



SPAG

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Single Person Approved by God

**5 Christian Clichés
That Need to Die**

**Burnout in Christian
Culture**

**Christian Persecution
on the Rise**

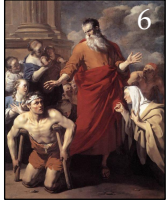
**The Case for the
Empty Tomb**

**Singles: How do You
Respond to Those
Dumb Comments?**

Domestic Violence and the Church

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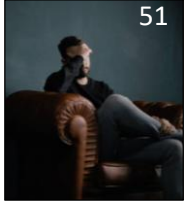
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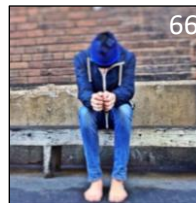
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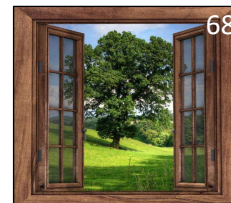
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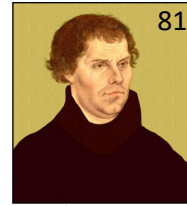
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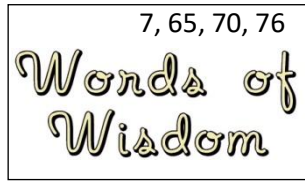
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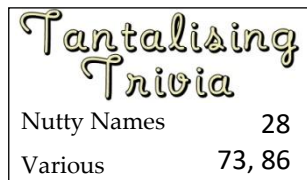
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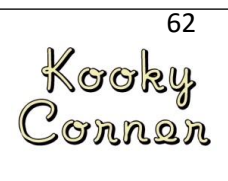
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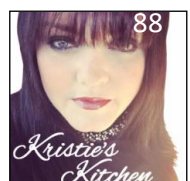
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Editor's Letter



Welcome to the twelfth issue of SPAG Magazine

As always, I'm delighted to bring you another huge issue with loads of great articles on a diverse range of topics, from part one of Ruth Lindsay's thought-provoking article "Domestic Violence and the Church" (p.37) to the light-hearted "A-Musings: Kooky Cars" (p.84). Our purpose is to encourage, challenge and inspire Christians in their walk, and we'd love it if you would let us know how we're doing. Do you have any comments, or are there any topics you'd like us to share in a future issue?

Thanks to JT for his encouragement: *"The March (2017) version spoke to me highly. I feel God used it to bless me."*

Margaret from Creation Ministries said, *"All the best to you and your team ... We live in interesting times and anything we can do to keep the Word of God alive is a very good thing."*

John from Voice of the Martyrs commented: *"I pray that your magazine will remain to be a voice to the community. Thank you for allowing us to share our stories with your readers."*

Subscriber Michelle S shared *"God bless your great and important work/ministry."*

Speaking of blessings, how would you like to bless us? I'd like to offer my grateful thanks to WD for their much appreciated \$70 donation and Heather & Paul for their \$100 contribution which covered 75% of the cost for renewing our business name, and annual post office box rent.

Are you aware that there are various other costs to maintain this ministry? Presently we are nowhere near meeting our regular costs, let alone paying our wonderful staff for their valuable contributions.**

May I encourage you to consider putting aside just \$2.50 a week? That's not so much is it? If we could get 25 people to do that, we would cover our basic operating costs for the year. May I encourage you to pray about it?

While we certainly welcome donations, unfortunately many single Christians are subject to very *unwelcome* comments about their state of 'unwedded bliss.' In this issue we're sharing some of those true comments on page 29.

Sit back, relax and enjoy the latest issue of SPAG Magazine. Please share it with friends, family and your church. SPAG Magazine staff and I would like to take this opportunity to send you our best wishes for Easter.

Warm regards

Vicki Nunn,
SPAG Editor

** PS: (As you may be aware, all outstanding costs are borne by me, and it continues to be very challenging for me to meet these costs. Since SPAG Magazine began in 2015, I have had to take over \$4,000 out of my pension to cover costs, including replacement of our computer, monitor and printer.)

SPAG Magazine Staff and Contact Details



Vicki Nunn: Editor, Journalist, layout designer, graphic artist



Joseph Kolapudi: Journalist



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SPAG (Single Person Approved by God) is a free quarterly, electronic magazine for adult Christians, with a focus on singles. While it is based in Australia, it is an international, inter-denominational publication aimed at encouraging, challenging and inspiring all believers, with articles suitable for all.

Another of our aims is to provide Church leaders and married couples 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 or photo for publication must be your own original work and not copied from elsewhere.¹

ADVERTISING:

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Community or non-profit groups are advertised free, though we cannot guarantee that there will always be 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, whether single or married.

~Please feel free to share this magazine with other Christians~

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 1 – Why Am I Attracted to Another Woman?

Dear Lou

I'm 33, and I didn't start dating until I was 26. I think I was just too scared of getting close to a girl. I didn't understand myself much and didn't have much confidence. Since then I've had a few girlfriends but no-one serious until recently.

I've been dating a nice girl for about a year and a half and I like her so much I'm starting to think about marrying her. But then in the last couple of months, I found myself attracted to another woman at my church. She's single too and nice and I think she gets me, more than my girlfriend does.

It worries me that I like someone else. Does that mean I'm not ready for marriage? Should I avoid that other woman? How do I stop liking her? Is there something wrong with me? Should I switch churches? What will happen if I marry my girlfriend and still like that other woman? Should I drop my girlfriend and take a chance that the new woman and me are more suited?

Matt

Greetings Matt,

Relationships can be one of the most complex and confusing part of a person's life. From your letter that is your experience right now. You have expressed some of your insecurities in life and need some guidelines on the dynamics of building a relationship.

One key criteria I give to people embarking on a relationship – hasten slowly. You must take the time to build a friendship with a lady before you even think about a relationship. With your girlfriend, you talk about *your* plans. I would suggest you spend time with her to build a strong friendship and together you can move toward a decision about what your plans together might be. Only after you do that will you be able to collectively decide if you are moving toward marriage.

You mention enjoying the friendship of another single and your confusion as a result of this. Only you can determine why your attraction is so strong and what the possible outcome might be. My feeling from you is a stronger attraction to the second lady, and this is the basis of your letter. You need to make an honest assessment of your situation and evaluate all options

before making any decision on your future.

Don't move forward carrying regrets. This means you need to have an absolute peace that your current relationship is the one for you.

People have said to me that they have met the perfect person for them and can embark on a beautiful journey with their soul mate. That is dream time thinking. One writer on personality said that you are attracted to a particular personality mix. This means that there could be a number of people with whom you could build a happy, meaningful marriage in this world. The issue is that you make a life choice to marry a special person, then work and work at building a lifestyle together.

Give yourself some time and make sure you are building a good friendship before you consider a deeper relationship.

God bless you on your journey.

Lou

Letter 2 – Why Should I Trust Him?

Dear Lou

I didn't know my dad and never heard from him until I was grown up and married with my own kids. I know he stayed with my mum only because she got pregnant with me when they'd only been together a few months. But then they used to fight all the time which is why they broke up when I was only a few months old.

Last year, my dad asked to come back into my life again. He says he wants to get to know me, but I'm not interested. What about all of those years he never bothered with me? What about all those years when I needed my dad and he wasn't there? Why should I trust him? He's married and has a couple of teenage kids, and NOW he wants to know me?

I have all of these feelings of anger coming up all the time and I don't know what to do. I've cried with my wife and she understands, but I can't seem to be able to get my feelings under control. I'm afraid I'm going to take out my frustrations on my wife and kids. I know I've been distracted and quiet. I think I'd like to know my brother and sister, but I don't want any strings attached. My father just has to understand that I don't want to know him.

I feel messed up and don't know where to go from here.

Jason

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 – Why Should I Trust Him - continued...

Dear Jason,

Let's go back to the beginning. You know nothing of your Dad except what you have been told by your Mum. For this reason you don't have the whole story of why your parents separated. Dr Phil always says, "It doesn't matter how flat you make a pancake there are always two sides." This is very relevant for you in your situation. You do not know what your father experienced in moving out of your life.

I hear your pain and confusion as to your life experience. Do you want to maintain the rage for the rest of your life or do you want to bring some resolve into your life? The fact that you are worried that your anger might flow to your family is a valid concern, and important enough for you to do something about it. The saddest aspect of repressed anger is that it often causes pain upon innocent people.

As hard as it might be, I think the time has come for you to meet with your Dad. If you don't, I could expect to see more letters like this one coming from you. You are an adult and need to make the step toward your Dad. It is not about venting past pain, but about putting in place a new foundation for your life. You might never build a permanent relationship with him, but then you might. Together you can set the agenda for the future.

Jason you owe it to yourself, and just as importantly your wife and children. This is one load you do not need to carry. Your Pastor or Christian Counsellor would be a positive assistance as you make your plans.

God will bless you as you take the initiative.

Lou

Letter 3 – I Miss My Friend

Dear Lou

I had a crush on a good friend but he told me that he doesn't have those same kind of feelings towards me. I was hurt, but we talked and agreed that the best thing to do is not to have any more interaction, other than maybe just to say hello at church.

We agreed not to hang out any more or to phone each

other because we want to honour our future spouse (we're both single) and also don't want to spoil the friendship that we had.

I miss him so much. I find myself wanting to text him about my day and about good things that happen. Did we do the right thing? Should I have fought for a relationship with him, and if so, how would I go about that?

How do I let go of my feelings for him? We had a lot in common and laughed together over the same kind of silly things.

I'm really hurting and miss my friend.

Alyssa

Dear Alyssa,

One of the things we most enjoy in life are good friendships, and they are vital to our own personal development. It appears you had this. What you have found is the reality of what happens when a friendship moves to another level and becomes a relationship. Many a friendship has ended as a result of one becoming romantically involved.

My advice to every couple building relationship is to make sure we communicate well. It would appear that you have stronger feelings in this situation. The healthy way to approach this is to say to him, "my feelings are getting stronger for you, How is that with you?" If they are not ready – you wait.

As you ask similar questions to this, you build friendship and then relationship, it will stop you second guessing what the other person is thinking. Let him know how much you miss the friendship you had, and would like to get back and rebuild your friendship. Making sure you ask the questions I have suggested as you move along in your friendship. Just because he didn't have the same feelings for you at present doesn't mean that you can't maintain a very healthy friendship.

Give it a go, and see what happens as you start sharing together.

God will bless you on your journey

Lou

In the Name of Jesus, Why?



by Ron Ross

Press Service
International

Keith and Debbie Jagers were missionaries in We, northern Ghana, Africa. The 30,000 population was predominantly Moslem. The hatred aimed at the Christians was intimidating and eventually resulted in a noisy, violent home invasion.

As they hid behind their bathroom shower curtain, Debbie was inspired to think of Psalm 91. Specifically she felt God say to her:

"You have been with Me in that secret place. Now you just stand in My shadow."

When they were discovered, the Jagers were brought to the bedroom. The gang demanded money. Keith had a one hundred dollar bill. As he handed it to the invaders he said, 'In the name of Jesus!'

There was an instant reaction! The men backed away and left for the living room. The Jagers remained as they were. They heard the men leave the house and then drive away.

Psalm 91 has become an integral part of the Jager faith. What does it say?

"Because he loves me," says the Lord, "I will rescue him; I will protect him, for he acknowledges my name. He will call on me, and I will answer him; I will be with him in trouble, I will deliver him and honor him. With long life I will satisfy him and show him my salvation." [NIV]

Keith and Debbie simply said, "that's what keeps us going."

If you have ever studied the wisdom in the Book of Proverbs you may recall:

"The name of the Lord is a strong tower; the righteous man runs into it and is safe."

Proverbs 18:10 [ESV]

That seems to fit so obviously into the Jagers' testimony.

Power

Sadly the name of Jesus has become a common swear word. His name is taken in vain and by thoughtless application it has been robbed of its full force.

Believers must maintain the significance in the Name and apply it in prayer with full power and authority. Remember:

"At the name of Jesus every knee should bow."

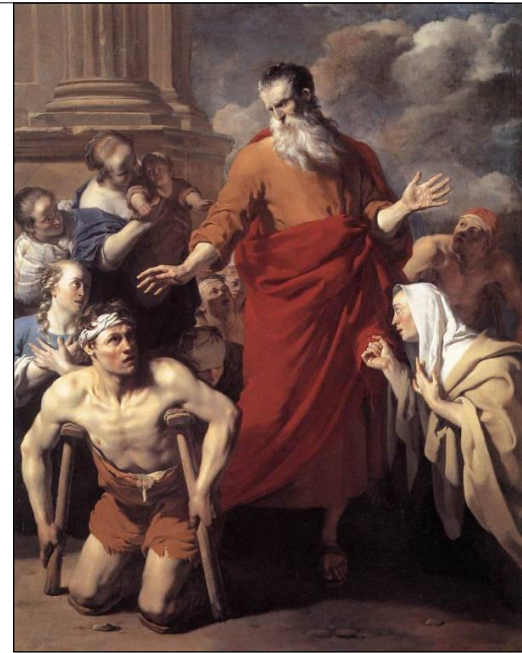
Philippians 2:10 [ESV]

This announcement to the church in Philippi comes as a description of the exaltation of Jesus. He is infinite. He has always been one with the Father. He remained God although He came to earth on a rescue mission.

After the cross, the Lord returned to His throne and is seated "at the right hand of the Father."

His sacrifice for us has provided our salvation and now He maintains that fellowship through our prayerful connection.

The authorities were shaken when Peter prayed and the lame man walked?



Peter heals the lame man

"They inquired, 'By what power or by what name did you do this?'" Acts 4:7 [ESV]

I am challenged by a Watchman Nee comment:

"If we study the word of God carefully and in the meantime we really seek to walk in the spiritual way, we cannot but acknowledge how many times we may have said 'in the name of the Lord Jesus' or 'in the name of Jesus Christ' without actually knowing how to use the name.

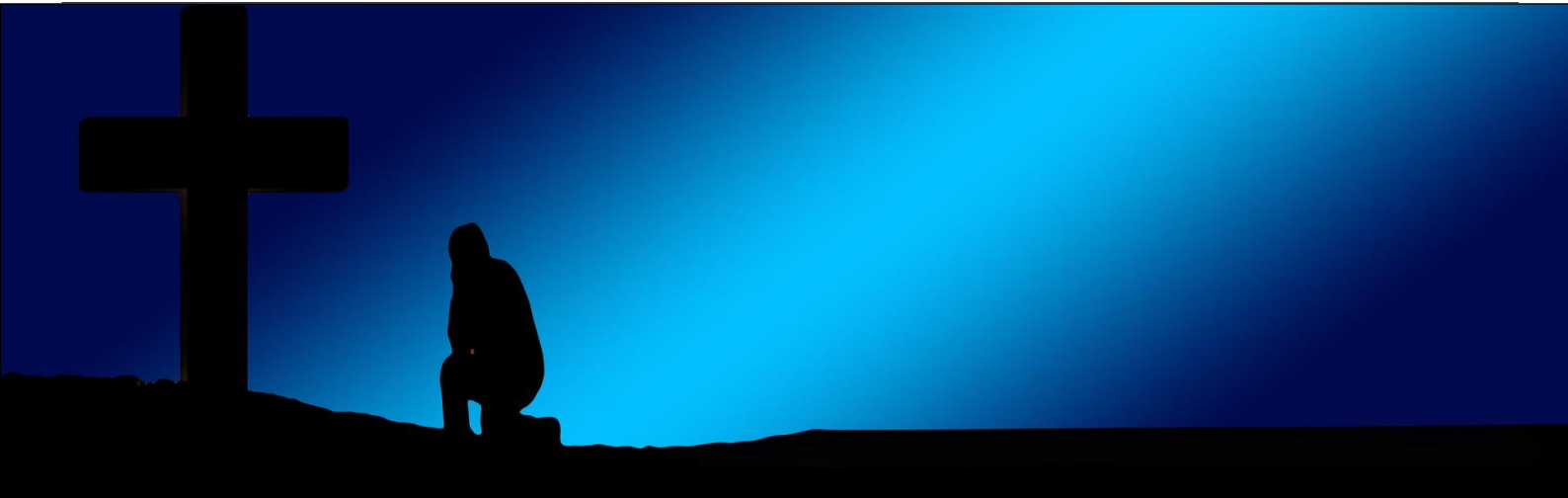
How can we be normal Christians if we do not even know how to use the name of the Lord Jesus?"

Anointing

God has chosen to speak to a fallen world through His church. It is a sobering and challenging thought.

Jesus is enthroned in heaven and we are His spokespersons on earth.

"Show us the Father," the disciples asked Jesus.



His answer was interesting:

"Anyone who has seen Me, has seen the Father."

It is important to see that the Father was not present but He was faithfully expressed through the life of Jesus.

Now, that witness has been transferred to the church. "Anyone who has faith in Me will do what I have been doing," Jesus said.

The disciples understood and went out and faithfully proclaimed the kingdom.

We often cry out for Jesus to intervene in this world. He will, but do we realise He has empowered and anointed the Church to be His ambassadors?

"Truly, truly I say to you, the one who believes in me, the works that I am doing he will do also, and he will do greater works than these because I am going to the Father."

John 14:12 [LEB]

What did He mean "greater works?"

Jesus was God on earth. We are mere human. Our authority comes through that amazing connection His name provides.

Because we are His and we walk by faith in Him, we have His blessing to be His representatives.

Respect

The disciples did not take liberties with Jesus. By their witness of His life, they treated Him with awe.

There is the story of the architect Christopher Wren. When he gave instructions for constructing St Paul's Cathedral in London, he ordered if any workmen were heard to use profanity on the job, they were to be dismissed. It was his application of the famous phrase "hallowed be the name."

The name of Donald Trump has provoked powerful passions for and against. In every generation we find names at the centre of our emotions and choices, our likes and dislikes.

We have as believers, the name which is above all names. The prophet Isaiah correctly called Him:

"the mighty God." Isaiah 9:6

Charles Lamb said, "If Shakespeare were to enter this room, we would stand to give him honour. If Christ were to enter we would bow before Him in worship." [END]

Notes:

1. Missionaries Claim Psalm 91 and Escape Death, www1.cbn.com

2. The Prayer Ministry of the Church, Watchman Nee, Christian Fellowship Publishers Inc

Biography:

Ron Ross is a Middle East consultant for United Christian Broadcasters (Vision FM).

His career started at WINTV (Email: ronandyvonne@mac.com)

Ron Ross previous articles may be viewed at www.pressserviceinternational.org/ron-ross.html

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Ross, Ron, Christian Today: In the Name of Jesus, Why?, available: www.christiantoday.com.au/news/in-the-name-of-jesus-why.html, accessed 23/01/18

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Words of Wisdom

"The measure of a man is not so much how tall he stands but how low he kneels."

Dr J Otis Yoder

Colour-blind Squid Camouflage Inspires Navy Research



by Jonathan
Sarfati

Cephalopods - the group of mollusks that includes squid, octopus and cuttlefish - are famous for their amazing ability to blend quickly into their surroundings. Now the US Office of Naval Research is funding research in several universities into man-made materials that have the same instant camouflage properties.¹

On land, the chameleon has a most ingenious colour-changing system.² But the colour changes are caused by hormones that travel through their blood system. Cephalopods change colour through their nervous system, so they adjust much faster - in only a second or two.

Even more amazing, they do so despite being colour-blind themselves! So how do they know what colours they need to produce in order to match their surroundings? It turns out that their skin has the same sort of



"Their skin has the same sort of light-sensitive proteins as the eye... the skin itself can 'see' the surrounding colours and change colour accordingly."

light-sensitive proteins as the eye - opsins - meaning that the skin itself can 'see' the surrounding colours and change colour accordingly. Researcher Thomas Cronin, an opsin specialist, said:

"The opsins may check the environment cell by cell to see what they're doing, or they may sense colour in a way the eyes are not capable [of] doing."¹

The researchers are still investigating whether the colour change involves the brain, or is an

automatic skin response. They are also trying to find out whether different opsins detect different colours (wavelengths).

These scientists plan to work out how the sensors are constructed and embedded in the cephalopod skin. This might enable them to make sheets of material - nicknamed 'squid skin' - that could sense the background and change colour to match.

This is not the first example of human designers inspired by cephalopods. Another example is a highly energy-efficient TV screen modelled from one of the cuttlefish's colour-changing mechanisms, the iridophores.³

In fact, there is a whole field of biomimetics - copying the ingenious designs in biology.^{4,5} This combines many different branches of science. For example, this 'squid skin' project includes experts in nanotechnology, materials science, marine biology, and animal behaviour. Yet this is merely imitating the One who has supreme mastery of all the sciences, because He is responsible for all the laws by which He upholds the universe (Colossians 1:15 ff.)⁶

The article¹ made another interesting point that inadvertently refutes a favourite anti-creationist argument, by atheist Richard Dawkins and others. That is, the cephalopods' fish predators have much better colour vision. Yet Dawkins has attacked the vertebrate (including fish) retina as being wired badly because it is 'backwards', while the cephalopods supposedly have the 'right' front wiring. Yet the 'backwardly' wired eyes see better, because they are a fine design feature. Recent discoveries show that the Müller cells form a fibre optic plate that transmits light through the nerves to the photoreceptors without distortion, and even screen out stray reflections and remove chromatic aberration.⁷ [END]

References and notes

1. Gwynne, P., Navy Studying Squid Skin to Create New Camouflage Patterns; www.foxnews.com, 21 May 2011. Return to text.
2. Sarfati, J., A coat of many colours: Captivating chameleons, *Creation* 26(4):28-33, 2004; creation.com/chameleon. See also *By Design*, ch. 3, "Colours and Patterns", 2008. Return to text.
3. Sarfati, J., Cuttlefish colour changes inspire new energy-efficient TV screen design,

Creation 32(1):22-23, 2010; creation.com/cuttlefish. Return to text.

4. Expert engineer eschews "evolutionary design": Philip Bell interviews creationist and Professor of Engineering Design, Stuart Burgess, *Creation* 32(1):35-37, 2009; creation.com/burgess. Return to text.
5. See also the articles under creation.com/biomimetics. Return to text.
6. See Sarfati, J., Why does science work at all? *Creation* 31(3):12-14, 2009; creation.com/whyscience and The biblical roots of modern science, *Creation* 32(4):32-36, 2010; creation.com/roots. Return to text.
7. See Sarfati, J., Backwardly wired retina "an optimal structure": New eye discovery further demolishes Dawkins; creation.com/mueller-v-dawkins, 27 May 2010. Also this refutation of critics: creation.com/mueller-feedback, 3 July 2010.

Bibliography:

Dr Jonathan Sarfati was born in Australia and moved to New Zealand as a child, and has a B.Sc. (Hons.) in Chemistry.

Dr Sarfati has been a Christian since 1984. He has long been interested in apologetics, the defence of the faith, and was a co-founder of the Wellington Christian Apologetics Society (New Zealand).

In 1996, he returned to Australia to take up a position as a research scientist and editorial consultant for Creation Ministries International in Brisbane. Then in 2010, he emigrated to the USA with his wife to work in the CMI-USA office as author, speaker, apologist, and Head Scientist.

Along with many articles, Dr Sarfati has written and co-authored numerous books including several which refute evolution.

A keen chess player, he is a former New Zealand Chess Champion. In 1988, F.I.D.E., the International Chess Federation, awarded him the title of F.I.D.E. Master.

Dr Sarfati is married to Sherry and they enjoy spending time with their two grand-daughters.

(Link to Youtube video on Dr Sarfati.)

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Sarfati, Jonathon, January 2012, *Creation Ministries International: "Colourblind Squid Camouflage Inspires Navy Research,"* available: www.creation.com/colourblind-squid, accessed 27/11/16



A Bit of Fun!

~ Collective Nouns ~



We know that a group of birds is called a flock, and a group of kittens is a litter, so for a bit of fun, put on your creative cap and come up with some original, clever or humorous 'collective nouns' of your own. Don't use the standard ones - we want you to use your imagination!

Dayna, a friend of mine on Facebook suggested this, and I thought it was a clever idea. We'll announce the best ones in the next issue, from all of the submissions we receive. Submit as many as you like - there's no limit.

Here are some examples to get those creative juices flowing:

An imagination of fiction writers;
A blaze of fire-fighters;
A timber of lumberjacks;
A scatter of children;
A migraine of mothers;
A tune-up of instruments;
A silence of librarians;
A temptation of sinners;
A passion of pastors;
A bruise of boxers;
An aggravation of politicians;
A pi of mathematicians;
A polygon of geometrists;
A squadron of wasps;
An uncertainty of voters;
A fire of Samsung 7s;
A flock of tweets;
A string of puppets;
A butt of baboons;
A pretentiousness of actors; and
A trembling of seismologists

Submission date now extended to 30 April 2018. Email:

spagmag@yahoo.com.au

We've also set up a form on our webpage so you can submit your entries online if you prefer.

Have fun!

The Church in Garbage City

OpenDoors®

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*This story first appeared on Open Doors Blog
(www.opendoors.org.au/blog)*

I like comfort. I think we all do. That's what makes being uncomfortable so distressing. Comfort is one of the biggest obstacles in being effective witnesses for Jesus.

Jesus came to live among broken people and live in our mess to show us the depths of God's love for us.

I was shocked and challenged by the example of real sacrificial love I witnessed in Egypt.

As our bus drove through the outskirts of Cairo, we were briefed on a bit of church history.

Growth Through Discomfort
Egyptian believers face a huge degree of social persecution. They are a heavily outnumbered minority, and have endured incredibly heinous attacks for many years.

But the church in Egypt does not shrink back. In the face of

persecution, the church is growing.

Whenever we brought up the recent attacks, or the general persecution, the response was always the same, "Yes it's hard, but we're growing because of it."

Churches across Egypt even saw a huge surge in attendance after the most recent Easter attacks.

We were told about a Cave Church that could seat 20,000 worshippers at once. It was built out of a cleared cave in the side of a mountain overlooking Cairo in an area known as 'Garbage City'. This is a majority Christian area, one of very few in Egypt.

My heart broke a little when we were told why.

"No Christians"

Employment can be very difficult for Christians in Egypt. Many workplaces will specify "no Christians". As a result, a huge number of Christians end up working as unofficial garbage collectors.

The bus was silent as we drove through Garbage City. It seemed like most of the rubbish is brought into their house to be sorted and either buried or recycled. This city was surreal, practically a rubbish dump with flats rising up out of the piles of rubbish. It seemed almost as if it was growing out of the homes, like a weed grows through the cracks in concrete.



A car loaded with a day's collection inside Garbage City

The Church In Garbage City

There was no official church inside Garbage City, until Father Simon was approached to lead a congregation in the heart of the city. He was told it was perfectly fine for him to travel in to lead the people and then return home to Cairo for a more comfortable existence.

But Father Simon thought fondly of his God, who came down into our mess and brought hope to the hopeless, light into the darkness, life to those who were dead.

He was not content to lead people he wasn't living with. So he moved into the garbage, into the mess. Just like Jesus did for us.

Today he leads an Egyptian mega-church in the most unlikely of places. With an insane seating capacity only matched by the insane amount of faith it took to create and sustain this work of God. We sat in awe as we watched thousands worship.

A Muslim woman near the front had come to be prayed for. I heard the most mind-boggling statistic: Father Simon has baptised 10,000 Muslim converts to Christianity since 2011.

A Room Full Of Wheelchairs

Father Simon's church even boasts a room by the stage filled with wheelchairs. These are relics



Street scene in Cairo



The streets of Cairo



Christians gathering inside the Cave Church



The room full of wheelchairs people no longer needed

left behind by those who'd found healing in Christ. A testament to God's power in a place where it might be easy to forget and lose hope.

We met some other incredibly brave and faithful men and women. I don't have room to share all their stories, but Father Simon's is one which I think will

challenge my own comfort for a long time to come.

I have such a hard time giving anything, even my time, to step into the mess of those who need Jesus' love poured out practically into their lives.

"For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sake He became poor, so that you through His poverty might become rich."

2 Corinthians 8:9 [NIV]

Those who need Jesus, need the Church to show up and be with them. We are the Church – the body of Christ. Will you take up the call to go, as He did, and get messy with those who so desperately need to meet Him?

[END]

This Easter we are encouraging the Australian church to stand **One With Them** - a movement of Christians giving up one day's wage for the persecuted church.

Biography:

Joshua Mikhael is a professional third wheel and story teller.

He often photographs weddings in Sydney, but in 2017 he travelled to Cairo, Egypt with some of our team to see the persecuted church of Egypt. What he discovered was anything but a weak church.

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Christians in Egypt displaying Coptic cross tattoos - a permanent reminder of their faith in Jesus

Up Close and Personal with Wildlife

~ Echidna (*Tachyglossus aculeatus*) ~

There have been three genus of echinids. *Megalibgwilia* is extinct and was found only in Australia. *Zaglossus* is located in New Guinea, while *Tachyglossus* is found in both countries.

While resembling South American anteaters, as well as hedgehogs and porcupines, they are not closely related.

Brown or black, the solitary echidna has a long, slender snout which serves both as a nose and a mouth and it has spines as well as coarse hair. Their short, strong legs are equipped with large, powerful claws which it uses to tear open anthills and soft logs, and then extracts its prey with its sticky, long tongue. The

short-beaked echidna prefers ants and termites while the long-beaked consumes worms and insect larvae

During harsh weather, echidnas shelter in rock crevasses and caves and are usually found in forests and woodlands, though often hidden beneath roots or vegetation. Surprisingly good swimmers, they use water for bathing and grooming.

Echidnas are one of only two monotreme species in the world, both of which are found in Australia. Both echidnas and platypus lay eggs and feed their young with their milk which they excrete through their skin, rather than through nipples.



Female echidnas lay just a single egg which is implanted in her pouch until it hatches ten days later. The infant remains in the pouch for up to three months, and once it emerges will stay in its mother's den for its first year before it leaves. [END]

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Happiness Habits: What We've Learned Till Now



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. We've shared different ones in previous issues of SPAG.

"You cannot protect yourself from sadness without protecting yourself from happiness."

Jonathan Safran Foer

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In this issue, we'll be combining several of the "Happiness Habits" suggested in earlier issues of SPAG Magazine. The full articles are available on SPAG Magazine's webpage under the Articles section. [Here's the link.](#)

I hope you'll find these helpful.

Part 1: Keep a Happiness Journal

[Link to complete article](#)

Gratitude can have a major impact on our attitude and a 'Happiness Journal' can help us to focus on the good things in our lives and distract us from the negative ones. Too many negatives can overwhelm us and make it hard for us to keep going.



1. Keep a Happiness Journal

At this point you may be thinking to yourself, "I've heard all of this rot before." Perhaps you may consider that a 'Happiness Journal' is a complete waste of time, or that it's only for girls, or for wimps. If you have trouble with negativity, then a 'Happiness Journal' is *exactly* what you need.

In a way, gratitude is a bit like an air-pump: every time we feel grateful for the positive things in our lives, it's like a burst of air goes into our floatation device which helps keep us afloat and buoyant, which is especially helpful when waves of trouble threaten to swamp us.

Buy a writing book and a pen and keep it *only* for your journal. Put aside a few minutes at the end of each day and after noting the day's date, write down all of the good things that happened to you. It could be something as simple as finding a car-park right when you needed it, or noticing a funny face in a cloud

Writing them down before bed can help improve our mood which may help us to sleep better. The following morning we should remind ourselves to look out for the good things in our day.

The following quote from Elisabeth Elliott really got me thinking:

"It is always possible to be thankful for what is given rather than resentful over what is withheld – one attitude or the other becomes a way of life."

I've learned that we can be both an optimist *and* a realist at the same time. Being a realist doesn't mean we have to be a pessimist, rather that we understand there are bad things, painful events and awful people in the world, but we *choose* not to focus on them, but rather look for the good. We *choose* therefore not to let the negative things in the world overwhelm us or try not to let it impact on our thoughts and feelings.

Part 1: Keep a Happiness Journal continued

The media loves to tell us about shocking news events and rarely about the good ones, and I personally find it impossible to maintain my optimism if I listen to the media on a regular basis, so it may be necessary for us to make a deliberate choice to avoid tuning into the news.

Finally, let's look at that 'Happiness Journal' again. If we keep up the journal for a year or so, at some point, we can go back and re-read some of our earlier entries. There will sometimes be events that we'd quite forgotten about that will make us smile. It can also be a good reminder that perhaps we did after all, have a very good year.

Part 2: Forgiveness and Friendship

[Link to complete article](#)

"Each morning when I open my eyes I say to myself: I, not events, have the power to make me happy or unhappy today. I can choose which it shall be. Yesterday is dead, tomorrow hasn't arrived yet. I have just one day, today, and I'm going to be happy in it."

