



SPAG

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Single Person Approved by God

Is the world going down
the gurgler?

Modern Missionaries: can
God save your life?

21 Sure-fire Ways to Alienate
and Discourage the Singles
in Your Church

Happiness - a
futile pursuit?

*Moral decadence and
terrorism: the connection*

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The narcissism
epidemic

Did the King Know the King of Kings?

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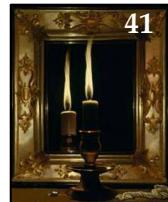
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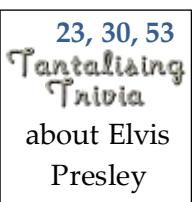
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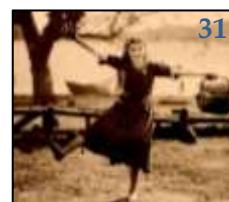
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It's our 2nd birthday!

Welcome to the ninth issue of SPAG.

It was on the first of June back in 2015 that SPAG Magazine was officially launched, and what a second birthday issue we have for you with a whopping 80 pages! (We'll be back to normal size for the next issue.)

I'm so thrilled to have been a part of the magazine's development since that time. It's been exciting to see how it has evolved and the addition of new segments with amazing contributors from different countries and organisations. We've shared articles from people willing to open their hearts and lives to you, others who have vulnerably shared their weaknesses, failures, struggles and deep pain. We've covered a huge range of diverse topics from present day slavery through to sexuality, modern missionaries to happiness habits, and from inspirational people through to Christian artists sharing their work and passion.

You'll notice there have been some little tweaks to some of our layout and a segment from Christian Today Australia in which they provide current news spots. We also welcome onboard Joseph Kolapudi who has offered his writing skills to contribute regular articles. You can read Joseph's first two articles on pages 7 and 71, and find out a little about him on page 41. Joseph has been writing for Christian Today Australia (Press Service International) and [here is a link](#) to his previous articles with this quality Christian publication. **Welcome on board Joseph!** Please encourage Joseph by sending him a note of welcome and thanks: email: spagmag@yahoo.com.au.

We continue bringing you articles from Creation Ministries International, Open Doors, Christian Today and Rest Ministries. Our Counsellor 'Lou' shares more guidance and wisdom to readers going through struggles and my lovely niece Christie provides us with new easy low-carb recipes in "Christie's Kitchen" on page 77.

This August marks 40 years since Elvis Presley's death and we ask if he was a believer on page 57. (In fact, our trivia in this issue is all based around him.) We share a tongue-in-cheek article on page 27 titled: "21 Sure-fire Ways to Alienate and Discourage the Singles in Your Church." Can you relate to any of these? While some are exaggerated, they're based on real experiences of Christian singles, including some of my own.

Frank T. McAndrew talks about grief when it comes to our pets on page 46 with his article, "Getting Over Rover - Why Our Grief Over a Dog Is So Intense." Although much of the media tends to paint the state of the world in depressing shades of black, Max Roser has kindly shared his in-depth research into how the world has actually **improved** in the last couple of centuries in his article, "A History of Global Living Conditions in Five Charts" on page 32. I hope it encourages you to realise how truly blessed you are to live in this era.

For anyone with children, particularly teenagers, Bert Fulks has a very helpful and easy plan to implement for moments when our kids are away from home and find themselves in an uncomfortable or difficult situation. His article "X-Plan: Giving Your Kids a Way Out" is on page 69. Plus as always, heaps more great stuff!

I've enjoyed my two year journey with SPAG Magazine as journalist, editor, layout artist and graphic designer. We've grown from just 25 pages in our first issue to an average of 55 pages in each of the previous four issues. During that time I've also managed to squeeze a bit of extra energy and time into writing two Christian books of fiction. (I have the third and final book in the series in the works.) Unfortunately it costs money to publish books and the funds to do this have been eaten up by the costs in providing this magazine free to you, as well as replacement of our ailing computer. Did you know that if **ten** people could contribute just **60¢** a day, our basic operating costs could be met?

10 people x 60¢/day = basic operating costs

Would you consider being one of those ten people? Perhaps you could ask nine people from your church or singles group to make up the remainder. Wouldn't that be marvellous!

So, how many words do you get for that kind of money? Out of curiosity I determined that the total number of words to date has been around 225,000, and we've had over 160 articles/items since we first began. That of course doesn't take into consideration the enormous amount of research and time involved in preparing articles, finding and creating images, sourcing other articles, updating our webpages, and putting the magazine together etc.

As always, we'd love to hear your feedback. Don't forget to send in your letters to Lou, our Counsellor if you need some guidance. You can either email us at spagmag@yahoo.com.au or post it to us to our new postal address: PO Box 9772, Frenchville Qld 4701 (Australia.) Actually I'd like to thank Ruth whose donation enabled us to rent our first postal box for a year ~ thanks so much Ruth!

I hope you enjoy the terrific topics we have in issue nine. Don't miss your chance to win a \$60 voucher in our competition on page 13.

Warm regards

Vicki Nunn,

SPAG Editor

SPAG (Single Person Approved by God) is a free quarterly, electronic magazine for 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 a focus on singles. 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 for publication must be your own original work and not copied from elsewhere.¹

ADVERTISING:

If you would like to promote your business or major Christian activity in SPAG, please contact the Editor Vicki Nunn on email: spagmag@yahoo.com.au or phone (+61) 042 44 33 772. You can find more information about advertising costs on SPAG's website (link here.).

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

1. By submitting your letter, item or article for inclusion in SPAG, you personally accept all legal responsibility for your submission, and acknowledge that you have not extracted nor copied written or photographic or other material from elsewhere that does not belong to you or whose copyright is owned by another. You hereby accept all legal responsibility and exempt SPAG and anyone associated with this magazine from any and all legal consequences and responsibilities. By submitting your letter, item or article you are giving your complete approval for SPAG Magazine and anyone associated with it, to freely use it in SPAG Magazine or on our website, agreeing that use of said item will be without charge and that you waive all financial compensations for said item. SPAG agrees not to share your personal details or your contribution with any other organisation or person not associated with it.

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

~Please feel free to share SPAG with others.~

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 – Disappointed in My Dad

Dear Lou

When my parents split up six years ago, I stayed with my Dad because I've always felt close to him. I'm still at home, even though I'm now 24 because we get along really good. Since I started dating, Dad has been dear about the kind of guys he thinks I should date: only Christian men who treat me with respect.

I've been encouraging him to find someone to love and for a long time he wasn't interested, because he was hurt after what happened between him and mum, and after the divorce and he wasn't sure if he could marry again.

About 4 months ago, he began to think about dating after talking with our Pastor. Ever since then, I've noticed Dad checking out women wherever we go. Sometimes it makes me feel uncomfortable that's he's ogling them. I'm not sure if he's always done that, or if he's taking more notice of women now. I kind of feel disappointed in him now because he's just thinking about the way women look.

Now that I know he might find a girlfriend, I've started worrying that if he gets married again, that things will change between us. I want him to be happy, but I worry about if she'll like me and maybe we won't get along. **Renee**

Hi Renee,

You have put a lot of information into one letter, and I can imagine that these things have been going round and round in your mind for a considerable amount of time.

The bottom line is this: you are using up a lot of energy worrying about things that, when it all boils down to it, are out of your control.

From your letter you mention about 'our pastor', so I am assuming that you are a Christian or at least are going to church. Assuming that, I would expect that you already have a

solid value system as to the sort of person with whom you would like to share your life. You build your standards and live by those Godly principles.

