

“Renewed Commitment and Passion”
The perspective of a newer CEO
of an older mission

I am grateful to the LCJE ICC for asking me to share my insights on how we in the LCJE can develop a renewed commitment and passion to Jewish mission and evangelism. To do so as a relatively new CEO of a very old European-based mission offers the opportunity to bring a unique perspective. To seek to revitalise and grow a mission with the amazing history that Christian Witness to Israel (CWI) has had, is a great privilege.

How do you do it? How has it worked for us? Is it working? These are questions that I hope I can help answer as I share and seek to inspire you with what the Lord has been doing for us in CWI.

We all know that in the sphere of mission and evangelism there are many challenges, and these seem to multiply day by day – especially when reaching specific cultural or religious groups. This is especially true in the politically and religiously charged world of Jewish evangelism.

It is very tempting to just throw our hands up, walk away, and do something entirely different - I have done that a few times throughout my ministry. But if you are here, I assume that you, like me, know this is a work that God has called you to.

I have found there are four particular challenges I face as I seek to renew commitment and passion to Jewish mission and evangelism, and I believe they are relevant challenges to us all. If we will focus on overcoming these challenges, I believe we can and will see many more Jewish people coming to know and follow Yeshua.

There is one thing I want to make clear as I start. None of the real challenges we face in bringing Yeshua back to Jewish people today have to do with Jewish resistance to the gospel.

Actually, there is a greater openness among Jewish people today than we have seen in many years. In fact, the challenges we face are with the Church and the Christian’s heart and mind when it comes to loving Jewish people enough to tell them that they need Yeshua.

I was recently challenged by the words of King Solomon in Proverbs 24:30-34 where he writes:

*³⁰ I went by the field of the lazy man,
And by the vineyard of the man devoid of understanding;*

*³¹ And there it was, all overgrown with thorns;
Its surface was covered with nettles;
Its stone wall was broken down.*

*³² When I saw it, I considered it well;
I looked on it and received instruction:*

*³³ A little sleep, a little slumber,
A little folding of the hands to rest;*

*³⁴ So shall your poverty come like a prowler,
And your need like an armed man.*

What convicted me about this passage is how easy it is to lose our way with the Lord – not even by deliberately forsaking him or his ways, but by simply cutting back or stopping the things we ought to be doing to maintain our walk with him.

Like a garden that slowly becomes overgrown with thorns and thistles, so when we neglect to do what the Lord in Scripture commands, we lose our way and poverty comes to us like a thief. The consequences can be devastating.

I have been a missionary in the UK for over 30 years. I was brought over to London by CWI after completing Dr Goldberg's Jewish Studies programme at Moody in 1988. And what I have noticed over these past 30 years is that the Church and Christians in the UK have grown less confident in sharing Yeshua with those around them. Weeds and thistles have grown up and choked our voices.

We fear being ridiculed and mocked from associating ourselves as disciples of Yeshua. Of course, Christians have always suffered these things – right up to martyrdom, but in the UK, it seems our garden has gotten very weedy.

And if it is that bad when thinking about reaching a neighbour who may be a nominal Christian, how much harder is it to think about bringing the gospel to someone, like a Jewish person, who may be vehemently opposed to Yeshua?

When I first came into this CEO role at CWI, I took some time to read and look back into our past. One of the things I noticed was that when CWI was first established 177 years ago in 1842, the first task that the leadership felt was needed was to get a concern for the salvation of Jewish people back onto the agenda of the Church. They needed to remind the Church that Jewish people need Yeshua too and that we must not neglect to bring the Good News to them.

They decided the best way to tackle this challenge was to get some well-known preachers like C.H. Spurgeon to speak on behalf of the mission and make a case for Jewish evangelism. I think they did a great job.

Jewish missions in Europe worked in partnership with the Church. They took the task seriously with resolve and focus and the result, by God's grace, was outstanding. When we look back into the history of Jewish mission in Europe, we see thousands, even hundreds of thousands, of Jewish people who came to faith in Yeshua, right up to the Holocaust.

But now, the garden walls are again broken down, the nettles sting and when it comes to the Jewish people, the gospel has mostly been choked from our throats. And the first thing that gags the words from our mouths are misdirected hearts. It saddens me to see that many Christians simply think Jewish people don't need Yeshua.

Of course, we know that when the Church was born, it was Jewish. If you wanted to be a follower of Yeshua, they believed you had to convert and be Jewish – after all Yeshua came as the Jewish Messiah.

And so, it took a dream from God to Peter to get evangelism among the Gentiles kick started. In Peter's dream, a big wide sheet came down from heaven full of Cumberland Sausages, Honey Glazed

Ham and Sticky Pork Ribs. God had to overcome Jewish prejudice when it came to the gospel going to the Gentiles and he used unclean food to make his point.

