

SPAG

Single Person Approved by God

Cost: FREE
A quarterly electronic
Christian magazine
with a focus on singles.

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**What a Near Death Experience
Taught Me**

**The 'Real' Festival: One Special
Meal in History**

**How to Discourage Suffering
Friends**

**The Impacts of Redefining
Marriage in Australia**

**The God of War vs the God
of Love**

Will I Be Single Forever?

The God Who Sees Me

My Year Without Porn

Regular Segments: Happiness Habits ☪ Words of Wisdom ☪
☪ Christie's Kitchen ☪ Puzzle Page ☪ Up Close and Personal ☪
☪ Letters to Lou ☪ Tantalising Trivia ☪ Creation Ministries ☪

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SPAG (Single Person Approved by God) is a quarterly, electronic magazine for Christians, with a focus on singles. While it is based in Australia, it is an international, inter-denominational magazine aimed at encouraging, challenging and inspiring believers. Another of our aims is to provide Church leaders with some insight into the problems and needs of the singles in their congregation who can sometimes feel overlooked or even unwanted in their church.

SUBMISSIONS:

Please feel free to write to SPAG via our email: spagmag@yahoo.com.au. Ensure you title your email with the relevant section of SPAG or address it to the Editor. You may feel compelled to respond to an article, or you may like to submit an article¹ or photo¹ of your own for consideration. Perhaps you have a question for Lou, SPAG's Counsellor.

Please note that any item for publication must be your own original work and not copied from elsewhere.¹

ADVERTISING:

If you would like to promote your business or major Christian activity in SPAG, please contact the Editor Vicki Nunn on email: spagmag@yahoo.com.au or phone 042 44 33 772. You can find more information about advertising costs on the website: www.spagmag.com.

Community or non-profit groups are advertised free, though we cannot guarantee that we will have sufficient space.

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Singles: we understand that you may feel invisible, overlooked or even unwanted in the church. Be assured that your needs, concerns and problems are real. You are not alone, but are part of a vast family of brothers and sisters. God sees you and your struggles: He knows you and He loves you. The articles here are written to encourage, challenge and inspire you. ~Please feel free to share SPAG with others.

EDITOR'S LETTER

Welcome to the eighth issue of SPAG!

Boasting more than sixty pages, the eighth issue of SPAG Magazine is brimming with great articles including some on the very real problem of pornography, even for many Christians. "My Year Without Porn" was written by journalist Tim Everton who shares about his own struggle (p33).

With same-sex marriage very much in the mind of the public, we take a look at the impacts of redefining marriage in Australia, not as a criticism of gay people, but about the serious consequences that will impact both Christians and those who hold to more traditional views, and in particular, its effect on our freedom (p44.) (You might like to read issue 2 which shared four articles on same sex marriage and the church, available to purchase in our online store.)

We have a new segment beginning in this issue called "Jerusalem Journal" which is a series of articles by an imaginary Jewish journalist from around the time of Jesus.

Get up close and personal with the Australian garden orb weaver spider (p18), though you may want to skip that page if arachnids make you squirm.

Stephen Witmer shares his own experiences in the article "Will I Be Single Forever," (p59) and I share what I learned through a near death experience (p19), while Bill Muehlenberg shares why people are leaving the church in droves (p61).

With Global Outreach Day coming up in May, you may like to learn some more about this annual worldwide event and encourage your friends, family and your church to get involved (p58).

Patrick Hughes is the inspirational person in this issue, focussing not on his difficulties as a blind, disabled person, but about his gifts and triumphs, particularly with the support of his loving family (p48). Happy 29th birthday Patrick!

Want more? You also have the opportunity to WIN a \$60 voucher for items in our online store! Simply purchase any items totally \$20 or more in the one transaction between now and the end of October to go into the draw. The more often you purchase, the more entries you'll have. This can include jewellery, ebooks, keyrings, donations, and gift vouchers etc. Because of problems and costs with posting overseas, we've had to restrict our competition to Australian purchasers, although if you're overseas and you'd **really** like something, you can email me directly on spagmag@yahoo.com.au and I'll try to organise it separately from our store, as overseas postage will cost more (p30).

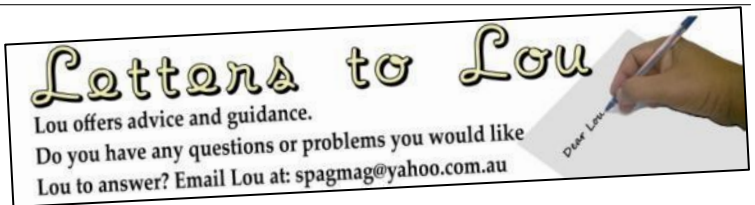
If you feel encouraged to comment about an article you read here, or would like to submit your own article or photo for consideration, you can email us at: spagmag@yahoo.com.au. SPAG Magazine is also seeking the assistance of another researcher/writer (p46) as well as a music reviewer (p60.) You can either email us for more information, or phone me direct on

042 44 33 772 (Australia.)

Don't forget to share SPAG Magazine.

Happy Easter!

**Vicki Nunn,
SPAG Editor**



Letter 1 – Losing My Mind after Losing My Heart

Dear Lou

I went onto a dating website and met a nice Christian woman. We chatted on the net for a few months, and then began talking on the phone before deciding to meet. Viv lives about an hour away from me and after meeting for coffee a few times, we began going out once a fortnight. She would always come into meet me because she lives in a small town

She says nice things to me and when we dance and my arms are around her, she says things like, "You make me feel so safe when I'm with you." She hasn't said much about her past except that she'd been hurt. Sometimes she gets busy and I don't see her for weeks at a time, but she phones me at least once a month. We'd been seeing each other for about nine months and I could feel myself falling for her.

Last time we met up for dinner at my place and afterwards she took me by the hand and tried to lead me to the bedroom. I was shocked at first and while I was tempted to say yes, I explained that I really cared for her, but as a Christian, I didn't think it was right to have sex before marriage. After that, she made excuses and left.

I tried to call her but she wouldn't answer the phone. For the first few weeks I left messages telling her I missed her, and then gave up about six weeks later. I was feeling hurt and confused. But every day I found myself thinking about her and don't know how to switch off my feelings for her. Then about four months later she phoned and apologised, saying that she'd had a family emergency and had to go to her daughter in Sydney. I think she lied about the reason.

I thought I'd never see her again, and I'm feeling confused. What's going on?

Ron

Dear Ron,

Aren't relationships fun! The problem with building friendship and relationship is that we don't know the other person's story. When this happens we often make assumptions which are incorrect, and as a result we second-guess the other person's word and actions.

As in all dating situations the issue is about building strong friendship, and making this your highest priority. Issues like this point to developing much healthier dating standards. I will mention these briefly below, but it is an issue which is far more complex than I suggest in this reply to you.

Always build friendship first because this is foundational in long-term relationships. When you sense your friendship is ready to go the next step ask this question, "I value our friendship and believe I am ready to take it to another level. How does this sit with you?"

Do this at every new development in your relationship and you will find building your relationships goes much more smoothly. This area is a great subject for a workshop for single and single again people.

I have not commented on all aspects of your letter, but by building healthy relationship skills, these will also be answered. Make contact and work at building a solid friendship before moving to any new level of dating.

Lou

Letters to Lou

Lou offers advice and guidance.

Do you have any questions or problems you would like

Lou to answer? Email Lou at: spagmag@yahoo.com.au



Letter 2 – Losing My Kids

Dear Lou

My ex-wife left me a few years ago and took the kids with her. She has fought me every step of the way after our break-up, and makes nasty comments about me in front of the kids when I go to pick them up. I don't say anything because that will just stir her up even more. Besides, the kids shouldn't see us fighting.

She has a boyfriend and since he got a job in another state, she's talking about taking the kids with her and moving to live with him. That means that the kids will have to start over at a new school and make new friends, and I won't get to see them much except for a couple of weeks during school holidays, if I can get time off work.

I love my kids, and I think what she's doing isn't right. She's thinking only about herself and not about them. I know if I say something to her, she'll just act nasty again. I can't afford to take her to court, and I'm worried this is going to get out of control.

I'm also worried about how this is going to affect my relationship with my kids. If she keeps on saying nasty stuff about me, won't they believe her? Is there some way that I can reassure the kids that I love them, other than just in words?

Seth

Dear Seth,

This is one of the series of questions that I am asked repeatedly, and sadly it is probably a significant player in the amount of domestic violence flooding our society today. When I encounter people like yourself, I often find significant levels of frustration. The problem that you will experience is enhanced when you receive 'trite' answers, which do little to help you.

You didn't mention the age of your children in your letter. Give your children some credit and know that they will read the situation more clearly than you could ever imagine. Your children are looking for security and my recommendation to you is to always look at ways to encourage your children, to make sure you spend valuable time with them whenever you can, and even though they are out of your state, make sure that you have phone contact with them on a weekly basis. In all of your contact make sure that your priority is your children, and as you are doing already, continue to avoid saying anything that is detrimental about your former wife.

As hard as this might seem, continue to be loving and caring toward your children and make sure you grasp every opportunity you have for contact with them. Again give your children credit for seeing the bigger picture.

My personal experience in working with people in your situation is to encourage them to comply with court orders, never miss an opportunity to be with the children, and always be positive in speaking with them. I have seen a person totally frustrated in going through a situation like yours, and have encouraged this person to do the things

I have mentioned earlier in this reply. Has it been frustrating for them? Absolutely: *"The fear has always been the children will hate me, and I am powerless to do anything about it."*

To this person I always said, keep a positive spirit and be the best parent you can be to the children, because there will come a time when they see your attitude and behaviour and warm to what they see. Some five years later, this person is still doing this. The recent result is that the children want to live with the positive parent.

Get some support around you and continue to build healthy attitudes and relationships.

All the best, Lou

Letter 3 – Shouldn't I Be Happy For Her?

Dear Lou

A couple of months ago, a woman from my church died. (Let's call her Kate.) We weren't particularly close, but were always friendly, but I'm having trouble kind of accepting it.

After the funeral, I offered to help the family, and suggested they let me know how I can help them. I've taken them a few meals, but I kind of feel inadequate, like I should be doing something more. It's not as if Kate and I were close, so why am I struggling?

A friend of mine says I should be happy because Kate's gone to heaven and won't be in pain any more. I understand that, but I'm reminded all the time about how she's not there anymore - going to church, singing in our church choir, and other little things.

I've been lucky so far because I've not really lost anyone close - my parents and brothers and sisters are still alive, and I still have my best friends. Why am I finding Kate's death so hard to accept?

Chrissie

Dear Chrissie,

It is always a sad time when a significant person in our life dies.

I would suggest that for the first time in your life you are experiencing grief: a grief that leaves us with a real emptiness in our heart.

When you are going through grief, doing things like you have been doing simply do not take away the emptiness in your heart.

My suggestion to you would be to go to your minister and ask about some grief counselling, or go to a Christian counsellor for help. It would also be beneficial to read some material on healthy grief.

If I was talking with you I would be looking at how you cope with grief, but more importantly I would be looking at what is going on in your life at a personal level. Maybe there is more to your history than just the passing of a friend.

It would appear that you keep yourself busy. Sometimes busyness is a cover up for who we are as a person. Getting some personal help could be of importance for you.

All the best,
Lou



BIBLE SOCIETY
1817-2017

2017: The Year of the Bible



Bible Society Australia Celebrates 200 Years



INTRODUCTION

As Bible Society Australia celebrates two hundred years on Sunday 5 March 2017, we would encourage everyone to keep their focus on the Bible itself, rather than our celebrations. The Bible is still the best-selling book of all time (for good reason) with more than five **billion** copies printed.

Early in the life of Australia, passionate community leaders like Lady Macquarie created the Bible Society.

They knew it wasn't just government that could build a nation - it would need people of hope, people who live light.

Today, we're Australia's longest-living organisation. Over the last 200 years, the Bible has done Australia a lot of good. And there's a lot more good it will do yet. So we're creating new ways to advocate for the Bible, to promote it, and offer people new ways to engage with it.

Established in Sydney in 1817, Bible Society Australia's activities take place as part of the United Bible Societies who operate across 200 countries.

We are one of the most extensive mission groups in the world and do our work in partnership with churches, providing resources and Bible-

focused campaigns and community programmes.

We have always been closely tied to the leadership of the nation, with governors, business leaders and senior clergy featuring in the Society's history.

Our vision is to see all people engaged with the Bible in a language they can understand, in a format they can use, and at a price they can afford.

In return, we enjoy the support of churches across all denominations and partner with other organisations in areas of publishing, literacy development (such as UNESCO) and

youth Bible engagement.

WHAT WE DO

Bible Society Australia is committed to giving access to the Bible across the world. Alongside this we advocate for and engage Australians here at home and people around the world with the Bible.

In order to pursue our mission, Bible Society Australia undertakes a range of activities:

- **We Translate the Bible into the World's Languages**

We support the ongoing task of translating the Bible into the world's languages, including in Indigenous languages and sign language (Auslan) in Australia.

- **We Provide Bibles to Those Who Want One**

We provide free Bibles and Scripture portions to Chaplains of hospitals, prison & defence force as well as to Scripture teachers. We also produce Bible resources to help people engage with the Bible.

- **We Help Others Understand the Bible**

We run local Bible engagement campaigns as well as overseas and indigenous Bible-based literacy programmes.

- **We Tell the World Why the Bible is So Good**

In many 'post-Christian' countries, we need to advocate for the beauty, truth and goodness of the Bible. We do this by equipping Christians to be more confident in the Bible.

We also champion the Bible by engaging the media, universities, schools, and



prominent think tanks with high quality and well-researched print, video and audio material about the relevance of Christianity in the 21st century.

SO WHY IS THE BIBLE SO GOOD FOR AUSTRALIA?

Over the last 200 years, the Bible has done Australia a lot of good:

- **Belief in human dignity:**

The Bible is a foundation to our human rights and our legal system

- **A passion for community service:**

Bible readers are more likely to

volunteer to help others.

- **Our great charities:**

Of the thirty largest charities in Australia, twenty-six are faith-based.

- **The values we cherish:**

The most common ANZAC statement is "Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends."

It's a Bible verse that captures our national vision for humility, sacrifice and friendship between equals.

- **A vision of eternity:**

If there is one Bible word all Australians would recognise, it's eternity. It's the message of

God's love for us in Jesus Christ, a love that will last forever.

FIND OUT MORE ABOUT US

You can find out more about Bible Society Australia on our website at:

www.bible.com.au

Information about our March celebrations and how you or your church can become involved is available on our website. You may also like to sign up for special invitations and bicentenary news.

Additionally, you can also phone us on 1300 BIBLES (1300 242 537) [END]





The God of War vs the God of Love

Is God in the Old Testament less loving than God in the New Testament?

by Vicki Nunn

Introduction

For some people there can seem to be a disparity between God as we read about Him in the Old Testament and the God we hear about in the New Testament.

First, we must recognise that many of us have grown up in a society that has deliberately tried to mislead us about who God is. It's an insidious deception designed to steer people away from God, by providing half truths and lies and creating doubt in our minds.

This specific deceit is one that we may hear about from an early age:

The God in the Old Testament is violent and is always killing people. That's not a God of love!

AND

Jesus in the New Testament is a softly spoken, kindly teacher who loves everyone and would certainly never harm anyone physically. That's not a God of war!

If the person of God in the Bible seems to be inconsistent, it's certainly likely to encourage people to doubt the Bible's authenticity and authority, and as a consequence, to encourage them to doubt the validity of Christianity.

This idea has permeated our society and makes it easier for non-believers to dismiss God.

This is not the first of the lies that we hear about God and Christianity. Another is that the Bible is full of errors, and yet, if we were to ask someone to point out those errors, they're unlikely to know the specifics, because they prefer to believe the lie.

Another common deception is the watering down of sin. Society today places a higher value on tolerance than it does on morality. Is it any wonder then that newer generations are growing up without any clear guidelines about what God says is good and what is not?

In movies, in the media, and sometimes even in our churches, Jesus is presented as a mild, even meek God, and it's not often that pastors want to tackle the subject of Jesus Christ hating evil.

While He mixed with sinners and some who were considered the lowest in His society, Jesus loved them, but at no time did He condone or encourage them in their sins – quite the opposite. The holy rage that Jesus demonstrated in the temple when He overturned tables, is one that may not be explained well or spoken about from the pulpit. As a consequence, we often don't equate the meek and mild Jesus we've heard about, with the 'angry' God in the Old Testament who had to punish sin.

There are many other lies too, but these particular ones are important to consider in connection with this article.

Israel Commanded to Destroy Nations

When the Israelites were freed from Egypt, God reminded them of his promise that He would give them a land to call their own. After their disobedience and their lack of trust in God during the trip to their promised land, the older generations were punished by wandering in the desert for forty years. When the older ones died, God reminded the younger generation of His promise to give them a land of their own, a promise he had made to their ancestor Abraham.

Moses relayed God's message to them which made it clear that the Israelites would have to rid the land of its ungodly people so that they could safely live there.

God's purpose for wiping out the inhabitants was two-fold:

1. To punish the inhabitants for their sinfulness; and
2. To ensure that the Israelites would not be corrupted by the sinful and extreme wickedness of the nations residing there. Destroying the wicked people would encourage the Israelites to focus on and remain in relationship with their one true God.

"Moses: As the Eternal, your True God, is bringing you into the land where you're going to live when you cross the Jordan, He'll drive out many nations ahead of you... The Eternal your God will put them in your power. You must crush them; destroy them completely! Don't make any treaties with them, and don't show them any mercy. Above all, don't intermarry with them! Don't marry your daughters to any of their sons, and don't marry your sons to any of their daughters."

***Eternal One:** This would cause your enemies to turn your children away from Me to worship other gods.*

***Moses:** So this is what you must do to these nations instead: tear down their altars, smash their monoliths, chop down their sacred poles, and throw the idols they've carved into the fire!*

Remember: you're a people set apart for the Eternal your God; He is your God and has chosen you to be His own possession - His special people - out of all the peoples on the earth...

He brought you out of Egypt with overwhelming power and liberated you from slavery to Pharaoh the king because He loved you and was keeping the oath He swore to your ancestors. I want you to know that the Eternal your God is the only true God. He's the faithful God who keeps His covenants and shows loyal love for a thousand generations to those who in return love Him and keep His commands.

But He holds personally accountable those who hate Him, and He destroys them; He does not delay when anyone hates Him, but He holds them personally accountable. Therefore, be very careful to obey the commands and rules and judgments I'm giving you today.

If you pay attention to these judgments and keep them carefully, the Eternal your God will keep the covenant He made with your ancestors and show you His loyal love. He'll love you and bless you and increase your population. He'll bless your children, and He'll bless your agriculture."

Deuteronomy 7:1-13a [VOICE]

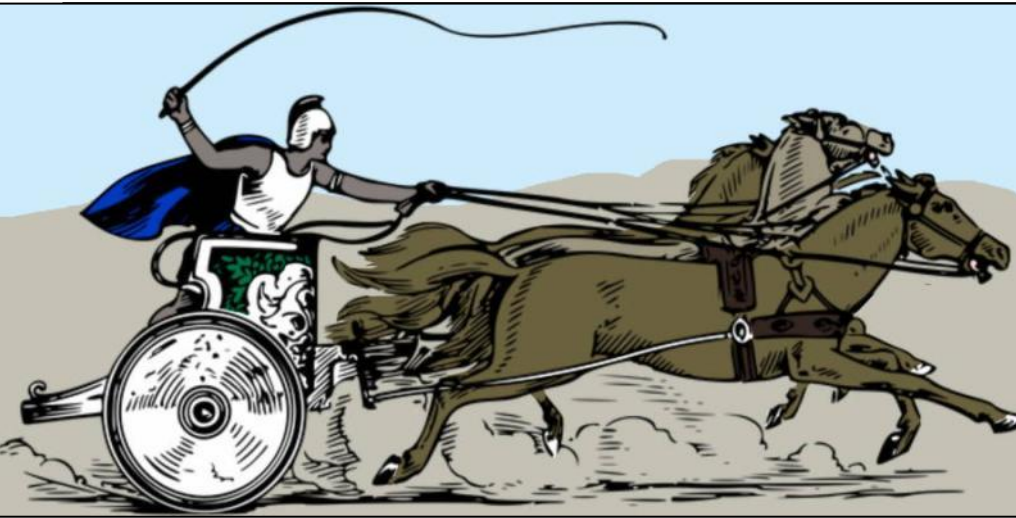
Note the section which refers to those who hate God:

"He holds personally accountable those who hate Him, and He destroys them; He does not delay when anyone hates Him, but He holds them personally accountable."

Verse 16 says:

"You are to destroy all the nations the Eternal, your True God, puts in your power. Don't show them any pity! You must not worship their gods - that behaviour is a deadly trap!" [VOICE]

These two passages demonstrate the reason why God 'goes to war' against ungodly people (as mentioned earlier): to both punish the inhabitants for their



sinfulness; and to ensure that the Israelites would not be corrupted by the sinful and abhorrant behaviours of the nations residing there.

By doing so, the Israelites would more easily remain within God's acceptable guidelines to be His holy people, and to keep their focus on Him, and to worship Him, their one true God.

What Nations Did God Promise to Destroy and Why?

In Deuteronomy 7:1, God gave the command to destroy seven nations when they entered the promised land:

"...Hittites, Girgashites, Amorites, Canaanites, Perizzites, Hivites, and Jebusites."

In the case of the Amorites for example, God had much earlier made a vow to destroy them for their sins. Back in Genesis 15:16, God promised Abraham that his descendents would be a great people, though they would be enslaved in a foreign land for four hundred years. He vowed that after that time, the Amorites would be destroyed:

"After four generations your descendants will return here to this land, for the sins of the Amorites do not yet warrant their destruction." [NLT]

It's apparent that while the Amorites were sinful at the time of Abraham, their sinfulness would eventually worsen to the degree that they would eventually warrant complete destruction.

While this may seem to suggest that God intended to destroy them all along, as with the citizens of Nineveh during Jonah's time, God gave them ample opportunity to turn away from their wickedness, but unlike the Ninevites, they did not change their ways.

It is likely then, that God gave each of these nations an opportunity to turn from

evil, but instead they continued on a downward spiral to utter wickedness.

In What Way Were These Nations Sinful?

There are many ways in which the other peoples were sinful. To many non-Christians and non-Jews, it may seem ridiculous that worshipping other gods could possibly be that harmful. If we understand that the gods these people worshipped were immoral and corrupt, then we can begin to understand why their own behaviour was also wicked. In addition to their violence:

- prostitution in the temples was a common practice;
- gang rape was normal;
- incest and adultery were typical;
- children as well as adults were sacrificed to their gods;
- bestiality was accepted;
- worshiping of idols and its practices was widespread, and
- barbarity and immorality were common and accepted,

There was no such thing as sanctity of life, no compassion, and no concept of decency etc.

God knew how contagious this evil could become and how vulnerable the Israelites would be if they were repeatedly exposed to it. He understood that they were unlikely to be strong enough to resist it in their human weakness.

History clearly demonstrates that our world has rarely been free of wars and conflicts, and so too were the times in which Israel lived. Nations around them often came against them in war in an attempt to destroy them, to take their land and possessions, to enslave them and to treat them cruelly and wickedly.

Recent history is a good indication of how little man's nature has changed. While the concept of pacifism is a lovely idea, and some people espouse the belief that man has evolved into better beings, the reality is that wars are inevitable because we live in a broken world and without God, we cannot escape our sinful nature and its repercussions.

Consequences of Failing to Obey God's Command to Destroy the Evil Nations

The consequences of not ridding their promised land of its inhabitants became apparent during the period of the judges:

1. There were ongoing conflicts with other nations; and

2. The Israelites turned away from God

1. Ongoing conflicts with other nations

At different times in the four hundred years leading to King Saul's reign, the Canaanites, Midianites and the Philistines sent raiding and warring parties against the Israelites.

During that period, under the guidance of the prophet Deborah, the Israelites defeated the Canaanites. Later, Gideon defeated the Midianites, and we know that Samson attacked the Philistines several times. One of their bigger threats, the Philistines, maintained a long-term aggression towards them.

During the reign of King Saul, the Israelites battled against the Ammonites, the Philistines and the Amalekites, and it was in battle against the Philistines that King Saul and his sons were killed.

In the time of King David, he recaptured Jerusalem from the Jebusites, forced the Philistines out of Israel and subdued several surrounding nations including Edom, Ammon and Moab, and the Aramean kingdoms of Damascus and Zobah.

It's quite evident then that there were ongoing dangers both from those who had originally resided in the land and from nearby nations, and so it was necessary to remove the danger to their people.

