

An interview with Richard Gamble Founder of Eternal Wall of Answered Prayer

Interviewed by Richard Gregory Smith

In FiBQ 20:4 architect Paul Bulkeley introduced his bold design for the Eternal Wall of Answered Prayer. This interview with Richard Gamble, carrier of the inspiring founding vision, update readers about how the project is developing.

Eternal Wall of Answered Prayer will be a Christian architectural sculpture built of one million bricks close to Coleshill near Birmingham, at the heart of the UK. Each brick will be linked to an answered prayer, while the striking Möbius strip design will soar 50m into the sky.

A year after receiving planning permission to build this national landmark about Jesus, Eternal Wall's Founder Richard Gamble explores the gargantuan task of running a completely unique charity, keeping God at the centre of the business, and explains how answered prayer has been vital to the project reaching this crucial point.

It's been a year since you received planning permission to build Eternal Wall. What's happened since then?

So much has happened this year that it feels like ten! I've been carrying the vision for 17 years and God gave us the green light to begin seven years ago, but the moment we got planning permission I noticed a clear change. No longer were we just casting the vision as an exciting concept; suddenly we had the responsibility of delivering that vision.

The vision itself is very simple – we're creating a piece of public art to provoke a conversation about prayer. However, the execution has proved to be incredibly complex. Over the last 12 months we've undertaken a massive amount of planning, creating a programme of all the work that needs to be done to build Eternal Wall.

We've been working hard with Snug Architects and other construction providers to organise the phasing of the build, whilst ensuring we're contracting with the right partners. Meanwhile, we've been seeking a technology partner to create the augmented reality that will allow visitors to read the answered prayers linked to the million bricks.

Additionally, we've built partnerships with 128 Christian organisations, including a whole range of churches from across different denominations. These partnerships were particularly valuable in helping us in our autumn Crowdfunding campaign, which raised over £500,000 to help finance the landmark's construction.

Looking ahead, we are about to build the access road to the site. We will be undertaking ground investigations in early 2022 and working on meeting our planning conditions. The Möbius strip will be created out of 94 sections, and the building of these sections will begin in January. We then expect to start cutting the ground in July. With the build taking 18 months, we hope to complete construction at the end of 2023.

What do you hope Eternal Wall will achieve, and what has kept you involved after all these years?

The reason I'm involved is really just simple obedience to God. I believe this is what he has asked me to do, and I'll continue doing it until he tells me otherwise.

The purpose of Eternal Wall is to make hope visible. In this nation it is very

difficult to communicate through the media that Jesus is alive, he listens and he answers prayer. What we want to do by creating this landmark, that will last for generations, is to help the nation to find hope. We want to give people an opportunity, no matter what storm they're in, to find hope in the God who answers.

An interesting challenge we've encountered, whilst communicating the simple message that Jesus answers prayer, is that we are sometimes misunderstood as portraying a transactional relationship with God, where whatever we ask he blindly says yes. Obviously this is nobody's true experience of prayer. Many of those who have this misgiving about Eternal Wall will be surprised when they visit and discover a rich library of stories that are more focused on the journey than the answer itself. They may even find stories where the answer is no, but even in the pain and grief of that answer, many of our contributors discover God in a new and deeper way.

I've found that God is more interested in the journey than the answer, and so if we're seeking to align our hearts with God's heart, we won't gloss over the

journey. We anticipate that as people read the stories of others like them, they'll find fresh hope for their own lives.

Have you seen any answered prayers during the journey of Eternal Wall?

There is no way we would have reached where we are without God's incredible favour on the project. One of the hallmarks for us has been God bringing in the right people with the right skills at the right time.

Following the successful planning decision, an investor came forward who said he would cover our running costs for three years, but wanted to look over the whole charity to ensure we were employing the right people. In the meeting, he then said that we needed to employ a Construction Project Manager. We debated this for some time, and realised the challenge was that the cost was too high to hire someone, but that volunteers would not be up-to-date with regulations. As the discussions progressed, I told the investor and his advisors that I really wanted the person to be a Christian, at which point they burst out laughing and said, "Rich, we're looking for a needle in a haystack anyway. If you want them to be a Christian it's a yellow needle in a haystack." I explained to them that during the last seven years,

every time we hit a buffer we'd prayed, so that's what I did there and then in the meeting.

