

REDMOONRISING

PETE GREIG//DAVE ROBERTS

THE ADVENTURE OF FAITH...THE POWER OF PRAYER



Red Moon Rising

PETE GREIG *AND* DAVE ROBERTS

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Electrical Storm

(PORTUGAL, GERMANY)

'Let's see colours that have never been seen
Let's go places no one else has been . . .
Well if the sky can crack there must be some way back
To love and only love.'

(U2 – 'Electrical Storm')

Standing on the spectacular cliffs of Cape St Vincent that night, I had no idea that my life was about to change. We had pitched our little tent on the most south-westerly point of Europe, far from the lights of any city and beneath a canopy of unusually bright stars.

For days Nick and I had been travelling west along the coast of the Portuguese Algarve, camping on cliff tops looking out to sea and cooking fresh fish on an open fire. By day we would hit the beaches, often leaving our backpacks on the sand to plunge into the sea.

Having recently graduated from university in London, our futures stretched out before us like those long, straight, empty roads you see in photographs of Montana. We were tanned and dirty, the sea had bleached our tousled hair, and we were having the time of our lives.

After so many days of travelling with the ocean on our

left, it had been exciting to catch the first glimpse of sea to the right as well. Gradually, over recent days, the land had tapered to the point where I was standing now, where a solitary lighthouse puts an exclamation mark on Europe, and the oceans collide in rage.

There is something absolute about Cape St Vincent: its lunar landscape, the ceaseless pounding of the waves against nature's vast battlements and even the black ravens circling majestically below as you look out to sea. Few things in life are so certain as these rocks. It isn't pretty, but it's real with a meaning that everyone senses and perhaps no one can quite express.

People have always been drawn to this mysterious wasteland, which has been battered for thousands of years by the collision of the Atlantic and the Mediterranean seas. Bronze age tribes buried their dead here and erected standing stones. In AD 304, grieving monks brought the body of St Vincent the martyr here and, according to legend, ravens guarded his bones. The place took on the martyr's name and became a place of Christian and Muslim pilgrimage for centuries to come. The Romans quite simply thought it was the end of the world. Here their maps ran out and their empire marched relentlessly into the endless sea. It would be centuries before Europeans 'discovered' the Americas beyond the blue curve of that deadpan horizon.

But standing there that night I knew none of this history. I only sensed something unfathomably sad and special about the place. Nick and I had pitched our little green tent right there on the cliffs, laughing that we were to be the most south-westerly people in all of Europe for a night. But, unable to sleep, I had climbed quietly out of the tent, leaving Nick gently snoring. A breathtaking sight had greeted

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me: the vast, glowering ocean glimmering under a shimmering eternity of stars. It was like being lost in the branches of some colossal Christmas tree.

**A faceless army of young people was
rising out of the page, crowds of them
in every nation awaiting orders.**

To the south of me the next great landmass was Africa. To the west it was America. But I turned and with my back to the ocean imagined Europe, rolling away from my feet for 10,000 miles. From where I stood, the continent began with a handful of rocks and a small green tent, but beyond that I could imagine Portugal and Spain, France, Switzerland, Italy and Germany eventually becoming Russia, China and the Indian sub-continent.

Visualizing nation after nation I raised my hands and began to pray out loud for each one by name. And that was when it happened. First my scalp began to tingle and an electric current pulsed down my spine, again and again, physically shaking my body. Nothing like this had ever happened to me before, and it was years before the spiritual excitement associated with the Toronto Blessing would appear to plug millions into the mains. I could hear a buzzing, clicking sound overhead, as if an electric pylon was short-circuiting, and I seriously wondered if I was about to get fried. As these strange sensations continued I received a vision. My eyes were open, but I could 'see' with absolute clarity before me the different countries laid out like an atlas and from each one a faceless army of young people was rising out of the page, crowds of them in every nation awaiting orders.

