

# Word

## Using the



### Emptiness and despair

The most vulnerable members of any society are its young. I don't need to quote you the statistics, but we know that time and again children and young adults in the UK are at the wrong end of international league tables. Unicef's *Global Report on Child Welfare and Happiness*, published in February 2007, concludes that schoolchildren in the UK are unhappier and more badly behaved than those living in each of the other 20 industrialised nations surveyed. The UK was also worst in terms of childhood poverty and deprivation, relationships and risky behaviour.

From knife murders to teenage pregnancies, alcohol abuse to illiteracy, divorce rates to obesity, all the indicators point to the same conclusion: something is rotten in UK society. The recent spate of teenage suicides in Bridgend, South Wales, is a chilling reminder of the emptiness and despair experienced by young people today. Children are now reaping the harvest sown by their parents, grandparents and great grandparents.

Today, young people in the UK inhabit a world shaped by materialism, hedonism and the cult of celebrity. And their 'inappropriate' behaviour is a reflection of wider society's 'inappropriate' priorities. Many children and teenagers are selfish, bitter and anti-social precisely because the wider world (ie their own family, the television programmes

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they watch, the social websites they visit, the video games they play, the magazines they read, the music they listen to) models selfishness, bitterness and anti-social behaviour at every turn.

### Tools for the job

I have no doubt that God called many Christians into education in order to change this situation. But often we have been ineffective and, before our very eyes, things have gone from bad to worse.

Instead of transforming young lives by radiating God's righteous light, perfect love and healing power, Christian educators are – like their non-Christian colleagues – frustrated, exhausted and bogged down in paperwork. In the meantime, things are actually getting worse on a national scale.

What do we need to do to change things and to put them right? After all, Jesus said that His followers would accomplish even greater things than He did! I have written this article in the hope of encouraging and equipping *ACT Now* readers for such a purpose.

We need to see schools for what they really are: a battleground for the minds and hearts of the next generation. When so many young people are lost and let down by the system, families and other adults in authority, schools can play a vital role in socialising young people into the ways of righteous thinking, speaking and doing.

But when we, as Christian teaching assistants and teachers, already work intense, committed,

## *The Holy Spirit who sustains the universe lives in every believer's heart!*

exhausting hours, what else do we have at our disposal that would allow us to make a massive difference? The answer is simple: we have God and we have His Word.

### **Speaking the Word**

When God creates He speaks His Word. We read in John 14:12 that we can do even greater works than Jesus. In Isaiah 55:10-11 it says: 'As the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return to it without watering the earth and making it bud and flourish, so that it yields seed for the sower and bread for the eater, so is my word that goes out from my mouth: It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it.' God is saying: *Use my Words, for in your mouth they are as powerful as if I had spoken them Myself.*

When we get to that place of gut-busting desperation, when we pour out our heart to God, then we are in a place where He can use us. It is not that we have moved God's heart; rather it is that our heart is now aligned to His heart for those in need. We can be effective for Christ in our schools and colleges by speaking **His Words** with **His Heart**.

We do this not by misquoting the Bible or half reading misused extracts, but by matching the Spirit with which a particular Bible passage was written with that of God's Father Heart for the situations we are in or aware of. God has led me (and you too no doubt) to my knees more than once to pour out His/my heart for specific families in my school where married couples were on the brink of divorce. God led me to speak His Words of the truth of forgiveness and reconciliation from the Bible on His behalf. I believe the marriages at the heart of those families were saved, at least in part, due to the unleashed Word leading them towards forgiveness.

### **Power and authority**

There is no need to add another burden to our working hours. The school workforce has already been remodelled, and we have already tried working harder and working smarter. Now is the time for us to get to know God's Word and then to use it – day in and day out – as a tool or weapon in the situations we face.



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At present Mark is writing a book of boy-friendly lesson plans for class teachers entitled *Teaching Boys and the New Framework*. He also works as a supply teacher in Herefordshire. Mark's educational influences include Michael Gurian and his spiritual influences include John Eldredge.

We need to see that God wants to use us to affect, fight for and change a situation. It is our personal responsibility to declare God's Word and speak it over a situation we are placed in to resolve. This could relate to one student or colleague; to a whole class; to a meeting of a school governing body; to a national education policy. It is time we took hold of the situations we are faced with rather than reacting to them or, even worse, responding passively. If we want to see national change and renewal then we are going to have to be proactive.

