

Patrick Regan is the founder and CEO of the charity XLP, which fights poverty, supports education and helps young people in the London area. He recently won the Mayor of London's peace award, speaks regularly at Soul Survivor and Spring Harvest, and is a frequent guest on radio and TV programmes. He is also an Ambassador for Compassion.

Liza Hoeksma is a freelance writer.

* * *

“Recent history shows us that hope is the real ‘X’ factor that everyone needs in life. Patrick offers us no hollow clichés or quick fixes, but breathtakingly honest, practical gems that emerge from his life and work. Read this page turner, be inspired by its faith-filled authenticity, and catch the spirit of hope that keeps the world changers going. Brilliant and refreshing.”

– **Jeff Lucas, author, speaker, broadcaster**

“This amazingly hopeful manifesto for change is earth-shaking. Reading this book will get you ready.”

– **Danielle Strickland, author, *The Liberating Truth***

“This is the future of the church, found amongst those others consider hopeless. Forget door knocking to tell people about Jesus, XLP loves like Jesus – and the press and politicians knock on their door to ask for the hope that they have.”

– **Jarrod McKenna, Australian peace award recipient and co-founder of The Peace Tree Community**

“This is a book for those who long for change on our city streets, and in the neediest places in the world. Patrick combines biblical faith and ground level experience to show that change is possible, when it is rooted in hope.”

– **Rt Revd Graham Cray, Archbishops' Missioner and Chairman of the Soul Survivor Trust**

“Patrick is an incredible visionary. This powerful book reminds us all that there is no ceiling to God's ability to transform a community. You'll walk away from it dreaming bigger and believing God's kingdom can impact your town and your streets.”

– **Vicky Beeching, worship leader and blogger**

“In the face of growing unrest across the globe, incivility that staggers human decency and deflates our confidence in the common good, Patrick Regan offers a sober, yet hopeful response. With over fifteen years’ experience on the front lines of London’s inner-city landscape, Regan knows the challenges all too well, but also taps into the unlimited potential of the One who can transform the heart and restore the city.”

– Louie Giglio, Pastor, Passion City Church and Passion Conferences, Atlanta

“Patrick Regan is a prophet. He finds diamonds in the mud... This has some of the most thrilling stories you’ll ever read of the transforming power of Jesus. Don’t just buy one copy, but get another and give it to a friend who is not yet a Christian. It’ll show them why we get so excited about Jesus.”

– Eric Delve, St Luke’s Church, Maidstone

“Patrick puts his hands on the ugliness of our world and squeezes out huge portions of hope. This isn’t a book about wishful thinking; it’s a book about God at work in a broken world.”

– Revd Joel Edwards, International Director, Micah Challenge

“Explores the life-giving force of hope. Written directly to all of us who claim to love Jesus, Patrick courageously exposes his own fragile vulnerability in order to help us more effectively understand what it really means to live as a Christian.”

– Diane Louise Jordan, TV presenter

“Patrick is a man on a mission. Whether on the streets of London or in a developing country on the other side of the world he is committed to serving others and to helping to change people’s lives and circumstances. This book is moving and inspiring and cannot fail to challenge all who read it.”

– Revd Les Isaac, founder, Street Pastors

NO CEILING TO HOPE

STORIES OF GRACE IN ACTION FROM THE WORLD'S
MOST DANGEROUS PLACES

PATRICK REGAN

WITH LIZA HOEKSMAN

MONARCH
BOOKS

Oxford, UK & Grand Rapids, Michigan, USA

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To Simon & Ali:

*Your support, love and
commitment to Diane and me,
and to XLP, have kept us going.*

You're both an inspiration.

Patrick

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Foreword

No *Ceiling to Hope* is for such a time as this. It will inform you, challenge you, break – and warm – your heart.

Some of the stories in these pages are truly shocking and could easily lead to a sense of despair about what is happening in our world today. Addiction, wars, gangs, poverty and pain, homelessness and hunger.

