

**Lessons on Faith &
Digital Media from
Bex Lewis**

**KEEP
CALM**

**KEEP
CALM
& *and*
#BeMoreBex**

PHIL 4:6



INTRODUCTION

Dr Bex Lewis, known to many online as @drbexl, was a life explorer, author, speaker, and academic, who loved people, Pokemon, port and pockets. She also loved cheese! She inspired many people with her positive attitude to life and was loved by many. Bex sadly died in February 2021 from cancer – her experience of which, in characteristic style, she recorded on social media to help all of us understand what it is like to be #busylivingwithmets. Bex was a great teacher, she was always looking for ways to learn herself and to share her knowledge with others. This teaching instinct came through not only in her academic and professional work in the area of Digital Culture but also in her Christian faith as she encouraged so many of us to be Digital Disciples. This ebook was compiled in response to the outpouring of love after Bex’s death online by people using the #bemorebex hashtag – which delightfully trended on Twitter on the day she died. These tributes are from people from all around the world and who met Bex in different contexts but there is an astonishing consistency in all the tributes - a real testament to Bex’s authenticity both on and offline. Hopefully this ebook can inspire us all to continue Bex’s legacy and #bemorebex.



Dr BEX LEWIS
Author, *Raising Children in a Digital Age*

BBC NEWS 09:44 DURT OF HUMAN RIGHTS RULES THE RIGHTS OF 1,015 PRISO

DIGITAL DISCIPLE

In her own words, Dr Bex Lewis was a 'life explorer'. A fiercely intelligent woman with a PhD that focused on second world war propaganda posters, and most famously the Keep Calm and Carry On poster; she always held her intellect very lightly and never made anyone feel inferior. Bex had a love for learning and a love for life. She was a keen traveller spending many years as a leader on Oak Hall holidays around the world.

I first made friends with Bex on Twitter back in 2009 when social media was on the rise. Both of us independently had seen the potential of social media for good in the Christian world and as our paths crossed we became Digital Disciples together through the Big Bible project – an online community Bex ran with CODEC at Durham University. It was some years before we finally met face to face but it was a seamless encounter, what we experienced of each other online was no different from how we were 'in real life' – a term we both disliked! Bex was incredibly open, always willing to make herself vulnerable if it meant it might help others. She became well known for running 'social media for the scared' sessions for the Church of England and introduced many Christian leaders to the delights of social media for mission and ministry. In 2014 she published her book 'Raising Children in a Digital Age' and appeared on the BBC's One show and the Steve Wright show on BBC Radio 2. Bex was always positive about the internet and the good it could do whilst maintaining a healthy approach which ensured safety. She often used the metaphor of the positive effects of swimming for children, but how you wouldn't just drop a child in the deep end and make them fend for themselves. Her openness and vulnerability came to the fore when she was diagnosed with Breast Cancer in 2017 which later developed into Metastatic Breast Cancer.

Bex did academic research into the use of social media by people living with cancer, she wrote a moving Lent Talk which was broadcast on Radio 4 in 2019 and recorded many of her experiences, the good, the bad, and the ugly, using the hashtag #busylivingwithmets. She even coined a new hashtag for when she was in various waiting rooms for appointments for her treatment – posting pictures of her feet (and she had an amazingly eclectic collection of shoes) with #waitingroomfeet.

It is often said that most people only have a handful of close friends and the rest of the people they are connected with are mere acquaintances. When you connected with Bex, however, particularly on social media – Twitter, Facebook or Instagram (and latterly TikTok) – you were never a mere acquaintance, you were her friend. Tributes flooded social media on the day she died (18th February 2021) using the hashtag #bemorebex. A striking number of the tributes were from people saying 'I never met Bex, but...' She was a true advocate of friendship and particularly online friendship – which to her, and those who knew her - was just as real as offline friendship. I've been struck by how deeply holy it was of Bex that she made everyone feel like a very close friend. So many people counted her as a close friend (even if they never met face to face). This was a truly saintly characteristic. Bex believed in being one's authentic self online and encouraged others to do so. A mutual friend, Rev'd Robb Sutherland shared this on Twitter: "That Oysters need a little bit of grit to start a Pearl is a well-trod metaphor. As I read so many of my friends' tributes to Bex, I am conscious that she was the grit that made so many of other people's pearls happen. Bex fostered relationship and community and pioneered her way across the internet inspiring a rag tag bunch of us together to be better than we were. The world is less bright today than it was yesterday."