Groucho Marx

Fostering Forgiveness

As you can imagine, holding onto grudges and focussing on how another has treated us

unfairly, affects our mental and emotional health. But scarily, it can also affect our physical health, because of stress, lack of sleep etc.

One way to overcome the negative effects is to foster forgiveness. This goes against the grain of human nature because we want the whole world to know how badly we were treated.

Holding onto grudges and anger simply increases our bitterness and hurt and oftentimes, the other person remains completely oblivious to what they did wrong. Therefore, no matter how much anger and bitterness we hold onto, that other person usually gets away scot-free, and the only person that is affected badly, is us.

If we understand and accept that, then we should hopefully be able to move to the next step and try to forgive that other person. This will allow us at last, to let go of the bitterness and anger which after all, is only harming us. But how do we do that?

How Do We Forgive?

There are several things that we can try:

(a) Painful though it may be, try to recall the incidence which led to the hurt and attempt to understand what happened from the other person's point of view, eg:

- could we have been mistaken in the identity of the culprit?
- could the other person's actions have stemmed from something other than nasti-

ness?

– could what the person said or did have merely been accidental or just the result of a poor attempt at communication or a joke?

(b) Ponder a time in our own life when we hurt someone and were forgiven. Consider how it made us feel to be forgiven and how it set things right between us and the other person. By offering forgiveness, the other person took the sting and the hurt out of the situation, and we could do the same.

(c) Write about forgiving the person who hurt us. We can do this in our happiness journal (which we spoke of earlier). We can also write a letter to the offender (but not post it). Writing about it can help us put the incident and our feelings into perspective and clarify the situation in our own mind. It may help us determine what we could have done to possibly change things.

(d) The last step is to consciously make a choice to hold onto the forgiveness and to let go of our anger and hurt and especially the desire for revenge. It may be something that we have to do repeatedly throughout the day, the week or even the months that follow.

Then, whenever negative feelings arise, we should talk ourselves through it, eg:

"Those horrible feelings have come up again. They make me feel bad and are not helpful to me... Even if that person doesn't deserve my forgiveness, I deserve to feel better about this. I deserve to feel happy."

Part 2: Forgiveness and Friendship continued

Fostering Friendship

One of the best remedies for improving our happiness, is to form one or two close friendships with some positive people. While electronically our connection with family and friends is increasing, the quality of our friendships and relationships seems to be suffering, and depression and loneliness are on the rise.

Good friends can reduce our stress levels, increase our confidence, and improve our happiness.

Finding Friends

For some of us, finding friends can be difficult and we may need counselling to help us overcome problems or fears from the past or to help us improve our social and other skills so that we can interact better with people.

We need to be willing to have a clear look at our behaviours and our activities to determine if perhaps, we are deliberately avoiding finding worthwhile friendships.

Conclusion

Forgiveness can be scary because it means we have to be

able to let go of something or someone that has hurt us, and somehow it doesn't seem right that while we're still hurting, nobody has been made to pay for the wrong-doing. We must practice forgiveness so that *we* can move on if we are to heal and if we are to gain happiness.

Try to forget that person that hurt you - can you honestly say that they deserve wasting one more precious second of your life on?

Friendship is a good way to gain a healthier and happier perspective on life. Friends can help us to forgive, to let go, and to move on. Friends can make life worthwhile.

Part 3 Difficult Decisions

[Link to complete article](#)

"Never cut a tree down in the wintertime. Never make a negative decision in the low time. Never make your most important decisions when you are in your worst moods. Wait. Be patient. The storm will pass. The spring will come."

Rev Robert H Schuller

Living With the Consequences

One of the challenges of adulthood is decision making, and living with the consequences of our choices. For those of us who struggle with low self-esteem, larger decisions can be particularly challenging and impact on our ability to find happiness in our choices, eg:

- We juggle all of the possible options and doubt our ability to make the right choice;
- We may worry that we've missed something obvious that

we believe will backfire on us later;

- We may phone friends repeatedly in the hope of gaining some clarity or reassurance, but still remain confused about whether we're doing the right thing;
- Once the decision is made, we may then go into a spiral of worry about the consequences of our decision. This can haunt us for weeks or even years;
- If our decision does result in something unfavourable, it only confirms to us that we're poor decision makers and increases our self-doubt;
- Even if the decision results in something positive, it seems almost anti-climactic because we were expecting the worst, and we may tell ourselves it was just a fluke and start worrying again that our next decision will be wrong.
- We impulsively make a decision because we aren't thinking clearly or because it's just too difficult to make a choice;
- Or we don't end up making any decision out of confusion and fear and then have to live with the consequences of our hesitation.

While the previous points may seem like extreme examples, if any one of these even faintly rings a bell, then I encourage you to consider that you need to start making deliberate changes in your personal decision-making processes.

One of the main reasons that decision-making can be so hard is that we've allowed it to become a



Part 3 Difficult Decisions continued

much bigger challenge than it needs to be. It's like the old phrase, 'to make a mountain out of a mole-hill.' We've gotten into the habit of seeing all decisions as insurmountable mountains of difficulty, rather than seeing them as they really are - just normal bumps along life's way.

If decision-making is difficult for us, it can certainly impact on our happiness, so we need to start healthy habits when it comes to our choices.

Be Well-Prepared in Advance

As much as possible, we should plan ahead for the larger decisions so that when they arise, we don't feel overwhelmed and are well prepared to make our choice.

If we leave decisions to the last possible moment, it will add to our stress levels; increase our confusion; and cause us to doubt our decision-making abilities.

Once we've made the decision, if we find doubt starting to creep into our minds, we should remind ourselves that we made the best decision after careful consideration. We should determine in our minds that we can live with our choice, no matter the consequences. We can do positive self-talk such as, *"No, I refuse to let this worry me. My choice was well thought out. I did a good job of preparing for this decision."*

Seeking Advice

Seeking advice from others can be both good and bad for us. It can be good in that more knowledgeable people can provide insight which may be beneficial. On the other hand, if we rely on others too much for advice, we can

become too scared or too lazy to tackle the important decisions for ourselves.

Keep God in the Loop

Are our major decisions part of our regular discussions with God? We certainly should be keeping Him in the loop and asking for His clarity and guidance.

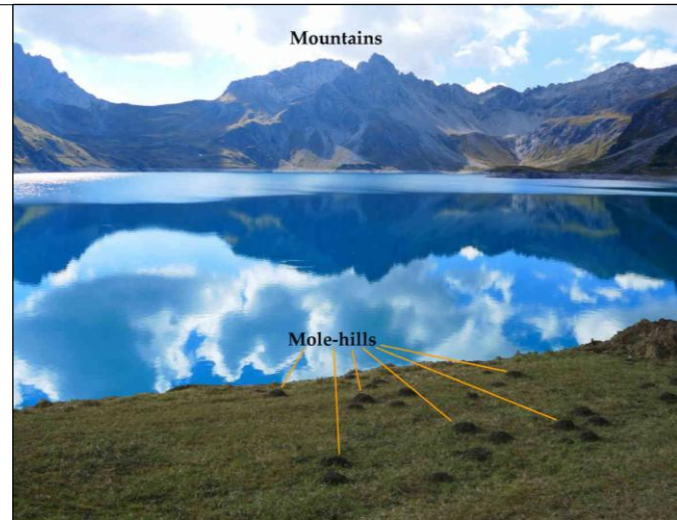
Keeping a Clear Head

If we want to ensure that we make a truly dumb decision that we're sure to regret, we can leave our decision-making to a time when we don't have a clear head. Let's consider:

- stress – if we're stressed out, it's good to put off making major decisions until things settle down.
- impulsivity – buying on impulse can lead us into making poor choices and getting into debt, and if this is one of our tendencies, we may have to call on someone who is more clear-headed to help us think things through;
- emotional mess – our emotions can impact hugely on our decisions because they affect our ability to think clearly; and
- tiredness – if we're doing too much or not getting enough sleep, it can affect our decision-making ability as well

Smaller Decisions

Not all of our choices need the preparation that our bigger decisions require. We must be clear in our own minds about what decisions need preparation and which ones don't. Obviously what we want for our pizza



topping is different to the choices we need to make when buying a house or changing jobs.

Conclusion

As with anything, the more practice we have with making decisions, the easier they tend to become in time. We should learn to embrace our mistakes because they happen to everybody. I've never met anybody who hasn't made some dumb choice at some point in their lives; sometimes repeatedly!

People who can shrug off mistakes have learned that beating themselves up about their choices, doesn't not in *any* way help them. We can determine to let it go and not to hold onto our feelings of shame or recrimination. This is an important 'happiness habit' we need to put into practice in our lives. As suggested earlier, we should get into the habit of positive self-talk such as:

"No, I refuse to let this worry me. I've made my decision and whatever the consequences are, I can survive it. If I've made the wrong choice, I can learn from this experience, but it doesn't mean that I'm a failure. All it means is that I made a wrong decision, and next time I will do better." (Repeat as necessary)

Part 4: Friendship[Link to complete article](#)

"Fake friends are like shadows always near you at your brightest moments, but nowhere to be seen at your darkest hour. True friends are like stars, you don't always see them but they are always there."

Habeeb Akande

When I grew up, I left home wearing rose-coloured glasses, naively believing that most people wanted to make the world a better place, and that everyone chose to work hard at friendships and relationships.

Boy! Was I in for a shock when I found out the truth!

It took me several years and much heart-ache before I finally figured out:

- not every friend is trustworthy;
- not every friend is worthy of my deeper friendship or love;
- friends will sometimes let me down;
- good friends don't criticise unless it's really warranted;
- true friends will stick by me no matter what;
- good friends will make the effort to work at our relationship; and
- I sometimes don't act as a good friend should.

That last one was particularly hard to accept, because I always thought I was a good person and a good friend, but there was at least one incident when I acted poorly in response to bad behaviour from someone that I had trusted as a friend.

While I could make excuses for it because I was angry and hurt, and emotionally immature, that



particular experience has stayed with me as a reminder of my own shameful and unacceptable behaviour.

That experience was a catalyst for me to never want to behave like that again, and to work at developing healthy habits in my friendships with others.

Why Is Important That We Have Good Friends?

I've had some wonderful and also some terrible friends over the years. When I was young and lacked belief in myself, I had some not so great friends. They talked about me behind my back, criticised me and made me feel bad about myself.

There was a foolish, naive part of me that wanted every single friendship in my life to work, and so I wasted lots of time, energy and emotions on people who proved not to be good-friend material.

How much better it would have been had I put all of that time, energy and emotion into my worthwhile friends.

It took me some years to figure out that I had the right to good, healthy friendships

Ultimately, good friends will make us feel good about ourselves, even though sometimes that may require that they bring any of our poor behaviours to our attention and encourage us towards healthier interactions.

What are the Traits of a Worthwhile Friend?

Some of the traits of a good friend are as follows:

- is loyal and trustworthy;
- is truthful, respectful and kind;
- enjoys our company and likes to make us feel good;
- does not judge us, but is willing to tell the truth about something difficult, especially when we need to hear it;
- is willing to support us no matter the circumstances;
- is loving and considerate;
- makes us smile and laugh;
- keeps in contact;
- makes physical contact, such as hugs; and
- listens to us.

That last one is vital to a friendship. Truly listening involves more than just hearing the words, but trying to put ourselves in the other person's shoes.

If you struggle with remembering what a friend said to you, practice listening. One way to do this is, when they are speaking, repeat what they're saying in your head, using your own words. (Notice I said, 'practice.' This skill takes time to develop.)

What are the Traits of a Poor Friend?

If we find ourselves feeling uncomfortable or bad about ourselves whenever we spend time with a particular person, we need to seriously consider how that person is treating us. It may be that we need to watch their behaviours and the words they use, to determine if they are acting kindly towards us.

Letting Go

At one time, I was friends with

Part 4 Friendship continued

a woman who became more and more critical the longer we were friends, even though she covered it up with smiles, jokes and laughter.

One day, I became conscious that a feeling of dread came over me when she dropped by my home, and later I felt relieved when she finally left. I knew that her abusive up-bringing had led to her showing poor behaviours in her relationships with others, but that didn't mean that I had to allow her to act poorly towards me.

After much prayer, I eventually severed my friendship with her.

Conclusion

Relationships and friendships can be tough, but when we find good, decent and trustworthy friends, they certainly make life worthwhile.

If we are finding struggles in our relationships with other people, we can find many sources of information and help on the internet nowadays, and we should also consider talking with a good Counsellor or our Pastor.

We need to get into good happiness habits when it comes to our friends including being aware of how we are being treated and how we feel around others. We should accept that not everyone is worthy of our love and in those circumstances, we should choose to let them go.

Finally, we should always remember that our Heavenly Father values us highly, and therefore we are worthy of

genuine friends and love who also value us highly.

Part 5: Understanding Yourself

[Link to original article](#)

"Let us be grateful to the people who make us happy; they are the charming gardeners who make our souls blossom."

Marcel Proust

Introduction

I very clearly remember the night in my mid twenties, when a friend of mine gave me a personality questionnaire to complete. Once he'd tallied all of my responses, he presented me with my 'personality type.'

As I read it, for the first time in my life I felt normal! At last, the strange behaviours of other people and some of the craziness of the world, began to make sense.

I understood, that the reason other people acted in ways that I didn't comprehend, wasn't because there wasn't something wrong with them or with me, but simply that other people felt, thought and reacted very differently to me because of their personality type.

It was an astounding revelation, and as I grasped it, it also filled me with a sense of freedom and acceptance.

This was a hugely significant event, because it was my first major step towards self-acceptance which contributed in positive ways to my growth as a Christian, both in the past and right through to today. It also began a thirst in me to understand other people.

God wants us to learn to understand ourselves so that we can learn to love ourselves in healthy ways. It is only once we learn to love ourselves, that we can healthily love and understand others, and this will be enhanced with the Holy Spirit's insight and guidance.

Why Are People So Weird?

What a great question! I'm sure you've come across people in your life that are annoying or just difficult to understand. From the moment of conception we develop in the womb with a tendency towards a particular personality type. The fact is, we all feel, think and respond differently to different circumstances, but there are consistent and logical behaviour patterns and thought processes behind people's responses because of our personality type.

Extroversion vs Introversion

Let's examine one of the simplest things that we can understand about people:

extroversion vs introversion.

Extroverted people tend to be the life of the party kind of people. Introverts can be fun-loving, but when they're around people they don't know, they may be more quiet and may seem withdrawn.



Part 5: Understanding Yourself continued

The difference between the two relates to where each gains their energy. Here's an example:

Max is an extrovert and Ian is an introvert

When Max the extrovert, is with a group of people, he becomes more energised as the event goes on. On the other hand, while Ian the introvert, can be outgoing and have fun, by the end of the function, he can't wait to get home and unwind to regain his energy.

Obviously these are very simplistic examples, and people are more complex than that, but we should understand that each person is perfectly acceptable as they are.

Just as we cannot force a blue-eyed person to have brown eyes, we cannot force an introvert to love socialising, nor can we force an extrovert to love extended time on their own – it's not natural for them, but both *can* develop in these areas.

Other Differences

There are three other areas in which people are different:

- people *see* the world in two different ways:
 - through things they can understand via their senses; or
 - through the impressions, patterns and meanings they see in the world around them;
- people make *decisions* based on two ways:
 - on basic truths and principles; or
 - by weighing their values and other people's points of views.

- people *live* their lives outwardly in two ways:
 - decided and structured; or
 - flexible and adaptable.

When we combine these four different areas (according to Isabel Briggs Myers and Katharine Briggs), we then have sixteen different personality types.

Finding Out More

There are many different personality tests available, and the most basic ones have just four different personality types, and these are fairly general.

One of the better tests is the Myers Briggs personality profiles which are much more in-depth as they focus on sixteen types (not just four), and can help us to understand ourselves and others more clearly, providing insight into what suits us when it comes to work; partners; spiritual gifts; prayer types and lots more!

While the profiles can never be 100% perfect, they are often uncannily accurate. It can be wonderful to read more and discover that at last, someone understands us!

I encourage you to find out more, but be aware that there are websites that will charge money for the full results of the testing, while there are many others where the results are free.

Conclusion

Each of the different personality types are important and can contribute positively to our society in different ways. No *one* type is better than any other.

Finally, let's not forget that God made you just the way you are for a reason, although you can't blame Him if you have a tendency



towards laziness or procrastination, which takes us into our next topic.

Part 6: Putting Off Procrastination

[Link to original article](#)

*"Procrastination is
opportunity's assassin."*

Victor Kiam

Introduction

Are you the Prince or Princess of Procrastination or perhaps the Lord or Lady of Laziness? Come join the human race, because we can all be prone to bouts of both of these not-so-healthy traits.

Occasional procrastination is fine, but when it starts to control our behaviours and our life, rather than us being in control, then we need to seriously look at how it is impacting us. We also need to understand that laziness and procrastination can have a hugely negative impact on our happiness.

laziness vs procrastination

What is the difference between them? While they do overlap, there are some differences. Here are the two definitions from the online Oxford Dictionary:

Laziness: *noun* – the quality of being unwilling to work or use energy; idleness.

Procrastination: *noun* – the action of delaying or postponing something.

Part 6: Putting Off Procrastination continued

The difference between the two is the *willingness* to undertake a task. Laziness is an active choice of will to *not* do something, whereas procrastination means we choose to *delay* a task while believing that at some point we will still have to do it.

Most people are more guilty of procrastination than laziness, so we'll focus more on the concept of procrastination.

In What Ways Do We Procrastinate?

We can find ourselves giving in to procrastination in several areas:

- *at home*: two things that are high on most people's procrastination list include housework and particularly clutter;
- *health*: getting exercise, eating more healthily, taking medication or going to the doctor;
- *our education*: we may delay undertaking study or courses;
- *careers*: being willing to try new tasks, learning new things or completing courses to improve ourselves or enable us to undertake more advanced tasks in our workplace;
- *relationships*: we can put off trying to resolve broken relationships, particularly those with family members and people that are difficult to get along with; and
- *as Christians*: we may also be guilty of procrastinating putting more effort into our relationship with God, or getting involved with our church, and we may even put

off consciously listening to God's leading or teaching in our lives.

How Can Procrastination Cause Us Unhappiness?

Initially when we procrastinate, we may feel glad that we postponed that dreaded chore. The problem with resisting tasks which we find boring or bothersome or that seem too large to tackle, is that they won't get done on their own.

There is no magic fairy on standby, ready to do our work, so the task sits there undone, reminding us constantly that it's still waiting, particularly if it's something like housework. We can only turn a blind eye to mess and dirtiness for so long.

If we allow time to pass or other tasks to pile up undone, the pressure in our mind increases. Eventually the pile of tasks can become so huge that it's difficult to know how to even *begin* to tackle it, which can lead to *more* procrastination and add to our stress.

This can be particularly true of aims such as looking after our health or improving our education. We may suddenly find that years have passed and that the resolution we made to improve ourselves when we were nineteen, remains incomplete and regret can take up residence in our minds and hearts, and contribute to feelings of unhappiness.

Living in a pig-sty or having a large list of incomplete tasks to undertake can make us grumpy and even depressed because we can't ignore it, and in our mind it can take on gigantic dimensions that make us believe it will be too

huge or even impossible to do on our own, or even that it's too late to try and resolve it.

Research of a group of more than 10,000 people indicated that 94% of those who procrastinate believe it impacts negatively on their happiness, with around 19% claiming that it's enormously negative.¹

It can impact our relationships by causing us to put off things until the last minute and make us late for appointments with friends and loved ones, or discourage people from visiting us if our home is dirty or messy, and in the workplace we'll soon develop a reputation for tardiness and/or slackness.

How Do We Overcome Procrastination?

One of the biggest reasons that we resist tackling procrastination is that we've let things go for so long, that it's grown from a molehill to a mountain! We may baulk at the size of the task or dread that it's going to be *so* boring.

Perhaps we fear failure or if it's in the workplace, some people may fear that they'll be so good at the task that they'll then be given even more difficult jobs that are beyond their capability and then perhaps people will think they're failures.

On the other side of the coin are the perfectionists who won't begin a new task until they've completed the one they're currently working on – absolutely perfectly.

Tackling Procrastination

Let's look at some ways that we can tackle our problem with

1. Procrastination Research Group, website: www.procrastination.ca/

Part 6: Putting Off Procrastination
continued

procrastination:

(a) *Be honest about it.* We often fail to recognise that procrastination is a personal choice. We must be honest with ourselves and look at all of the areas of our life where our procrastination is having an impact:

- work?
- relationships?
- household chores?
- health?

(b) *Take small bites.* Rather than allowing ourselves to feel overwhelmed by how much there is to do or how much we need to change, we should remind ourselves that we can tackle this issue one small step at a time.

Set ourselves a goal of attempting just the *one* task and try to complete as much as you can in a set period of say twenty minutes.

Once the period has elapsed, we can take a five minute break, congratulate ourselves for our achievement and reminding ourselves of how far we've come, rather than focussing on what there is yet to do.

(c) *Try to make it interesting.* What can you do to make the task a little more fun? Play music; sing; dance; or make up a limerick in your head?

(d) *Be aware of distractions.* What are the things that distract us from completing our tasks? TV, computer games, phone calls or social media? So, wwatch it around. Complete 20 minutes of a chore and reward

ourselves with five minutes of fun once the task is complete

(e) *Focus on one thing at a time.* Most individual tasks require our undivided attention so we can't fool ourselves into thinking we can do two tasks at the same time. Likely neither will be done well, or they'll take longer than they should.

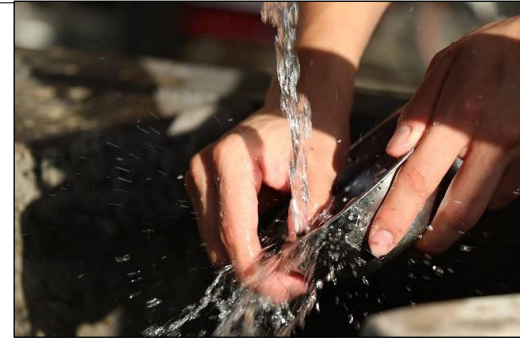
If we're feeling overwhelmed by the enormity of the tasks, we can tackle the easier jobs to begin, eg washing the dishes. Once it's completed, we should allow ourselves a moment or two to feel good about it, and to enjoy how clean and tidy it is. Go ahead and feel proud of your achievement!

(f) *Set ourselves a goal.* Once we begin to tackle this problem, we can begin to set ourselves achievable goals, such as washing our clothes once a week. In fact, some people put aside a set day and a time to complete a particular chore.

We should aim to wash all of our clothes, and not just what we think we're going to need for the next few days, otherwise we'll be heading down "Procrastination Road" again.

I love that sense of freedom I feel when I've completed my washing and then later have put it away, because I know that I won't have to think about it for another week, and I'll have plenty of clean clothes to last me for seven days, including my favourite shirts!

There are a couple of monthly chores that I always aim to complete on the first day of the month, because it's far too easy for me to forget to do



them, and I've added reminders into my phone to tackle other important chores on certain days as well.

(g) *Time it.* One of the lies we use to convince ourselves to procrastinate is that a particular job will take too long or that we have more important things to do.

The fact is, that it often takes far less time than we think to do the task, particularly those everyday household chores that most procrastinators hate, eg making the bed, washing the dishes or tidying up.

When I recognised I was lying to myself about those annoying little tasks, I started timing how long it actually took to complete them. I now know that making my bed takes me less than one minute and whenever I want to make an excuse not to do it, I cannot justify NOT doing it. Thirty-seven seconds to make my bed? Of course I can manage that!

(h) *Do it as we go:* some tasks do take more effort than others, but we can make it easier on ourselves by doing what we can along the way, eg thoroughly rinsing the dishes and utensils as we cook dinner, and then there's no nasty, stuck-on crusty bits at wash-up time that take *forever* to scrub off.

Part 6: Putting Off Procrastination continued

- (i) *Declutter the clutter.* Research suggests that we can waste up to thirty minutes a day looking for lost items. When we can't find something we're looking for, it can encourage us to procrastinate.

One way that we can help to eliminate clutter and the frustration that goes with looking for lost keys and other items, is to become more organised.

As I have a terrible short-term memory, I will rarely remember where I put things and so I've trained myself to place items in a particular place. It makes no sense to me to waste my valuable time looking for lost items – valuable time that I could spend doing things that I enjoy.

I encourage you to put the effort into learning how to declutter – there are various websites that can help you with suggestions on how to do this.

From my own personal experience, I can tell you how much simpler and less stressful it has made my life to be clutter-free, but it took me several years to fine-tune my home and to train myself.

- (j) *Planning our schedule.* Along with my bad short-term memory is the inability to remember birthdays and appointments.

If we are disorganised with our time and miss appointments, it can encourage us to procrastinate in the future. I'm so grateful for modern technology and the fact that I can

easily add reminders into my phone. This is a very useful habit to start, and while it may take a little time to train oneself, it's well worth the effort.

Conclusion

The wonderful thing about overcoming our natural inclination to procrastinate is that it usually results in us having a more pleasurable leisure time, because we aren't thinking about what needs to be done, or having to step over the mess in the middle of the floor, or forgetting to attend that important engagement, or having to kill that infestation of mutant cockroaches that have taken over your kitchen.

I'm going to finish this section so that you can get up and go and do that boring chore you've been avoiding RIGHT NOW ... oh, and don't forget to time it – you may be surprised how little effort it actually takes!

Part 7: Derailing Depression

[Link to original article](#)

"Why am I so overwrought, why am I so disturbed? Why can't I just hope in God? Despite all my emotions, I will believe and praise the One who saves me, my God."

Psalm 42:11 [VOICE]

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 simply uninformed. We discussed this in more detail in our article "Can Christians Have a Mental Illness" in the December 2016/February 2017 issue of SPAG Magazine and

have shared it on our website ([link here](#).)

We even took a glimpse into the lives of well-known Christians and Biblical people who struggled with depression at some point in their lives. ([link](#))

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.

As someone who suffered depression and anxiety for several years, I know that mine was the result of ongoing bullying and harassment at a workplace combined with terrible, long-term physical pain and lack of sleep, which eventually led to depression, anxiety and panic attacks.

Mine was not the result of sin, or not having enough faith, or being disobedient towards God.

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.

We've included this topic here because depression can obviously impact hugely on our happiness.

God Loves Us No Matter What

As we begin 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

Part 7: Derailing Depression continued

and suffering on us – it's not in His nature to wish harm on us.

He can and will 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 those who suffer.

While personally I would have preferred not to experience horrendous pain and depression, I believe that I've become a more compassionate, understanding and tolerant Christian as a result.

Many people with depression try to mask it and can outwardly appear happy, but are twisted up inside. They fear judgement by their fellow Christians, as if they're failures. Those who have never been through depression, haven't a clue about the suffering and pain that depression brings.

From Where Does Depression Arise?

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.

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 worldwide².

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 etc
- 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, particularly suicide, 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.



². Australian Bureau of Statistics. (2008). *National Survey of Mental Health and Wellbeing: Summary of Results, 2007*. Cat. no. (4326.0). Canberra: ABS.

Part 7: Derailing Depression continued

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.

Blaming Others – Nasty People

There's something important that we should know – we can't blame others for how we feel or react to a situation – it is entirely up to us about how we deal with our emotions. Our emotional responses are *ours* to deal with. Nobody else is responsible for our feelings nor our reactions.

While it's true that nasty people can affect us emotionally, we may have options about how to deal with them. In the workplace we may need to take the situation to a manager, someone in a higher position, or the Personnel Officer. If it's a toxic working environment, sometimes it may be necessary to seek employment elsewhere.

Prayer is vital, particularly asking God to help us to ignore any nastiness, and as difficult as it may sound – praying for the

person responsible and asking for God to bless them. That's a shocking thought isn't it – that we should ask for God's blessings on such a horrible person? Our natural human response is to say, "Hey! That's not fair! They don't deserve it."

Having worked in such a situation myself, daily asking for God's blessings on a particularly horrible person for two years, I was slowly able to let go of that person's nastiness and pass it onto God, even though on occasion they still deliberately tried to hurt me.

After a while, I began to feel sorry for them, because they must have felt so unhappy and miserable with their life, for them to act like that. Through my prayer, God was slowly able to change my attitude towards them, and my anger began to dissipate.

In time, I came to a point where I was able to forgive them. That doesn't mean that I ever trusted them again or expected them to change their behaviour. Forgiveness isn't so much about healing our relationship with that other person, but about healing our own broken or hurting heart, and then being able to move on.

There's a well-known passage in Luke 6:27-38 about loving our enemies, which I encourage you to pray about and read through. I particularly like the way it's worded in The Voice Bible version. The first verse says:

"If you're listening, here's My message: keep loving your enemies no matter what they do. Keep doing good to those who hate you."

Isn't that challenging?

"Keep speaking blessings on those who curse you. Keep praying for those who mistreat you."

Perhaps I should print that on a poster and put it somewhere so I'm reminded of it every day.

While we aren't responsible for suffering depression, we are responsible for trying to overcome our own emotional responses to difficult situations.

Sometimes though, it's ok to give up on a situation or a person – it doesn't mean that we've failed – it's just time to move on.

We Have the Right to Healthy Relationships

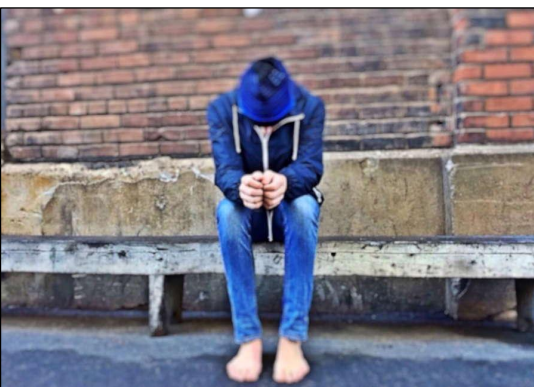
We have the right to have healthy relationships with others. If someone is nasty, just because they're a relative or a Christian in our church or in our circle of friends, that doesn't mean we have to put up with their awful behaviour. There will be times when we can't avoid those nasty people and we may have to take the step of speaking to them (as scary as that sounds).

There are times when no matter what we say, a person will continue with their negative remarks or actions. In those circumstances, we have the right to walk away.

Getting Help for Depression

Sometimes when we're depressed, it can be hard for us to recognise that what we're experiencing is depression nor understand that we need medical aid. We should listen to our family and friends if they're suggesting we seek help.

Depression isn't something about which we should be



Part 7: Derailing Depression continued

ashamed, especially when we consider the earlier, startling statistics about depression in the general population, and yet it's something seldom discussed, as if it's some terrible thing we should hide it because people might think we're weak or weird, or as in some churches, that we must be terrible sinners.

1. See Our Doctor

If we're suffering depression, our doctor should first rule out any physiological cause for it. If it stems from a physical issue, then our doctor should be able to help with the right medication, vitamins etc.

2. Get Medication and/or Help from a Therapist

If our depression is not from a physical cause, then our doctor should be able to guide us to where we can find help, eg a course of anti-depressants combined with guidance from a qualified therapist.

If our depression arises out of another mental illness, then our doctor should be able to put us in touch with a psychiatrist or psychologist who specialise in mental disorders.

3. Pray, Pray and Then Pray Some More

We should be keeping prayer as the cornerstone of our day. This can be challenging when we are depressed, but if our relationship with God is not at the core of our life, then it can make matters worse and is likely to deepen our depression.

Happiness Habits for Helping to Keep Depression at Bay

If we're suffering depression or heading towards it, and it doesn't have a physical cause, are there some happiness habits which we can put into practice? Yes, there are, although I can't guarantee that this is some magic cure, but it should hopefully contribute to an improvement in our mood, and help us to handle each day a little better. It may even stave off severe depression.

What are these habits?

- Prayer;
- Counselling;
- Focus on facts – not feelings;
- Look after ourselves;
- Find things to enjoy; and
- Find God's purpose for us.

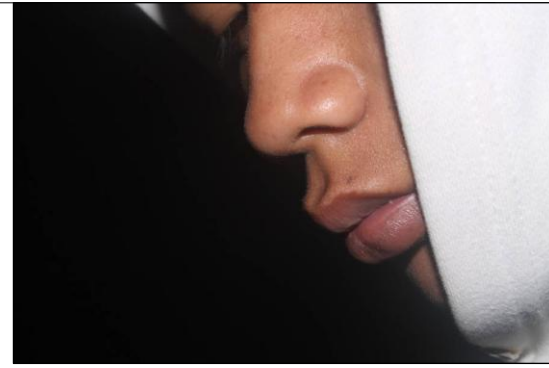
1. Prayer

While it may seem obvious to pray when we're depressed, it can sometimes be difficult for us to do so, because our depression can mess with our minds and cloud our thoughts. We may struggle with finding the enthusiasm to pray, or the depression may overwhelm us so much, that we simply can't focus other than to say a few perfunctory sentences.

