



# Interview with Lou Fellingham

## **LOU FELLINGHAM WAS INTERVIEWED BY MISSIONAL FOCUS CO-EDITOR REV CAROL CLARKE**

### **CC: Please can you introduce yourself and your ministry?**

**LF:** My name is Lou Fellingham, I am married to Nathan and together we have three children: Jesse, Ella and Jude. I have the privilege of being able to do the two things I love: being a mum and also telling people about Jesus through song and word. I have been worship leading, singing, songwriting and in full-time ministry for 30 years. Along with participating in worship at my local church, I also joined the band Phatfish in 1994. We were a band for 20 years.

The band was formed to lead worship in our local setting and also perform sets of songs about the light of Christ in pubs and clubs, that brought light. That was the starting point of why I moved to Brighton. I love mission, worshipping and evangelising to others.

### **CC: How would you define missional worship and what do you believe sets it apart from traditional worship practices?**

**LF:** I find this question interesting because as a worship leader, I consider worship to be a way of life. It's not just about what we sing on a Sunday. It's about the entire week, our way of living, our thoughts, our finances, our time and what we give our heart to. I believe that the verse, 'Love the Lord your God, with all your heart, with all your soul and with all your mind' in Matt. 22:37 serves as a good starting point to define missional worship. We must then love others and our neighbour as ourselves. In my opinion, that is a great summary of missional worship. It's where we keep God at the centre; we worship him, and then show love to others. To me, missional worship consists of those two interconnected aspects. That is where I continue to love him and keep him at the centre. I continue to praise him, magnifying him in my life and that is how I communicate and love other people.

### **CC: Do you think there are any differences to traditional worship practices when we think of missional worship?**

**LF:** I think when we are in a congregational context and we are worshipping and singing songs in one accord, there is both the personal and corporate dynamic of worship colliding and this is both powerful and missional.

As people bring their personal worship to God, the wonder of salvation, His faithfulness towards them, the cry of 'ABBA Father,' those looking in will discover that God is real and has a deep impact on people's lives. Alongside this, there is also power when people come and unite with one voice the joy of their salvation. Where else do you find a group with such diversity, age range, social status coming together, loving one another and loving something, someone more than themselves?

The church proclaiming the truth of who God is, is a light to the world. Our hearts' desire is that as this happens, those looking in would say, 'surely God is in this place.' When we we proclaim God, people will see Him for who He is, and they will hear the truth and the testimony. We want to declare who God is, His salvation, the truth, His holiness, the wonder of creation, His healing power and His Kingdom.

Whether the expression is traditional or not, we want worship songs that lift people to see God for who He is, songs that lift their hearts to His truth, and then express the love and care that the Father, the Son and the Spirit has for each one of us and His people have for Him.

I do think one thing we could be aware of is our language. Asking the question of whether the words that we're using are necessary to our faith and theology, or just a bit exclusive or cliquy and could be different in order to make a song more missional.

### **CC: Are there any examples of how missional worship has led to acts of compassion or community engagement in your own context?**

**LF:** Worship Wednesdays are when my husband and I lead worship online. We started this in May 2020, during the lockdown, and we continue to do this on Wednesdays. This has been a context that has led to acts of compassion and where a community has been established. People worship together, care for and pray for one another. They bring their requests for prayer, answers to prayer and their thankfulness. We were not expecting this community to grow, but people have shared Worship Wednesdays with non-Christians. An online Christmas Carol service was one instance where we sang Carols, Christmas songs and traditional hymns, which was our fourth Christmas Carol service. I share about Jesus, have lots of fun, and allow time where we pause, pray and reflect. This is partially due to remembering the Christian tradition of lighting candles that is found in churches and also many outside of the

Christian faith still find comfort and hope in doing so.

Several years ago, a friend of mine lost her brother and she has often attended a church to light a candle. She does not have any sort of a religious background or a known desire for God, but remembering and lighting a candle can be comforting. I try to draw from things that help people feel connected. I bring the message of Jesus Christ and the gospel and was in awe when I received a message from a lady who introduced her friend to my music and Worship Wednesday, although she was not a Christian. She listened repeatedly and has now come to realise how much she needs God and has begun her walk living for Jesus. Another thing that happened was that I composed a song called 'My God Cares For You', for a friend whose brother passed away. It is not a song we are going to sing on a Sunday, but it is still communicating the love of God. It proclaims the testimony of God's care, even in difficult moments. I also composed the song 'God of Mercy', many years ago; it was known as the 'Prayer Song', because we were performing it at an event for Hope HIV and we wanted a song that most people could relate to, even if they did not have a faith; most people pray.