You can be sure of one thing and that is Dad's are pretty protective of their daughters, so they will always think the boyfriend they choose is never good enough for their little girl. Renee, build your own set of principles and don't compromise your values. As you go deeper in your relationship get someone who you love and respect and have them talk to you about your developing relationship. It is a challenging adventure but well worth working on for your own future.

You mention Dad getting a divorce. Reality is that he is possibly now only getting over the hurt of a marriage break down, and the fact that you are a young woman is allowing him the opportunity to look forward to his own future. You have given your Dad permission to move on, and are supersensitive to the fact that he is now in the single-again group of people. It appears that he is ready to look for a future partner.

Because of this you are sensing fears that you cannot control. You have no power right now to determine whether or not you will be able to build a positive relationship with any woman your Father meets. One of the toughest matters to work through in your situation is the blended family matters. Renee, when and if your father goes into a new relationship, you will work out what it means to build a new relationship with that person.

You are responsible for **you**. You make the best possible decisions in your power in your personal

relationships and allow your Dad to take responsibility for his life.

Please relax a little and enjoy what you have at the moment. I would love to see you with a mentor who will be a sounding board for you in a lot of your decisions. **Sincerely Lou**

Letter 2 – His Behaviours are Killing My Love

Dear Lou

I've been married for almost eleven years and we have two kids. My husband has OCD (Obsessive Compulsive Disorder) which I knew about before we married. But knowing about it and living with it are two different things.

His obsessions include extreme cleanliness and orderliness. While I understand and accept that we should have a certain order to things at home eg where items are located so we can find them, but my husband goes beyond that. Towels have to be folded in a certain way and placed in the cupboard in a certain way; all towels, sheets etc have to be white and if there are any stains or greyness, he throws them out and we have to buy new ones. It's such a waste of money when they're still perfectly fine to use.

I've tried reasoning with him, but he won't listen. I've suggested getting counselling but he's resisting because he doesn't think he should be the one to change, but that I should change, and that I knew what he was like before I married him.

I worry our kids will grow up and become obsessed the same way my husband is, but mostly I worry that they'll never be in a healthy relationship because the only example is what they've seen with my husband and me and the way we fight. I worry too that one day it's all going to be too much for me and I'll walk out. I still love him, but I feel like I'm being slowly smothered by his extreme behaviours which are getting worse. **Grace**

Letters to Lou

Lou offers advice and guidance.

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Dear Grace,

You have analysed your situation, and now find yourself trapped.

The issue for you both now is to get into some level of counselling. You need to reaffirm that this is not 'his' problem, but it is an 'our' problem. You can approach him by saying "I need help to know how to work through our current situation, and in so doing enable each of us to bring positive change into the marriage." Many, many times, I have heard the phrase you have used, "You knew what I was like before we were married and I don't see the need to change now."

The problem with that statement is that it is extremely selfish. The reality is that once you are married you now are a couple and live together. If your partner upsets you can't go home – you **are** home. This means that you need to work **together** to make your marriage work. His comment to you that you should change is an arrogant statement and is a level of bullying. You need to make an appointment with a marriage counsellor and even if he refuses to go with you, go anyway.

Sadly many a marriage has broken down over issues like you talk about. The high priority is to get help for yourself and also for your marriage.

You mention about your children. Remember that children learn what they observe, and you are going to need to assure your children of your love and care for them. The fact that your children are aware of the struggle you have (they problem-struggle with any obsessive behaviour they observe) means they are open for you to talk with them about what is normal.

Your children will love you both, but struggle to love the behaviour.

Please get some help because this is one issue which is going to need far more knowledge than you are able to provide.

Remember it is an 'our' problem. Most males will resist strongly if they perceive that this is 'my' problem. If you have family/friends, get your children to look at what their family relationship is like, and even get your children talking about what they see as a normal, healthy family life.

Get help as soon as you can.

Lou.

Letter 3 – Am I That Creepy Guy?

Dear Lou

I help out at church in a few things. I'm 23 and I know I've got a lot to learn about being a Christian, but I think I'm a nice, considerate guy. I know I'm not good looking, and I'm too skinny. Why can't the women in my church see past my looks and see the nice guy inside?

Do the women think I'm creepy, and desperate because I'm so friendly and because I've asked a few women out? (They always say no.) I've noticed that when I'm about to start talking to a woman after church, they sometimes kind of look around me when I get near them, like they're looking for an escape route. One time when I sat next to a girl who is quiet and hasn't got many friends, and when I started talking to her, she got up and moved away from me. That really hurt my feelings! I wasn't interested in her, but thought she looked lonely. After that I started worrying that I'm coming across as a creepy guy.

I even tried NOT talking to them, but they certainly didn't start chasing me! I can't even seem to get to be friends with any of the single women. What am I doing wrong? How do I change my approach? Should I just give up?

Aiden

Dear Aiden,

In your letter you tell a lot about yourself and also struggles with relationships. You present relationships as your big struggle.

I have a statement I live by when it comes to working with and helping people. The statement is this, "The real problem is always deeper down and further back."

Without knowing you, if you came to me for help I would start with you. I would be looking at a number of things which go to make you the person you are. This would include your family and upbringing, your personality, events in your life, how you came to faith in Christ. I would suspect that one of the primary issues in life is about who you are, how you see yourself, developing a positive self-worth, and trying to understand the messages you are sending yourself.

I don't think we need to talk about building relationship or friendship with people, but about getting you to a Christian Counsellor who can spend a considerable amount of time helping you to become the person that you would like to become and that God wants you to be.

Once that happens I would hope we are able to look at a much more positive relationship with other people, both male and female. I know you might think I have not answered your question, but remember the real problems are always deeper down and further back. My prayer for you Aiden is to find a Christian Counsellor who can help you believe in yourself, then later to help you work through the ability to build friendships with people.

Regards Lou



by John
Skinner

Press Services
International
Columnist

I have, for many years, been concerned about the decline in the moral standards of our society both here in Australia, in Europe and North America.

Prostitution is legal in many places, gay rights have been forced upon us and marriage between two men or two women is now legal in some countries against what in my view is God's Word and may soon be in Australia.

Pornography is available daily on our television sets – see World Movies and SBS – without even mentioning the internet - nudism

on our beaches is common, language heard on the streets from children would make our grandparents shudder and then there is the 'Safe Schools' legislation threatening our schools. In fact, 'Safe Schools' is already in place in Victoria.

We are well aware of the banning of prayers in schools; our kids are no longer given religious education unless their parents specifically allow them and the mention of God or Jesus is strictly forbidden.

We have become a secularised society. Our society has gone to great lengths during recent decades to marginalise biblical Christianity in the public sphere. Where am I going with a subject which is already well-

known to most Christians today?

Paris Attacks

Many were stunned by the stories the media published following the callous murder spree of Daish-backed terrorists in Paris on 13 November 2015. However, few people are likely to have read Daish's own statement of responsibility for the attacks and their stated reasons for carrying them out, all ignored by the media. The media, perhaps understandably, has demonstrated an unwillingness to aid in the spread of their propaganda but I believe there is another reason.

It is uncomfortable even to acknowledge the contents of the statement because its description of the increasingly decadent West is rather 'too close to the bone.' Let



it be absolutely clear though, in what follows, I am not suggesting for a moment the perpetrators of these crimes were justified in their actions. Nevertheless, there is surely a connection between the secularisation of Europe and the increasing jeopardy of the safety of its citizens.

Danish Media

Columnist and award-winning Danish journalist Iben Thranholm, having previously worked for Denmark's equivalent of the ABC, threw caution to the wind and spoke her mind.

For instance, while the media reported the name of the band playing at the Bataclan Theatre was 'The Eagles of Death Metal,' they chose to ignore the fact the killing spree happened just at the moment when the band were performing their popular song 'Kiss the Devil'.