In writing this I have barely scratched the surface in terms of all the facets of Bex's full life. She epitomised the words of Jesus in John 10:10 'I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.' Someone responded on Twitter to the news of her death by saying "The UK church lost a really important and thoughtful voice in #DigitalCulture today". Bex had a tremendously positive impact on me and on so many others – she was the queen of social media in the Christian world – chances are that if you're a Christian on social media that you would have come across Bex. Her legacy will be huge, I only hope that we can all #bemorebex – that we live life to the full, share our vulnerability and put our faith in Jesus just like Bex did. Rest in peace my dear friend.

Bryony Taylor (@vahva)

LESSONS FROM BEX



LIVING OUT FAITH

Bex my cousin, my first pen pal, a shared love of badge collecting through our teens, she was steadfastly kept on writing & being in touch when many teen friends couldn't cope with the sudden death of my dad. There were times of spasmodic contact during the early years of our early careers, but we always touched base. Forever thankful that her move to Manchester meant more frequent meet ups. I will miss her honesty, humour, humility and just her heart of love...everything really... she knew I wasn't eloquent in posts and it's taken me a week. She spoke in an interview about this favourite verse of hers, she lived it out. (Romans 12 v1 MSG) *Gone ahead of us, we will see you again one day ☺ oh and the red lippy is on order☺ #BeMoreBex*
Lizzy McGrath

HOLY ENERGY

I first met Bex through social media so I guess you could say that the first thing she taught me was that you can make (real) friends through that medium – that you don't necessarily have to have met someone face to face to develop a meaningful relationship with them and to get to know them. This was easier with Bex as she was so genuine online, exactly the same as she was in person. When we eventually did meet face to face, therefore, I already knew her. We were already friends. It was easy and relaxed and I just remember having so much fun talking, debating, musing and eating cake. All of our subsequent face to face meetings contained the same ingredients. There was always interesting discussion and sharing of ideas. There was always fun. There was always easy laughter. There was always food. And as I write this list I'm struck by the holiness of it all. The way she spent her time, her energy and her love was about as holy as a person can be and left you humbled and thankful to have shared in it. Bex taught me that intelligence and holiness can be worn lightly, so lightly that sometimes you barely notice it until you look back on it. That friendship is real. And that there is no distinction between the virtual and the real, just as there is no distinction between the church and the world. That many of the boundaries we perceive are of our own making, mirages that we think we see that are not really there.

They can be ignored, crossed over and life can be lived in a truly holistic way. But the most important thing Bex taught me is how to be a good friend – I will try every day to #bemorebex **Leanne Bell**



GOOD ENOUGH PROJECT
WITH WILL TAYLOR

Ep8



ZEST FOR LIFE

ZEST FOR LIFE Bex had such a zest for life and wanted to do so many amazing things and was still making an impact on the world right up to her death. I don't think we have heard the last of Dr Bex Lewis, her legacy lives on. ☺

Steph Cordery



AN UNFINISHED WORK

There are some chance encounters in life that turn out to have the power to change the trajectory of a life. I am deeply and profoundly grateful that I met Bex just over a decade ago, when I was in the first few years of my part-time PhD. Something happened in the way that Bex connected me into her network of Christians working in or with digital media and culture that changed the way the next few years turned out. That conversation led to me presenting at the 2010 New Media conference, which had a knock-on effect of meeting lots of people that I'd known via Twitter, which had a knock-on effect of adding a few more Church of England priests into my social circle. I'm not saying that Bex was entirely responsible for me finding the path to ordination, but I wonder what would have happened if I'd not made those contacts.

I have always been grateful for the friendship and encouragement Bex offered (she was the first person to cite my thesis anywhere, for example). Along with many others I was gutted to hear of her sudden death on 18 February. I only have one photo of Bex where she isn't smiling. This was a Serious Phone Call: standing in a bus stop in Salford in the summer of 2015 as she was offered the job at Manchester Met. I was on placement in Manchester that summer and we'd spent the afternoon waiting for that call... Many others have written more, and will write more, about Bex's extraordinary personality and heart. Her generosity, kindness, capacity for networking, encouragement, laughter, and ability to find time for adventure was rooted in a deep faith.

We shared a real dislike for the glib use of Jeremiah 29:11 and the superficiality this is sometimes associated with (God's got a plan! It's fine! You're *meant* to have cancer/get divorced/lose your job...) There's a line in L.M. Montgomery's *Anne of the Island* that has been sitting with me this morning, thinking over the suddenness of Bex's death. Ruby Gillis, one of Anne's classmates has died, and her mother gives Anne (of *Green Gables*) the last piece of embroidery Ruby was working on. "There's always a piece of unfinished work left." There's no last blog post, no last Cancer Update or Opinion Minute. No more retweets, Facebook comments, useful links to follow up. She's gone, and we are sad. And even yet, I find hope in the unfinished work finding completion as her friends take to heart the call to Be More Bex. Smile more. Learn, question, teach, pray, play. Embrace friendship and connection and LIFE as far as you possibly can. #BeMoreBex.