I have no idea how long that vision lasted – it might have

been a minute or as much as an hour – but eventually I climbed into my sleeping bag next to Nick, who was quietly snoring, and with my head still spinning, I drifted into a deep sleep.

My life would never be the same.

* * *

Two years earlier, in the city of Leipzig in communist East Germany, a 13-year-old was looking around in amazement at all the candles and people crammed into the building to pray for peace. Markus Lägel felt like a small part of something very big – anonymous and special at the same time.

It was hard to be a Christian under one of the most repressive regimes in the world. The ever-present fear of conflict with the West weighed heavily on everyone, so the East German church began to mobilize prayers for peace. They started in 1979, and by 1989 the prayer rally at Leipzig was attracting 300,000 people.

With so many people expressing their protest in prayer, the State was preparing for war. Markus remembers guns on the roofs of churches and tanks in the street. But when the Berlin Wall finally came down one communist official made an extraordinary admission to a journalist: ‘We were prepared for every eventuality, but not for candles and not for prayers.’

Markus spent formative years caught up in those peace prayer rallies in Leipzig and when the communist regime finally fell, he became convinced that prayer has the power to undermine any ideology that oppresses. Watching consumerism usurp communism, one form of oppression

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for another, Markus began a spiritual journey that would one day make him an essential part of the 24-7 story.

* * *

As Nick and I hitched our way back across Europe, the vision of Cape St Vincent kept replaying in my mind. 'Where is the army, Lord?' I would wonder again and again as we travelled from Lisbon to Valladolid, Bilbao, Bordeaux, Paris and London. 'Where are the signs of such people in these streets, these tenements, these crowded places?' Maybe my vision had meant nothing at all.

It's a question I guess we all ask, looking around our towns and cities, looking at the classroom or the office or the campus, watching TV and even scanning the pews at church. Where are those 'forceful' men and women rising up to lay hold of God's kingdom (Matthew 11:12)? Where are the people of God advancing the purposes of God with militancy and humility in the power of his Spirit today?

And why do we need such an army anyway, when churches abound? What is the urgency that compels us?

To die for

I still remember where I was when I heard the news that Kurt Cobain had killed himself. Somehow it seemed momentous that a world-famous musical genius had stuck a gun in his mouth and pulled the trigger. In his suicide note he simply claimed that he felt 'guilty beyond words'. But, with hindsight, the rock star's suicide wasn't momentous at all; it was just another death of another depressed

individual failing to find sufficient meaning in a messed-up world.

After working twelve hours a day copying product numbers into account ledgers, a Japanese man called Wataru Tsurumi wrote a book called *The Complete Manual of Suicide*, advising young people on how to kill themselves. It has sold 1.3 million copies since 1993.

Der Spiegel magazine estimates that in Germany alone there are at least 30 Internet death forums where suicidal teenagers can discuss the best ways to die. A kid called Rizzo wrote on one: 'Hi people! I've bought a 7-metre long piece of cord. Can someone tell me the height of drop to hang myself properly?' A forum master called Markus 'B' left his final message on 11th November: 'When you have a 12-calibre shotgun in your hand, you think differently about death. If you think there's something heroic about shooting yourself, hold a gun in your hand.' Three days later Markus's parents found him dead with the Beatles track 'Let it be' playing on repeat.

With suicide rates among young men soaring, alongside self-harm and eating disorders in women, we can say with some confidence that this generation may well be hurting more profoundly than any other. Amid sparkling creativity, spectacular innovation and unprecedented wealth, growing up in the West means for many a sense of alienation and a craving for intimacy, authenticity and hope.

That, surely, is a heart cry that moves the heart of God as his Spirit intercedes for us in groans beyond talking. It's why he anoints us to preach good news to the poor and to bind up the broken-hearted (Isaiah 61:1). It's why he is sounding the trumpet in our time, summoning his forces to wage war in heaven and declare peace on earth (Ephesians 6). The battle is real, but it's not just to save our souls from an

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epidemic of rock 'n' roll angst, and it's not simply to refill our lonely pews either. We need an army to arise because the poor and the oppressed are crying out to God for urgent intervention and some ray of hope. 'Though I call for help,' they say, 'there is no justice' (Job 19:7).