We know that then the Gentile, Cornelius and his house were saved. This resulted in the first Council of the Church meeting in Jerusalem and big debates taking place. They were trying to get their Jewish minds around Gentiles believing in the Jewish Messiah.

But today we face the same problem in reverse – once again, like CWI's founders 177 years ago – we need the Church to see that, just as the early Jewish disciples had a problem bringing the gospel to the Gentiles, now the Church has a problem with bringing the gospel back to Jewish people.

I pray God gives Church leaders today a dream of a wide sheet coming down from heaven stacked full of bagels, lox and cream cheese, beet borscht, blintzes and gefilte fish – they need to rediscover his heart for Jewish souls that need saving. What a greater banquet it would be with Jewish and Gentile food together.

But food aside, this is the first challenge we face – helping the Church remember that Jewish people need Yeshua too – and therefore getting Jewish evangelism back on the agenda, activity and support of the Church.

This is a real problem. Like a coin, on one side we have those who say Jewish people are saved simply by observing our own religion. These Christians love the Jewish people so much or are so enamoured with Judaism, that they are willing to stand against the words of Yeshua who said he is the only way to the Father.

I have met these Christians and debated with them. They have strongly pushed their belief that Judaism saves Jewish people or being a member of the Jewish race is enough to enter God's eternal Kingdom.

And then, there is the other side of the coin. And on that side, we have those Christians who have a disregard for Jewish people and do not care about the lost state of Jewish souls. Perhaps it is because of Middle East politics or Israel's policies, or because their theology holds Jewish people either responsible for the death of Yeshua – 'let his blood be on us and our children', or because they believe that the Jewish people are replaced by the New Covenant Church and are of no concern anymore.

Furthermore, with the rise of Anti-Semitism in Europe and across the globe, it is hard for people – even some Christians – to escape without being a little affected with a rise in personal anti-Jewish sentiments themselves, even at a minimal level.

The problem is that when we dislike or simply disregard a person or an entire people group – the thorns and thistles of prejudice also choke the love of God from our hearts for them and their need of Yeshua too. We simply don't care enough to even think or be concerned for eternal welfare.

But Yeshua looked down upon his people in Jerusalem and he wept. He said, *'I wanted to gather you under my arms as a hen gathers her chicks.'* Does the Church have the same passion for the Jewish people that Yeshua has? If not, the challenge we face is how to help the Church rediscover the Lord's

passion that his Jewish people be saved and help her prioritise having the gospel preached to them with conviction and power.

Jewish people need saving just like anyone else. We must help the Church remember this and act on it. But there is a second challenge we face in Jewish mission today.

In my work as a mission leader, I have the privilege of travelling and meeting believers from all over the world. Cultures are so interesting and offer so many different perspectives on life and faith and discipleship.

But one of the strange things that I engage with regularly among Christians is that of seeing the Jewish people as a means to the end. And when I say the end – I mean the end of the world.

I often have believers say to me after a meeting, 'We love the Jews and we are giving all we can to help get them back to the Land of Israel so that Yeshua will return.' Indeed, I am sometimes asked to speak on 'the end times and the Jewish people'.

There are a number of things that worry me about this but there is one concern for me that stands out above the rest. The problem I have is when we talk about 'The Jews' and we see them collectively as a people who are a means to an end. When we do that, we don't have the heart that Yeshua has.

It seems to me that the concern to get Jewish people back to the land of Israel over and above the salvation of Jewish people is entirely misplaced and certainly selfish.

Yes, of course the Church cries, 'Maranatha! Come Lord Jesus!' But even if getting Jewish people back to the Land were to usher the return of the Lord, how does that save Jewish people from the eternal separation from God that Yeshua warned them of?

After all, it was Yeshua speaking to a group of Jewish people in the Land of Israel who said, *'What does it profit a person to gain the world, (or a piece of land), but lose their soul?'*

Again, Yeshua cares about Jewish individuals. In Matthew 8:12-14 he tells a parable about a shepherd and his 100 sheep.

He says, *'What do you think? If a man has a hundred sheep, and one of them goes astray, does he not leave the ninety-nine and go to the mountains to seek the one that is straying?'*

¹³ And if he should find it, assuredly, I say to you, he rejoices more over that sheep than over the ninety-nine that did not go astray. ¹⁴ Even so it is not the will of your Father who is in heaven that one of these little ones should perish.'

Yeshua sees us all as individuals – that includes Jewish people. The challenge we face is not seeing Jewish people as a collective means to our end, or the end – but understanding the terrible end that awaits the one who does not profess faith in Yeshua as Lord and Saviour.