For many of us, prayer is *hard* – we don't all have the gift of prayer.

In an earlier issue of SPAG Magazine, I shared about a simple prayer technique which has stood me in good stead over the years: JOY. = Jesus; Others; and Yourself: **J = Jesus.**

First, praise God, Jesus and the Holy Spirit. Hebrews 13:15 reminds us that believers are supposed to keep offering praise:



Following are some suggestions for praising God:

- Praise God for His salvation. (See Ephesians 2:8-9)
- Praise God for His loving kindness. (See Psalm 117)
- Praise Him for His goodness. (See Psalm 135:3)
- Praise God for His wonderful grace. (See Ephesians 1:6)
- Praise Him for His mercy, justice and holiness. (See Psalm 99:3-4)

O = Others.

Secondly, pray for others, including our family, friends and our church and its Pastor, and also for persecuted Christians. We have a [prayer page](#) on our website with prayer needs for many of our persecuted brothers and sisters which you may like to use.

Y = You.

Finally, it's time to put forward our own needs and problems to God.

We shouldn't be discouraged or worried about opening up to God – He already knows what we think and feel, but opening up that communication between us will enable the Holy Spirit to commune with us, so that God can speak with us.

. = Stop

Yes, that's a stop there. We should endeavour to take some

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time to try and sit in silence and listen to God. We can ask Him to help us focus and switch off any craziness going on in your head.

The more we try and listen to God, the more easily we'll recognise His voice and His guidance.

2. Seek Counselling

In the past, if we've experienced harmful or negative relationships, particularly in our childhood, 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.

If we've grown up with unhealthy attitudes and behaviours towards others, we may not be able to clearly see them in ourselves.

Without this insight, we are unlikely to grow, 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 perspective and can enable us to learn appropriate and healthier behaviours in our adult relationships, and particularly with our spouse and our children.

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.

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 or that God can't use us.

At my age (54) 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, but I can improve if that's something that I really desire. 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.

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.

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. 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.

(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.

(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, etc

Part 7: Derailing Depression continued

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.

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

It can be easy for us to lose our social skills if we rarely leave the home, and have little social interaction, which 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.

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.

(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.

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.

- Keep up the good hygiene;
- Wash our clothes, iron them and repair if necessary;
- Do the dishes every day and put them away;
- Make the bed every morning and change the sheets regularly;
- 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.

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.

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.

5, Find Things to Enjoy

Each of us can make conscious choices to undertake activities or change behaviours which result in a boost of the good chemicals in our brains which encourage us to feel more positive, and can reduce

our depression. It's exciting to think that we can actually make a literal difference in our own brain chemicals.

(a) The Little Things:

The happiest people I've known are *not* those who seek after possessions, power or position, but those who find enjoyment and joy in the small things. It often takes a conscious and sometimes daily effort to change our approach.

(b) Practicing Gratitude

There's a reason why attitude sounds like it's part of the word gratitude – changing our attitude can once again stir up those good brain chemicals. While this is linked to the previous section about enjoying the little things, this takes it up a notch or two.

We can use the Happiness Journal (mentioned in the first section of this article) to write down something for which we are grateful every day.

For some of us it's easier to harp on about things that are going wrong, particularly if we're depressed, but focussing our mind each day on at least one thing for which we are grateful, can help to knock depression onto its butt, or maybe help to derail it before it takes hold.

If we complain a lot and more often focus on the negative things in our life, those neurons in our brain that fire when we complain can fuse together. The more we complain, the more easily those neurons are triggered until eventually they begin to fire much more easily than neurons

Part 7: Derailing Depression continued

that result from positive experiences.

That means that we *teach* our own brains to become wired to being negative and critical!

The opposite is also true – the more we focus on being grateful and endeavour to find joy in our life, the more easily our brains will trigger our positive and happier thought processes.

(c) *Setting Goals*

Another way to boost those good brain chemicals is to achieve a goal. Whether it's something small or large, we can set ourselves a goal and work out how we're going to achieve it.

We should start planning for our next goal just prior to completing our last one and we'll be ready to go when the time arrives.

While small aims are great, we should also encourage ourselves to set big ones as well.

If we're feeling uninspired, we can go online and read about the goals other people have set themselves, or think about those little dreams we've had over the years.

(d) *Hugs, Friends and Puppies*

While that may sound like a strange title, having friends, giving and receiving hugs and owning pets, particularly dogs, can boost the good chemicals in our brains as well.

(e) *Remembering Our Achievements*

Another brain booster is reminiscing about things in our

past that we've done particularly well, or were commended for, which, is good for us.

It's not supposed to be about pride, but more about reminding ourselves that we've done some pretty good stuff, and that we still have the capacity and the time to achieve more.

(f) *Releasing Endorphins*

Most of us have heard that eating chocolate or laughing can release endorphins (more chemicals) which make us feel good.

While it may seem almost fake if we have to force ourselves to smile or to laugh, oddly enough, it really can work. Other things which may boost our endorphins including smelling vanilla or lavender, eating spicy foods, or just stretching our bodies.

(g) *Eating Well*

In the rush, rush, rush of our busy lives, it can be easy to leave good nutrition out of the equation. If we aren't obtaining the proper nutrients from our diet, it can certainly impact on our health and also on what is happening in our bodies and brains, which ultimately affect our moods.

(h) *Meditation*

The majority of us find it difficult to meditate, especially in a world where our brains are switched on most of the time with our electronic devices making phone calls, sending text messages, social media and so on.

Meditation is a learned technique that can take a long

time to master, but it's a God approved practice which is discussed and encouraged in the Bible (See Philippians 4:8; Psalm 63:6, Psalm 143:5-6 and Psalm 145:5)

Meditation is a prayer where we meditate or focus our mind on the nature of God and His works, such as Jesus' sacrifice for us, and the Holy Spirit's indwelling.

We may choose to look at the wonders of His creation, or His holiness or majesty. Otherwise we may just sit quietly in His presence, trying to be open to the touch of His Holy Spirit.

To begin meditating, we must put away distractions and give ourselves sufficient time to relax and focus on God, even if it means we have to get up a little earlier each day.

While eastern mysticism also suggests the use of meditation, we should avoid any cross-over between the two, particularly repetitive phrases that quickly lose their meaning.

The Psalms can be a good place in which we can find ways to praise God, or to encourage our minds to focus on His greatness, such as Psalm 145:5-9:



Part 7: Derailing Depression continued

6. Find God's Purpose for Us

God gives each of us gifts which we should be deliberately working at developing. Those who've grown up in unhealthy environments as children, may come to believe that they have no gifts or talents.

We seem to honour people whose talents are more in the frontline of the church such as the pastor or the worship team, forgetting the many unseen or forgotten workers whose talents are vital in keeping a church operating such as: cleaners, gardeners, teachers, IT people, etc.

There are many people whose work outside of the church are also important: RE teachers, prayer warriors, Bible study leaders, missionaries, and many more.

We should remember that no one comes into those positions without striving to develop their talents in some way. We have a responsibility to seek out areas in our lives and our skills where God can use us, and as time passes, we may find opportunities to develop further talents.

Final Note

There are many areas that contribute to our well-being and our happiness as we have discovered.

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.

I hope you will be encouraged to start these many techniques and

suggestions in your life and your everyday living, and to actively look at ways that will encourage the development of happiness while at the same time ensuring your first priority is your relationship with God.

Our Happiness Habits section has been a regular part of SPAG Magazine for quite a number of issues, and while we'll still include an article on this topic every now and then, they will no longer be included in every issue.

The complete articles can be found on our website [on this link](#).

I hope you have found these helpful. Don't forget to come back and reread this article and implement them in your life.

These 'happiness habits' can improve your happiness levels, as well as your relationship with God. [END]

Bibliography:

No name, undated, Oxford Dictionary, available: www.oxforddictionaries.com/, accessed 01/08/17

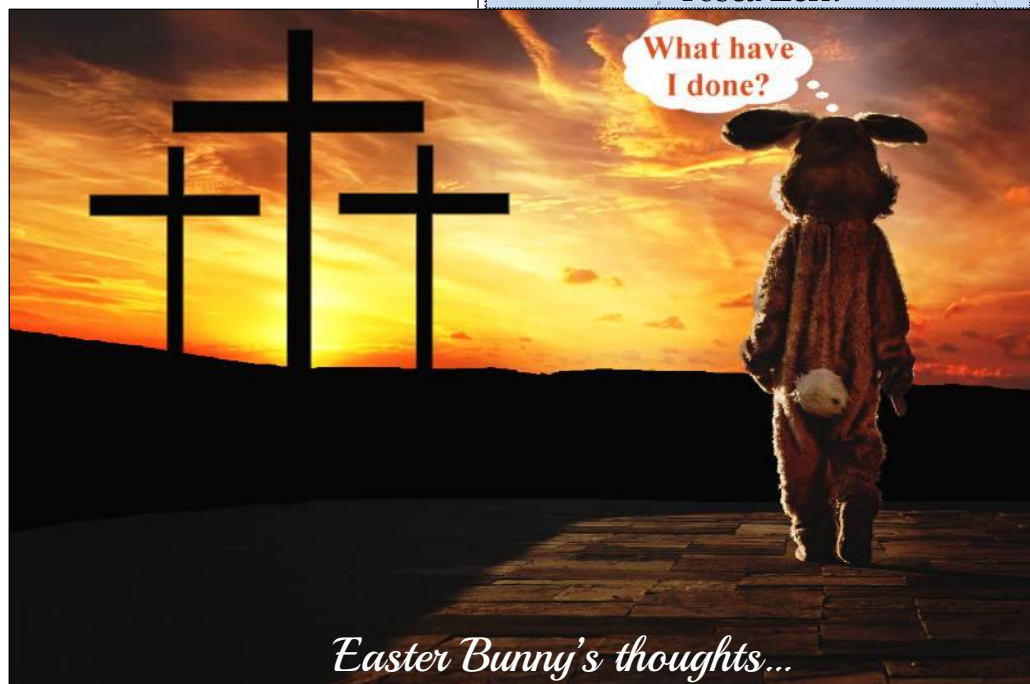


Tantalising Trivia

Nutty Names

Did your parents saddle you with a dreadful name? If so, you may feel a little better after checking out these monikers. Yes, the following are real names of real people, extracted from birth records, voting rolls and more:

Matt Adhoor
Magdalena Babblerjack
Zetta Cabbage
Nancy Dancy
Vanity Fair
OK Pun Gassett
Pool Hall
Mingtoy Johnson
Fannie LaFata
Althea Foss McBiddlewhiskers
Voltaire Nails
Monique Pancake
Loyce Quattlebaum
Goldie Sacharin
Zennus Tabbutt
Wyoma Ubelhor
Tosca Zerk



Singles: How Do You Respond to Those Dumb Comments?



by Vicki Nunn

Over the years as a single person, I've been on the receiving end of some pretty dumb, occasionally annoying or even rude comments and questions about my state of unwedded bliss.

Why do people think they have the right to comment or make suggestions about how to 'cure' my 'problem?' Those same people certainly wouldn't ask married people about their love-life, would they?

How Do You Respond?

How do you respond to others when they make silly, annoying, rude or repetitive comments about you being a single person? What kinds of things do people say to you?

I had a couple of relatives who thought it was hilarious to regularly ask me,

"So how's your boyfriend?"

I would reply,

"Which one?"

There was also this question:

"So when are you going to get married?"

My favourite reply,

"I'm waiting for an archaeologist. After all, the older I get, the more interesting he'll find me.¹"

Or in response to,

"When are you going to find a husband?"

I could have responded:

"I'm waiting for the local college to run the course 'Christian Husband-hunting 101.'"

Next time someone asks me:

"Are you still single?"

I might just respond:



Other Dumb Comments

A group of single Christians got together recently and shared some of those thoughtless comments they've received over the years and some responses.

Perhaps you can relate to some of these. In fact, why don't you send us some of the comments you've been subjected to, simply because you're still single.

Here's a [link](#) to our web-page where you can submit your own comments online, or email them to us at:

spagmag@yahoo.com

So, let's get started:

Comment to SC (female):

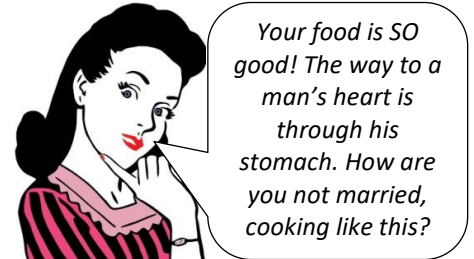
"You're not putting yourself out there!"

RS (male):

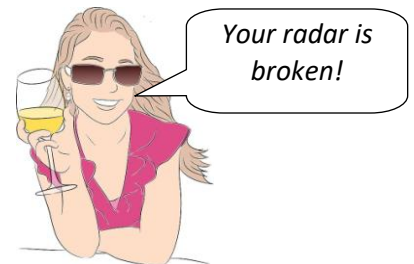
One year I got a Valentine's card from my mother because...



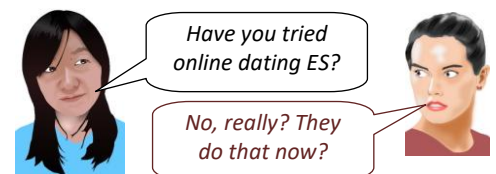
Comment to SC (female) after cooking a meal:



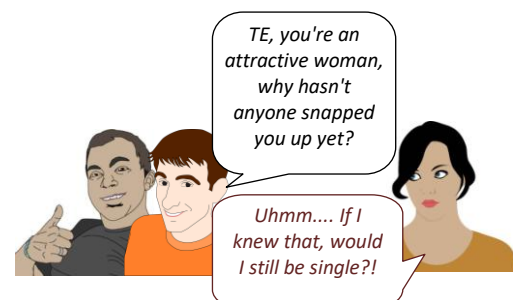
Comments to NJ (female) from five different women including family and two best friends:



Regular comments to ES (female):



Comments from guys in groups to TE (female):



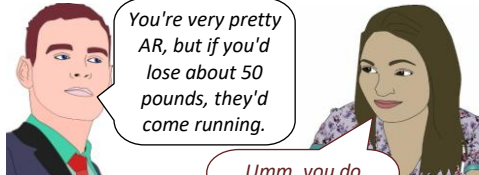
1. Thanks for that suggestion Agatha Christie.

Comment to NM (female) from her mother:



You have a lot of baggage NM, and I feel you're called to remain single.

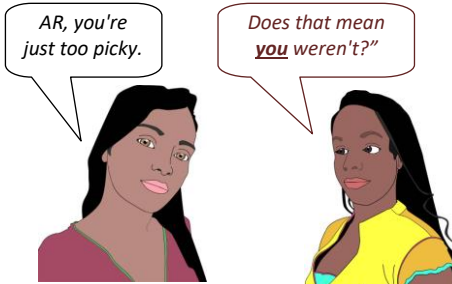
AR (female) received this heart-felt comment from a workmate:



You're very pretty AR, but if you'd lose about 50 pounds, they'd come running.

Umm, you do realise that there are a bunch of single thin women in this world?

The married sister of AR (female) said to her:



AR, you're just too picky.

Does that mean you weren't?"

JL (female) shared this story:

"When I went home and we all attended church during Christmas, my niece just blurted out...



Oh gosh! Aunt is the only one who is single now. You should have a husband to sit with you in the church.

Mother's comment to AR (female):



AR, if you'd learn how to cook more stuff, you'd attract someone.

But everybody likes tacos!

DD's ten year old grandson said:

"I think you should try those dating sites... to find you a husband."

DD: What!? How does he even know about those sites?! He's ten! I don't know why he's suddenly made it his mission to get me a husband!

RS (male) shared:

The only time I can remember hearing anything about singleness preached in my church was in a sermon on "living together in love," that was aimed at the married folk. The 'sermon' thrown in for the singles was:



Single people: you can babysit for the married folk so they can go out on date nights.

JF (female) shared:

A female visitor I met for the first time at my church said:



Oh, you have the gift of singleness. No one in my family has that!

#\$@&!>!

JF: I managed not to thump her.

HW (female) shared:

My cousins tell me all the time:



HW, you're gonna make a great wife!

AR (female) : in front of my boyfriend that my family was meeting for the first time at Thanksgiving, my nephew commented:



I thought you were gay cause we haven't seen you with anyone since your divorce.

Comment to AC (female):

"Don't worry you'll find a nice husband and get remarried."

AC: "Who says I want to get married?"

DD (female) received a little note from her seven year old granddaughter while they were both in church. The note read:



I'm praying for a husband for you. I promise I'll find you one.

Comment to AR (female) by her two loving sisters:

"You're not feminine-looking enough. Wear make-up, fix your hair! Stop wearing jeans, shirts, and flip-flops."

Question put to MA (female):



Are you a lesbian?

AR (female) received comments from both her non-Christian sister and friend:



AR, you need to show cleavage.

Then I'm doomed!

The Case for the Empty Tomb



**by Clifford
Ross**

Press Service
International

The Sydney Morning Herald once recorded the death of an extraordinary man: Sir Lionel Luckhoo. The Herald called him the “Perry Mason of the Caribbean,” and that he was.

He had 245 consecutive successful defences in murder cases. Even the fictional Perry Mason lost a case after seventy acquittals. The Guinness Book of Records lists Sir Lionel as the world’s most successful advocate.

I had the privilege of meeting Sir Lionel and he was a most humble man. You would not have guessed he was knighted twice by the Queen of England, successfully argued cases before the Privy Council and was at one stage Ambassador in England for two independent countries.

The Meaningless of Life

Sir Lionel shared with me that in spite of all his fame, court success, power and wealth he felt empty inside. The older he got the more meaningless life appeared. He said, “I had no peace.”

Then at age 63 he heard about the resurrection of Jesus. He personally checked it out using his legal skills.

He found that the message of Jesus’ resurrection satisfied not only his heart, but his mind, and he gave his life to Jesus. He said the transformation was immediate. It’s the resurrection and its power which we celebrate on Easter Sunday.

Is the Resurrection Based on Reliable Facts?

Sir Lionel said:

“I have spent more than forty-two years as a defence trial lawyer in many parts of the world. I say unequivocally the evidence for the resurr-ection of Jesus Christ is so overwhelming that it compels acceptance by proof which leaves absolutely no room for doubt!”

How can we be so sure?

What’s The Real Evidence for the Resurrection?

To establish the resurrection one must be able to prove two things. It’s not complicated really:

1. One must show Jesus was dead at point A, ie beyond resuscitation; and
2. It must be shown he was alive at point B, ie at a later date.

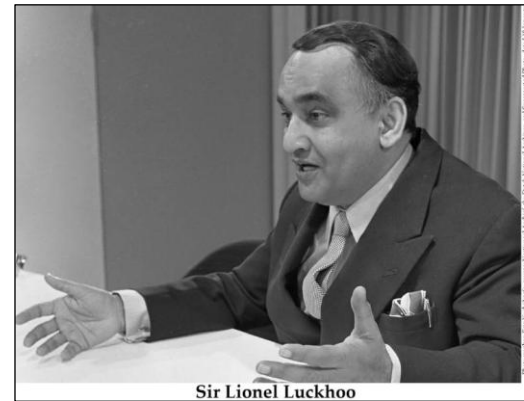
If someone is dead then alive, the only reasonable inference is resurrection, and if that, Jesus deserves to be worshipped as Lord, as he has defeated our universal enemy - death.

What is the Case for Jesus Being Dead?

What is the case for Jesus being dead at point A? Well let’s act as a jury and look at the evidence.

Firstly, we have the eyewitness accounts in Matthew, Mark, Luke and John that are found in the New Testament. They clearly testify Jesus was crucified until dead. A spear was even thrust into his side bringing a sudden flow of blood and water. He was dead.

Some sceptics like Dan Brown in the Da Vinci Code say, “Look he just swooned death and was



Sir Lionel Luckhoo

later revived and pretended he died.”

Can you imagine a man whipped to the point of death as Jesus was, hanging on a cross with a spear thrust into his side, being able to jump around three days later convincing every he was one hundred percent fit?

Even David Strauss, the famous sceptic of Christian things, admitted the old swoon theory is a greater miracle than the resurrection itself!

Most liberal scholars invent the swoon theory because they will never accept any miracle – miracles aren’t sophisticated enough for them – but yet they can’t avoid the empty tomb. Their conclusions for a lawyer are biased and ridiculous.

Additionally, the Gospels that record the death of Jesus are reliable.

The former Chief Justice of New South Wales, Sir Leslie Herron stated:

“Let any objective reader put side by side the four Gospels and he will be struck, as any Judge accustomed to evaluate evidence is always struck, with one outstanding fact. It is this: that while there may be a great variety

detail or form of expression or narration of or emphasis put on occurrences, underneath it all, the substance and the weight of the narration are true."

Sir Leslie was one who really knew what reliable evidence was.

The New Testament gospels document that Jesus was dead, but of course there is other historical evidence that Jesus was dead at point A.

The Jewish historian Josephus affirms his death as does the Roman Tacitus who states Jesus was put to death by Pontius Pilate.

Alive at Point B

What is the evidence for Jesus being alive at Point B? We have the direct eyewitness accounts of the disciples and others recorded for us in the reliable Gospel accounts. As Clarrie Briese, former Chief Magistrate of New South Wales says, these testimonies have a real ring of truth to them.

He says, they tell the story "warts and all," and further states:

"The witnesses of the resurrection of Jesus Christ are witnesses of the highest credibility."

The Apostle Paul also goes on to list there were over five hundred witnesses (1 Corinthians chapter 15). He records a superb witness list to the fact of resurrection, that included people who were initially sceptical but saw the risen Christ and then believed. He is saying to the reader, here are their names - check it out.

Apart from the eyewitness accounts there is circumstantial evidence. For example, no one ever produced Jesus' body to refute the claim.

The Romans certainly didn't want any rumours out there about this crucified Jesus being a resurrected Messiah and Lord, but no one produced the body to quash the story.

Let's consider the curious fact that the Jewish followers of Jesus changed their day of worship from the sacred Saturday Sabbath to Sunday. Why would they do that unless they truly believed he was risen?

The tomb was empty.

Let's look at the impact that the message "He is Risen" has had on our society.

Lord Hailsham, one of the most significant lawyers of our age stated:

"Our whole system of education, public or private, our network of hospitals, our social security system itself, have each a clear origin in this Christian foundation."

The tomb was empty, Jesus is alive!

Listen to how the Apostle Paul shared the news in 1 Corinthians chapter fifteen, verses three to five. These few verses all agree, there was a creed the first Christians shared when they met. Paul said:

"For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Peter, and then to the Twelve."
[NIV]

This Easter we can join with millions of people saying:

"Christ is Risen - He is Risen indeed!"

The ultimate proof we have of this is that when we put our trust in Jesus, He comes into our lives. He transforms us and walks with us.

We discover it is true that God loves us so much that He sent His only Son into the world to die for us.

To God we are significant.

Sir Lionel Luckhoo said of his commitment to the risen Christ:

"From that day my life changed. My life took a 180-degree change. I found real peace and happiness and joy."

If we want forgiveness and power for living, it's truly found in the crucified and risen Christ.

As the hymn writer wrote:

*Thine is the glory,
Risen conquering Son,
Endless is the victory
Thou o'er death has won.
Jesus meets us,
Risen from the tomb,
Longingly he greets us,
Scatters fear and doom.*

Our hope is the truth - He is Risen. [END]

Biography:

Ross Clifford's book is "Leading Lawyers' Case for the Resurrection." Ross is a former lawyer, Baptist Pastor and now Principal of Morling Theological College, Macquarie Park.

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Clifford, Ross, undated, Christian Today: The case for the empty tomb, available: www.christiantoday.com.au/news/the-case-for-the-empty-tomb.html, accessed 22/01/18.

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Modern Missionaries: PNG Adventures

My First Year in Papua New Guinea



by Liz Gill

How it All Began

As I reach the end of my first year here in Papua New Guinea, it is interesting to look back on the adventure so far and see how much I have learnt and grown.

Like every journey, this adventure started long before I set foot in PNG. About ten years ago, I was at the beginning of my nursing training when I visited a small Church in a different town one Sunday and heard a lady speak about the work she was doing with New Tribes Mission (NTM) as a Bible translator in PNG.

I was moved by the need for people to do this work but thought, "I could never do that." I'm not good at learning foreign languages. I don't even speak English properly half the time, but she also mentioned the need for support workers, including nurses!

Over the next couple of years, I kept hearing more about nursing in missions and PNG. Eventually, I concluded that God might be trying to tell me something. By the time I graduated and became a Registered Nurse, I had decided to work towards going to PNG as a nurse to serve in missions.

I also decided that, if I was going to go and help people, I wanted to be as helpful as possible. So, first I had to work for a few years to get experience and

confidence. While I was doing that, I thought it would be a good idea to do some Bible College study. Then I heard about a tropical nursing course in London that is specifically for nurses wanting to work in resource poor regions.

At that stage, I had made contact with the NTM clinic here in PNG and was encouraged by the doctor to attend that course before coming to PNG.

About seven to eight years after I first heard about this opportunity, including five and a half years of study, I was begging God to finally let me come to PNG.

The paperwork and support raising process took another year, but finally, I was able to join the NTM team as a Registered Nurse to serve in their Medical Clinic.

Land of the Unexpected

They call PNG the land of the unexpected. I think the name fits. Before I even arrived at Lapilo (the NTM base where I live and work), I had an unexpected overnight stay in Port Moresby.

Due to airport upgrades in Goroka, the last leg of my journey was delayed. This was rather annoying because it meant that it took me three days to fly a distance that would normally take five hours to fly. The upside though, was that my unexpected layover allowed me to see a little of Port Moresby and get to know the NTM government representatives who had helped me



The view from my house



Gaining new skills

through my nursing registration and visa process.

When I eventually reached Goroka, I was met at the airport by the doctor and nurses from the clinic, given a quick tour of town, then dropped at my new home.

I am living in a nice little three bedroom home near the top of the hill. Singles don't normally get three bedroom houses but the

family that was living there previously was on home assignment for the time that I'm to work here, so I'm house-sitting for them.

It's nice having the extra space, and living at the top of the hill keeps me fit but by far the best thing about this house is the view! It blew me away that first afternoon when I walked into the house and I've marvelled at it almost every single day during the past year.

I love to sit and watch the clouds lift off the mountains as I sip my cup of tea in the morning before work!

Orientation and Work

Two days after I arrived I was straight into orientation. I was so glad I didn't have jetlag to deal with! There was plenty to learn about NTM, PNG, and Tok Pisin (Pidgin).

The full orientation and language course takes eight weeks but only three weeks in I was pulled out and sent to work in the clinic full time. One of the other nurses nearly miscarried so she was put on strict bed rest for a few weeks. (Praise God, she now has a healthy baby boy!)

At the same time, another nurse was finishing in the clinic and heading home to Germany. This meant I had to jump in and learn fast!

Lots to Learn

There has been so much to learn! Thankfully, the doctors here love to educate. They are always looking for opportunities to teach us something new, and there is seemingly no end to new things here!

Nursing in a clinic is very different to nursing on a hospital ward. Nursing in PNG is very different to nursing in Australia. I have had to learn different processes, different diseases, and different treatments. For the first eight months we only had one doctor so all the nurses needed to know enough that we can look after patients on our own if he was away on a medivac or for some other reason.

I have really enjoyed learning lots of new skills!!

A few months after I arrived, our radiographer had to go back home, but before she left she trained all of us nurses to be able to take our own x-rays.

It was a bit of an information overload but our classes were full of laughter as we practiced positioning each other in the many varied, and sometimes odd, positions required for different x-ray views.

I have also mastered several basic blood tests. I find blood fascinating, so this is now one of my favourite parts of the job. I know that when I get home I am going to get so frustrated not being able to run my own tests anymore!

We can only do a handful of common tests but this helps phenomenally with giving accurate diagnoses and ongoing monitoring, plus it saves our patients the cost of shipping samples down to Australia for testing.

Another new skill that I get to practice somewhat regularly, is suturing. My first sutures were on a teenage boy who sliced his foot while playing in the river with his



Learning about village life

friends. In addition to stitching lacerations, I have assisted the doctor with excising a few small skin lesions.

We see every medical need from the routine, such as blood pressure management, to traumas, such as burns, and other emergencies, like a detached retina.

We deal with what we can and transfer the rest to other health care facilities as appropriate. For our missionaries, most of what we can't handle means a medivac down to Australia. No two days are ever the same, and I love it!

Other Things to Learn

Outside the clinic there has been a lot of other things to learn.

Living in the NTM compound here is kind of a double culture shock. There are the PNG people and their culture all around us, just outside the fence, watching us and our strange habits and many of them, working with us and helping us.

This I was expecting. What I wasn't expecting so much was the culture shock *inside* the fence. There is a reason they call Lapilo 'little America.' I know the Americans are right when they say it isn't really like America, but when at least half of the people on base are American and our supply store gets the majority of its stock

from the US, then the 'Americaness' is hard to ignore.

Fortunately, I already spoke some American (yes, it is a different language) before coming here. I am now quite fluent and even manage the correct accent sometimes... although not always intentionally.

Life in Lapilo

The unique culture of Lapilo is especially evident in our social events. Life on the mission field can be as routine as life anywhere else.

Fun breaks from the routine are always welcome but there is not a lot of entertainment options around here that we're used to, so we make our own fun.

There are sporting events, movie nights on the big screen in the conference room when someone gets sent a new DVD, and potluck dinners for absolutely every imaginable reason!

The most elaborate events are the high-school fundraisers. They have organised a Taco Truck, themed Skate Nights, and a Christmas fair. Most of the community gets really involved and they are a lot of fun!

One of my greatest frustrations living here is that I can't just get in my car and head out wherever whenever I feel like it.

For safety reasons, women are advised not to drive and I can't leave the compound without being accompanied by a man (and since I don't have a husband to be my bodyguard, I need to find a third person so we keep it all looking proper).

This means it is often weeks between excursions but I have made it a habit to take every

opportunity I can to explore this beautiful country, or just to go to the grocery store in town... you have no idea how exciting grocery shopping has become for me!

On one visit into town, I was able to visit the haus sik (hospital). Some of the ladies on base do doula work at the haus sik on Saturdays. I was with one of these ladies so she could take us up to the maternity ward and into the birth suite area.

The comparison between this birthing area and the ones I am used to back home was quite confronting. The haus sik has just one birth suite which can have up to six labouring women at the same time in bays separated only by curtains. The midwives are very skilled but they have a workload we would consider unacceptable in Australia.

As I have built friendships with some of the locals, I have been able to get out and spend some time with them, learning more about the PNG way of life.

My Cooking Adventure

One of my favourite adventure was learning to cook supi mambu! Mambu is the Pidgin word for bamboo. So literally, we cooked our food inside a bamboo tube, but first we had to prepare it the traditional way.

Bonita, the clinic wok meri (cleaner), was our guide, teacher, and mama bear. We rode into town on a PMV (public motor vehicle), the local bus system, and went shopping at the big food market. We bought the bamboo, veggies, and live chickens.

We then caught the PMV back out past Lapilo and walked to Bonita's place. Fortunately, there



Shopping at the big market in Goroka



Preparing the chicken for lunch



Cooking - PNG style



Visiting the haus sik (hospital)

was a bridge we could use to cross the river which was very high at the time, so it would have been interesting trying to swim across with all of the food!

At Bonita's, we sat around in her little cooking hut while she taught us white girls how to prepare the food and cook it over the fire. It took us a couple of hours but it tasted so good it was totally worth all the time and effort!

Other Adventures

On a few occasions, I have been able to travel further afield to explore more of PNG and visit some other NTM missionaries.

PNG is a hugely diverse and largely untamed country. Visiting our 'bush' missionaries has given me opportunities to see parts of this country very few other foreigners get to see, and to learn from the locals the joys and challenges of subsistence living in the jungle.

These visits have also burdened my heart for the need these people have to be able to hear the gospel in their heart language.

There are over eight hundred distinct languages in PNG, and many of them are still unwritten.

Thousands of people are living and dying every day with no knowledge of God.

I get to work alongside some amazing people who have given much of their lives to learning language and culture so that they can present the good news of salvation through Christ to one of these language groups. Sometimes the need that remains is overwhelming, but visiting these villages and seeing the growing churches is truly inspiring!

Beach Withdrawals

As much as I love the view and the weather up here in the highlands, every few months I start to suffer from beach withdrawals.

This is a real thing! I grew up in a coastal town and have never lived more than a couple of hours from the beach in my life. I guess here I'm still only a couple of hours from the beach, but only if I could fly!

Actually, flying is really the only viable way for me to get down to the coast but it's expensive so beach trips don't happen very often, but I have made sure they do happen occasionally.