Sara Batts-Neale

LESSONS FROM BEX



#AUTHENTIC

I first met Bex in person at her book launch for Raising Children in a Digital Age, but I knew her from before that online. And to know Bex online was to know the real Bex, as so many others have affirmed. I've long had the sense that online friends were real friends, but Bex solidified that to me so clearly, and I've followed her in sharing this view in my online communications, whether phrased explicitly or I hope through what I share. She invited us to journey alongside her not only with her academic achievements, which we lauded, but her move to Manchester and decorating her flat or to her #WaitingRoomFeet and then her being #BusyLivingwithMets. How she welcomed us in to the day-to-day details of her life was a thing of beauty. When I contributed to a wordcloud about Bex, the first word that came to mind was #authentic. Others soon followed – #smile, #smart, #caring. And so many more. Grateful to have been Bex's friend online, which of course, is in real life. Amy

Boucher Pye



MEMORABLE TEACHER

I was really saddened by the news that the lovely Bex Lewis passed away. I join hundreds of people in giving thanks for her life. She was my lecturer and tutor at Winchester University, and I always enjoyed meeting up to not only discuss my Final Year Project but all things media too! She was gentle, patient and a good listener. Helping me to finish my third year project which I found so tough with dyslexia. Post uni, we remained friends, meeting at various digital conferences, meeting up when she was in London. I always enjoyed her positive stance on the safe use of the internet, on how it could be used for good communication and the gospel. Every Keep Calm poster will forever remind me of her. I think the last time I saw Bex in person was at my Wedding, but we remained active chatting online. I can't believe it was only a few days ago we were in conversation on Instagram, me telling her how good it was that she was openly sharing her Cancer and her Covid journey so we can all be more aware of what people are going through, and she in turn enjoying my posts about being a mum! I will miss her but blessed to have known her. Rest in Peace and rise in Glory. #bemorebex Trending on Twitter! 🙏

Helan Byrom

HER LEGACY

In 2011, newly housebound with a devastating chronic illness that had left me bedbound, I entered the world of Twitter, desperate for company and to process spiritually my life's implosion. Bex Lewis soon found me, at once the mother and sister of the Christian digital media space. In a world that seeks to elevate your own career and popularity, Bex was intent on always elevating others, and cheered for and championed me in concrete ways. Her intellectual curiosity was not directed at dissecting or destroying, but encouraging and building up, even when it came to exploring her cancer journey. She made her achievements look effortless because she had no airs or pretences. She was the rare kind of person who could make others feel utterly comfortable and shine, without needing to degrade or hide herself in the process. She had the grace of both helping and receiving help, without shame. It wasn't merely her sharp analysis or her campaigning, her wit and exuberant joy that made her so beloved. What she modelled was authenticity, without needing to call it 'modelling'. She was whole. See her tweets, hear her interviews, meet her in person, and like a stick of rock she was the same all the way through. Like the Holy Spirit, she came alongside and helped people before they'd realised it. Bex taught me three lessons. First, hospitality of heart - the challenge to be so at home in your own soul that it is always open, welcoming others. Second, an attitude of curiosity that delights in life, knowledge and people. Third, her utter integrity of good character. What I learned from Bex is not so much how to be a better user of digital media but how to be a better person. That is her legacy.

Tanya Marlow



Friendship in a Digital Age

Are you really my friend? Exploring digital relationships

Dr Bex Lewis

Bex.Lewis@mmu.ac.uk

November 12 2015

Bex Lewis @drbexl

COLLABORATION AS A LIFESTYLE

Bex and I met more than ten years ago. We worked together, shared an office, and crossed paths at more Christian conferences, technology events and media training days than I can count. Bex was fascinated by people, history and social change, and particularly by the question of persuasion: how can media be used to encourage people to change in positive ways? If you're reading this book, you'll know Bex was never content to let her research on that topic remain theoretical. She was convinced that her research and teaching could help make life better for churches, families and communities. Bex put vast energy into supporting positive change, through her writings, her consultancy, her many media appearances and her public speaking. Her core message was straightforward, attractive and compelling: don't be afraid of social media, keep trying new things, seek out new connections, and look for digital community wherever you can find it. It's no surprise that community found her, and this book is a testimony to the impact she made.