**CC: In what ways has missional worship shaped the sense of community and purpose in your congregation and what action has it inspired?**

**LF:** I attend Emmanuel Church, Brighton - a member of the Newfrontiers family, founded by Terry Virgo. I have spent 30 years there. I think what is interesting in this context is that when you have been in a church for many years, you see the different waves that the church goes through and the various focuses the church has for a season, with the full gospel as the foundation but often emphasising different aspects of the gospel at different times. During my early years at Emmanuel Church, worship played a major role. We had a strong international focus. I performed with the Stoneleigh International Bible Week band which drew thousands of people. There were powerful encounters with the Holy Spirit.

It was in the era of the Toronto Blessing and I encountered God in deep ways. The call to worship across all nations felt wide and broad and seems to reach from north to south, east to west.

The church then went through a transformation, with more emphasis on the city and the local community, leading to a more single focused approach. I believe that both are of value but within the context of worship at our local church, I would say our expression of worship over time has slightly changed. Currently, we have a city focused agenda, but we have church plants in other cities around the nations, like Berlin and Krakow.

Within our church context, we want worship that glorifies and magnifies God, that is filled with the Spirit and the Word and uses language that people can relate to; Brightonians need language they can understand. I have spoken to one gentleman at my church, who is not a believer, but he attends the church every Sunday evening because the worship is a place of peace for him whenever he walks in. I believe that is bringing people to God and God to people!

**CC: Are there any specific Bible verses that you believe inspire missional worship?**

**LF:** A crucial and foundational scripture in my opinion is, Matt. 22:37 and 39, which speaks about loving the Lord, your God, with all your heart, soul, and mind, as well as loving your neighbour as yourself. And Psalm 145 which exhorts people to praise God to the ends of the earth, comes to mind as well. It continues to say that nations will see Him. 'One generation commends your works to another; they tell of your mighty acts' (v.4). It describes who God is and then all His works shall give thanks to Him and His people shall bless Him (v.10). Furthermore, even the passages from Col. 3:16 and Eph. 5:19 that talk about speaking to one another with psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit are missional, because when we carry out these actions, we are filled with the Spirit; it comes as we speak and declare these truths one to another.

That is, therefore, mission in and of itself because freedom is brought about by the Spirit of God; the Kingdom comes, people are saved, set free, healed, and delivered, and fear has no place anymore. This indicates that God's people have seen God and they do not see fear anymore. I'm not suggesting that everything is eradicated - after all, we're all work in progress - but these verses tell us what to do when we meet. It's not simply that we have a nice sing-along, but God's power is released when we sing spiritual songs together. When many voices come together to proclaim the goodness of God, there is power in one voice joining with others.

**CC: Do you think contemporary worship songs include sufficient focus on mission?**

**LF:** I think we have to come back to the heart of what we believe mission is in order to answer this question. To love God and to love others. Over the years, I have sung many contemporary songs that do this. Again, there are different seasons that we have leant towards, for example, the faithfulness of God, the Fatherhood of God, and the Spirit moving. Generally there has been a good mix of songs that lead us to the throne, that feed us and also gives us a place to respond. We are looking for a mix of songs that allow what Matt Redman calls the revelation and response. I think the challenge has been that we have invested in bands and the development of musicians but perhaps not continued to teach the congregation about worship. So for me, the imbalance has come by the contemporary scene leading the congregation to be more passive and, dare I say, even more consumeristic.

As a worship leader, this has never been my intent nor have I heard it from any other worship leaders. Our desire is to have the congregation sing, for us to join and worship together. My job is really just to put in markers as we go and help facilitate the congregation to find their song for the King. The importance of the people of God singing and not just watching is crucial. I guess the temptation for creators and songwriters is to write songs that may be musically satisfying but not so congregation-

friendly. The good news is there are plenty of songs being written at the moment that are both musical and creative and also easy for the congregation to sing. Lyrically there has also been a temptation to write a lot of 'feeling' songs as some put it, but not enough about who God is, His worth and His greatness. I am pleased to say that I think there are plenty of songs to choose from in this day that carry *both* the truth of who God is *and* the testimony of what He has done for us, giving us the opportunity to respond in thanks and praise.

I believe God is moving in a new and fresh way in this upcoming season. There is a fresh outpouring of the Spirit in a tangible way. The songs are reflecting on His holiness, identity, majesty, greatness and worth and the song of heaven and earth is being released in a wonderful way.

Songs such as 'Waymaker' that both allow us to hear truth about who God is and also allow us to respond and bring our personal testimony. Let's not be satisfied though. Let's keep deepening our understanding, knowledge and love for God and let's keep asking for songs that reflect His heart that will unlock the revelation of our triune God.

**CC: Some churches are not practising what we are describing as missional worship. What do you believe is preventing them?**

**LF:** I don't know, ask them! I don't want to make big statements about churches that I do not know. What we need, in my opinion, are churches that recognise their need for God and are true to His Word and love the Spirit. The Spirit is not an adjustment, an add-on or bumper sticker. The Spirit is God Himself coming to us. So, we need to know that we need His presence within us, because it brings life to the Word of God. The Spirit brings life to you and it helps us to have revelation of who God is and the truth of Him at work in us. The Spirit is personal and there is so much more than that.