Yet Patrick constantly gives us stories of hope, courage, love and triumph. He's been into many of the world's darkest places, but has found that God's people are there bringing light. He's visited places of brokenness and seen first hand those servants who are willingly mending things in God's name. Much of the work being done isn't glamorous and won't get talked about on the world stage, but it's absolutely vital work for God's church, part of the reason for her very existence.

Likewise the work being done by Patrick and his team at XLP. From Peckham to Jamaica, from Tower Hamlets to Ghana they are pouring out their hearts and lives in the service of those who, to the uninitiated, may seem to be the most undeserving. Patrick and his friends have seen beneath the surface and have touched the despair of a generation who have never felt loved, affirmed or accepted: a generation often without hope. The team are ordinary, vulnerable people and God is using them to pour his healing and grace into these broken lives.

This book presents a challenge to each one of us to follow their example, to hear God's call for us to stand up for the marginalized and oppressed, and to do everything we can to bring heaven to earth. We as the church can bring hope and transformation to a world in desperate need – if we will

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only act. And, as Patrick is so right in saying, we do this most effectively in the strength of Jesus who is himself the hope of the world.

Patrick has been my good friend for many years now. I have watched the ministry of XLP grow and develop and at the same time not lose its heart, vulnerability and passion. XLP is an authentic ministry from authentic people who have too much integrity to enlarge their stories of grace. I am confident that what you read here is absolutely reliable. They are the real deal. I have seen the suffering and the days of despair over the years and Patrick doesn't shy away from honest accounts of his own struggles. But I have also seen the provision and mercy of God poured out in the most amazing ways and the miracles God has done through Patrick's obedience.

The stories you find here will move you. But be warned they don't make for comfortable bedtime reading: they will inspire you to love, to act, to serve and to pour yourself out to bring the hope our world so desperately needs.

Finally, I love Patrick dearly. I am so proud of him. I commend this man and his book to you with all my heart.

Mike Pilavachi
December 2011

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Liza – I love working with you; it's always full of lots of laughter and then some tears.

Thanks to all those who helped out with stories and input: Simon Marchant, Johnny and Catherine Smith, Margaret Ferguson and those at Woodvale Church in the Shankhill community, Emily Vesey, Adrian and Jane, Andy Flanagan, Mike Biddulph, Becca Brierley, Dad, Leanne Sedin, Tom Booker and Mike Coates.

Special thanks to some of my heroes: Akousa Arkhurst, the students at Jubilee School and all my friends in Ghana; and Ms Lorna Stanley and Debbie in Trenchtown. I have told your stories many times, as you are real examples of what loving the hell out of people looks like.

Thanks to those who offered so much help and support in getting this book done: Wendy Beech-Ward, Tony Collins, Jenny Ward, Phil Loose, Ian Hamilton and all those at Compassion, Ibiere Oruwari and my amazing PA, Becky Hunt.

The XLP team: it's a real privilege to lead such an amazing bunch of people who are so committed to seeing change happen from the grass-roots up.

About XLP

I started the charity XLP after a stabbing in a school over fifteen years ago. I had no idea what I could do to help when the school approached me – I just knew I was called to do something.

I had grown up in Chelmsford and had only recently become a youth worker in a church in London. As I got to know these young people, I began to see what many of them faced every day of their lives: broken homes, financial and emotional poverty, educational failure, and living in areas where gangs, drugs and crime were becoming an increasingly significant problem. Many of these young people were becoming “outcasts” – from their schools, from their families and from society.

The longer I worked with them, the more my heart broke for them. I could see all the potential that God had given them to be amazing people and live incredible lives, and at the same time I could see them struggling against so many issues. I knew I had to stand with them – live, laugh and cry with them – and that God had called me to follow Jesus’ example in embracing the least, the last and the lost amongst the young people of London.