Bex was also a popular face in academic community, where her willingness to connect and share ideas was much loved. Since her death, I've heard many colleagues mention the book or article they had planned to write with her, one day. It's a great sadness to me that we won't see all those brilliant partnerships in print. So that's one big lesson I've learned from Bex: collaboration is a lifestyle, and you've got to live it now. Bex's life and ideas have left another challenge for researchers interested in digital media. She was convinced that her research mattered, and she was determined to make sure it was heard. Bex recognised how badly audiences needed to hear a positive message about social media, and she was prepared to share that message again and again with journalists, radio and TV presenters, companies, charities and Christian congregations. The academic community needs to keep alive her rare commitment to using research for the benefit of society. I hope that commitment will be Bex's most enduring legacy. I know Bex's memory will continue to challenge me to think bigger and speak louder, and I'm sure I'm not the only one.

Tim Hutchings

LESSONS FROM BEX



THE REAL DEAL

Dr Bex Lewis was the real deal and advocated cogently for others to follow suit. There was no pretence – when life was good, it was good; when it hurt, it hurt. There was no fakery or exaggeration exploiting the imaginary online/offline dichotomy she deplored. She cogently urged Christians to behave more like Jesus in their digital interactions – for their faith to be fully expressed and not hidden under a Twitter-bird-shaped bushel. My own thesis on Putting Your Faith in Social Media – which she generously supported –could almost have quoted nobody else but Bex and still have been (nearly) balanced and (certainly) academically rigorous. But this excerpt from a Bible reflection entitled Journeying In Community encapsulates her take on the potential for meaningful fellowship in the digital sphere: ‘In social media ... it is possible to communicate at a shallow level but true fellowship takes us beyond empty words and jokes. It demonstrates care for others, inclusiveness even where there are disagreements, opportunities for accountability, and a sharing of ideas.’ To me, this is a beautiful definition of social media that sounds a lot like how church should be. Perhaps social media even does it better from time to time? It resonates with an interview that Bex gave to Church Times: ‘Relationships online may have a different nature, but they are as valid and real as offline relationships. Most people relate to each other in a variety of ways ... Those that are solely online are no less real than those conducted face to face.’ Bex may have used Facebook on occasion to champion the cheese industry or (quite rightly) rail against kale. This was no vacuous ‘cat poster’ or Bernie Sanders meme, but an online representation of a physical world preferences. It was who she was. Honest. True. Always. Thank you, Bex. **David Giles, Salvation Army**



TWITTER TONIGHT

Bloody hell
Cancer sucks
And Covid sucks
In fact, right now
It all sucks
And I don't give a flying f***
About my language
But you know what didn't
suck tonight?
Twitter!
Tonight Twitter came alive in
love
In memory of an amazing
woman
A friend, a guide, an
inspiration
As we all declared
#BeMoreBex
Because she didn't lose any
fight
She won the adventure of life
And I for one am bloody glad
I got to enjoy some of that
adventure with her
Online
Offline
Wherever we found ourselves
Living honestly with humour
and tears
Sharing our fears
Knowing there were many
days that suck
But we don't have to deal
with any of them alone
Until we meet again
My friend
x **Emma Major**



JUST DO IT

I learned about faith & digital media from Bex. Give it a try. Give people a chance. Go for it. Just do it. See the good in everyone. See it through to the end. Don't be afraid to pitch your idea. Just do it.

Pam Smith, i-church.org



LINCOLN DIGITAL
www.lincolndigital.com



ONLINE IS AUTHENTIC

I'm not sure when exactly I first encountered Bex, but it must have been sometime between January 2010 (when I joined Twitter) and the 2011 Greenbelt - because when I arrived to take part in a digital surgery there, we greeted each other like old friends. This was the most important lesson that many of us learnt from Bex: that online friendships are just as authentic as offline ones. (And that "in real life" should never be used as a synonym for "offline"!)

I was always somewhat in awe of Bex's approach to the digital space & faith. When we (alongside Church Times cartoonist Dave Walker) were chosen by Tearfund for a "Bloggers" trip to Uganda, I wondered what on earth my truly amateur blogging could offer compared to Bex, who was very definitely qualified for the experience! My tactic has been to bumble around & try and work out what feels right, but Bex intentionally and authentically got to grips with it all. Authentic is still the key word that comes to mind when I think about Bex & digital - she didn't compartmentalise, what she did online was all authentically her. Whenever I teach on faith & digital, this is what I come back to - that our faith is an authentic part of who we are, so by being authentic online, this should shine through. It shone through Bex. When her cancer diagnosis opened up a new digital space for her to build relationships in, she remained truly authentic.