JOURNEY: THE POWER OF STORIES

How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of those who bring good news, who proclaim peace, who bring good tidings, who proclaim salvation, who say to Zion, 'Your God reigns!' (Isaiah 52:7)

In New York City a guy called John bought a Big Mac for a homeless man; it was the beginning of a lifelong friendship. In Dublin, Lucy's heart felt as if it were breaking as she prayed for friends who didn't know Jesus. In Tennessee, a prodigal stepped inside a prayer room and began the journey home.

The stories of Jesus are still being told. He is alive and moving powerfully in our generation, still comforting those who mourn, answering prayer and making ordinary lives extraordinary.

Stories are powerful; they can evoke anger, ignite truth, inspire hope or invade a person's loneliness with an empathetic hug. Jesus told stories but he also was the story. Throughout this book, in these 'Journey' boxes, you'll find short quotes and personal accounts of God on the move. If life is like a video, these are like snapshots capturing particular moments on people's spiritual journeys. Hopefully they will help you to understand God's character better. And when we get our heads around God's character, prayer, devotion and discipleship ceases to be a technique and becomes an instinct. That's when we can take our place in an army that marches on its knees, fighting for the Prince of Peace.

Black death

‘And who is my neighbour?’ (Luke 10:29)

We probably never expected to find ourselves living at the time of the worst epidemic in world history, but AIDS has now killed more people than the Black Death. That’s why in Africa tonight 400,000 children will lie down to sleep without a mother or father to kiss them goodnight, innocently orphaned by AIDS. History will hold us accountable for our response to such suffering. And yet some countries, like Malawi, are being forced to spend more on debt repayment to countries like ours than they are on preventing and treating HIV/AIDS or feeding their own people.¹ Our governments are effectively making things worse!

In America, 40 years after Martin Luther King’s ‘I have a dream’ speech, if you’re black you are nearly twice as likely to be fired from your job than your white co-workers.² What’s more, the median income of black American families was 54 per cent of the income of white families in 1992, which is significantly worse than it was back in 1969.³

Something has to change and Jesus says that something *can* change, promising that ‘the first shall be last and the last shall be first’. In a world obsessed with celebrity, sex and superficial appearance, he still chooses the lepers and the AIDS victims, the bullied kids from school and the ‘fools’ of this world to confound the wise with hope and justice. In

1 www.maketradeair.com August 2003.

2 Even allowing for differences in age, education, job performance and a score of other factors, blacks in the US are fired at nearly twice the rate of whites (*Philadelphia Inquirer*, October 1994).

3 *Ibid.*

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the company of Christ, the ugly become beautiful and classroom cowards become the bewildered heroes of his kingdom. That, after all, is my story, and I suspect it is yours too:

Take a good look, friends, at who you were when you got called into this life. I don't see many of 'the brightest and the best' among you, not many influential, not many from high-society families. Isn't it obvious that God deliberately chose men and women that the culture overlooks and exploits and abuses, chose these 'nobodies' to expose the hollow pretensions of the 'somebodies'? (1 Corinthians 1:25–27, *The Message*)

That is the gospel as much today as it was when Paul was writing to the Corinthians. In fact there may well be more outcasts in our modern industrialized society – slaves of the free market economy – than there were in the Roman Empire. When I worked in Hong Kong with heroin addicts as part of Jackie Pullinger's remarkable ministry, she would say, 'If you want to see revival, plant your church in the gutter.' Jesus warned us that the upwardly mobile middle classes would always find it extremely hard to receive him. But among the losers, the freaks and the apparent failures, what one preacher called the 'shrimps and wimps and those with limps'⁴ . . . that is actually where the gospel spreads quite easily.