It has been a hugely challenging journey. From working with a few kids in a single school, XLP has grown to now work in over sixty schools across seven inner-London boroughs and in numerous estate communities, reaching 12,000 young people every year through schools and after-schools clubs, a double-decker bus project, a “pimped out” police riot van, art showcases, sports coaching and our mentoring programme. We run a gap-year training programme called Experience,

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which works in partnership with local churches, and we also partner with St Mellitus College to offer a degree course in theology and youth ministry. We have built a school in Ghana, and worked with people in Bangladesh, China, Turkey, Jamaica, South Africa and so many other places around the world. The stories along the way have been a combination of elation and tragedy. We've seen many find hope for the future in what seemed like hopeless situations. We've even had young people we work with become volunteers and staff members at XLP.

You can read more about the history of XLP in the book *Conspiracy of the Insignificant* (Kingsway, 2007). You can also read more about gang culture and why young people are drawn to it in my book *Fighting Chance* (Hodder, 2010).

If you're interested in finding out more about the work of XLP, or you would like to volunteer, donate or get involved in one of our projects, we'd love to hear from you. You can contact us in the following ways:

- Website: www.xlp.org.uk
- Postal address: 12 Belmont Hill, Lewisham, London SE13 5BD
- Telephone: 020 8297 8284
- Email: info@xlp.org.uk

You can also find us on:

- YouTube: www.youtube.com/xlplondon
- Facebook: www.facebook.com/xlplondon
- Twitter: www.twitter.com/xlplondon and www.twitter.com/PatrickReganXLP

Chapter 1

The Chance of Hope

London, October 2009. Ben, a thirty-year-old man, walks home from a nightclub with his girlfriend Allana, after an evening celebrating her birthday. Three young men stumble across them and grab Allana's fancy dress hat from her head. When she asks for it back, the youths punch her, then attack Ben, hitting him in the face and pushing him to the ground. As he lies helpless, they violently kick his head, inflicting such serious wounds that Ben dies just a few hours later from catastrophic brain damage. CCTV cameras capture delight on the young men's faces as they stand over Ben's broken body.¹

A year later, as the offending men were put on trial and sentenced, I was invited to talk on a national TV station about this tragic incident as an example of the growing violence amongst young people. The topic was pretty grim. The news had been full of reports of the increasing brutality amongst the UK's young people. Teenagers killing each other over anything from a look they didn't like, to the fact that the victim lived in a postcode they didn't like. Young people were also responsible for many deaths of innocent bystanders like Ben; lives were being lost over nothing more than a hat, leaving families and communities devastated at the senseless deaths.

As I sat there nervously on the plush studio sofa, I talked to the TV presenters as we waited for our cue. They took a polite interest in the work I do in inner-city London and around the world, but their weariness was written all over their faces.

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They'd seen too much. Gathering and reporting the news for a number of years had exposed them to the escalation of futile gang wars, story after story of young people becoming increasingly violent, volatile, and involved in serious crime. The female presenter shook her head as she said there was only one conclusion to draw from the evidence: this was a lost generation. My heart fell to the floor. Here I was, planning to talk about how we could help young people, see past the labels and stereotypes, choose not to write kids off when they've never been given a chance in life; and the people interviewing me could see no possible future for this entire generation. How many of the viewers thought the exact same thing? What did it mean for young people if adults were ready to write them off?

As the cameras started rolling and the red light shone, telling me we were live on air, my mind was scrambling around trying to think of the best way to address this lack of hope. The picture was bleak; that I couldn't disagree with. There was no doubt about it, things were bad and seemed to be getting worse. I saw it every day in my work: young people were getting into drug dealing to make some easy money. They were dropping out of school and becoming increasingly isolated from society. They were angry and frustrated and saw violence as their only form of expression. But despite all of that, despite working day in and day out with these young people who were struggling, and despite being all too aware of what they were facing, I couldn't agree with the presenter's conclusion. I locked eyes with this woman who thought there was no hope for this generation of young people and said, "I refuse to believe this is a lost generation. I am convinced that if we tackle the drivers of why these things happen, we can bring about change. Hope is a refusal to accept a situation as it is."