2. Israelites Turned Away from God

During that four hundred year period after Joshua had died and before King Saul came to power, the Bible says that the Israelites stopped worshipping God, which was likely as a direct consequence of being

influenced by other ungodly people remaining in their land. In Judges 21:25 it reads:

"In those days Israel had no king; all the people did whatever seemed right in their own eyes." [NLT]

It is evident even from this single verse, that the Israelites were no longer putting their faith and trust in God, but allowed themselves to be led by their own natures.

We can confirm the behaviour of the Israelites towards God simply by reading more of the Old Testament, where we learn that they allowed themselves to be swayed by the behaviours of other nations, time and time again. In fact, their third king, the once remarkably wise King Solomon, was induced by his wives to worship other gods in his later years.

It is in these same books of the Old Testament that we read about how the Israelites repeatedly turned their backs on God and succumbed to the temptation to worship other gods.

Perhaps if the Israelites had succeeded in completely ridding their land of foreigners, they may have remained more faithful to God.

Why No Wars in the New Testament?

Why didn't God also command Israel to destroy other nations in the New Testament? In fact, why didn't God command the Jewish people to go to war against the Romans who had taken control of their country?

Anyone who has studied the Bible will know that over the centuries, God repeatedly forgave the Jewish people for their rebellion and sin. Time and time again He forgave them when they disobeyed His laws, worshiped idols, sinned and intermarried with other nations; and yet He continued to love them.

In addition to worshipping other gods, the Israelites came to embrace many of the customs of neighbouring evil nations and were strongly influenced by them, and fell away from worshipping Him.

Despite the many times God sent prophets to warn His people, they

continued their rebellion and sin.

Eventually God came to the point when He gave up on the Israelites as His people and 'divorced them.' In Jeremiah 3:8 we read:

"...I sent unfaithful Israel away with a decree of divorce for these acts of adultery..." [VOICE]

Before the New Testament we see that a change had come about in God's relationship with the Israelites. While He still loved them, He was no longer leading them as their God nor giving them direct commands as His people. This is one reason why we do not read that God commanded His people to go to war in the New Testament – even though He still had relationship with particular individuals, the Israelites were no longer His people, as a nation.

Additionally, when the Israelites had been allowed to rebuild their temple under Nehemiah, and to return to their religious routines, there came about a significant shift in the way they did that. Their worship became legalistic and incorporated as a part of their traditions, rather than worshipping God as an act of love.

Even though in the New Testament times there were individuals and small groups who chose to resist the Roman occupiers, the majority of the Israelites were happy to keep the status quo and to remain under Roman rule, as long as they could maintain their religious practices.

Another more obvious reason is that Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection brought about a cessation in the need for adherence to God's laws and the requirement for sacrifice.

Also, as people of all nations, were then incorporated into the new plan for reconciliation with God, this meant that the original requirement to destroy and remove gentiles from Israel's land, was no longer relevant.

Change to God's Laws

We should recognise that God has not changed from day one to today. He is still a holy God who rejects evil people, yet still remains a God of love, who wants relationship with us.

We know that Jesus' purpose was ultimately so

that every person, regardless of race or background, could be reconciled with God. We understand that the old sacrificial system and its laws were insufficient and were no longer needed after Jesus. In fact, the Jewish laws and rules by that time had become ridiculously complex and the Jewish leaders were focused on the need for strict adherence to the law above all else, including loving God.

In Matthew 5:38-45 Jesus says:

"You know that Hebrew Scripture sets this standard of justice and punishment: take an eye for an eye and a

tooth for a tooth. But I say this, don't fight against the one who is working evil against you. If someone strikes you on the right cheek, you are to turn and offer him your left cheek. If someone connives to get your shirt, give him your jacket as well. If someone forces you to walk with him for a mile, walk with him for two instead. If someone asks you for something, give it to him. If someone wants to borrow something from you, do not turn away.

You have been taught to love your neighbour and hate your enemy. But I tell you this: love your enemies. Pray for those who torment you and persecute you - in so doing, you become children of your Father in heaven. He, after all, loves each of us - good and evil, kind and cruel." [VOICE]

Jesus wasn't saying that the evil that people did was acceptable to God, or that He approved of their evil nature, rather that God wants to have relationship with each of us.

He was also trying to point out that adherence to the law was not to be our ultimate goal, but that we were supposed to love our neighbours and to love God, just as God loves everyone equally.

The War Against Evil Began in Eden and Continues Today

God's plan to do away with sin and evil was put into place with Adam and Eve as they left the Garden of Eden. In Genesis 3:15 He gave a promise, even back at that early time, that someone would come who would strike against Satan – this was the first promise of the Messiah.

Throughout the Old Testament, God tried repeatedly to reconcile with His people after they rebelled. One of many examples can be found in Ezekiel 18:25-32 where God spoke through the prophet and explained that He hated evil but





would rather that people turned to Him for forgiveness and to change their ways. This is not the speech of a hateful, vengeful God, but One of love; One who wanted to bring His people into a loving relationship with Him:

"You say, 'The Lord's way is not fair at all!' Hear Me, people of Israel: You think My way is unfair? You are the ones with unjust ways! If a righteous person turns away from the right path and chooses to act wickedly, he will die for it. He will die because of the sin he committed. But if a wicked person turns from the wicked path and chooses to be honest and live a righteous life, he will end up saving his life! Because he thought about his wrongs and turned away from the wicked things he'd done, putting them behind him, then he will surely live. He will not die!"

Yet the people of Israel continue to complain, "The Lord's way is not fair at all!" You think My way is unfair, people of Israel? Don't you think you are the ones with perverted ways?

Therefore, people of Israel, I will judge each of you according to what you have done. Repent! Turn from your wicked ways so that your sins do not trip you up! Get rid of all your wicked ways! Acquire a new heart and a new spirit! Why would you choose to die, people of Israel? I don't enjoy watching anyone die, so turn back to Me and live!" [VOICE]

The war against evil continues into the New Testament where we discover that Jesus did not come to be an avenging Messiah for Israel, to destroy their oppressors, but as a new means of

reconciling people to God. While the war against evil remained, the method for doing battle with it would change with Jesus' death and resurrection, and the means of reconciling with God would also be altered forever.

No More Command For War Today?

The war against evil itself, continues today. Perhaps at no other time in history has evil been so allowed to flourish:

- The concept of 'me above all others' is actively encouraged in many countries. This selfishness is contributing to the fracturing of our societies, and will perhaps play a major role in its eventual destruction.
- Fame and fortune are promoted as the ultimate aim for individuals, while moral decency, and love and compassion for others is being left by the wayside as a casualty of selfishness.
- In once Christian countries, our religious freedoms are being taken from us, often in subtle ways, one piece at a time, under the banner of 'tolerance,' meaning tolerance of any behaviour deemed as acceptable, which is oftentimes enabled by the media.
- Crimes of genocide and the murder of Christians and other religious minorities are being repeatedly ignored by western media. Instead the media sells us lies, rather than tells us truths.

They deliberately mock good moral ethics and Christianity and actively drive increasing hostility towards the very people who work for the betterment of our society through their compassion, love and christian action.

- In the media and most teaching establishments, evolution is taught as fact rather than as a theory, and creationism and Christians are ridiculed; and
- Government leaders and those in authority are increasingly given immunity when they commit crimes. In addition, they are encouraged to rule while possessing secret, selfish, and sometimes quite frightening agendas.
- Abortion has become commonplace, disguised under the claim of 'my body: my choice,' rather than the reality of selfishness. Around one

million babies (if not more) in the US alone, are being aborted annually.

Evidence that Man has Not Changed

Possibly the best evidence to demonstrate how little man has changed since Adam and Eve, is the way each of our 'civilised' societies deliberately choose to ignore and trivialise the taking of human life when it comes to abortion, particularly the life of an innocent, helpless baby.

God makes it clear in the Bible that murder is not acceptable, so are there some instances in which we as Christians can seriously consider abortion as an option? Perhaps when the mother's life is in danger due to the pregnancy it may be considered, but these cases are so scarce that it can rarely be legitimately used as an excuse.

The Guttmacher Institute in the USA provided some startling statistics in relation to abortion in the USA:

1. 19% of pregnancies in 2014 resulted in abortion¹;
2. Around 926,200 abortions were performed in 2014 which is a decrease of 12% from 2011 when more than one million were performed annually;
3. Surprisingly, 54% of the women claimed they were Catholic or Protestant; and
4. Worldwide during 2010–2014², an estimated fifty-six million induced abortions occurred each year. This number represents an increase from fifty million annually during 1990–1994, and doesn't include statistics for usage of either the 'morning after' or the 'abortion' pills.

Let me just restate that alarming statistic for you:

56 million abortions are performed each year,

and this number is increasing.

More and more women are choosing to use the 'morning after' or 'abortion' pills over induced abortions. Another option which has now become available is an injectable abortion medication.

Literally hundreds of millions of unborn children have been and continue to be murdered.

In fact, with contraception so easily accessible in the western world and more reliable than ever, surely abortion should be decreasing. The suggestion then is that abortion is more a matter of convenience,

and that some women are using abortion as a form of contraception.

While Guttmacher Institute's studies claim that abortion levels have declined in the US, they admit that their studies only capture about half of all abortions. Additionally, the study doesn't include statistics for the increasing use of the 'abortion' pill, or the 'morning after' pill with statistics suggesting there's been a 43% increase in abortions through use of the 'abortion pill' alone.^{3,4}

In the UK the 'abortion pill' is illegal, and yet purchase of these pills is increasing with women up to 39 weeks pregnant taking it.⁵ The increased usage of these types of pills has also been reported in Australia^{6,7} and Europe⁴.

Consider also that a good portion of people who are pro-abortion would also likely be anti-war, but do not see this as hypocrisy.

Societies Evils

While I could probably list many more evidences of evil in modern times, it's important to recognise that we must remain vigilant to the ways in which it is permeating our society, and to committing to fighting against it.

We cannot stand idly by and whine about the state of our country, if we are not prepared to fight against evil. We can't allow ourselves to feel overwhelmed or give into apathy or be lulled into believing that resisting evil is somehow biased. We must fight it:

- Through prayer;
- Through developing and growing our relationship with God and to hungering for Him;
- Through actively fighting to change laws that are wrong/evil;
- Through giving of our time, money and/or energies to churches and organisations that seek to help those in need and to encouraging our brothers and sisters in their walk;
- Through helping the weak and the vulnerable both in our country and overseas whether financially, through prayer, or through encouraging the UN and leaders of different countries and our own, to help them.
- Through being willing to stand up for what is right, even though it may alarm or hurt us.

There is still an enormous physical battle to come which is revealed to us through the book of Revelation. Although

details of exactly how this will happen may be interpreted differently, we know that this final battle will see Jesus leading heaven's armies to vanquish evil.

Conclusion

God has not changed; He is still a holy and just God who hates evil and punishes those who embrace it, and neither has there been a change in God's desire for us to have relationship with Him. From Genesis through to Revelation we see God's unfolding plan for us to be reconciled with Him, and for evil to be overcome.

While it may almost seem that these two aspects of God are in discord, we should realise that it is part of God's holy and good nature to abhor evil and yet to love us, and then perhaps we can understand, even if only a little, that there is no conflict.

As God's utter holiness and goodness is in direct opposition to evil, ultimately evil must be utterly defeated so that we can be forgiven and one day fully live in harmony with Him. [END]

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Words of Wisdom

"Consider what you owe to His immutability. Though you have changed a thousand times, He has not changed once."

Charles Spurgeon

Tantalising Trivia

A woman by the name of Anna Hascher was involved in two separate hit and run accidents in 1983 and again in 1992. The accidents occurred less than 500m apart, and it was the same car driver who struck Ms Hascher on both occasions.

On a similar subject, Frank Tower was once a passenger on three different ships:

- the Empress of Ireland (1914);
- the Lusitania (1915); and
- the Titanic (1912)

Each ship sank, and each time Frank Tower somehow managed to swim away to safety.

I'd imagine after that, any time he wanted to go sailing with his friends or family members, they'd all suddenly remember a prior engagement.





www.samaritanspurse.org.au

Samaritan's Purse is a non-profit, Christian organisation providing emergency relief and development assistance to suffering people around the world. It's meeting the physical needs of victims of war, famine, natural disaster, poverty and disease with the aim of demonstrating God's love and sharing the Good News of Jesus Christ.

The aid and assistance are given without regard to the race, creed, gender, religion, or ethnicity of the beneficiaries.

"Go and do likewise," Christ commanded after explaining the parable of the Good Samaritan in Luke ten. So we do. Samaritan's Purse travels the world's highways looking for victims along the way. We are quick to bandage the wounds we see, but like the Samaritan, we don't stop there. In addition to meeting immediate, emergency needs, we help these victims recover and get back on their feet.

DOMESTIC DISASTER RELIEF

Australia and New Zealand Domestic Disaster Relief Program.

Samaritan's Purse is a second responder, deploying to disaster-affected communities when emergency services have declared the area safe. Our teams of volunteers equipped with tools, equipment and resources provide practical support and recovery assistance to affected families.

"Let my heart be broken with the things that break the heart of God..."

(See video: <https://youtu.be/PGxHjAjcyh4>)

INTERNATIONAL DISASTER RELIEF

In disasters, wars and emergencies, children and families are often hardest hit. Samaritan's Purse stands ready to respond at a moment's notice to humanitarian crisis around the world, bringing relief, comfort, physical help and life-saving, emergency aid to victims of war, famine, natural disaster, poverty and disease.

(See video: <https://youtu.be/VE-SktqlvVA>)

WATER, SANITATION AND HYGIENE

Our Turn on the Tap campaign is providing safer, healthier options with wells, rainwater tanks, BioSand water filters, toilets and more along with vital training in health and hygiene practices.

WHO statistics reveal that 2.5 billion people lack access to improved sanitation; 1 billion people practice open defecation (nine out of ten in rural areas); 748 million people still lack access to improved drinking water and an estimated 1.8 billion people use a source of drinking water that is faecally contaminated.

(See video: <https://youtu.be/hbjVbaD97Rk>)

HEALTH AND NUTRITION

Samaritan's Purse builds health clinics and provides health education and a range of targeted health services for women, children and families. The health issues of people in poverty are many and women and children are especially vulnerable. By providing the

right programs and facilities, we are improving the quality of life and well-being of whole communities.

(See video: <https://youtu.be/5DKzyiUI2Ec>)

PEOPLE AT RISK

Did you know that 823 million people (about a third of the world's urban population!) live in slum conditions?

Samaritan's Purse provides aid, health care and education for victims of human trafficking, orphans, the disabled, and other vulnerable communities who struggle to survive in hostile living environments and are always at risk of being exploited.

(See video: <https://youtu.be/oPdztZ55eB0>)

FOOD SECURITY AND LIVELIHOODS

For 2.6 billion people in the world, subsistence farming is literally the only way to live. They have to eat what they grow to survive.

Samaritan's Purse helps people build livelihoods by farming animals and agriculture. As well as feeding their families, they can sell produce and animals to earn income. Farming based livelihoods are a powerful tool that empower poor families in rural communities to break the cycle of poverty and become self-sustaining with hope for the future.

When a family has income, they can do things most of us take for granted: they can send their kids to school; pay for food, clothing and medicine and





more. A life free from poverty begins with income. Our livelihoods programs provide both training and resources and have the aim of generating income.

(See video: <https://youtu.be/3CPSKtzAvM>)

EDUCATION AND VOCATIONAL TRAINING

774 million adults still cannot read or write and two-thirds of them are women².

Educating children is a powerful weapon against poverty. A quality education can lift marginalised children out of poverty in a single generation, equipping them to support themselves and their future families.

Samaritan's Purse works with partners around the world to provide boys and girls with basic educational opportunities, believing all children should have access to quality education and the hope of a future free from poverty. Our educational projects help communities build schools, develop skilled teachers and purchase supplies.

(See video: <https://youtu.be/S30HCmXa9dA>)

CHURCH RESOURCING

Did you know that 42% of the world's people groups are unreached with the Gospel³.

In poor nations, Samaritan's Purse builds churches, trains church workers and provides Bible literature and other practical resources to equip and empower the local church in reaching their community with the Good News of Jesus Christ.

(See video: <https://youtu.be/L1RkbDxUCYw>)

OPERATION CHRISTMAS CHILD

We are continuing what Jesus started.

Every shoebox gift delivered by Operation Christmas Child is a tangible expression of God's amazing love. But a shoebox is just the beginning. It also presents an opportunity in more than 100 countries for our church partners to invite children into a deeper relationship with Jesus Christ through The Greatest Journey⁴.

The Greatest Journey helps children learn about God, faith and being a follower of Jesus Christ in their own language. When they graduate, each child is given their very own Bible in their own language.

Since 2009, millions of children around the world have learned what it means to faithfully follow Jesus Christ through The Greatest Journey. As a result, lives are being changed for eternity and new churches are springing up in communities across the globe.

We praise the Lord for making The Greatest Journey one of the largest discipleship programs in the world today. But there are many more boys and girls we still urgently need to reach with the truth of God's Word.

(See video1: <https://youtu.be/9nooMF3t0Cc>; video2: www.youtube.com/watch?v=OEAKua7ScWw; and video3: www.youtube.com/watch?v=vCUTaIvGzI4)

GET INVOLVED

Volunteer

Give the gift of time and join our merry band of volunteers! Volunteers are the strength of projects like Domestic Disaster Relief and Operation Christmas Child.

Donate

Give a donation and make a difference in the lives of children and

families in need in some of the world's poorest nations.

Fundraise

Maybe you are not in a position to donate. Ever thought about fundraising? Some of the best times are had raising funds while you are doing what you love in sport or some other pursuit. It's so easy with our Reaching for Change online fundraising program. Try it. You'll be so glad you did!

Pray

We believe in the power of prayer to influence circumstances. Please pray for our staff and workers around the world as we reach out to that in greatest need to fulfil our mandate of 'Helping in Jesus' Name.' [END]

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In New Zealand:

Operation Christmas Child: 0800 684 300

Donations: 0800 726 274 (email: donations@samaritanspurse.org.nz)

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Show Some Love Today



by Levi
McGrath,
Christian Artist

Late last year I took my three year old son Eden to a skate park in a busy Melbourne suburb. On the way there, under a cricket scoreboard, was a man laying on a worn out, dirty mattress with a doona over him while his friend went to the toilet by a tree. I said a brief hello to them, and after we'd passed by I said to Eden, "Those men have no home and nowhere to sleep tonight. They have no TV and probably no food to eat either."

"No TV?" Eden asked, "So they can't watch ABC kids?" he added in surprise.

"No they can't", I said as I explained that it was a really sad situation.

While Eden zoomed all over the skate park on his bike, fearlessly dodging much bigger skaters with a confidence I can only assume he got from his mother, I couldn't stop thinking of the men we'd passed by earlier.

After finishing up on the swings nearby I asked him, "Eden, should we go and get the men some food?"

"Yes, let's buy them some dinner", he answered.

We ordered a couple of pizzas to takeaway for the two men and with the extra waiting time while they cooked, we headed down to the supermarket. This is where things got interesting. I told Eden, "We're not here to buy things for us. You choose some things you think the men might like."

That suggestion led us straight to the Freddo frogs! After stressing to him that they might be more in need of items other than chocolate, Eden chose apples, bananas, juice, bottles of water and some muffins.

Then came the cool part. We struggled across the busy road with a bike, pizzas and the shopping and made our way back to the men. I spotted a half empty sack of wine now in front of the mattress. We stopped and handed

them the pizzas and the groceries. The two men were shocked.

One of them, a recently arrived Burmese refugee began to cry. He said, "I heard Australia was a nice place."

The other man who was on the mattress was embarrassed and reluctant, but still expressed his gratitude and thanks as his face softened with a touch of surprise.

We chatted for a while and they said hello to Eden, and he got shy as kids do, then we walked back to the car. I was aware that there was so much more we could have done - those gentlemen had bigger needs than a few groceries.

There was something though that my son prompted me to think about. He didn't have a preconceived notion in his head about why those men were homeless, or that they should be judged for their alleged poor choices, or for being drunk. He didn't see them as too dirty, sick, weird or scary to approach. What he was confused about was why they were sleeping during the day ... that's it! Nothing more.

I'm often reminded that as a Christian, we usually have a set list of things that we stand against, with Muslims and gay marriage often making that list. The following morning I was reading a pretty awesome book and I saw something that caught my eye. This is from John 15:16-17 in Jesus' own words:

"You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you so that you might go and bear fruit... This is my command: Love each other." [NIV]

We are given a pretty clear instruction - it isn't to hate everyone nor to fear.

My son had shown me what it is to love and the bible also says that if we don't have faith like a child, then heaven is only a pipe dream.

Show some love today. [END]

Biography:

From working with former child soldiers in Uganda, to his role as Assistant Music



Director with Melbourne Street Choir Inc. and the School of Hard Knocks, Levi McGrath is committed to music and social justice – and he wants to motivate and inspire a new generation of people to stand up and make a difference.

Levi began his professional music career in 2007 with the release of his debut album 'Move,' which saw two singles reach the Top 20 on the TRAA Christian Radio Airplay Chart. In 2009 Levi spent six months living in Uganda working with former child soldiers, this led to his critically acclaimed album 'Children of War.' Levi is touring his latest album 'Come Home' across Australia and New Zealand this year.



Advertising Promotion



World Vision is a worldwide community development organisation that provides short-term and long-term assistance to 100 million people worldwide (including 2.4 million children).

For six decades, World Vision has been engaging people to work towards eliminating poverty and its causes. We are committed to the poor because we are Christian.

We work with people of all cultures, faiths and genders to achieve transformation. We do this through relief and development, policy advocacy and change, collaboration, education about poverty, and emphasis on personal growth, social justice and spiritual values.



**Help build lasting change
for the world's children.**



Phone 13 32 40 to sponsor a child or donate

Web: www.worldvision.com.au

Happiness Habits: Derailing Depression Part 2



Just because you're a Christian doesn't mean that happiness comes automatically as part of the package.

Society tells us that happiness comes from being successful, famous, young, slim and/or attractive, but it's an illusion. Those things don't buy happiness. In fact, happiness is not a destination, ie you don't reach a state of happiness and stay there forever. Rather, happiness is a choice. It comes from regularly practicing good mental, emotional and physical habits which you maintain for a lifetime.

There are various happiness habits that mental health professionals suggest you undertake regularly. A different one will be provided in each issue of SPAG.

"Hardships often prepare ordinary people for an extraordinary destiny."

Screenwriters: Christopher Markus, Stephen McFeely and Michael Petroni

In this issue, we continue with part two of the article: Happiness Habits: Derailing Depression. (Part 1 was shared in the December 2016 – February 2017 issue.)

Following is the same introductory segment, and if you've read part 1, you can look for the highlighted segment where we begin part 2.

Introduction

Depression is a mental illness and Christians can suffer it too, although there are some Christians and churches who think they know better – ignore them because they are uninformed. We discussed this in more detail in our article "Can Christians Have a Mental Illness" in the previous issue of SPAG Magazine, and we took a glimpse into the lives of well-known Christians and Biblical people who struggled with depression at some point in their lives, in the same issue.

While sometimes depression may arise from sin, more often it does not, and no amount of confessing our sin or asking for deliverance or just having enough faith, will necessarily remove it.

Unfortunately for some of us, depression can be a nasty cycle where the depression causes unhealthy behaviours, eg avoiding people and social activities, not getting enough sleep, not eating properly etc, which can then contribute to deepening of the depression and perhaps other disorders, and around and around it goes.

As we continue this topic, may I remind you that God's love for you is unchanging. When we are weak or troubled, God loves us no less than when we are strong.

God has no wish to inflict pain and suffering on us – why would He desire to see our child raped and murdered; or to cause us horrendous bodily harm; or to see our family persecuted and our home burnt to the ground? It's not in His nature to wish harm on us.

He can use our experiences though, to stretch and shape us, and from them we can develop more empathy, compassion and understanding for others who also suffer.

Since one of our greatest commandments is to love one another, then developing these traits can be a helpful gift for us in our interaction with others.

What is Depression?

Depression is a feeling of sadness that doesn't pass quickly. Some people can experience other symptoms as well such as anxiety and panic attacks.

One of the problems with depression is that it's not something we can be talked out of by "just getting over it," "by looking on the bright side of life," "confessing our

sin," or "having more faith." It really is a serious issue that should be tackled and in many cases, it can't be overcome without help.

From Where Does Depression Come?

Depression can stem from trauma and stress, even dating back to our childhood. It can result from being in a hostile work or home environment, from ongoing financial hardship, to worries about what is happening in the world, concerns about our children and family, loss of a partner or family member, health issues, long-term illness and so on.

It can also occur due to a physiological problem such as a chemical imbalance in the brain, hormonal imbalances, thyroid problems, lacking in particular vitamins or minerals or even not getting enough sunshine. It may stem from another mental illness, or as a side-effect from some medications, use of narcotics or alcohol etc.

Statistics suggest that as many as 45% of the Australian population will suffer a mental health condition in their lifetime. In any one year, around one million adults in Australia have depression, and more than two million suffer anxiety. It is claimed that depression is the leading cause of disability worldwide¹.