Was it, as Thranholm wrote, a 'diabolical irony' the massacre took place just as people were joining in with the lyrics, "I'll love the Devil, I'll sing his song?"

The deaths of so many people, many in the prime of life, is absolutely tragic however, listening to some political leadership through the media, one would think the 'jihadists' were not motivated by their Islamic faith at all and yet they say they are.

Thranholm again; "There is little sensibility to religion and spirituality in Europe - and none whatever among the political elite. This is the root of the problem... The decline of Christianity in the West has created a spiritual and moral vacuum of colossal proportions."

Do the facts suggest this is so? To deny this is simply the crassest political correctness.

Satanic Shenanigans

Why is it taboo to mention the connection between such terrorist acts and the religious ideology behind them? Why did the media avoid drawing attention to the satanic shenanigans of the Bataclan rock concert? They desperately want to believe the 'war on terror,' which Western nations must fight, has nothing whatever to do with religion!

However, in their hearts, at least some people suspect this to be true.

Apostle of atheism, Richard Dawkins wrote:

"There are no Christians, as far as I know, blowing up buildings. I am not aware of any Christian suicide bombers. I am not aware of any major Christian denomination which believes the penalty for apostasy is death. I have mixed feelings about the decline of Christianity, in so far as Christianity might be a bulwark against something worse."

Christianity, the Force for Good

Thranholm goes on to highlight some of the sure signs of this abandonment of Christianity, such as the removal of "all religious symbols from public spaces" on the part of several EU member countries.

These are things with which we are becoming increasingly familiar. The 'root of the problem,' as Thranholm makes clear, is the "spiritual and moral vacuum which has resulted from the rejection of Christianity."

What some find exasperating about this wilful blindness is Christianity is the 'force for good' for any society and we reap what we sow if we suppress its truth. [END]

Biography:

John Skinner served in Vietnam then the Tasmanian Police before taking up the position of CEO of the Australian Rough Riders Association (professional rodeo based in Warwick, Queensland, Australia). Before retirement to his small farm, he was a photo-journalist for 25 years. He is married with 3 children and 6 grandchildren.

John Skinner's previous articles may be viewed at: www.pressserviceinternational.org/john-skinner.html

Article link:
www.christiantoday.com.au/news/moral-decadence-and-terrorism-the-connection.html



Words of Wisdom

"If you do not plan to live the Christian life totally committed to knowing your God and to walking in obedience to Him, then don't begin, for this is what Christianity is all about. It is a change of citizenship, a change of governments, a change of allegiance. If you have no intention of letting Christ rule your life, then forget Christianity; it is not for you."

Kay Arthur



Can you identify the item in this photo close-up?
 Answer on page 79.



The Narcissism Epidemic



by Joseph Kolapudi
SPAG Journalist

Some time ago, when I used to watch '*Everybody Loves Raymond*' around the TV during dinnertime with my family (don't ask why), the nightly back-to-back episode that particular evening followed the wedding of Robert, Raymond's brother, to Amy, who was Raymond's wife's best friend.

It was quite an amusing ceremony to watch, complete with monologues from Raymond's mother during the ceremony itself, monotonous speeches during the reception, and mad parents having arguments in front of the bride and groom.

At the climax of one such debate over whether or not Robert's mother should or should not have objected during the ceremony, Pat, the bride's mother, speaks up. Pulling Robert's mother Marie aside, she insists, "You know, this wedding, whether we like it or not, was for Robert and Amy, and you never should have intruded on their moment of happiness in the chapel".

By this time during the show, I was exchanging glances with my sister, as my parents were in the lounge room also watching it.

So Marie, Robert's mother, replies insistently, "*I was doing it for them!*"

Then Pat delivers the killer line, "*Oh, Marie...I think, maybe you were doing it for you. You were so busy thinking about what you needed to express, you didn't think about anyone, including your son. I think that's called 'narcissism'.*"

By this point, my parents, of course, were only half-smiling.

Perhaps we all know of a narcissistic individual, who preys upon the lives of others for their own personal enjoyment. Such sadism is

an unfortunate consequence of the society we find ourselves living in.

No longer is narcissism confined to the margins of society, but it is now blown up on the big silver screen, invading our personal lives, and dragging down the conscience of individuals to a level where there is no constructive outcome.

Of course, before delving in too deep, let's back it up and define this term called 'narcissism'.

According to its German roots, the mythological story is told of the youth Narcissus who fell in love with his own reflection in a pool of water, and after wasting away from unsatisfied desire, transformed into a flower which is known today as the bulbous plant, *Narcissus*, with yellow flowers and a cup-shaped corona¹.

Other synonyms used to describe the word narcissism include self-centeredness, smugness, and egocentrism. All words, noticeably, that focus on self.

Since the time the word was first coined in the early 1800s, it has been difficult for people to really understand if they are narcissistic or

not. From Adolf Hitler to Paris Hilton, we see that their tendency to dictate other people's lives in servitude to their own affected hundreds, if not, millions of people, and negatively affected their own.

Psychologists now refer to this as NPD, or Narcissistic Personality Disorder². As much as it can be treated, it is said to be incurable.

The warning signs of narcissistic tendencies can be seen early on. Frequently, these can be identified as the smallest of signs early on in relationships, whether it is between a boyfriend and girlfriend, husband and wife, best friends, or even an ex. How individuals respond to conflict, or pointedly closed questions, or even something as simple as taking out the rubbish on a Thursday night, these situations all require a response. How one responds to certain situations can be a reflection of one's character, and their tendency to act in a certain way, especially if it becomes a pattern.

According to studies conducted in the USA, the levels of narcissism, particularly amongst college students, have steadily risen since the 1970s, and young people are now much more likely than older adults to experience NPD³.



'This is rising at an alarming rate, and doesn't seem to be slowing down. Another major study published by the National Institutes of Health, found that 9.4% of Americans in their 20s had experienced NPD at some point in their life. That's almost ten percent of millennials, affecting over 14 million people in the United States alone.'

Some of these contributing factors are shown to have an effect on the level of narcissism one experiences, such as individualism, ego-ism, self-esteem, and the importance of social status, not to mention materialism.

Furthermore, the Personality Disorder Awareness Network claims this is not simply limited to a certain subsection of society, but NPD represents a significant portion of mental health illnesses worldwide⁴.

Relationship with a Narcissist

Trying to be friends with a narcissist, having a parent who is narcissistic, or marrying a full-fledged narcissist, can cause us enormous harm because in most cases, narcissists see nothing wrong with their manipulative and often nasty behaviours.

To them, taking advantage of others to feel superior, and to gain control of them and to use them for their own advantage, is perfectly acceptable. In most cases, the narcissist looks down on others when they can take advantage of them, because the narcissist sees them as weak and therefore deserving of being exploited.

Often by the time they've reached their mid 20s, narcissists have already learned many of the behaviours by which they can manipulate others, and they will use them to their advantage. They are always on the lookout for ways they can use others.

As Christian brothers and sisters, it's important to be loving towards them, while at the same time remaining alert to the likelihood that

they will endeavour to control us through emotional blackmail.

We cannot fool ourselves into believing that a narcissist will change if only we loved them more, or gave into their demands more. Often that just reinforces the narcissist's belief that we are weak and deserve to be used by them.

If we're married to a narcissist, they may even go to counselling as a way of faking that they care for us and that they want to change. They will say all the right words and sound genuine to us and to the counsellor, but they rarely have the desire to change.

Most narcissists simply don't have the insight to understand why their behaviours are harmful, nor have any idea how or why they should change.

