

Weekly Newsletter

6 January 2026



Reflection: What are you looking at?

By Lorna Ferguson

“... fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.” Hebrews 12:2 (NAS)

Happy New Year! This traditional greeting invites us to look ahead to the year to come with hope for good things. But if we are honest, what do we really see, and how do we feel, as we look out on the world at the start of 2026?

My church here in Sakata has been going through the book of Ecclesiastes in our weekly Bible study. In this book, the Preacher observes how life is lived ‘under the sun’ (that is, without reference to God), to see if he can make sense of it. Much of what he sees, however, is not good: injustice, oppression, the insatiability of the rich, the drudgery of work, and unfairness as the wicked live long and prosperous lives. Whatever path he explores – wisdom, pleasure, possessions – his repeated conclusion is that it is ‘hevel’.

Hevel is usually translated as “vanity,” but the word literally means “vapour,” or “mist.” It describes something real, but fleeting—something you can see yet cannot grasp or hold onto. Life under the sun, the Preacher tells us, often feels like that: frustrating, elusive, difficult to make sense of.

Ecclesiastes actually feels very up to date. In 2026, we can see many of the same realities the Preacher saw all those centuries ago. As we look at our world, we too see greed, injustice, oppression, and people not getting what they deserve. As the Preacher notes, “there is nothing new under the sun” (1:14). Ecclesiastes is not an optimistic book for the state of the world, but it is real.

However, there are glimpses of hope. While the Preacher describes the state of things ‘under the sun’, he also calls us to lift our eyes, reminding us that “God is in heaven and you are on earth” (5:2) and that ultimately, “God will bring every deed into judgment” (12:14). There is a greater reality above the sun. God is present, in control, and faithful, even when we cannot understand his ways.

As Christians, we know this reality, but too often we can be tempted to focus our eyes on things ‘under the sun’. In Japanese the character for eye is 目 and the character for look is 見 – an eye with legs! It’s a reminder that we can choose where we take our eyes, what we focus on.

When we were told that my husband David’s cancer was terminal, I felt the temptation to look at our circumstances ‘under the sun’. There it looked like the cancer was in control, rather than God. It was hard to see how God’s plan for us was one of love, and how he would work it together with all things for good. But God showed me that I had a choice. I could look at our circumstances, or I could look to God and to his word. And so, with his help, each day I chose to look to him, to trust that he was in



control, that he was loving and good, as his word promised. There was much I didn't understand, and still don't, but he enabled me to lift my eyes and trust him with all that was happening.

This is the essence of faith. As the writer of the letter to the Hebrews explains, "faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not yet seen" (11:1). This does not mean that Christians are called to ignore or deny what they see 'under the sun'. We are to see the brokenness of the world, to pray for it, and to live faithfully in it—seeking justice, loving our neighbours, and being salt and light where God has placed us.

But the things of this world are not to be our focus. We are to fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith (Hebrews 12:2). The Japanese translation is helpful: "don't take your eyes off Jesus". Things may not make sense now. Life may seem unfair and like *hevel*. Yet as we choose to look to Jesus and remember what he has done for our salvation, God assures us that "we will not grow weary or lose heart" (Hebrews 12:3). As we begin this new year, whatever might be happening 'under the sun', may each one of us choose to lift our eyes and fix them on Jesus. Then it really can be a blessed new year.

Margaret Horsburgh's Funeral

Margaret's funeral will take place on Wednesday this week (7 January). The burial will be at Craigmillar Castle Park Cemetery at 10am followed by a Thanksgiving Service at Holyrood at 11am. Refreshments will be served in the church afterwards and the service will also be live streamed. Please continue to pray for Donna, Darren and the family.

Josh Lohr's Funeral

The funeral for Josh (Ann Lohr's son) will take place on Thursday this week (8 January). There will be a Thanksgiving Service at 1pm in Holyrood followed by a private cremation. Refreshments will be served in the church after the service. Please continue to pray for Ann, Jane, Alex and their families.

Women's Discipleship at Holyrood

This term our in person Women's Bible Studies will resume on **Thursday 22 January** at 10.30am in the church. We'll be continuing our studies in the book of Acts and will enjoy studying God's word and praying together. Coffee and scones will be provided and all women are welcome.