Symptoms of Depression

Some of the symptoms of depression can include:

- Difficulty sleeping or too much sleeping;
- Finding ourselves focussing on the negative and unhappy things in our life;
- Difficulty enjoying things we once took pleasure in;
- Feeling emotionally numb or apathetic, or feeling like crying, screaming or shouting even over trivial matters;

- Complaining a lot, particularly if this isn't something that we usually do;
- Worrying much more than usual;
- Overeating or not eating;
- Feelings of guilt that don't seem to pass;
- A physical reaction such as knots in the stomach or tightening of the throat muscles that won't relax;
- Lack of enthusiasm for socialising, lacking the motivation to leave our home or perhaps even wanting to close the doors and windows and turning out the lights, as if we're trying to shut out the world;
- Anger with people around us and even God, which may be out of proportion to the situation, or won't go away;
- Lack of patience and even lashing out at others over small things;
- Doubting that others love us, including God or perhaps feeling like we aren't worthy of love;
- Reluctance to read the Bible or pray, or to attend church or Bible Study;
- Feeling hopeless or even like there's no point in going on, perhaps even as if we're in a deep, dark pit with no way out; and
- Thoughts of suicide.

If several of these ring a bell, I would encourage you to seek help as soon possible. There's no point in delaying or making excuses, because in many cases, depression doesn't go away on its own. Obtaining medical help in the early stages of depression can make it much easier to manage than when it's in full swing.

While God sometimes does heal depression, for many people it will be a part of the struggle of our life's journey, perhaps even one of the burdens that we carry for life.

Getting Help for Depression

In the previous issue we looked at ways to seek help for depression including:

- (a) *See Our Doctor*
- (b) *Get Medication and/or Help from a Therapist*
- (c) *Pray, Pray and Then Pray Some More*

Then we began to look into happiness habits that we can undertake ourselves which can be of great benefit to us. We looked at focussing in our prayer time and also some simple suggestions on how to improve it.

In this issue we'll continue with this topic and looking into seeking counselling, focussing on facts rather than feelings and looking after ourselves.

- Part Two -

2. Seek Counselling

In the past, if we've experienced harmful or negative relationships, particularly in our childhood homes, or if we're currently in a difficult marriage or have friends or family that cause us stress and anxiety, we should seek counselling to try and work through the issues.

I've known several people who grew up in an unloving or harmful home environment, and as adults several struggled with developing healthy relationships. If we've grown up with unhealthy attitudes and behaviours towards others, we may not be able to clearly see them in ourselves.

It may take years for a trained counsellor or psychologist to help us break through and perceive how our thinking processes and our behaviours need to change, because in our mind they're perfectly normal – that's how we were taught to think and behave.

Without this insight, we are unlikely to change, and the more we continue with our unhealthy and even harmful behaviours, the more ingrained they will become.

Counselling can help us to put things into their proper perspectives and can enable us to learn appropriate and healthier behaviours in our adult



relationships, and particularly with our spouse and our children.

In any marriage that is troubled or where poor communication is an ongoing issue, both parties should seek counselling to improve their relationship.

There may be some local support groups we can attend where we can share our problems, eg Al-Anon if we're from a home with an alcoholic. Sometimes just knowing that there are other people who struggle with depression or who understand what we're going through, can help us to recognise that we don't have to do it on our own, and that our responses and behaviours are normal, and we aren't weird or unfixable.

One of the worst things about depression is that many people think they have to manage it on their own, perhaps because some see depression as a weakness and are afraid of being judged and looked down upon. From what I understand, this response is more common in men than it is with women, often because men have been taught to 'tough it out,' or not to talk about their feelings.

3. Focus on Facts – Not Feelings

Feelings can be wrong, but true facts cannot. If we find we're looking for the negative too often in our life, it can mislead our thoughts into feeling that things are hopeless or that nothing is good, and may lead us down the slippery slope into depression.

I remember going through a period like that many years ago, and one day I realised that I was losing my enjoyment and enthusiasm for life. There was nothing seriously wrong, but I had allowed my thoughts to become pessimistic which led to feeling negative.

I didn't like feeling that way, and so I made a conscious decision to focus on what was good and to try to let go of the negative.

Some people allow pessimism to control their lives, and whenever I've encountered someone like that, they've usually been a misery to be around.

If we're too critical of ourselves, we may allow ourselves to feel useless and that we have limited skills and abilities, or that we aren't very clever. Perhaps we compare ourselves to others, or are always too negative about our efforts, particularly when we make mistakes. Maybe we are highly critical of ourselves when things don't go right or even blame ourselves for other people's mistakes. Perhaps we exaggerate the size of our mistakes and blow them all out of

proportion. This is one way that we focus on our feelings and not the facts.

The fact is that yes, we all make mistakes, even those people who seem to have it all together. Yes, we may not be the cleverest person in the world nor have any wonderful talents, but that doesn't mean we can't learn. At my age (53) I'm still learning. When I look back over the past thirty years, I can see how much I've grown, not just as a Christian but in my talents and interpersonal skills. I've accepted that there are some things at which I'm never going to be particularly good, eg sports, book-keeping or growing geraniums, but I can improve if that's something that I really desire, though I'm realistic enough to know I'm never going to run a marathon. We don't have to aim to be the very best at something. We can learn new skills or develop old talents and learn to be content with our development.

How do we focus on facts and not feelings? Grab a pen and a pad and make three columns. On the left-hand side, write down all of the things about which we're feeling negative. Then in the middle column, write down as many positive things we can about the item on the left, and then in the right-hand column, note down how we may be able to fix it if we need to (see the table at the top of the right-hand column.)

When we focus on our feelings instead of the facts, situations can often appear 'unfixable,' or just too hard to deal with.

Writing it down helps to clarify the circumstances and can cement the facts, rather than the feelings, in our minds. This may provide us with ways to overcome the problem, or simply to improve the situation, or reduce our feelings of negativity. Perhaps it can enable us to change our mind-set which had been focussed on

Negative	Positive	Fix it
I hate my job	(a) I have a paying job which is better than trying to live on govt support; (b) Having a job lets put food on the table, pay bills & even save up a little money; (c) I can learn new skills & knowledge (d) I'm not stuck at home all day feeling bored; (e) Maybe one day I can afford to buy a car or a home of my own; (f) I can apply for a better job, even while I'm still working at a job I don't like. (g) Consider that if I get a new job, I may not enjoy it any more than my current job.	Write down the things I do enjoy at my job. Write down a list of my skills. Update my resume. Start looking on job websites and see what jobs are available - what kind of training can I do that employers are looking for? I can take some new courses paid by my employer, or study online. If I can improve my skills, I will be more employable, or maybe I can apply for a different job with my current employer.

the negative emotions, so that we can perceive and concentrate more on the good and positive things instead.

4. Look After Ourselves

(a) Keeping Busy

Keeping ourselves busy, both physically and mentally is an important part of keeping healthy, and helping to turn away depression. I'm not suggesting that 'busyness' for the sake of being busy is the aim, rather that our purpose is to work at developing our body, mind and spirit.

(b) Improving Our Relationship with God and With Others

If we are developing our understanding of God, and endeavouring to maintain a good relationship with Him, that is also good for us spiritually and can improve our emotional well-being.

Let's not be content with the status quo – if we actively seek to develop our understanding of God, of others and of ourselves, we can more fully develop as Christians – endeavouring to act as brothers and sisters who love as Jesus would have us love.

(c) Improve Our Knowledge and Understanding of the Bible

We can develop our minds and spirits with regular Bible study or



other Christian learning activities. There are many good websites where we can obtain free, daily Christian devotions, or even do online Christian courses.

Even at my age, I am more mindful than ever that I cannot be content to think that I know all of the answers. The day that I start thinking that, is the moment that my growth halts. Show me a Christian who thinks they know it all, and I'll show you a shrivelled up, hard-hearted, stunted human being who is useless to God, to others and to himself.

(d) Looking After Our Health

In the busyness of our lives, particularly when working, raising children and giving of our time and efforts to the church, the community and/or charities, it can be challenging to find the time or the energy to develop our own minds, spirits and bodies.

If we are to continue working well for God and to sustain our relationships and our well-being, we should make an effort to maintain our overall health, or eventually we'll run out of energy, physically, spiritually and/or mentally. If we work ourselves too hard, it's actually possible to wear ourselves out and sometimes, we may not ever be able to return fully to our previous energy and health levels.

I understand that it will be difficult, if not impossible for those who suffer from poor health to be physically active or to maintain a healthy body. It's important though that we take the proper medications, to regularly rest and eat well, and if at all possible, to attend occasional social activities.

(e) Keeping Up Our Social Skills

From my own experience, I know that it can be easy for us to lose our social skills if we rarely leave the home, and have little social interaction, it can encourage depression to take hold more easily.

For those suffering depression, especially anxiety and panic attacks, it

can be difficult to overcome our reluctance to leave the home and face people. The fear starts taking over, our heart begins to palpitate, and we may even feel physically ill.

Perhaps we can set a goal in the beginning, to get out of the house just once a month to attend a Bible study or social group. Once a month, say for one hour, that's just one hour in 744 hours. Then we can aim for two hours in the next month if possible, and so on.

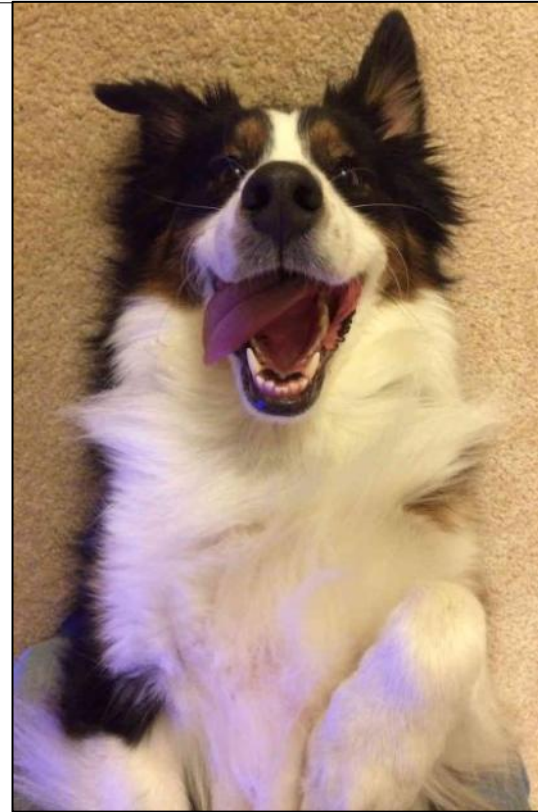
Remember it's not a competition – we don't have to push ourselves too hard, but we should push ourselves at least a little.

(f) The Little Things That Make Us Feel Good

When we're even mildly depressed, we can start getting slack with our appearance and our home environment. Sometimes it all just seems too hard and takes too much of our energy.

When we start going down that path, it can become more and more difficult to keep it under control, and it can contribute to a deepening of our depression, particularly if our home environment begins to look (and smell) like a pigsty.

- Keep up the good hygiene – bathe regularly, wash our hair and keep it trimmed;
- Wash our clothes, iron them and repair if necessary;
- Do the dishes every day and put them away. It's awful to have to get up every morning when we're already feeling down, to be faced with a sink full of dirty, yucky dishes;
- Make the bed every morning and change the sheets regularly. It may all seem too much, unless we break it down into how long it actually takes us. Thirty-seven seconds in our day to make the bed, really doesn't seem so hard;
- Keep our appointments with our counsellor or mental health worker;



- And so on

While these things seem obvious, they can sometimes be one of the first areas where we lose our focus. The more we let it go, the harder it will seem to even want to bother. Before we know it, we can be living in a such a messy and dirty environment that the task to fix it will just seem too overwhelming. We should get to it before it gets out of control.

Conclusion

This article developed into a much larger and wordier piece than I'd anticipated, but there are so many areas that contribute to our well-being which can discourage depression that it seemed appropriate to include as many as possible. I'm sure there are many other things we can do in our efforts to reduce our vulnerability to depression, but hopefully we've covered some of the more important ones.

We must remain mindful that God desires for us to be healthy in our bodies, minds and spirits, and to have a healthy and balanced self-image. There are behaviours and thought processes that are unhealthy for us to indulge, and which we should avoid.

I hope you will be encouraged to start these techniques in your life and your every day living, and to actively look at ways that will derail depression before it begins to take a hold, while at the same time ensuring that your first priority is your relationship with God above all others things.

In the next issue, we'll continue this subject and look at finding things to enjoy; and finding God's purpose for us. [END]

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Up Close and Personal With Aussie Wildlife

Australian Orb Weaver Spiders (Eriophora transmarina)

Not only are there a wide variety of types of the Australian Orb Weaver Spider (more than one hundred), they vary enormously in shape, size and colour, so much so that the average person may not realise that one is a cousin to another, which is demonstrated in the images on the right.

One thing they do share in appearance is a large abdomen which may have an irregular leaf-shaped pattern on the top. Some may have several white spots and even one or more stripes. The segments of their legs can range from dark red to reddish brown in colour. After moulting, the spider can sometimes have changed its colour so that it may blend in more easily with its background.

Another thing that the Australian

Orb Weaver spiders have in common is their complex, large webs which they make at night so they can

feed, often building in areas near lights or in between trees so they can more easily catch their prey.

In daylight they'll hide out near their webs, under bark, twigs or leaves or even under rocks. For humans that are not fond of spiders, the bad news is that they are often found around homes - but the good news is, they don't seek our company and will generally retreat if disturbed. They've even been known to drop to the ground and 'play dead,' when they think they're in serious danger.

They don't generally bite, but thankfully if they do it's not toxic, though there may be some swelling and a little pain for a couple of hours.

It's the female though that tends to be the scariest for humans, as they are bigger than the males, ranging between 20mm and 25mm in size, while the males are only between 15mm and 17mm. [END]

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What a Near Death Experience Taught Me

by Vicki Nunn

When I was in hospital after thyroid surgery in 1994, the doctor and staff were unaware that my parathyroids had stopped working due to the trauma of the surgery. These glands govern the calcium levels in one's body.

About 2am I woke up feeling quite strange as my calcium levels had bottomed out¹. I was in the ICU and let the nurses know I was experiencing tingling and quite painful tightening of my muscles and that the sensations were worsening.

They must have recognised what was happening, though nobody explained anything to me. Unfortunately the doctor had gone home hours before and there was no-one to provide proper treatment. The nurses dashed out of the room and left me alone in the semi-dark, as they frantically tried to contact the doctor from the nurses station.

In extreme cases (as with mine) the entire body goes into severe spasm as every muscle in the body contracts tighter and tighter¹. This means that both externally and internally, the throat and chest muscles tighten up,

which restricts air-flow and in extreme cases like mine, can lead to death.

I remember not being able to move as the muscles agonisingly stiffened more and more and I soon realised that I was having difficulty breathing.

Meantime the nurses were outside on the phone in the nurses station, trying to contact the doctor for approval for intravenous calcium to be administered. That meant that no-one was checking on me to see if I was in distress and I was unable to move or call out to them for help. It was a truly terrifying experience.

I discovered that the body's response to not getting enough air is enter into a state of utter panic, and there was absolutely nothing I could do about what was happening to me. It was a dreadful feeling - overwhelmed by panic, being powerless to move or call for help and not being able to get sufficient air.

It was then that I realised that I might just be dying. Throughout the entire experience I was completely lucid and conscious. Possibly five or ten minutes had passed by that time, and once I realised that perhaps I was



going to die, it was if my mind just came to terms with it, and the feeling of panic evaporated.

Somehow, I was still managing to get enough air through shallow breathing to stay alive, but I wasn't sure how long it would last.

I remember being disappointed, at the thought of dying because I still had so much that I wanted to do, as I was only thirty years old.

Once the disappointment passed, I grew excited upon realising that I was going to heaven! Woohoo! I immediately let go of my concerns about what I was leaving incomplete and basically called out to God in my mind, saying "I'm ready - let's go!"

At that instant I sensed someone standing at the foot of my bed, their hands resting on the rail near my feet.

Though I couldn't really see anyone in the half-light, I could still make out a kind of a vague outline of what appeared to be a male figure. I'm not sure who he was, but if he was an angel, he didn't seem to have any wings.

He spoke into my mind with words of reassurance that everything would be fine, and a feeling of peace and calm enveloped me. Then He said that I wasn't going to die because God still had a purpose for me, and that there were things yet for me to do.

Oh, the overwhelming and utter, crushing disappointment I felt when I realised that I wasn't going to heaven after all! Moments before my mind had been blazing with an intensity of excitement that I'd never experienced before, and I'd been ready to drop everything and go!

Just a few moments later, the nurses returned to the room and as



¹Hypocalcemia



they switched on the lights, the figure disappeared. They administered the calcium through my drip and I was finally able to breathe normally again as the excruciating pain of my stiffened muscles eased.

As much as I wanted to share with the nurses about my experience, I realised that they were unlikely to appreciate what had happened and were likely to simply dismiss it as a side effect or my imagination. The main reason though that I didn't share it with them, was that it was so intensely personal and such an incredible, supernatural experience that I was still feeling quite overcome and in awe of what had occurred.

How it Changed Me

The experience was so sobering and life-changing, that it affected the way I viewed my life as a Christian. Although before that time I'd usually tried to be obedient and do what God

asked me, the near-death experience really took my commitment to a new level.

I've never forgotten that He asked me to stay for a reason, and I've always tried to remain conscious about whether I was fulfilling the purpose for which God had asked me to remain behind.

Am I Fulfilling God's Purpose for Me?

After that time I continued working in children's ministry until physical restrictions led me to giving that up.

A few years after that, I became a radio presenter on the local Christian radio station for around eleven years. Additionally I began a Christian singles ministries that I co-ordinated for fifteen years. After a time, due to health issues amongst other things, I eventually gave those up.

Now I'm both journalist and editor of SPAG Magazine, a project which was instigated in 2015 after God's guidance for this new period of my life.

My next aim is to have two books edited and published and then complete the third book in the Christian series that I'm writing.

I hope this doesn't sound like I'm boasting - I certainly don't mean it to appear that way, but I can't help but wonder if I would have achieved all of that without that supernatural and near-death experience which compelled me to strive harder to complete the work to which God called me.

Conclusion

My experience is not something that I would wish upon anyone, and it has certainly placed me in a rather unusual position: I can never doubt about where I am going and that God is very, very real. I also know that He is a personal God, not a vague, uncaring entity who has just left the world to run on its own, but someone who genuinely cares about every individual one of us and has a plan for each of us, if only we would be

willing to let go of our fears and our pride and let God take control of our lives.

While I strive to obey God's lead, my obedience hasn't resulted in me living a wonderful life without any problems. Instead, part of my "package deal" as I call it, has been ongoing health issues, pain and physical restrictions. That means that I am no longer able to work in secure employment. While my financial situation has on occasion been quite dire, and trying to live on a disability pension is challenging, I know that God has my back. He has blessed me in many other ways and though there are still times when I struggle, I know that I'm exactly where God wants me to be.

How About You?

So how about you? Where is your focus? Is financial or job security high up on your priority list? Would you be willing to give them up if God asked you? Are you willing to drop your own personal goals if they clash with God's purpose for you?

Do you need to go through a near death experience to get your priorities right? I hope not!

May I encourage you to sincerely seek God's clarity and purpose for your life. Would you be willing to share with God about your fears, or if you have a struggle with letting go of what you think is important? Will you seek the Holy Spirit's guidance and open up your heart and your mind to wherever or whatever God wants for your life?

Be brave - take the risk - after all, God has already prepared everything in advance for you. Though it may mean a challenging experience or even facing terrible difficulties, are you willing to say "Yes," to God's plan and purpose for you?

While I can't guarantee any angelic visitors, I can promise that the outcome will be worth it, and the promised retirement plan is out of this world! [END]





'Bug Eye' Broadens Field of View

by David Catchpoole

Wanting to reduce the weight and size of night vision goggles worn by frontline troops, and also hoping to widen the field of view, engineers at BAE Systems looked to the eyes of the tiny parasitic fly *Xenos peckii* for inspiration.¹

Executive scientist Leslie Laycock explained that existing equipment only provides a 30-40° field of vision, severely limiting 'situational awareness' during night-time military operations.

"Most of the size and weight of a conventional lens is due to the glass - the actual optics," he said. "So, when we were thinking of ways to miniaturise the equipment, we looked at insects because they have tiny optics in their eyes, which provide high quality images. The compound

eyes of insects can often contain up to hundreds of thousands of tiny lenses. We didn't want to go to that level of complexity, but found the *Xenos peckii* with 50 larger lenses, which provided the high resolution and sensitivity that we required."

Each of the 50 separate lenses in each eye produces an individual image, which the insect's brain meshes together to form a single large panoramic image.

The researchers say they have managed to recreate this effect in a new imaging device, dubbed 'Bug Eye', which has nine lenses. Each lens is about the size of a mobile phone camera lens, arranged on a curved surface.

The new technology provides troops with a 60 degree field of view, almost doubling that of

previous helmet-mounted devices, and is both more compact and lightweight.

The Bug Eye system is also being applied in other areas too, e.g. providing missile tracking systems² with 120° field of vision (a dramatic improvement on the previous 0 degrees), and doing away with the 'black spots' of current

CCTV camera systems.

While it's nice that insect eye design has inspired a broadening of the field of view of soldiers on night missions, wouldn't it be even better if it inspires a broadening of people's worldview generally? I.e. that they might come to a right view that eyes in nature are of Designer origin, rather than (as is unfortunately taught currently in schools, universities and elsewhere) of an evolutionary origin.

Nobody in their right mind would defraud the inventors of the night vision technology by denying them credit for their handiwork, or even their existence. How much more credit than is due to the One who designed the eyes that inspired them in the first place?

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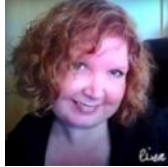
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Ministering to those
with Chronic Illness

by Lisa Copen



When you have begged God for healing, have you ever wondered why it didn't occur when you were asking, seeking, and knocking furiously? Lisa shares.

"Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; the one who seeks finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened"

Matthew 7:7-8 [NIV]

This verse is likely not unfamiliar to you, although it may be one which stirs uncomfortable emotions if you have asked for healing and it has not occurred

We have asked... we have sought... and we have knocked. We've begged God for healing, looked at our sins in detail to seek the cause of our pain. Has anyone else tried to "kick the door down," perhaps even leaving fingernail marks as you slid down it?

In "Commentary Critical" it explains how God is assuring us - through the desires we have - that He is there to meet our needs.

We ask for what we wish for.

We seek for that which we miss.

We knock when we feel shut out.

By applying this insight and the request for healing, I can see layers of God's assurance.

"I know you wish for healing, my child. I know the pain is intense.

You miss the carefree feeling of a life without pain and suffering. You miss the confidence of being able to make plans and be assured they will come to fruition. I understand how you miss serving those you love -especially me.

I hear your knock. I hear your desire to be let back into the life you once led. I see the grief and the tears as you knock continuously on that door to your previous life.

I am right here beside you. I am not on the other side of the door, waiting for you to earn your way back through so that we can be together. I will never leave you. I know the plans I have for your life."

Too often we quickly apply our own preconceptions to the words ask, seek, and knock.

We pray for our desires (quick relief of pain).

We seek by looking into ourselves, rather than seeking God.

We knock by begging, repeatedly for God to fulfil our wishes to feel normal again, rather than looking for Him right where we are.

We must believe that God wants to give us the desires of our heart—even when it feels like He is denying our prayers.

Prayer: Father, only You know the desperation of my prayers for relief from the pain. I trust that You hear them—and that You answer them. The answers come in ways I am blind to at times, however. Open my eyes to see You as my loving Father who hears all my desires—what I wish for, what I seek, and wants to be included in ways I feel left out of. Give me peace that I am not unheard and that Your blessings will far outweigh even the requests that I offer. Amen."

Does God Hear My Prayers for Healing?

When you consider that you are 'knocking' because you feel shut out of something, what is the first thing that comes to mind? When you pray for something (think of a specific request) what kinds of ways do you feel shut out? [END]



Song: "A Mother's Prayer" is a song by Rachel Aldous. She wrote the song about how she prayed for her little girl who lives with a disabling chronic condition - and how she was healed! I know many of us have prayed for healing and it has not come in the way we expected. It is okay to ask. Follow God's prompting on your heart. I hope the videos blesses you.

-Lisa

This link is about the song:
www.youtube.com/watch?v=Zt8vA4nW1ck&feature=youtu.be

Following is the link to the song itself and how the singer prayed for her daughter's healing - and how God answered those prayers:
www.youtube.com/watch?v=re5EIUIXbhc&feature=youtu.be

About the author:

Lisa Copen is the founder of Rest Ministries. As this was posted this she was preparing for her 7 hour chemo-medication infusion on the following day - which is always followed by a couple of weeks of awful side effects, and then she has her second dose. Just prior to this, God placed her in the position of homeschooling her son. She tried to rejoice rather than cry, and clung to the fact that God is faithful as she collected information and started networking with other moms.