Anti-social Behaviours

An interesting study entitled "*Narcissism and Machiavellianism in Youth*" was conducted by a group of researchers led by Dr Christopher T Barry, who found that both narcissism and Machiavellianism in adult populations have found to be risk factors that lead to a variety of antisocial behaviours, from entitlement and exploitation to self-absorption and defensive egotism. Unfortunately, this antisocial behaviour exhibited during the years of youth tend to bear destructive fruit in later years⁵.

The link between narcissism and Machiavellianism lies within the perception of power. Niccolò Machiavelli was an Italian political philosopher, who during the late 1400s to early 1500s developed a theory that utilising deceit and ignoring moral standards can be justified in the pursuit of political power⁶.

Such a personality trait feeds off an individual interested in the



manipulation of others, exploiting them to such an extent that they are able to achieve their own goals. Unfortunately, those who exhibit such a trait treat people not as individuals, but as a means to an end.

I remember growing up listening to one of my favourite rappers, who released an album under the alias, *Makaveli*. Of course, as a teenager, I didn't know any better, but after some initial research realised with horror that the man considered himself as a sort of 'saviour of society', who thought he could establish his legacy by dominating anyone who came in his way.

For many, such a standard of living is unthinkable, yet narcissist traits can begin to wreak havoc in relationships, homes, and personalities almost imperceptibly.

Perhaps we have all been witnesses to this consequence in our own lives. Even if a person is single, the relationships between parents, siblings, even friends, can become strained by unpredictable behaviour that becomes commonplace over time.

How Do Narcissists Develop the Disorder?

In many cases, narcissism begins when a child, usually before the age of seven or eight years old, is exposed to physical, emotional or other types of abuse. The child becomes emotionally stunted and this affects the normal growth of their personality.

This child then grows up into adulthood with a sense of 'neediness,' which can never be satisfied, no matter how much love and attention they receive.

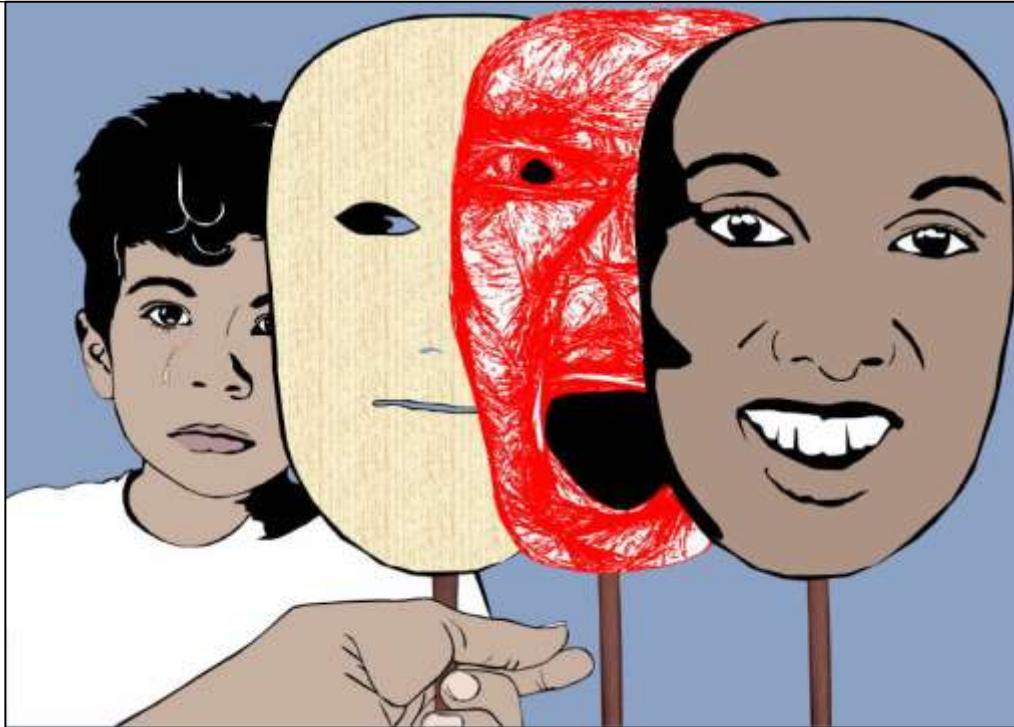
By the time they reach full adulthood, they've grown to believe that everyone around them is there for their own use, so they can feel that they're loved and in some cases, entitled to a form of power that is often abused.

The problem is, because of this emotionally and relationally stunted growth, they can't fully wrap their heads around the whole concept of love. Because they can't understand love, they can never receive enough attention to fill the void in them.

Additionally because they can't understand love, they can never give it. This is an important point we must recognise if we are in a relationship with a narcissist or want friendship from them. Absolutely nothing that we do or say, no matter how much love, affection and attention we give them, it will never fill that emptiness in the narcissist which began from that early abuse.

Shockingly, this behaviour can even surprise the worst of individuals at the beginning, but it can quickly become routine if not checked initially.

Contrary to popular belief, narcissists are not born narcissists. Sometimes, the most intelligent of human beings can become the worst manipulative monsters if no one opposes them. It is imperative to seek help if this is happening in the lives of loved ones or even personally, instead



of letting it spiral into a destructive pattern with no way out.

While I was travelling in Germany recently, I was surprised to hear from my German friend, who was showing me around town, that Germany, and indeed, all of Europe is slowly drawing to a moral decline that doesn't seem to be reversible.

In Germany, there is a word known as '*schadenfreude*', which is basically defined as pleasure derived by someone from another person's misfortune. It is actually a compound word from the German root words *schaden*, meaning 'harm', and *Freude*,

Because they can't understand love, they can never give it.

To think that someone would actually experience joy from harming someone is alarming, but unfortunately, this is the perception of a classic narcissistic individual.

But can such a tendency be guarded against? Perhaps it can. As with most personality disorders, narcissism is one that often begins early in life, and can be seen mostly during the teenage years to the early 20s.

However, as society progresses, the need for early prevention instead of a later cure is likely to have more



positive and far reaching effects than a simple placebo to the problem itself long after it has arisen.

Can a Narcissist be Helped?

In the majority of cases, a narcissist will not recognise that there is anything wrong with their behaviours. In their minds, the manipulation of others is perfectly normal.

Because they are unable and unwilling to open up their inner person to explore their problems, narcissists won't accept that they have any. They honestly believe that the problem is with everyone else, particularly those closest to them.

In extremely rare cases, a narcissist may recognise their unhealthy behaviours, but because this was a coping mechanism that they learned in early childhood, and because their personality and emotional development were stunted, it is unlikely that they will ever be able to change much, if at all. In a way, the behaviours that they learned were a substitute for that stunted little child that never grew up.

Of course, God can and does work miracles, but we must always remain mindful of the fact that narcissists will say and do anything to get what they want.

How can we therefore know for sure if they have really made a heartfelt commitment to God? The answer is - we can't. Most Christians would be ecstatic if someone they know turned to Christ, and while it would be wonderful if that were true of narcissists, we can never really know for sure.

Even if they do make a true commitment to God, it will prove extremely difficult for them to ever overcome their harmful, long-term behaviours.

What Are Some of the Signs of Narcissism?