It's been lovely seeing posts from some of her breast cancer network friends who aren't Christians, but who recognised the importance her faith had in her life and work. I've been thinking about #BeMoreBex and what it might mean to me, and I wonder if it's about being a bit more open online; being a bit less hesitant to post; and becoming a lot more passionate about building up online friendships again. I think Bex would approve...

Liz Clutterbuck

LESSONS FROM BEX



INDOMITABLE ENERGY

I will always have incredibly fond memories of Dr Bex Lewis - when she was at CODEC in Durham and I was at London School of Theology (LST) we wanted to run a course that would be for both cohorts at both campuses. With limited expert speakers available we decided, to try and month by month stream a talk from one campus to the other - and have people pay to watch both in the flesh at one and on a big screen at the other campus. These days it would have been no problem with Zoom, Teams etc but back in 2013 there really wasn't the easy-to-use tech readily available. Bex was indomitable in her energy in helping make it happen. I remember one talk she gave herself and we had to have a 'cake break' mid-way through.

I'm grateful for having gotten the chance to work with her and we kept in touch, online on social media and through Pokemon Go where we swapped gifts daily. The world will probably never see another of her like, and we are all the poorer as a result but memories are an invaluable commodity and Bex should be an inspiration to everyone to make some that will last!

Matt Adcock (@cleric20)

A PROPHETIC VOICE

Bex Lewis was one of the first people to introduce me to the importance and the power of social media. Twitter in particular. Whenever I am tempted to abandon Twitter to the constant disputes and sniping, it is the example that Bex set that reminds me that there is good to be found. Relationships to be built. Collaborations to be made. Friendships to be appreciated. Bex always insisted that online interaction was just as 'real' as offline (Bex was the first person to explain that distinction to me). A decade ago that seemed something of a stretch but I think we can all see that the experiences of the last twelve months have proved what a prophetic voice Bex was.

Paul Windo, Urban Saints

13 · Trending
#BeMoreBex



AN ENCOURAGING ANTIDOTE

The first time I heard Bex speak at a conference she disarmed us all by talking with humility, openness and humour about imposter syndrome - not something I expected, especially from someone who so obviously knew their stuff and was so widely and deservedly respected. She set a standard on providing context and signposting to others, demonstrating that in 'faith and digital' there is no single definitive contribution. Her opinion mattered more than anyone else's when I was asked to write a book about social media. Even though we'd only had lunch once a year before, it was credit to her generous spirit that she offered to read it, mark it up and talk it through. Her antenna was up for anything that could be interpreted as denigrating the value of online relationship. Unusually she often reposted her book reviews many months later, an enormous unexpected encouragement for many. The intersection of digital and faith can be hampered, not helped, by early adopters who unintentionally come across as dismissive of those trying to catch up or understand. Caustic commentary could send those who need nurturing back into retreat. Bex's voice was an antidote. She welcomed anyone to the conversation, struggling or otherwise, cool or otherwise, imposter or otherwise. In faith and digital Bex taught us to be open-hearted as well as open-eyed, in the spirit of 1 Thessalonians 5:11-13: 'Encourage one another and build each other up... Acknowledge those who work hard among you... Hold them in the highest regard in love because of their work. Live in peace with each other.' #BeMoreBex

Laura Treener



A CODEC CONNECTOR

The great outpouring of love for Bex on Twitter the night that she died showed her greatest achievement – she connected with people online or offline. She made friends. She valued people. Her posts were full of people sharing meals with her, laughing together, enjoying themselves (even in the last pain-filled days), but also talking about how important and real online (and offline) friendship was. Before she moved to Durham, Bex worked for CODEC at Premier in London. I recorded a short video there about her BigBible project a decade ago in which she explored the need to crowdsource content to allow all the contributors to scale a mountain rather than everyone starting from the bottom of the slope – resourcing the church or any other organization as a co-operative venture rather than a competitive one. Such ideas filled CODEC’s early work on the digital mission of the Church.

My recollection of Bex is of someone who worked so hard (although seemingly effortlessly) in bonding with people, in connecting to them. That smile. That personality. That brain. A social maven connecting with people in order to encourage them but also to co-opt them, urge them to join with her in her great ambition to demonstrate that friends were friends, offline or online. She knew so much – made connections with anyone she could to learn more – brought their experiences into her own teaching. Building a community of scholarship and practice-based theology around her all the time. She developed her band of digidisciples around the BigBible project as a resourcing hub for those exploring Christian engagement, coaxing blogposts, videos, and resources out of them.

