

*Text of a message delivered by Grant Harris at Windsor Park Baptist Church on Sunday 14th September 2025.
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Sunday 14th September 2025

This message is different to Windsor Park's inperson services. In our services we'll be welcoming Ants Watt, the CEO of Joyya, and one of Joyya's local staff, Priyanka Dutta, who will be sharing about the on-the-ground work of Joyya and how they are seeking to transform its neighbourhood in Kolkata. This message (available on all Windsor Park's media channels) paints the bigger picture of Windsor Park's involvement with Joyya and its predecessor, Freeset. The inperson and online services relate to one another, but available time limited both being presented at once 😊.

Introduction: Google Reviews

During the week Jo and I started looking at accommodation options for a trip we're taking over summer. Some of you might remember the old days of looking in AA Accommodation Directories that we'd flick through, but as you know these days it's all online, and it's one thing for an accommodation provider to have a great website, but the most important thing we looked at was their Google reviews - what do people really say about their experience is what we're looking for. It's fair to say that our decisions were almost entirely based on reviews, because when something is good, you want to talk about it so that others can also experience it.

Of course this is nothing new, it's just the form is different these days. When Jesus was talking to his disciple's post-resurrection he said to them as recorded in Acts 1:8, ***'But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.'***

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What he's really saying to them is that if what they had seen and heard had been transformative in their lives, especially when they were about to witness his ascension and then the arrival of the presence of God through the Holy Spirit, then as a result of those things they will become a living Google review of everything that has changed for them because of Jesus.

Because when something is good, you want to talk about it so that others experience it.

Being on Mission

At a very foundational level, this is what being a follower of Jesus has always looked like, and still looks like today - if Jesus has changed your life, surely you'll talk about it, because when something is good, you want others to experience it, right?

In the language of our times, we call this being people on mission, people who are committed to going where God leads to talk about that which gives our lives purpose – but again, this idea of 'going' is nothing new. In the Bible we see:

- The Apostle Paul going on perhaps four journeys throughout much of the ancient world to tell people about Jesus. He travelled over 15,000k's and established at least 14 churches through Greece, Turkey, Syria, and numerous regions you won't find on modern-day maps.
- After Jesus's ascension, we see that the Apostles travelled widely to spread Christianity. Peter went to Pontus, Galatia, and Rome; Andrew went to Scythia (regions of modern Ukraine, Romania, Russia); Thomas went to India; John spent time in Asia.

Other prominent travels include James the Elder going to Spain, Philip going to Scythia and Greece, and Bartholomew visiting India, Armenia, and Southern Arabia.

Being walking Google reviewers of Jesus was big back in the day, because what they had experienced was so good, they wanted to talk about it so that others could also experience it.

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Modern mission

In our more modern times, when England-born Baptist minister, William Carey, went to Calcutta in 1793, he became known as the *'father of modern missions.'* His essay (in old fashioned language), *'An Enquiry into the Obligations of Christians to Use Means for the Conversion of the Heathens'*, was significant in his time and led to the founding of the Baptist Missionary Society, one of the earliest modern mission societies of the type we now identify with today.

It was as a mission-minded church that brought Baptists to New Zealand in 1851 when the first Baptist church was planted in Nelson, and it's no surprise that our first missionary, Rosalie McGeorge, was sent to Bengal in British India not too long after that, in 1886. Sadly, Rosalie died in Ceylon, now Sri Lanka, on her return voyage to New Zealand just five years later.

In 1889, the second missionary sent by NZ Baptists was 32-year-old Hopestill Pillow who departed from Christchurch to join a mission in Calcutta, India. But again, after six years, she too fell ill and died six year later in Calcutta and is buried there.

So, in our family of Baptist churches in Aotearoa, we have a long heritage of being called to follow the example of Jesus, particularly by serving the edges of society around the world as part of partnering with God in his mission to draw people to himself. Through love and compassion and by putting our faith into action, telling people about the all-encompassing love of God is core to our DNA. Through modelling faith and being living Google reviews, we seek to use the words we say in the Lord's prayer by bringing heaven to earth. That is mission.

Here at Windsor Park, we follow in this tradition through what we call Beyond the Walls – we've always sought to balance the things we doing locally in our own community with our support and actions that seek to witness the resurrected Christ beyond our walls – including our wider nation and to the people and places we believe God leads us to around the world.