There are several symptoms that can indicate a person has narcissism:



- They often envy the easy way that other people interact with their friends, family and co-workers;
- They may believe that others envy them and they can sometimes fantasise about their own attractiveness, success and even their power;
- They may be arrogant, particularly towards those that they've found are easy to manipulate;
- They lack the ability to empathise with others and genuinely don't understand other people's feelings or needs;
- They can use exaggeration and even lies about themselves, their achievements or about events in an attempt to gain attention, to look good in front of others or superior to them;
- They believe that they deserve more attention, better favours and advantages than anyone else and will use other people to ensure they receive them;
- They not only desire frequent admiration and praise from others, they expect it because they truly believe they are either superior to everyone around them or deserve superior treatment;
- By observing the interaction of others, they may learn appropriate behaviours in relationships, even if they don't understand them, and because they don't understand them, sometimes their actions and responses will be puzzling, confusing and even inappropriate to those around them.
- If something doesn't go their way, or if they perceive another person/organisation will interfere with their ability to get what they want, they can show signs of rage towards them that are far out of proportion to the event that caused it, and they can maintain the rage for months and sometimes years⁷

Relationships With a Narcissist:

As a Parent:

The classic example of 'helicopter parenting' often springs to mind when thinking of a narcissistic parent. Overbearing expectations, strict disciplinary measures, paranoid observations are all warning signs that your parents might be onto you, in a negative way.

Unfortunately, such parenting is often difficult to defy, which actually reinforces this form of manipulation and can lead to more severe consequences. It is possible, however, to challenge this form of behaviour through a positive attitude and a willingness to seek the root of the cause, rather than outright defiance.

As a Spouse/Partner

Early in new relationships, the narcissist will come across as warm, charming and loving and show the behaviours that they believe are



appropriate, sometimes even taking it up a notch so that the focus of their attention will come to believe utterly in the narcissist's sincerity and devotion.

Once they are confident that their 'love' is reciprocated, the narcissist's behaviours will slowly shift into that of a controller to ensure that their domination of the other will feed their ego and their unquenchable need for admiration and approval.

This unreasonableness to accept or be accepted can form negative perceptions early on the relationship, but it is important to realise that your spouse does need attention, just like everyone else, the difference being that this follows the precedent of positive reciprocation

As a Co-worker or Manager

It is very easy to identify the coercive co-worker or the manipulative manager, especially if you have to deal with their negative

tendencies day after day, which can lead to quite a predictive pattern.

However, if their aggressiveness is compromising a positive working environment and affecting those around you, it is imperative that this is addressed early on in the working relationship before things get out of hand. It's better to be open and honest than hide your feelings and regret it later. (For more information on how to deal with these issues, please [click here](#)).

Conclusion

As mental health becomes more of a priority, especially in Western countries, the need for community is also important, especially for individuals who feel as if they cannot relate to others. Withdrawal often occurs when people are neither recognised nor cared for, and this can become a problem for those who feel as if they need to be heard, especially by those around them.

The community we find in the first century is one that cared for the other, which placed people's interests before personal priorities, where sharing

with each other was considered of high importance rather than an optional privilege.

In such a community, there was never a place for narcissistic tendencies. Instead, this Christ-like community continued to grow and grow as a result, and became a model for others to follow.

Perhaps we know a few Pats and Maries within our own community or circle of friends, but if we learn to welcome them, and to understand their likes and their dislikes, especially if they have a problem with us or others around us, we can learn to become a real community - one that cares and considers others, and what they're going through.

Maybe, just maybe, they'll be able to know what a truly caring heart is capable of, instead of a heart that is incapable of knowing what true community is supposed to be. [END]

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My Problem With the Bible



by Brian Zahnd

I have a problem with the Bible. Here's my problem...

I'm an ancient Egyptian. I'm a comfortable Babylonian. I'm a Roman in his villa.

That's my problem. See, I'm trying to read the Bible for all it's worth, but I'm not a Hebrew slave suffering in Egypt. I'm not a conquered Judean deported to Babylon. I'm not a first century Jew living under Roman occupation.

I'm a citizen of a superpower. I was born among the conquerors. I live in the empire. But I want to read the Bible and think it's talking to me. This is a problem.

One of the most remarkable things about the Bible is that in it we find the narrative told from the perspective of the poor, the oppressed, the enslaved, the conquered, the occupied, the defeated. This is what makes it prophetic.

We know that history is written by the winners. This is true -

except in the case of the Bible it's the opposite! This is the subversive genius of the Hebrew prophets. They wrote from a bottom-up perspective.

Imagine a history of colonial America written by Cherokee Indians and African slaves. That would be a different way of telling the story! And that's what the Bible does. It's the story of Egypt told by the slaves. The story of Babylon told by the exiles. The story of Rome told by the occupied.

What about those brief moments when Israel appeared to be on top? In those cases the prophets told Israel's story from the perspective of the peasant poor as a critique of the royal elite. Like when Amos denounced the wives of the Israelite aristocracy as "the fat cows of Bashan."

Every Story Has a Bias

Every story is told from a vantage point; it has a bias. The bias of the Bible is from the vantage point of the underclass.

But what happens if we lose sight of the prophetically subversive vantage point of the Bible? What happens if those on top read themselves into the story, not as imperial Egyptians, Babylonians, and Romans, but as the Israelites? That's when you get the bizarre phenomenon of the elite and entitled using the Bible to endorse their dominance as God's

will.

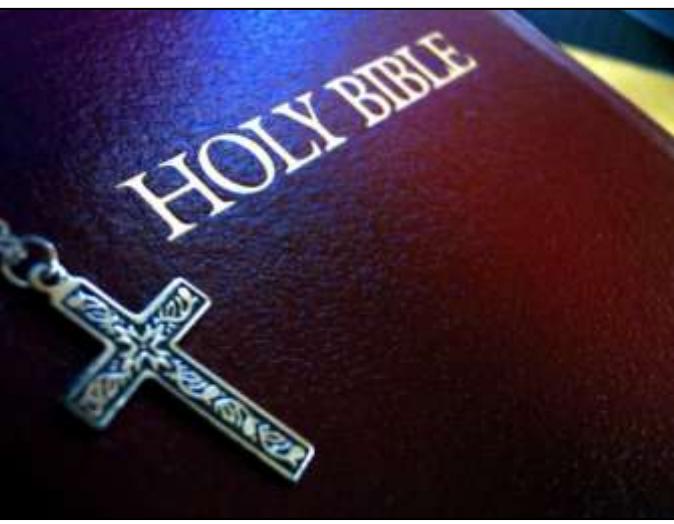
This is Roman Christianity after Constantine. This is Christendom on crusade. This is colonists seeing America as their promised land and the native inhabitants as Canaanites to be conquered. This is the whole history of European colonialism. This is Jim Crow. This is the American prosperity gospel. This is the domestication of Scripture. This is making the Bible dance a jig for our own amusement.

As Jesus preached the arrival of the kingdom of God he would frequently emphasize the revolutionary character of God's reign by saying things like, "the last will be first and the first last." How does Jesus' first-last aphorism strike you? I don't know about you, but it makes this modern day Roman a bit nervous.

Imagine this: A powerful charismatic figure arrives on the world scene and amasses a great following by announcing the arrival of a new arrangement of the world where those at the bottom are to be promoted and those on top are to have their lifestyle 'restructured.'

How do people receive this? I can imagine the Bangladeshis saying, "When do we start!?" and the Americans saying, "Hold on now, let's not get carried away!"

Now think about Jesus announcing the arrival of God's kingdom with the proclamation of his counterintuitive Beatitudes. When Jesus said, "Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth," how was that received?





Jesus speaks to the rich young man

Well, it depends on who is hearing it. The poor Galilean peasant would hear it as good news (gospel), while the Roman in his villa would hear it with deep suspicion. (I know it's an anachronism, but I can imagine Claudius saying something like, "sounds like socialism to me!")

And that's the challenge I face in reading the Bible. I'm not the Galilean peasant. Who am I kidding! I'm the Roman in his villa and I need to be honest about it.

