

# The beginning of Hope Church

## Where it all began for us

I became a Christian in May 1994, was baptised in water in December that year and was baptised in the Holy Spirit in January 1995. I was passionate about Jesus and passionate to see the church experiencing more (and expecting more) of the Holy Spirit - becoming more like Jesus as we worshipped, prayed and served together.

In 1996 I remember our house group going for a prayer drive around Corby, stopping at various places to pray and share an impressions we felt the Lord give us for those places. When we came to Oldland Road we drove along until it came to an end at a mound of mud. It looked as though in the future this road would become the entrance to a new housing estate. At the moment, though, all we saw as we looked out was scrubland. This scrubland continued as far as the eye could see and covering a vast area where old steel-working quarries had once been. Now they were filled-in and nature had taken over. So we prayed for this area, for the housing estate that would one day stand there and for a Christian presence to be established in that community. As we were praying, I remember having a strong impression that I would one day be part of the answer to that prayer! So God began to place in me a desire to see a church planted on the estate that would one day become Oakley Vale.

## The Birmingham years

In 1997 I left Corby to go to university in Birmingham. I married Maggie in 2000 and we settled in Birmingham where we started our family (Aaron arriving in 2002 and Sam following in 2004). In 2003, after recognising my giftings and testing my calling, my pastor asked me to join the leadership team at Selly Oak Elim as Assistant Pastor. This would involve beginning to journey towards ordination as an Elim Minister, receiving on-the-job mentoring and being linked to Regents Bible College in Nantwich for training.

In 2007, I was ordained as an Elim Minister and we felt increasingly sure that our time at Selly Oak was coming to an end. We began to meet with a series of people to think through and pray about the process of planting a church in Corby. At the end of 2007, my parents bumped into Faye Harris' mum, Carole, at ASDA and they told her that we were planning to come back to Corby to start a church. Carole excitedly told my parents that Faye and her family had recently moved back to Corby and that perhaps I should get in touch. Details were swapped, emails were exchanged, and at the end of 2007 we became aware that God had gone ahead of us and was already gathering the people who would make up the nucleus of Hope Church.

## Moving to Corby

Faye & Andy Harris, with their family, along with David & Sheilagh and Nick & Rachel had moved to Oakley Vale and had begun praying together on a Thursday evening. Faye & Andy had felt called to leave their home in Devon and move to Corby (where Faye grew up), not quite knowing what God had planned. They only knew that He wanted them to be part of something new and that it would emerge 'organically'. Similarly, both David & Sheilagh and Nick & Rachel were uprooted from Kettering and moved to Corby prompted by the Holy Spirit, not quite knowing what God had planned. They quickly met Faye & Andy and started to pray together on a Thursday evening.

We came over to Corby in February 2008 and met with the three families to try and discern whether God was drawing us together and whether our heart to plant a church on Oakley Vale lined up with what God was already doing with the others. It quickly became clear that God was knitting us together and from April 2008, Maggie & I made the trip to Corby and back most Thursday evenings to meet the others for worship and prayer. Over the following several months, a number of people started joining us who lived in (or near) Corby but who had been worshipping elsewhere. Hope Church had been born.

## Words from the Lord

The whole process was so totally a God thing and it felt very much like the fruit of years of faithful prayers by Christians in the town. We had many prophetic words during this time and sensed that God was doing something that went far beyond Hope Church, something He had been preparing for a long time – much like in C.S. Lewis' book, Prince Caspian, where Aslan gathered the Narnians in secret but was about to roar! When he did, the army that He had been preparing would be revealed and rise up to fight the forces of evil! It felt like such a wonderful picture of how the Lord's Kingdom would advance in Corby – that God was gathering his people in secret, often under the enemy's radar, and that when the time was right a mighty army of God's people would arise from all the churches...some of whom hadn't even been saved yet! We sensed a call to pray for greater unity between the churches, believing that whatever God was doing would follow a joining of hearts between believers in the town. Blessing follows unity and every revival has been born out of passionate, united prayer by the people of God.

In August 2008, we were sent from the Selly Oak church. Our house sale fell through several times so we moved into my parents' house near Lodge Park School. Six months later, after the house prices had plummeted, we found a beautiful house that we were able to buy at a dramatically reduced price. Although it had been frustrating to wait, God had everything in hand and proved once again that He is in control and will provide (abundantly) for all our needs. As soon as we arrived in Corby we hit the ground running! We took services at St. Michael's and at Corby Baptist Church, put on a community BBQ for neighbours of David & Sheilagh (including a bouncy castle). From October, we began to meet together on Sundays in the showroom at Thorpe's factory unity on the Earlstree Industrial Estate and experienced some beautiful times of fellowship...and the children finally joined us! Those were really special days and a necessary transition from our small Thursday gatherings (although by now they were not so small!) to where we would meet next. We began meeting at Oakley Vale Primary School from November 2008 and launched publicly on 16<sup>th</sup> November that year. We were astounded at the number of people who came to our launch service and praised God for adding people to our number. We have been overjoyed to see a constant stream of non-Christians and prodigals coming to our Sunday gatherings and God quickly gathered an amazing group of people into the ever-expanding core of the Hope Church family. It felt like His favour was very much on us and that he was beginning to show us that 'all things are possible for them who believe'. Our constant prayer throughout this time (and will be into the future) is:

**'May Your Kingdom come and Your will  
be done in *Corby* as it is in heaven'.**

Amen.