

## Step By Step

We have recently enjoyed watching a programme on BBC called 'Race Across the World'. The basic premise is that several teams, each consisting of two people, have to race each other across the entire width of Canada, a journey of several thousand miles. They all start equal, from the same place at the same time and with the same budget (equivalent to the cost of a direct flight). There are several rules; they have to surrender their mobile phones and they are not allowed to take any commercial flights. Along the way, the teams have to call in at the same specific checkpoints in order, but the route they take between destinations, and the modes of transport they use (whether ferry, bus, hitchhiking or costly taxi), are completely up to them.

The first realisation is just how much harder it is to navigate your way and find out information such as bus timetables, without a phone. Anyone with a smartphone will know how much we rely on the Internet to provide quick answers and directions, and how lost we can feel when it's not available. When we're not sure how to do something, how often do we reach for our phone or laptop. How often do we ask another human being? How often do we ask God?

We are reminded that the Internet is not the only source of useful information! Through talking to other people, we can find out so much more, and if we look and listen, God can also give us direction through the people we meet and the experiences we encounter.

It takes a huge amount of courage and faith to set out on a journey, not knowing where you need to get to, how you will get there or what will be involved. We are reminded of the calling of the disciples and the trust placed in Jesus as they set course for a new life, leaving everything behind.

Because of each competitor's extremely limited budget, at some stage, most teams in the Race Across the World need to seek help from other people and consequently experience the kindness of strangers. With budgets dwindling, and increasingly remote territory to transverse, there is no room for prejudice or carefully selecting whom to ask, when contestants are otherwise stranded in the wilderness – anybody that passes is a potential source of help. While on many occasions requests are met with suspicion or blank refusal, almost always after a period of waiting, a good Samaritan, sometimes the last person you would expect, comes to their aid and quite often helps them in ways beyond their expectations. It is interesting how these random acts of kindness are often described by the competitors in spiritual terms, even by people who don't appear to be religious. One team meet a young woman in a shop, and when she learns of the race and how little money they have, she gives them a lift of several hundred miles, she also gives them food, and accommodation. They are incredibly touched by the woman's kindness and describe her as a 'godsend'. They reflect on how 'someone must have been looking down on them that day' as well as thinking how their own attitudes to helping strangers have been changed.

Another of the teams is a young married couple, who are trying to come to terms with their struggles to have a family. Near the end of the race (spoiler alert..!), with only a few dollars left of their budget, they are trying to find a lift to the final checkpoint, with no public transport available. After approaching countless strangers for lifts, with no success, a middle-aged man stops and says that he's happy to take them in his van. The couple are elated to have found a solution to their problem, and they are back in the Race! Furthermore, as the three of them drive along, the conversation turns to family. The man tells them how he

himself was adopted, and what a fulfilling choice it can be and how he viewed it as such an expression of love. A chance encounter from a place of need, had such consequences and impact on that young couple. It is hard to believe God wasn't involved in some way in this chance meeting on their own personal journey.

The programme made us think about how we require help to lean on God in times of need, and to trust that He can provide for us and others, at times when the situation can seem so desperate. We should not rely on our pre-programmed prejudice and superficial judgements when deciding who to offer help to, but open our eyes more widely to the love Jesus shows and helps us to recognise people in need, reflecting that love. We never know how much our random acts of kindness might mean to other people or how those people might go on to show or reflect it to those they meet on their own journeys.

As we all journey through life, we pray that God opens our eyes and minds to encounter Him and to listen for His quiet voice in the world around us. Let us move forward in faith and courage to recognise the opportunities to share and receive God's love, one step at a time.

**Alan and Eleanor Dawson**