I too can hear the gospel of the kingdom as good news (because it is!), but first I need to admit its radical nature and not try to tame it to endorse my inherited entitlement.

I am a (relatively) wealthy white American male. Which is fine, but it means I have to work hard at reading the Bible right. I have to see myself basically as aligned with Pharaoh, Nebuchadnezzar, and Caesar.

In that case, what does the Bible ask of me? Voluntary poverty? Not necessarily. But certainly the Bible calls me to deep humility — a humility demonstrated in hospitality and generosity.

There's nothing necessarily wrong with being a relatively well-off white American male, but I better be humble, hospitable, and generous!

If I read the Bible with the appropriate perspective and humility, I don't use the story of the Rich Man and Lazarus as a proof-text to condemn others to hell. I use it as a reminder that I'm a rich man and Lazarus lies at my door.

I don't use the conquest narratives of Joshua to justify Manifest Destiny. Instead I see myself as a Rahab who needs to welcome newcomers.

I don't fancy myself as Elijah calling down fire from heaven. I'm more like Nebuchadnezzar who needs to humble himself lest I go insane.

I have a problem with the Bible, but all is not lost. I just need to read it standing on my head. I need to change my perspective. If I can accept that the Bible is trying to lift up those who are unlike me, then perhaps I can read the Bible right. [END]

Biography:

Brian Zahnd is the founder and lead pastor of Word of Life Church, a non-denominational Christian congregation in Saint Joseph, Missouri. Brian and his wife, Peri, founded the church in 1981. Brian is also the author of several books, including Water to Wine, A Farewell To Mars, Beauty Will Save the World, and Unconditional?: The Call of Jesus to Radical Forgiveness.

Article link:

<https://brianzahnd.com/2014/02/problem-bible/>



Competition:

Win a \$60 Voucher!

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

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

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

Please note: the competition is only available for purchasers with an Australian address due to the costs and difficulties with setting up our shop for overseas buyers at this time.

So What's Available?

Just to whet your appetite, below are some examples of what's available in our online store. We have a great selection of earrings, some key-rings and pendants along with previous issues of SPAG, and a gorgeous, inspirational e-book. Not all items are Christian based, but I'm sure you'll find something you like either for yourself or someone you care about. We also have gift vouchers available to purchase: [Link to the shop here.](#)



1. Armour of God keyring
2. *Three sizes of owl earrings
3. Celtic knot yellow earrings
4. Faith keyring
5. Knotted cross pendant
6. Purple 'lava lamp' earrings
7. *Small cross earrings
8. Christian charms keyring
9. Red 7 drop earrings
*swarovski crystal beads

Happiness Habits: Derailing Depression Part 3



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

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

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

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

Screenwriters Christopher Markus, Stephen McFeely and Michael Petroni

In this issue, we continue with part three of the article: Happiness Habits: Derailing Depression. (Part 1 was shared in the December 2016 – February 2017 issue and part 2 in the March - May 2017 issue.)

Introduction

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

While sometimes depression may arise from sin, more often it does not, and no amount of confessing our sin

or asking for deliverance or just having enough faith, will necessarily remove it.

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

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

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

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

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

What is Depression?

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

One of the problems with depression is that it's not something we can be talked out of by “just getting over it,” “by looking on the bright side of life,” “confessing our sin,” or “having more faith.” It really is a serious issue that should be

tackled and in many cases, it can't be overcome without help.

From Where Does Depression Come?

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

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

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

Symptoms of Depression

Some of the symptoms of depression can include:

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

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

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

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

Getting Help for Depression

In the Dec 2016/Feb 2017 issue we looked at ways to seek help for depression including:

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

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

In the previous issue we continued with this topic and looked seeking counselling, focussing on facts rather than feelings and then looking after ourselves.

In this issue we'll share the final part of this series and look into finding things to enjoy, which will boost those positive brain chemicals that make us feel good, and lastly, we look at finding God's purpose or us.

Part 3

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 may be as simple as taking the time to enjoy a sunset, the smell of rain, or a tasty dish of sausages and mash!

When we allow ourselves to wallow in a pity party, when we focus on the negative things in our life or what we haven't achieved or what we don't have, we've



usually forgotten to enjoy the simple things. It often takes a conscious and sometimes daily effort to change our approach.

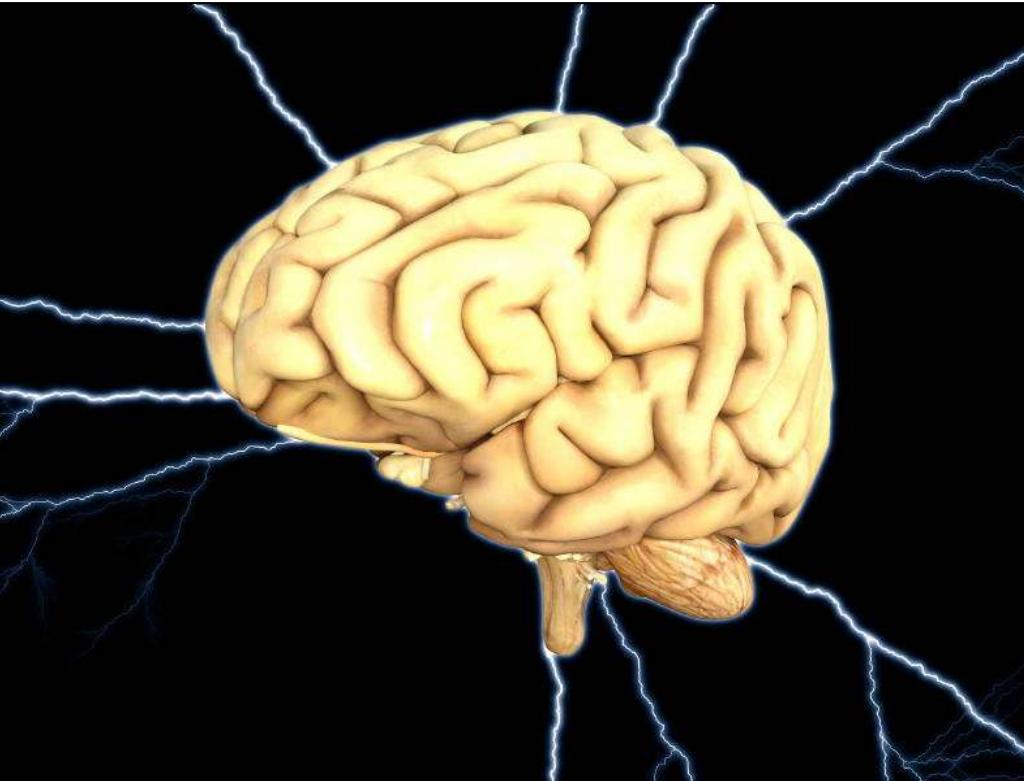
One of the things we discussed in an earlier issue of SPAG Magazine was a 'Happiness Journal,' where we daily write down some of the good things we experienced during the course of our day. If we can begin this habit, of pausing to enjoy something, and making a note of it at the end of our day, it can begin to alter in the chemicals in our brain which make us feel more positive – apparently it's been scientifically proven.

(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 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.

A neuropsychologist by the name of Donald Hebb believes that groups of neurons in our



brains that trigger during our life experiences, actually fuse or wire together if the experiences are similar. If we complain a lot and more often focus on the negative things in our life, those neurons that fire when we complain also fuse together. The more we complain, the more easily those neurons are triggered until eventually they begin to fire much more easily than neurons 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.