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The God Who Sees me

by Vicki Nunn

Introduction

"You are the God who sees me..."

Genesis 16:13b [NLT]

In Genesis chapter 16 we read about Hagar who obeyed her mistress Sarai and conceived a child by her master, Abram. Suddenly Hagar the lowly Egyptian servant who had been someone of no consequence, was somebody important - she was to be the mother of her Master's only child.

On learning of her pregnancy, Hagar grew arrogant towards the barren Sarai. The situation went to Hagar's head and she allowed her pride to overwhelm her. While we may not agree with Hagar's reaction, it is understandably, a very human response.

Sarai would not allow such disrespect from her servant, and reacted by treating Hagar so appallingly that the servant fled into the wilderness. (Abram had removed himself from the argument between the two women, by advising Sarai to respond as she saw fit.)

Sarai's mistreatment must have been truly terrible for Hagar to leave the security of her home while she was pregnant, and then attempt to survive in the hostile wilderness with no ready source of shelter, food, water or security.

While she was there, alone and struggling, Hagar likely would have felt absolutely distraught and realised that she had nowhere to go. She'd hit rock-bottom and may have been wondering if she was going to die.

I imagine she was probably crying in desperation as she realised the hopelessness of her predicament. What thoughts went through her mind? Perhaps she was considering her actions and had come to recognise how proud and inappropriate her behaviour had been towards Sarai.

Realising that she'd be treated badly again if she chose to return to her mistress, her desperation was almost palpable.

God's angel found her beside the only source of water, and Hagar understood, possibly for the first time in her life, that God was real and that He cared.

In chapter 16 we read:

"The angel of the Lord found Hagar beside a spring of water in the wilderness, along the road to Shur. The angel said to her, 'Hagar, Sarai's servant, where have you come from, and where are you going?'"

"I'm running away from my mistress, Sarai," she replied.

The angel of the Lord said to her, 'Return to your mistress, and submit to her authority.' Then he added, 'I will give you more descendants than you can count.'

And the angel also said, 'You are now pregnant and will give birth to a son. You are to name him Ishmael (which means 'God hears'), for the Lord has heard your cry of distress.

...Thereafter, Hagar used another name to refer to the Lord, who had spoken to her. She said, 'You are the God who sees me.' She also said, 'Have I truly seen the One who sees me?'"*

...So Hagar gave Abram a son, and Abram named him Ishmael. Abram was eighty-six years old when Ishmael was born." [NLT]

"You are the God who sees me," she said.

Perhaps her face lit up in wonder as she recognised, *"He sees me - an unimportant Egyptian servant. He sent a message to me!"*

She'd likely have heard Abram and Sarai talking about God on various occasions, and may have assumed that their God was the same as all of the uncaring Egyptian gods



Sarai presenting Hagar to Abram

she'd grown up with. God proved her wrong by showing her compassion.

Perhaps Hagar didn't know that she had been made in His image, and that every single person is important to Him. She discovered not only that God loved her, but He wasn't some impersonal, distant Being, but someone who involved Himself in the lives of the people He created.

But this wasn't the only time that God spoke to Hagar. Several years later after Isaac was born, Sarai (now Sarah) saw Hagar's son Ishmael making fun of her son Isaac and demanded that Abram (now Abraham) send both Hagar and Ishmael away. Although he was very unhappy about sending his son away, Abraham was reassured by God that a great nation would come from him (Genesis chapter 21:14-21), and he accepted and trusted that God would look after the child:

"So Abraham got up early the next morning, prepared food and a container of water, and strapped them on Hagar's shoulders. Then he sent her away with their son, and she wandered aimlessly in the wilderness of Beersheba.

When the water was gone, she put the boy in the shade of a bush. Then she went and sat down by herself about a hundred yards away. 'I don't want to watch the boy die,' she said, as she burst into tears.

But God heard the boy crying, and the angel of God called to Hagar from heaven, 'Hagar, what's wrong? Do not be afraid! God has heard the boy crying as he lies there. Go to him and comfort him, for I will make a great nation from his descendants.'

Then God opened Hagar's eyes, and she saw a well full of water. She quickly filled her water container and gave the boy a drink.

And God was with the boy as he grew up in the wilderness. He became a skilful archer, and he settled in the wilderness of Paran." [NLT]

Imagine Hagar's thoughts the second time she was in the wilderness. Perhaps she thought "Oh no, not again! What will become of us? Are we going to die?"

Soon her hope began to fade when their water ran out and it seemed that all was lost. It was almost as if God was pushing Hagar to her absolute limits so that she would remember Him and call out to Him for help.

I wonder why she remained silent. We know that she hadn't forgotten God for earlier in chapter 16 it said, *"thereafter, Hagar used another name to refer to the Lord, who had spoken to her."*

Was Hagar angry with God for allowing it to happen again? Perhaps she felt the terrible injustice of Abraham and Sarah's rejection and thought that God was unfairly punishing her and her son.

How often do we react in a similar kind of way when things don't go as they should, especially when we are treated unjustly?

My Story

Whenever we have struggles, wherever we strive to overcome sin or

personal problems, we can become so focussed on the situation or the struggle that we may find it difficult to rest in God and to trust that He has everything under control.

From personal experience I understand how we can become so swallowed up by a difficult situation. After a serious injury at a former workplace, I suffered excruciating pain. While the surgery to reattach two shoulder tendons a month later was mostly successful, I still suffered agonising pain which affected my sleep and work and lead to mild depression.

My depression deepened when some workmates continually suggested that I'd made the whole thing up or that I was faking my pain and disability. This added to my stress and increased my depression.

During that time, I prayed and read God's word, but I was in such physical, emotional and mental pain that it affected every area of my life. I cried out to God to ease my suffering but it seemed that God was silent. I never doubted that He was still there, but to me it felt like God was adding to my punishment by remaining silent. I cried out for help and said, "I trust you Lord, even though I can't see a way out of this situation. You know my needs."

When workmates began bullying me and deliberately made negative

comments about me to others within earshot, I was filled with emotional pain and anger at their betrayal. I sought help from a psychologist who, rather than helping me, told me that I was *imagining* their poor behaviour simply because I was in pain. Several months passed before my physical pain slowly began to ease a little, but my depression deepened as the bullying increased, particularly as I clung to the psychologist's suggestion that I was simply over-reacting and the bullying was all in my head.

Though I continued trusting God, He continued remaining silent.

After ten months, their harassment became so bad, that I had to take stress leave from my place of employment where I'd worked for 14 years. There was no support from management, and from what I know now, some senior staff may actually have encouraged the awful bullying behaviour in the subordinate staff.

After His months of silence, God spoke to me – strangely enough, He spoke to me through a joke.

I was talking to a good friend about my workplace and about the chief bully who'd encouraged other staff to treat me poorly. At that moment, the foster child I had in my care asked me a question. He was completing a crossword and couldn't figure out the answer.

"What's the word for 'the sound of an ass,'" he asked.

I burst into laughter when I recognised that God was telling me something about the nature of the chief bully.

"Bray," I replied. "The sound of an ass is bray."

God was telling me that the person was of no consequence as they were simply the empty braying of an ass, and that they themselves were simply an ass!

Sarai sent pregnant Hagar away





The angel comes to Hagar in the desert.

But there was another reason that I'd found it so humorous - there was also a link between the answer and that person's name.

Unfortunately, my depression continued, and within several months, while still on stress leave, I was fired. Then my foster child's behaviour worsened and soon left home. I suffered panic attacks and it became difficult for me to leave my home.

One by one I dropped activities and limited my social activities because I couldn't cope.

As a consequence of my physical and psychological injury and subsequent inability to work, I soon found myself in a dire financial situation, and was in danger of

losing my home. From month to month, I wondered where I was going to find enough money to pay my home-loan and insurance and still live on \$50 a week for everything else. It came to a head when my rates were due and I had no money to pay the several thousand dollars required.

"Lord, I trust you that somehow I'll get enough money," I said. "I'm leaving this in your hands because this situation is so far out of my reach to manage, that it's ridiculous."

Once again, God was silent.

My financial situation worsened, but then at last, money came through - just enough to pay the rates and just in the nick of time!

The stress of the situation along with my deteriorating health deepened my depression. This went on for another year and then I eventually had to sell my house and move to a new town 400km away because it was the only place where I could afford to live and cope with the repayments of a cheaper home. The move away from the support of family and friends added to my depression. It felt like I'd been exiled and punished for something that I didn't do.

Then slowly, things began to improve.

It took just over six years before I was able to come to terms with what had happened, even though because of my poor health, I now have to live on a disability pension. I've been able

to forgive the bullies, and in a way, to forgive God for allowing me to go through such an awful time.

Then house-prices came down back home where my friends and family were, and I recognised that I could finally return after my exile.

At last it felt like I could rest. Although there are still some lingering psychological and emotional issues, I trust that God will help me to work through them.

As I was coming towards the end of that period, God reminded me of the law that He'd set in place for the Israelites regarding their fields (Leviticus 25:3-5). On the seventh year, the land was to remain fallow and untouched so that it could rest and regain its vigour.

In a way, this was similar to my own situation - in my seventh year, I could rest and regain my strength.

The God Who Sees Me

When we are going through terrible trials; when we are tempted by sin or about to make another dumb choice, rather than struggling with the situation, is it possible for us to turn our focus to God; on the fact that despite our repeated failures or ongoing difficult situations - God's love for us doesn't falter?

We may not always sense His presence, and sometimes all we can do is hold on for the gut-wrenching roller-coaster ride, but we are reassured time and time again in the Bible, that His love for us remains unchanged. Psalm 139 verses 1 to 18 wonderfully reminds us how well God knows and cares for us:

"O Eternal One, You have explored my heart and know exactly who I am; You even know the small details like when I take a seat and when I stand up again. Even when I am far away, You know what I'm thinking.

You observe my wanderings and my sleeping, my waking and my dreaming, and You know everything I do in more detail than even I know.

You know what I'm going to say long before I say it. It is true, Eternal One, that You know everything and everyone.

You have surrounded me on every side, behind me and before me, and You have placed Your hand gently on my shoulder.

It is the most amazing feeling to know how deeply You know me, inside and out; the realisation of it is so great that I cannot comprehend it.

Can I go anywhere apart from Your Spirit? Is there anywhere I can go to escape Your watchful presence? If I go up into heaven, You are there. If I make my bed in the realm of the dead, You are there. If I ride on the wings of morning, if I make my home in the most isolated part of the ocean, even then You will be there to guide me; Your right hand will embrace me, for You are always there.

Even if I am afraid and think to myself, "There is no doubt that the darkness will swallow me, the light around me will soon be turned to night," You can see in the dark, for it is not dark to Your eyes. For You the night is just as bright as the day. Darkness and light are the same to Your eyes.

For You shaped me, inside and out. You knitted me together in my mother's womb long before I took my first breath. I will offer You my grateful heart, for I am Your unique creation, filled with wonder and awe. You have approached even the smallest details with excellence; Your works are wonderful; I carry this knowledge deep within my soul.

You see all things; nothing about me was hidden from You. As I took shape in secret, carefully crafted in the heart of the earth before I was born from its womb. You see all things; You saw me growing, changing in my mother's womb; every detail of my life was already written in Your book; You established the length of my life before I ever tasted the sweetness of it.

Hagar and Ishmael in the desert, before the angel appeared.



Your thoughts and plans are treasures to me, O God! I cherish each and every one of them! How grand in scope! How many in number! If I could count each one of them, they would be more than all the grains of sand on earth. Their number is inconceivable!

Even when I wake up, I am still near to You." [VOICE]

Conclusion

When it seems that our world is falling apart, and even when it feels like God is keeping His distance, we can hold fast to His promise that He doesn't love us any less because of our failures or our circumstances.

- His love is big enough for you;

- His strength is big enough for you;
- His plans include you;
- His eyes are upon you - He sees you - You are precious to Him!

Remember:

"He is the God who sees me."
[END]

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Good Grief: How to Discourage a Suffering Friend



by Vaneetha
Rendall Risner

What's the Best Way to Discourage a Suffering Friend?

I can tell you what I've done.

I've told suffering friends about how other people are going through more painful trials. I've given examples of how brave, godly and optimistic these other people are. I've freely doled out advice, even mini-sermons, about how their horrible situations will turn out for the best.

I wasn't trying to be discouraging. I was trying to help. Surprisingly, my advice didn't help at all. My words just added to their pain.

I know, because I've been on the receiving end of that kind of 'help' as well.

That 'help' has cut deeply. It has left me feeling judged and misunderstood in the midst of my struggle. It has made my burden

heavier. It has made me feel lonely and isolated, unsure of whom to trust.

So when my friend Jane is told her circumstances aren't that bad and she needs to trust God more, I feel bad for her. She has been dealing with a difficult situation for years, and it is getting worse. When she says she's being compared to others, I understand her pain. I've been there before. But when she tells me that I am the person she's being compared to, I am mortified.

I feel like I've just added to her burden. That's a horrible thing for a friend to do. Jane feels like she's surrounded by Job's comforters, who went on and on, speaking about things they did not know or understand.

As Job said, *"I have heard all this before. What miserable comforters you are! Won't you ever stop blowing hot air? What makes you keep on talking? I could say the same things if you were in my place. I could spout off criticism and shake my head at you. But if it were me, I would encourage you. I would try to take away your grief."* (Job 16:2-5 NLT).

Job wanted his comforters to stop talking, to stop blowing hot air, to stop criticizing and judging. He longed for them to listen, to encourage him, and to think about what he needed in his grief.

I've been like Job's friends more often than I care to remember, and I've been in Job's place too. I've been a miserable comforter and I've received miserable comfort.

What I've Learned

Here is what I've learned from both sides of the fence:

When I'm in agony, I don't want trite comments. When someone tells me to count my blessings; my plight could be worse; there are starving orphans in Africa who have a much harder situation, I want to scream. Of course, these things are all true. But at that moment, they feel

"When people minimize my struggle, it magnifies my pain. I feel judged and misunderstood."

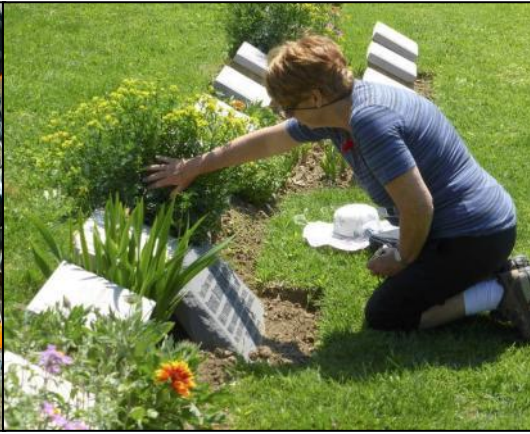
irrelevant.

Pat answers sound sermonising. Saying that all things work together for good for those who love God is absolutely true, but it feels hollow at a funeral, besides, unsolicited advice is criticism.

It's hard to be compared to the seemingly perfect Christians in the world, who appear to face every trial with smiles on their faces, and who never seem to get discouraged.

True, I may not be healing as fast as they have. Perhaps they are trusting God more than I am, maybe their situations are harder than mine, but when people minimize my struggle, it magnifies my pain. I feel judged and misunderstood. It also makes





me want to explain my miseries in excruciating detail, to get corroboration that my situation is difficult.

The fact is, I don't always handle my trials well. I'm broken - a work in progress. I don't like having things unravel.

I can take some suggestions, but I'm fragile. I need encouragement to balance out any advice, and mostly I need grace. It's hard to present a perfect, put-together self when life is crushing me.

I know Jane's friends meant well. We all do. We don't want our friends to be overwhelmed, held captive to their struggles. We don't want them to be defined by their trials. We want them to learn from their mistakes and find joy in the present.

Those are worthy goals, but we cannot presume that our mere words will bring them about. Transforming our suffering is the work of the Holy Spirit and not the product of good advice. Our main work is to pray.

How Should We Treat Our Suffering Friends?

What does being a friend to someone in need even look like? What should we say to our neighbours who are struggling?

From my experience, the most comforting thing we can do is to sit and say nothing. When Job's friends first saw him:

"...they sat with him on the ground, seven days and seven nights, and no one spoke a word to him, for they saw that his suffering was very great." Job 2:13 [NLT]

Job's friends should have finished the way they began.

Having someone listen as I pour out my heart has helped me more than any words ever have. I just want someone to be there, to weep with me; to say they are sorry that things are so hard; to not expect me to have perfect theology; and to let me rant. What an amazing gift it is not to feel judged by every word I utter in desperation.

We need to remember there is mystery in suffering - we don't understand the ways of God. Job's friends thought they did, which was why they blamed Job for his plight. There are no easy answers in grief.

It's easy to discourage a struggling friend - trust me, I know.

But I'm challenging you, me, all of us, to put down our expectations of our suffering friends, not try to 'fix' them, or bludgeon them with our theology.

Instead, let's sit with our friends; cry with them; and support them as they grieve. They need grace to heal.

Remember, we don't need to be a saviour for our suffering friends. They already have One... and so do we. [END]

About the Author:

Vaneetha Risner writes and speaks about finding joy in the midst of suffering. She and her husband Joel live in Raleigh, North Carolina, USA. Vaneetha blogs at www.danceintherain.com and recently published a book with Desiring God entitled "The Scars that have Shaped Me: How God Meets Us in Suffering."

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Words of Wisdom

Faith is the vision of the heart; it sees God in the dark as well as in the day.

Anonymous

Modern Missionaries: David Collins - Living the Dream



by David
Collins
Solomon Islands

Introduction

Since moving to the Solomon Islands one year ago, a few friends of mine have applauded me on living the dream. Perhaps some imagine me boating around the islands, fishing, snorkelling in pristine waters teeming with fish and coral. It's a tough life, but someone has to do it!

Eventually, I catch myself in my musings, remembering the fact that no matter where we live on this beautiful planet we all share, this life we now know will one day be the dream that we once had. We will wake up from this brief nap we've taken called 'the here and now,' and we'll find ourselves experiencing a brand new day; the eternity otherwise described as the hope of the believer.

Trying to Live the Dream in the Here and Now

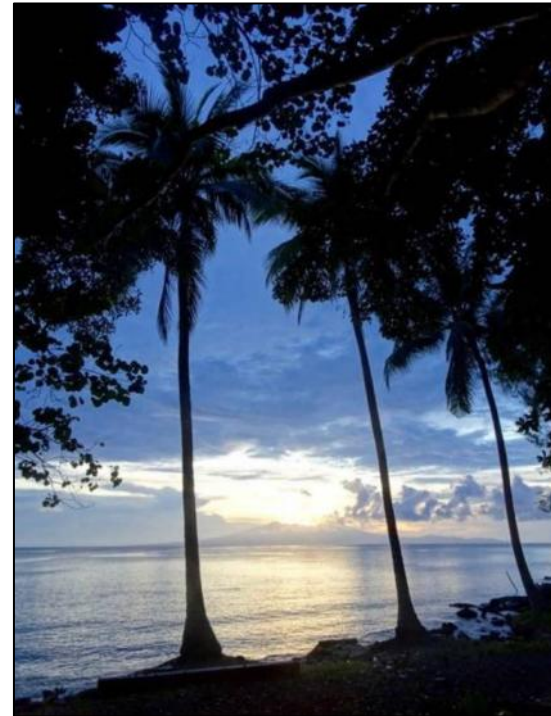
To me, it seems too many of us seek to find in this life that which we will only know in the next. Yes, we might catch glimpses of glory when we've fallen in love or witnessed the birth of a child. We may have been fortunate enough to do lots of travelling to far away places, which has been a large part of my experience, or we may have reached some pinnacle of power and achievement, wealth and prestige. Some of this may have even caught us by surprise and we feel blessed with our journey.

Yet, every day of our lives we're also confronted by the reality of evil. We see it in ourselves in our lurking sinful nature. We witness the actions of other people and shudder at the cruelty and violence of some, and all of us suffer duress experiencing the effects of the curse upon the rest of our created world: physical weakness and mental infirmity lead to deficiency in our efforts, while natural disasters bring destruction from which we cannot escape.

I'm very aware of all of this, living in the poorest country in the Pacific Region, where earthquakes abound and sea-storms claim the lives of travellers almost every week. While beauty confronts me wherever I look, I also see the effects of suffering and shame, not just in a material deprivation, but in the way people miss out because of a lack of opportunity and systemic oppression. This is the very reason why I'm willing to live with the hardships involved with residing in a foreign country: the need in the Solomons is great, but we can best guide others to grace by intimately sharing our lives and demonstrating the power of God at work in our own.

Doing What We Can Wherever We Are

Still, there's one thing we can all do wherever we are, and that is to make our life count. While we live for eternity, eternity can also live on in the lives of the people our lives touch. It's like the ripple effect of a stone falling into a pond: the immediate effect may be



great, but the long-term result can be greater, as our influence spreads out and touches others in an ever-widening circle.

This has nothing to do with fame - experiencing fame in one's lifetime often serves to destroy the person involved. It's far better instead that we direct other people's attention to Jesus: to let

others see Him, not you. It doesn't matter who does the work, as long as God gets the glory.

Conclusion

But there are some things at least that only we can and will ever do for other people, so let's not waste what we have on self-pity and indulgence. While we continue breathing we can still give, at least in small ways. In so doing we will experience blessing as we realise the ways in which God can actually use us and in the fact that He's not finished with us yet.

There's an old saying that goes like this:

"Only one life, soon it will pass. Only what's done for Christ will last."

May we all live to hear these words: *"Well done, good and faithful servant!"* [END]

Biography:

David is a 50 year old single man, who's been an Australian pastor for most of his adult life. He was seconded to the Wesleyan Methodist Church of Solomon Islands, to assist them with establishing their new ministry training centre. In this role he's been developing curriculum,

equipping and mobilising staff, creating sound administrative and financial systems and working towards doing himself out of a job as he gives others responsibility to take on these same roles, first with him and eventually instead of him.



Competition: Win a \$60 Voucher!

Until the end of October 2017, SPAG Magazine is offering our Australian readers the chance to go into the draw to win a \$60 voucher to spend in our online store!

All you need to do is make a purchase from our store totalling \$20 or more in one transaction before the end of October 2017, and you'll automatically go into the draw. This can include donations, gift vouchers etc.

Ensure you provide **all** of your details including a phone number and an email address, when you submit your order.

Please note: the competition is only available for purchasers with an Australian address.

Why only Australia? We have looked into expanding our shop so that we can post items overseas, but the costs involved as well as the difficulties in setting it up to sell overseas can't be justified, particularly since we are a very small team and simply don't have the funds to pay an IT person to set this up for us, eg there are issues with paying taxes when posting to certain countries, plus setting up paperwork for Australian

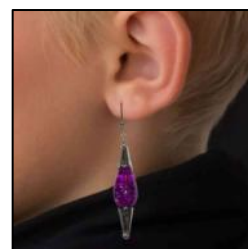
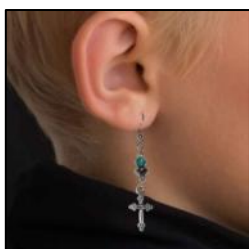
taxes, and myriad other problems.

So What's Available to Buy? Below are some examples of what's available in our online store, just to whet your appetite. We have a great selection of earrings, some keyrings, pendants and previous issues of SPAG, as well as a gorgeous, inspirational e-book. Not all items are Christian based, but I'm sure you'll find something you like either for yourself or someone you care about. We also have gift vouchers available to purchase:

www.spagmag.com/product-category/jewellery-other-christian-items/



Simple Faith keyring; Christian charms keyring; Armour of God keyring. Solid cross pendant Three styles of owl earrings



Earrings: little cross; red three drop quirky; Celtic knot in yellow; red wheat five drop; purple lava lamp style; red seven drop fan
Note: the majority of the glass beads are Swarovski crystal (except for the purple lava lamp style shown here). In certain earrings styles you can choose your preferred colour. Hooks are stainless steel, which means they're far less likely to cause a reaction, and sterling silver hooks are available to purchase.

30 Minutes To Leave Mosul

OpenDoors®

by Open Doors
Australia &
New Zealand

This story first
appeared on Open
Doors Blog
(www.opendoorsblog.org)

It was a hot afternoon in Mosul. When Amer turned on his mobile phone, it seemed to explode with messages and missed calls.*

"Haven't you heard? You are a Christian. If you don't leave Mosul by 12 midday you will be killed unless you convert."

Amer's heart raced. It was 11.30 am.

It was June 2014 in Mosul, Amer's hometown. Islamic State, then known as ISIS, had swiftly taken over his city. Christian houses were marked with an 'N' for Nasrani – meaning Christian, and scores of Christians left the city right away.