30 minutes later, a man was driving his car, heard a news report about Eternal Wall on the radio, and felt God say, "You need to get involved." He's a Senior Construction Project Manager overseeing the Commonwealth Stadium in Birmingham, just a couple of miles from where we're building Eternal Wall. He contacted his directors, who, as part of their CSR, have released him and an assistant to work for Eternal Wall, for free, one day a week. It was just an extraordinary moment of God's favour and perfect timing.

You've been carrying this vision for 17 years. What have you learned on the journey?

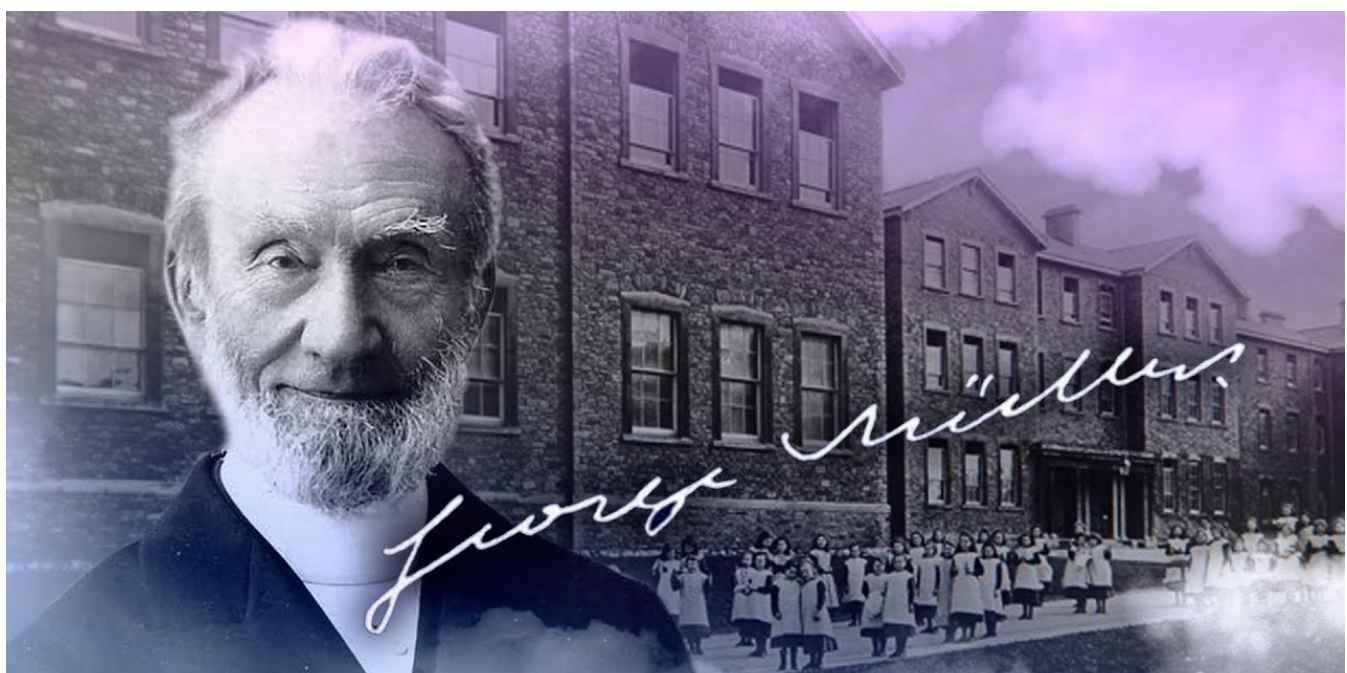
The vision is massive, and we're creating a number of world firsts. The physical structure that Snug Architects have designed is incredible as it pushes the boundaries of engineering. Technologically, we are developing one of the biggest pieces of augmented reality ever created. We are also producing the largest database of answered prayers in the world, containing 1,000,000 stories - the biggest we've found so far held 20,000. Finally, it will be the first ever crowd-funded landmark on the planet.