As Christians, hope is an amazing part of our heritage and our inheritance. It can set us apart and make us stand

out in a society that is increasingly cynical and worn down by the pain it sees in the world today. We worship the God of all hope (Romans 15:13), the God who clearly demonstrates to us through the Bible that there is always reason to have hope, no matter how bad things seem. This has never been clearer than when we look to Jesus dying on the cross. We barely need reminding of what a dark day it was for Jesus' followers as they saw their leader publicly humiliated and brutally beaten. For the Jewish people standing there on Good Friday, it was a catastrophe and a moment when their dreams were crushed and hope seemed futile. God's chosen people had experienced the oppression of overlord nations such as the Assyrians, the Babylonians, the Medo-Persians, and the Greeks over several hundred years. At the time of Jesus, they were being ruled over by the Romans. Many of the Jewish people, particularly the poor, were beleaguered and worn down. All they wanted was to be left to rule their own land; to have God's land inhabited and ruled by God's people without interference. Instead they were being oppressed by yet another ruling enemy. The Romans may have let them keep their own customs to some degree, but they had to pay extortionate taxes and they were living in fear, knowing that those who didn't obey and co-operate would be easily disposed of. All they had to cling to was the hope of the promises of God.

That hope had been passed from generation to generation as they waited. And waited. And waited. But they believed God would be true to his word and a Messiah would come to restore their kingdom. They weren't entirely sure whether this Messiah would be a king, a prophet, a priest or a warrior, but from the way they reacted to Jesus, it seems they were hoping for a warrior who would step in and overturn the powerful Roman Empire. They wanted a revolution. They wanted Jerusalem and Israel to return to the glories of the time of King David and King

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Solomon. No doubt they had visions of God's armies marching towards Jerusalem, hopes that their longings would be fulfilled and their nation would be great again. Then along came Jesus; they thought he might be the Messiah, but he didn't seem to be acting like a warrior king. They watched events unfold and saw him arrested, convicted and executed brutally and publicly. When they looked at Jesus hanging naked, beaten, alone and seemingly humiliated on the cross, any remaining hopes of him being the Messiah must have been shattered. He wasn't evicting the pagan Romans who tainted their land, restoring their nation to its former glory or ushering in Yahweh's return to the Temple. He was being cursed, nailed to a Roman cross and killed like a criminal. Public humiliation and death; what a dark day for Jesus' followers.

For all those whose hopes had rested with him, it looked as if the Romans had won again. Their hopes had come to nothing and Jesus had failed to fulfil their dreams. So the mockers looked on and laughed. The Romans may have sat back and thought they had stamped out this upstart carpenter from Galilee. Many of Jesus' disciples fell into disarray and desperately tried to make sense of what was going on and decide what to do. It looked like an absolute disaster, but even in those dark moments, there was reason to hope. As we well know, God was up to something. In that desperate and bleak situation, God was actually working for the salvation of all humankind. Jesus' followers had been right to put their hope in him, right to trust that God would be true to his word. The cross is the ultimate example of the fact that things aren't always what they seem, that God can work for good in any situation and that with God there is always reason to hope.

Perspective

Hope calls into question the present reality. It may seem as if hope is illusive sometimes but it's a choice about what perspective you choose to take. If you walk along the street and look down at the ground, you often focus on the grey concrete slabs. They are dirty and depressing, lifeless and miserable. But if you look harder you might see something else. Anywhere there is a gap between the concrete slabs there are signs of life. Grass will fight its way up, desperate to get to the surface, craning and straining against the odds to grow up towards the light. You can slap concrete on the ground but you can't keep life down. There's always something growing and looking for life, something surviving despite the odds.