Being so close to the equator, the coastal regions of PNG are hot and humid all year round, which just means you can enjoy the gorgeous beaches and reef all year round too.

PNG has some of the best dive sites in the world, so many of the missionaries here get their scuba diving licence and take their breaks by the coast, because even missionaries need holidays sometimes.

The End of My First Year

As I reach the end of my first year here in PNG, I am ready for a holiday, and I'm feeling very excited about my upcoming visit home!

There a lot of things I miss about life in Australia, and there are many people I can't wait to see.

I truly love life here in PNG as well - this is a good life. I have a lot of new friends, my job is challenging but satisfying, and

every day I get to be a part of something that matters eternally.

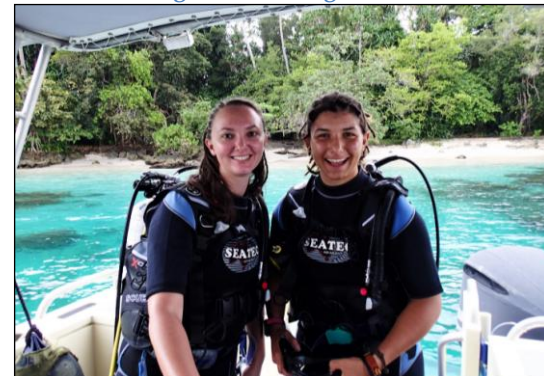
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High school fund-raisers (above and below)



Scuba diving near Madang (above and below)



Biography:

Elizabeth Gill has been a Registered Nurse with New Tribes Mission in Papua New Guinea since February 2017. Follow Liz on [Instagram](#).



Domestic Violence and the Church

~ Part One ~

Warning: this article may distress some readers.



by Ruth
Lindsay

Introduction

"I heard a loud sound coming from the spare room and sighed. Something heavy had been thrown against the wall of the room, followed by a muffled curse.

While the sudden mood changes of my husband Donny were nothing new, I had no idea what was wrong. I refused to go in there, and my mind frantically raced trying to figure what to do next.

"Lord..." I prayed, and got no further. God didn't seem to care about me or my angry husband.

I realised that I couldn't get to my toddler without walking past the spare room where my husband was. Footsteps headed in my direction, and as I leaned against the washing machine, I rested my hand protectively and lovingly on my pregnant belly.

While I was only three months along, I looked like I was about five months, and I felt sick, bloated and exhausted. "It's ok, little one... it's ok," I whispered.

My babies always went quiet when the abuse was bad.

Donny rounded the corner. "Look at this!" he yelled, waving a mouldy sandwich container towards me.

"You never clean this house! What do you do all day - sit on your #@!?! backside, while I work? You're #@!?! lazy and useless."

Donny had a temporary job at the moment and was away for two weeks at a time, returning home on the weekend and then gone again. He was packing to leave that afternoon, while I folded his clothes that I'd brought in from outside.

Our spare room was full of stuff that I wasn't allowed to touch, because he

was the only one allowed to pack and unpack in there.

Now this mouldy container was my fault. It seemed like I'd heard that line a million times before. It was always my fault... always.

"Sorry," I mumbled.

It was better to submit and admit to any wrong-doing then to try and defend myself. I dropped my head and looked at the ground.

He spun on his heel and returned to his packing, and before long I heard more objects strike the walls. It sounded like he was in a full-blown rage.

I headed for the kitchen with a sigh. Hearing the TV in the lounge room, I realised my 13-month-old son was watching his favourite show, I hoped that he would not hear what was going on with his father.

A couple of hours to get through and I reminded myself that I just had to hang on. I didn't need another black eye, or broken nose, or burst eardrum... I didn't need any more bruises, or complications to this pregnancy.

As I walked past the spare room he yelled at me. "Look at this pigsty!"

I looked into the room where things had been strewn everywhere in his rage.

My back stiffened. "It's not my stuff," I said quietly.

I stood in the doorway, not saying any more. My legs ached but I knew better then to sit down while he was working. He'd likely pull the chair out from under me, if I did that.

He strode purposefully towards me, waving his arms around and yelling.

"How about something to eat?" I asked, trying to placate him as I quickly headed into the kitchen.

He followed.

In the middle of the room as I turned around, he came up close behind me.



His eyes were sharp and furious as he leaned in towards me, so close that I could smell coffee on his breath. He was still yelling.

As I backed up, he swiftly brought his hand up as if he was about to strike me.

"Oh no, not my face!" I thought with alarm.

His hand swung towards the side of my head and stopped at the last moment. Instead of hitting me, he firmly flicked his hand back and forth, the wind fanning my face and the side of his hand deliberately hitting the end of my nose.

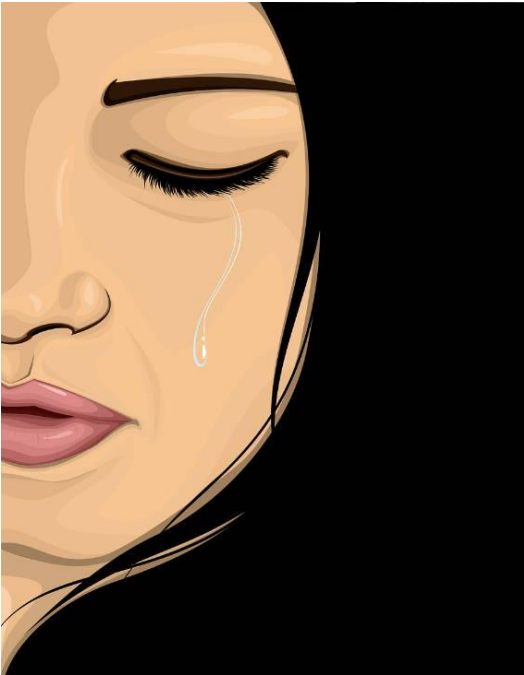
Closing my eyes, I bowed my head slightly.

Forcefully he thrust his body forward so that his stomach hit my pregnant belly. He was frightening me. I kept my hands by my side, my eyes to the ground and backed away.

He did it again. Stepping backwards, I soon found my back pressed against the kitchen bench.

I had run out of room with nowhere to escape and wondered what was going to happen next, as he resumed his shouting.

Over his yelling I heard a noise, like a high pitched scream, and glancing over his shoulder, I saw our young son standing at the entrance of the kitchen. His little face was screwed up in fear. He



stood with his mouth open, but no further sound came out.

The instant that Donny was distracted by our son's scream, I took the opportunity to duck past him.

Grabbing my son, I sped to my room, and quickly locked the door. Leaning against it, I listened, trying to determine what kind of response there might be from my husband. I could hear his heavy breathing just outside, but he didn't touch the door handle.

I wondered what I might do if he tried to come in.

After waiting a few minutes, I lay down on the bed and soothed my son to sleep.

As I drifted off to sleep, I thought again about how I hated my 'Christian' life, and that I was slowly coming to hate my 'Christian' husband.

Our life was a lie. Upfront it appeared loving, busy and purposeful, but behind the doors of our house hid another dimension... another world.

Everyone thought Donny was the most wonderful man. He came across as caring, loving, godly, a little intense, but wise.

In reality, he was spiteful, cruel, intimidating, angry and controlling. I felt helpless, weak, stupid and scared.

I utterly believed that I'd failed miserably at life, in my marriage, and as a mother. I hated who I had become – weak, pitiful and stupid. I was tired, alone and emotional and I didn't know what to do next.

I felt far from the God I professed to worship and love.

My world was grey and black, with two tiny dots of sunshine – my son and my soon-to-be-born son. As I whispered their names, a sob was wrenched from me.

I fell asleep crying and troubled, but even there, Donny invaded my dreams in yet another nightmare. I woke crying aloud in the now quiet house. Scared that Donny might have heard me, I covered my mouth and listened. My heart pounded while I waited, but silence remained.

Slowly I unlocked and opened the door and saw that his bags were missing from the spare room. He was gone.

There was a note which read, "I will not be back next fortnight. Maybe I will find someone else to live with."

I sat down, a mixture of intense emotions stirred within me. Fear, confusion, anger and despair filled my mind. I was a prisoner in a nightmare that was alive and walking. I couldn't keep going on like this. I realised that my babies would suffer.

There was a surge of strength in me as I recognised that I was their protector and that was one thing I could do for them.

While my son slept, I uttered the first honest prayer I'd said in months, "God help me and guide me, I don't know what to do. I commit my life fully into your hands."

After that, I picked up the phone and shakily phoned the police."

(Excerpt from "Behind Closed Doors."¹)

Domestic Violence and the Christian home

Is it possible for there to be domestic violence within a Christian marriage?

Sadly, the answer is a resounding 'YES!'

Surely within the Christian church then, these abusive marriages must be rare?

Sadly, the answer here is a resounding 'NO!'

These are often quite startling revelations to many Christians and sometimes even church leaders. The assumption is that if both of the partners in the marriage are Christians, then God will work on problems and behaviours that are unhealthy in the relationship.

For genuine Christians who are growing in Christ and growing day by day and year by year, a healthy, loving, growing marriage is definitely possible because each is willing to change and grow so that the marriage will flourish, a teamwork of mutual love and care.

I have personally witnessed healthy Christian marriages including my own marriage to my second husband Kim, and yet I was also a personal witness in my first marriage, to a painfully, destructive relationship that was supposed to be between two loving Christians.

I lived in a virtual hell, being controlled and in fear for fourteen years and when I needed help, it was difficult to find it in the church. Yet, I did not realise how bad the state of that marriage was, until I left and was shown what a true, strong and healthy marriage could be.

This article was *not written as a means of criticising the church*, but in an endeavour to make people aware that domestic violence is far more common than we realise within many Christian marriages. I am also hoping that the information I provide here will bring insight both to church leaders and Christian adults about domestic violence, as well as suggestions about how the Church can truly help its victims.

Due to the lack of reliable data on domestic violence against men in marriages, I am at this time focusing on female victims of domestic violence within intimate Christian relationships or Christian marriages in Australia. Should further information become available, a more complete article could be put together.

My Personal Journey

In an environment that included the change from victim to victor in the messy and secret world of domestic violence, it has been a part of my personal journey to explore the love, healing and hope that God provides.

My circumstances enabled me to identify the beliefs, struggles and mistakes that I personally witnessed and encountered within the church as they attempted to deal with my experience of domestic violence and abuse.

Our Saviour quoted the words of Isaiah in Luke chapter four, in which we are reminded that He was sent for the broken-hearted and the captive:

"The Spirit of the Sovereign LORD is on me, because the LORD has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to bind up the broken-hearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners..."
Isaiah 61:1 [NIV]

I had read this scripture many times and never understood that this scripture was for someone like me. It helped me comprehend that in Christ was freedom, release and healing, and this extended to all areas of my life, including my messy, personal world. Before I

could accept this, I first had to come to the realisation that I was broken-hearted, and captive to an incorrect belief system, as well as a prisoner of domestic violence.

During this article it is necessary for me to use the terms 'abuser' or 'perpetrator' and 'victim.' While the church prefers to use less abrasive words to describe someone caught in this sin and those affected by that sin, I would suggest that it's not just a matter of dealing with a sin, but is a twisted belief system that excuses one person's desire to hurt another person who is vulnerable... a person who is broken-hearted, captive and a prisoner.

By writing this way, my hope is to encourage people to honestly consider both about how we in the church view abusers and victims, and whether our view is Biblical or simply based on what we have learned and accepted from the limited knowledge gained from our own narrow upbringing.

Breaking the Silence

For many families who have domestic violence hidden within the foundations of their family structure, it is ultimately only Christ who can change and heal. Healing cannot take place though, until the roots of abuse are exposed and removed, and the silence and shame revealed.

"To remain silent about abuse, violence, and suffering does not help any community. For me personally, it was hard to break that silence. It

was acceptable to share my pain with my family doctor and occasionally with an unfamiliar doctor at a hospital where I went for treatment of my injuries, but to come to any point where I would start to risk seeking the help that I needed, required a bravery that I didn't possess at the time. What I held within me was simply too hard to speak about.

***Those that hold
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scriptures***

To the outside world, I appeared to have the perfect husband, and a great marriage, so when I finally did speak, I had to share more than just the abuse; it was about breaking that perfect image and the lies that ran secretly and deeply underneath it all.

For many Christian women, coming up through the shame and pain that covers the veil of silence can be likened to breaking thick ice on the edge of a frozen pond in the middle of winter - from underneath it. To be able to break through and speak requires more than she can do herself.

Often those that should help her, instead become her strongest critics and adversaries. Those that hold the greatest ability to bring about a miracle of a changed life in her abusive husband, often become confused by our God-given scriptures which are supposed to produce good fruit and real permanent change in a hardened heart.^{2"}

What is Domestic Violence?

I've heard people talking about abuse and specifically about domestic violence, and I think that it should be made clear that



Sometimes the only type of physical abuse is that of a push or a shove, yet the verbal and psychological abuse can go on relentlessly every day.

Statistics suggest that one in four women will experience emotional abuse, while one in six will be the victim of physical violence.

Domestic violence is not just one hit, one punch or one argument, it is a systematic, long-

term pattern that includes:

- creating ongoing fear in the victim;
- regular intimidation of the victim;
- ongoing controlling behaviours; and
- may also include physical violence;

Every abuse pattern starts somewhere, and a single incident still requires serious attention, because wherever a single incident arises, there has to be a cause from which further incidences may possibly arise. Yet from the first incidence, there is another part of domestic violence that is rarely addressed within Christian circles:

- isolation -

Abusers isolate their victims, particularly from those that the victim may seek to obtain help. It takes an incredible amount of courage for a victim to come forward and speak about what is going on within the relationship. Isolation allows the abusive behaviours and patterns of abuse to be hidden and to continue within the home.

Types of Abuse

I am aware that on most websites, these types of abuse are usually included under the category of 'Domestic Violence,' but I disagree with this: abuse is abuse and violence is violence. While they can go together, they are very different types of abuse. Violence is only one part of it. When most people speak of abuse within intimate relationships, they often categorise all abusive behaviour as 'domestic violence.'

While it is the physical violence that gets most attention, all types of abuse are unacceptable. Some are criminal offences and include marital rape and physical abuse. Within those two types of abuse, we need to understand that there are likely other forms of abuse occurring that are not so evident, but can often be more harmful in the long-term.

Verbal Abuse:

This includes using words to diminish the self-worth of another and to cause them to doubt who they are as an individual. Additionally, it can include using words which cause a victim to feel intimidated.

Examples of this may include screaming, shouting, put-downs, name-calling, swearing, and using sarcasm or ridiculing the partner for their religious beliefs or ethnic background. Verbal abuse can sometimes be the beginning of the next stage of abuse which is the physical violence.

Emotional Abuse

This includes any type of behaviour which deliberately undermines the victim's confidence as a person, and often leads the victim to the belief that

domestic violence is not entirely about the physical violence side of it. The Centre for Relationship Abuse Awareness states:

"An important piece in understanding the dynamics of domestic violence is the definition of abuse. Abuse is defined as the systematic pattern of behaviours in a relationship that are used to gain and/or maintain power and control over another. When one defines domestic violence in terms of physical abuse only they do not fully understand the dynamics that keep these relationships together³."

Most people are shocked by the discovery that physical violence can be part of a Christian marriage.

While understanding that physical violence is confronting, this is not the only type of abuse. What many people don't understand is that the physical violence will often be the culmination of many days or months of all other types of abuse which eventually culminates in physical violence.



they are stupid, weak, lazy, and/or useless. There may be behaviours that cause the person to believe that they are a 'bad parent' or even to believe they're going crazy or insane.

Emotional abuse may also include threats of suicide; and/or warnings that they will harm others around them including children. This abuse can cause the victim to believe that it was their fault.

The perpetrator may also use silence and withdrawal as a means of abuse and control.

Physical Abuse

Behaviour may include pushing, shoving, hitting, slapping, attempted strangulation, hair-pulling, punching etc. and may or may not involve the use of weapons. This also includes the throwing of items at the victim, such food or drink.

Not all physical violence ends in bruising or wounds, eg. food rubbed deliberately in the victim's face to cause humiliation. This type of abuse can cause physical

discomfort, bruising, wounds, permanent injury or even death.

Social Abuse

This involves isolating the victim from people who are important to them such as family and friends and includes preventing the victim from contacting them.

This could also involve verbal or physical abuse in public or in front of others so that the person feels humiliated and withdraws from others out of embarrassment and shame.

It could involve continually criticising or mocking the victim's friends and family, often so insidiously that the victim isn't aware that is occurring. As a result, the victim is slowly disconnected from those that could most help them.

Financial Abuse

The perpetrator often gains full control of the finances, including spending and decisions about money. This causes the victim to be financially dependent upon their abusive partner. Further abuse results from denying them access to money, including any of their own, and forces the victim (and children) to live with limited funds. The abuser may demand that the victim accounts for every cent that is expended.

This type of abuse can often be a major contributing factor for victims, particularly women, who believe that they're trapped in the relationship. When they have no money, there is no way they can leave if they don't have the financial resources to do so, particularly if they have been isolated from others, and want to take the children with them.

Sexual Abuse

This may include forced sexual contact, rape, and demanding that the victim perform sexual acts that cause pain or humiliation. It may also include forcing them to view pornography and belittling them for not appearing, and/or behaving as the sexual partner the abuser demands of them.

Spiritual Abuse

Ridiculing or putting down the victim's beliefs are one way that the perpetrator can abuse them. Male abusers may use scripture to remind his wife that she is 'just a woman' or limiting what her role is as a wife.

Abusers will lie to Christian leaders so that they might help the perpetrator to control their victim. It can also include forcing the victim to attend a church that encourages controlling behaviours.

Separation Violence

After the relationship has ended, the abuse can continue. The time of separation or shortly afterwards can often be a very dangerous time for the victim. The perpetrator may perceive a loss of control over them and become unpredictable. During this period, violence may escalate to the point where the victim feels more unsafe than when they were in the relationship and this may explain why some victims return to their abuser.

After the breakup, the perpetrator may go to great lengths to keep up the 'good guy façade, to encourage others in their church, friends, or family to believe that he is 'really a good guy' which encourages others around him to let down their

guard. At that point, the abuser can step up their campaign on 'who their ex-partner really is' and 'what they're like in reality' causing those who know the victim to begin to doubt her claims of abuse.

It is this subtle emotional abuse that will cause others to wonder if the victim is just 'being silly' or over-reacting and may encourage the victim to try to sort things out by going back to the relationship. This causes not only a 'false reconciliation' but may also put the victim's life (and that of any children), in very real danger.

It's important to understand that at this point, without intervention and counselling, reconciliation is not possible. Without the abuser having a complete change in their thinking and behaviour though deep counselling, including recognising and understanding that their own behaviour is the problem, it will never be possible to have a healthy, long-term reconciliation.

Stalking

Sometimes the victim is stalked by the perpetrator after they separate. A behaviour is considered stalking when the same type of behaviour occurs on more than one occasion.

Stalking includes being in places the victim is known to normally frequent such as the workplace, or a particular shopping centre.

It may include watching the victim, following them, making persistent phone calls and sending unwanted letters, cards and gifts, even though the victim may have made it abundantly clear that the relationship has ended.

In a Christian marriage, the abuser may claim that they weren't stalking the victim but were simply 'sitting outside their house praying for them and their marriage.' Pastors and church leaders need to be reminded that stalking is a criminal offence no matter what type of 'Christian phrasing' the abuser uses to excuse the behaviour. They also need to realise that abusers will use common Christian words and phrases to sound pious or make it seem like they are the victims.

Domestic Homicide

The victim and/or children may be killed by the abuser as a result of domestic violence. This can happen before the victim leaves the family home or after they attempt to separate. It may also happen during the period after the relationship is dissolved.

The most dangerous time is after the relationship has ended and the controller recognises that they have lost their power. Filled with rage, they are more likely to act irrationally and aggressively.

Statistics on this Issue Within the Church

It is concerning that even in these modern times, the personal beliefs of those in church leadership could be hindering victims from coming forward and seeking help. Many churches remain unaware and uninformed about the issue of domestic violence, as they don't see it as a 'church' problem. Some leaders

may even turn a blind eye to those seriously in need of help.

While the Christian home and the church should be free from these types of behaviours, sadly they are not.

The statistics are not good. In the general population, figures indicate that on average, one in four women are abused by their intimate partner such as a boyfriend, partner or husband.⁴

In gathering evidence, it was difficult to find detailed statistical evidence on the seriousness of the issue, because this question has never been asked: how many

Christian women are in or have been in abusive or domestic violence situations?

The statistics don't delineate those in relationships within the major group which it clumps together as those between 15 and 65 years of age. Further the figures don't

include those who remained in an abusive marriage until death, nor those who didn't recognise that they were in abusive relationships. Additionally, the data did not differentiate between those who held a religious belief and those who did not.

While I would like to provide clear data on the number of Christian women in abusive situations. I cannot provide accurate figures, but for necessity sake it is imperative that I give you something on which to ponder.

In June 2017 it was estimated that the population of Australia

...the personal beliefs of those in church leadership could be hindering victims from coming forward and seeking help



was 24,487,000 people, of which 12,150,000 were male and 12,337,000 were female.⁵

For simplicity's sake I will remove a number of factors, including children under 14 years old, people over 65 and half of those counted in the 15 to 24 years bracket. This leaves 59.86% of the population, which makes it approximately 7,384,900 women between the ages of 19 and 65 years.

The statistics suggest that there are about 52% of people that identify as having a Christian faith, which brings the number of Christian women to 3,840,000. Of those it is said that 1 in 4 women are living in or have experienced abuse. This brings the figure to 960,000 Christian women that either have been in or are in domestic violence situations.

Even if we want to be very conservative about this, and

divide that by a further 50% to allow for those that assume this is more a 'worldly problem' rather than a 'Christian problem' and also to include only Christian women who actually come to church or are regular attendees, and we're still talking about 480,000 Christian women in Australia who have been in or are in abusive relationships.

Consider that based on those figures, it is most likely that on any Sunday, there are women in your church who need help and assistance. It would be reasonable to expect that in a church of one hundred people, you would find at least three women who are experiencing domestic violence and/or abuse, and up to another three that have (in a previous relationship) experienced domestic abuse and violence, and this is a conservative number.

It is my personal opinion that domestic violence and abuse is just as prevalent in the church as it is outside it. From what I have personally seen and experienced, it is also my opinion that the one in four women is still a valid statistic within the Christian community as it is outside of it.

Is it Just a 'World Problem?'

In talking with pastors and Christian people, I've found that most Christians feel that domestic violence is more a 'world problem' and don't believe it's an issue for the Christian church. However, since what Christians would see as 'worldly issues' (eg. pornography, rape, paedophilia, anger issues, gambling, excessive

drunkenness, drugs, divorce, abortion, homosexuality and couples living together before they are married) are now currently issues that churches deal with, it is not hard to surmise that domestic violence and abuse are also a present issue of the modern day church.

Recent events have brought the testimony of some Christian women to the forefront of the media's attention. An article written in 2017 by Julia Baird and Hayley Gleeson, confront Christendom and the Australian public with the following quote.

"As theology professor Steven Tracy wrote in 2008: 'It is widely accepted by abuse experts (and validated by numerous studies) that evangelical men who sporadically attend church are more likely than men of any other religious group (and more likely than secular men) to assault their wives.'"^{5,7}

These words should encourage some inward reflection and more open transparency in how domestic violence and abuse is dealt with in the church. Because domestic violence veils itself in silence, the secrecy of lives lived in violence and abuse often find a greater secrecy in the walls of the church. The abuser has more to lose if his abuse is found out, including the status of being a 'good Christian man.'

Silence is one of the greatest allies to violence and abuse continuing and remaining hidden behind the four walls of the house and the church.

This is not only a 'church

7. The quote by theology professor Steven Tracy, was written in 2008 before it was understood about the level of domestic violence hidden in marriages where Islam is the religion of the home. "Unfortunately for women, much of the corrosion in Islam's message pertained to issues related to women. Why? Historically women have been easy targets; it was an easy way for the powerful to ensure they maintained control over at least one segment of society. The subjugation of women is important on a number of societal levels for the power elite. Once women are excluded from the potential power base on a societal level, the next logical step is to exclude them from decision making or power at the domestic level."

problem' as recognised by a recent article into one journalist's story on the silence within the media, and her own experience of the silence within the non-religious media. Heidi Davoren wrote:

"As a young journalist, the lack of interest and coverage given to domestic violence created the impression that this topic was not relevant to our readers - domestic disputes were a minor inconvenience that took up valuable airplay on the police scanner when we could be chasing real stories like car crashes and drug busts.

I did not question the authority that enforced this media silence. So too was the case for suicides - we did not report them.

*They were taboo. These were the rules and I followed them. But as with most things, it seemed to me there were too many grey areas that called into question the suitability of such a blanket ban."*⁵

The question then needs to be asked: is it that domestic violence and abuse is considered less important than many others issues that plague a nation, a town, a community... and perhaps a church?

How do Pastors Deal with Domestic Violence?

One pastor I spoke to, waved his hand at me and said, "Well, we don't have problems like that."

His naivety shocked me, as well as his refusal to seriously consider the problem.

I have heard many pastors protest that domestic violence would not be tolerated in the church, and they would speak out against such evils. Instead, what I witnessed when this situation arose, was both their inability to deal with the problem and their desire to silence and close down the victim in an attempt not to embarrass the perpetrator, and to eliminate the possible effect on unity within their church.

Not only is the issue of domestic violence often not recognised by the church, but when revealed or exposed within its walls, it is my experience that it is often dealt with incorrectly, even to the harm and detriment of the victim.

Sadly, from the pastors and church leaders I have spoken to, many feel unqualified and ill-equipped to deal with this type of problem.

Breaking the law, un-Christlike behaviour and sin, are

areas that the church has often struggled to deal with effectively. Any of these areas may be seen as a personal failure of the local church establishment or the pastor or both.

Rather than seeing it as a societal sickness and human disease, some leaders may see it as a problem with 'their club,' they take such revelations as being a problem with their church and they take it personally. This may result in the problems being swept under the carpet until those in the abusive situations, simply stop seeking help from their leaders,

submit to the abuse and/or become silent.

Confrontation, truth, accountability and change are the only ways to deal with any form of abuse. Some church leaders try to ignore the situation or suggest to the victim that things will get better if they pray, or behave more appropriately in a way that the abuser will feel placated.

It then becomes less about the abuse, the victim and the perpetrator, and more about maintaining the status quo.

From the testimonies of women that I have spoken to, some churches are resorting to ostracising the victim, either because they don't know how to deal with the issue, or because it is easier to ostracise the victim then to directly deal with the perpetrator.

In the previous quote by Julia Baird with Hayley Gleeson they also quote the CEO of Safe Steps Family Violence Centre, Annette Gillespie:

"...in 20 years of working with victims of domestic violence, she found it was "extremely common" that women are "encouraged by the church to stay in an abusive relationship."

"I know that for many women the experience of violence was worsened by the lack of support people turned to in the church," she said. "Often people say it is the guilt of going against the church teaching that leads them to stay in relationships well beyond a time they should leave because they are trying to please the church as well as please their partners ... they often feel they will have to choose between leaving religion or

... women are "encouraged by the church to stay in an abusive relationship."



violence. So when they leave a relationship, they leave a church.”⁵

The article then goes on to say...

“Women in faith communities where divorce is shunned, and shameful, often feel trapped in abusive marriages.”⁵

Unfortunately, it is my experience that few pastors and church leaders are equipped to deal with domestic violence within a Christian marriage, and as a result, few victims receive the help they so desperately need.

If it was difficult for the victim to speak out about the abuse the first time to those they trusted the most, imagine how much more difficult it will be for them the next time they seek help. So, the abuse continues while the victim feels imprisoned in a living hell, with no way out. This may also explain why some people return to an abusive partner.

Is the Church Changing?

In July 2017 an ABC news article “Australian church leaders call for urgent response to domestic violence,” stated:

“An ABC News investigation into religion and domestic violence involving dozens of interviews with

survivors, counsellors, priests, psychologists and researchers from a range of Christian denominations has found the Church is not just failing to sufficiently address domestic violence but is, in some cases, ignoring it or allowing it to continue.”⁷

It is clearly noted, at the end of this article that a number of churches were making moves toward the change necessary.

John C Maxwell said “We cannot become what we need by remaining what we are.”

For the church to be able to change its approach to domestic violence and abuse:

- It needs to understand what domestic violence and abuse is
- How it can hide under the veneer of certain Christian beliefs and family structures
- Have policies in place to deal with perpetrators and victims.
- Train their leaders and members to recognise and deal with domestic violence and abuse.
- Look at what areas of their church personal beliefs and structure that allow perpetrators to hide and the victim unable to come forward.

- Have an honest look at what the bible has to say about relationships, marriage and women.

I am a living testimony of church families and wise pastors who helped me change my situation and heal, who stood with me while I got back on my feet and who still stand with me today.

They understood and saw the dynamics and problems involved and worked to help me, while still reaching out to the angry man who needed help too.

While I saw church leaders make mistakes, I understand that rarely was it done with direct intent to hurt, but rather an inability to deal with a messy and awkward situation.

It was disconcerting to see that church leaders preferred to stick to what they knew and believed to be the problem, while still allowing the victim to remain in an abuse situation, or even turning the victims away.

My personal desire is that through speaking out, I can reach out and encourage others to change their lives, while sharing

my own testimony of God's help, protection, love and mercy.

The road from captivity to freedom is not easy, but it is always worth the journey... and every person, no matter where they are on the road, is valuable.

[END]

Part two of this article will continue in the next issue of SPAG Magazine, where we'll cover topics such as:

- How to avoid common mistakes;
- Domestic violence is not a problem of submission nor one of obedience;
- Abuse is about control, intimidation and fear;
- It is not about problems with alcohol and drugs;
- It is not because she's crazy or hormonal;
- Jezebel and spirits of darkness;
- Laws need to be obeyed;
- A Christian wife will also be concerned about her marriage vows;
- Going back to a place of danger;
- A safe place;
- Leaders may also be abusers;
- What about men that are being abused;
- When it's not the truth;
- What about the abuser; and
- What can we do?

Notes

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Biography:

Ruth Lindsay is a wife, mother of two teenage sons, author, speaker, blogger, and bible study leader who enjoys reading, eating chocolate, and coffee with friends.

Ruth is founder of "Be Alive Ministries," an outreach to women. Her first book "He Whispers Our Name," is an outreach for women of all ages about God's heart for people, and His desire to have a real and authentic life-changing relationship with Him. Her second book, "Behind Closed Doors" is still being written and is aimed at helping others become free from domestic violence and abuse.

The Be Alive Ministries Facebook page, enables her to reach others from her small country town in Queensland, while her website www.ruthlindsay.com.au and blog page www.ruthlindsay.com provides a base to be able to work from home to touch the lives of many.



WHY IT'S GOOD TO BE SINGLE:

Reason No. 92

I'm not so horrible that I'd want to inflict my family on some poor, unsuspecting dope.



We zoomed in on an object which you can see below. Can you guess what it is?



Answer on page 89

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"Yes the disciples followed Jesus - but not on Twitter."

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Biblical Dating: An Introduction



by **Scott Croft**

www.PureIntimacy.org

Applying God's Word to the topic of dating, finding a spouse, and getting married.

If you're reading this, you're interested in dating. You've done it, you're doing it, you'd like to do it, or you need to teach somebody else how to do it. Don't worry. You're not alone.

Church vs World

In our society, dating has become something of an obsession. It is expected to be a universal phenomenon. It's just something you do if you're single and of age (and that age is quickly dropping) in America.

It is considered the natural precursor to marriage, and is generally considered something to be desired, whatever form it might take.

As evangelical Christians, we're called to be distinct in the ways we think and act about all issues that confront us and those around us. This topic is no exception. So, is there such a thing as biblical dating? If so, what is it?

How can Christians think differently about this pervasive issue in media and culture? How are we doing so far?

The answer to that last question is 'not well.' Surveys consistently indicate that professing Christians behave almost exactly like non-Christians in terms of sexual involvement outside of marriage (in both percentage of people involved and how deeply involved they are — how far they're going), living together

before marriage, and infidelity and divorce after marriage.

In fact, depending on which statistics one believes, the divorce rate for professing Christians may actually be higher than for Americans as a whole. Granted, not all of these people are evangelicals, but we're not doing so well either.

Indeed, the central issue we need to confront — and the reason I write and speak on this topic — is that when it comes to dating and relationships, perhaps more than in any other area of the everyday Christian life, the church is largely indistinguishable from the world.

That truth has brought immeasurable emotional pain and other consequences to many Christians. Worse, it has brought great dishonour to the name of Christ and to the witness of individuals and the church.