There is an end that is coming and it is terrible, and it happens to over 150,000 people every day! Hebrews 9:27 reminds us *'it is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment.'* No matter if a Jewish person passes away in Israel or America, in Europe or Australia, they need Yeshua – who

according to Hebrews 9:28 *'was offered once to bear the sins of many. To those who eagerly wait for Him He will appear a second time, apart from sin, for salvation.'*

Yeshua doesn't see Jewish people as a collective group who need to be delivered to a land, or who need a helping hand in rebuilding a temple, no, he sees each of us as an individual, a lost sheep, in need of him, the Saviour, who is the Great Shepherd.

So, the first challenge is getting Jewish evangelism back on the agenda of the Church. And the second challenge is seeing Jewish people as individuals that need to be saved.

The third challenge we face is around resource. And when I say resource I don't specifically mean money – although, of course all mission work needs funding in order to be carried out. But when I say resource I am talking more about our focus, energy and time. In fact, to simplify it – let me call it 'Oxygen' – because it is oxygen that fuels a flame.

Yeshua says in Matthew 5:14-15: 14 *'You are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden.'*¹⁵ *Nor do they light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house.* ¹⁶ *Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven.'*

You are the light of the world. You are the flame of God's message. And you need oxygen to burn bright – without it you are nothing – literally.

But there is a limited supply. Our oxygen is restricted by time and it's burning away. When it runs out, the flame goes POOF! And our light is gone.

That is what our life is like. We are the light of the world – we are to let our light shine – but it is a limited resource.

There are only so many years of our life, so many hours in the day, so many minutes of light – there is only so much oxygen. Then our light flickers out and we stand before God to give an account of how we used that precious resource of oxygen that he gave us.

Where the second challenge had to do with our focus on lost Jewish souls – this challenge is about our focus on the amount of air that we have and whether we use it on the message of Yeshua – or on something else.

Many will say that telling Jewish people about Yeshua is hard – that it is discouraging. I think we can all agree that telling anyone they are a sinner in need of saving is hard! Add that to the fact that Jewish people have suffered and been killed in Jesus' name for 2000 years and we face a huge hurdle. But with God all things are possible!

But as missionaries to Jewish people we always face a choice. And it is a difficult one: do I spend my oxygen telling Jewish people about Yeshua or telling the Church or Sunday School or house group about Jewish people, about Jewish customs, about Jewish culture.

As missionaries to Jewish people this is the great temptation we face: one day we are on the streets sharing Yeshua with Jewish people, knocking on Jewish doors, going to the Jewish community centre and places where Jewish people gather in order to meet and share the Good News with them... but

after a little while you discover it is far easier to talk about Jewish people than to talk to them about sin and our need of the Saviour.

We become experts on Jewish people and customs, we speak at conferences, we write books and so on – but who will tell them about Yeshua?! There is only so much oxygen. Our flame starts to flicker. It needs to burn bright. This is the continual temptation and challenge we face in Jewish mission.

It is way easier to talk to the lost about anything other than sin and the judgement of a Holy God, and the salvation that comes through faith in Yeshua and his death and resurrection. In 1 Corinthians 1:18 Paul writes: *'For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.'*

I have worked in and out of Jewish mission since I was 18 years old. Like many of you, I know first-hand how much easier it is to talk about Jewish people and Jewish things than it is to talk to Jewish people about the crucified, risen, and returning Messiah.

But this is the challenge we face, as those in Jewish mission and as individuals in the Church. If we take time to think and look at the conversations on Facebook and other social media networks, there is only so much oxygen. And it appears that when it comes to the Jewish people, Christians would rather burn up air debating Middle East politics, or issues of the Land, or Jewish culture, or fighting Anti-Semitism, or the Jewish roots of the Christian faith and so on, than we would talk about Yeshua and the Jewish person's need for him – or to the Jewish person about him. I am not saying these other issues are not important, but not even remotely as important as a person's eternity separated from or joined to God.

The day ends, the oxygen is gone, what did we burn for? – lifting Yeshua up or lifting up something else?

You are the light of the world – a city on a hill – what cause did you burn for? In the LCJE we must continue to rise to the challenge to use all the oxygen we have been given to burn for one single issue – bringing Jewish people to salvation in Yeshua and helping them follow him.

Yeshua said in John 4:35, *'lift up your eyes and look at the fields, for they are already white for harvest! And he who reaps receives wages, and gathers fruit for eternal life, that both he who sows and he who reaps may rejoice together.'*

If we are to be successful in Jewish mission today we must believe God – and believe him enough to sow. Because if we do not sow we will not reap. But the more we sow the more we will reap!

In faith and to this end, we in CWI have focussed our message, our time, our energy, our efforts. We are an historically old mission, and we are also a small mission, but over the past four years God has raised up new missionaries with us and by his grace, used us to see over 100 Jewish people come to faith. We rejoice, God is saving Jewish people! These are Jewish people that we know, that we are discipling, seeing baptised and placed in believing congregations.

