Eastern Europe.

Pauline, Dawn and Rosemary can be contacted for more information concerning the boxes, which will be blessed at our service before being collected, probably by mid October. (Date to be confirmed at a later time)

Thank you.

Dawn Haughton, Pauline Purdy and Rosemary Livings

Junior Church

On 14 September during the Sunday morning service, we included the Junior Church annual dedication. Phil prayed for all the leaders, helpers, children and young people as the new school year starts.

Julie presented each child with a special book of prayers or Bible stories, as a gift from the Church. She spoke about how fortunate we are in our church to have such a wonderful group of children who do attend regularly, and she valued them and explained that the leaders enjoy teaching them every week. For those children who didn't attend on the day, we will keep their books safe, and they will receive them when they next come to Junior Church.

This service was also a good opportunity to present a special award to one of our young people, Abbie. Earlier in the year, Julie had nominated Abbie for the prestigious Lundie Memorial Award which is organised by the United Reformed Church, and we were delighted to learn that she had won the award.

Phil presented her with the certificate and medal, and also the cheque for £100.



With this money, Abbie has bought some youth Bibles as a gift to the Church. Phil and Julie thanked Abbie and explained this award recognises everything that she does for our church, not only in Junior Church, but with Messy Play, Holiday Club and Girls' Brigade.



A short series on Prayer

Contemplative Prayer – Listening for God in the Quiet (Phil Nevard)

There are days when we come to prayer full of words—needs to name, people to hold, thanks to give. But sometimes, what we long for most is silence. Not because we have nothing to say, but because we are weary of noise—outside and inside.

Contemplative prayer is the quiet heart of the spiritual life. It's less about speaking to God, more about simply being with God. Waiting. Listening. Letting go of the need to explain or achieve.

This kind of prayer doesn't always feel productive. You may not come away with a revelation. But something happens in the stillness. Slowly, gently, we are reshaped—not by answers, but by presence.

Think of Elijah in the cave (1 Kings 19). There was wind, earthquake, fire—but God wasn't in any of them. Then came the sound of sheer silence. And there, in the hush, came God.

Contemplative prayer invites us into that hush. Not to escape the world, but to meet God more deeply within it. It teaches us patience. It helps us become less reactive, more rooted. It softens the sharp edges of our days.

You don't need a retreat centre to begin. Just a few minutes of stillness. Sit somewhere quiet. Light a candle if it helps. Breathe slowly. Choose a simple word or phrase—like “peace” or “Here I am, Lord”—and repeat it gently when your mind starts to wander.

You won't get it perfect. Distractions will come. That's okay. The aim isn't perfection. It's presence.

The gift of contemplative prayer is not that it changes everything around us—but that it changes us. We become quieter, more spacious, more attuned to grace.

A question:

When was the last time I gave God my silence, not just my words?

A response:

Set a timer for five minutes. Sit in stillness. Breathe. Let God meet you in the quiet.

GOD CALLING

TASTE AND TRUST

"O taste and see that the Lord is good"

PSALM 34:8

He is good. Trust in Him. Know that all is well.

Say "God is good, God is good".

Just leave in His hands the present and the future, knowing only that He is good.

He can bring order out of chaos, good out of evil, peace out of turmoil. God is good.

I and my Father are One. One in desire to do good.

For God to do good to His children is for Him to share His goodness with them.

God is good, anxious to share His goodness, and good things, with you, and He will do this.

Trust and be not afraid.

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My apologies for missing a couple of months with "God calling". I was a little indisposed as they say. Thank you so much for your prayers and well wishes, especially the wonderful, colourful picture and card from junior church, it was very appreciated.

I had wonderful care at both Addenbrooks and Brookfield hospitals, however I could have done without 'Covid' ! Anyway, it was an interesting 7 week journey and I met some very interesting people on the way.

It's lovely to finally be home and now it's time for the hard work to begin, in getting back my independence which unfortunately will not happen over night. However I do hope to see you all soon.

Much love to you all.

Kate Leach

October Prayers



Autumn the season of “mellow fruitfulness” and as we celebrate harvest on 19th October, how can we forget all the places and people of our world for whom just finding enough to eat and drink is a daily battle.