We Should be Different

It doesn't have to be this way. For Christians, the Lord has given us his Word, and the Holy Spirit helps us to understand it. We have brothers and sisters in Christ to hold us accountable and to help us apply the Word to our lives. If you're a Christian, that's the biblical life you're called to.

That's what I hope my column (www.pureintimacy.org) will be about — applying God's Word to the topic of dating, finding a spouse, and getting married.



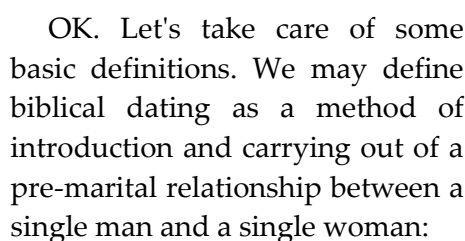
I also hope that many of you will set the agenda. Well, except for this column. Just this once, I'm going to set out a basic framework for biblical dating so we all know what we're talking about — or at least so you know where I'm coming from.

Scripture Rules

I have to start by explaining the theological doctrine that drives the approach I want to outline (and advocate). That doctrine is called the sufficiency of Scripture.

Almost all professing evangelical Christians are familiar with and vigorously defend the doctrine of the inerrancy of Scripture (which states that the Bible is the authoritative Word of God, it's true, and it contains no falsity or error). I certainly agree with the inerrancy of Scripture, but that's not what I'm talking about here.

The doctrine of the sufficiency of Scripture assumes inerrancy but then goes a step further. This doctrine simply holds that the



- Romans 13:8-14 (love others, work for their soul's good; don't look to please self)
- Romans 14:1-15:7 (favour others, not self ... value what's good to their souls)
- I Timothy 5:1-2 (treat single women as sisters in Christ, with absolute purity)
- Titus 2:1-8 (young men and women should focus on self-control/godliness)
- John 14:15 (if you love Christ, you will obey His commands — read: above your own desires — and live biblically)

Again, we'll talk more about these and other passages as we deal with specific questions.

Modern Dating

We may basically define modern dating as a method of introduction and carrying out of a pre-marital relationship between a single man and a single woman:

- that begins with either the man or the woman initiating with the other;
- that is conducted outside the formal oversight or authority of either person's family or church; and
- that may or may not have marriage as its goal and is often purely 'recreational' or 'educational.'

Now, the biblical support for the modern approach to dating ... (insert crickets, tumbleweeds, person whistling here).... That was it. There isn't any.

The very idea of extended romantic or sexual involvement outside of marriage doesn't even appear in Scripture unless it is described as illicit (sinful).



Furthermore, it doesn't even appear in any society, western or otherwise, in any systematic way until the 20th century!

While the principles supporting biblical dating have their beginnings with the very structure of the family, modern dating has its origins with the sexual revolution of the 1960s. It is brand new, and yet, seemingly, it is all we know.

Differences Between Modern Dating and Biblical Dating

So what's the real difference? Here are some fundamentals:

Modern dating philosophy assumes that there will be several intimate romantic relationships in a person's life before marriage. In fact, it advocates 'playing the field' in order to determine 'what one wants' in a mate.

Biblical dating has as its goal to be emotionally and physically intimate with only one member of the opposite sex ... your spouse.

Modern dating tends to be egalitarian (no differences between men and women in spiritual or emotional 'wiring' or God-given roles).

Biblical dating tends to be complimentary (God has created men and women differently and has ordained each of these spiritual equals to play different and valuable roles in the church and in the family).

Modern dating tends to assume that you will spend a great deal of time together (most of it alone). Biblical dating tends to encourage time spent in group activities or with other people the couple knows well.

Modern dating tends to assume that you need to get to know a person more deeply than anyone else in the world to figure out whether you should be with him or her. The biblical approach suggests that real commitment to the other person should precede such a high level of intimacy.

Modern dating tends to assume that a good relationship will 'meet all my needs and desires,' and a bad one won't — it's essentially a self-centred approach. Biblical dating approaches relationships from a completely different perspective — one of ministry and service and bringing glory to God.



Modern dating tends to assume that there will be a high level of emotional involvement in a dating relationship, and some level of physical involvement as well. Biblical dating assumes NO physical intimacy, and more limited emotional intimacy outside of marriage.

Modern dating assumes that what I do and who I date as an adult is entirely up to me and is private (my family or the church has no formal or practical authority). Biblical dating assumes a context of spiritual accountability, as is true in every other area of the Christian life.

Basically, we can make three general statements about modern dating vs. biblical dating in terms of their respective philosophies:

1. Modern dating seems to be about 'finding' the right person for me (as my friend Michael Lawrence has written on the Pure Intimacy website); biblical dating is more about 'being' the right person to serve my future

spouse's needs and be a God-glorifying husband or wife.

2. In modern dating, intimacy precedes commitment. In biblical dating, commitment precedes intimacy.

3. The modern dating approach tells us that the way to figure out whether I want to marry someone is to act like we are married. If we like it, we make it official. If we don't, then we go through something emotionally — and probably physically — like a divorce.

In biblical dating, Scripture guides us as to how to find a mate and marry, and the Bible teaches, among other things, that we should act in such a way so as not to imply a marriage-level commitment until that commitment exists before the Lord.

Let's Talk Some More

I'm supremely confident that as we go back and forth on this topic, some — perhaps many — of you will disagree (if you don't already) or be initially annoyed at some of my statements.

Ask yourself why. What are you trying to hold onto that you think this approach will take from you (privacy, autonomy, a secular idea of freedom or of your own rights)?

I have a particular challenge for those of you whose main objection is that the practical details we'll talk about here 'are not explicitly biblical:' think about the details of how you conduct (or would like to conduct) your dating life.

Can you find explicit support for the modern approach in Scripture? Are there even broad principles in Scripture that justify the modern vision of dating (or yours, whatever it may be)?

The Bible simply doesn't give us explicit instructions on some of what we'll discuss. Fair enough. In such a situation, we should ask what gets us closest to clear biblical teaching. In other words, within the many gray areas here, what conduct in our dating lives will help us to best care for our brothers and sisters in Christ and bring honour to His name?

That's it. That's a basic framework for biblical dating as best I can discern it from the principles of God's Word.

Now, you're on. No question is too broad or too specific, too theoretical, too theological, or too practical. Agree with what I've said, or challenge it. This is how iron sharpens iron.

Just remember one thing: we're in this together — for His Glory.

(Read the second article in this series.)

Biography:

Scott Croft served for several years as chairman of the elders at Capitol Hill Baptist Church in Washington, D.C., where he wrote and taught the Friendship, Courtship & Marriage and Biblical Manhood & Womanhood CORE Seminars.

Scott now lives in the Louisville, Kentucky area (USA) with his wife, Rachel, and son, William, where he works as an attorney and serves as an elder of Third Avenue Baptist Church.

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Croft, Scott, 2006, Pure Intimacy: Biblical Dating - An Introduction, available: www.pureintimacy.org/b/biblical-dating-an-introduction/, accessed 25/01/18.

STRAIGHT OUTTA LGBT



by **Zachary
Holder**

I spent plenty of time in the presence of God. I read my Bible for years, and I prayed for God to miraculously take same-sex attraction (SSA) away, but nothing happened.

I'm not saying those things don't work, because I know of people who have had an encounter with God and SSA completely vanished, but for me, it wasn't like that.

Why did I not receive complete deliverance at one of the hundreds of altar calls I answered? Was there something wrong with me? Did God just not like me as much as others? Did I not deserve deliverance because God hated gays?

Some of my questions never received answers, but I knew God didn't play favourites and He had great gifts for His sons and daughters. I had a deliverance destined for me. I just didn't know how to get it.

The Early Years

I was an openly gay teen. I loved God, but He wasn't my only lover.

For the longest time, I never understood why I was attracted to the same sex and why everyone else was born normal.

Since I can remember, I was always different from other guys. I was treated differently in elementary school. In kindergarten, it only took my first best friend one day to never speak

to me again because I was too 'weird.'

At the age of ten, I was molested by a guy. I didn't have a dad to run to, so for years, I wrestled with the 'why' question. *Why was I the victim?* Maybe my difference translated into vulnerability to him.

Throughout middle school, I was bullied and labelled 'gay.' At that point in my life, I had no identity. I didn't stand for anything so I fell for everything. I accepted the label. My difference became homosexuality.

I learned fast that accepting the labels didn't stop the labelling. Agreeing with naysayers fuelled the fire rather than quieting the crowd.

Christianity Didn't Instantly 'Fix' Me

In the middle of all the chaos, I decided to follow Jesus. Little did I know following Jesus was not a quick fix for my life. That decision actually made everything harder.

Now I had the responsibility of proving to everyone that I'd somehow quit cold turkey and was no longer attracted to guys.

I was in a whirlwind of emotions and identities. My life started to spiral out of control. I fell into depression and started to harm myself. My family started to distance themselves from me. I didn't blame them. I wouldn't know what to do if I was put in their position.

Fast forward a few years, and in the midst of my messy life, God



began to encounter me on a deep level.

I wasn't seeking Him in any way or desiring what He gave me. He came out of left field. I received the baptism of the Holy Spirit without knowing what it was, but from that moment on, I could sense God's love peeling back the layers of pain and rejection that had gripped my heart.

He began to speak to me in the most intimate way. It made no sense to me that a holy God would choose to encounter and speak to the heart of an openly gay teen.

Through God lavishing me with His love, I began to realise that a lot of my problems, if not all of them, were an issue with the way I thought.

Ephesians 4:23 says:

"...let the Spirit renew your thoughts and attitude." [NLT]

That's exactly what I began to do. I began to pray, "Lord, cut on me; don't cut me off."

It Takes Time

This process taught me that a relationship with Jesus is just that: a relationship.

It takes time and investment. It's a journey, and in this journey, I

learned how to personally overcome homosexuality and same-sex attraction.

Before you continue reading, this is not *the way* to see freedom in your life. This is the way God led *me* to freedom.

Your relationship with God is personal and unique. What works for me might not work for you. After all, this is Christianity, not a one-way American dream.

1. God was taking me on my own journey that didn't look like anyone else's.

I could sit down with all the counsellors in the world and try to get help from them, but without God, I would never change. He created me, therefore He had the answers.

2. Homosexuality and same-sex attraction were an issue of the thoughts in my mind.

The voice in my head that spoke to me non-stop was fuelling my issues.

It wasn't molestation that caused me to be gay. It wasn't an absent father or being born different that caused same-sex attraction. My experiences didn't cause my problems.

What I thought about my experiences caused my problems.

In other words, if I could change what my mind dwelled on, I could change my life.

The Holy Spirit led me to stop saying "I am a gay Christian" to "I struggle with same-sex attraction."

I am glad He didn't stop there because that would've just been going from bondage to bondage.

That small shift in mindset laid a foundation and opened the door

for complete freedom. Shortly after, I began to declare, "Same-sex attraction is not a sign of a lack of love, it is a symptom of spiritual brokenness."

3. I was attracted to what was mysterious.

The only reason I was attracted to the same sex was because I saw guys as a mystery. Therefore, I wanted to get close to what I didn't understand.

It seems weird, but remember that I was treated differently even from birth.

My experiences did not create this mystery, my thought processes about it did. So I decided to make what was common to me (girls) a mystery and what was a mystery to me (boys) common.

I stopped hanging out with girls and starting hanging out with guys.

At first, it was extremely awkward and uncomfortable, but as time went by, my life began to transform. God transformed things so drastically, my appearance even began to change!

4. When I looked into the eyes of fire, all other lovers burned away.

The glue that held my freedom together was the fact that Jesus desired to be intimate with me.

The most intimate people look eyes with each other. Watch happily married couples. They love each other so they make intimate eye contact. When I locked eyes with the One who died for me, everything changed. I began to become like the One I was daily beholding.

Freedom at Last

These short simple truths changed my life completely. Now I live in complete freedom from homosexuality and same-sex attraction. I live full of attraction for God and my wonderful girlfriend.

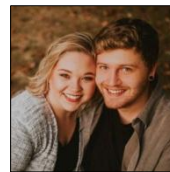
God did not just deliver me out of darkness, He delivered me into His marvellous light!

— UPDATE —

I wrote this in July of 2016. I am now married to that beautiful woman, Bayleigh Autumn Holder.

We are missionaries who believe in finishing the Great Commission, but most of all, I no longer am attracted to men! No more thoughts. No more desires. No more confusion. [END]

Biography:



Zachary Holder is an alumnus of the Ramp School of Ministry in Hamilton, AL. After graduation, he married Bayleigh West and moved to her hometown in the Upstate. They are expecting their first child in July, Lori Jane Holder.

While starting their family, Zachary is in the process of writing his first book, "Promise Over Pride", a story of his journey of freedom from sexual abuse, same sex attraction, and homosexuality.

Zachary and Bayleigh are also founders of *Hearth in Home*, a company of sons and daughters, marked by the fire of God, seeking revival in the Upstate of South Carolina.

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Holder, Zachary, July 2016, Moral Revolution: Straight Outta LGBT, available: www.moralrevolution.com/straight-outta-lgbt/, accessed 25/01/18

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Does Jesus Really Understand My Chronic Illness and Pain?



by Lisa Copen

Jesus knew suffering, but does that mean He understands long-term chronic illnesses? Lisa shares.

I have heard many believers share how they know God understands all that they experience – chronic pain included. But it takes a brave person who steps away from the expected ‘appropriate questions’ and admits those feelings of “How does Jesus really understand chronic illness? He didn’t experience ongoing pain like I do.”

I understand how this question is valid. We can relate to the extreme suffering Jesus went through at the end of His life, but it was still a small amount of time.

Over the years, I have met thousands of people who are physically suffering or who have experienced intense emotional pain. When I was younger, I believed our suffering was more unique from the suffering of others. Now, however, I see just how similar the path of suffering is that we are each on.

Pain is pain. We all hurt. To compare our pain to that of another, announcing that we hurt more or less than another, is pointless and harmful.

Jesus Suffered

Before He was born His very life was in danger and as a toddler his family was fleeing death, pursued by King Herod. Perhaps you are familiar with the scripture of His suffering in the desert at the hand of Satan’s temptations. We rely on Sunday School drama-tisations that show a brief conversation between the two. But Luke 4:1-2a says:

“Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, left the Jordan and was led by the Spirit into the wilderness, where for forty days he was tempted by the devil.” [NIV]

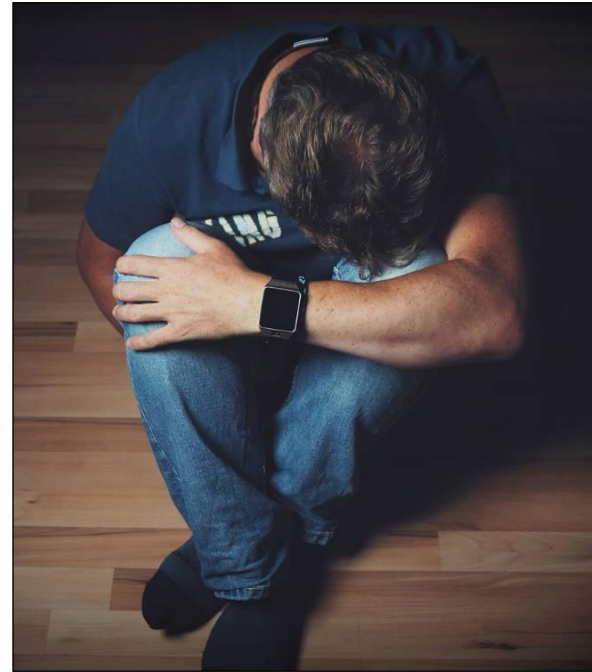
He was despised by men, mocked, beaten, and then killed.

We cannot fathom His pain.

Yes, He was able to walk across lands without a cane or crutches during His ministry, just as we may have some days that are better than others, but His abilities do not decrease His credibility.

Through the Bible we see people suffering. Women whose lives were threatened because of sexual sin; people with disabilities and illness being forced them out of their communities; those who had emotional pain from their choices or the pain of generations handed down.

Yet, over and over Jesus met them where they were. He did not compare their pain and tell them to ‘buck up’ because they could



have it worse. Jesus called them daughter, He touched them, He loved them, He tried to find out what their real needs were.

Let us trust our Saviour knows our pain. He is God – He felt it every time He looked into someone’s heart and saw their pain, and He still does so today.

Prayer: “Jesus, I confess that sometimes I wonder how You can truly understand what I am going through since scripture doesn’t tell me You suffered from a chronic illness or daily, unrelenting pain.

Help me remember that You are King of Kings and my Creator. You cannot help but feel what I feel. And I cannot assume to know all of Your experiences. Give me the compassion You bestow on us all. Amen.”

Do you ever question if Jesus really gets what you are going

through? If so, feel free to share. If not, why do you think you accept His understanding fully?

Easter season the year that I wrote this was special to me, because never before had I truly felt like we were seeing our world setting the pieces into places that will bring our Saviour back to this earth.

[This is a link to Kristian Stanfill singing "Even So Come"](#) and the lyrics share how we hope for His coming – sooner rather than later!

May it bless you. Let's get excited about how one day we will have our big party in heaven and be able to spend eternity chatting and laughing. Hugs to you. -Lisa

Biography:

Lisa Copen began RestMinistries.com in 1996, a non-profit, Christian organization for those who live with chronic illness. Their daily devotionals send out encouragement to people around the world.

She has written a number of books on living with chronic illness, the most recent is "Refresh Me, Lord." It is a book of prayers on topics related to the everyday struggles of having a chronic illness, while praying the scriptures.

Lisa has lived with rheumatoid arthritis for over 22 years and resides in San Diego, CA, USA with her husband and teenage son

Lisa has also set up her online store where she sells her beautiful, antique-style pendant necklaces with scripture and other inspirational messages.

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Jerusalem Journal



ירושלים יומן

Carpenter Wows Crowd

by Abel Lissnar

April 26AD

A poor carpenter from Nazareth called Jesus, accompanied by his twelve disciples, has been drawing crowds wherever they travel. While Jesus is a common name, I wondered if this was the same man that I had met a couple of years ago at the wedding in Cana, who was a cousin of the bride.

Thousands claim that they have seen Jesus perform healings and miracles: the blind have been given sight; lame people were made to walk; the deaf could hear; lepers were cured; and even the dead were brought back to life.

The group has travelled the country from Sidon in the north to Jerusalem in the south. Jesus' message has been, "The Kingdom of God is near! Repent of your sins and believe the Good News."

One evening, I joined a large crowd of at least 5,000 men near the town of Bethsaida. We were seated on a hillside listening to Jesus preach about the Kingdom of Heaven.

Many in the crowd had travelled a long way, and sitting out in the sun all day, they were tired and hungry. The disciples asked around and found some empty baskets and five loaves of bread and two single fish and gave them to Jesus. Looking up towards heaven, Jesus thanked God, blessed the food and then began breaking it into pieces, and dropping them into the baskets. He continued breaking up both the bread and the fish in his hands and soon the first basket was full and the disciples passed it out to the people. Then another basket was filled with bread and fish, and another and another.

It was the most incredible trick I'd ever seen. I made my way to the front of the crowd and watched as the teacher broke more pieces of bread and fish from his hands into more baskets. I have no idea where the extra pieces appeared from - certainly not from within his robe as his hands remained in full sight.

The crowd were hushed to silence by the remarkable feat. Nobody knew what



to make of it. Somehow, those five loaves and two fish fed everybody there and yet there were still twelve baskets of food leftover!

After the crowd finished their meal, Jesus spoke to them saying, "If any of you wants to be my follower, you must turn from your selfish ways, take up your cross daily, and follow me. If you try to hold on to your life, you will lose it. But if you give up your life for my sake, you will save it. And what do you benefit if you gain the whole world but are yourself lost or destroyed?"

Some people claim that Jesus is John the Baptist, some say Elijah, and others say he is an ancient prophet risen from the dead. Some even suggest that he is going to be the new Jewish King. I spoke with Peter, one of Jesus' disciples who said that "Jesus is the Messiah, the Christ sent from God!"

A reliable source claims that the Jewish religious leaders are furious with him. They fear he'll stir up rebellion in the people and make our Roman rulers angry. Others say that Jesus is a heretic and a trouble-maker and is teaching radical religious ideas, and must be stopped.

Whoever this man is, he preaches good news about our God and the Kingdom of Heaven. I was a witness to an astounding miracle that I cannot explain, unless I can believe that he really is the Son of God.

[END]

Changeless God in a Changing World

~ Part Three ~

Continuing Our Seven Securities of Life in God



**by Andrew
Brandon**

In the June/August 2017 issue of SPAG Magazine, we shared Part 1 of this article by Andrew Brandon where he discussed:

- where is your security;
- the world at warp speed;
- what is meant by a changeless God ; and
- how do we discover our security in God.

In Part 2 we began to explore our seven securities of life in God including:

1. paternity - a security based on relationship;
2. propinquity - a security based on God's permanent presence; and
3. promises - a security based on God's infallible word.

In this final part, we explore the last four of the seven securities of life in God: including:

4. protection - a security based on God's power and Christ's triumph over Satan;
 5. provision - a security based on an Almighty Father's love and care for us;
 6. prayer - a security based on God's promise to answer our petitions; and
 7. peace - a security based on sharing God's unruffled, eternal peace.
-

4. Protection: a Security Based on God's Power and Christ's Triumph Over Satan

God is the secure defence of His people. The Scripture describe the security we have in God in a numbers of different ways:

Refuge (Mashseh) - Psalm 91:2, 9.

Fortress (Metsudah) - Psalm 18:2; 31:3; 71:31

Tower (Misgab) - Psalms 18:2; 59:9; 16:17; 62:2, 6; 94:22; 61:3; 144: 2; Proverbs 18:10; 2 Samuel 22:3

Arms - Deuteronomy 33:27

Weapons - Psalm 91:4

Psalm 91:11-12 states that God "will command His angels concerning you to guard you in all your ways." [NRSV]

In his book, "Angels: God's Secret Agents," Billy Graham tells the story of the Rev. John Patton, a missionary in the New Hebrides Islands, who was protected by angels.

The local chief and his men had surrounded his house to burn it down and kill him. Their intention was plain but they suddenly showed signs of fear and extreme agitation and fled into the jungle.

A year later the chief was converted and requested baptism; many of his subjects followed his example. During the ceremony, the chief interrogated John. "A year ago," he said, "I came with



▲ Refuge ▲ Fortress ▲ Tower ▲

my warriors to kill you and burn down your house."

"I remember clearly," John replied, reliving the incident and shivering with a sudden chill of fear. He grinned ruefully at the chief: "What stopped you?"

"The gigantic men in white robes who surrounded your house. They had eyes like lightening and swords of fire. Who were they? The chief looked at John respectfully waiting for his reply.

The tribe's noisy chatter subsided and every face turned expectantly to him. John replayed the events of that day again. He had registered the expressions of terror on the warriors' faces and



realised something extraordinary

had happened. Initially he had been terrified, but the icy fear gave way to a wild, exhilarating joy. He felt as if the Almighty was standing next to him. If he was martyred, and it seemed more than likely, he would fly straight to the arms of God.

"So that's why they ran away," he thought. "Angels! And I didn't see a thing."

For a second time he grinned ruefully: "Lord, I thought I was going to be dispatched to you on a spit of spears. Why didn't you let me see them too? It would have helped."

"Who were they?" persisted the chief, and snapped John from his reverie.

"Angels! A regiment of angels! Angels are God's warriors and they were sent to protect me."

News travels fast in an island culture. From that day on, nobody messed with the man with a bodyguard of angels.

God is almighty and has the power to protect and shelter us in every circumstance. In the 16th Century, a movement known as the Reformation erupted in Europe. The catalyst of this

gigantic religious upheaval was an Augustinian monk and professor of theology called Martin Luther.

He argued that the Bible was above the Church and Tradition, the only definitive authority in matters of life and doctrine. His desperate attempts to conform to God's righteousness, left him beaten and almost suicidal. Later he would write: 'I looked for God and saw only the devil.'

In his distress, he began to search the Scriptures and the writings of the Church Fathers²⁸. His studies led him to conclude that God's righteousness could only be received as a free gift of grace, the doctrine we call 'justification by faith'.

These two ideas seem strange sparks to ignite the tinder of a Reformation that set Europe aflame, but that is exactly what they did.

The Catholic Church had controlled the religious life of Europe through priestly mediation, penance and the sacraments for almost a thousand years. It was the monopoly shareholder in salvation and conferred on its traditions equal authority to Scripture.

Luther's protest ended a millennium of Catholic hegemony

and threw wide the gates to freedom of religion and conscience.²⁹ It is not surprising that he was the most hated and hunted man in Europe. The Catholics anathematised him, destroyed his writings and wanted to burn him at the stake for heresy.

His survival against all odds was a miracle that Luther attributed to God. We still sing the anthem he wrote celebrating God's protection and the triumph of his truth.

His words were forged in fire and even today they resonate with reality:

*"A mighty fortress is our God,
 A bulwark never failing;
 Our helper he, amid the flood
 Of mortal ills prevailing;
 For still our ancient foe
 Doth seek to work his woe'
 His craft and power are great,
 And armed with cruel hate -
 On earth is not his equal.
 Did we in our own strength
 confide,
 Our striving would be losing;
 Were not the right man on our
 side,
 The man of God's own
 choosing.
 Dost ask who that may be?
 Christ Jesus, it is he!
 Lord Sabaoth is his name,
 And he must win the battle.
 And though this world, with
 devils filled,
 Should threaten to undo us,
 We will not fear, for God hath
 willed
 His truth to triumph through
 us.
 Let goods and kindred go,
 This mortal life also;
 The body they may kill:
 God's truth abideth still,*

His kingdom is forever."

The hymn was translated from German and written in the archaic English of a different age, but the sentiment is contemporary.

When I read or sing this hymn, I want to shout out, "Hallelujah! A mighty fortress is our God!"

Please note that Luther was more concerned about the triumph of truth than his own survival.

The corollary of God's sovereign protection is that we too are enlisted as warriors in the holy war.

This is dramatically described in Revelation 12. Satan is hurled from heaven to earth by a coalition of angels led by Archangel Michael. Furious over his defeat and subsequent exile, Satan declares total war on the children of God and turns planet earth into a battlefield.

Fearless in the face of this savage onslaught, the people of God overcome the devil by the 'blood of the Lamb.'³⁰

Psalm 91 not only promises God's angelic protection, but also the power and courage to trample 'the young lion and the serpent.'³¹

This idea was carried over into the New Testament. When the seventy evangelists returned to Jesus and announced euphorically, "Lord, in your name even demons submit to us," He replied:

"I watched Satan fall from heaven like a flash of lightening. See, I have given you the authority to tread on snakes and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy; and nothing will hurt you."³² [NRSV]

God has given us the weapons³³ and the authority to defeat Satan and his demons.

Where is the devil today? Brother and sister he is under your feet. Look up and see Jesus enthroned and victorious; look down and see the serpent defeated and his head crushed by Christ's mortal blow. Christ bruised his heel³⁴ on the serpent's head so you can stamp on him.

Peter says that Satan is like a prowling lion hunting for prey. Meditate on His words. The devil is not the lion, but he merely imitates the behaviour of this predatory beast.

There is only one Lion, and He is the conquering Lion of the Tribe of Judah, the victorious Lord Jesus Christ³⁵.

Peter and James offer the same advice in dealing with this fake lion: 'Resist him firm in faith and he will run away'³⁶."

On battlefield earth, we are the victors. God has given us the authority and state-of-the art weaponry to defeat Satan. If we fail, we only have ourselves to blame. Here are some tips from the Bible Battle Manual:

- When Satan takes you on a guided tour of your past sins and failures, show him the blood of Christ; tell him you're forgiven. If he persists, take him to the graveyard and show him your tombstone. Tell him that the 'old you'³⁷ died with Christ and was buried with him: "Satan, you're addressing a corpse. I died with Christ to sin. You're speaking to the new man, the resurrection man. Quit rapping and start running³⁸."



- When Satan tells you that you're rubbish and will never amount to anything, laugh at him and show him your adoption papers: "Satan, I'm the adopted child of God and co-heir with the Lord Jesus. I will live and reign with Christ forever. I am God's master-work, planned before all ages for a ministry of good works and worship. My Father doesn't make rubbish³⁹."
- When Satan oppresses you and attempts to steal your joy and passion in God, resist him. Use the all-powerful name of Jesus and stab him through the heart with the Spirit's sword, the word of God. Don't let him bully you into submission and depression. Stand up and fight. Resist him firm in faith.



- When Satan attempts to neutralise you by lies, suppression of your gifts, ferocious opposition, and all his other dirty tricks, march to war. Pray and fast and resist him with every weapon in God's arsenal. God has given you authority over the devil and all his works, so use it. Drive him from your life in riotous retreat.
- Satan can't kill you. He has no authority over you whatsoever, but he's very theatrical. He will try and scare you to death. Don't be intimidated. However big and ferocious he seems, he's a midget compared to the Almighty. If he tries to scare you, scare him: "Satan, you're a bragging bully but my Elder Brother beat you up. Hallelujah! Let me read your future. You've been judged and sentenced to the Lake of Fire."
- If you want to make Satan hopping mad, constantly praise Christ for His triumphs. The

devil can't stand it. It's like acid in his eyes. If you feel dejected, wounded in the war, and in need of a pick-me-up, sing, clap, rejoice, praise, shout, stamp, yell, leap and dance with joy (Habakkuk 3:17-19.) Go on the offensive! Don't let negative feelings get the better of you:

**"Let everything with
breath praise the Lord!**

5. Provision: a Security Based on an Almighty Father's Love and Care For Us

(Matthew 6:25-34). We are fortunate enough to live in the wealthiest civilisation in history.

Scientific breakthroughs in technology and medicine have given us unprecedented luxury, health and longevity.

Guaranteed monthly salaries, the minimum wage, pensions, life assurance, the National Health Service, sickness benefits, generous redundancy payments and the Welfare State keep us from the deprivations that afflicted previous generations.

Fridges and freezers allow us to stockpile food. In the event of a major emergency, the average family could survive for at least a month on this tinned and frozen largesse.

For many of us, the petition in the Lord's Prayer, "give us this day our daily bread," is almost irrelevant. Why petition "our Father in heaven" for "daily bread" when we can select a ready meal from the freezer, microwave it, and minute or two later eat dinner?

Admittedly, I am grateful to live in this era and benefit from all the advantages of our civilisation.

Who in their right mind would elect to go back in time and endure tooth extractions and surgical operations without anaesthetics?

The problem that we must confront, however, is that it is possible to live as a Christian in our culture without exercising faith.

Our world has been tamed and domesticated by technology and medicine. With morphine drips, even dying can be fun!

It is now possible to make the journey from birth to death First Class, avoiding the extremes of poverty, hunger, destitution, sickness and agony that were once the human lot, and tragically still are in many parts of the world.

The danger for the Christian in this society is that we can easily incur Christ's savage indictment of the Laodiceans:

"For you say, 'I am rich, I have prospered, and I need nothing.' You do not realize that you are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked." Revelation 3:17 [NRSV]

Christ's antidote to their spiritual poverty was to buy from him "gold refined in fire"⁴⁰, a vivid metaphor of a purified faith⁴¹.

If our security rests in our bank balance, job security, family, pension fund or Welfare State, we can be in serious trouble. The Recession has shown the impermanence of all these quasi securities; an economic downturn can sweep them all away.

Sadly, if our security rests in these things, their abrupt removal will expose the utter poverty of our inner lives. We may have

“gained the world” but neglected to develop our spiritual resources.

Praying for an increase in faith can be a very dangerous business. Faith is rarely conferred as a sudden infusion but is learnt in the difficult circumstances of life. God often arranges circumstances in such a way that we have no alternative but to trust him for provision.

After warning Ahab of an impending drought, Elijah is instructed by God to camp at the brook of Cherith.

Breakfast and an evening meal will be provided by a flock of scavenging ravens:

“I have commanded the ravens to feed you⁴².”

Elijah has been raised in the tough austerity of the desert.

He knows that carnivorous ravens do not share their food with ravenous prophets. God is sending him into an impossible situation. He can only survive by a daily miracle. Elijah either lives each day by faith in God’s promise or dies of starvation.

Things get no easier for Elijah. Soon the brook dries up and God gives him his marching orders:

“Go now to Zarephath... I have commanded a widow there to feed you.”

1 Kings 17:9 [NRSV]

Ahab’s wife, Jezebel, was a Phoenician princess and a fanatical devotee of her country’s chief deity, Baal. Once she became Ahab’s wife and queen of Israel, she ruthlessly imposed Baal worship on the nation and attempted to exterminate God’s prophets.

Elijah’s prophecy of drought was God’s judgement on this idolatrous and corrupt system. Zarephath was in Phoenicia, at the very heart of Jezebel’s country. God, in a very real sense, prepared a table for Elijah in the presence of his enemies.