With the background of New Zealand Baptist missionaries originally feeling called to India, we've continued to hold this long association, particularly in what is now called Kolkata. In 1996

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Windsor Park was one of five churches that encouraged NZ Baptists to continue to explore what mission in that city looked like. The result of that was two couples, the Osbornes, and the Hiltons, relocated to a Kolkata neighbourhood to seek opportunities to be a good witness, a good Google review, of Christ. This led to the founding of an organisation called Freetset in 2001, which grew to be a large social enterprise creating employment opportunities for women affected by sex trafficking in West Bengal.

Our previous Senior Pastor, Brian Winslade, took an active role in supporting this developing work, taking teams of people over to Kolkata to experience first-hand the challenges of global mission as well as stretching people's worldview. Some of you may have gone with Brian. I visited Freetset for the first time just after I assumed the reins from Brian in 2010, and had my world totally shaken as I wrestled with some of the deep complexities of our world and the role of the church to bring the love of God into those dark places; it's still something I'm wrestling with to this day!

Over the years we've continued to stay connected to the Freetset story in a range of creative and missional ways. Here at Windsor Park, we ...

- Supported a credit facility of \$250k in 2013 to assist the working capital of Freetset, utilising some of our professional skills with some of the equity we steward in our assets.
- We kicked off the Gateway Project 2015 to purchase a large building at the entrance of one of the largest red-light districts of Southern Asia, and as part of that we guaranteed a loan of \$600k to enable Freetset to settle on the building. This building has now become a beacon of hope under the banner of what is now known as Joyya.
- As part of that ongoing growth, I served on the Freetset International board for a number of years, with the privilege of also having Brian as part of it – deep Windsor Park roots right there!
- I've continued to take teams to Kolkata and expose them to global mission in this vibrant, hot, city, visiting the church that William Carey founded in 1809, Carey Baptist Church.

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When we're there, we also,

- Visit the grave of Hopestill Pillow in the Lower Circular Road Cemetery, recognising that NZ Baptists have skin in the game in this city. This grave is about to undergo restoration, funded by Oxford Terrace Baptist Church, the church in Christchurch where Hopestill Pillow came from.
- Give exposure to the transformative effect of business-as-mission.
- We explore the dynamic culture of Kolkata where there are people, everywhere.
- We look for opportunities to continue to be involved, including a team member sponsoring the purchase of a building in 2017 in a city 6 hours north of Kolkata that is on the main human trafficking route from Bangladesh and Nepal into India. This building is increasingly another beacon of hope in an area otherwise bereft of opportunities.
- We've been privileged to see the morphing of Freeset in Joyya over the last few years, an initiative that has grown out of Southwest Baptist Church in Christchurch.
- Currently, we've loved seeing Sam Mackay be part of Joyya as their first official intern, where he still is.

So today, 232 years after William Carey first arrived in Kolkata, and 139 years after New Zealand Baptists first went to India to live out their faith, we're still there, still living out the words that Jesus gave to his disciples almost 2,000 years ago, **'You will be my witnesses.'**

Today Joyya has three distinct parts to its operations:

1. Employment Opportunities: 'Joyya Goods', is the business arm which offers employment and produces textile goods for the export market – primarily to the USA, which is challenging now due to 50% tariffs placed on India!
2. Social Opportunities: 'Joyya Collective', is the social arm which collaborates with a range of aligned businesses and NGOs, and

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3. Relational Opportunities: 'Joyya Neighbours', is the relational arm which focuses on participating in local community through the provision of training and upskilling opportunities.

While this is a great story and we can celebrate it, it's also a challenging story, because for all of us who are followers of Jesus, we are part of what Jesus told his disciples to do in Acts 1; it's the same thing we see recorded at the end of the Gospel of Matthew (Chapter 28 Verses 19-20), that passage that we call The Great Commission ... ***'Go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.'***

When we combine these two imperatives from Jesus, we get a clear sense of the outward nature of what Jesus calls us to ... to witness, to make disciples, to baptise, to teach, in our local neighbourhoods (our Jerusalem), in our nation (our Judea and Samaria), and around the world (our ends of the earth). This is an expanding circle pushing us beyond every comfort zone. For those who Jesus was speaking to, Jerusalem was home. Judea was the extended neighbourhood, Samaria was the uncomfortable middle ground people had been taught to avoid, and the ends of the earth was the great unknown, but note that Jesus doesn't say, *'If you feel called.'* He says, *'You will be my witnesses.'* This is a natural overflow of a life touched by grace.