But she also wrote and taught and shared so much herself. Bex’s creativity was poured into people – into the huge numbers of people she taught through Medialit, through the courses she ran for the Church of England and other denominations, at conferences like Spring Harvest and Greenbelt; through her pioneering input into the Premier Digital Conference which grew into the largest religious-orientated digital conference in the UK. Through her mentorship of award winners at the Premier Digital Awards which she judged year after year and through Church of England Labs projects. Indeed of her mentorship of so many of the leading figures in digital church today. Her teaching both at Durham and Manchester was always student focused – empowering others to engage with research and to find their own path. But she wrote too – her PhD on Keep Calm and Carry On, her book on Raising Children in a Digital Age, her academic contributions at CODEC at Manchester and other bodies.

But I do think it is her contribution to individuals that is so important. She poured her love into her friends and her family and they were happy to return that love to her in thankfulness. She enabled others to be better people. She encouraged others to go the next step on their journey. She empowered others to be the people they could be. She transformed individuals, transformed the life of the church and pioneered digital theology before those two words were ever put side by side. Thank you, Bex.

Peter Phillips, Centre for Digital Theology, Durham University

LESSONS FROM BEX



CROSSING COMMUNITIES

Bex was one of those rare and amazing people who resourced and enriched all she encountered. She was a true inter-disciplinarian, able to move between academic fields with ease - including history, religion, and digital culture - contributing at both academic and popular levels. While an academic, Bex's strength lay in her capacity to engage with and communicate to a wide range of audiences, offering robust, constructive, and clear advice and advocacy in the digital media space. A regular speaker in the media, in church communities, workshops, and conventions, Bex's passion for things digital and how we might flourish in those digital spaces was a constant theme. Not only did she talk and write about that, but she modelled that in her own use of social media and other digital tools. This concern for others came through in her writing, whether about children, young people and the Internet, thinking about the ethical impacts of digital technology on society, or in how digital spaces might be places of spiritual growth. I regularly refer people to Bex's work in my teaching and research, and my own work has been enriched greatly by her. Above all, though, Bex's greatest contribution was her ability to form relationships across all the communities she was part of. Shaped by her faith and commitment to seeing others grow and flourish, she was an amazing person to know and be known by. Our worlds are significantly diminished by the loss of our dear friend, colleague, and companion on the way.

Stephen Garner, Laidlaw College, New Zealand

MAKING DIGITAL SPACES KIND AND GOOD

Even a decade ago, the online space was intimidating. I joined Twitter to broadcast how much God loves women and was mostly pseudonymous. At the time Bex Lewis was running The Big Bible Project. When I started #6monthBible, a collective tweeted adventure through the whole Bible in 6 months, Bex was keen for me to write a blog about it for them. There was never any ownership of the digital space for Bex; she didn't try to take over #6monthBible or make it part of The Big Bible project. She just wanted to encourage everyone to get involved. That was a crucial thing I learned early on from her.

In more recent years, Christian initiatives have tried to "AstroTurf" their projects onto social media platforms (astroturfing is something that appears to be a grassroots activity, but really isn't). But as Bex understood, the beauty of social media is that it becomes successful only if people want to get involved, not by having well-known people copy and paste enthusiastic slogans. She never tried to own a space and passionately wanted everyone to be able to join her. This was an extension of her personality. As many have said, to know Bex was to count her as a friend.

Bex was always incredibly generous; sharing her knowledge, platform, kindness and experiences (both the good and the bad). She normalised online spaces as sacred and saw the potential of digital to do good and be good. And as we all reckon with the ongoing reality of pandemic lockdowns, her passion has become realised in the lives of so many. Over lockdown I've been delivering a lot of online training. One of the activities we do is to bring an object that represents what is most important to us. A significant number of participants apologetically display their phone, explaining that through lockdown their phone has kept them in touch with loved ones, with old photos and videos reminding them of good times that will hopefully take place again. Their phones keep them connected to everything that matters to them. I encourage them to be unapologetic, just as I know Bex would.

A decade later and online spaces are perhaps more intimidating than ever. There is less space to be unsure and, more than ever before, my half-written tweets are deleted, rather than sent. However, in seeing Bex's lovely people come together to call for us all to #bemorebex I have been reminded that digital spaces do matter and that we can use them for good. As Bex goes on to the great ever-after with Jesus, I hope to continue her work to make digital spaces kind and good. As she always knew, these spaces belong to us all and we have a collective responsibility to make them places where we want to be.