Arriving at Zare-phath’s gates, Elijah meets the widow as she collects sticks on which to cook a final meal for herself and her son. When Elijah asks for food, she informs him that she only has a handful of meal and a little oil in a jug. Elijah predicts the impossible:

“Do not be afraid;... For thus says the Lord the God of Israel: The jar of meal will not be emptied and the jug of oil will not fail until the day that the Lord sends rain on the earth⁴³.”

Elijah lives in the Zarepheth guest house with the widow and her son. At meal time each day, the jar of oil and jug of meal are supernaturally replenished. Once again, Elijah only survives by a daily miracle, but there is one significant difference: Elijah’s faith also guarantees the survival of the widow and her son.

Implicit in both Cherith and Zarephath is an impossibility overcome by faith in God’s promise.

Providentially, God develops Elijah’s faith by kicking away his props and securities. To survive he must trust in God; there is no other alternative.

God may be dealing with you like this. Don’t confuse difficult circumstances with demonic attack or even the Lord’s chastise-



Elijah being fed by ravens

ment. The gold of faith is always refined in fire. God has promised to provide for His children, and however impossible our circumstances, we must take him at His word.⁴⁴

Faith, like a muscle, will only grow with regular exercise. The heavier the weight and resistance, the stronger and more developed the muscle.

Give your faith plenty of exercise; increase the resistance to encourage growth; make sure your security is in God and He will never fail you. Praise His Name!

6. Prayer: a Security Based on God’s Promise to Answer Our Petitions

The prayerless Christian reminds me of a person who goes to work in the morning and leaves his front door wide open. Before his departure, he glues a note to his bay window: ‘Thieves are Welcome’. On returning in the evening, he discovers that his invitation has been accepted and thieves have stripped his house bare; even the floorboards and light fittings are missing.

Neglect prayer and you will lose everything except your salvation. Why live in a plundered

house, when you can enjoy the bounty and security of God?

Prayer is God's priceless gift to us, the means by which we co-operate in His rule, dialogue with him and receive His gifts.

Our security in God is not only determined by God's initiative in Christ, but our response. As our heavenly Father, He wants our obedience, love, friendship and empathy.

Communicating with God is not a complicated, mystical process that requires years of ascetic training and exercise. On the contrary, it is as simple as recognising the Father's immediacy and dialoguing with Him.

Notice I use the word 'dialoguing' and not 'talking'. 'Talking' denotes a monologue, a one way conversation with God in which He is the Sympathetic Listener and we are the voluble petitioners.

Can you imagine anything more boring than a tirade of need, petition, self absorption, interspersed with a little insincere praise and thanksgiving?

I regularly use the gift of tongues, but I am alarmed by the idea that this gift is somehow superior to other forms of prayer.

We often lack intelligence and imagination in our approach to heavenly Father. He is a loving, intelligent and communicative Person; our intelligence, creativity and personhood are derived from him. He specifically designed us in His 'image and likeness' so that

we could respond to him intelligently.

Let's put this in context. Imagine your child requests 'daddy' time. You're delighted by the idea and sit her on your knee: "How was school today, Joanna?" you enquire, anticipating a pleasurable hour or two of chatter, laughter and camaraderie. The question is ignored, and for the next hour she is transformed into a tongues automaton. As her 'daddy, you want rapport and dialogue, but instead she bombards you with an alien language. The language is incomprehensible to her but she hurls it at you in cascades of meaningless syllables and vowels.

Admittedly, daddy may understand the language and appreciate some of the fine sentiments that Joanna uncomprehendingly expresses, but He wants more, much more from the relationship than this.

Let me get to the point! Throw off all the traditional and superstitious ideas that you've inherited, and think Scripturally, logically and empathetically about God. He is a Person, your loving Father, with feelings, thoughts, desires, imagination and a fierce yearning to communicate.

We may feel that by incessantly speaking in tongues or bombarding him with requests, we are somehow fulfilling our obligation to be relational. The notion is laughable.

If we adopted the same approach in a human relationship,

we'd be very unpopular. I can almost overhear the remarks:

"I said 'Good Morning, Femi! How are you today?' and she shouted at me in a foreign language for half an hour. I only wanted to have a conversation with her."

"I met Bill this morning! A very weird fellow! You can't get a word in edgeways when he starts talking. I tried but it's like diverting a charging bull with a tooth pick.

All he did for forty-five minutes was ask me for things. Okay, not all the time. He interrupted the 'give me, give, give me' routine with exaggerated flattery like, 'You're beautiful. You're the highest, greatest, and most magnificent. Hallelujah! I praise you! Thank you for your grace, mercy and generosity! I worship you for bending your ear to your humble servant! Bless your name!' and strangest of all, 'I am a beggar and you are my provider'.

He must have mistaken me for somebody else. And all that beggar stuff is crazy. He wears an Italian suit, gold Rolex and drives a Bentley. Probably I was another one of his scam victims. It's a strategy. He bullies you into giving him money, cars, food and paying his credit card bills.

The most extraordinary thing was this: at the end of this mugging, he said he wanted to be my friend. My friend! I'd sooner befriend a crocodile!"

The simple process of thinking is often worth more than a few hours of hollering at God.

Unfortunately, some of us have made the mistake of believing that the mind is an obstacle to relating

Communicating with God is not a complicated, mystical process



to him. This is utter nonsense, dangerous nonsense. Thinking is a divine activity, distinguishing us from beasts. It is important to use our cognitive gifts and imaginations in the service of our heavenly Father. Think! Imagine!

Why should God's personhood relationally be any different from ours? Why should He tolerate a one way conversation when we regard such behaviour as rude, insensitive and intrusive?

Are we so stupid that we believe we can please God and force His compliance by battering him with incessant demands or strafing him with tongues?

The two human parallels are proof enough that this kind of prayer hardly constitutes communication. Friendship implies dialogue and a selfless interest in the other person. How do you think God feels when we treat him like a slot machine?

No person ever wants to be relegated to a 'utility'. By all means petition God and use the gift of tongues for self edification,⁴⁵ but recognise that what He really wants from us is friendship: dialogue, obedience and the intuitive ability to empathise and share His outlook.

None of us will ever outgrow the necessity to petition God, but our motive in prayer should not be 'need' or 'greed', but love and delight in Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Neglect prayer and your 'blessings in heavenly places in Christ' will be stolen from you. The shell of your house, your salvation, will remain, but everything else will be lost.

I can think of nothing more tragic for a believer than a 'Godless Christianity:' an empty house bereft of warmth, light, decoration, comfort and companionship.

Ultimately, a prayerless life is an empty, wasted life. The prerequisite for enjoying God and His security is prayer, which leads naturally to my last security.

7. Peace: a Security Based on Sharing God's Unruffled, Eternal Peace

Prayer and God's peace are partnered in the New Testament (Philippians 4:6-7: John 14:27).

As we have seen in this study, God is passionate, colourful, dynamic and involved, but He is never stressed. Why? As the Almighty, He has everything under control; as the perfect, holy

God, He is at peace in himself: a symphony of harmonious attributes.

He is not a flustered, ineffectual MD, stressed out by His responsibilities and kaleidoscopic changes in His universe. The Almighty is more than adequate for every contingency and emergency in heaven and earth.

Peace is the inevitable attribute of a God who is all-powerful, all knowing, and has no internal conflicts and complexes, 'the perfect Personality.'

The 'peace of God' must never be confused with isolation or detachment. Let me explain this with a couple of examples. A person married to a hostile and abusive partner may divorce her husband to gain 'peace;' a house owner with 'neighbours from hell' may decide to move in order to find more peaceful accommodation.

In both scenarios, peace is obtained by separating from the source of conflict and discord.

God's peace is not like this. He is utterly involved in His universe. In the midst of conflict and the dramatic convulsions of creation, He is totally at peace.

God is all serenity, tranquillity, stillness and poise, yet with one word He can ignite the fiery conflagration that will end our universe.⁴⁶ This peace is God's gift to us and it is aligned to prayer.

Through prayer, we offload our problems and needs to our Father, and in return, He downloads His peace to us.

We will never enjoy complete security in God until we share His peace. Don't run away from problems but give them to our

heavenly Father, exchange them for His peace. If you run away and bury your head in the sand, the tide will turn and drown you.

Our security must never be in anything as fickle as circumstances. Our Rock is immovable and everlasting; our security is in him.

His peace be with you!

[END]

Biography:

Andrew Brandon is the Director of CWEST, a mission and media charity, and the Creative Director of Gladius Pictures Ltd. He has worked internationally as an evangelist and itinerant Bible teacher, but in recent years has been writing for theatre, film and documentaries. His most recent film, 'Parallel City', is currently on the international film festival circuit and is beginning to pick up award nominations.

Andrew's writing includes theatre and pantomime for children and adult theatre and film as well as documentaries. He defies stereotyping and has written in a number of different genres: science fiction, fantasy, comedy, musical theatre, historical, romantic, Westerns, action and topical.

He has recently completed a groundbreaking twenty episode TV series that combines two parallel narratives: a First Century action epic and a Twenty-First Century family saga. The interconnected stories race towards a totally unexpected climax. Brandon's aphorism, "If the imagination doesn't move it stagnates," defines his approach to his art.

He is the creative powerhouse behind Gladius and is responsible for the company's motto: 'Excellence without Compromise'. He is a professional with high professional standards. Andrew has never missed a writer's deadline.

As creative director, Brandon mentors and inspires other artists, most of whom come from the UK's ethnic minorities. He lives and breathes diversity. Change stimulates him. He is happiest when he's in transit through London's diverse ethnic worlds, drawing his inspiration from the city's melting pot of cultures.

For his last documentary, 'Epic Journey: Seven Ancient Churches', he cycle-camped from London to Istanbul.

Notes:

- 28 The Church Fathers are the early theologians of the Church who defined orthodox doctrine. Their theology is referred to as 'Patristic Theology', from the Latin for 'father'.
- 29 'Hegemony' means 'sole leadership, domination'.
- 30 Revelation 12:7-11
- 31 Psalm 91:13
- 32 Luke 10: 17-20
- 33 Ephesians 6: 10-20; 2 Corinthians 10:3-6
- 34 Genesis 3:15
- 35 Revelation 5:5
- 36 James 4:7; 1 Peter 5:8-9
- 37 The 'old you', referred to Romans 6:6 as the 'old self', is our old, sinful identity. This can best be described in terms of an autobiography in two volumes. The first volume is called 'Life in My Old Identity', and ends with crucifixion. The second volume is called 'New Identity in Christ' and describes the creation of new identity. The old identity was dominated by sin, selfishness and Satan; the new identity is ruled by Christ and the fruit of His Spirit'.
- 38 Romans 6
- 39 Ephesians 1:3-7; 2:10
- 40 Revelation 3:18
- 41 1 Peter 1:7
- 42 1 Kings 17:4
- 43 1 Kings 17:14
- 44 Matthew 6:25-34
- 45 Study 1 Corinthians 12 in which Paul explains the purpose and limitations of the gift of tongues.
- 46 2 Peter 3:3-10

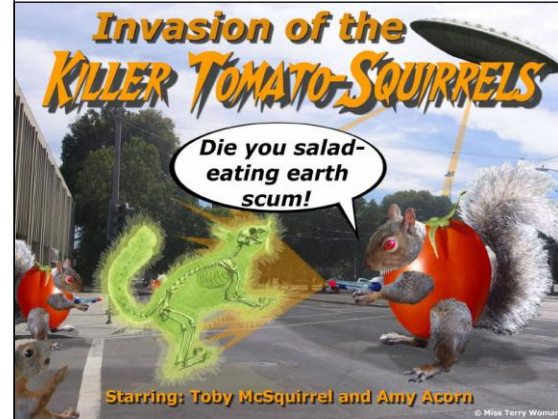
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Inspirational People:

~ Strength to Love ~

Remembering Dr Martin Luther King Jr



by **Joseph F. Kolapudi**

SPAG Magazine
Journalist

Introduction

It's difficult to believe that it's been fifty years since the tragic assassination of Martin Luther King Jr. Many remember him as a man of courage, strength and truth, yet few know what prompted Dr King, as he was known, to love those who hated his guts and wanted him dead.

How do you love your enemies? Why risk your life doing so? What makes the difference between self-assurance and confidence in the face of hate and bigotry? These questions point to a conviction that can be hard to find these days, but was demonstrated in Martin Luther King Jr, and through his deep trust in his Saviour.

Born in January 15, 1929, he grew up in the shadow of his father, Reverend Martin Luther King, Sr, a well-known Baptist preacher in Georgia, and his mother, Alberta Williams King, who was a famous choir singer in Atlanta¹. It was natural that King followed in his father's footsteps, and eventually became a preacher at the age of twenty-five.

From an early age, King noticed the way that African-Americans were treated differently to other members of society. It was

through his father's example that he learned to speak out against injustice.

However, it wasn't until December 1, 1955, when Rosa Parks refused to give up her seat to a caucasian traveller on a city bus, in effect breaking the Jim Crow laws (which involved segregation of blacks and whites in the United States), that Dr King finally put his foot down.

In conjunction with other protest groups, most notably the National Association for the Advancement of Coloured People (NAACP), as well as the President of the United States, Richard Nixon, he arranged for a bus strike that lasted 385 days, which eventually led to the desegregation of public transportation.

The incident launched Dr King into the national spotlight, although it took many more marches and public protests until finally, in 1964 and 1965, the Civil Rights Act and the Voting Rights Act were respectively signed into federal law².

Interview with Jim Zwerg

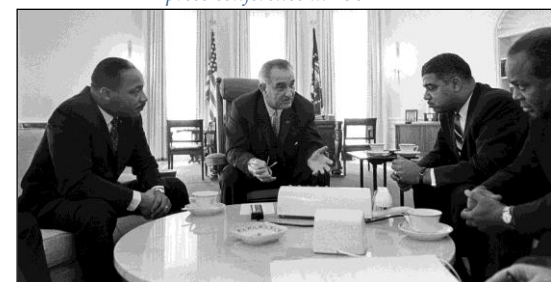
I had the amazing opportunity to interview a close friend of Dr King, a man by the name of Jim Zwerg, who many might not know had a big impact on the way caucasian members of society began to view segregation. He was one of the original 'Freedom Riders,' the thirteen member group that boarded a bus to



Dr King and his wife Coretta Scott King in 1964



Martin Luther King and Malcolm X waiting for press conference in 1964



Martin Luther King Jr met with President Lyndon B Johnson and other Civil Rights leaders Whitney Young and James Farmer.

Montgomery, Alabama in defiance of segregation laws. Jim Zwerg was the first off the bus and met the hostile crowd waiting to receive them.

Jim recalled some of the experience with me:

"A mic had been set up by the media, when the mob seemed to come out of nowhere, screaming and brandishing weapons... I bowed my head and prayed, I asked God to be with me, to give me the strength to remain non-violent, and to forgive them... At that point, I was pulled into the mob and quickly rendered unconscious."

To me, it was evident that sometimes showing courage can be costly, but it is definitely worth the fight. Jim was later awarded the Freedom Award in 1961 by Martin Luther King Jr, who encouraged him to finish his education and pursue his divinity degree. At the time of the Freedom Ride, Jim was only twenty-one years old.

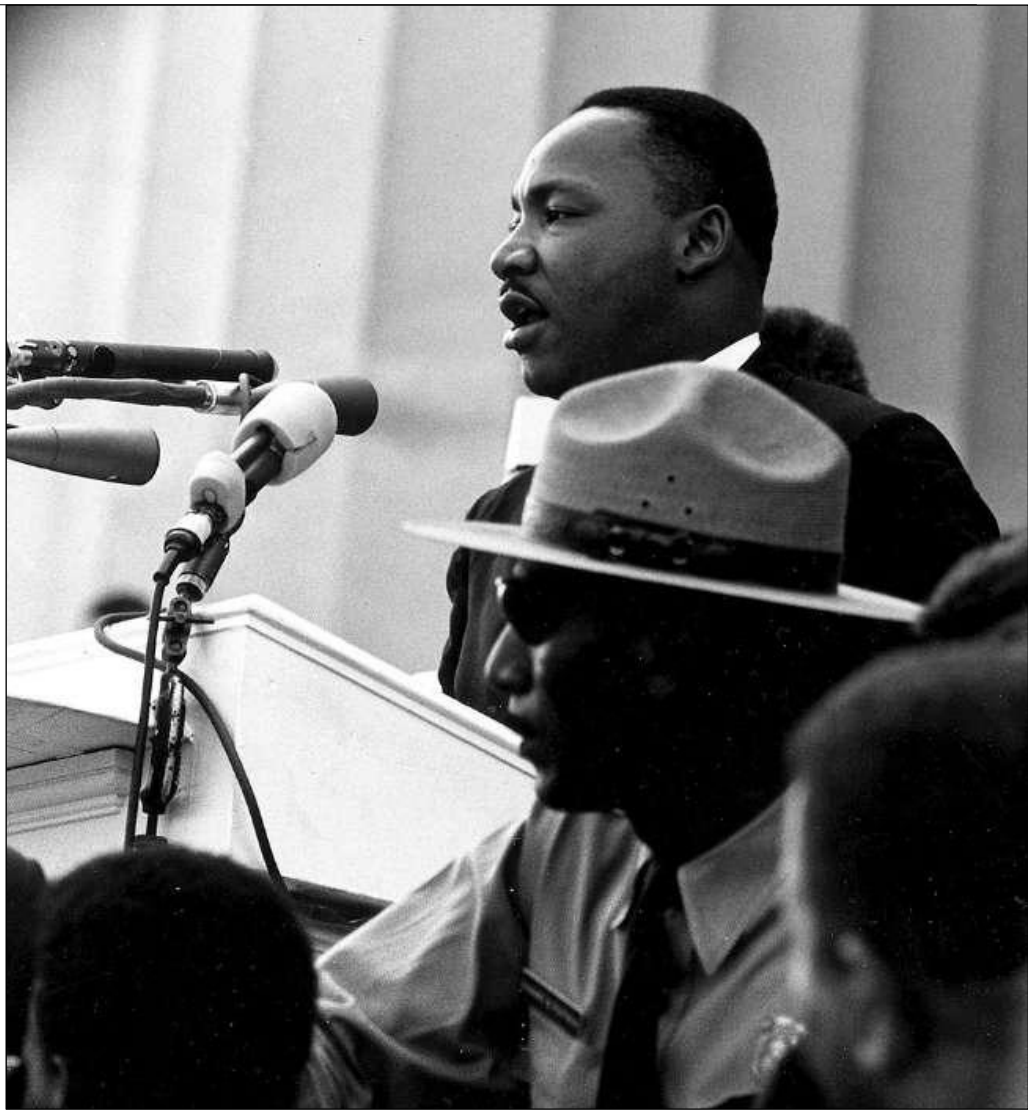
Courage that is Missing Today

Astounding as it is to hear of the bravery of so many who joined Dr King in his nonviolent fight against violence, racism and bigotry, I find this courage lacking in many of today's young people, including myself. How much easier it is for us to:

- choose the easy way out;
- fit in rather than stand out in a crowd; and
- allow our voices to be smothered into silence when asked our opinion on contentious, hot-button topics.

It is difficult to be different.

When I was in to high school and heard Dr King's famous



Dr Martin Luther King Jr giving his 'I Have a Dream' speech during the March on Washington in Washington DC on 28 August 1963

speech, "I Have a Dream," I wondered what was going through his mind when he delivered those inspirational words of wisdom. I wondered if he was thinking about what had led up to that moment, standing on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial.

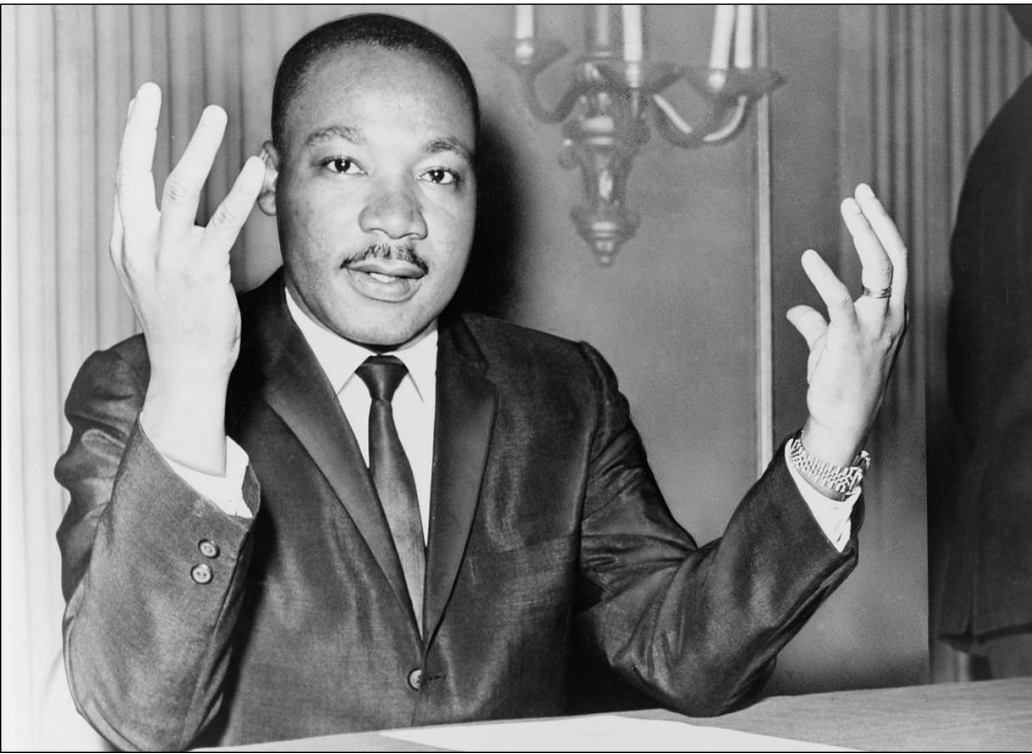
Later, when I myself stood in that same spot in Washington DC, on a family trip to the States in 2015, I understood the weight of that historical moment. The spectacular view of the Washington Monument reflected onto the National Mall around the Reflecting Pool surely draws one into deep reflection, on both the past, and the future.

Perhaps Dr King dug deep into his own experience of the burdensome journey for equality, that he was able to look forward with courage and hope that freedom might yet be a few days away.

Dr King's Legacy

Despite being assassinated on April 4, 1968³, Dr King's legacy has lived on and stood firm through the test of time. Countless millions remember him on Martin Luther King Jr Day every year, which is marked as a national holiday in the United States.

One of my favourite quotes of Dr King does not come from his "I Have A Dream" speech, but from



Martin Luther King Jr at a 1964 press conference

his letter that was written while in jail in Birmingham, Alabama. An excerpt reads:

"Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere... we are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny... whatever affects one, affects all indirectly."⁴

It was this commitment to his people, as a pastor first, and secondly as a political activist, that enabled that journey to freedom to endure and eventually provide a way for every person within his community, his state, and his nation to enjoy the freedom for which he had fought, until his dying breath.

Conclusion

We all have dreams and aspirations in life, just like Dr King. Perhaps we have yet to determine what our dreams are, or perhaps we are so close to fulfilling our purpose that we can almost taste the sweetness of freedom, but just need that gentle nudge to take that next step.

If you have ever wondered what your purpose is in life, you are not alone. Making a change by living differently can sound more challenging than it needs to be. Let us be encouraged by the words of Dr Martin Luther King Jr who said,

"Only through an inner spiritual transformation do we gain the strength to fight vigorously the evils of the world in a humble and loving spirit."⁵

This is what gives us the courage and strength to fight for what is right and to love as we should. [END]

Notes

¹⁻³Pettinger, T., "Martin Luther King Biography", Oxford, available: www.biographyonline.net/politicians/american/martin-luther-king.html, accessed 3 February, 2018.

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⁵King, M.L.K., "Strength to Love", Fortress Press, Minneapolis, MN.



Words of Wisdom

"So even if you love and lose, keep sharing God's love anyway. Love in the face of suffering and grief and heart-ache and loss. Love beyond racial and religious and physical borders and barriers. Love like a fool without considering what such love will cost."

Meadow Rue Merrill

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If God is With Me, Why Am I Lonely?



by Christina
Jones

Press Service
International

Somewhere between Sunday School and youth group, I picked up the idea that if I were in a right relationship with God, I would always feel fulfilled. The persistent loneliness I felt didn't fit into that picture, so I prayed and read my Bible like I was told I should, to be close to God.

I made good friends, and sometimes there were moments (I can almost pinpoint them) when I didn't feel even a little bit alone. Certain sunlit moments with certain people when I knew I was fully seen, heard, and loved. These, I think, are some of the best moments in life.

But the loneliness always comes back, and sometimes it isn't even for lack of company. I've found that sometimes I feel it the heaviest when I'm leaving a small group meeting, or after "putting myself out there" at some social event.

Sometimes, I feel it sharply when I try to smile and make conversation at church, and it can be like choking in a crowd. And as far as I can tell, there seems to be no relationship between the emptiness of loneliness and the fullness of my relationship with my Creator. No matter how close I feel to Him, it seems, the loneliness can still get its claws into me.

The human design

I've come to the conclusion that human beings were not created to



be fully fulfilled in a relationship with God alone. Adam in the garden – in *perfect* relationship with God – was lonely. God's response was not to tell Adam to work on their relationship. Instead, God said "it is not good for man to be alone," and made a human companion for him.

Even in a perfect environment, in a perfect relationship with God, Adam was designed to be in relationship with other human beings. And he felt the pull of that design.

There are now 7.5 billion people on earth. Unlike Adam, it is not hard for us to find other human beings to relate to. So if other human beings are thick on the ground, and a relationship with God is accessible through Jesus, why loneliness?

Alone in a crowd

Clearly it isn't enough just to live among 7.5 billion people. The nakedness of Adam and Eve in the

garden wasn't only a lack of clothing, but symbolic of their relationship with each other. They hid nothing because they had nothing to hide; they had never been hurt, never known a harsh word or a moment of rejection.

They approached each other without fear, fully expecting to be accepted, and fully accepting one another. In this way, they experienced and participated in God's love – both in a direct relationship with Him, and in their relationship with each other.

When suffering became a part of the human experience, we saw division between people for the first time. As humanity hid themselves and their shame from God, they hid from one another too. Where once there was acceptance, suddenly there was blame and fear as Adam and Eve turned inward, protecting themselves where once they had

exposed their souls happily to one another.

And I think that is how we still are; longing to be together as our design demands, but when we draw close, the broken edges – fears, insecurities, pride – catch at each other. Even as Christians, while our relationship with God has been (and continues to be) restored, our relationships with other people are rarely what they were created to be.

So, of course we are lonely. How could we not be in this circumstance? We are unable to live in relationship with each other the way we were designed to. We stand in proximity to each other and feel alone, because we were meant to be fully seen, heard and loved by each other, but instead we hide ourselves in shame of the darker aspects of our humanity, and in fear of being rejected. It's like we stand behind glass walls, looking at each other but unable to really *be* with each other.

What do we do now?

I've learned to change the way I pray about loneliness. In a world of broken relationships, it takes a monumental courage to continue being open to other people, and for that I think I can ask God: the courage to keep loving and hoping and reaching for other people in search of those genuine, sunlit moments of connection. But I don't expect this to fix the problem of loneliness.

Loneliness, like every other suffering we experience, is not something that a relationship with God delivers us from. Instead, it is something we can expect to experience in a world that is not all that it was created to be. So I take comfort in the paradox that

even in my loneliest moments, I'm not alone.

There will be no full end to loneliness this side of eternity, but our God has entered into and lived in the darkest places of the human experience. There is no deeper loneliness than what Jesus experienced among us, and even though he cannot (or maybe will not) break the pattern of our design to relieve us of our nagging sense of alienation, he will stand in the dark with us and whisper promises about the dawn, when everything will be restored to what it was meant to be.

And that is enough for me.

[END]

Biography:

Christina Jones is recuperating from graduate school by watching far too much TV and ignoring the many very good books waiting to be read and re-read on her shelf.

She moved to Spokane, Washington where she works for a non-profit that prepares for and responds to natural disasters.

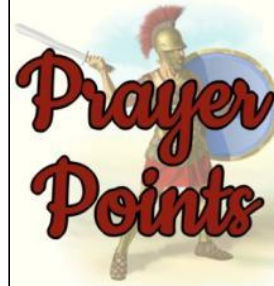
She is usually running late and has a background in international relief work, and has become very good at sprinting through airports.

When not watching TV, working or running through airports, Christina enjoys Latin dancing, solitary evening jogs, old buildings, too much ice cream and long conversations with good friends.

Christina Jones' previous articles may be viewed at www.pressserviceinternational.org/christina-jones.html

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Jones, Christina, 9 March 2017, Christian Today: If God is with me, why am I lonely?, available: www.christiantoday.com.au/news/if-god-is-with-me-why-am-i-lonely.html, accessed 31/01/18



Do you struggle with prayer? Do you find it hard to know what to say or are at a loss for words? Many Christians struggle in this area too.

We'll provide suggestions with each issue about various people and topics which we hope will inspire and help you in your prayer time. May we encourage you to make this prayer a part of your regular daily routine.

Prayer for Our Country's Leaders

(Proverbs has some great insight for the leaders in our country, and these daily prayer suggestions are based on many of them.)

Our Father in Heaven,

Thank you for the freedoms that we have in our country. We pray for our brothers and sisters in Christ who are persecuted for their faith, that the leaders in their country will develop compassion, integrity and wisdom and please create in them, a desire to make their country better for its people, including those who have a different faith to them.

Day 1: Grow decency and purity in their heart

Grow our leaders in decency, sincerity, humility and purity, for it is from the heart that good and noble things arise. Urge them to be quick to forgive and slow to anger, swift to correct problems and wisely turn away from sin and selfishness. Let them be leaders who heed counsel, act on wise instruction, and are keen to grow in wisdom, decency, purity and humility.

Be a beacon for our leaders, so that their hearts, minds and souls are stirred to strive towards what is right, and encourage them to search their hearts and minds to ensure that their motives and actions are good and trustworthy.

Day 2: Guard their tongue

Encourage our leaders to speak always with a truthful tongue. Remind them with a guilty conscience if they attempt to twist or distort the truth, and let those who act dishonestly be quickly found out. Let the leaders in our country stand out from many others across the world, and let their words demonstrate a compassionate and caring heart.

Day 3: Steer them towards integrity and guide their goals

We know that wise guidance is necessary for the good of our nation. Encourage our leaders to turn their eyes towards what is good, right and noble. Open their minds and hearts to the truth of Your gospel, and encourage them to fix their minds on what is good and holy.

Help them to set clear and honourable goals for the good of our country and its people, rather than seeking to line their own pockets or to boost their status. Help them to recognise that wealth and celebrity and other worldly aims may promise happiness and fulfilment, but they're empty and will ultimately leave them devoid of contentment. Encourage them to stay on the straight and narrow path and not to be tempted to leave the safety of your road, for those who live rightly lean towards justice and are a good guide for those who follow.

Day 4: Encourage them to aim towards gaining wisdom

Let our leaders desire to grow in wisdom and help them to understand that living and guiding wisely can lead to a satisfied life. Let their good judgment and insight be a beacon for those who follow. I pray that You will bring joy to those who delight in wisdom, particularly wisdom found in Your Word. Let those who follow be filled with a desire to light the way for truthfulness, honesty and decency within politics.

Day 5: Grow in compassionate wisdom

Let the wisdom of our leaders bring healing to rifts and problems within our country and to those people who have been harmed. Encourage our leaders to be kind to all who are struggling whether due to limited finances or physical and/or mental or other challenges. Let the kindness of their leadership bring about a change in attitudes and hearts within our communities, and particularly that systems and finances are set up which will benefit those in need.

Day 6: Create a thirst for truth and godly understanding

Cultivate a hunger within our leaders to make our country great and to live in a way that honours You. Help them to turn away from paths that lead away from You. I pray that our political system will change so that it winnows out the dishonourable, indecent and selfish, rather than encouraging those kinds of people into its ranks, which has been the way for many years now. Bring about a change so that the upright and those who trust in You, will not only find a place within our political system, but also shine Your light to guide others along the right path for leadership in our country.

Day 7: Let our country's leaders become a shining example

Let our leaders become known for their wisdom and knowledge. May their example encourage other leaders across the world to desire that for themselves. Let us become great, not because of our wealth, but because of our wisdom, compassion, honesty and decency. Encourage others to recognise that their country too can be great, particularly if they live according to God's instructions and right-living.

Amen

5 Christian Clichés that Need to Die



by Matt
Smethurst
The Gospel Coalition

"Books don't change people," John Piper once observed. "Paragraphs do. Sometimes even sentences."