Thankfully Amer's wife and four children were away on holidays when Islamic State conquered the city, and were safe.

Amer hadn't left right away, he had experienced this before and wasn't easily scared away. He grew up in Mosul and had noticed the tension increase. He was used to it.

"It wasn't the buildings that changed, nothing you could see," recalls Amer, "What changed was what lived in people's hearts. Everyone was influenced by the constant wars. Around me I heard Christians being threatened to convert [to Islam] or leave Mosul. This was long before 2014."

What Amer didn't realise was the scale of these threats had increased in just a matter of days. He had missed the advertisement that was put on every mosque –

calling Christians to convert, pay a high tax (known as jizya) or be killed. He didn't see any of the announcements on TV.

His phone was off, so he missed all the calls that came in on his mobile phone. He nearly missed the chance to get out alive.

Amer had to make a choice, and he only had thirty minutes. He quickly read the messages on his phone. 'Convert to Islam, pay a tax or be killed' the messages said. His Christian friends had warned him that paying the tax wasn't a realistic option. It's convert, or be killed.

Amer didn't need long to think about his decision. "I don't believe in Islam and I would never say I do. I am a Christian and I'd rather leave my house to terrorists than lie about my faith."

There was just one option: one option and thirty minutes to do it – he left everything behind and fled the city for his life.

In the most nerve-racking thirty minutes of his life. Amer grabbed some documents, money and his mobile phone, jumped in his car and started the engine with shaking hands.

"I was afraid, yes certainly. But it was a huge relief that my family was already out, that they were safe. The only thing I had to do was make sure that they didn't lose their husband and father."

During the ride out of the city, Amer's mind kept spinning with thoughts, "A friend had told me that the fighters at the checkpoints had become crueler by the day, taking everything from the refugees. They even took their cars and made them walk in the burning hot sun to the next Kurdish city."



Cars were driving on both sides of the road – about ten lanes of cars were overflowing.



This was taken about 6am on 10 June 2014. The Christian who took the photo had left at midnight and still hadn't passed the first checkpoint.



Displaced people from Mosul/Nineveh Plains sought shelter under a highway near Dohuk, northern Iraq



Over 1,000 displaced people receive dinner every night at this church, partly sponsored by Open Doors.



Displaced Christians sleeping in the yard of a church in Erbil, northern Iraq



Amer playing piano in his new music shop

Approaching the checkpoint Amer made up his mind. He was alone. He could take risks. They had his house, his shop. He would not let his car be taken as well by these monsters. Knowing the Mosul area inside out, he took the bumpy and dusty roads leading around the checkpoint.

How he managed, he doesn't know, but Amer didn't see any Islamic State fighters on his way. He didn't pass an Islamic State checkpoint. With his heart beating in his chest, his car still with him, he arrived in the next Kurdish city. He had made it! His kids still had a father, his wife still had a husband. "God saved me. He is the one who led me through safely."

Amer is now rebuilding his life in a city in the Kurdish region of northern Iraq. He was reunited with his wife and four children and received food packages from Open Doors' partner. He received a loan to open a music shop in his new city. [END]

*Name changed for security purposes.

You can give hope to Christians like Amer by giving to Open Doors' Iraq Appeal: through their website:

<https://secure.opendoors.org.au/donations>

Please pray for Amer and other Christians currently displaced in Iraq.

- Pray that they would continue trusting God even in the uncertainty.
- Pray that those who forced Christians to leave including Islamic State as groups earlier than them, would come to know Jesus as Lord. Pray for God's justice to be done.

You can sign up to receive regular prayer emails:

www.opendoors.org.au/

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Words of Wisdom

Be strong and brave, and don't tremble in fear of them, because the Eternal your God is going with you. He'll never fail you or abandon you!

Deuteronomy 31:6 [VOICE]

Organisation Promotion



*Single?
Christian?
Looking for
fun, friend-
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For more information, contact the Director, Rev Steve Mitchell who has a real pastor's heart for singles:

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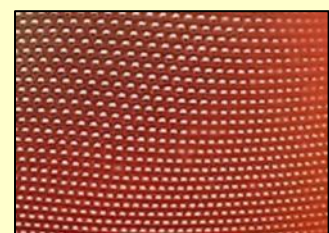
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What is it?

Can you identify the item in this photo close up?

Answer on page 66.





by Tim Everton

Press Service
International
Columnist

Pornography: it's a hidden, dirty and shameful thing most of the time, but ten to one you began reading this article for the title alone.

Pornography production and consumption has exploded these last few decades, these last few years especially thanks to the ever increasing high speed internet connection and phone capabilities allowing us to be plugged into porn anytime and anywhere we choose.

The pornographic industry in the US alone has annual revenue upwards of three billion dollars and is increasing every year. Astounding statistics in regards to pornographic addiction and the subsequent side effects of its use can be found on newly founded websites such as Covenant Eyes,

Nofap and Fight the New Drug.

The shame of addiction

I myself know what it is like to suffer from a pornographic addiction. I know the guilt, shame and regret it brings along with it. I know how it affects and somehow infects almost every area of life. I can understand how it can drive people to suicide, and in some cases, actually has.

I was tired of the empty promises of porn. I was sick of the cycle of guilt, shame and isolation. I was sick of the horrible mental, physical and antisocial effects. I knew it was wrong, that it was bad for me in every way; but that didn't stop it taking control. Once the chain reaction of temptation begins, it can be almost impossible to stop.

My year without porn

After years of going through my own struggles and battles, and after lots of personal research, I have this year started a challenge for those of you who want to kick

this habit once and for all.

My Year Without Porn is an accountability support group with the goal of actively attacking (and hopefully defeating) this addiction for the period of a whole year (and hopefully, beyond).

Medical and scientific research is now revealing that pornographic use/addiction is both psychologically and physiologically similar to heroin or cocaine use, due to the strength of its addictive nature and the way it hijacks the brain's reward pathways and chemical makeup.

Extended exposure to pornography floods the brain with ever increasing levels of dopamine (the brain's feel-good chemical.) Having a continual flow of dopamine, the brain then reduces the amount of dopamine receptors due to the overload - so to maintain the same level of sexual arousal, the user needs an ever-increasing amount of variety, hard core content, and novelty to maintain the same 'high' they once gained from viewing pornography. So the downward spiral continues, increasing the guilt, shame and isolation.

Can pornography get you high?

Absolutely - pornography is a virtual drug with no outward symptoms. It can be accessed from almost anywhere and has the same damaging effects to the brain as many street drugs.

I plan to continue writing about my journey and exposing the truth of this issue, but for now I want to talk directly to you. If you are sick of porn and fed up with what it is





doing to your mind, your family, your spouse, your spiritual walk, and your integrity - I ask you to join me in this challenge.

Will some of us fail? Probably, but that is no reason not to start. Accountability, support, and planning methods to help conquer addiction will help us stay on track.

'A man is not an island', the old saying goes and I believe true and lasting freedom can occur in the context of a loving and supportive community. Nothing good grows in the dark or in the cold, but if we step out into the light whatever is hidden can be dealt with.

Can you be free? Yes, I believe so. This is about saying 'enough!' Enough excuses, enough using porn to escape and medicate our pain or our problems, enough warping and polluting our minds. Enough of objectifying and dehumanising women.

Take up the challenge

If you would like to take up this challenge, if you would like to step out of the darkness, out of the shadows of shame, and into a community where others will be there to support and guide you,

then please take the challenge with us.

You deserve it, your family deserves it, your wife or partner, or future partner deserves it, your kids or future kids deserve it... the world deserves it. They all deserve YOU to be the best version of yourself that you can be, the person you were born to be... And that person is one who is clean, clear and in control of his life and his choices.

There is hope, there is freedom, and there is the life you want available for the taking...

Take the challenge with me - you can start at any time.

Our Facebook page, 'My Year Without Porn: MYWOP Challenge 2017' will feature updates, encouragement and info to help guide and support you in your journey.

Please click the link here to find out more.

I have also created a closed group for those who want to discuss their struggles in a more private setting named: 'MYWOP Challenge'. To join this group please ask via the main page. [END]

Biography:

Tim Everton is a youth worker and designer from the beautiful Southern Coast of South Australia. In his off-time he pursues graphic design, photography, the beach (and its various forms of enjoyment) and seeking out his next best cafe latte.

Tim Everton's previous articles may be viewed at: www.pressserviceinternational.org/tim-everton.html

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www.christiantoday.com.au/article/my.year.without.porn/21025.htm, accessed 12/02/17



Suggestions for Electronic Daily Devotions:

Adults:

- www.worthydevotions.com
- www.crosswalk.com/devotionals/encouragement
- www.insight.org/resources/devotionals

Women:

- www.joycemeyer.org/Articles/Devotional.aspx
- www.crosswalk.com/devotionals/girlfriends
- www.justbetweenus.org/dailydevotionsforchristianwomen

Men:

- www.biblegateway.com/devotionals/mens-devotional-bible
- www.powertochange.com/blogs/experience/devotional
- www.crosswalk.com/devotionals/harvestdaily

Seniors:

- www.crosswalk.com/devotionals/seniors
- www.lightsource.com/devotionals/daily-living-for-seniors
- www.christianity.com/devotionals/daily-living-for-seniors
- www.hope-fulldevos.com

NB: these links are provided as a suggested resource only. Provision of these in no way suggests that SPAG Magazine endorses these sites or their products, or other materials connected with them, nor does SPAG Magazine vouch for the content or security on these sites.



by Vicki Nunn

Introduction

For many years, the city of Toowoomba in Queensland has been known for its annual Carnival of Flowers festival, but from 2016 it also wanted a new title: "A City Free From Porn," and it encourages other communities in other cities and towns to take up the challenge as well.

In October 2016, more than two hundred people met together to discuss the frightening effects of pornography, its impact on marriage and in particular its impact on our younger generations. Speakers included Mayor Paul Antonio, and social activist John Minz from Toowoomba Together. Other speakers included young men who had their lives negatively impacted by porn and women whose marriages were destroyed by it.

Supporters were asked to take a pledge:

"I acknowledge that viewing pornography promotes exploitation of women and violence against women and it damages families. I commit that I won't view porn and I will help create a city free from porn."

Toowoomba's mayor Paul Antonio said, "No-one could doubt that

A City Free From Porn

pornography is one of the elements of violence within the family. Many young ladies have had horrific experiences with porn and there is no doubt it has the characteristics of an addiction."

A group called the Toowoomba City Women began around ten years ago with the aim of bringing churches together to support and protect girls and women by providing residences for unwed mothers and support through their summer camp programs. Its founder, Letitia Shelton is one of the people behind this new tactic to encourage the whole community to become involved.

How is Porn Addictive?

When our brains find an experience that we enjoy, it activates neurons which release chemicals that strengthen different connections in our brain. The more often we have that experience, the stronger the connection becomes.

With pornography, our brain reacts to it by making a connection with pleasure, and the more we watch it, the stronger those connections become. Unfortunately it becomes addictive because it takes more and more porn to stimulate that pleasure and to keep those connections strong. As with many addictions, it begins to consume more and more of our thoughts and our lives until it becomes such a need within our brains, that we cannot switch it off.

Thankfully, the addiction can be overcome. Research indicates that those strong connections in our brains will become weaker and weaker, the more we resist the temptation. The need for porn will eventually weaken, and down the track those connections will fade away.

How much better for each of us though, if that addiction had never begun.



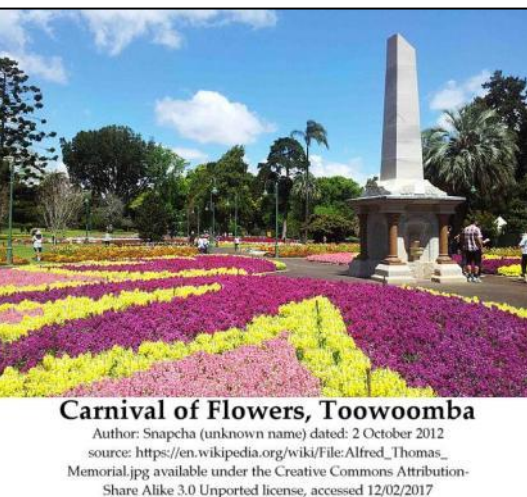
Pornography has Become a Public Health Crisis

In January 2017, South Dakota senators (USA) unanimously passed a resolution that stated pornography had become a public health crisis. This was based on a report by the National Center on Sexual Exploitation. With more than twenty major studies being undertaken since 2009, the irrefutable conclusion is that pornography damages the body and the brain, and has led to an increase in sexual violence in our community.

Pornography impacts the way that we view sex and particularly the way we view women. It consistently tells its viewers that women want to be raped or physically abused when it comes to sex, and even encourages the lie that rapists are unable to control their urge to rape. It also encourages males to believe that when a woman says no to sex, they actually mean yes, or if they wear a short skirt or skimpy clothing, they're just 'asking for it.'

Sexual Objectification Linked to Violence Towards Females

According to research undertaken by psychologists at the University of Kent in the UK, there is a direct link between aggression towards females and the sexual objectification of girls. They discovered that the more males objectify females, the more they acted aggressively towards them, and viewed them only as sexual objects, ie as bodies for sexual use by males. The study also made a connection



Carnival of Flowers, Toowoomba

Author: Snapcha (unknown name) dated: 2 October 2012
source: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Alfred_Thomas_Memorial.jpg available under the Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 3.0 Unported license, accessed 12/02/2017

between violent video games, and sexualised media poses, with aggression towards girls.

While not every person who views porn will show this aggression, it's clear that porn isn't harmless and that for many it affects how they view sexuality, the human body and girls.

Consider also that another study showed that convicted rapists use the same language as men's magazines to describe females. The University of Surrey's Dr Peter Hegarty said,

"There is a fundamental concern that the content of such magazines normalizes the treatment of women as sexual objects. We are not killjoys or prudes who think that there should be no sexual information and media for young people. But are teenage boys and young men best prepared for fulfilling love and sex when they normalize views about women that are disturbingly close to those mirrored in the language of sexual offenders?"

Is Pornography Violent?

An earlier study of popular porn videos discovered that in 304 scenes, there were around 267 acts of physical violence (88%), 149 instances of verbal aggression (49%), with 289 instances where the victim responded with either pleasure or neutrally. Disturbingly, 286 of the victims shown were females (94%).

The overriding message that arises from pornography is that women like to be raped, forced into sex, and also being beaten up. It's not surprising that another study indicated that the more a person was exposed to violent porn, the more likely they were to rape. Even viewing non-violent porn can lead to increased coercion to have sex or to use alcohol and drugs to persuade women to have sex.

Does Porn Lead to Domestic Violence?

Not every instance of domestic violence arises out of the use of pornography, but pornography has led to an increase in domestic violence, according to welfare

workers at the Gold Coast Centre Against Sexual Violence.

At a meeting in late 2016, information was shared about the increasing levels of violence against women who were forced into sex, and then physically abused, with many victims seeking treatment at emergency rooms at local hospitals.

Centre director Di McLeod said, "What used to be an uncommon story is now very much an everyday story involving women of varied ages and diverse backgrounds."

In the past five years there was a 56% increase in referrals from public hospital emergency departments.

The welfare workers claim that some who view pornography don't understand that there is a difference between reality and fantasy, and they believe that women are "up for it 24-7."

Conclusion

With children as young as eleven viewing pornography on a regular basis, including pornographic rape and sexual violence, this is a horrifying situation that needs to be addressed. As individuals and particularly as a community, we need to do more to stop the damage being done.

New generations of children are growing into damaged teenagers and adults who cannot function well in relationships, and no longer know how to think and act appropriately towards others, particularly women.

While the porn industry continues to find a willing audience to whom it can sell its 'products,' it will never stop. All it takes is one individual in one community to stand up and make a difference - to help their local community understand the dangers of porn, and encourage others to personally become involved. If



communities across Australia and across the world would take a stand, perhaps we'll be able to save our society from self-destructing in the long-term. [END]

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What's the Problem With Porn?

Collective Shout Responds to Common Pro-Porn Arguments

*** Warning: Explicit Content ***



by Caitlin Roper

Collective Shout
This article was posted
on the Collective Shout
website on 23/01/17,
and can be found via
this link.

Introduction

When it comes to pornography, there is no shortage of opinions. We've compiled responses to some of the more common arguments from defenders of the porn industry.

"Porn is Just Fantasy, it Isn't Real"

Porn is not merely a fantasy. Fantasy occurs in the mind. A scene featuring a woman being choked could not have been produced without an actual woman being choked in front of the camera, for the enjoyment of male viewers. When acts of sexual violence and cruelty are carried out on the bodies of real life women, this ceases to be fantasy and instead becomes reality.

It is worth noting also that many common sexual acts in pornography are violent in nature, acts that women report as painful or degrading and that they do not enjoy - and further, acts that men do not expect them to enjoy.

Surely this must lead us to question why it is that cruelty, humiliation and sexualised aggression by men against women is a fantasy? Why is this dehumanising treatment of women sexually exciting for male consumers?

As Robert Jensen wrote, *"Men get something very concrete from pornography: they get orgasms... But it comes at a cost, and the cost is our own humanity."*

"Sure, Some Porn is Bad, but Don't Demonise the Whole Industry"

Sometimes supporters of the pornography industry will argue that its critics are merely cherry-picking the worst and most extreme content. However, our focus is on mainstream porn, which in recent

years has become more violent than ever before. Researcher Rebecca Whisnant noted¹, *"In today's mainstream pornography, aggression against women is the rule rather than the exception...[it is] so prevalent it would be hard for a regular consumer to avoid it."*

Mainstream pornography promotes male dominance and female subordination, with women frequently being referred to as bitches, whores, sluts and 'cumdumpsters'. It is strikingly sexist and racist.

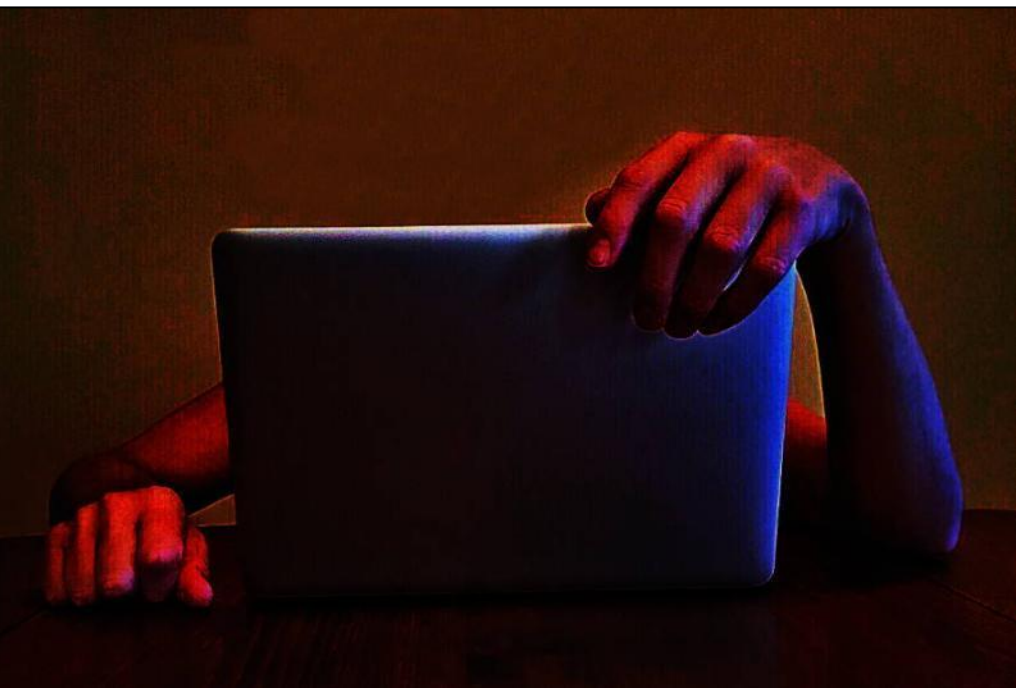
In any other medium, similar racist stereotypes would be met with outrage, but in porn, it is accepted.

A 2010 content analysis² of the best-selling and best-renting pornographic videos available in the USA found that verbal and physical aggression against women was rampant, with physical aggression occurring in eighty-eight percent of scenes, with ninety-four percent of physical and verbal aggression directed towards women.

One need look no further than the pornography industry's own statistics at Adult Video News to see the best-selling pornographic films including sexualised violence against women, misogyny, incest, racism and pseudo-child pornography titles.

"Women Use Porn, Too"

While research indicates³ that males are more likely to view pornography for sexual excitement and masturbation than females, and while the vast majority of porn is made for a heterosexual male





market, some women view pornography also.

On ABC, psychologist Laura McNally pointed out⁴, *"Indeed, some women enjoy porn. Most people take pleasure in habits that are ultimately harmful, like alcohol, tobacco, or drugs. Women don't have a special moral imperative to only support industries that serve a purpose for feminism."*

Some women participate in activities and industries that are sexist or harmful to women as a whole. That some women participate does not change the reality that sexualised violence against women in pornography impacts the status of women in general, both in its production and consumption by men.

Many more women, however, speak about the damaging impacts of pornography, from the negative impacts on their intimate relationships and marriages and pressure to appear and act in accordance with a certain pornified aesthetic.

Indeed, pornography has been named as a factor in the rise of practices⁵ such as brazilian waxing and cosmetic surgery, including labiaplasties, as women and girls compare their vulvas to those of women in pornography.

Doctors report treating girls as young as twelve with sex related injuries⁶, inspired by porn, and women and girls report pressure to submit to unwanted and degrading sex acts that pornography has normalised.

(Read the experiences of young women reporting coercion and pressure to submit to porn-inspired sex acts by male partners⁷.)

Women are harmed in both the production and consumption of pornography.

The porn industry harms men and boys in different ways. As the pornography industry aggressively targets potential viewers including children, men and boys are increasingly struggling to control their pornography consumption.

Mainstream pornography provides distorted messages about men, women, relationships and sexuality, undermining healthy sexual development and a sense of connection in relationships.

Male porn performers are often muscular with large penises, leaving men and boys feeling inadequate. Pornography use can lead to shame and self-loathing for many men and boys, more of which are beginning to speak openly about the impact on both their mental health and their perception of women (see here and here).

Men and boys who use pornography often report experiencing difficulty in intimate relations. After habitually masturbating to pornography on a screen, some men have trouble becoming aroused while engaging in real life sexual encounters and may report a lack of sexual attraction to female partners. This may include participating in sex acts with their partner but needing to think about scenes from pornography in order to maintain arousal and function sexually.

"You are Policing/Shaming/Dictating What Consenting Adults Can Do"

We are engaging in critical analysis of an industry that exploits and dehumanises women and girls for profit. This can include asking questions about why male porn users find pleasure in the consumption of violence or the subordination and humiliation of another person.

It is worth addressing the notion of 'consenting adults', keeping in mind that many of the staple sex acts in mainstream pornography are violent, degrading and acts that most women do not find pleasurable.

Many common acts in porn are designed to inflict maximum physical damage to the woman. Indeed, based on promotional material for popular porno-graphic movies on the AVN website, it would appear that the damage done to women's bodies can be a significant drawcard for male consumers.

"It is Up to Parents to Prevent Their Children Accessing Porn"

While parents certainly need to take an active role, having age

"Pornography is to sex what McDonalds is to food. A plasticised, generic version of the real thing."



appropriate conversations with their children and learning about online safety, it has become near impossible for parents to prevent their children being exposed to pornographic imagery and messages due to advances in technology and the increasingly pornified public space.

Young people are faced with pornographic magazines in supermarkets, petrol stations and newsagencies, hyper-sexualised music videos, soft porn outdoor advertising and mainstream popular culture in general.

The advertising industry in Australia regulates itself, frequently dismissing complaints about porn-inspired advertising including strip clubs and Sexpo outside schools, ruling such content is not inappropriate for children.

Many children stumble across porn online even by accident, others are exposed to hardcore porn at friends' houses, or even at school. Some experts believe the average age of first exposure to pornography is 11. Gone are the days when porn was difficult to access - now it is impossible to avoid. Unfortunately, not all parents

are willing or able to take appropriate measures to prevent their children from being exposed to pornography.

We believe all children have the right to a childhood free from pornography, and that the Government and regulatory bodies must implement strategies to uphold the interests of all children.

"You're Just Anti-sex"

Proponents of the porn industry often frame criticism of the porn industry as an opposition to sex. This is a disingenuous tactic, conflating the sexualised abuse of women in pornography with sex as if they were the same thing.

Porn industry defenders argue those critical of exploitation in the industry are just repressed, closed minded and uptight about sex, as if participating in or profiting from the sexual exploitation of women is progressive.

If porn is supposed to represent freedom, then whose freedom does it represent? Freedom for the women reduced to a series of holes for men to brutalise? For people of colour, who are subjected to racist stereotypes and fetishised? It would appear that this 'freedom' is limited

to men who profit from or consume porn, men who find sexual gratification in seeing women demeaned and abused. This is the freedom supporters of the porn industry are fighting for.