Talking about a revolution

Revolutions always begin in the streets with the dispossessed – never in the corridors of power. Think of the early

4 Gerald Coates.

church, the French Revolution, the Bolshevik Revolution and the American wars for independence. Think of William Booth's Salvation Army and the birth of Pentecostalism in a back street of Los Angeles. Think of the roots of rock 'n' roll, of hip-hop and rap.

Something must change. Something can change. But can the church as we know her rise to the task? The respected researcher George Barna looks in the rear view mirror and makes a tragic observation: 'Recent decades have seen the impact of the Church wane to almost nothing.'⁵

**In the company of Christ, the ugly
become beautiful and classroom cowards
become the bewildered heroes of his
kingdom.**

The charismatic movement of the last 50 years has, in parts, done more to 'church' a generation into certain ways of thinking and acting than it has to disciple them to think and act like Christ. As a result, teenagers and young adults are finding our meetings and teachings increasingly irrelevant. Every Sunday thousands of our contemporaries leave the pew, never to return. But statistics mask the real story. A 50-year time warp often separates Saturday night from Sunday morning, and faced with such alienation some of our peers have simply retreated from the world altogether, taking up residence in a protective Christian bubble in which they can avoid meaningful interaction with the challenges of a wider culture. Others send their bodies faithfully to church on Sunday, having stored their brains in a pickle

5 George Barna and Mark Hatch, *Boiling Point* (Regal, 2001), p. 311.

jar at home and left their hearts at the party, the pub or the cinema the night before. And of course many of our friends just avoid church altogether.

Right now, one in five American children are living in poverty and yet, according to the Barna Research Group, 'Half of all adults did nothing at all in the past year to help a poor person' and 'few churches have a serious ministry to the poor'.⁶ With such crying needs and such self-absorption among God's people, surely things have never been worse?

Christianity will be forgotten in 30 years

In a message called 'Prayer & Revival' J. Edwin Orr, a widely respected historian, described the situation in America in the 1780s. Drunkenness was epidemic and the streets were judged not to be safe after dark. What about the churches?

The Methodists were losing more members than they were gaining. In a typical Congregational church, the Rev. Samuel Shepherd of Lennox, Massachusetts, in sixteen years had not taken one young person into fellowship. The Lutherans were so languishing that they discussed uniting with Episcopalians who were even worse off. The Protestant Episcopal Bishop of New York, Bishop Samuel Provost, quit functioning; he confirmed no one for so long that he decided he was out of work, so he took up other employment.

The Chief Justice of the United States, John Marshall, wrote to the Bishop of Virginia, James Madison, that the Church 'was too far gone ever to be redeemed.' The great philosopher Voltaire averred and the author Tom Paine echoed, 'Christianity will be forgotten in thirty years.'

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 41.

⁷ International Revival Network: www.openheaven.com

The spiritual state of America's universities at the time concurred with such gloomy predictions, giving little or no hope for the future of the faith in that land:

Take the liberal arts colleges at that time. A poll taken at Harvard had discovered not one believer in the whole student body. They took a poll at Princeton, a much more evangelical place, where they discovered only two believers in the student body, and only five that did not belong to the filthy speech movement of that day. Students rioted. They held a mock communion at Williams College, and they put on anti-Christian plays at Dartmouth. They burned down the Nassau Hall at

DEEPER: VALLEY OF BONES

Consider for a moment some statistics. They're mainly from the UK and USA, but with small variations they might represent any major Western nation. They could so easily be used to posture and condemn, accuse others and parade our virtue. But there is another way to view them. Think of them as the symptoms of a spiritually malnourished generation. Think of them as the evidence of loss, alienation and pain.

Drink and drugs – Almost a third of UK teenagers have been drunk 20 or more times and more than 35 per cent have experimented with illegal drugs.¹ Why?

Bullying – Nearly one-third of the middle school and high school students in one survey admitted being a bully, being bullied or both.² Why?