In my opinion, worship needs to be filled with those things and the Word, and as a church we should be focused on Him. This leads to all the other aspects of being a missional church, such as caring for the poor, speaking to injustice, loving your neighbour and serving in the way that God has called you.

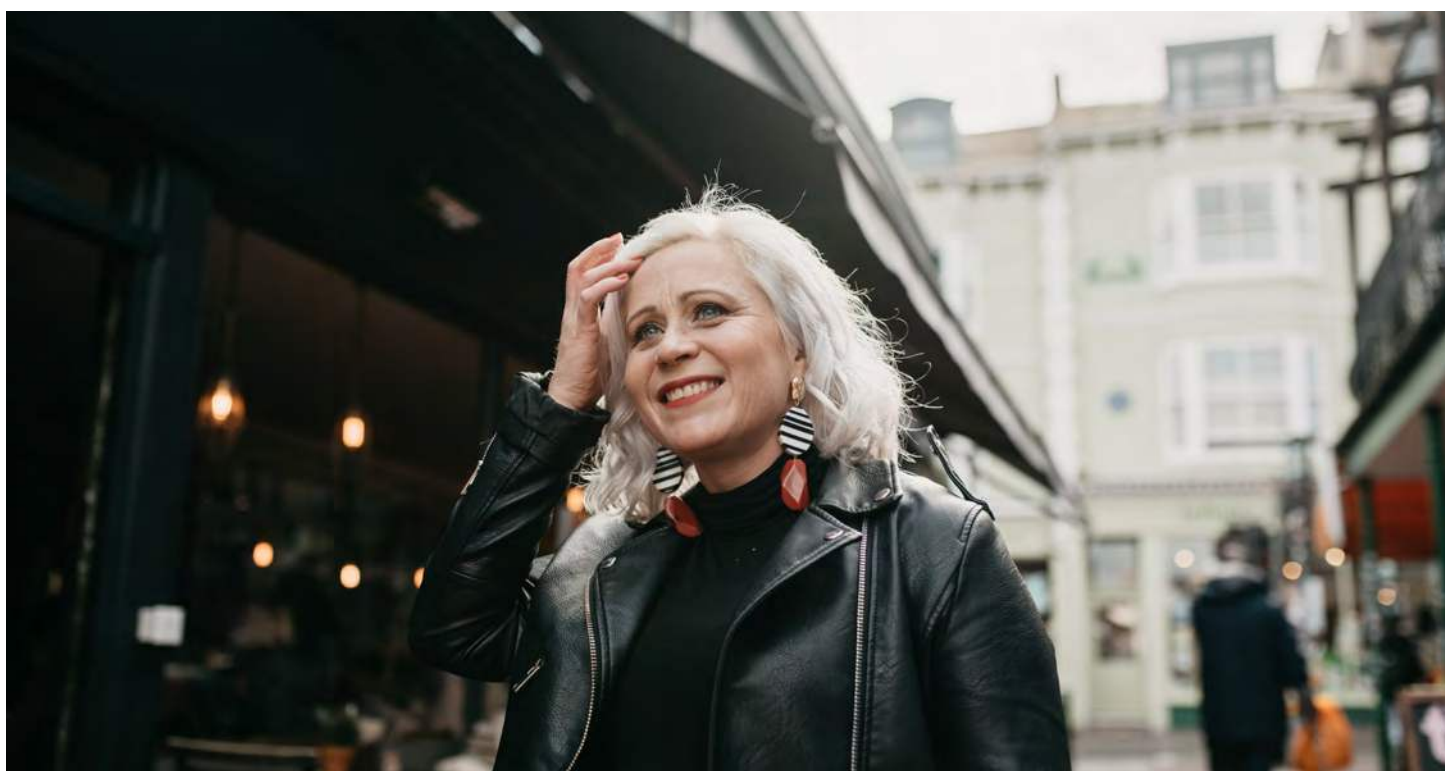
Different churches will have different needs but the underlying need of God around the world is the same but how we reach people with the love of God

might be different. I believe the big challenge for churches is to not grow sleepy or weary, and that is hard because of the things that happen in the outside world, in leadership and in our personal life which will inevitably serve up disappointment and pain. Worship is such a crucial gift to us from God.

Worship is of course foremost for Him and no-one else, but He also knows that it does our soul good. It brings us blessing and faith and encouragement as we magnify and centre our lives on Him. It is important to keep the church singing and worshipping. This doesn't mean burying the hard things of life and pretence, it can often be the opposite. As we come in our brokenness and pour out our offering of worship and surrender to God's will, we find God meets us in ways we never thought possible. This can be so missional.

What we want, in my opinion, is for churches and God's people to be able to keep coming back to the heart of worship and place of surrender, trusting God through the good times and the hard times, and we will find that this speaks volumes to both those in and outside the church.

**CC: Lou thank you for taking the time and contributing to Missional Focus.**





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