Anti-porn campaigners recognise that pornography is the commodification of human sexuality. It is produced by an industry concerned not with liberation or authentic sexuality, but maximising profits. As Professor of Sociology and author Gail Dines argued. *"Pornography is to sex what McDonalds is to food. A plasticised, generic version of the real thing."*

Campaigners against pornography acknowledge the industry harms women, children and men, that is has negative impacts on sexuality, sexual performance, relationships and mental health, and that it hinders healthy sexual relationships, intimacy and human connection. As Dr Dines said, *"You can't be pro-porn and pro-sex. You have to pick one."*⁸

Some people mistakenly believe that pornography is simply imagery of naked bodies, or consenting adults having sex. The reality is quite different, with mainstream porn routinely communicating messages about power between men and women, sexualising male dominance and aggression and the subjugation of women. Instead of making love, Dr Gail Dines suggested mainstream pornography is about men 'making hate' to women.

This is not sex, it is sexual exploitation. As a Collective Shout friend says, *"Comparing porn to sex is like hitting someone in the head with a frying pan and calling it cooking."*

Statements made by pornographers make it clear that female pleasure is not their goal, rather, female punishment⁹.

"Female Porn Performers Choose to Work in the Sex Industry"

As sex trade survivor Rachel Moran said, *"The concept of choice is rooted in the privilege of a genuine alternative. When I think of my choices, they were simply these: have men on and inside you, or continue to suffer homelessness and hunger. Take your pick. Make your 'choice'."*

Some women enter the industry willingly. In *"Getting Off: Pornography and the End of Masculinity,"* anti-porn activist Robert Jensen argued, *"Their choice is free, in the sense that no one is threatening them with direct harm if they choose differently, but it is not made under conditions of complete freedom, given their limited power in the system."*

Many industry survivors, however, argue that rather than being a choice, it was a lack of choices that lead to their entering the sex industry, with economic hardship being a significant underlying factor for many of them.

Other women described histories of childhood sexual abuse, and how such abuse groomed and prepared them for the sex trade- having taught them their bodies were not their own, but for men to use and enjoy - and to dissociate during the abuse, which was a useful skill in enduring ongoing paid abuse by sex buyers.

Other women believe they chose to enter the industry, but did so without a full understanding of what they had agreed to, or agreed to certain conditions which were violated and felt powerless to object, such as performers for torture porn site Kink¹⁰:

'...Models became afraid that voicing concerns meant risking their jobs. "You're in a position where if you don't follow along, you're going to lose shoots," [Alexander] explains.



'Bottoms agrees that the fear of losing work is legitimate. "Blacklisting happens," she says. "It can be unsafe to be a whistleblower."

Aaliyah Avatari, who formerly performed under the name Nikki Blue and famously lost her virginity during a live Kink broadcast in January 2011, says she was blacklisted after the controversial performance. *"They're very picky and choosy," she claims. "If a model whines too much, they won't work with her anymore."*

"It took me months to heal after I lost my virginity," she claims. "I had to have vaginal reconstructive surgery. There was no compensation for that. Honestly, I was lucky I had insurance at the time."

Proponents of the sex industry often claim that women choose to work in pornography and prostitution, that rather than exploitation, this is an issue of women's bodily autonomy. Not surprisingly, they are reluctant to discuss the choices of men who create a demand for the abuse of women in the industry.

"Porn Can Play a Positive Role in Sex Education"

Given the easy accessibility of online pornography and a lack of other suitable sexual education alternatives, porn has come to function as one of the primary form of sex education for young people.

However, porn is a very poor educational tool, *"a distortion of respect-based sexuality"* according to Dr Abigail Bray and Melinda Tankard Reist, co-editors of *"Big Porn Inc: Exposing the harms of the global pornography industry."*¹¹

Mainstream porn fails to promote safe sex, consent, respect or mutual pleasure. Rather, it presents males as dominant and sexually aggressive, who are entitled to use women's bodies in any way they wish. Women are portrayed as sexual objects who never say no and enjoy painful, degrading and cruel sexual practices.

Porn gives young men unrealistic expectations in relating sexually to women. A fifteen year old boy described how porn set him up for failure in 2014 resource *"In The Picture"*¹²:

"The first time I had sex, because I'd watched so much porn, I thought all chicks want this, all chicks dig this done



to them, ...so I tried all this stuff and it ended up bad."

Dr Michael Flood argued¹³ that porn is 'sexist education', with pornography influ-encing young people's acceptance of both "sexist and stereotypical constructions of gender and sexuality" and "sexually objectifying understandings of and behaviours towards girls and women."

"If pornography made us healthy, we'd be healthy by now," Dr Mary Anne Layden.

"The problem is kids accessing material that is intended for adults"

"Women in Porn Like it"

It can be uncomfortable for regular consumers of porn to acknowledge their role in perpetuating the exploitation of women in porno-graphy. It is therefore not surprising that it may be preferable to believe women in the industry enjoy painful, degrading and humiliating sex acts, rather than to recognise they are finding sexual enjoyment in the abusive treatment of women.

Bridges' 2010 study¹⁴ found that when aggressed against, ninety-five percent of targets responded either with expressions of pleasure or neutrally. This doesn't mean that

acts of violence such as choking or slapping are pleasurable, but it does reinforce what women in the sex industry know - that their jobs rely on giving the impression they enjoy acts of aggression enacted against them.

There is certainly no shortage of accounts from current and former porn performers as to the violence, STIs and trauma they endured in the sex industry. Is there any other industry in which such treatment of workers would be permitted?

(Read accounts of violence, abuse and trauma from porn performers here.¹⁵)

"Feminist Porn' or 'Ethical Porn' is the Solution"

We reject the notion that women can be objectified, their bodies and sexuality commodified in a good way, a way that is ethical.

The porn industry is built on sexual violence, cruelty, humiliation and brutalisation of women, in short, human suffering. The answer is not then to improve the conditions of such an industry, but to abolish it.

The vast majority of porn eroticises inequality and men's violence against women. So-called

ethical or feminist porn is statistically irrelevant - for all the discussion around the need for ethical porn, it is not ethical porn that people are watching, not feminist porn that keeps the nearly \$200b industry turning.

Neuroscientist Ogi Olgas said on feminist pornography¹⁶:

"What is fascinating is that women commonly promote the idea of feminist porn and socially want to believe in it. Activists argue that there needs to be more of it, women support it in public... But when it comes down to it, that is just not what they are interested in looking at."

Even if we were to accept that ethical or feminist pornography exists, the content is often indistinguishable from mainstream porn.

In a critique of the work of the work of Tristan Taormino¹⁷, a so-called 'feminist pornographer', it was noted that depictions of violence against women, such as gagging, choking, slapping or misogynist name-calling were still prevalent. *"Either it is ethical and honourable to 'play with' and promote dynamics of humiliation and violence that terrorise, maim and kill women daily, or it is not,"* concluded the report¹⁷.

Australian researcher Dr Meagan Tyler told ABC¹⁸ the notion of ethical porn was nothing more than a selling point from the industry:

"The claims about ethical porn, at this point in time, are more industry propaganda than anything else, and are - what would elsewhere be rightly recognised as - corporate whitewashing."

"It's for a small segment of consumers who would like to think that their pornography consumption is unproblematic and they would like to think that what they are doing is totally different from what others are doing"

when, in reality, it all feeds the same commercial sex industry.

"If there are consumers out there really concerned about the conditions of performers, I'd suggest not using pornography." [END]

Biography:

Caitlin Roper is an activist, mother of three and Campaigns Manager at Collective Shout: for a world free of exploitation.

Further Reading:

"Growing Up in Pornland: Girls Have Had It with Porn-Conditioned Boys" Melinda Tankard Reist Collective Shout submission "Harm being done to Australian children through access to pornography on the internet"

"Porn stars speak out," Collective Shout

Watch: Porn Harms Kids 2016 Symposium Presentations

Read more stories from former porn performers at Shelley Lubben's website.

"Mindy's story: Creating Porn Stars and Destroying Lives:" A letter to FTND from an Ex-Porn Producer

"They Shoot Porn Stars Don't They?" Susannah Breslin (Warning- contains distressing content and pornographic imagery)

For help with a porn addiction, go to the Guilty Pleasure website.

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Words of Wisdom

*Do not be dismayed by
the brokenness of the world.
All things can be mended.
Not with time, as they say,
but with intention.*

So go.

*Love intentionally,
extravagantly,
unconditionally.*

*The broken world waits
in darkness for the
light that is you.*

L.R. Knost

Jerusalem Journal



ירושלים יומן

Census and a Celestial Sign



by Abel Lissnar

September 28BC

The Census

***New**

As my first assignment with Jerusalem Journal, I've been asked to talk to my fellow Israelites as they return to the home of their forefathers, to participate in the census which, as you know, Caesar Augustus has decreed for the entire Roman world. This has proven rather challenging with the great distances required, but thankfully I have the use of a good horse, otherwise my sandals would soon have been worn out.

So far I've spoken with a farmer from Masada, a Rabbi in Qumran, a shopkeeper in Beersheba, and a tax collector from Hebron and I've arrived in Bethlehem on my way home to Jerusalem. It was late in the day when I reached this small town, and too late to travel on.

This little town is bustling with new arrivals and I just managed to get the last room, which unfortunately is in a rather dingy establishment. I couldn't even identify the food they served us for our evening meal.

A Strange Sign

The noise level has been ridiculous with music and singing from most of the inns, and it was this that drove me out into the streets late in the evening because I was unable to sleep. It was about four hours or so after sunset and I noticed people were gathering together, staring towards the east, and speaking in hushed tones.

Before long, the music and singing stopped and more people began to spill out of the doorways into the streets, until there was barely room to turn around.

At first I assumed that perhaps some high Roman official and his entourage had ridden into town, but instead it was a completely natural, though remarkably strange-looking phenomena in the sky: it was an enormous star, unlike anything that I've ever seen before, and I could almost swear that its rays seem to be shining down upon this little hick town.

"What is it?" I asked an older gentleman standing nearby.

"I don't know," he whispered, barely glancing at me. "Perhaps it's a sign from God."

"A sign of what?" I asked, "And why here? Bethlehem is the back-end of Israel with nothing going for it, except perhaps for a few mangy sheep."

"Yes," he replied, staring fixedly at the bright light, "But isn't there a prophecy about it, about Bethlehem I mean?"

I cast my mind back to some of my early lessons in the Torah as a child, but recalled that I'd had little interest in our people's history, let alone the crazy rantings of some nut-job prophet from centuries before.

"What prophecy?" I asked turning back to him, but he'd already disappeared into the crowd. Despite the fact that there were so many people, it was oddly quiet, with just whispered conversations.

I overheard a middle-aged couple talking and the wife said, "Do you think it's a sign from God, warning the Romans to leave Israel?"

"No, God's forgotten all about us!" the husband replied with a touch of anger in his voice. "Maybe it's one of the Roman gods having a bit of fun at our expense."

Everybody I spoke to seemed to have a different opinion about the star, some suggesting that it was the sign of a great tragedy about to befall either Israel or the Romans, but nobody seemed to agree.

After a time, when nothing else appeared to be happening, and the star hung unmoving in the same spot in the sky, people began to return to their rooms to sleep.

I was on my way back when I decided to stop in at the stables next to the inn, to ensure my horse was being properly cared for, as I was keen to return home first thing in the morning.

To my surprise, the place was crowded with people as well as animals, and the smell of sweaty, unwashed bodies mixed with animal dung and old hay, was not a good combination.

Just as I was about to turn to leave, a scrawny man about my father's age, grabbed me by the arm and shoved his face close to mine.

"Did you see?" he asked excitedly.

"The star?" I asked absently. I couldn't understand why there were so many people inside the stable, and why they weren't outside looking at the bright sky.

"The child!" he exclaimed with a toothless smile.

Glancing across to the far corner, I noticed a young woman, sitting on some hay with a new-born baby in her arms. Her husband stood protectively next to her.

"Ok, so there's a baby," I replied as I shrugged my shoulders. "Big deal. Women have babies all the time. Anyway, what are the rest of you doing here? Who are you guys?"

"Shepherds," he replied.

"That explains the smell," I thought.

"Did you hear? Did you see?" he added eagerly.

"The big star in the sky?" I asked slowly as if talking to a backward child.

"Yes! It's because of the Messiah!" he exclaimed, shaking my arm.

As I shook his hand free, I sarcastically replied, "Next thing you'll be telling me that you saw a bunch of angels in the heavens, singing to you about the Messiah being born in a stable in this dinky little town."

"How did you know?" he asked, his face creased into a delighted grin. "Come! Come in and see the child - the Messiah!"

Shaking my head, I left the shelter and made my way back to the inn.

It's a well-known fact that shepherds spend far too much time on their own with just stupid sheep for company. It's little wonder then that a man of his age had finally lost his marbles.

Conclusion

Tomorrow I return home to Jerusalem where thank the gods, I'll meet very few shepherds in my career as a journalist.

I look forward to a hot bath so I can rid myself of the smell of sheep dung, animal food and crazy shepherds. [END]



The Impacts of Redefining Marriage in Australia



by Sophie York
Marriage Alliance

Introduction

Those who push for same-sex marriage often argue that the redefinition of marriage will not affect anyone except members of the LGBT community who want to get married.

Tiernan Brady, Executive Director of Australia's "Equality Campaign" and architect of a similar movement in Ireland is fond of saying that *"all that happened was that nobody lost anything and one small group of people in society - our lesbian and gay friends and family members - were allowed to get married."*

Despite Mr Brady's promises, and the promises of many like him, we know that in countries where the definition of marriage has been changed to include same-sex couples, it has had an impact upon ordinary men, women and children throughout society.

Even without the evidence, it is common sense that this would be the case, because changing any law has intended and unintended consequences, and changing the marriage law is no different. Indeed, we can expect that changing laws around

Marriage Alliance

the institution upon which our communities are built will have dramatic consequences, and that is exactly what we are seeing.

Senate Committee Inquiry

At a Senate Committee inquiry in January, same-sex marriage advocates unanimously asked the Senate Committee to reject any protection for religious freedom or freedom of conscience if same-sex marriage was legalised.

As part of their response to the inquiry, two advocacy groups, Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays (PFLAG) and just.equal jointly commissioned the largest survey of LGBTI Australians ever performed. The results were overwhelming:

- more than ninety percent of respondents did not want a civil celebrant or military chaplain to be able to decline to celebrate a same-sex wedding;
- more than ninety percent wanted the law to coerce bakers, photographers, florists and other wedding service providers to provide goods and services for weddings;
- the same proportion also did not want the ability for a venue to refuse to hold a same-sex wedding, even if it was owned by a religious organisation, meaning that they believe faith-based schools should be required to host same-sex weddings in their chapels and halls;
- alarmingly, 59 per cent of respondents do not even believe that ministers of religion should be given protection which would allow them to refuse to celebrate a same-sex wedding.



>90%	All civil celebrants and military chaplains should be required to perform same-sex wedding
>90%	All wedding service providers should be required to provide goods and services
>90%	All venues should be required to hold same-sex weddings
59%	All ministers of religion should be required to perform same-sex weddings

Impacts Overseas

This is hardly the 'live and let live' culture which is promised by same-sex marriage advocates. They ignore the fact that in Australia, we have never forced Jewish caterers to provide pork, or Seventh Day Adventist outlets to provide alcohol, nor required doctors to euthanase.

There are numerous examples. Why the sudden necessity for coercion? Isn't a belief in traditional marriage a reasonable dispensation?

We should not be surprised for a moment, because we have seen these restrictions on religious freedom occur overseas.

In the United States, cake shop owners Aaron and Melissa Klein eventually had to close their business after being made to pay US\$135,000 for their refusal to provide a cake for a same-sex wedding.





Another baker who refused was forced to provide staff training on LGBTI issues and file quarterly compliance report.

Similar stories have been repeated for florists, bakers and reception venue owners.

The restrictions do not only affect those in wedding-related businesses, but in other areas as well.

A UK student was dismissed from his studies towards a social work degree at Sheffield University after he expressed his views about same-sex marriage on his personal Facebook page.

Law graduates from Canada's Trinity Western University are not permitted to practise their profession in the province of Ontario, after its law society ruled that the students' signing of a personal pledge to refrain from all sexual activity outside of heterosexual marriage rendered them unfit to be lawyers. This story particularly strikes me, because it has nothing to do with the quality of the law degree!

Impacts on Education

Continuing to speak personally, what alarms me now - as a mother and aunt of school-aged children - is the dramatic effect the redefinition of marriage has had on the education of children.

After the law has been changed to declare that homosexual and heterosexual marriage is 'equal,' sex education has similarly been changed to present all forms of sexual activity as equal.

In countries where the law has changed, sex education is now much more complex than the 'birds and the bees.'

Reasonable and age-appropriate explanations about 'where babies come from,' given with a sensible moral and biological framework, are being replaced by sex education relating to sexual technique and exploration, an approach which removes childhood innocence, and creates confusion.

The Canadian Supreme Court declared that there is a 'right' for kids being raised by same sex parents to see their own family structures families given 'equal recognition and respect' in learning materials.

All schools, including religious schools, are being forced to teach a sex education curriculum which introduces homosexuality in Year Three and explicit details of homosexual sexual activity in Year Seven. At the end of last year, a court ruled that a parent had no right to remove his children from such classes because to do so would go against the 'value' of tolerance.

This is what we can expect to happen if marriage is redefined in Australia. There are already indications of this with the Safe Schools program, which exposes our children to radical gender ideology.

The creator of Safe Schools, Roz Ward, has said previously that, despite the program being marketed as an anti-bullying initiative, it was actually about 'gender and sexual diversity.'

Schools are not required to obtain parental consent to introduce the program or even to notify them that it is being brought into their child's school.

It is having frightening effects: in 2009, the year before Safe Schools was introduced in Victoria, six children sought help for gender dysphoria from Victoria's Royal Children's Hospital. Last year, the same hospital estimated that it treated 250 children for gender dysphoria.

I do not believe that the more than forty-fold increase in gender dysphoria cases for children is a coincidence, but rather the result of introducing dangerous and unscientific ideas to children, in pursuit of political ideologies.

But this is what happens when we decide that gender is not relevant to marriage; we decide it is not relevant in any area of life.

Impact on Birth Registration

If we return to Canada for a moment, the new All Families Are Equal Act requires that birth registries no longer refer to 'mother' or 'father,' but use the generic term 'parent' instead.

To accommodate the increased use of surrogacy and other reproductive technologies used by same-sex couples looking to start a family, up to four 'parents' are eligible to be listed on a child's birth certificate.

In Canada, birth certificates are no longer the primary identity document for the child born, but another government-endorsed affirmation of the emotional relationship of adults.

Again, we are already seeing preparatory signs of this in Australia, with birth certificates in the Australian Capital Territory and New South Wales providing the



option for any combination of two mothers, fathers or non-gendered 'parents' on birth certificates.

LGBTI Seeks to Silence Non-conformists

It is important that we keep ourselves informed about these and other consequences of the redefinition of marriage, especially given that those who wish to push this change through Parliament, are seeking to silence us.

You may remember that the Catholic Archbishop Julian Porteous of Hobart and with him, every Catholic Bishop in Australia, was told that he had a case to answer before the Tasmanian Anti-Discrimination Commission for issuing a pastoral letter to parishes and parents of children in Catholic schools on the topic of marriage.

The silencing is something Marriage Alliance has experienced ourselves, firstly with several television and radio stations refusing to run our advertisements, and then being asked to move an event we had planned at the Mercure Hotel, Sydney Airport, because of **threats** received by the staff following a concerted campaign from LGBTI activists to shut down the event.

Uphold and Protect Marriage

In these times, we need to stand together so that our voices will be heard. The team at Marriage Alliance are committed to being a

voice for all of those who seek to uphold and protect marriage. If you would like to find out more, receive our updates, or join our campaign, please visit us at:

www.marriagealliance.com.au.

About Marriage Alliance

Sophie York is the National spokeswoman for Marriage Alliance, an independent organisation which advocates the right of all Australians to freely support the legal definition of marriage in Australia remaining exclusively between one man and one woman (known socially and culturally as 'husband and wife.')

This organisation considers that such marriage has served Australian families, society and culture well. It also considers that whenever major societal structural change is contemplated, the rights and freedoms of all possibly affected by the change, must be acknowledged and protected. [END]

Biography:

Sophie is a barrister at the NSW Bar, who works as a lecturer in Jurisprudence at Sydney University, and has lectured at Notre Dame University in Public International Law and Legal Philosophy. She is an Officer in the Royal Australian Naval Legal Reserves. She is also a Red Cross trained Instructor in the Law of Armed Conflict (International Humanitarian Law).

She is a published author and a Board member of Campion College.



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A-Musings

by Vicki Nunn

There was a fellow at a former workplace who wore long denim shorts down to his knees in the warmer months. We women teased him about his knees and his manly legs, and he told us ladies to keep our hands to ourselves. Obviously, he was irresistible!

Working out in the field, it made sense for him to wear shorts, but I can't imagine it's the best attire to wear somewhere that you want to be taken seriously such as a meeting, a conference or to the opera.

I was reminded of this when my friend Ana did some face-painting with the kids at her old workplace. Several of the children had their faces painted, so Ana decided to join in the fun, and had her own face done at the same time. She ended up looking quite literally, like a clown.

It was a little later, when she was endeavouring to discipline the kids and tried to bring them under control, that she made a rather interesting discovery: no-one is going to take you too seriously if you look like a clown.

So then I wondered, would the head clown at a circus have trouble keeping the lesser clowns in order? *"Boss, if you want me to shovel elephant poop, the least you can do is wipe that smile off your face!"*

It's probably a good thing for politicians to keep in mind. I can recall several politicians losing the respect of the public by a little light-hearted foolishness. Many

Verily Scarily



Australians will recall in the mid 90's the then Australian Foreign Minister, Alexander Downer, wore a pair of fishnet stockings and high-heeled shoes for a fund-raising event. Cartoonists had a field day and for many months afterwards, continued to portray Downer in fishnets.

While he may once have aspired to become Australian Prime Minister, after that event, the man might as well have handed in his resignation. Every time the Australian public looked at him they thought, *"Yep, that's the man I want running my country, because any man who wears fishnets and high-heels is superbly suited to the role of diplomat and will surely be taken seriously in discussions with esteemed leaders of foreign countries or if we go to war."*

I'm sure he scared a few people with his taste in footwear, while I, on the other hand, once frightened a little child by some things I had in my neck.

A number of years ago, I had thyroid surgery which resulted in a 12cm cut around the base of my throat, held together by a dozen large staples.

A week after the operation I stepped into the lift at the hospital to attend a check-up. I could feel the other two occupants ogling my grotesque appearance. The little girl stared at me in horrified fascination - probably because I looked somewhat like Frankenstein with the dozen large metal staples stuck into the raw-looking wound around my neck, that looked as if someone had tried to cut my throat. The added swelling and bruising wouldn't have helped my appearance either.

The little girl appeared to be too terrified to scream - she just clutched piteously at her mother, and probably hoped desperately that I wouldn't eat her.

I think I may have scarred that child for life. [END]



Inspirational People: Patrick Hughes



by Vicki Nunn

Introduction

Patrick Henry Hughes will celebrate his twenty-ninth birthday in March this year (2017). During those twenty-nine years, with the support and encouragement of his family, he has achieved more than many of us do in a lifetime.

Born without eyes and without the ability to fully straighten his arms and legs, Patrick is not able to walk and has had surgery to insert two steel rods to his spine to correct scoliosis. He has had artificial eyes fitted and uses a wheelchair. While for most of us, this may sound like the makings of a story of tragedy, instead it is one of triumph.

About his limitations, Patrick said, *"God made me blind and unable to walk. Big deal! He gave me the musical gifts I have and the great opportunity to meet new people."*

Along with his remarkable musical talents, Patrick has excelled at school and university, graduating magna cum laude from the University of Louisville in 2010, where his major was Spanish, which he speaks fluently.

Birth and Music

After Patrick's birth, his parents felt confused and upset, and their hopes and dreams for their son began to fade. His father, Patrick Snr asked, *"Why us? We've played by all the rules."*

By the time he was nine months old, when he was placed in front of a piano, Patrick showed a natural musical talent. His mother said, *"You could go up and hit a*

note and no matter where it was on the piano, within one or two tries, he would find that exact note."

By the time he'd reached his second birthday, Patrick was able to play requests for simple melodies, and his father was ecstatic. *"Ok," he thought, "We're not going to play baseball, but we're going to play music together. And that was really exciting. Let's see how far we can run with this."*

The older Patrick grew, the more his passion and talents grew and by grade school he was able to play many of the standards songs, and by high-school his musical skills even included blues numbers. In addition to the piano, Patrick also plays the trumpet and sings.