That's what this book is all about: facing up to the reality that often life looks like a series of concrete slabs, and learning to focus our gaze on where the grass is growing, where hope is springing into life, where Christians are bringing God's life and love and seeing change. We'll look at the fact that even if you try to pull the grass up, you'll find that its roots are still there and new shoots will start to grow. We'll be looking at where we get our hope from, the true and unending hope that is ours in Jesus. We'll be challenging ourselves to see hope where the world sees disaster, to cling on to hope till our dying breath, to find evidence for hope when confronted with pain and misery. We'll be looking at one of the key challenges for us as Christians today: how do we gain and keep a perspective of hope, no matter what? We'll be looking at God's perspective, which comes from a place of hope, where love can overcome hate, where forgiveness can overcome bitterness, brokenness and violence. We'll be looking at how we stay in it for the long haul, not letting our spirits be dampened but understanding that

if we make this our life's work, we'll eventually see the grass breaking through the concrete and taking over the landscape.

We have to train ourselves to have this perspective of hope, because when we talk about the state of the world it's easy to focus on the negative things. We're constantly told how bad things are, but if you're anything like me, the statistics quoted are so huge that it's hard to wrap your head around them and make them mean something. How can we visualize the 1.1 billion people who don't have access to safe drinking water?² Or the 8 million children whose lives could have been saved if their parents had access to the right medicine?³ We look at the massive numbers and it's hard to imagine that things can ever change, that we can make any difference at all. We feel like a tiny ant trying to move a mighty oak tree. If we're going to bring change, we have to have hope for what we can achieve. So let's start by looking at some of the signs of life and some of the statistics of amazing change. It seems to be one of today's best-kept secrets that there is good stuff happening in our world, and not just small changes in individuals and communities (though these are crucially important and something I want to talk a lot about). There are also enormous, wonderful and world-altering changes happening that are the rewards reaped from people's compassion and dedication to stamping out pain and suffering where they can. Change is happening:

- The number of people living in extreme poverty has been halved in the last 30 years (from 52 per cent of the world's population to 26 per cent).
- Whilst 40,000 children used to die every day from preventable causes, that figure now stands at 21,000.
- 22 countries have halved their rates of malaria in 6 years.

- The number of children dying from measles has dropped by 78 per cent in the last 8 years.⁴

Now *that* motivates me. In my lifetime alone, the number of people living in extreme poverty has halved. Halved! I hope to have at least as many years ahead of me as there are behind me, so what else could I expect to see happen? What else could we achieve? What disease could we wipe out? What social injustice could we obliterate? What legacy could we leave that would have future generations looking back at the early twenty-first century and saying, “Wow, those people wouldn’t stop. They worked tirelessly on their watch. No one thought it could be done but they changed the world.”

Hope without limits

Clearly, it isn’t just Christians who are involved in trying to end poverty, injustice and suffering in this world, so why does the church need to get involved when there are so many amazing organizations doing great work?

The first and most obvious answer is that God calls us to do these things and to be his hands and feet in this world.

The second answer is that as God’s people we have something amazing and unique to offer the world: hope without limit. He gives us hope for today, that things can change in the here and now. But he also gives us hope for eternity, the promise of a day when every tear will be wiped away and everything will be restored. We have both hope for eternal life and hope that God cares right here and right now. He’s not the strange old man in the sky who only takes an interest in us after death – and then only to invite us into paradise or send us

off to eternal damnation. Who wants to be in relationship with someone like that? Our God cares; he cares enough to embrace the sin of the world on the cross. He cares enough to come and get involved, he cares enough to say, "I want to help you out of your brokenness, poverty and pain." He screams throughout the Bible that he can't bear injustice, that he wants his people to be compassionate and care for the poor. His very essence is love and he sums up his entire law in saying: love God, *and* love your neighbour as yourself.

The third answer is that the church is uniquely positioned to deliver things other organizations can't. The church is made up of millions and millions of people worldwide, with congregations placed all over the globe. Whilst some relief efforts are hampered by corrupt governments and local officials who steal or redistribute aid for their own benefit, churches are often ideally placed to get aid to where it is most needed.