Lord, we do give thanks for your bounteous provision, however we come before you to pray for those caught up in war zones, places of drought and places of floods.

For babies; children; young people and adults facing malnutrition and starvation both in the UK and the world.

We pray for leaders to open their eyes to the awful atrocities that are happening as a result of their actions.

Jesus came over 2,000 years ago to show us the way of peace and we pray in His name,
Amen

Anne Pegram

Fred Kaan wrote:

“Put peace into each other’s hands and like a treasure hold it, protect it like a candle flame, with tenderness enfold it”

October is also the time when shoeboxes for Christmas are prepared and we remember the work of the Blythswood Trust distributing the boxes to those do not otherwise receive Christmas gifts.

Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayers, Amen

October Flower Rota

Thank you to everyone who has kindly put their name down on the Rota which is now full to the end of November. We will then decorate the window sills for Advent and over the Christmas period.

However I will also be preparing the new Rota for 2026. I will be putting a reminder in the Weekly notes to sign up as we will need your help again to fill up, especially for the first few weeks in the New Year.

Of course we are always happy for anyone to arrange their own flowers just let us know.

The flowers will always be given away to someone in need of a Thank You or as support from the Church.

05 th October	Kate
12 th October	Colin
19 th October	Pam
26 th October	Rosemary Harriss



Thank you again for your support from the flower team.

Rosemary Harriss, Rosemary Livings, Dawn Haughton and Vivien Ford.

Psalms of Ascent

We're starting something new in the magazine this month: a series of reflections on the Psalms of Ascent.

These were songs for people on the move, heading up to Jerusalem.

They remind me of my own walk on the Pennine Way – or rather, my almost-walk, because I didn't finish it. That unfinished journey has stayed with me, and it's given me a way of looking at these psalms. After all, most of our lives are like that too: not neatly tied up, still in progress. My hope is that these reflections might give us space to think about our own unfinished journeys, and to notice how God is with us along the way.

Psalm 120: an unfinished journey into Shalom

(written by Rev'd Phil Nevard)

In my distress I cried to the Lord, and He heard me.
Deliver my soul, O Lord, from lying lips and from a deceitful tongue.

What shall be given to you, Or what shall be done to you, you false tongue?
Sharp arrows of the warrior, With coals of the broom tree!

Woe is me, that I dwell in Meshech, that I dwell among the tents of Kedar!
My soul has dwelt too long With one who hates peace.
I am for peace; But when I speak, they are for war.

I learned this on day one of my Pennine way walk. It was the only one I learned while walking - but I think it has stuck! I love the alliterative "L"s in "Deliver my soul, O Lord, from lying lips", and I love how "my soul" has so much more depth than "me".

In my distress I cried to the Lord, and He heard me.
Deliver my soul, O Lord, from lying lips and from a deceitful tongue.

I learned these opening couplets over several miles. At times I was in distress myself - climbing steeply up Kinder Scout! I love how the psalmist just bangs in straight to the point... "IN MY DISTRESS!!!" I don't think we can get enough of this. More than once, I have spoken to people who have told me their lives are in too much of a mess just now to get involved with the church - "Maybe I'll come along when I have my life sorted..." The psalmist isn't having any of that... NOW - while I'm in my distress, not having thought about it later, but in the middle of it - while I am distressed...

What is he going to do? He's going to cry out to the Lord. "Pray" seems like too tame a word for this.

As I said, I learned these first two couplets over several miles, and I was quite pleased to have finally grasped the first one. I had a look at my crib sheet to start the second couplet when I noticed I had learned the first one wrong.

I had learned: "In my distress I cried to the Lord, and He answered me." when actually it says "In my distress I cried to the Lord, and He heard me."

I was really pleased to see this and spent some time wondering about the difference between being answered and being heard. I've spoken to many people in distress over the years, sometimes in extreme distress, and in almost all cases their need has been to be HEARD rather than for me to give them answers.

It was a bit of a sadness to discover that the NKJV probably isn't the best translation, that nearly all the others have "answered" and that "answered" reflects the Hebrew better. BUT... I'm sticking with "heard". I cried out to the Lord, and He heard me"

Deliver my soul, O Lord, from lying lips and from a deceitful tongue.