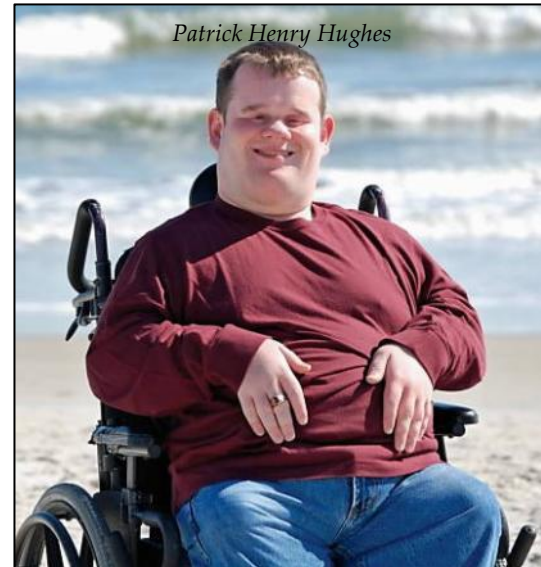
In 2006, Dr Greg Byrne, the Associate Director of Bands at the University of Louisville, told Patrick that he should be part of the university's marching band.

Patrick thought, *"How in the heck am I supposed to march?"*

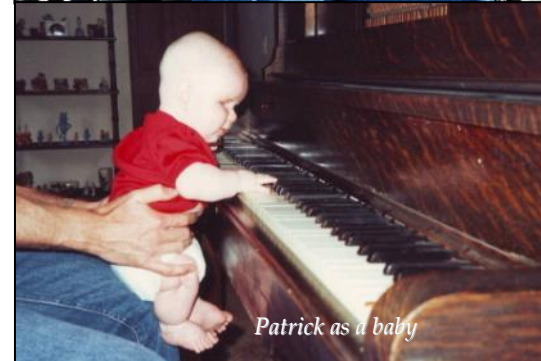
Playing a trumpet while trying to manoeuvre a wheelchair was just not going to be possible, so they had to work out how to include Patrick in the marching band without leaving him sitting on the sidelines to play.

Patrick Snr thought, *"Well if Dr Byrne is so impassioned about it and Patrick wants to do it, then by golly, I'll give it my all as well."*

And so it was that Patrick Jr as well as Patrick Snr became part of the 214 strong Louisville Marching Band, with his father learning the drills and manoeuvres required to



Patrick Henry Hughes



Patrick as a baby



Patrick's parents: Patricia and Patrick Snr



Patrick playing in the marching band at the Kentucky Derby



Patrick performing at Kentucky State Fair in 2009.



Playing at the Holy Spirit Catholic Church in McAllen, Texas



At Willow Creek Leadership Summit in Chicago, Illinois in August, 2007



Patrick with his parents at graduation



Patrick going ballooning

push Patrick in his wheelchair in the correct formations. This enabled his talented son to become a fully functioning member of the band.

Patrick and his father's participation in the marching band drew large crowds to the game and before long his talents became well known throughout the city and his fame eventually spread to the rest of the country.

They participated in pre-game drill practices, then marching around the stadium at football games and performing in front of thousands of people during half-time. Patrick even played at basketball games.

His parents believe that their son is an inspiration for others. Patrick Snr said, *"Maybe when they hear him play they recognise, 'Wow! Imagine the possibilities (that) I didn't even consider when I saw this young man, that I now know from hearing him play.'"*

After Graduation

Since university, Patrick's story has been featured on a variety of shows including ESPN, The Ellen Show, The Today Show, and Oprah. He's played at the Kennedy Centre, at Kentucky State Fair, and twice at the Grand Ole Opry, and has performed with Faith Hill, Pam Tillis, Lonestar and others. He was featured in Sports Illustrated, People Magazine and many more, and even played for Muhammad Ali.

Father and son have travelled across the USA and other countries such as Central and South America, Europe, Asia and Canada to share their story about overcoming obstacles, and as a way of inspiring others.



Patrick with his mother Patricia



Patrick with his father, Patrick Snr

Patrick has recorded two CDs of well-known songs and even includes some of his own compositions. Additionally, their first book "I Am Potential" has been published, and in 2015 became a feature length movie starring Jimmy Bellinger as Patrick and Burgess Jenkins as his father.

Patrick Snr said of his son, *"He's my hero... What he goes through - it's taught me that I don't have any complaints. I guess a father couldn't ask for anything more than the relationship that I have with Patrick."* [END]

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The 'Real' Festival: One Special Meal in History



by Justin Monaghan

Press Service
International
Columnist

Over the past three years our household has celebrated Passover. This Jewish festival is currently being celebrated, starting April 22 and finishing April 29.

You may ask, "Why would you do this? I thought you were a Christian, not a Jew?"

My wife and I have discovered the richness which comes with connecting to the roots of the Christian faith - the history of the Jewish people.

It gives us an even greater and deeper understanding of who the Father is, who the Son is and who the Holy Spirit is. I will do my best to summarise why Passover - and this incredible moment in the history of the human race - is so important for us today.

We celebrated Passover on Friday night with a few brothers and sisters in our home. Each year our celebration aims to give insight into the truth of this festival - the prophetic message of who the very person of Jesus is and his act of sacrifice on the cross of Calvary. We hold a celebratory and remembrance meal of awesome food, worship and prayers reminding us of the story of Israel and how we are part of this continuing story.

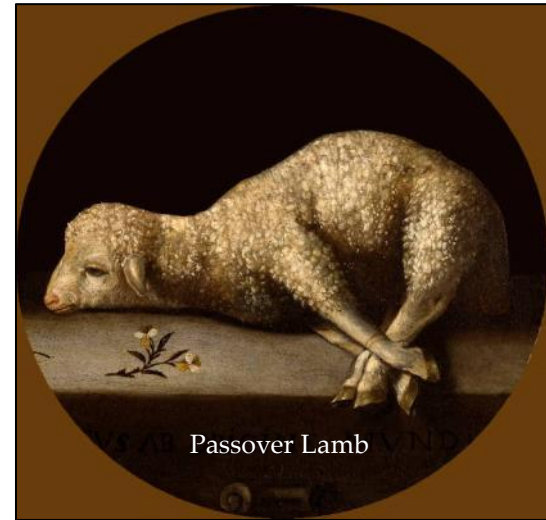
What is Passover?

My first experience of Passover was watching the animated movie Prince of Egypt. I loved this movie as young person because it combined two of my passions: cartoon animation and Bible stories.

You can read the biblical account which inspired the film in the book of Exodus. This story follows Moses and his journey to free the Israelites from the slavery of the Egyptians and Pharaoh.

In the midst of this story is the first Passover meal. God (Yahweh) instructs the Israelites to sacrifice a lamb and paint the blood of the sacrifice over the doorframe of their houses to protect them from the angel of death, who would come and take the life of the firstborn of all families in Egypt.

The film depicts the angel of death hovering over the houses and entering where the blood was not on the doors. It would enter the house and take the last breath of the



all the firstborn sons. When the angel saw the blood on the door posts it would not enter and pass over. This visual gave me an understanding of Passover being about the angel of death entering/not entering houses, but there is more. Passover is not about the angel of death, but about the presence of God.

God's presence

The sacrifice of animals was part of Israel's heritage. It was symbolic of a transaction: a relationship being formed. When blood was spilt it represented the restoration of relationship with God or the forming of relationships-or covenants-with others.

This system may sound barbaric to us, but it would have been clear to the Israelites what was going on. This action was not about fear of the angel of death taking their sons, but about God himself taking up a relationship with them.

The blood of the Passover lamb provided the opportunity for the presence of God to literally come and passover into their homes, thus protecting them from the messenger of the Lord - the angel of death. This moment became the foundation of Israel as after this night the Israelites



The first Passover



Remembering the first Passover

were released from slavery and became a nation unto God.

This Passover moment was etched into Israelite culture, and is instituted as an important time of year to observe, this is why it is still celebrated today. It was a message about the freedom God offers through a blood sacrifice and relationship.

Passover and Christ

The Passover festival is not just a reminder of Israelite history in Egypt, but the prophetic meal and celebration of Christ's finished work on the cross. Christ's death occurred during Passover festival celebrations. This is important because Christ crucified is the fulfilment of the Passover lamb.

Just as the presence of God passed over into the homes of the Israelites because of the lamb that was slain, so too is Christ the ultimate lamb who was slain, whose blood was spilt and was painted over our door way for the very presence of God to take up his home in us.

This is quite an incredible and often very hard thing to fathom, but it's the truth. The very presence of

God resides in your temple, your body, because of God's plan to dwell with his people and be their God.

In his word God continually ties us back to our roots; reminding us of the importance of knowing our heritage because it helps us to understand even more of who God the Father is. As Christians we follow Jesus and try to live like him. Jesus' example was his Father and he only did what the Father told him to do (John chapter 5, verse 19).

So, as we met around our table in our home in South Australia last week with a cooked lamb we were living out the very history and heritage of God and his family. This time of Passover reminds us of the amazing finished work of Jesus on the cross, and how it made way for the Father's very presence to take up home in us.

Maybe next year you might join me in celebrating the 'real' festival - the special, historic, prophetic and fulfilled festival of Passover. [END]

Biography:

Justin Monaghan is currently launching as a professional prophetic artist under the label JR Faith Creations and runs a creative home fellowship with his wife Liana. Justin is also heavily involved in his local surfing community of South Australia as a surf coach, a judge of surf contests and a member of Christian Surfers

Check out JR Faith Creations to see some of his art at www.facebook.com/jrfaithcreations

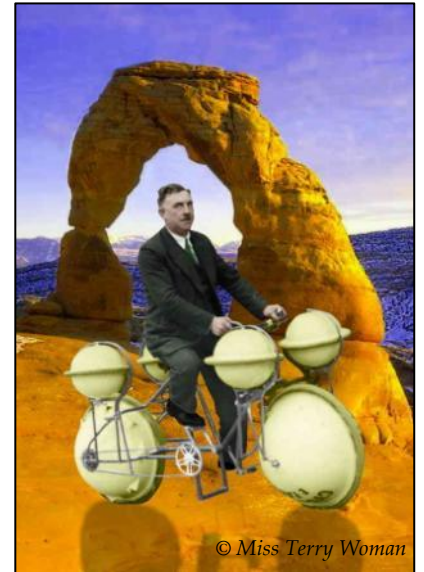
Justin Monaghan's previous articles may be viewed at www.pressserviceinternational.org/justin-monaghan.html

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Kooky Connor



© Miss Terry Woman

Lunar Cycle

Advertising Promotion

~ Miss Terry Woman ~

www.missterrywoman.com

From classic to quirky, you can find a huge variety of products with **graphic designs** created by Australian Christian artist Vicki Nunn:

- Clothing;
- Kitchenware;
- Phone covers;
- Clocks;
- Canvases;
- Stationery;
- and so much more!

There'll be something to please you at 'Miss Terry Woman.'

You can find links to the four different shops at:

www.missterrywoman.com

with over 25,000 items in the Australian shop alone.



EMILY'S VOICE

Fall in love with the unborn
www.emilysvoice.com

by **Paul O'Rourke**
CEO, Emily's Voice

Introduction

Emily's Voice is using the beauty, dignity and humanity of the unborn, together with real, personal stories, to protect women and save babies.

The culture-changing media campaigns on TV, radio, billboards and social media are now being seen in four Australian states by 4.5 million people; and they work.

Changing Views

Galaxy Research has confirmed that twenty-two percent of Queenslanders and twenty-five percent of Tasmanians, aged 16-24, have changed their views on abortion after seeing the ads.

These include women like Stacey, who was living in a women's shelter in Launceston when she saw Emily's Voice ads on TV and received a little feet pin in the mail. The little feet are the shape and size of an unborn child at ten weeks from conception.

The ad featured Madeleine, who 'chose' to end her pregnancy at just eight weeks, a decision she profoundly regrets. Stacey took notice, moved back home and gave birth to Oliver who is now more than six months old.

One of the dozen or so ads also features Nikki, who came to Australia a few years ago from the Philippines and discovered she was pregnant.

Her distraught mother asked the doctor what they should do. The female doctor replied that young Australian women in such circum-

stances would have an abortion.

When Nikki replied that abortion was against her values, the doctor replied: "Yeah, but you've already had sex outside of marriage. Isn't that also against your values?"

She told Nikki that continuing the pregnancy would be selfish as being a single mother would bring shame, embarrassment and financial pressure to the family.

The doctor wanted to make it easy and cheap: She told Nikki that if she was under nine weeks she could have a chemical abortion at home.

Rattled by the doctor's confident judgement, Nikki's mum Bernadette, who also was against abortion, suggested having a termination may be for the best on this occasion.

Then they went for an ultrasound.

A tiny body with a beating heart lit up the screen in the darkened room.

The light came on in Bernadette's own heart and mind when the radiographer said:

"Look, there's your grandchild."

And the result is three-year-old Nahla.

The Emily's Voice ads speak to the reasons why about ninety-seven percent of women consider abortion: the financial, emotional and social concerns of one-in-three Australian women.

There are ads about a young man who gets his then student girlfriend



pregnant and realises he needed to 'man up and take responsibility,' as well as an adoptee who loves her life and would like to meet her biological mother to say "thank you, thank you for my life. You've given me an incredible gift."

Then there's Gavin who wondered how they would cope when his bride conceived on their honeymoon. He declared: "Seventeen years later, we've just had our seventh child, and I reckon I coped just fine."

Other stories highlight the physical features that are evident in the womb and which carry us through life: our heart, hands, hair and feet.

We recognise that the ads are being seen by thousands of women and girls who have already experienced the shame and regret of abortion.

The campaigns are not unlike other public health advertising such as the sun safe message, quit smoking advertising or motor accident authority campaigns.

These campaigns will evoke painful memories for those who have lost a loved one to melanoma, a car accident or smoking-related cancer.

Our Purpose in Advertising

Our ads are motivated by love: love for the mothers and their unborn children.

*Love them both:
Emily's Voice shares
stories of hope through
beautiful media
campaigns.*



We know that many women make an irreversible choice, often under pressure from others, at a time when they are vulnerable, and without all the facts about the consequences.

The purpose of the ads is to restart the conversation about life in a contemporary, relevant and yet sensitive way.

The broadcast and social media ads direct viewers to the www.notbornyet.com website where visitors can learn more about pregnancy, abortion, child development, pregnancy and post-abortion grief.

The website provides links to pregnancy support centres in each state and territory.

The campaigns started almost nine years ago in the Darling Downs of Toowoomba in Queensland.

The ads can now be seen in several regional centres in Queensland and NSW, as well as throughout Tasmania and Western Australia. [END]

Biography:

Paul O'Rourke is the CEO of Emily's Voice. He is the former CEO of Compassion Australia, has a Master's Degree in child development and authored several books, including the provocative, *Why Satan Hates our Kids: How Children are Suffering and Why The Church Should Care*.

For more information, please go to our website: www.emilysvoice.com



Love for a College Girl

by Vicki Nunn

Late last year I received an email from 'Miss N' who was going through some struggles in her desire to obey God and the pressures on her to find love.

With her permission, I'm sharing her letter and my response. I hope it will be helpful to anyone struggling with similar issues and pressures.

Dear Vicki

I'm having emotional crisis. I'm in between wanting to wait for the right time and wanting to actually get on a date. I don't know what to do or what to feel.

I just want to honour God in every single thing that I do but as a human being, I'm finding it hard sometimes and I'm struggling.

I'm 22 and I'm in college. What should I do? Miss N

Dear Miss N

I so vividly remember what it was like when I was around your age. One day I'd be sure in my commitment to God and waiting for the right man, and the next day, all of those promises would seem to fly out the

window when I met a really nice guy, even if he wasn't a Christian.

My emotions often seemed to take me on a rollercoaster ride with huge ups and downs - some days I'd be feeling amazing, and other days I felt so terribly low. Thankfully, those huge highs and lows settle down over the years, particularly as you grow in confidence and faith in God.

I particularly hated those periods when the lows would just want to drag me down and it felt like nobody would ever love me. I would pray and ask, "Don't I deserve to be loved? Don't I deserve happiness? My friends and people around me seem to be finding love and finding happiness but I don't. I'm doing the right thing and waiting for the right man, but sometimes it feels almost like You're punishing me, and I don't understand why."

Sometimes I just want to go out and find someone for myself."

I hope that what I share here makes sense to you, but the emotional rollercoaster is an experience that many younger people have, particularly when they are still





'healthy' relationship here not 'happy' relationship.

Even the happiest of marriages go through terribly difficult times, times when one or both find it hard to love the other; times when they may feel unhappy and wonder if it will ever get better; and even

growing emotionally and spiritually.

For me, it wasn't until I was in my late 20s that I was personally ready emotionally and spiritually for a healthy relationship with a Christian man.

But let me go back to those questions I asked when I was in my early 20s and explore them a little:

- "Don't I deserve to be loved?"
- "Don't I deserve happiness?" and
- Everyone else is finding love and happiness - why can't I? Am I being punished?

Don't I Deserve to Be Loved?

Yes you do deserve to be loved. God's commitment to us in sending Jesus to die for us, and His desire to develop a relationship with us shows that we are deserving of His love the greatest love of all (no, not the Whitney Houston song.)

Be reminded though that what God wants for you, particularly when it comes to a loving relationship with a man, and what the world says is love or will bring you happiness, are two vastly different things.

We are bombarded with the world's messages about love and relationships and intimacy, and we may believe its claims that these will bring us happiness. The fact is, a 'feeling' of happiness in relationships/marriage is usually short-term, and it takes an enormous amount of hard work and commitment to sustain a healthy relationship. Notice that I said

times when they'll wonder if they'd be happier and better off on their own.

I would encourage you not to believe the world's claim that being in a relationship will bring you happiness; or will make you feel more complete; or that it will make you whole.

As none of us are perfect, so no potential partner is perfect. Since both people going into this relationship are imperfect, there is a minefield of possible problems that will result from both of our imperfections.

Be aware that no one person will ever complete you or make you whole. Yes, in the beginning, for a short time you may 'feel' happy, but soon the rosy glow disappears as you come to see both his faults and your own, and how they impact on your relationship in unhealthy ways:

- arguments sometimes over the silliest of things;
- bossiness/control one trying to be in charge of the other;
- annoying habits and quirks at first may have almost seemed cute, but annoy the heck out of you after a while; and
- not seeing eye to eye on important issues such as finance/budgeting especially when neither side is willing to listen to the other's point of view, or being too stubborn to compromise. (Finance arguments are usually at the top of the list of things over which couples quarrel, but there are many, many more!)

"Don't I deserve Happiness?"

You should be aware that this particular message from the world is actually a big, fat lie. Happiness is not about 'feeling' good all the time - this is the lie we're told.

Happiness is about finding contentment in whatever situation we are in and seeking to find joys in many areas in our life. Happiness is not a feeling. Happiness comes about:

- in recognising where and how we are blessed and fortunate;
- in developing and growing in our relationship with God;
- in being willing to grow and change, no matter how much this may hurt our ego or our feelings; and
- in letting go of the world's lies about what is important or what will make us happy, but instead, sincerely seeking God's truth about what is really important in His eyes.

We are told we'll be happy if we find a partner; or have lots of money; or have a great job; or own a home; or have kids; or even if we become famous. Certainly they may bring us good feelings for a short time, but happiness is not a state or a place that you reach and then you stay happy forever afterwards. The world continually lies to us about this.

We have to be willing to let go of this fantasy and the idea of seeking a wonderful 'feeling,' and instead ask God to help us to recognise what real happiness is. In my case, it took me several years to understand it.

Everyone Else is Finding Love and Happiness - Why Can't I? Am I Being Punished?

No, you aren't being punished. If you haven't found a good partner yet, remember that you are still young and if you are seriously seeking to grow your relationship with God, then perhaps He is simply saying,

"I'm working on growing and developing you right now and that's the most important thing."

Perhaps you aren't ready for a healthy relationship yet. While you may feel like you're ready and you could certainly run out and easily find someone who is unworthy of your love, but is that who or what God wants for you?

Just because you aren't in a relationship right now, doesn't mean that you are being punished or that God is saying, *"No! Never."* He may just in fact be saying:

"No, not right now. Just be patient. I'm waiting for you to grow a bit more."

For some Christians, as it's been in my case, God asks us to remain single and celibate. I'm not saying that this is the situation for you, though it may be. Even if you are single for longer than you had expected or hoped, God may still have marriage in mind for you.

Perhaps God is stretching and growing you so that you are able to make yourself fully available to him and to let go of your own desires. It's challenging to have to let go of our expectations for our lives, but whatever happens, we must just trust that He has the best plan for us.

This was particularly hard for me because God gave me a very strong maternal instinct and so I naturally thought that marriage and children were going to be part of my life.

That didn't happen, and it has continued 'not happening' to my present age. I'm 53 now and know that I will never have children of my own. My heart still hurts a little that I will not know the love of my own children, but being obedient to God has brought compensations with it: I was involved with children's ministry for many years and a foster carer of more than 25 children, so I was able to give my love, compassion and care to other people's children. God gave me

that strong maternal instinct because he had these things in mind for me.

With time, He filled my heart with contentment and gave me a sense of purpose. The world lies to us when it says that:

"If you aren't in a relationship, then there is something wrong with you."

We should recognise that this is simply not true. Even well-meaning friends and family may wonder why we haven't jumped into a relationship sooner. There are many Biblical examples of people who have remained single, and God was able to use them because they were free from the ties of marriage.

Paul is a classic example of someone who recognised that because he didn't have a wife and children, he was therefore free to do God's work.

Being in a relationship doesn't prove that you are worthy of love. You already are. Every single person in the world is worthy of love. You are certainly worthy of love but please don't give into the world's lie that you need to be in a relationship to prove that you are worthy.

May I encourage you to ask God to help you in this area of your life. Tell Him every day about your struggles, and most importantly, ask Him to show you where He wants you to

grow.

Ask Him to show you how to be willing to be vulnerable to His guidance in your life, even though it may hurt your feelings and your ego. That's tough to do, but vitally important for every Christian. Anyone who is not willing to grow or to be vulnerable to God's guidance usually does so because of pride and/or fear, and they soon become



stagnant and cannot mature in their Christian walk.

Being 22 and at college, you will likely be feeling enormous pressure to begin dating or to find someone to love. Remember, you don't have to prove anything to any other person. The person to whom you have the utmost responsibility is God. Remind yourself of this when you are feeling pressured - you don't have to prove to anyone that you are worthy of love you, because you are already worthy of love!

Rush In and Live to Regret it

If you rush into a relationship now, before you are ready, then you are likely to develop a problematic relationship. Yes, you may develop feelings of love, but if this is not what God wants for you right now, you must ask yourself:

"Am I doing this because I want it, or because this is what God wants for me? Am I doing this out of my own selfish desires, or because God is saying, it's ok?"

Non-Christian Partners - RUN AWAY NOW!

If any potential partners are not a Christian, then please run the other way! I can honestly say that I have never seen a happy/healthy relationship between a Christian and a non-Christian.

Usually, it has been the complete opposite. How can you possibly share with a non-believer about your growth in God and your relationship with Him? How about all of those special and precious moments when God speaks to your heart or your

*Being in a
relationship
doesn't prove
that you are
worthy of love.
You already are!*



mind about a particular issue, those intimate moments when you feel the touch of His loving hand - how could a non-Christian understand that?

In a way, it would be a little like a sighted person, trying to explain colour to a blind person and how certain colours or particular things make them feel. There is absolutely no way that they can understand it.

Our relationship with God is intricately sewn through every area of our life and can only be shared with and understood by another Christian.

I have seen relationships between a believer and a non-believer where the non-Christian has grown jealous of the time their partner spent with other Christians or in their church activities.

They became resentful and even argumentative with them for 'wasting' their time on church stuff.

They simply didn't get it!

While it's true that a non-believer may become a Christian, from what I have seen, this is usually rare. Don't fool yourself into believing that this is the one time when they'll be converted. You aren't the first person to try and deceive themselves into believing that your partner will be the exception.

I've even seen a marriage where the husband banned the wife and

their children from any church activities except the Sunday morning service. For the wife, she said it was a bit like walking on eggshells all the time, worrying whether he was going to ban her and the children altogether from church. She tried to keep the peace as much as she could, but it made her very unhappy and caused huge stress in their relationship.

As a Christian, the spiritual part of you yearns to be able to share that part of your life. Jumping into a relationship with a non-believer, no matter how much you are attracted to them or how much you feel that you love them, will only add to the likely struggles in your future relationship.

I would encourage you to find a good Christian female friend that you can talk to about your spiritual growth and struggles - perhaps a more mature person in your church who can mentor you.

Talk to your Pastor about it, and seek out a good Bible study group that challenges you, as it will be very helpful in your development as a Christian woman.

