

“PERSEVERANCE” (Paul Cowley)

- Where have you seen God at work in your life this week? (Share any brief examples and encouragements).
- Was there anything from Sunday’s message which you found particularly inspiring or challenging?
- Was there anything else you particularly noticed?

Romans 5:2a-5 (NIVUK)

We boast in the hope of the glory of God. Not only so, but we also glory in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. And hope does not put us to shame, because God’s love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us.

Jeremiah 29:11 (NIVUK)

For I know the plans I have for you,’ declares the Lord, ‘plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.

Catch up on Paul Cowley’s story in this article from The Church Times (11 September 2020):

<https://www.churchtimes.co.uk/articles/2020/11-september/features/interviews/interview-paul-cowley-bishops-adviser-for-prisons-and-penal-affairs-london>

Paul opened his message by saying three things:

1. God has a plan for your life
 2. It will probably involve a struggle
 3. Remember that God loves us and cares for us
- *Do you feel like your life has been the unfolding of God’s plan, or more like you have had to make it up as you go along?*
 - *Or, perhaps you have been more influenced by other people... who, or what, has shaped you?*
 - *Have you experienced discouragements and failures which, as you look back on them, you can see that God was using them to get your attention?*
 - *Do you think God is trying to get your attention now?*
 - *What have been the biggest struggles along your way?*
 - *Are you facing struggles right now that you would like prayer for?*

Paul Cowley describes his early life as being blighted by drink, debt, divorce, and despair. He has written a book about his life with the title: **Thief, Prisoner, Soldier, Priest**. Recently he was awarded an MBE for his work amongst ex-offenders. Without his early negative experiences, Paul would never have had the kind of success in changing people’s lives that he has had. He says, “Don’t let your past determine your future.”

- *God has a way of redeeming and using people not just despite our painful past experiences and failures, but because of them. Are there scars that God has turned into stars in your own life?*