A good sentence is a gift. We love finding complex truth shrink-wrapped in clear, simple, memorable form. It's why Charles Spurgeon and C.S. Lewis are dominating a newsfeed near you. Even God likes pithy statements - at least enough to breathe out a whole book of them.

But one-liners aren't always helpful. Sometimes, in our desire to simplify truth, we can trivialise and even obscure it. And to obscure the truth is to tell a lie.

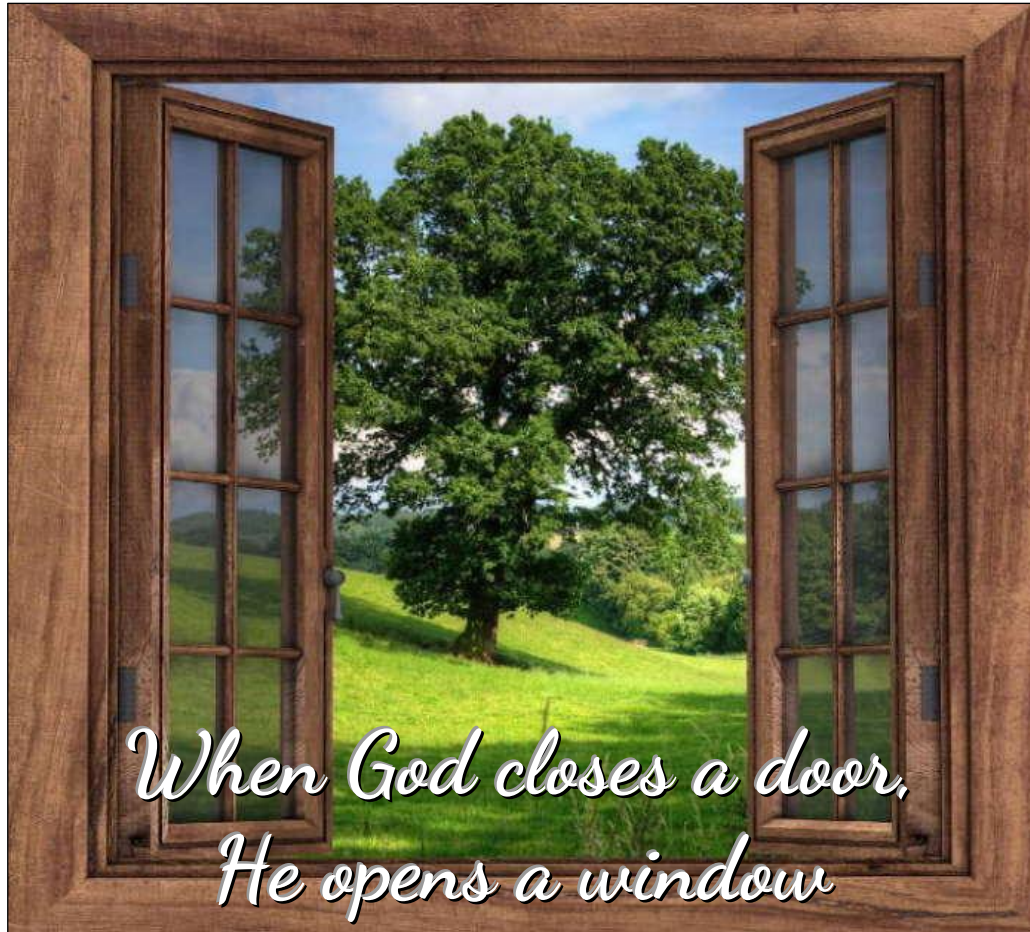
Here are five popular Christian clichés that are not biblical, and therefore need a memorial service.

1. "When God Closes a Door, He Opens a Window"

I appreciate the heart behind this statement. It's true, after all, that God can do anything he pleases (Jeremiah 32:27), that he sometimes redirects our course (Proverbs 16:9), and that he never abandons his own (Hebrews 13:5).

But if God closes a door in your life, there's no guarantee he'll open a window. He may not open anything. He may want you to realise you have the wrong address.

Scripture is filled with examples of the Spirit closing doors, windows, and any other conceivable entrance to keep one from heading in the wrong direction or at the wrong time



(e.g., Proverbs 16:9; 19:21; Acts 16:6-7).

I once heard calling described as the trifecta of affinity, ability, and opportunity. Do you like it, can you do it, and is there an open door? Now there are rare times when, if the third piece isn't in place, God may want you to break down the door. Missionary martyr Jim Elliott once said that a lot of folks are sitting around waiting for a 'call' when what they need is a kick in the pants.

But what if God has something else for you entirely? What if he *doesn't* want you to move to that city, or take that job, or enter that relationship - whether by door or window?

Maybe he wants you to re-evaluate in light of affinity, ability,

and opportunity - your internal desires, your confirmed giftings, and your actual options.

2. "You're Never More Safe Than When You're in God's Will"

Insofar as the safety here is eternal, or means something like "in the right place," this maxim is gloriously true. Almost every time I hear it though, the person is referring to physical safety.

Years ago, as I was preparing to become a missionary in a closed country, a few well-meaning believers assured me God would protect me from harm since he had called me.

Jesus seems to disagree:

"You will be delivered up even by parents and brothers and relatives and friends, and some of you they will put to death. You

will be hated by all for my name's sake. But not a hair of your head will perish." Luke 21:16-18 [ESV]

Some of you they'll slaughter. You'll be entirely safe. Huh?

These promises sound contradictory, but they're not. Justin Martyr (AD 100-165) was almost certainly reflecting on this passage when he said,

"They can kill us, but they cannot harm us."

I love that. Only a Christian could say something so crazy.

God has promised us many wonderful things; physical safety is not one of them. Brutal life circumstances are normal in a fallen world. Pursuing God may even lead you into *greater* physical danger. But you will be spiritually alive and eternally secure.

3. "Let Go and Let God"

At its best, this phrase highlights the value of surrender. God is God and you are not, so lay down your résumé, your excuses, your fears.

All too often though, the phrase is wielded as if the symbol of Christianity is not a cross but a couch. It's subtly used to put the brakes on striving, on working, on effort.

Now, if "let go and let God" solely referenced the moment of *justification*, it would be fine. But it typically refers to the process of *sanctification*, which is anything but passive.

The Christian life is gruelling. When Paul reflects on it he doesn't think of sunsets and naps but soldiers and athletes and farmers (2 Timothy 2:3-6). He thinks of running tracks and boxing rings (1 Corinthians 9:24-27).



We're called to work out what God has already worked in us, labouring not *for* our salvation but *from* it (Philippians 2:12-13.) This dynamic of restful vigilance (Matthew 11:28-30; 16:24) - what the Puritans called "holy sweat" - lies at the heart of Christian experience.

As J.I. Packer once put it,

"The Christian's motto should not be 'Let go and let God' but 'Trust God and get going.'"

4. "God Will Not Give You More Than You Can Handle"

In a culture that tells us we can be anything we desire, this motivational slogan is meant to encourage, to reassure us that life won't be *too* hard. There will be challenges, sure, but God knows my limits. He won't overdo it.

The problem however, is that God *will* give you more than you can handle. He'll do it to make you lean on Him. He'll do it because He loves you.

Over the past few years, few things have encouraged my soul

more than the letters of John Newton (1725-1807), the former slave trader who penned "Amazing Grace." In one letter to a widow fearing death, Newton writes:

*"Though our frames and perceptions may vary, the report of faith concerning [the time of death] is the same. The Lord usually reserves **dying strength for a dying hour**..."*

When the time shall arrive which He has appointed for your dismissal, I make no doubt but that He will overpower all your fears, silence all your enemies, and give you a comfortable, triumphant entrance into His kingdom. You have nothing to fear from death; for Jesus, by dying, has disarmed it of its sting, has perfumed the grave, and opened the gates of glory for His believing people."

The good news is not that God won't give us more than we can handle; it's that He won't give us more than *He* can handle.

5. "God Helps Those Who Help Themselves"

I'm not aware of a statement more commonly mis-identified as a Bible verse, and the fact that it originates from Benjamin Franklin - not God's Word, is the best news you will encounter today.

If God only helps those who help themselves, we're all sunk.

He didn't come for moral standouts; He came for moral failures (Matthew 9:12-13; Luke 19:10).

He came for us.

While this slogan may be a fine summary of the teaching of other religions, the entire message of Christianity hinges on the fact that, as Charles Spurgeon once quipped:

"God helps those who cannot help themselves."

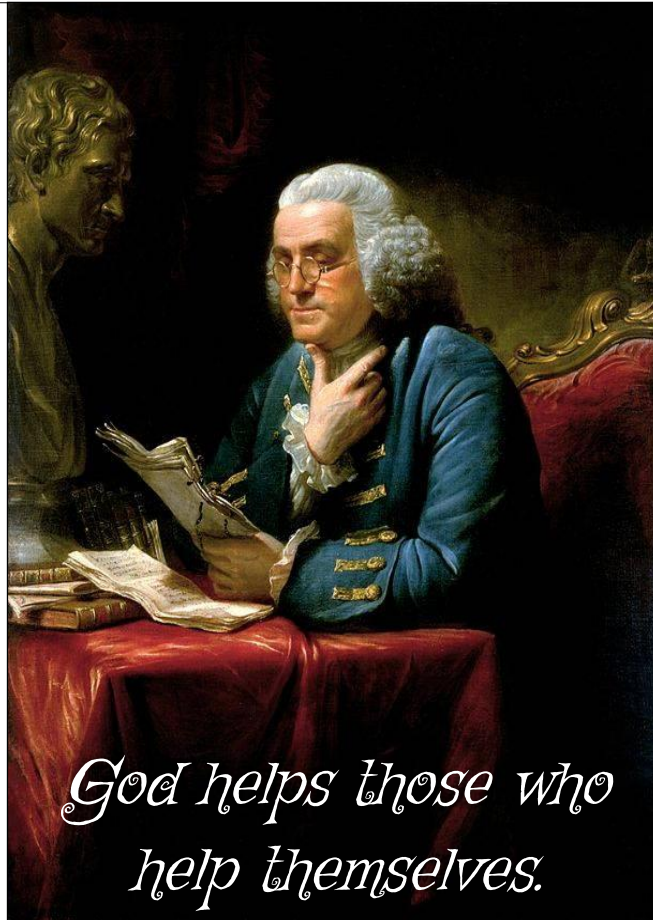
Indeed, he helps those who humble themselves, who repent and rely on Jesus alone.

Truth is Loving

While the heart behind these five mantras is often genuine, they are all unhelpful for one overriding reason: they are unbiblical.

Speaking biblically isn't just a matter of truth; it's an issue of love. God's words, after all, aren't just true; they're also *good* for the world.

May we love our neighbours by



God helps those who help themselves.

stewarding our words, and steward our words by speaking what's true. For love rejoices with the truth (1 Corinthians 13:6).

[END]

Biography:

Matt Smethurst is managing editor of The Gospel Coalition and author of "1-2 Thessalonians: A 12-Week Study" (Crossway, 2017).

He and his wife, Maghan, have three children and live in Louisville, Kentucky. They belong to the Third Avenue Baptist Church, where Matt serves as an elder. You can follow him on Twitter.

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2. Send us your photos. Submit your best good quality natural scenery photograph (A4 vertical format) for our back page, or good photos of Aussie wildlife including birds, insects and spiders. (Note your photo must be your own work and not the property of another person or organisation);
3. Send your original article for consideration. (When writing your piece, ensure you make note of all of your sources including web addresses, book details, authors, pages, and Bible translations etc);
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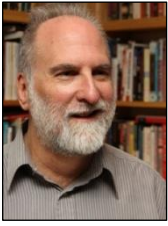
Words of Wisdom

"Neither theological knowledge nor social action alone is enough to keep us in love with Christ unless both are preceded by a personal encounter with Him. Theological insights are gained not only from between two covers of a book, but from two bent knees before an altar. The Holy Hour becomes like an oxygen tank to revive the breath of the Holy Spirit in the midst of the foul and fetid atmosphere of the world."

Fulton J. Sheen



Christian Persecution on the Rise



by **Bill Muehlenberg**
CultureWatch

It would be rather easy – and appropriate – for me to change the name of my website from CultureWatch to Persecution Watch.

To watch Western culture is increasingly to watch case after case of Christian persecution. On a daily basis Christians are being vilified, attacked, persecuted, and targeted by various forces, including secularist governments.

Indeed, as I have documented so often, the persecution is coming more and more from the state, which seems to have decided that the biggest threat to its existence is biblical Christianity.

Christians of course claim a higher loyalty to the only one true sovereign. Thus the state, which has delegated – and limited –

authority from God, cannot claim or demand ultimate allegiance.

Laws to Silence Christians

That is partly why all sorts of laws are being passed to effectively silence the Christian churches. All sorts of cheap excuses are brought up to render believers ineffective in proclaiming their faith. All manner of politically correct foolishness is sweeping the West, all with the intent of muting the Christian voice.

Consider this incredible case in San Diego, California. Here is how a report by Drew Zahn of World Net Daily covered the story:

“A San Diego pastor and his wife claim they were interrogated by a county official and warned they will face escalating fines if they continue to hold Bible studies in their home.

The couple, whose names are being withheld until a demand letter can be filed on their behalf, told their attorney a county government

employee knocked on their door on Good Friday, asking a litany of questions about their Tuesday night Bible studies, which are attended by approximately 15 people.

“Do you have a regular weekly meeting in your home? Do you sing? Do you say “amen”?” the official reportedly asked. ‘Do you say, “Praise the Lord”?’

The pastor’s wife answered yes. She says she was then told, however, that she must stop holding ‘religious assemblies’ until she and her husband obtain a Major Use Permit from the county, a permit that often involves traffic and environmental studies, compliance with parking and sidewalk regulations and costs that top tens of thousands of dollars.

If they fail to pay for the MUP, the county official reportedly warned, the couple will be charged escalating fines beginning at \$100, then \$200, \$500, \$1000, ‘and then it will get ugly’.”¹

Imagine that! Now even home Bible studies are becoming illegal.

What sort of madness is this? Clearly it is diabolically-inspired madness.

The Power Behind the Power

We know that there is a very real spiritual power which wants to silence all of God’s people, and this spiritual battle is of course being fought out in our courts, our laws, our cultures and our social policies.

Dean Broyles of the Western Center for Law and Policy said:

“I’ve been leading Bible studies in my home for 13 years in San Diego County, and I personally believe that home fellowship Bible studies



are the past and future of the church ...

If you look at China, the church grew from home Bible studies.

I'm deeply concerned that if in the U.S. we are not able to meet in our homes and freely practice our religion, then we may be worse off than China."

The law group issued a statement saying that it is:

"...troubled by this draconian move to suppress home Bible studies.

If the current trends in our nation continue, churches may be forced underground. If that happens, believers will once again be forced to meet in homes.

If homes are already closed by the government to assembly and worship, where then will Christians meet?"

Good question indeed. With hate crime laws, anti-discrimination legislation, and all sorts of other nefarious laws, the free proclamation of the gospel is under threat already.

The Gospel is Under Threat

Churches are especially being targeted here, and now the powers that be want to clamp down on Christian activities in the home as well.

Perhaps if these trends continue in the West, believers will be forced to meet in isolated forests and deserts, away from the ruling authorities and religious police, just as is happening in China and other nations where the church has been driven underground.

Persecution Now Emerging Here

Not long ago Western Christians used to read about the



horrible persecution of the church in Communist countries such as the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe.

We read about the great exploits and sufferings of Richard Wurmbrand (*"Tortured for Christ"*), Haralan Popov (*"Tortured for his Faith"*), Brother Andrew (*"God's Smuggler"*) and others who ministered amidst great hardship and opposition in Communist lands.

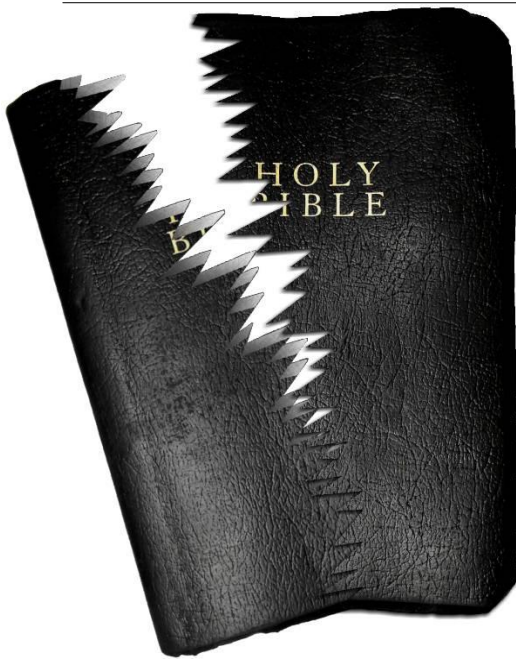
I read these books with fascination and horror when I was a young believer in the 1970s. Little did I realise that within a few short decades some of these

Communist nations would no longer be under the jackboot of atheistic Communism, but that the 'free' West would quickly begin to take their place.

Sure, the US does not yet have its own Gulag, and Australia has not yet set up concentration camps for those troublesome Christians, but the way things are heading, it may not be all that far off.

Increasingly it is becoming very risky indeed to publically proclaim your Christian faith in the secular post-Christian West.

Indeed, the West is not so much post-Christian any longer, but



actually anti-Christian, and it is getting more so each passing day.

One sure sign that things have reached their logical outcome is when my CultureWatch website is no longer to be found. One day it may well be forcibly taken down by censorious authorities.

Persecution of the Early Church

Of course the early church wrestled with all this as well. They proclaimed Jesus Christ as the one true royal master, not Caesar. A clash of royal domains was underway.

As Tom Wright says about Paul while in prison:

"The reason he was there was that what he had been doing and saying was seen as an offence to the people in power. He was announcing a royal message, a 'gospel' which clashed head on with the royal message on which the Roman Empire was built: the announcement of Caesar as Lord."

Conclusion

We too proclaim a different king. This is the risen Lord who was betrayed and rejected by men. They hated him and they will hate us. There is no getting around this.

In the light of all this, every one of us must start asking ourselves some very hard questions.

Are we willing to pay the price for following Christ publically and boldly?

Are we committed to our Lord so fully, that we would be willing to lose our jobs, be heavily fined, or spend time in prison for the sake of Christ?

Are we willing to give our very life away for the sake of the gospel?

Remember, it is always easier to say we will die for our Lord. It is much harder to actually live for our Lord right now.

Will we walk with Him along the road less travelled?

Will we join Him on the Via Dolorosa?

Will we take up our cross and follow Him as he has called us to do?

Very soon indeed these will not just be rhetorical questions. [End]

Biography:

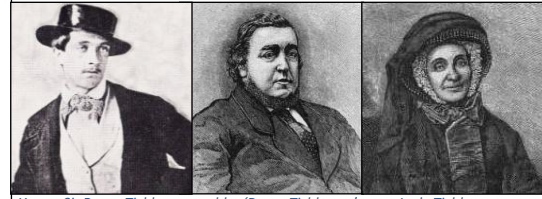
American-born Bill Muehlenberg, lives in Melbourne with his Australian wife Averil, and they have three sons. The couple spent five years in Holland working as missionaries with Youth With A Mission. Bill is a spokesman for the Family Council of Victoria, and has an independent ministry in pro-faith 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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Tantalising Trivia



Young Sir Roger Tichborne older 'Roger Tichborne' Lady Tichborne

Roger Charles Doughty Tichborne, a wealthy, young aristocrat disappeared at sea after a ship-wreck in 1854 and was presumed dead.

His overwrought mother refused to accept it, placing advertisements in newspapers throughout the world, seeking to find him.

Eleven years later, in 1866, Mrs Tichborne was contacted by an Australian man who claimed he was her long lost son. Overjoyed after being reunited with Roger, Mrs Tichborne ignored some troubling facts:

- Roger had been of a slight build, while the Australian man was more than double the weight of her son; and
- the claimant spoke only English, although her son had also spoken French;

There was one undeniable fact though - the claimant looked remarkably like her beloved son.

When Mrs Tichborne died, she left everything to Roger. The other heirs weren't happy about it and took the matter to court. The case proved a huge sensation in England, and after drawn out proceedings, 'Roger' was deemed to be a fraud when he couldn't answer some simple questions about the man he claimed to be.

Sentenced to ten years, the 'imposter' began losing weight while imprisoned, and the thinner and older he became, the more he grew to look like Roger.

After his release, 'Roger' had several unsuccessful business ventures, and was destitute when he died in 1898. The family permitted a card bearing the name "Roger Charles Doughty Tichborne," to be placed on his coffin before his burial, and the name 'Tichborn' was written into the cemetery records. [End]



'Alternative Facts' and Christians as Gullible Skeptics



by Trevin Wax
The Gospel Coalition

It happened during the Ebola crisis a few years ago. I was following the news coverage, praying for missionaries and hoping for a solution that would put a stop to the plague in Africa.

Frustrated with the mismanagement of the situation and concerned about the possibility of an outbreak in the United States, I made a snarky comment on Twitter about a governor who had said that panicking was ill advised because the Ebola virus was not easily contracted.

A friend of mine, Jeremy Writebol, called me out on Twitter for spreading misinformation. He told me there were only a few ways that Ebola could be contracted, and that the governor's statement was factually correct and desperately needed.

I wasn't about to argue with

Jeremy. His mother is Nancy Writebol, one of the missionaries who, with Kent Brantly, contracted Ebola and survived. I figured he knew what he was talking about, and I was spreading misinformation. Busted!

Fake News and the Mainstream Media

One weekend, an advisor to President Trump claimed the White House spokesperson gave 'alternative facts' regarding the size of the crowd at the inauguration. The 'truth versus spin' debate happened furiously online, with 'fact-checkers' trying to set the record straight while Trump supporters pointed to yet another example of the 'lame-stream media' promoting their own narrative.

This outburst is just the latest in a series of events where truth, facts, and spin are all confused.

Late last year, much was made about the plague of 'fake news'

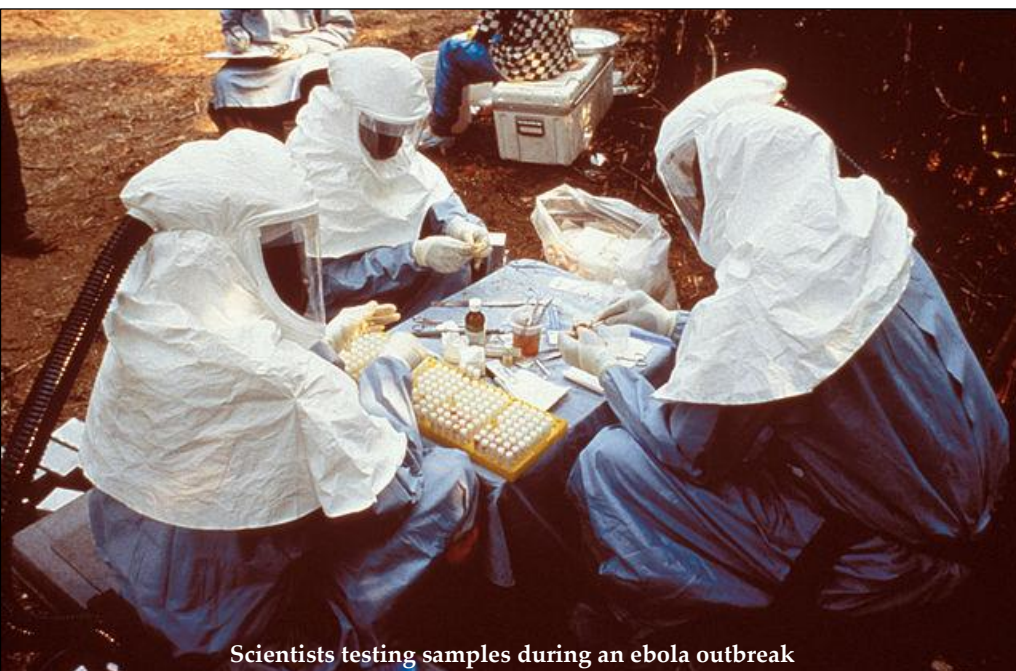
spreading online, through false websites, ridiculous email chains, and on social media. The mainstream media outlets are aghast at the irrelevance of 'fact checking,' and Oxford chose 'post-truth' as the word of the year.

But many Christians believe the word 'post-truth' has shown up late. We've been speaking out about postmodern philosophy in the university, biased media coverage, and 'post-truth' tendencies for years. It's only now, after Election 2016 trafficked in post-truth news stories on the right that everyone seems to have woken up to the problem.

There are good reasons for Christian skepticism toward mainstream media outlets.

For example, Mollie Hemingway has painstakingly documented the ways journalists collude with the abortion industry in their coverage of Planned Parenthood controversies. Marvin Olasky points out¹ how false figures in the abortion debate ('alternative facts') were used to shore up support for pro-choice policies:

"The advent of penicillin led to a decline in abortion-related maternal deaths from 5,000 per year during the 1930s to perhaps 300 (officially, 160) in 1967. Yet 1960s pro-abortion leaders like Dr. Bernard Nathanson gave "5,000 to 10,000 deaths a year" as the current figure, and leading newspapers used that number to promote abortion legalization as a way to stop "back-alley abortions."



Scientists testing samples during an ebola outbreak



What's the point in chiding the abortion industry for championing false, but 'useful' numbers regarding abortion deaths in the 1960's if we are just as guilty for spreading misinformation because we find it useful or beneficial to our party?

On an episode of *This American Life*³ last year, host Ira Glass spoke with his Uncle Lenny who believed President Obama was bent on destroying America through illegal immigration and intentional disastrous policies. The misinformation came fast and furious:

- Obama has played more rounds of golf than any president in history. (Untrue: Eisenhower played three times as much, and Woodrow Wilson four.)
- Obama claims to have run the Harvard Law Review but never contributed an article for them. (Untrue. He did.)
- Obama wants the borders of Canada and Mexico to be erased, and that is why he ignores all deportation laws. (Untrue. Obama deported 2.5 million people, more than any other president.)

Ira's uncle refuses to believe that Obama deported that many people. It must be false. Exasperated after that last stat, Ira says, "Facts do not have a fighting chance against this right-wing fable."

Now, *This American Life* is a liberal-leaning radio show on NPR. I wish that Ira Glass were a little more skeptical of the mainstream media he trusts without question.

Nathanson, after coming to Christ and opposition to abortion, said, "I knew the figures were totally false, but they were 'useful.'"

The NYT Narrative

The New York Times displays liberal bias both in what their journalists write and what stories they choose to cover (and what they bury elsewhere).

Michael Cieply, who recently left The Times after working there for twelve years, explains² how the atmosphere differed from the Los Angeles Times:

"By and large, talented reporters scrambled to match stories with what internally was often called 'the narrative.' We were occasionally asked to map a narrative for our various beats a year in advance, square the plan with editors, then generate stories that fit the pre-designated line. . . ."

The bigger shock came on being told, at least twice, by Times editors who were describing the paper's daily Page One meeting: "We set the agenda for the country in that room.""

Conservative Christians have a right to be skeptical when it comes to mainstream media bias. But we are way too skeptical if we distrust any fact or figure from any mainstream site, and we are much too gullible if we easily believe stories that come from other sources, including the new administration.

Gullible Skeptics

Too many Christians these days are 'gullible skeptics.' Skeptics toward establishment type media outlets, and gullible toward other websites or toward political spinmeisters who already line up with their pre-existing beliefs or worldview.

He's right to point out how easily people fall for false information when it comes from the sources that affirm their pre-existing worldview. In fact, this happens on both the right and the left.

Facts don't have a fighting chance against 'left-wing fables' either. Entire books have been written about how the religious right is on the verge of setting up a theocracy through secret gatherings and meetings that are planning sessions of solidifying power. (Trust me. I flipped through one of these left-wing books in an airport and chuckled my way through it, at both the unfamiliarity with common Christian terminology **and** the suspicious motives toward any conservative Christian involved in politics. A left-wing fable, indeed.)

No, the plague of misinformation infects conservatives and liberals alike, and Christians and non-Christians as well. But surely Christians are called to show a better way.

Sarah Pulliam Bailey, a friend who writes for The Washington Post, urges Christians⁴ to carefully consider what our gullibility and skepticism may communicate:

"As a reporter who also happens to be a Christian, I believe that truth exists and can be ascertained, even if imperfectly and the fact that we understand it imperfectly heightens our duty to pursue it diligently. And I believe journalism is the one of the best practical pursuits of truth in

earthly life, one that allows us to reveal and explain the truth to others.

Many religions seek a truth that is beyond the scope of journalism, yet if people of faith no longer accept the veracity of factual truth, then they threaten to undermine their own pursuit of ultimate questions.

Abandoning mainstream media sites for opinion sites you already agree with is not the answer. The "mainstream media" is collectively valuable because it presents a range of information and viewpoints, while the Breitbarts of the world present a singular voice to a targeted group of people.

Way Forward

In "This Is Our Time,"⁵ I build on Frank Luntz's point that news today has become less about information and more about affirmation. It's about affirming what we already believe to be true.

The 'everywhere at all times available' culture created by our smart-phones gives us regular doses of news that tells us 'You are right.'

If we are to be faithful in a world of "'fake news,' 'alternative facts,' and biased sources, we are going to need to be more careful with the statistics we share, the news stories we read, and the sources we trust.

Gullible skeptics, either on the right or left, don't stand out from the world. And what we need today is for Christians to **care** about getting the facts straight, whether or not they're useful or

beneficial to 'the party line,' because we believe in a God who tells the truth. [END]

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1. www.world.wng.org/2016/12/fake_news_the_bigger_culprits/;
2. www.deadline.com/2016/11/shocked-by-trump-new-york-times-finds-time-for-soul-searching-1201852490/;
3. www.thisamericanlife.org/radio-archives/episode/599/seriously;
4. www.washingtonpost.com/news/acts-of-faith/wp/2016/12/08/evangelicals-your-attacks-on-the-media-are-getting-dangerous/;
5. www.amazon.com/This-Our-Time-Everyday-Gospel/dp/1433648474/ref=sr_1_1?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1477062933&sr=1-1&keywords=This+Is+Our+Time%3A+Everyday+Myths+in+Light+of+the+Gospel

Biography:

Trevin Wax is a Bible and Reference Publisher at LifeWay Christian Resources, general editor of The Gospel Project, and a teaching pastor in Middle Tennessee. You can follow him on Twitter, Facebook, or receive blog posts via emails. Visit his blog's homepage here. You can find a more extensive bio here.

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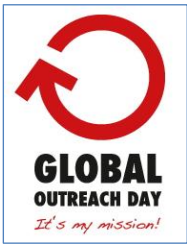
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**Facts don't
have a fighting
chance against
'left-wing
fables.'**

Words of Wisdom

*"Life has a way of testing
our anchors and
tempting us to drift.
Nevertheless, if our
anchors are correctly
placed in the rock
of our Redeemer,
they will hold no matter
the force of the wind,
the strength of the tide, or
the height of the waves."*

Dieter F. Uchtdorf



Event Promotion

G.O.D. Global Outreach Day

~ Saturday 26 May 2018 ~

Take part in this worldwide event!



What is G.O.D.?

G.O.D. stands for Global Outreach Day. Millions of Christians across the world share the Gospel together. People just like *you* share the gospel with someone who hasn't heard about it, or are not yet born again Christians, and when possible, lead them to salvation in Jesus.

*Everyone can reach someone.
Together, we can reach the world.*

All you need is a willingness to go and share the gospel according to your personal gifting and calling as the Lord leads you.

There are thousands of ways to do this, either personally or together with a group, or through a church.

During the entire month of May 2020, our goal is to mobilise 100 million Christians to share the Gospel. We believe that together with many denominations and ministries it will be possible to reach 1 *billion* people with the Gospel.

What Can You Do?

The aim is that you reach at least *one* person with the Gospel on Global Outreach Day, this year on Saturday 28 May 2018.

Reach others using a personal approach with an unsaved friend or neighbour; share the Gospel on streets, campuses, public places or transport, to larger evangelistic event and outreaches.





You can 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

Don't Feel Like an Evangelist?

Talking to other people about Jesus may make us feel uncomfortable. Perhaps you feel unsure if you can do it. Don't worry - there are various free resources available to help you to experience a real breakthrough!

We have lots of creative suggestions on about what you and your church, friends or Bible study group can do.

Our free resources will inspire and equip you to go out and effectively reach people for Christ.

Click here to link to our online, downloadable, free training package.

Find out more on the link here:
www.globaloutreachday.com

What Happens Afterwards?

After the Global Outreach Day, the God Movement takes over with ongoing evangelism, discipleship, and church planting.

Every believer is a witness and a disciple maker. Every church is invited to plant new churches.