Priorities – It currently costs \$2.2 million to air a 30-second commercial during the American Super Bowl, while literally hundreds of millions of people are malnourished, homeless and dying of curable diseases.³ Where are the people crying for change?

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Princeton. They forced the resignation of the president of Harvard. They took a Bible out of a local Presbyterian church in New Jersey, and burnt it in a public bonfire. Christians were so few on campus in the 1790s that they met in secret, like a communist cell, and kept their minutes in code so that no one would know.

It's hard to believe that this was taking place in America just 200 years ago, but then, Orr continues, God intervened and he did so by mobilizing his people to pray, first in the UK and then in the States:

Self-harm – *Children as young as six are cutting themselves. The average self-harmer is aged eleven, and one in ten adolescents are thought to have cut themselves deliberately at least once. A typical 16-year-old girl says that most days she cuts into her arms until they bleed, explaining that 'the pain proves you're human'.⁴ Why?*

There are never simple one-line answers to such questions. Maybe some people are merely rebellious, refusing any constraint. But for how many is sex a search for intimacy, drink and drugs a way of escape, self-harm a demonic self-loathing and bullying a search for power and significance? Only a prophetic community can help people discover the wisdom that will heal these wounds.

1 BBC Report, 20/2/2001.

2 *The Journal of the American Medical Association*, 25th April 2001.

3 George Barna and Mark Hatch, *Boiling Point* (Regal, 2001), p. 110.

4 Centre for Suicide Research, Oxford University, 2003.

A prayer movement started in Britain through William Carey, Andrew Fuller, John Sutcliffe and other leaders who began what the British called the Union of Prayer. Hence, the year after John Wesley died (1791), the second great awakening began and swept Great Britain.

In New England, there was a man of prayer named Isaac Backus, a Baptist pastor, who in 1794, when conditions were at their worst, addressed an urgent plea for prayer for revival to pastors of every Christian denomination in the United States. Churches knew that their backs were to the wall. All the churches adopted the plan until America, like Britain, was interlaced with a network of prayer meetings, which set aside the first Monday of each month to pray. It was not long before revival came... Out of that second great awakening came the modern missionary movement and its societies. Out of it came the abolition of slavery, popular education, Bible Societies, Sunday schools and many social benefits.

Utter hopelessness turned to renewal and restoration as God's people turned to determined prayer. Could it happen for a new generation?

UCBONES

'Where, Lord, is the army for today?'

It was a question the people of Israel in captivity asked too. Then Ezekiel found himself in a valley of dry bones – as unpromising a place as any confronting us – only to witness a dramatic transformation. The bones became corpses, 'breath entered them; they came to life and stood up on their feet – a vast army' (Ezekiel 37:10).

We may be tempted to look at youth culture around the world and echo the despair of the people of Israel: 'Our bones are dried up and our hope is gone; we are cut off.'

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But could it be that as we declare the ‘word of the Lord’ in our time, the flesh will return, bones will reconnect and the body will breathe again? Could an army arise in Silicone Valley, the Thames Valley or any other modern-day valley of bones?

Years after Markus Lägerl’s experiences in Leipzig and mine in Portugal, we are friends from different countries walking the journey of faith together. These days you may find us on occasion wearing identical 24-7 T-shirts. On the front they say ‘UCBONES’ and on the back ‘ICANARMY.’ We’re declaring to those cynics busy writing off our generation, ‘You see bones, but I see an army!’ We choose to believe that walls can still fall the way they did in Jericho and in Germany. We choose to believe that a heart cry can become a war cry for justice. We choose to believe that the army of the Lord can arise once again in the valley of dry bones.

Then he said to me: ‘Son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel. They say, “Our bones are dried up and our hope is gone; we are cut off.” Therefore prophesy and say to them: “This is what the Sovereign LORD says: O my people, I am going to open your graves and bring you up from them; I will bring you back to the land of Israel . . . I will put my Spirit in you and you will live.”’ (Ezekiel 37:11–14)