

An Amazing Year

What a remarkable year 2002 was for Durham Road Baptist Church, culminating with an attendance of 56 for our Christmas Day Service! Who would have thought it possible 12 months ago, when a typical Sunday morning congregation numbered around 20? Altogether over the course of 2002, some 270 different people shared with us in worship!! As we look back over the past 12 months, we find ourselves echoing Paul's words of praise and prayer from Ephesians 3.20-21:

Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen.

A New Year to look forward to

We trust and pray that the new year just begun will continue to see DRBC grow numerically. But our *Verse for the Year* (2 Peter 3.18) encourages us to seek spiritual growth alongside the numerical growth:

Grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and forever! Amen.

God's Grace: our gro-bag

Our *Verse for the Year* reminds us that God's grace is the soil in which our spiritual life is rooted for on-going nourishment. It is like our spiritual gro-bag!

The Christian life **begins** with God's grace, Paul reminds us in Ephesians 2.5: "*It is by grace you have been saved.*" And the Christian life also **continues** through God's grace. "*My grace is sufficient for you,*" God reassured Paul, as he struggled with his '*thorn in the flesh*' (2 Cor 12.9).

God's grace: seen in us

But our *Verse for the Year* also reminds us that God's grace is a virtue to be **reproduced** in our lives, both at the personal level and also collectively for us as a fellowship of God's people based in down-town Gateshead. As individuals, and as a church, we will want to be increasingly like '*our Lord and Saviour*' who was *full of grace* (John 1.14).

- This will mean cultivating a **spirit** like his - a heart and mind that instinctively incline towards generosity, rather than adopting a grasping attitude. We live in a consumer society where the emphasis so often is on how much people have got already and how they can come by even more. And so we frequently need to remind ourselves of Jesus' word: "*It is more blessed to give than to receive*" (Acts 20.35). Giving is more characteristic of God than getting. And so, as his people, we should be more concerned to give than to get, to be generous rather than grasping. Then we will be more like him.
- When our inner spirit is instinctively generous, our **words** will also be generous. Jesus taught that *out of the overflow of the heart the mouth speaks* (Matthew 12.34). So our words are like a print-out of what's going on in our hearts. When our hearts are characterised by grace, so will our words be - as befits those who are followers of Jesus. *All spoke well of him and were amazed at the gracious words that came from his lips,*" we are told (Luke 4.22). And so Paul reminds us, *Let your conversation be always full of grace* (Col 4.6). We will want our words for others to be as generous as they can be: *Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen* (Eph 4.29).

- When our heart is characterised by a spirit of generosity, there will be a joy and spontaneity to our **giving** to the Lord's work, both in terms of our time and money, and also our talents and resources. Paul reminded the Christians in Corinth of the grace their fellow believers in Phillipis had shown:

We want you to know about the grace that God has given the Macedonian churches. Out of the most severe trial, their overflowing joy and their extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity. For I testify that they gave as much as they were able, and even beyond their ability. Entirely on their own, they urgently pleaded with us for the privilege of sharing in this service to God's people. And they did not do as we expected, but they gave themselves first to the Lord and then to us in keeping with God's will [2 Cor 8.1-5].

God's Grace: our provision

As we look ahead to a new year of service to the Lord, we all recognise **the financial challenge** that lies ahead of us as a church - both for the ongoing support of the ministry and outreach of the church, and also as we seek to undertake much needed building work to make our premises more accessible to those with disabilities of one kind and another. But we move forward confidently, resting on God's promise to supply all our needs:

My God will meet all your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus.
[Phil 4.19]

We have already started to see God's goodness to us in this regard. During the month of December, we were thrilled to receive two separate gifts from people outside the fellowship totalling £1500! They were people who had heard what God was doing at DRBC and wanted to be a part of it! How we thank God for moving their hearts to be so generous towards us. We can echo again Paul's words to the Corinthians:

You will be made rich in every way so that you can be generous on every occasion, and through us your generosity will result in thanksgiving to God. This service that you perform is not only supplying the needs of God's people but is also overflowing in many expressions of thanks to God. Because of the service by which you have proved yourselves,

*men will praise God for the obedience that accompanies your confession of the gospel of Christ, and for your generosity in sharing with them and with everyone else. And in their prayers for you their hearts will go out to you, because of the surpassing **grace** God has given you. [2 Cor 9.11-14]*

Looking Ahead

On **Sunday mornings** between now and Easter we will be looking at Paul's letter to the Christians in Ephesus and its surrounding area. **Ephesians** lays down sound foundations for the Christian life - first by exploring what God has done for us ("*the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus*", Eph 2.7); and then by explaining what our response to him should be ("*I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received*", Eph 4.1).

On **Sunday evenings**, we will be looking at some of the **Parables of the Kingdom**, as found in Matthew's Gospel, which will also highlight the wonders of God's grace to us and the challenges of practical discipleship.

Let me draw your attention to two special **Wednesday evenings** as part of our focus on the local community. On 15th Jan, we are looking forward to a visit from **Pat Hardy**, Head Teacher of Caedmon Primary School; and on 19th February, we will enjoy a visit from **John Eagle**, our local Councillor for the Bede Ward on Gateshead Council.

Here too are the dates for our **Tuesday night Fun and Food for all the Family evenings**, 7.00-8.30pm:

- 14th Jan - Games Night
- 11th Feb - Quiz Night
- 11th March - Games Night
- 8th April - Easter Special

Please make good use of all these events, and also our monthly International Teas (held at 5.30pm on the last Sunday of each month), to invite friends and family to join with us.

We look to God to make 2003 a year of significant growth, both in terms of quantity and quality, numerically and spiritually - so with him leading us all forward, **let's go for growth!**