



THINK TANK 2018: AN UNFOLDING JOURNAL

A few months ago, I took some time to review the last ten editions of the Journal, beginning with our launch at the House of Lords in 2013. At the time of the launch we had two concerns in mind. One related to content and the other to the technical issues that surrounded an on-line Journal.

In terms of content, we were primarily occupied with ideas, by which I mean concepts that had a practical application. That pre-occupation with the world of ideas meant that most of the content consisted of articles, some of which were rather academic in tone even though there was some thought given to application.

Alongside that concern we realised that we really had little idea of what an on-line Journal was really like. Even though we knew it should not be a print Journal that was replicated electronically, in reality it was hard to enter a different imagination. It took some time to configure the use of other media,

particularly video, to make proper use of the on-line functionality of the Journal.

As I reviewed the development of the Journal, it was fairly clear to see the learning that has taken place in terms of visual and technical expertise. Much of that learning has taken us towards stories - the amazing narratives that explore how the God of mission is working in the lives and ministries of people who are working across vastly different contexts with very different groups of people.

The completely unexpected was to see the extent to which the move from thoughtful articles to lived experience has impacted both the Journal and those of us who are interacting with the editorial content. We are being shaped, changed and challenged by the engagement of others in mission.

It was in that context that the editorial team met for its annual retreat. As we reflected on the impact of the Journal on ourselves, we engaged in a daily discipline of *Dwelling in the Word* - in this case Acts 16: 6-15. This story disrupted our agenda just as the stories of mission had disrupted our ideas about the Journal.

For me, the most intriguing part of the Acts account was the extent to which the plans of Paul and his team did not necessarily go according to plan. There were times of disorientation, of not knowing, of not seeing, of expectations confounded and of new opportunities emerging. I was particularly struck by the extent to which Lydia needed to convince Paul to accept the hospitality of her household.

It could have been Paul, seeing the opportunity in the receptivity of Lydia, who might have been tempted to exploit her willingness to be available. Far from it, he had to be persuaded. That made an impression on me. There was no manipulation, no misuse of power, no arrogance, but instead a humble desire to follow where God was leading, however surprising and unplanned it might be. This was no text book example of how to plant a church but it is a provoking illustration of how God works with us in mission.



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