Here's the meat of his distress. The "lying lips" could mean general untruthfulness, but when coupled with the single "deceitful tongue" this very much sounds to me like the distress caused by a particular person - with two lying lips and a deceitful tongue - spreading malicious untruths about our psalmist. The psalmist has been unfairly slandered and/or libelled, and his reputation is damaged. Maybe the whole village is now magnifying the slander with whispered gossip. But this doesn't sound like it is petty gossip, this feels big...

One night in October 2019, Kira was asleep with her husband Lee, 38, and their children Keanu, 11 months, Harrison, 22 months, Tori-Leigh, three, Riley, seven, Lexi, eight, and Zak, aged 15. She said: "My neighbour rang me up on Saturday morning and asked if I'd been outside. As soon as I'd seen what they'd done, I broke down in tears. I was horrified." The word 'pedo' was daubed all over the front of her house in black spray paint. ""The number five bus goes straight past our house every 20 minutes, so loads of people would have seen it," she said. "If they don't know you personally, they could think it's true."

This sounds kind of like that - some serious, reputation-damaging malicious deceit. I think the psalmist knows who it is, but it has spread well beyond the perpetrator (via the equivalent of the number 5 bus). How I wish so many generations had NOT been brought up with the monumentally stupid rhyme: "sticks and stones may hurt my bones, but words can never harm me." Oh, they can. And this psalmist is hurt and wounded. Maybe then you can forgive the next stanza:

What shall be given to you, or what shall be done to you, you false tongue?
Sharp arrows of the warrior, with coals of the broom tree!

You see, the psalmist takes this to God "in his distress". He doesn't take this to God weeks after he has processed it and thought it through and started to deal with it and learned how to talk about it calmly. This is NOW! This is what he feels - and he takes those feels (as the young people might say!) and delivers them straight into God's lap - uncensored, warts and all.

Some have said that this is confessional... but I'm not sure - I think it's just the ugly truth that he wants revenge - he wants the perpetrator to suffer as he has.

Sharp arrows - I guess we know what they are - and "coals of the broom tree". Sometimes known as the "Juniper", the Broom Tree was a place of desert shelter (as enjoyed by Elijah) but also it seems to have been well known as source of long-burning hot coals that give out an intense heat over a long time. (Some say that the angel used some of wood from Elijah's broom tree to bake the loaves.) Exactly the kind of think you'd want in your barbeque.

So... it's likely the psalmist is telling God that he wants this person to be shot with arrows and roasted over hot coals for a very long time - or shot with burning arrows that will burn for a very long time. Either way - a graphic and grisly punishment. And he's telling this to God. It's good to be reminded that this is what God wants - for us to be honest about how we feel and to take those feelings to him. God is not squeamish. There is no point offering God a sanitised version edited down to a PG certificate because we think God shouldn't know what we're really thinking. I think it's fascinating that the kind of words read monotone as psalms in church pass without even the flutter of an eyelid yet were you to reproduce those sentiments in a prayer of intercession, you'd be thrown out on your ear before the tea had gone lukewarm.

God, we are appalled by the thing that happened in our town last night.
May the one who did it get found by the mob and be beaten to a pulp and thrown dead into the river along with his wife and family.
Amen.

Unless we bring to God the true ugliness of our own lives - how can God begin to transform us in the encounter?

Woe is me, that I dwell in Meshech, that I dwell among the tents of Kedar!
My soul has dwelt too long with one who hates peace.
I am for peace; but when I speak, they are for war.

Some Psalms are all solved and wrapped up by the final stanza - and we're ready to praise God and move on. Not this one. But there is a shift in tone. The raw anger has gone - the psalmist seems to have lost the thirst for revenge. Having spelled it out to God (probably not once!!) he has arrived at another place. He's now in a place of lament or woe.

He doesn't dwell in Meshech (Usually identified with a region in Asia Minor, near the Black Sea.) Meshech was a descendant of Japheth and often associated with northern or northeastern tribes. Meshech is often mentioned in connection with warlike or barbaric peoples. Nor does he dwell among the tents of Kedar (a nomadic people associated with the Arabian desert.) They are descendants of Ishmael (Genesis 25:13) and known for their tents, black goatskins, and trade in sheep, goats, and camels (Isaiah 60:7; Song of Songs 1:5). Sometimes they are associated with hostility toward Israel.