As you can imagine, all of these firsts come with significant challenges. As I look at these mountains in front of us I cannot help but conclude that the overarching narrative of this project is that it is through the impossible challenges that God is most glorified.

I've learned that the price of this narrative is that we cannot approach Eternal Wall as a normal business project when there are such significant uncontrollable elements. We cannot control the finances; we cannot control the number of people who get on board. All we can do is create the opportunity for people to join us. And we can pray.

However, I've found that my drive to keep the project's momentum high can often overtake the timing of God. One of the biggest things I'm learning is how to make peace with the fact that his timing is often different to mine. I need to submit to his wisdom through prayer.

Although we may make diligent plans, they can only succeed if God decides to step in and make a way. I find it interesting to look at the life of George Müller, who built an orphanage which was completely dependent on God's provision. What he considered to be the last minute clearly wasn't God's last minute, as he always provided on time. I find that to be a continual encouragement.





Eternal Wall (artist's impression)

Image by Darc Studio

What's been your biggest challenge?

Without a shadow of a doubt, the biggest challenge has been timing. From a business perspective, trying to get the multiple complex facets of this project going at the same speed has been particularly challenging. The only solution I've found is prayer.

Galatians 5:25 [ESV] says 'If we live by the Spirit, let us also keep in step with the Spirit'. Trying to keep in step with God's intentions has been a key way to overcoming this challenge, although that is sometimes easier said than done.

I've received a couple of instructions from God as I've sought to lead this project. The first is to lead in peace. The second is to slow down, and he'll do it faster than I can imagine. I've found that these commands are often connected. In the moments where I lose my peace and find myself carrying anxiety, it's often because I'm trying to push myself, or elements of the project, too fast. Learning to obey his instructions has been a process, but I've found myself becoming hypersensitive to the idea of leading in peace; not allowing myself, my team or even outside suppliers, to push us past where God wants us to be.

In the world of business this is a counter-intuitive message. Whilst I believe that we should do things with quality, professionalism and efficiency, there are times when our actions

should be counter-intuitive, as it is these moments of obedience that bring glory to God.

You have a history of building businesses and organisations with fast growth. How have you achieved this?

When you're working in a business or project that's growing incredibly fast, it's important to recognise how your own role changes, and how other people's roles need to change. Only a few years ago Eternal Wall was a team of three people crammed into an office no bigger than a cupboard. We now have a team of 20 people and a further 200 volunteers. I work on the premise that you should do what *only you* can do, and I try to filter that through the whole charity. That said, I still feel constant pressure to let go of different things and delegate more.

It's also so important to have a team of people who are able to develop at that rate of growth. All of the team at Eternal Wall are light-handed; their focus is more on seeing the project come to fruition than holding tightly to their own role and identity within the project itself. This is massively helpful as it allows you to change the structure and develop quickly.

I've been really blessed not only by the people who have continued in the project over the last several years, but also by the people who have held

it lightly enough to know when their time has come to an end. To achieve this culture, you need people who have a close relationship with Jesus and are walking in step with him. Of course there are always bumps in the road, but it's the team behind this project who are making it happen - not just the employees but also the different professionals and organisations who have helped us along the way.

How can people help?

One of the most amazing privileges on this journey is connecting with people who are volunteering their skills and abilities to move us forward, whether it be planning barristers, project managers, or administrators, and we have a continual need for people to volunteer.

We also need people to share their stories. We would love to get more answered prayers from people in business, because we believe God inhabits that world too.

Of course, we also need finance. This is a massive faith project, and we need the support of thousands of people to help us cross the line. 

You can find out more about Eternal Wall and the different ways you can get involved, such as volunteering, sharing an answered prayer, and donating, by heading to eternalwall.org.uk.



Richard Gamble is the founder of Eternal Wall of Answered Prayer. He is a serial entrepreneur with a track record of running fast-growing technology businesses. He is the former CEO of Sports Chaplaincy UK and author of Remember: Revealing the eternal power of answered prayer.