Interestingly the inclusion of Samaria is crucial. Jews and Samaritans had centuries of mutual prejudice against each other despite shared ancestry. In our polarised world, where we tend to stay within cultural bubbles, Jesus calls us to cross uncomfortable boundaries. That's why staying involved in uncomfortable places needs to remain part of our missional focus, and it's why I encourage you to stay connected to the missional initiatives we believe God has called us to. Perhaps this is why this message has come up at the start of Te Wiki O Te Reo Māori because that is still an uncomfortable space for many people in our nation today.

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Practically, continuing to be involved in the mission of God could mean four things for us:

1. We **pray** with global vision. 'Your kingdom come' isn't just about New Zealand – it's asking for God's reign from South Sudan to Singapore, from Rwanda to Russia.
2. Here at Windsor Park, we **give** sacrificially to that part of our budget we call Beyond the Walls.
3. We **go** when we can – through short-term exposure trips, prayer walks in our multicultural neighbourhoods or building relationships across cultures.
4. We **welcome** the nations here. The North Shore is incredibly diverse. The "ends of the earth" aren't just far away – they're in our schools and workplaces. Sometimes international mission begins with inviting a colleague from another culture for coffee.

Ultimately, committing to be involved in God's mission flows from understanding God's heart. The God we serve isn't tribal. His love is as wide as creation itself, and his desire is that all should come to know him. When we participate in mission, we're not just fulfilling a command – we're participating in God's nature, who loved the world so much he sent his Son across the greatest boundary of all: from heaven to earth.

The risen Christ still stands before his church with this same commission. The question isn't whether we're called to care about mission – the question is how we'll respond.

Will we stay comfortable in our Jerusalem? Or will we allow God to stretch our hearts until they're as wide as his love – right here in Auckland, and to the ends of the earth?

When we think about our response to that question, we need to ask ourselves another question, *'Will we be a one-star witness - silent, hidden, unhelpful, or a five-star witness whose life makes others want to know Jesus?'*

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Reflecting on Sunday 7th September 2025: Dr Paul Jones challenged us to think about how we recognise the presence of God in our lives, all the time. How did you work that out over the past week and what difference did that make in all the ordinary moments of your life?

These questions help you think more about this message. We hope they might be a conduit for conversation and reflection, encouraging us to wrestle with how this message might practically work itself out in our lives.

1. If your life was the only review someone read about Jesus, what rating would it get, one star or five? What would need to change for your witness to be more compelling?
2. Jesus names Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and the ends of the earth in Acts 1:8. Where is your 'Samaria', the uncomfortable space or people you'd rather avoid, and what step could you take to cross that boundary and engage with people you might normally try and avoid?
3. The sermon reminded us that the 'ends of the earth' are often in our own backyard here on the North Shore. Who has God placed in your workplace, classroom, or neighbourhood that you might be overlooking, and what practical step could you take to show them Christ's love?
4. We heard stories of Baptists in New Zealand giving sacrificially, travelling, and even dying in pursuit of God's mission. Considering that heritage, what sacrificial step might God be asking of you - in prayer, giving, going, or welcoming, to keep Windsor Park a five-star witness today?

If you'd like to chat with someone about your spiritual journey or anything else going on in your life, please contact us at care@windsorpark.org.nz; **we're better together and no perfect people are allowed.**

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Below are some further resources that may take the message further and deeper and enable you to explore other viewpoints on the same theme. We also encourage you to engage with the preacher if there are further questions you have or if you'd like clarification on anything. Email info@windsorpark.org.nz and we'll direct your query to the appropriate person.

1. Windsor Park Baptist is not exempt from being reviewed online, and people do form their opinions of a church by reading reviews. If your experience of Windsor Park is positive, **write a Google review** and rate the stars with what you feel comfortable. The things you say about Windsor Park help others decide whether to engage with us, and you! We hope your experience of Windsor Park is positive, but if it's not, think about how you can be part of the solution.
2. In **RightNow Media** is a short video series called **Gospeler**. In this six-session series (one hour of time in total), author and businessperson Willie Robertson encourages us to embrace our identity as "gospelers," ready and able to share the good news of Jesus. We don't need to preach to share the gospel; we simply need to have meaningful conversations. Here's the link: <https://app.rightnowmedia.org/en/content/details/864905>
3. The **YouVersion Bible App** is the world's leading app to not only read the Bible on, but to see a range of other useful resources. Download the app and create your own account and then set Windsor Park Baptist Church as 'My Church'. Each week we recommend a short devotional plan (you'll get a notification about a new plan each week). This week we'll recommend **Life on Mission**, which is a short devotional series that talks practically about living a missional life.