Even people outside of the church acknowledge that it has a lot to offer. In an article in *The Times* entitled "As an atheist, I truly believe Africa needs God", Matthew Parris describes the difference that he believes the Christian faith makes:

Now a confirmed atheist, I've become convinced of the enormous contribution that Christian evangelism makes in Africa: sharply distinct from the work of secular NGOs, government projects and international aid efforts. These alone will not do. Education and training alone will not do. In Africa Christianity changes people's hearts. It brings a spiritual transformation. The rebirth is real. The change is good...

I would allow that if faith was needed to motivate missionaries to help, then, fine: but what counted was the help, not the faith. But this

doesn't fit the facts. Faith does more than support the missionary; it is also transferred to his flock. This is the effect that matters so immensely, and which I cannot help observing...

Whenever we entered a territory worked by missionaries, we had to acknowledge that something changed in the faces of the people we passed and spoke to: something in their eyes, the way they approached you direct, man-to-man, without looking down or away.⁵

Culturally engaged but morally distinct

Sometimes it can seem as though it would be an easier task to go to some far-flung place to deliver aid and preach the gospel, and far more of a challenge to do it on our own doorsteps. Why? Because the Western church seems perhaps to be in a time of exile. Belief in Christian values is being eroded, religion and society are no longer in sync, and the church is often seen as an outdated, irrelevant or even dangerous institution. Schools no longer sing hymns, many find it an offence to celebrate Christmas and would rather call it the “Winter Festival”.

The people of God have found themselves in a state of exile many times throughout history. When the Babylonian army invaded and destroyed Jerusalem, the people of God were taken into exile. Tens of thousands of Hebrews were herded across several hundred miles of desert to live in a new place where Yahweh was unknown. There was no Temple of God, no Levitical sacrifices, no Yahwistic festivals and celebrations, and

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a wholly different set of values. Put simply, they were “aliens in a foreign land” and they felt it. The book of Lamentations expresses the crushing sadness they felt; they were a people who felt abandoned, rootless, vulnerable and orphaned. Yet in that place, and with that sense of vulnerability, God told them through Jeremiah:

This is what the Lord Almighty, the God of Israel, says to all those I carried into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon: “Build houses and settle down; plant gardens and eat what they produce... Also, seek the peace and prosperity of the city to which I have carried you into exile. Pray to the Lord for it...”

Jeremiah 29:4-7

The Jews were free to build houses, earn a living wage and observe their customs and religion, but they couldn’t return home to their capital. At the same time, they were called to be different by the prophets of old and to maintain the integrity of their identity as Yahweh’s chosen people, even in their current circumstances. That was the tension they had to hold to, and that is what we need to rediscover today.

The key thing for us to remember, whenever we are confronted with the challenge of being a church in exile, is that we have several choices about how we respond. We can fight the change from Christmas to “Winterval”; we can sign petitions and complain loudly to anyone who will listen. Sometimes there is a place for all of that and it’s important to stand up for what we believe in, but does it help people hear our message and turn towards our God? Our second choice is to batten down the hatches, hide ourselves away and create a Christian subculture that exists behind walls. We can have

a view of mission that's akin to scurrying out of our safe-house once a year to capture anyone who doesn't put up a fight and dragging them back with us. Then we can make them into clones of ourselves, only able to survive in a Christian bubble. Thirdly, we can choose to embrace living in "Babylon", go along with its culture and live by its values because, let's face it, life's a lot less hassle that way. We can blend in, become synonymous with our surroundings, periodically telling stories of the old days but treating them more like fairy tales than inspiration to live by. We can forget our past, forget who we are and what our story is. *GQ* magazine wrote a feature about evangelical Christians, which woefully concluded that we are essentially a Xerox copy of the wider culture – not markedly different in any way.⁶

Or there's another choice. We can stand up and stand out in our world. We can stand for something different. We have the dangerous stories of Jesus to drive our hope. We can follow his example and turn from today's culture of consumerism, greed and selfish living. We need to check whether our values are too in line with the world around us. Maybe we're trying to be culturally relevant, or maybe we just like living in nice houses, driving nice cars, planning our careers, and buying our kids the latest trends. Maybe we've bought into the culture of individualism. Even within the church we more often ask, "What is *my* calling?" than, "What is *our* calling as the body of Christ?"