Seek God's guidance in finding contentment and joy in your life and your walk. Ask God to help you recognise what are your own selfish desires or are lies of the world. Ask Him to help you to let go of desires

that are not from Him and to grasp what God really wants for you and your life. Talk to Him about your struggles - be really open and honest with him eg,

"God, you know that I have an almost overwhelming desire in my life to be in a relationship and to find love, but please help me to understand what it is that You want.

Help me to let go of the lies that the world tells me about happiness. Help me to understand what real happiness is. You know that I am weak You can see the desires of my heart. Is that what You want for me?

Help me every day to grow a little stronger in You. Help me to learn to be patient. Help me to let go of my own selfish desires, even though it may hurt my heart."

I hope that helps you Miss N.

We've put together a segment on our website called "Happiness Habits." You can find these suggestions in the menu drop-down list under "Articles/Having Struggles."

These articles have been shared in previous issues of SPAG Magazine and we'll continue to add them to our website. May I encourage you to drop by and read the different sections about finding happiness, and pray about it, asking God to help you to understand, and to open your heart, mind and spirit.

You might like to come back in a few months or so and reread them at which time you may find that God has given you some further understanding and insight.

Thank you for reaching out, Miss N. I really hope that this has been helpful to you - all the very best.

Warm regards

Vicki Nunn
Editor
SPAG Magazine



No Time to Rest - No Time Not To



by Chloe Alexander

Press Service
International
Columnist

I couldn't even begin to count the number of times my mum has warned me against burning the candle at both ends. For those unfamiliar with the expression, it means to be so busy that you are getting very little or no rest.

I am often stumped when asked what I do just to relax. It's not something that comes naturally or easily for me, and I notice my lack of rest and relaxation often when both ends of the candle have met in the middle and I am totally burnt out.

Eighteen months into my latest life-change venture, I am completely and utterly exhausted. Every part of me is spent - physical, emotional, mental, spiritual. I knew I was tired, but as I work on resting, an even deeper sense of exhaustion is revealed. I've pushed myself too far and I need more than a good night's sleep to get my vitality back.

A Balanced Life?

While I personally work on restoring my vitality, I believe the more important issue is that of preventing another cycle of burnout and restoration.

What is wrong with the way I'm living that causes these cycles, and what is it that I'm supposed to do, particularly as a Christian, to maintain a life that effectively balances work, rest, worship, and play?

I am in a discipleship group which recently began discussing the rhythm of life and the balance of work and rest. I'm the first to admit that I didn't have a second of my day free to rest in the midst of working to deadline after deadline for a month. Being told

that I needed to incorporate rest into my life was laughable. There was not a minute spare to be allocated to rest. Yet I can't keep going without some.

Here comes the 'BUT!'

I realised that if I believed that the Bible and the life of Jesus teaches that rest is not only important but a necessity then something in my life needed to change. I had to implement this teaching; I had to find a way to incorporate this funny little thing called 'rest' into my life.

In Mark 6, verses 30 to 32, after the feeding of the 5,000, Jesus invites the disciples to get away from the crowds and take a rest. The work has been done, the demands have been met, and now it is time to retreat, to rest, and to be restored.

Jesus demonstrated a life lived in the balance of work and rest, and so should we. To give of ourselves, and then purposefully take time and space to rest and re-energise ourselves in order to be able to continue on giving of ourselves and serving. To find a balance between giving of and resting ourselves each day, each week, each month, and each year.

Is Spiritual Rest Different?

Balance is needed for physical, mental and emotional rest and ultimately wellbeing. Does the same work for spiritual exertion and rest?

I'm not so sure. Spiritual rest doesn't mean switching off your spirituality for an hour a night, or six weeks a year.

Spiritual rest is about abiding, remaining in Jesus, being focused on Him, and coming to Him to share His yoke and learn His ways. When God is our top priority, when He is who we seek and follow, we find rest from the worry of controlling our own



lives. As we rest and remain in Jesus, fruitfulness is the result. In a sense, spiritual 'work' flows out of resting in Jesus.

My challenge to myself in combating the cycle of burnout and restoration is to find my spiritual rest in Jesus as my number one, and to be diligent in giving myself the time and space to rest my body, mind, and soul.

What these times of rest look like will be different for everyone, but key words that come to my mind as someone living in the modern, Western world are 'unplug', 'disconnect', 'turn off'.

Slow down, look away from the screen, get outside, and breathe. [END]

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Words of Wisdom

Empty pockets never held anyone back. Only empty heads and empty hearts can do that.

Norman Vincent Peale



GOD: Global Outreach Day

27 May 2017

One Day - One World - One Message – JESUS!

The vision of the Global Outreach Day is to build up a network of Christians worldwide, equipping and mobilizing them to share the Gospel to over 200 nations on one single day.

Mobilising

The G.O.D. is a massive mobilisation movement in the body of Christ to fulfil the Great Commission to our generation. It started with a single day, but it's already growing into a mighty movement!

Our focus is not only to mobilise the already active evangelistic people. We aim to see the WHOLE church - every single believer - stepping into divine action to reach the lost.

We are believing for a revolutionary change in the culture and thinking of the global body of Christ concerning practical evangelism.

The Great commission of our Lord and Master will never be fulfilled only by great evangelistic ministries alone – how excellent and efficient they ever may be. It takes all of us.

EVERY believer and every church is needed to reach every lost soul! That is the very heartbeat of God!

The Equipment

Although many Christians want to reach people with the Gospel they feel limited and inadequate, sometimes not even called to do it. We are providing spiritual and practical training for you to experience a real breakthrough in personal and corporate Evangelism!

You don't need to be a 'super-evangelist' with a 'super-budget.' There are thousands of ideas and creative ways to lead someone to Jesus Christ. Let us help you to release your potential.

The Momentum: One Single Day!

The Global Outreach Day creates a global momentum that makes it easier for every believer to step out and do something.

Millions of Christians move, pray and act all on the same day and encourage and inspire each other. A wave of evangelism and salvation will sweep the globe.

The testimonies are already awesome, and so are the results! Millions of souls have already been saved.

What is it About?

It is about YOU sharing the gospel in any possible way to people who have never heard it or are not yet born again Christians, and leading those people to salvation in Jesus.

All you need is a willingness to go. Share the gospel according to your personal gifting and calling as the Lord leads you.

There are thousands of ways to do this, either personal or together with a group or a church.

What Can I do?

Reach at least ONE person with the gospel on Global Outreach Day!

From a personal approach to unsaved friend or neighbours to sharing the Gospel on streets, campuses, public places or transportations to larger evangelistic events and outreaches, there are many, many options.

Reach out to the people, don't wait for them to come to you!

Create opportunities to:

- get in contact and start a conversation;
- share your testimony and the Gospel message;
- offer them prayer; and



- lead them to a decision.

It is not as difficult as you might think!

Need Some Help?

We have prepared free resources that will inspire and equip you to go out and effectively reach people:

- Three steps training manual;
- Video teaching and training: learn to communicate the right message and lead someone to Jesus;
- Free study resources to mobilize others for the G.O.D.;
- Share videos from the yesHEis app on your phone to help start conversations about Jesus with your friends and family; and more.

Following is the link to the resources page which includes training videos, books, help with communication etc:

<http://globaloutreachday.com/resources>.

Find Out More

To find out more about Global Outreach Day, go to our website at www.globaloutreachday.com/

If you're a Pastor, please note that Stu Millar, from the G.O.D. team, will be travelling in late April to share the vision with pastors in Sydney, Darwin, Perth, Adelaide, Melbourne and Brisbane. Email s.millar@globaloutreachday.com for details. [END]

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Author: no name provided, undated, GOD: "Global Outreach Day," available: www.globaloutreachday.com/, accessed 02/02/17



Will I Be Single Forever?



by Stephen Witmer

Pastor, Pepperell,
Massachusetts,
USA

I was single all through my twenties, and I enjoyed it a lot of the time. When I wanted a particular food for dinner, I ate it. When I wanted to take a week to hike a one-hundred-mile section of the Appalachian Trail, I hiked it. When I felt called to pursue graduate work in another country, I went. And there were other, less selfish benefits, including more time and energy for building deep friendships and fruitful ministry.

But, all in all, I found singleness pretty tough. There were seasons of terrible loneliness when I wondered if God would ever give me a lifelong companion. At times I was like a severed powerline, the voltage of unfulfilled longing causing me to thrash about in ways that hurt others. I was sometimes jealous of married friends.

I did not always navigate singleness with grace, poise, deep faith, and steadfast joy. Instead, I blundered between enjoyment and regret, happiness and longing, purity and sin.

I wish someone had helped me understand, and then live, my singleness in the light of eternity. I think it would have helped me to enjoy a godlier, more productive, more contented life during those years.

A Stable Ground for Soaring Hope

Eternity changes everything, including our singleness. By 'eternity' I mean the future new creation God

describes in the Bible. This is a future beyond our wildest imaginings and most fervent hopes. It's this present world renewed, restored, and remade into a perfect place with no more sin, suffering, brokenness, tears, pain, or death.

The new creation will be far better even than the original Eden, because:

1. Jesus will be physically present there (Revelation 22:1); and
2. It will last forever, with its inhabitants never falling into sin — unlike Adam and Eve.

In other words, the world's perfect future will be better than its perfect past. Eden was lovely fragility. The new creation will be gorgeous stability. Eden was like an exquisite china bowl — beautiful but breakable. The new creation will be like the Alps — breathtaking and immovable.

We're imperfect people living in an imperfect world, but this perfect future becomes our future when we're united to a perfect Saviour through faith. We can then be completely assured that this future is ours. In the Bible, that firm assurance is called "hope."

Christian hope is the confidence that an amazingly good future is securely ours, and this hope changes the way we view our present. It strengthens and equips us in every life situation, including singleness. It heightens our restlessness for the new creation, and that restlessness makes us more content.

To Grow More Content, Get More Restless

One of the feelings I often experienced as a single person was lack of

contentment. Even some of my most enjoyable adventures and sweetest experiences were shot through with a longing to share them with someone else.

A robust longing for eternity helps us with our discontentment by increasing our restlessness. That sounds like a contradiction, but it's not. The apostle Paul was a tremendously restless person, one who said he strained forward and yearned for God's final future (Philippians 3:13–14), and yet he also said that he had learned the secret of contentment in any circumstance (Philippians 4:12). The two are intimately related after all.

The reason we grow discontent in our singleness (or our job, or marriage, or car, or children, or anything else) is because that person or thing (whatever it is) looks so big and eternity looks so small. If you hold a coin close enough to your face, it will obscure an entire city skyline.

When our present circumstances look bigger than eternity, we have lost perspective. When we lose perspective, we tend to load too much of our contentment onto something never designed to bear the weight. We look to a spouse, a friend, a vacation, or an accomplishment to give us the happiness they never can.

Your Marital Status in Heaven

The problem with this way of





living is that it leads to perpetual discontentment. If God gives us a better job but we're still seeing our job as bigger, more important, and more meaningful than the new creation, we'll either sacrifice everything to excel at it, or be destroyed if we lose it.

If we're single and all we can see is our longing for a spouse rather than eternity with Christ, we'll load down a God-sent spouse with the crushing weight of needy expectation, or become a resentful or cynical or broken-hearted single.

A discontented single person will become a discontented spouse and then a discontented parent . . . until eternity breaks in and moves to the centre.

God is more concerned with a change in our perspective than a change in our marital status. If eternity is at the centre, and a husband or wife or child fails us - or if we don't have the husband, wife, or children we're longing for - it will be painful but we'll be okay, because we know a perfect eternity is still ours. There's ballast in our boat, and it will hold us steady through the

disappointments, missed opportunities, and tragedies of this life.

The more restless we are for the new creation - the more our thoughts and emotions are captivated by it - the

less we'll be shaken by disappointment in this life and the more we'll see every present blessing not as a final destination but as a signpost pointing toward eternity. The more restless we become, the more contented we are.

Perhaps if you're a single person, your identity as a 'single' has moved to the centre of how you think about yourself. But it appears from Jesus' teaching that in eternity we'll all be single. There won't be marriage in the new creation. What will define us forever will not be our marital status, but our enjoyment of the perfect presence of Christ.

That means a single person who loves Jesus is much more like a married person who loves Jesus than like a single person who doesn't know him. We'll know Jesus forever and be loved by him for eternity. This is way more central to our identity than our marital status. Don't think of yourself as unwanted by any

"Some are discontent in singleness because fifty years with a spouse begins to look better than eternity with Jesus."

prospective spouses. Know yourself as loved forever by Jesus.

It's likely that for many (not all) singles, there will be moments and seasons of loneliness and longing — times when it feels awkward to be the only single person at the table or the party. That was certainly my experience. But knowing our God and his final future for us plus knowing ourselves in light of that future can produce a profound contentment in our present. [END]

Biography:

Stephen Witmer is the pastor of Pepperell Christian Fellowship in Pepperell, Massachusetts, and teaches New Testament at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary. He is the author of *Eternity Changes Everything* and a 12-week study in Revelation. He and his wife, Emma, have three children.

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On Leaving Church



by **Bill Muehlenberg**
CultureWatch

There are many Christians who have stopped going to church. They have not given up on God, have not renounced their faith, have not denied Christ, and have not become pagans. They simply are no longer going to church.

That this is happening is not a matter of doubt, but why this is happening is in fact a difficult question to answer.

One recent article spoke about this trend. Entitled "The Rise of the 'Done With Church' Population," it looks at this scene - primarily in America - but does not offer us any clear indications as to why this is becoming such a problem. The article begins:

"John is every pastor's dream member. He's a life-long believer, well-studied in the Bible, gives generously and leads others passionately. But last year he dropped out of church. He didn't switch to the other church down the road. He dropped out completely. His departure wasn't the result of an ugly encounter with a staff person or another member. It wasn't triggered by any single event.

John had come to a long-considered, thoughtful decision. He said, "I'm just done. I'm done with church."

John is one in a growing multitude of ex-members. They're sometimes called the de-churched. They have not abandoned their faith. They have not joined the also-growing legion of those with no religious affiliation—often called the Nones. Rather, John has joined the Dones.

At Group's recent Future of the Church conference, sociologist Josh

Packard shared some of his groundbreaking research on the Dones. He explained these de-churched were among the most dedicated and active people in their congregations. To an increasing degree, the church is losing its best.

For the church, this phenomenon sets up a growing danger. The very people on whom a church relies for lay leadership, service and financial support are going away. The problem is compounded by the fact that younger people in the next generation, the Millennials, are not lining up to refill the emptying pews.

Why are the Dones done? Packard describes several factors in his upcoming book *Church Refugees* (Group). Among the reasons: After sitting through countless sermons and Bible studies, they feel they've heard it all. One of Packard's interviewees said, "I'm tired of being lectured to. I'm just done with having some guy tell me what to do."

"To an increasing degree, the church is losing its best."

The Dones are fatigued with the Sunday routine of plop, pray and pay. They want to play. They want to participate. But they feel spurned at every turn.

Will the Dones return? Not likely, according to the research. They're done. Packard says it would be more fruitful if churches would focus on not losing these people in the first place. Preventing an exodus is far easier than attempting to convince refugees to return."

Hmmm, interesting. There would be many reasons why people stop going to church. We all might have our suggestions as to why this is occurring. I have my own ideas. Let me list a few such possibilities here:

- Many believers are growing tired of the celebrity culture in our churches.



- Many believers are fed up with the incessant entertainment and worldly amusements found in the churches.
- Many believers are not being fed from the Word of God.
- Many believers are put off by the attempt to cater solely to youth, while ignoring their needs.
- Many believers are tired of just being bench warmers, with no role to play.
- Many believers are weary of the constant need to be "relevant" at the expense of biblical orthodoxy.
- Many believers are looking for the real deal. They want an encounter with almighty God, not just a razzmatazz stage production.
- Many believers are desiring genuine Holy Ghost revival, not just pep talks, self-help seminars, and a me-centred gospel.
- Many believers are starving for the reality of First Century Christianity.

Many more reasons could be mentioned. And this is just my take on things. Having spoken at so many churches and home groups and small fellowships over the years, I can get a bit of an understanding of some of these trends. And many of these believers who have left the church have not forsaken Christian fellowship though.

Mindful of texts like Hebrews 10:25 of *"...not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together,"* they still meet with others. But often it is just a very small home group. Often it is just a small band of believers who meet in a small community centre.

They are still eager for God, but have been turned off by so much of the

church scene today. Many are repulsed by the celebrity and entertainment culture that runs rampant in so many churches today. They just want to worship Jesus and encourage one another without all the worldly rigmarole.

I have spoken in many of these small fellowship groups. Some of their services can easily last 3, 4, 5 or more hours. They can't get enough of genuine Christianity and heartfelt worship. But they have gotten enough of churchianity. They are fed up with a church that increasingly resembles the world more than it does the New Testament.

While this move away from the churches may be a way these believers find a new outlet for Christian fellowship, it is obviously tough on pastors and church leaders. One thing they may have to do is slow down, think, pray and ask some hard questions.

But the problem is, so often our leaders are so busy doing church, that they do not have this needed time to reassess, rethink, and re-evaluate. I once wrote a piece in which I made the serious suggestion that some churches might be best placed to actually shut down for a brief spell as the members, and especially the leaders, spend some quality time on their faces before God.

I said in part:

My recommendation is this: it may well be the best thing in many cases to simply shut our church doors and post a big sign on each entry with words something like this:

"Dear friends, sorry but our church is now closed for repairs. It will be closed for perhaps a few days, perhaps a few weeks, and maybe even longer, until a full and thorough renovation has taken place.

These doors will remain shut for as long as it takes. We will notify you when the doors will reopen. In fact, there will be no need to notify you, because it

will be apparent to everyone when the renewal work is completed. Thank you for your patience."

Is It Time To Close Our Churches?

Does that sound like a pretty radical proposal? Of course it does. But it may take something radical like this to deal with a church which seems to be losing its way, and is in many ways haemorrhaging to death. When things get that bad, radical surgery is indeed required.

I do not envy being a pastor or a church leader. They have a very tough job, and their work is often thankless, painful and exhausting. We certainly must pray for our leaders. They certainly need it. And they need regular encouragement as well.

But the church is going through tough times now. I certainly do not have all the answers for this. But we must be willing to at least pause and reflect, pray and seek God, as to how we might turn things around. We must at least begin there.

Let me finish with a few great quotes from a few great saints. Their words of warning and advice make for more helpful starting points:

"If the Holy Spirit was withdrawn from the church today, ninety-five percent of what we do would go on and no one would know the difference. If the Holy Spirit had been withdrawn from the New Testament church, ninety-five percent of what they did would stop, and everybody would know the difference."

A.W. Tozer

"Oh for radically Bible-saturated, God-centred, Christ-exalting, self-sacrificing, mission-mobilizing, soul-saving, culture-confronting pastors!"

John Piper

"When the church is absolutely different from the world, she invariably



attracts it. It is then that the world is made to listen to her message, though it may hate it at first."

Martyn Lloyd-Jones

"The church has lost her testimony. She has no longer anything to say to the world. Her once robust shout of assurance has faded away to an apologetic whisper. She who one time went out to declare now goes out to inquire. Her dogmatic declaration has become a respectful suggestion, a word of religious advice, given with the understanding that it is after all only an opinion and not meant to sound bigoted."

A.W. Tozer

"The Church is looking for better methods; God is looking for better men. The Holy Ghost does not flow through methods, but through men. He does not come on machinery, but on men. He does not anoint plans, but men...Men of prayer."

E. M. Bounds

Biography:

American-born Bill Muehlenberg, lives in Melbourne with his Australian wife Averil, and they have three sons. The couple spent five years in Holland working as missionaries with Youth With A Mission. Bill is a spokesman for the Family Council of Victoria, and has an independent ministry in pro-faith and pro-family activism. He is head of an apologetics/ethics ministry called Culture Watch. In addition to authoring several books, Bill is a part-time lecturer at several Melbourne theological colleges.

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CHRISTIE'S KITCHEN

MAIN COURSE:

Crispy Salmon with Salad (serves 2)

Ingredients:

- 1 cup of rocket leaves
- 1 grapefruit sliced into segments
- 1 avocado sliced
- 1 lime juiced
- 1 sliced red onion soaked in the juice of the lime
- 2 pieces of salmon (or 4 smaller pieces)

Instructions:

Preheat the oven to 180°C.

Heat up some coconut oil¹ or butter in a frying pan. Sprinkle some salt onto the skin of the salmon and fry for a couple of minutes in the pan to make skin crispy. Don't overcook it though as it may make the flesh a little chewy.

Place the salmon in a tray in the oven for 10-15 minutes until it's cooked through.

Create your salad anyway you wish and place salmon on top to serve.



¹Coconut oil specifically for cooking often has the coconut flavour removed so it doesn't affect the taste of the dish.

LOW-CARB RECIPES

Easy recipes for one or two people, with regular supermarket ingredients. All recipes have been tried and tested, in Christie's Kitchen!

DESSERT:

Baked Cheesecake (serves 2-3)

Ingredients:

- 3 packets of cream cheese
- 3 eggs
- 1 tbsp lemon juice
- ½ punnet of strawberries or raspberries
- ⅓ cup of sugar substitute (or equivalent of stevia), or add more if you like it sweeter

Instructions:

Preheat oven to 160°C. Put aside half of the berries. Put the berries through a blender or mash with a fork. Then combine all of the ingredients together in a bowl, and mix thoroughly.

Pour into a greased pie dish then cook in the oven for one hour. Then leave it to cool.

Once cooled, decorate with the remaining berries and serve with fresh cream.



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~ Puzzle Page ~

Easter Cipher Puzzle

Can you work out these Bible verses? Each letter of the alphabet has been allocated a symbol, so you have to figure out which letter goes with which symbol (we've given you a couple of the symbols to get you started.) Write down the letter in the corresponding cypher box underneath the symbol as you go. Then find the corresponding symbol in the puzzle and write in the correct letter. The more letters and words you figure out, the easier it will become. There are two pages of this puzzle to complete.

Hopefully from there, you should be able to work out these verses. If you get stuck, the cipher grid and answer can be found on page 66.

CYPHER:
















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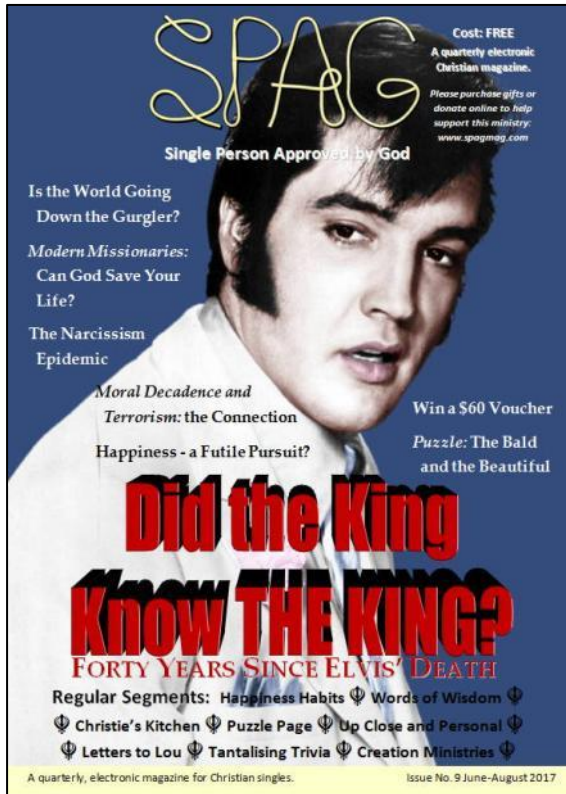
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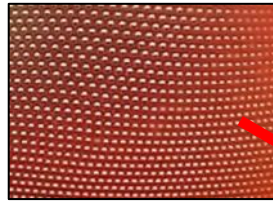
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Continued on next page

Next quarter's issue:



"What is it?"



The image on page 32 is a close-up of the eye of a house-fly

ANSWERS:



Answer: Puzzle Pages (p64/65)

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Verse: As Jesus was making His way to Jerusalem, He took His twelve disciples aside and once again told them what was about to happen. Jesus: "We are going to Jerusalem. The Son of Man will be betrayed to the chief priests and to the teachers of the law. He will be condemned to death, and the priests and teachers will turn Him over to the Romans, who will mock Him and flog Him and crucify Him. But on the third day, He will be raised from the dead to new resurrected life."

Matthew 20:17-19 [VOICE]

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All costs are presently borne by our Editor, Vicki Nunn, and yet she currently receives no wages for the hundreds of hours she puts into the magazine. Consider also the recent cost to replace our ailing computer and new monitor in 2016/2017 was around \$2,000. While we received two donations totalling \$250 (thank you LP & SM©) the remainder of the cost came out of Vicki's pocket. As Vicki lives on a limited disability pension, she struggles to make ends meet, let alone manage to cover the increasing costs to run the magazine. *Can you help support us, and consequently help other Christians?*

Rottneest Island Beach, Western Australia