There is only so much oxygen, so in faith, we are taking the opportunity to let the flame of Yeshua burn bright for Jewish people to see.

Changing the analogy of oxygen to sowing seeds – We are seeking to cast the seeds of the gospel everywhere we can with all the strength we have – trusting God to give the harvest.

Which leads me to what I believe is our last and greatest challenge...

In Matthew 5:35-38 we read: ³⁵ *Then Yeshua went about all the cities and villages of Israel, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every sickness and every disease among the people.* ³⁶ *But when He saw the multitudes, He was moved with compassion for them, because they were weary and scattered, like sheep having no shepherd.* ³⁷ *Then He said to His disciples, "The harvest truly is plentiful, but the labourers are few."* ³⁸ *Therefore pray the Lord of the harvest to send out labourers into His harvest."*

The harvest IS plentiful – it is. But the workers reaching Jewish people are so few.

How can we get Jewish evangelism back on the agenda of the Church? How can we reach over 15 million lost Jewish individuals? How can we gain more oxygen to use to share Yeshua? How can we sow more gospel seed?

The challenge is before us – how do we do it? We need more missionaries! We need missionaries to the Jewish people from all over the world – Europeans, North Americans, Asians, Africans, Australasians, Latin Americans. Chinese, Inuit, Cajun, Swiss, Korean, German, Kiwi, Kenyan, Nordic – we can go on and on – from every walk of life!

The harvest is plentiful! But our numbers are small. We need commitment from the Church, we need to focus on the lost 15 million Jewish people. We need the resources of the saints – time and money and even whole lives given to Jewish mission.

The essence of what I am trying to say about how we renew our commitment and passion for Jewish evangelism is that we need to continually face one extremely hard truth: more than anything else, Jewish people need Yeshua. Jewish people need to be saved. We need to believe this right down into the very core of our souls, and act on it.

Just before Rosh Hashanah 2003 I faced a personal catastrophic event in my life. My 65-year-old Jewish mother suddenly died of a massive heart attack. When I was first told the news I nearly fainted from the sudden impact of grief. Not the grief of losing my mother, but the grief of her not knowing Yeshua and the resulting eternal consequences for her.

I had prayed for my mother's salvation daily for nearly 25 years. I believed with perfect faith for her to be saved. But as far as I knew and experienced in our relationship, right up to her final moment, she would not even pray to God, so how could she have ever come to faith in Yeshua?

Now, suddenly, her life was over. She was gone. And the gnawing pain of her potential eternal suffering drove my life to implode. My closest friends would say I had a nervous breakdown. I don't know – I can only say that even now I am still limping from it.

Over time, the Lord has taught me to be content to preach the gospel to the living and leave the judging of the dead to God. And so, I leave my mother and my fears for her in the care of the God of grace. But this event has certainly focussed me. It has impassioned me. It has clarified the desperate nature of the work we do and the eternal significance it carries.

When my mother died, I could finally understand how Paul felt when he wrote in Romans 9:1-4a: *'I speak the truth in Christ—I am not lying, my conscience confirms it through the Holy Spirit—² I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart. ³ For I could wish that I myself were cursed and cut off from Messiah for the sake of my people, those of my own race, ⁴ the people of Israel.'*

I am sure my experience is not at all unique. But it has focussed me and clarified what I have been enabled to do as a leader of a Jewish mission.

I ask myself of a potential recruit or a current missionary, would this person make the effort to tell my mother about Yeshua? Would they be willing to love her enough to offend her with God's truth, with the gospel of Yeshua?

It has focussed how I spend my time, who we recruit, how we train, how we supervise and encourage our staff to maintain their focus and passion. And God is honouring this focus and passion. Sharing Yeshua without distraction is bearing fruit and we rejoice.

I want to encourage you to assess your time, your focus, your energy, your faith.

Are you ensuring Jewish evangelism is on the agenda of the churches in your sphere of influence, over and above any other issue?

Are you focussing on lost Jewish individuals over and above seeing the Jewish people as a means to the end?

Are you using all your oxygen to tell Jewish people about Yeshua and seeing them come to faith and be disciplined into the body of Messiah over and above any other cause?

Are you seeking to partner with everyone you can in order to raise up more missionaries to harvest the ripe fields of Jewish people?

Do you believe what we are doing is making an eternal and significant difference?

If not, pray. Pray like it matters because it does. And then in faith, act. Do something about it. Set goals. Work with others. Partner together. Grow your focus. It matters more than anything else. Let's work together to ensure we keep our priorities straight.

Let's pray and ask Yeshua to grow and maintain in us the heart he has for his Jewish people. He is the Good Shepherd who has compassion on his sheep and will leave the 99 and go for the one. He gave his life, let's follow Yeshua and do the same.