We know that lots of women are not able to make the in person studies for a number of reasons and are offering the option of doing a Bible reading plan together for those who cannot attend.



The Bible reading plan will run for the same length of time as the in person studies and provides a great opportunity to be in God's Word daily, communicate with other women, and increase fellowship rooted in God's Word while providing accountability for one another. We will -

- Work through Glen Schrivener's *Reading Between the Lines* of the Old Testament
- Communicate in smaller WhatsApp groups to reflect on the daily readings and share prayer requests
- Follow the daily reading plan (short passages with short reflection...not too big of a commitment!) 5 days a week, Monday-Friday.
- Begin with an in person brunch on Saturday 17 January 10:30am to meet your small group and clarify goals of the study together.

Please let Anna Barnard (Annabarnard@gmail.com) know if you'd like to take part in the Bible reading plan by Saturday 10 January or if you have any questions. The church will provide copies of the book so please let Anna know if you need a copy and we will do a bulk order of *Reading Between the Lines*. Thank you!

Christmas Appeal 2025

The current total for the Christmas Appeal comes to **£12,923.75**. The last Sunday of the Appeal will be 18 January and there's still time to give!

There are four projects that we are supporting this year in our Christmas appeal:

- Women's Workers for Tranent Community Church - funding for Jen and Morag as they provide practical and spiritual care for women in the church and evangelism among women in the community.
- Cross Training Ministries – to invest in inspiring and training men in every corner of Scotland.
- Craig Anderson and the Church Plant in Galashiels – to help with the purchase of their new building and be an encouragement to Craig and his core team. We're looking forward to hearing from Craig at our prayer meeting this Wednesday.
- East of Scotland Gospel Partnership - this partnership is in a relaunching phase and would greatly benefit from having some funds to develop its work.

Tranent Community Church and Cross Training Ministries will each receive 40% of the total raised with Craig Anderson and the East of Scotland Gospel Partnership each receiving 10%.

The Christmas Appeal is still open and as usual people can transfer money directly into the church bank account <https://holyroodevangelical.org/giving/> or place donations into the offering box marked Christmas Appeal. Thank you!



Prayer Meetings and Home Groups

We're looking forward to meeting to pray together **this Wednesday** at 7pm with refreshments from 6.45pm. We'll continue our rhythm of meeting on the 1st and 3rd (and 5th if there is one) Wednesdays of the month for our prayer meetings. There is also an online prayer meeting option available for those who can't make it into the building and codes will come out on Wednesday mornings.

Our Home Groups will resume on **Wednesday 14 January** and meet on the 2nd and 4th Wednesdays of the month. This term we'll be looking at some of the training sessions produced by Passion for Life as we think about witnessing in a cross cultural context. If you're not in a Home Group yet, please contact Liz@holyroodchurch.org

Cornhill Bible Course

A reminder that the **Cornhill Bible Course** begins on **Saturday (10 January)** online, at **8:00am**.

This course is a great opportunity to deepen your understanding of God's word. It is designed for those who are keen to grow in the joy of studying and teaching the Bible, but who are not yet able to commit to the full Cornhill Training Course. It is delivered by **Cornhill Scotland lecturers** and runs on **Saturday mornings from 8:00–9:15am for six weeks**, via Zoom.

This year we will be exploring a selection of the **major biblical songs**. Though often overlooked, these poetic passages are central to interpreting the narratives in which they appear and provide rich theological insight into the Old Testament as a whole.

The cost is £30 (but please speak to Liz if cost is an issue) and you can sign up [here](#).

Church Calendar

For your info and prayers:

- **Wednesday:**
 - Thanksgiving Service for Margaret Horsburgh's Life at 11am followed by refreshments
 - Prayer Meeting at 7pm (with refreshments from 6.45pm)
- **Thursday:** Thanksgiving Service for Josh Lohr's Life at 1pm followed by refreshments
- **Sunday:**
 - Morning Service at 10.30am – Joe Barnard preaching (live streamed)
 - Evening Service at 6pm – Jon Gemmell preaching (live streamed)
- **Monday:** Baby and Toddler Group from 10am – 11.30am