The Psalmist is using these names symbolically to express alienation and distress—like saying, “I feel like I’m living among people who don’t share my values or who are hostile to me. I live among my own people, but it feels like they are an alien people, that I don't know them at all. It's like me, as a Bolton fan, getting frustrated with fellow Bolton fans whining on the internet and accusing them all of being Wigan fans...

My soul has dwelt too long with one who hates peace.
I am for peace,

I find this to be such a poignantly aching sentence, particularly with the use of "my soul" rather than just "I". It communicates a resigned weariness, but I think it is also the place of change in this psalm - showing us where this journey is going.

I am for peace, he says - "shalom" is the word. He has left behind his thirst for revenge and retribution; his extreme distress seems to be replaced by sadness. He has taken a turning and decided he is going to live in peace - I am for Peace. The psalmist has been changed by this encounter. He has come to terms with what has happened to him and found a new way to respond - to become a man of peace, shalom.

But when I speak, they are for war.

I suspect this kind of ending reflects people's actual experience better than the "and then it was all great!" kind of ending, because things are not often suddenly all fixed, are they? I love the idea of a psalm showing us the struggles of a man on an unfinished journey to shalom - because we are ALL on an unfinished journey to shalom, aren't we?



For more information or to book, please enquire in the Cafe or phone 01223 839323

As I see it ...

by Mike Wilson

O Lord, hear my prayer. Come, and listen to me!

(Please note that the views expressed in this article are those of the author, Michael Wilson, who owns the copyright, and not in any way representative of the views of Sawston Free Church.)

Nick Robinson (no relation to 'Tommy') has written an interesting piece in the 'In Depth' section of the BBC Website about the row over free speech in the UK. Conspicuous voices from the USA are playing their part in fuelling popular anger over so-called 'woke' influences curbing the legal right of the likes of Tommy Robinson (that is, Stephen Yaxley) and his associates to say what they like about whom they like. The irony is that, as I write, Donald Trump is doing all he can to silence Jimmy Kimmel (an American late-show pundit) for mockingly describing his President in terms unacceptable to Donald Trump.

Nick Robinson expresses sympathy for the Commissioner of the Metropolitan Police. Sir Mark Rowley fears that criminalising what people say (be it as hate-speech or anything else) places both individuals and police in impossible positions. *I feel in an impossible position!*

Presumably, now the UN has itself declared Israel guilty of genocide in Gaza, I too am allowed to say so in print. But I am not absolutely sure. Graham Linehan is threatened with prosecution because he has suggested that a trans-identifying male should not be in a space designated 'females only'. Were I to suggest that here, presumably I too would be vulnerable to prosecution, legal definitions notwithstanding. I find it hard to credit that I might be criminalised for discussing such issues in a church magazine.

Robinson comments on mounting evidence that whereas older people deplore modern limitations on free speech, younger people are less critical. They are very conscious of contemporary cancel culture, and how pressure groups can exploit hate-speech legislation to silence those who express views inimical to their own, even forcing people out of employment. To them, freedom of speech hands people a weapon to use against them.

Robinson picks out US historian Tim Snyder, who distinguishes between 'free-speech' and 'me-speech.' Powerful influencers, he says, 'believe they are right about everything.' They believe that people who disagree with them should be silenced. They do not think that they themselves should be silenced. I see a similarity between this, and how claims to 'my truth' are always to 'my' advantage, whereas 'the' truth can often be much to my disadvantage.

What is totally lost in all this, says Robinson, is the idea that free-speech is as much about listening as it is about speaking. Cancel culture denies people their right to be heard. Users of 'me-speech' have no interest in listening. Why should they? They 'know' they are right.

All this reminds me of how 'listening to' (or better, 'attending to') functions in our Christian tradition. According to Christianity, one of the characteristics of God's love is that God always listens. Love always listens. To be listened to is one of the most precious things. Jesus caused outrage because he attended to – listened to – people judged not worthy of attention – women, the poor, the diseased, the estranged, the outcast and the alien. Small wonder every secular therapist knows that their listening heals far more than their speaking.

What we all crave, surely, in these mouthy times, is not so much to speak, as to be heard?

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