We need to remember that we're meant to be distinctive. We are not here to keep the government, our friends, our colleagues or anyone else happy: we are here to serve the kingdom of God. Which means sometimes people will love us and other times they won't understand us at all. So instead of being distracted by false idols like success, money, fame and security, we should be facing up to the problems and challenges

in our communities and around the world and finding new ways of engaging with them. We need to take ownership of the problems around us and work with people who are suffering in order to find solutions. Wouldn't that make people take notice for the best possible reasons? Wouldn't that pique their interest in God if they saw his people were carrying such hope that they kept on going, believing there can be lasting change, and were prepared to make sacrifices themselves to see it happen?

Stories of hope

During their time in exile the Israelites recalled their history and the stories of what God had done in the past. I think of these as dangerous stories of grace in action, and they are just as important for us today as they were for the Israelites. These stories inspired the people of God. They were daring, unsettling and even scary, but they would fill God's people with courage. Telling these stories of God's goodness and his plan for the whole of creation brings us hope today. We have the same stories as the Israelites had, of a God who parted the Red Sea, who rained down food from heaven, who brought water out from a rock. We can also tell of a carpenter from Nazareth who healed the sick, raised the dead, loved the poor and the disenfranchised, and set the captives free. We have stories of how Jesus saw and met with individuals. How he met with a woman abused by men and scorned by her society, and gave her dignity for today and hope for tomorrow. How he encountered a man with leprosy, healing him and setting him free from the stigma that had dominated his life and determined his future. We have stories of a Saviour who is all about forgiveness and restoration. Every time we remember how he embraced a child

everyone else thought was a waste of time, we are shown a glimpse of God's intentions for human history, a foretaste of the future with God. We're reminded we have a God who cares, who gets involved; we have a God who loves.

This is the activity of the King; this is the work of the kingdom, an indication of what is to come. This is what the church is called to do. Rather than simply hanging around on earth, doing our own thing in our own way, and waiting to die and "go to heaven", our God has called us to partner with him in realizing his ultimate purposes of recreating heaven and earth to be all that he intends it to be. That's huge! The all-powerful Creator of the universe who formed the stars and our world and all life, loves you and me and wants us to become all that he intends us to be by working with him towards the re-imagining of heaven and earth! When we work with God like this, towards his ultimate goal and purpose, we are changed, the people and the world around us change too, and every now and again we see a glimpse of what it will be like when we walk with God in the restored universe. On this journey we are not only echoing the dangerous stories of the past, but becoming intimately involved in those stories that God is writing upon history today.

At XLP we meet as a team every Monday morning and one of the most important things we do is share dangerous stories of change as they happen. Sometimes the stories make us laugh, other times they bring us to tears. They fill us with the courage and compassion to keep going with the things God has set before us. When we see God break into a young person's life, we are encouraged and reminded that this is God's will. When we see a family restored, their lives put back together, we're reminded that this is the kingdom come on earth. We tell and retell the stories, making sure that all our volunteers hear them – and as many other people as possible. Stories have

NO CEILING TO HOPE

the power to inspire, to break your heart, to make you laugh, to make you cry, to fill you with courage and compassion, to galvanize you into action. They prompt faith, hope and action, provoke change and challenge complacency. They remind us we are a community of people gathered around a cause, not a social club or a self-help meeting.

In this book I want to share some of the stories of where I've seen hope in our world. I've seen some terrifying and desperately painful situations transformed by God's people getting involved and bringing a piece of heaven to earth. As God's people we have an amazing opportunity to constantly evolve the story. There are so many areas that can be seen as lost causes, but as God's people we need to have a different perspective. God challenges us to see the world through his eyes. If we believe he can make any difference in our world, then we need to start seeing things in a new way. When others are giving up and calling a situation "hopeless", shouldn't we be standing firm, calling on the promises of God, refusing to accept a situation as it is, and being fully persuaded that there is *always* hope?