Natalie Collins



LIVING REALITY DIFFERENTLY

It seems appropriate that many people will say they 'only' met Dr Bex Lewis 'virtually' – yet found it a life changing, perspective-altering experience. I am among them. Even in her departure from this world (far too soon), she challenged one of the most damaging clichés about cancer. No, "Bex didn't lose a fight, she won at life". Death gets us all, and illness isn't a war. It's a fact of our mortality, a sign, a condition to be lived with, through and beyond. Equally, the digital world isn't an un-reality to be accepted grudgingly, or shrugged away as fake and transitory. It's increasingly part of the developing reality of human and planetary life: something to be embraced, reasoned with, humanised and transformed... alongside all the other shapes, sizes and fits of what we call 'the real'. Indeed, in certain respects (both encouragingly and discouragingly) the digital realm can prove more enduring than other aspects of earthly existence.

Those who live with illness and disability are most likely to grasp this, because digital devices and modes of communication can be a liberation from an imprisoning normalcy that the unforgivingly physical aspects of what usually gets termed 'real life' too readily impose. After the virus (whatever that turns out to mean), the church and other civic bodies will, hopefully, have understood that living in what is now referred to educationally as a 'blended' or 'hybrid' environment is a necessity, not an option, if we are going to learn to be truly inclusive. This understanding was second nature to Bex in her teaching, writing, workshoping and living. Her wisdom, memory and hopefulness live on every time it happens. Yes, Bex, you won – and you will go on helping us to win in all the right ways.

Simon Barrow

LESSONS FROM BEX



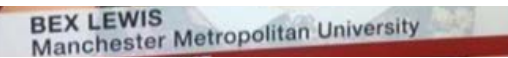
AUTHENTICITY ONLINE

So many have said Bex taught them to be authentic online. The majority of our 15 year friendship was thousands of private messages sent at all sorts of random hours of day and night. Nothing was off limits-the ups and downs of both our lives. Not an online friendship just a deep meaningful friendship and one I will truly miss.

Bex supported me navigating the public side of social media with the limits imposed by adoptive parenting. No publicly living out the day to day, posting of photos and dare I say it helped me compose the odd cryptic message to put people off. Working out how to "politely" ask parents to take down their innocent assembly and nativity photos that it was, in their opinion, their right to post when all I want to do was shout "No it is Not!" We laughed together we had enough for a whole section in the rewrite of her book. Her understanding of the positive and negatives of digital media and the impact it could have on lives, communities were second to none. She shared this knowledge freely, widely generously with wisdom, insight, fun and shared herself with all.

Yet it is in the depth and love of those personal messages that we shared fun, life and love. For all the reasons above I can't share an example but each message demonstrated her care, a living deep faith. Even at the end the shared joke of the Andorran Wild Mountain Turkey hunt moved to the hospice bringing smiles and laughs in the messages. A Bex hole has been left in my message inbox

Mel Cunningham



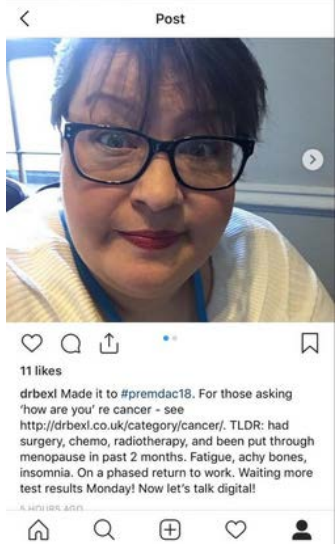
DIGITAL INCLUSION

Right from my first introduction with Bex in 2012, via tweet she was a loyal friend. Bryony Taylor introduced us, as she was friends with us both. Like Bryony, Bex always made me feel included, and that what I am and what I have is enough. Bex was very Jesus like in that way. One of the first to show me friendships made on social media were Real friendships. Bex saw me and she saw my gifts and recruited me for the BigBible Project almost from the get-go. (When she worked for CODEC in Durham.) I wrote for them for at least a year, learning as I went about being my "authentic self" in what I wrote, and also what I posted online.

One other memory sticks out. It was 2012 I think. At the New Digital Media Awards (and Conference) as it was then. It's now the Premier Digital Conference. Bex was part of a round-table discussion on faith and social media. During this, she presented my thoughts on this through slides I'd written, while I sat at home in Leeds in my wheelchair. Inclusion in Action. Ahead of her time for sure. Bex lived inclusion. It was no afterthought for her.

Over the years we were much less in touch as I became more and more limited in energy. I focused on cheering Bex on through social media, following her blogs, and praying for her daily through her treatment, along with many others. I'll always be grateful that Bryony introduced us. I learnt so much from Bex about friendship, the different spaces in which life happens, and living a joyful, faithful life, right to the end. Your legacy lives on Bex. May you rest in peace, my friend, and rise in Glory.