In James 5:13-16 we are reminded that we should pray all the time, regardless of how we feel: 'Are any among you suffering? They should pray. Are any cheerful? They should sing songs of praise. Are any among you sick? They should call for the elders of the church and have them pray over them, anointing them with oil in the name of the Lord. The prayer of faith will save the sick, and the Lord will raise them up; and anyone who has committed sins will be forgiven. Therefore confess your sins to one another, so that you may be healed. The prayer of the righteous is powerful and effective.' The challenge for us is to 'pray without ceasing' (1 Thessalonians 5:17).

### **Prayer matters**

We may not have time to spend extra hours in prayer, but we can all offer simple bullet point prayers from the heart in line with the Spirit. These are the prayers that God wants to hear from us (Matthew 6:5-13).

In Ephesians 1:18-23 we read: 'I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, and his incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is like the working of his mighty strength, which he exerted in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms, far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every title that can be given, not only in the present age but also in the one to come. And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way.' This includes school and college governors, principals and headteachers, as well as Ofsted inspectors and politicians.

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For those of us working in England, we can visit the Department for Children, Schools and Families website and print out the photographs, names and job titles of those currently serving on the DCFS Board: [www.dcsf.gov.uk/aboutus/whoswho/](http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/aboutus/whoswho/) and those serving on the DCFS Ministerial Team: [www.dcsf.gov.uk/aboutus/whoswho/ministersinfo.shtml](http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/aboutus/whoswho/ministersinfo.shtml)

You might like to include the names of those in positions of authority involved in your own school/college, Local Authority and/or Diocese as well. In any case, I have identified some choice excerpts from God's Holy Word (see quotes below)

to help you make things happen and to shift national and local situations.

The Holy Spirit who sustains the universe lives in every believer's heart! This gives us phenomenal power to change the world around us when we speak **His Words** with **His Heart**. In Ephesians 3:20 Paul writes: 'Christ is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us.' Now all we have to do is to live, think, pray and act in accordance with this mind-blowing truth and, in so doing, inspire students and colleagues to want to do likewise.

■ Mark McEvilly

## Useful toolbox verses

### God's leadership

*I'll go ahead of you,  
clearing and paving the road.  
I'll break down bronze city gates,  
smash padlocks, kick down barred entrances.  
I'll lead you to buried treasures,  
secret caches of valuables –  
Confirmations that it is, in fact, I, God,  
the God of Israel, who calls you by your name.*

ISAIAH 45:3-4 (The Message)

*Light, space, zest – that's God!  
So, with him on my side I'm fearless,  
afraid of no one and nothing.*

PSALM 27:1 (The Message)

### Wisdom, humility and patience

*Quiet down before God,  
be prayerful before him.  
Don't bother with those who climb the ladder,  
who elbow their way to the top.*

PSALM 37:7 (The Message)

*Fear-of-God is a school in skilled living –  
first you learn humility, then you experience glory.*

PROVERBS 15:33 (The Message)

### Challenging wrong priorities (and excessive workload)

*Every God-begotten person conquers the world's ways. The  
conquering power that brings the world to its knees is our faith.  
The person who wins out over the world's ways is simply the one  
who believes Jesus is the Son of God.*

1 JOHN 5:4-5 (The Message)

*Work six days and rest the seventh.  
Stop working even during ploughing and harvesting.*

EXODUS 34:21 (The Message)

### Faithful worship

*My question: What are God-worshippers like?  
Your answer: Arrows aimed at God's bull's-eye.*

PSALM 25:12 (The Message)

*Listen, dear ones – get this straight;  
O Israel, don't take this lightly.  
Don't take up with strange gods,  
don't worship the latest in gods.  
I'm God, your God, the very God  
who rescued you from doom in Egypt,  
Then fed you all you could eat,  
filled your hungry stomachs.*

PSALM 81:8-10 (The Message)

### God working through His people

*Open up before God, keep nothing back;  
he'll do whatever needs to be done:  
He'll validate your life in the clear light of day  
and stamp you with approval at high noon.*

PSALM 37:5-6 (The Message)

*I'll live in them, move into them;  
I'll be their God and they'll be my people.  
So leave the corruption and compromise;  
leave it for good,' says God.*

2 CORINTHIANS 6:16b (The Message)

*God doesn't want us to be shy with his gifts,  
but bold and loving and sensible.*

2 TIMOTHY 1:7 (The Message)