Looking Ahead to 2020

During the entire month of May 2020, our goal is to mobilise 100 million Christians to share the Gospel. Together with many denominations and ministries it will be possible to reach *one billion* people with the Gospel.

Register today for this historic month of salvation at:

www.god2020.net.

[END]



CHRISTIAN TODAY

News Snippets

Time for Christian Parents to Step Up

As changing values and politics rock our world more than ever before, Christian parents are called to take courage and look up to our heavenly Father for wisdom. [Link](#)

A Cashless Society! Prophesied!

Biblical prophecy of a cashless (and even cardless) society is rapidly coming to fruition all around the world. What exactly could come to pass in the next five to ten years that only the Bible could've predicted? [Link](#)

Identity Politics is Heating up in Australia

Arguments over whether not Australia Day should be given a new date opens up a myriad of complex opinions and questions for all Australians. Is there a way we can be unified amongst our differences? [Link](#)

Two-State Solution: No Solution at All

The prophesied worldwide revolt against Israel as a Jewish nation comes to pass as more and more countries are in support of splitting up Israel. The question is, how can we support the nation of Israel, and the spiritual war at hand? [Link](#)

"Me Too" Not For the Faint Hearted - Boys May Well Learn to Be...

As the "me too" movement that rallies against sexual assault continues to gain support worldwide, we also must consider the harmful ways our society raises young men in their treatment of women. [Link](#)

www.christiantoday.com.au

Burnout in Christian Culture



by Cheryl McGrath
Press Service
International

Working in a Christian workplace, or any kind of Christian ministry, seems to mean that inevitably the question of burnout is going to come up. My workplace, CMS Victoria, has just run its annual summer conference, "Summer Under The Son." It's a fantastic event, running over four days and three nights, but for our small team it's taken a lot of hard work and - yes - a good deal of stress.

Over the months of preparation, I've had many conversations with team members about the importance of balance - putting in the hours when the chips are down, but also maintaining regular discipline with work hours. Burnout, on the other hand, is ongoing overexertion and stress, pushing a person to the point that it has a negative impact on their health, relationships or personal life.

Burnout can happen in any workplace, but in Christian circles

it seems particularly rife. Not only with those who work in ministry, or who work for Christian organisations, but even lay people who find themselves over-committed.

What is Burnout?

Burnout isn't the same as sacrifice. As believers, we know it's part of a living faith to give sacrificially - whether it's time, talents, effort or resources. Jesus says as much in Luke chapter 9, verses 23-24:

"If anyone comes after me, they should deny themselves, take up their cross and follow me." [NIV]

We are called to give Christ our all - not just how we live our lives, but giving him all our gifts and passions to be used to his glory. (He gave them to us in the first place.)

The problem with burnout is that, if we're not mindful of it, it will drag us down and make the ministries or commitments we're trying to fulfil less effective - not more. In his book "Zeal Without Burnout" (which I highly recommend for more on this

topic), Christopher Ash shares an analogy of a firefighter:

"Obviously you have to push yourself physically when fighting a fire. It's a stretching experience that is uncomfortable and physically difficult..."

It's foolishness to ignore your limitations, try to be the hero, and cramp up, pass out, or have a heart attack while in a burning structure because you're beyond the limits of what God has supplied you with the capability of doing.

It's a form of heroic suicide that is counterproductive because you're now no longer effective in fighting fire and the resources that were dedicated to fighting fire are now dedicated to saving you."

Too often, ministers are pulled in twenty different directions at any given time, and saying "no" can feel like you're letting someone down. Over my years in church circles, I've seen leaders around me hopelessly overcommitted and running on fumes, trying to fulfil what they see as their role but unable to breathe or rest.

I've had mentors who've tried to cram a coffee with me into their schedule, but were spread so thin they were barely able to be emotionally available. I've also had friends who've been unable to rest or socialise because of youth leading, Sunday school preparation, music commitments and service leading - all in the one weekend.

Being Mindful of our Culture

Are we normalising this culture of busy over commitment in Christian culture? I worry that we





are. While we admire someone's commitment and willingness to serve, we need to keep some key things in mind.

Trust in God is the biggest one. It's one thing to work hard for Christ, but it's a whole other thing to burn the candle at both ends, to be anxious and sleepless, because we haven't remembered that God's got it in hand. We're not superhuman and we can't do anything without God – so why do we work sometimes as though we have to do it ourselves?

In the lead-up to "Summer Under The Son," our staff team regularly prayed that God's will would be done, that he'd ease our concerns, and thanked him for having the outcome in his control. Like 1 Peter 5:7:

"Cast all your cares on him, for he cares for you." [NIV]

It's also important to remember that we are fragile and we need rest. Not just sleep - although that's helpful! - but rest in God. Blocking out time to read the Bible, reflect and pray is actually

so fundamental to keeping on track with everything else.

It's only in the past couple of years that I've really come to understand this, but being a human, it's often the first thing to fall off my radar. To keep going, I need this rest.

We need to maintain our Christian community and friendships, even when we're under the pump. Not only is it important to have people around us keeping us sane, but Christian friendships in particular are there to build us up and keep us accountable.

This is another reason why staying close to a Christian community, whether we're busy or not, is so important. When we are under the hammer, these are the friendships that will give us perspective on our own walk and help us stick with it.

Just as it's unfortunate to have Sunday-only Christians, or Christians who are unwilling to step up, we equally shouldn't want believers so stressed out and bottomed out that they can't function or honour their other

commitments in life - like family, rest, or quiet time with God.

Striking a Balance

It's tricky to get a balance, and I am far from getting it right. For every person who over-commits, there's another who should be contributing more but isn't.

Burnout should be a wake-up call to those of us who don't make it a priority to serve - that we not only should be serving, but that it supports our brothers and sisters who are shouldering our burden.

Burnout is something we should talk about more in churches - because let's face it, it's rife. Let's remember that saying 'no' can be healthy and help us serve God in other ways. Let's also keep any eye out for each other and encourage each other to keep a balance.

We should certainly work for God's glory, but we need to also remember our frailty and our trust in God. [END]

Biography:

Cheryl McGrath is a communications and editing professional at the Christian mission organisation CMS Victoria. She is interested in theology and new ideas, and lives in Melbourne.

Cheryl's previous articles may be viewed at: <http://www.pressserviceinternational.org/cheryl-mcgrath.html>

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The Fierce Urgency of Now



by **Tim Price**

Press Service
International

Defining Moments

Particular moments in Christian history proved undeniably defining. Times where great acts upended the world for good, like during book of Acts, or for ill, as seen in periods like the Dark Ages.

Other generations witnessed giants like Martin Luther and the reformers propel the church back to its Biblical roots, or much quieter lives like Mother Teresa forsake everything for the poor and needy.

Mission defined other times, where countless brave and selfless souls took the Gospel message to places previously unreachable.

Other generations saw men and women of all backgrounds and stations stand for faith under unbelievable persecution, gladly renouncing worldly riches to advance Christ's redeeming work.

The crucial point is this: every Christian age was defined by something. Whether this be by truth, action, and heart, or largely

the opposite: error, inaction, or weakness.

Such times usually came in cycles, as the church swayed between realising its identity and calling, to seasons where prosperity resulted in sleepwalking in the opposite direction.

In every case, Christian generations were defined by an understanding of their time and a subsequent response to its unique opportunities and challenges.

Dark Clouds on the Background of the Church's Self-Portrait

The modern Christian church has also been painting its own self-portrait against the background of the world's canvas over the last fifty years. While few seem to realise it, we're now in a period which will either make or break this defining image. So a pressing question arises: will we be a masterpiece or a washout, a Picasso or a forgery?

If you feel I'm being overly dramatic, consider the following seriously dark and sweeping brush strokes beginning to dominate the background of our time.

The spectre of terrorism has

surprisingly begun to rear its ugly head across Europe, especially in France, Germany and England. This reality, along with governments' inability to adequately deal with mass migration, is giving rise to increasing public discontent with traditional bureaucracies and their agendas.

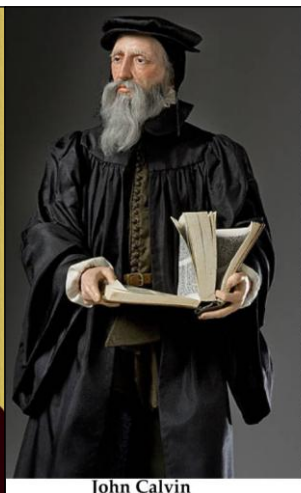
Populist political influences are thus gaining traction, even in America, by a celebrity president intent on 'making America great again' through nationalist-driven economic reform, protectionist immigration policy, and a general disdain for the 'tried and true' ideological platforms of the past.

The world's moral code faces an unprecedented crisis of character through new realities like transgenderism and gay marriage laws. Indeed, the very foundations of Western society are being rocked through an explosion of drug culture, corporate criminality, online abuse, and immoral entertainment and fashion.

The world's peace and prosperity are also under threat. Countries like China, Russia, and



Martin Luther



John Calvin



John Knox



Mother Teresa

Photographer: Peter Ayrault (Wikipedia), dated 18 September 2007, available under the Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 3.0 Unported license. Photo has been cropped. Source: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Peter_Ayrault_-_George_-_Source.jpg

Photographer: Teddies (Wikipedia) dated 13 July 1986, available under the Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 3.0 Germany license. No change made to photo. Source: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Mother_Teresa_090.jpg

North Korea are increasing their military capabilities and reach at an alarming rate. This new reality is testing the West's collective resolve and the waters of the post-Cold War world order.

What once was so certain now seems vulnerable. Even easy and 'tried and true' things are becoming fraught with difficulty and perplexity - even unexpected danger.

Don't get me wrong, the clouds of these realities don't entirely eclipse the present good or God's work through His people over the last half-century. Much of the West and modern church still enjoy peace and prosperity, and a moral conscience and Gospel influence which past generations would've died for.

Nevertheless, the darkening world scene reveals a critical flaw in this picture, namely, that the body of Christ is no longer the earth's most influential presence. The world's societies and institutions are now dancing to the beat of another drummer, and the sounds of those post-modern realities are getting louder.

Defined by Struggle and Hardship?

No Christian generation wants to, by necessity, define itself against great immorality or turbulent struggles. But such things have usually been the very watermarks which produced the most lauded Christian generations.

Martin Luther King Jr's time was one such moment.

Set against the discrimination and oppression ravaged America of the 1950-1960's, Luther led a civil rights movement which forever transformed the nation's view of race and human rights.

Luther enshrined the memory of this brave crusade in the national conscience during the 1963 March on Washington, when he spoke of the need for immediate 'vigorous and positive action' on civil rights due to 'the fierce urgency of now.' (Time Magazine)

The modern church era is facing its own 'fierce urgency of now' moment.

While the reasons differ, they're no less significant or defining. The church's own interests are even at stake.

Like everyone else, Christians may soon face a lack of peace and prosperity due to war, and defending against terrorism may bring a curtailment of religious freedom and rights which it has enjoyed so abundantly till now.

More strikingly, the church may lose its salt-preserving influence, and surrender the fervent heart of its world-wide mission by failing to embody its own beliefs. Unfortunately, as previously mentioned, this slide has begun already.

Learning from the Masterpieces of History

We should allow Christian history to teach and inspire us to offset the present dark and ominous tones of immorality and

uncertainty with the bright and striking colours of Holy Spirit-led action, integrity, and Christlike compassion.

Past heroes of the faith are watching on, and calling us to copy the vivid image of their own grand historical portrait.

Like individual brush strokes on the canvas of our time, each of us can colour humanity's collective future for better or for worse.

Our defining moment is coming.

Time to get painting. [END]

Biography:

Tim's home is on the Gold Coast in Queensland. He has a Graduate Associate of Theology degree, taught in Christian Education for over six years, and is currently studying a Masters of Divinity in theology at Liberty University in the US.

He enjoys writing, the beach, and spending time with family and friends.

Tim Price's previous articles may be viewed at www.pressserviceinternational.org/tim-price.html

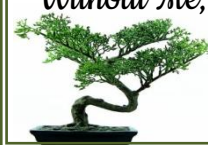
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I am the vine, and you are the branches. If you abide in Me and I in you, you will bear great fruit. Without Me, you will accomplish nothing.



John 15:5 [VOICE]

Tolerance Isn't Good Enough



by Erik Cooper
erikcooper.me

Moralism is the by-product of religious self-sufficiency. It's a form of self-righteousness that may start with professed dependence on Christ, but lives itself out as if pleasing God is an outflow of a person's ability to outwardly obey the rules (or at least only break the ones that are socially and culturally acceptable to ignore).

Moralism is comparative righteousness. It completely misses the transformational power of the Gospel because it misidentifies our core problem as bad moral behaviour.

In today's shifting moral climate, religious moralists are finding the cultural to be more and more hostile toward them. They're called out as modern day Pharisees (or worse), accentuating their own virtue by looking down their noses at the lack of virtue they see in others. Jesus definitely had strong words for people like this.

But here's my rub:

...tolerance is just secular moralism.

I texted the following to my brother-in-law after the news of the horrific Orlando massacre began filling the airwaves and our social media streams:

"I hate the word hate. Secularism can't solve any problems because it refuses to identify real causes. If 'hate' is the

problem, then 'tolerance' is the answer.

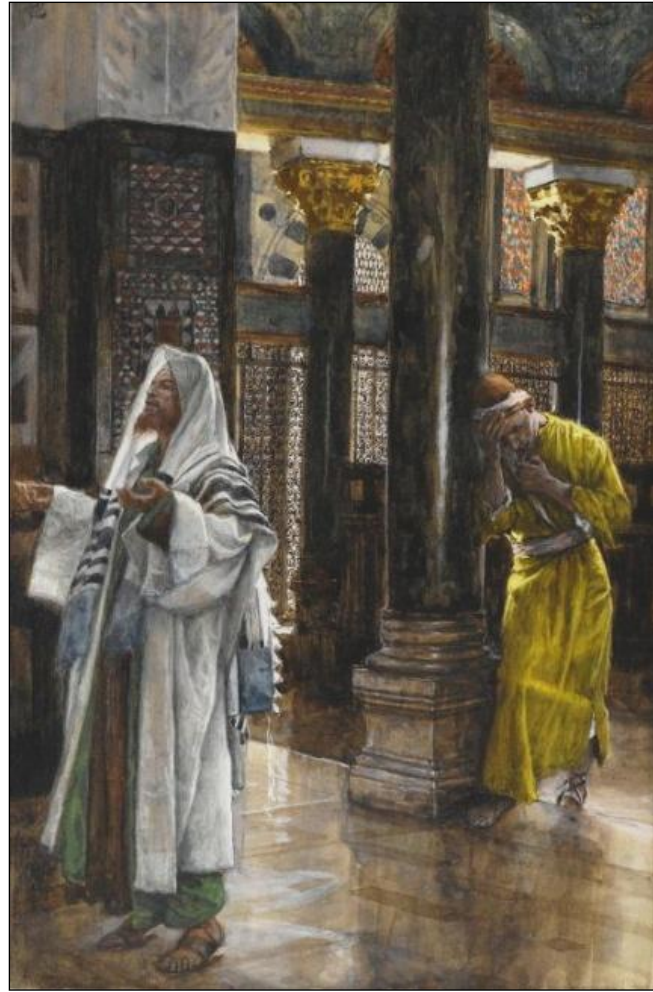
Unfortunately, we humans have proven for 4,000 years that more and more enlightenment doesn't seem to change us all that much.

But if SIN is the problem, then we have to acknowledge we don't have the answer – in ourselves, and herein lies the rub for human hubris."

If good behaviour is the moralist's redemption, tolerance is the secularist's redemption. It's a battle of varying forms of self righteousness, and it all completely misses the beauty, the power, the hope, and the true transformational ability of the Gospel message:

- that we are all horrifically broken;
- that we are completely incapable of fixing ourselves;
- that we already have a Saviour; and His name is Jesus.

Religious moralism and secular tolerance are just two sides of the same self-righteous coin. If we really want to learn to love each other, to truly get along, it's going to take a whole lot of humility and dependence on Someone greater than ourselves. [End]



The proud Pharisee and the publican

Biography:

Erik is involved in the executive leadership of two non-profit organizations: Community Reinvestment Foundation, a non-profit housing company that specialises in providing high quality affordable housing, and The Stone Table, a ministry organisation that focuses on the connection between business and missions.

In his spare time, Erik loves to write about the intersection of God and everyday life. He is a proud husband and father of three beautiful children and makes his home in Indianapolis, Indiana USA.

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A-Musings

Kooky Cars



by Vicki Nunn

The one thing that unites many adults, regardless of age, gender, religion, economic status or ethnic background, is that, deep down inside, we ALL believe that we're better drivers than everyone else!

Next time you're out driving around in your car, consider the following four things that you should never say if you get pulled over by a police officer:

1. "You're not going to check the boot are you?"
2. "I thought you had to be in good shape to be a police officer!"
3. "Hey, aren't you the guy from the Village People?"
and finally:
4. "Could you hold my beer while I get out my licence?"

For a bit of extra fun anytime you're feeling bored, stand on the side of a busy road, pull out your hair-dryer and pretend your checking everyone's speed.

While we're on the subject of roads, have you ever been out driving and seen those signs for car-boot sales? I can't help but giggle when I hear of flea markets or Monster Garage Sales. I certainly don't want to buy car-boots or fleas, but who in their right mind would want to buy a monster?

That got me thinking - if you're were actually selling a real monster at a monster garage sale:

- How would you tie it up?
- Man-acles in the garage?



What would you feed it?

- Leeches and scream?
- Ghoulish?

- If the monster got a sore throat, would you need to give it medicine for gargoyling?
- How would you exercise a monster? Would you let it play squash or fetch the postman?

While there are some silly names for yard sales, car manufacturers have come up with some quite silly names for motor-vehicles over the years.

- Let's look an old classic - the Mitsubishi Colt.

You may query why I find the Colt a particularly stupid name. When the manufacturers put their heads together they probably thought the name 'Colt' would encourage us to imagine a frisky young horse, rearing up on its hind legs, and raring to go... but when it comes to motor vehicles, describing a car as having only *one* horse-power just seems kind of dumb to me.

- Some car names I find simply irritating, such as the 'Getz.' Can anyone honestly tell me they put much thought into naming that one? It's about as subtle as a whack over the head with a brick. "Well golly-gee whiz, it obviously 'Getz' you from point A to point B."

Frankly I don't think that's much of a selling point... because so do my feet!

- Then there's the Swift - whoever thought up this name needs a *swift* kick in the pants. How unimaginative is that? They might as well have called it the 'Vroom Vroom!'

If you take a look at cars over the last sixty years or so, you will notice a pattern in motor-vehicle manufacturer selling techniques:

- In the space-fixated 50s, to sell a car, all you had to do was make a car look like a rocket by adding some fancy fins.
- During the 60s the Combi-van encouraged young hippies to

think of open roads and freedom.

- The 70s were all about wearing wide, loud clothes and hair, and having a car to match.
- The 80s focused more on economy in your vehicle so that you could save money to spend on product for your hair.
- The 90s vehicles really didn't matter, as long as they boasted a stereo loud enough to bust the elastic in an old lady's underwear as she walked past.

But today, car manufacturers have to appeal to a much wider buying public. For the guys there is the macho machine to impress the ladies. Just throw in a manly sounding name like Ranger, Crewman or Patrol and you've got a potential winner.

Any vehicle that sounds vaguely like it's having a fun time will be a great selling point for the younger generation such as the Rio or the Festiva, because they sound like their much more fun to drive, than say, the 'Great Wall.'

When it comes down to the 'Great Wall,' why would anyone name a vehicle after something you certainly wouldn't want to *drive* into? When you think about

it, the car name 'Great Wall' is only a slight improvement on 'The Concrete Slab.'

I suspect though that car manufacturers have cottoned onto the celebrity phenomena and are using subtle methods to entice people to buy their vehicles. Consider the following:

- Carmen *Elantra*;
- *Maxima* Smart;
- Tom *Cruiser*;
- *Camry* Diaz;
- Freddy *Kluger*;
- *Forrester* Gump; and
- Frank *Sonata*

Thankfully in the years I've been driving, I've never been involved in a serious accident. But I'd love to be a fly on the wall at the insurance agency when they tell the claimant:

"I'm sorry Sir, but we had to reject your car accident insurance claim because you said you hit a 'Mirage.'"

Finally, I'd like to finish this article with a very important question about cars:

"How come whenever I see an 'Echo,' there's only ever one?"

[END]

International Awareness Days

March to May

March:

1. World Civil Defence Day | Zero Discrimination Day;
3. World Wildlife Day;
8. International Women's Day;
14. National Pi Day;
15. World Consumer Rights Day;
20. World Oral Health Day | International Day of Happiness | World Sparrow Day;
21. International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination | World Poetry Day | World Down Syndrome Day | International Day of Forests | World Puppetry Day;
22. World Water Day;
23. World Meteorological Day;
24. World Tuberculosis Day;
25. International Day of Remembrance of the Victims of Slavery and the Transatlantic Slave Trade;
27. World Theatre Day;
30. School Day of Non-violence and Peace

April:

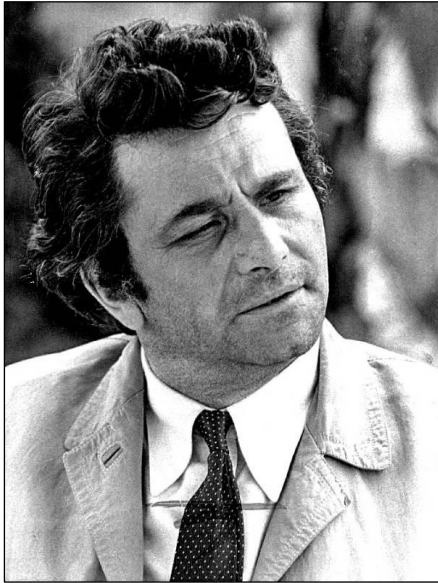
2. International Children's Book Day | World Autism Awareness Day;
6. International Day of Sport for Development and Peace;
7. Day of Remembrance of the Victims of the Rwanda Genocide | World Health Day;
12. International Day of Human Space Flight;
17. World Hemophilia Day;
21. World Creativity and Innovation Day;
22. International Mother Earth Day;
23. World Book and Copyright Day;
24. World Day for Laboratory Animals;
25. World Malaria Day;
26. World Intellectual Property Day | International Chernobyl Disaster Remembrance Day;
28. World Day for Safety and Health at Work;
29. Day of Remembrance for all Victims of Chemical Warfare | International Dance Day | International Bee Day;
30. International Jazz Day

May:

1. International Workers' Day;
2. World Tuna Day;
3. World Press Freedom Day;
4. International Firefighters' Day | Star Wars Day;
5. International Midwives Day;
8. World Red Cross and Red Crescent Day;
- 8-9. Time of Remembrance and Reconciliation for Those Who Lost Their Lives during the Second World War;
9. Europe Day (celebrating peace);
10. International Migratory Bird Day;
12. International Nurses Day;
15. International Day of Families;
17. World Telecommunication and Information Society Day;
18. World AIDS Vaccine Day | International Museum Day;
21. World Day for Cultural Diversity for Dialogue and Development;
22. International Day for Biological Diversity;
23. International Day to End Obstetric Fistula;
25. Geek Pride Day | Towel Day (to celebrate the author Douglas Adams);
26. Global Outreach Day
29. International Day of UN Peacekeepers;
31. World No-Tobacco Day.



Tantalising Trivia



I remember as a youngster, thoroughly enjoying the TV series 'Columbo' with Peter Falk as the lead actor.

His character pretended to be a fumbling, and not very intelligent detective, which often encouraged

the crooks to reveal something important which lead them to more easily being arrested.

To most viewers, it was fairly evident that Mr Falk had a glass eye, but did you know there were other actors who also had some physical imperfections?

- Rex Harrison was blind in one eye;
- Humphrey Bogart had a scarred lip which was damaged while he was onboard a troopship that was shelled by the Germans;
- Dudley Moore had a club foot; and
- Clint Eastwood was once fired by Universal Studios because they thought his Adam's apple stuck out too far. [END]

Organisation Promotion

CHRISTIAN TODAY Australia

Since its founding in 2002, Christian Today Australia has become the leading non-denominational Christian news website in the country. Christian Today Australia gains affiliation to the Christian Today network based in the UK, and is part of the CMCI Group, the world's largest Christian news company.

Christian Today Australia's vision stems from the calling to establish the kingdom of God on earth through media by serving as a platform from which Truth is presented according to Matthew 5:37, "Simply let your 'Yes' be 'Yes,' and your 'No, 'No.'"

The publication aims to bring unity among Christians across all denominations and restore God as the centre of the nation.

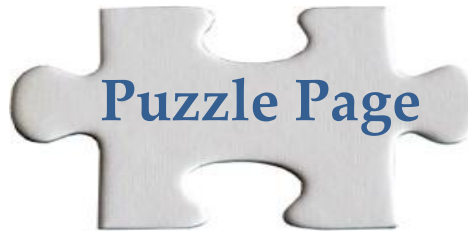
Web: www.christiantoday.com.au

Contact us at: www.christiantoday.com.au/contactus

The Lord is my rock, my fortress, and my saviour; my God is my rock, in whom I find protection. He is my shield, the power that saves me, and my place of safety.

Psalm 18:2 [NLT]





Instructions: Unscramble each of the clue words below that are associated with Jesus' death. Then copy the letters into the cells underneath that list, with its corresponding number, which will eventually give you a connected Bible passage.

* Answers on page 89 *

| | | | | | |
|-------|----------------------|---------|----------------------|------------|----------------------|
| MEOWN | <input type="text"/> | MYRA | <input type="text"/> | LEVIEBE | <input type="text"/> |
| GEARV | <input type="text"/> | GKNI | <input type="text"/> | NIOMURGN | <input type="text"/> |
| TENSO | <input type="text"/> | LEGSAN | <input type="text"/> | SIDSPURRE | <input type="text"/> |
| MYTEP | <input type="text"/> | LYOJUF | <input type="text"/> | REEFIHNTDG | <input type="text"/> |
| COSSR | <input type="text"/> | RIGNONM | <input type="text"/> | LEFI VIERG | <input type="text"/> |

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20 21 22 23 24

25 26 27 28 29 30 31 32 33 34 35 36 37 38 39 40 41 42 43 44 45 46 47 48

49 50 51 52 53 54 55 56 57 58 59 60 61 62 63 64 65 66

67 68 69 70 71 72 73 74 75 76 77 78 79 80 81 82 83 84 85 86 87 88 89 90 91 92 93 94 95

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LOW-CARB RECIPES

Easy recipes for one or two people, with regular supermarket ingredients. All recipes have been tried and tested, right in Kristie's Kitchen!

MAIN COURSE:

Stuffed Mushrooms (serves 2)

Ingredients:

3 large mushrooms with insides scooped out;
50 grams cream cheese;
50 grams cream cheese;
1 rasher of bacon;
20 grams on diced onion;
½ teaspoon garlic;
40g of grated cheese
3 thick slices of halloumi

Instructions:

Preheat oven to 180°C. Cook the bacon, onion and garlic together in a frying pan and set aside to cool a little. Mix the cream cheese and cream together until it becomes smooth and creamy, then mix through the bacon, onion and garlic.

Cut off the mushroom stems and gently scoop out the insides of the mushrooms, then cook the mushrooms in the oven for ten minutes. Once cooked, remove it and fill with the creamy mixture and cover with grated cheese and place back into the oven for a further ten minutes

While that's cooking, cover the haloumi in salt and pepper and cook in the frying pan until golden brown on both sides. Place the haloumi on top of the cooked mushrooms and serve on a bed of spinach.

Optional: dress with balsamic glaze



DESSERT:

Lamington Balls (serves 2-3)

Ingredients:

100g dessicated unsweetened coconut and put a little aside for rolling later
200g raw almonds and/or cashews or nut mixture
50g sugar-free maple flavoured syrup
2 tsp natural vanilla extract or vanilla bean paste
50g coconut oil

Instructions:

Mix together well, then roll the mixture into small balls. Finally, take a large tablespoon of the mixture and roll into balls, then roll into the extra coconut to coat each one.

Note: these will keep in the fridge for up to one week.



Bibliography: Riddle, Nikalene, 24 January 2015, Skinny Mixers: Raw Lamington Truffles, available: www.skinnymixers.com.au/skinnymixers-raw-lamington-truffle/ accessed 12/02/18

Next quarter's issue:

Cost: FREE
A quarterly electronic Christian magazine.
Please purchase gifts or donate online to help support this ministry: www.spagmag.com

Single Person Approved by God

Billy Graham:
An Ordinary Man with an Extraordinary Spiritual Gift

- Hate like Jesus
- Four things God says to singles
- Domestic violence and the church - part two
- Did Jesus understand long-term illness?
- Cuttlefish colour changes inspire new energy

Regular Segments: Letters to Lou, Puzzle Page, Open Doors, Tantalising Trivia, Inspirational People, Creation Ministries, Kristie's Kitchen, Words of Wisdom, Rest Ministries

A quarterly, electronic magazine for all Christians, with a focus on singles. Issue No. 13 Jun to Aug 2018

Please seriously consider supporting this important ministry either financially or through prayer. You could make a one-off donation, or donate regularly through your bank. You can even purchase items from our online store, such as our gorgeous online e-book "Reflections" with over 120 pages of stunning scenery photos and inspirational quotes and Bible verses.

All ongoing costs are presently born by our Editor, Vicki Nunn, and yet she currently receives no wages for the hundreds of hours she puts into this magazine, and nor do we have anything to pay our wonderful staff.

May I encourage you to join our SPAG Prayer Network on Facebook, where you can join other Christians to pray for this important ministry.

Can you help?

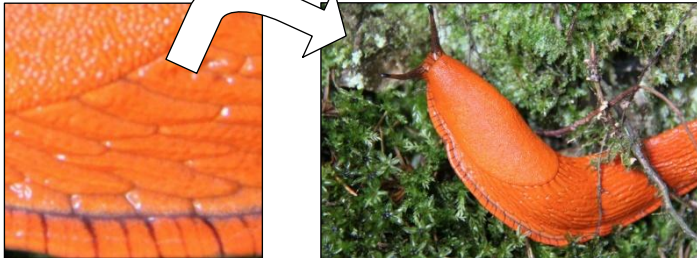
PUZZLE PAGE ANSWERS:

| | | | | | |
|-------|-------|---------|---------|------------|------------|
| MEOWN | WOMEN | MYRA | MARY | LEVIEBE | BELIEVE |
| GEARV | GRAVE | GKNI | KING | NIOMURGN | MOURNING |
| TENSO | STONE | LESSAN | ANGELS | SIDSPURRE | SURPRISED |
| MYTEP | EMPTY | LYOJUF | JOYFUL | REEFIHNTDG | FRIGHTENED |
| COSSR | CROSS | RIGNONM | MORNING | LEFI VIERG | LIFE GIVER |

EARLY ON SUNDAY MORNING, EVEN BEFORE THE SUN HAD FULLY RISEN, THESE WOMEN MADE THEIR WAY BACK TO THE TOMB WITH THE SPICES AND OINTMENTS THEY HAD PREPARED. WHEN THEY ARRIVED, THEY FOUND THE STONE WAS ROLLED AWAY FROM THE TOMB ENTRANCE, AND WHEN THEY LOOKED INSIDE, THE BODY OF THE LORD JESUS WAS NOWHERE TO BE SEEN. THEY DIDN'T KNOW WHAT TO THINK. AS THEY STOOD THERE IN CONFUSION, TWO MEN SUDDENLY APPEARED STANDING BESIDE THEM. THESE MEN SEEMED TO GLOW WITH LIGHT. THE WOMEN WERE SO TERRIFIED THAT THEY FELL TO THE GROUND FACEDOWN. TWO MEN: "WHY ARE YOU SEEKING THE LIVING ONE IN THE PLACE OF THE DEAD? HE IS NOT HERE. HE HAS RISEN FROM THE DEAD. DON'T YOU REMEMBER WHAT HE TOLD YOU WAY BACK IN GALILEE? HE TOLD YOU THAT THE SON OF MAN MUST BE HANDED OVER TO WICKED MEN, HE MUST BE CRUCIFIED, AND THEN ON THE THIRD DAY HE MUST RISE." LUKE 24:1-7



Answer: it's an orange slug! (see below)



Suggestions & Links 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

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[NLT] Holy Bible, New Living Translation, copyright © 1996, 2004, 2007, 2013, 2015 by Tyndale House Foundation. Used by permission of Tyndale House Publishers Inc., Carol Stream, Illinois 60188. All rights reserved.

17 December, 1998, "What's in a Name: Reflections of an Irrepressible Name Collector" by Paul Dickson, Published by Merriam Webster, ISBN 13: 9780877796138



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