If we're struggling to find things because we're feeling down, it can be challenging to look past such difficulties, but there are almost always things for which we can feel grateful, eg a child or grandchildren, a partner, music, our eyesight, the use of our hands, a talent, our favourite food etc.

In time it becomes a little easier each day to write one thing, and sometimes we may want to write down even more. We can use our journal any way we want – there are no hard and fast rules – it's ours to use to help us on our journey.

Then in a year, we may like to go back to those early entries to remind us of all of the things for which we are grateful during that period.

(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. There's no point in setting ourselves a goal in which we're likely to fail – no, sorry, you're probably never going to be an astronaut. Set a realistic goal, and break it down into steps. Here's an example – goal: to get

healthier – aim to walk 5,000 steps in a day.

Step 1: buy an inexpensive pedometer;

Step 2: for one week, walk 1,000 steps;

Step 3: for week two, walk 2,000 steps;

Step 4: find a nice park to walk to and aim for 3,000 steps every day for one week; and so on.

... Step 6: walk 5,000 steps!

If we're prone to being tough on ourselves or being far too competitive and want to push ourselves too hard, remember the aim here is to reach a goal. We're not actually required to punish ourselves if we don't achieve that day's or that week's goal. There's no need to beat ourselves up, because that's going to mess with those lovely, happy-feeling chemicals going on in our brain.

If we don't achieve that day's goal, that's fine – we can continue the following day. That's hard for those of us who are competitive – to let go of our need to over-achieve. We must remember what the aim here is: to get healthier – it's not about killing ourselves and over-extending or possibly even harming ourselves. We'll feel

pretty foolish if we tear a tendon in the first week because we pushed ourselves too much!

"You are never too old to set another goal or dream a new dream."

Les Brown

Once we've achieved that goal, we can celebrate with a silly dance; reward ourselves with a night out at the movies; or do whatever appeals to us. After that, we can choose to continue our 5,000 steps each day (if we have the time and enthusiasm) then set ourselves a new and different goal, eg read all of the Psalms in one month; learn how to paint; take up archery; or



save up enough money to buy a new camera.

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.

When I was eighteen I undertook a ceramics course, and I enjoyed it so much that I promised myself that I would do it again. It wasn't until thirty-four years later that I was able to finally achieve that goal!

While there may be limitations to achieving all of the goals we had when we were younger, whether due to limited finances or physical restrictions, I'm sure there are still many things that we can achieve, even when we're well past retirement age.

(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.

Culturally, at least in Australia, we don't seem to get anywhere near as many hugs as we need, particularly adults. While men may feel uncomfortable with that thought, we human beings are

made to be hugged. I'm not suggesting that we rush out and grab hold of complete strangers or start hugging everyone in our workplace - that's unlikely to be well received!

If we feel uncomfortable with hugs, perhaps it's about time we should overcome our hang-ups, otherwise if possible, we could get a dog and be prepared to give and receive lots of doggy love. Cats can be good too, though they may not always be in the mood for a hug when we need it.

(e) Remembering Our Achievements

Another brain booster is reminiscing about things in our past that we've done particularly well, or were commended for. While I'm not suggesting that we focus all of our time thinking about the past or wishing things were as good now, indulging in a little spot of day-dreaming every now and then, remembering those achievements, 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 probably 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. Just by stretching our lips into a smile for ten or twenty seconds, can start

stirring up the endorphins. The more we smile and laugh, the more our endorphins kick in. Throw on a comedy or a classic TV series we used to enjoy, and even when the jokes are old, it can still make us feel good.

We can add more to the list of things which may boost our endorphins including smelling vanilla or lavender, eating spicy foods, or just stretching our bodies. Perhaps stretching soon after we arise in the morning might just be a good way to boost our mood, and to start our day well.

A good dose of laughter each day, or just smiling and getting those smiling muscles moving, really can make us feel good.

(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.

It's not my responsibility to nag you - so take the time to improve your knowledge and perhaps even your cooking skills.

(h) Meditation

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

While it may have been easier for our predecessors to meditate in the past because they had fewer distractions, they also had much less leisure time than us and were likely physically more tired than we are.

Meditation isn't something that many churches seem to discuss or encourage Christians to put much effort into. 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:

"Finally, brothers and sisters, fill your minds with beauty and truth. Meditate on whatever is honourable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is good, whatever is virtuous and praiseworthy."

Philippians 4:8 [VOICE]

"Often at night I lie in bed and remember You, meditating on Your greatness till morning smiles through my window." Psalm 63:6 [VOICE]

"And yet I can't forget the days of old, the days I've heard so much about; I fix my mind on all You have done; I ponder the work of Your hands; I reach out my hands to You. All that I am aches and yearns for You, like a dry land thirsting for rain." Psalm 143:5-6 [VOICE]

"Your majesty and glorious splendour have captivated me; I will meditate on Your wonders, sing songs of Your worth." Psalm 145:5 [VOICE]

What is meditation and how do we do it? We often think of meditation as someone sitting cross-legged, eyes closed and monotonously repeating the mantra "Aum," or something along those lines. (That isn't Christian meditation but rather Buddhist.)

Meditation can form a part of our daily time with God, and it's 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. Find a comfortable spot in which we can sit straight, but not stiffly. There's no need to sit cross-legged or to have any special pose. For some it's helpful to close our eyes, while others may find it easier to concentrate with our eyes open.

Some people like their meditation to be quite structured because it helps them to channel their thoughts, while others may be more relaxed in their approach. Some find it easier to talk out loud, but meditation for many people is usually quiet.

There are myriad books and websites that provide suggestions and techniques which encourage us in our desire to mediate on God. 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:

"Your majesty and glorious splendour have captivated me; I will meditate on Your wonders, sing songs of Your worth."

We confess - there is nothing greater than You, God, nothing mightier than Your awesome works. I will tell of Your greatness as long as I have breath.

The news of Your rich goodness is no secret - Your people love to recall it and sing songs of joy to celebrate Your righteousness.

The Eternal is gracious. He shows mercy to His people. For Him anger does not come easily, but faithful love does - and it is rich and abundant.

But the Eternal's goodness is not exclusive—it is offered freely to all. His mercy extends to all His creation." [VOICE]

We don't need to chant but simply to focus on an aspect of God and to try and brush aside the random thoughts that flit through our minds. It will be challenging at first because we're so used to letting our minds race around with no focussed control.

If this is something that we desire to pursue more deeply, we can ask the Holy Spirit to help us to develop the necessary skills and

to quieten our thoughts, and with time and practice it will become easier.

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 have come to believe that they're not a worthwhile person, or that they have no gifts or talents.

Some people miss out on opportunities to develop their talents as they're growing up, and others may not even be aware that they have any. Some of us come to believe that the little talent that we have isn't worth anything, or isn't as good as those of other people, but that isn't true.

We seem to honour people whose talents are more in the frontline of the church such as the pastor or the worship team, sometimes forgetting the many unseen or forgotten workers whose talents keep a church operating such as: cleaners, gardeners, teachers, IT people, church accountant, secretary, treasurer, organisers, deacons, missions co-ordinator and so on. There are many people whose work outside of the church are also important: RE teachers, prayer warriors, Bible study leaders, missionaries, and many more.

Nobody came into those positions without putting in effort 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.

Conclusion

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

depression, but hopefully we've covered some of the more important ones.

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

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

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

Welcome to Pindaya, Myanmar (formerly known as Burma), where tourists and pilgrims from around the world journey to see the limestone caves and over 8,000 golden statues that are set up as a shrine to Buddha.

Nearby, a missionary pastor quietly transforms his humble home into a church for former Buddhists who are now disciples of Jesus. All of them are now outcasts.

This story was first published in our Frontline Faith Magazine – The Rise of Extremism Edition.