Jackie Davie





Bex Lewis

Technology Enhanced Learning Fellow, University of Winchester

A LIGHTHOUSE

Working through the grief at the passing of special people whom we hold close to our hearts such as Dr Bex Lewis – both personally and professionally – is a time to reflect on the gifts, the lessons that knowing them bestow on us.

I first met Bex in person in Porto, Portugal at the European Conference on Social Media (ECSM) in 2015, where we were both talking about the use of social media in higher education. We discussed our work with each other and with those present. Not just the practice of using social media, but also our research in the adoption of it for formal and informal teaching and learning. Our connection however, went beyond the academic use of social media. We both had a faith and that was a lovely way to connect on multiple domains, not simply the academic. And then, of course, there was the inevitable fun and laughter. In my work on social media, however, I was grappling with multiple conflicting aspects. In teaching and learning, there was the tensions between a conduit for levelling the playing field for many and for peer-to-peer teaching, versus the ethical issues and the potential for misinformation. Personally, there were tensions between social-connectedness and social isolation, especially when used as a weapon to target others.

Personally, at the time I met Bex I was struggling with my faith. I had come out of a long relationship with an abusive man who had professed to both love God and me. In hindsight, the latter was most definitely not true. Unfortunately, while he was not a user, social media became a way to further extend the cruelty by proxy. There was much to work through at the time, and Bex was there to help process. Bex was also a lighthouse in the way she used social media to champion things that others could not speak up about, doing so with conviction and courage, never unkindly, but able to point to injustices at the same time.

I have learnt so much from Bex, as I am certain that others will also attest. I guess the biggest take-away is that irrespective of the circumstances that we find ourselves in, faith, hope and love remain key. These three – faith [abiding trust in God and His promises], hope [confident expectation of eternal salvation], love [unselfish love for others growing out of God's love for me] (Amplified Bible) – should guide us in our use of the digital media, and Bex epitomised these. #BeMoreBex

Julie Willems, Australia

LESSONS FROM BEX



SUPPORTING THROUGH WISDOM

We are sad to hear that our friend Bex has passed away after her long and difficult journey with cancer. Praying for her family and for those that are close and impacted by this sad news.

Bex, we were so blessed by your support and the encouragement you showed towards the work of Missional Generation and our shared passion of all things digital. Wonderful memories of our conversations when we were starting to develop faith resources using VR & AR & your fresh perspective & energy on using digital in sharing Jesus. Your words of wisdom on social media will be missed and I loved your fresh perspectives & always loved chatting to you. You will be greatly missed in so many ways by so many people. Thank you for all the support you have given to parents, children, and youth workers. Your words of wisdom on social media will be missed and I loved your fresh perspectives & always loved chatting to you. You will be greatly missed in so many ways.

Ben Jones, Missional Generation



TEACHING VIA TWITTER

I probably knew Bex better from Twitter than I knew her in the material world. She taught me through her contribution to Twitter that combining scholarly and personal faith matters was OK. Regardless of the content, she was always teaching with a human touch that came through. She emoted feelings of optimism, frustration, wonderment, and anger (especially about cancer, rightfully so). She was a good digital citizen with a keen insight and a kind word.

Brian Altenhofen





UNSTOPPABLE EVEN IN DEATH

The day I read online that said Bex was no longer with us I cried so hard I gave myself a headache. I mourned not having the chance to share one more coffee together, or witty FB messenger exchange or writing that book on faithful technology and discipleship we had talked of co-authoring. I have known Bex over ten years, and she had a dominant presence on my social media feeds, even after cancer started to sap her previously unstoppable energies. She had been my saving grace in 2012 during a rather challenging sabbatical in the UK. I ended up spending many hours with her, watching her pound out Big Bible Project posts, sharing cups of tea at her home and exploring the NE coast (especially a memorable trip to Hadrian's Wall). I quickly learned to deeply value her down to earth perspective, her honest responses to life's complexities, her real faith and cheese fandom.

Bex is the one who introduced me to microblogging, showed me how to use Hootsuite and inspired me to turn my academic work into practical tools for helping the church think more deeply about technology. She was a prophetic voice in the area of faith and digital media. She exhorted people with a smile to look realistically at the opportunities digital media offered them for building networked friendships, faith and social good in a chaotic world. To say Bex will be missed is an understatement! She left her positive mark on so, so many of us. She modeled care and authenticity both online and offline. My social media feed will not be the same without her. And my life will never be the same because she was my friend. #BeMoreBex leaves a deep digital and spiritual legacy for us to live into.

Heidi Campbell (@heidiacampbell)