Aung* and his wife Phyu* were once devout Buddhists. Aung

worked as a carpenter until his conversion in 2012.

Constantly working to earn 'merits' through good deeds, Aung sponsored boys to train in the monastery, practised meditation and learned rituals for casting out evil spirits.

It was Aung's older sister who changed the course of his life. She had invited Aung and Phyu to a Christian meeting. They were moved by the worship and teaching and gave their lives to Jesus.

Trouble started as soon as the couple returned home. Their village consisted of about 200 households, all Buddhist. Aung was "invited" to the monastery to explain where he and his wife had been. When he openly explained, he was told that they had three days to return to Buddhism.

Four days later, under the

cover of darkness, Aung removed the traditional Buddhist shrine from his home and carried it to the local pagoda. He was secretly followed. The next day the village chief demanded that every household send a representative to a meeting to confront Aung.

At the meeting Aung was asked to bow before the idol and recite a passage from Buddhist scripture. He refused. The monk demanded that Aung publicly declare himself a Christian. Aung quietly said, "My family and I are Christian."

"I can't hear you!" The monk screamed. "Speak up. Shout!"

Aung grabbed a microphone and boldly declared, "My family and I are Christian!"

The monk then announced, "Aung is no longer a Buddhist. He can no longer live in our village. Are you agreed?" Everyone raised





their hands.

Aung fled from his village to Pindaya, where the house church pastor gave him refuge and accommodation. Aung's son remained at home with his auntie.

Shwedagon Pagoda,
Shwedagon Pagoda, Myanmar,
600km from Pindaya.

For the next two months the boy suffered—mocked by his school mates because of the shame of his parents. Aung went back to the village to check on his son and tend his garden. He slept in his old house for two nights before his presence was discovered.

The village leader offered a solution. Aung could come home and tend his garden, but he had to promise not to practice anything outside of Buddhism, or attend church. He was told to never bring another Christian into the village. Reluctantly Aung signed the agreement.

Several months later when the Pindaya house church held evangelism training, the teachers asked to visit Aung's home and pray for the village. That night, five villagers stoned Aung's house, smashing the roof and windows. They removed the

furniture and burned everything to the ground.

Aung and Phy় were left without a home, work or income. The couple have found temporary shelter in a nearby town. Their pastor shared that two other families in his congregation have faced similar problems when they converted from Buddhism to Christianity; the monks threw them out. "Officially, the central authorities make a phone call and say, 'let them worship freely,' but the villagers don't cooperate."

Aung and Phy়'s son has felt the persecution, observed his parents' response, and is now a follower of Jesus. He prays that he can one day attend Bible school and become a worship leader or pastor.

Please pray for Aung, his family and the increasing number of Christians displaced through Buddhist extremism.

**Names changed for security reasons.*

This story was first published in our Frontline Faith Magazine – The Rise of Extremism Edition, 28 September 2016.

Link to this article:

www.opendoorssblog.org/2016/09/28/aung-and-phyu-from-buddhism-to-christ/



Organisation Promotion

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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.powerchange.com/blogs/experience/devotional
- www.crosswalk.com/devotionals/harvestdaily

Seniors:

- www.crosswalk.com/devotionals/seniors
- www.lightsource.com/devotionals/daily-living-for-seniors
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Happiness: a Futile Pursuit?



by Paul Lewis

Press Service
International
Columnist

King Solomon at the height of his greatness as a king had many profound and sobering thoughts on both life and its pursuits. One consistent theme throughout Ecclesiastes was that "all is vanity".

Among his many pursuits, wealth, fame and pleasure are three that we can certainly identify with today. They are the things that we often presume will bring us happiness. Vanity, he labelled them.

In Ecclesiastes chapter 2, Solomon says "I said in my heart, "come now, I will test you with mirth; therefore enjoy pleasure"; but surely, this also was vanity. I said of laughter- "madness!", and of mirth, "what does it accomplish?" Solomon attempts to seek satisfaction and was more often than not left wanting.

This is instructive for us in the present. Indulge me whilst I attempt to share my take on the pursuit of happiness in today's context.

I do not dispute the fact that we all want to be happy and that the desire is legitimate, Christian or not. I am disputing the contemporary view of happiness as I understand it to be, and proposing what I do believe and would have others believe as well.

In C.S. Lewis' essay, We Have No 'Right to Happiness', he addresses a sentiment on

happiness that I believe our current culture shares. In the essay, a lady espouses the view 'we have a right to happiness'; to this Lewis responds and says:

"A right to happiness doesn't, for me, make much more sense than a right to be six feet tall, or to have a millionaire for your father, or to get good weather whenever you want to have a picnic."

"I can understand a right as a freedom guaranteed me by the laws of society I live in. Thus, I have a right to travel along the public roads because society gives me that freedom; that's what we mean by the roads 'public'."

"I can also understand a right as a claim guaranteed me by the laws, and correlative to an obligation on some-one else's part. If I have right to receive 100 pounds from you, this is another way of saying that you have a duty to pay me 100 pounds".

Lewis makes a salient point here that speaks to the heart of the idea behind our society's idea of being happy. You see, happiness in one sense is too vague for the purposes of claiming the right to be happy, this is what I mean; if I were to say to you "I want to be happy", you would probably ask "how could I make you happy?" or "what would you need to be happy?" Those questions would be very logical questions

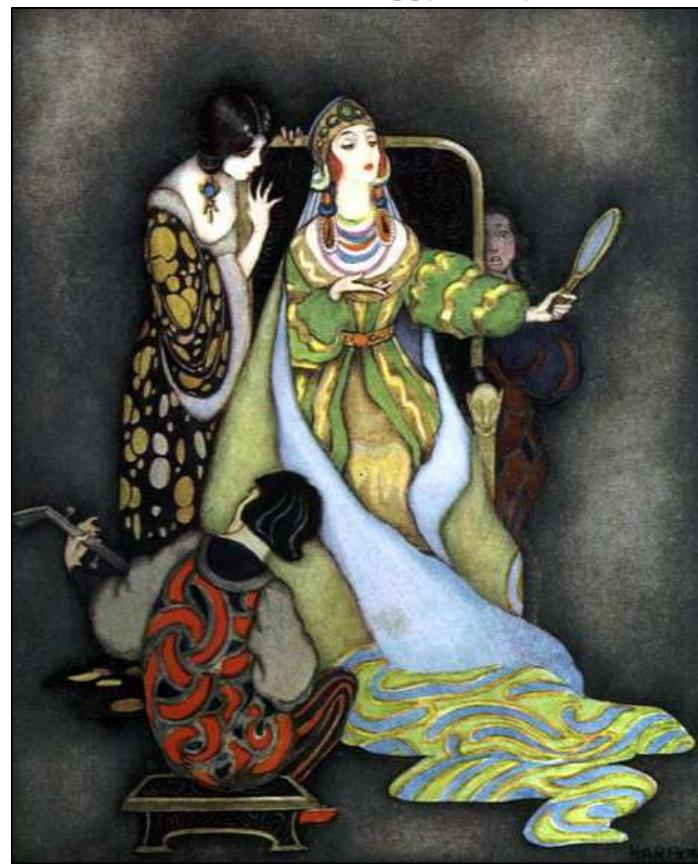
to ask. In stating that we want to be happy it suggests that we are currently unhappy and simultaneously reveals our desire for happiness.

However, it is merely a statement of desire and does not indicate the method in which the said happiness is to be attained. To what extent should this happiness be pursued? What if this happiness comes at a cost? Does the end justify the means? Lewis disagrees:

"They did not mean that man was entitled to pursue happiness by any and every means - including say, murder, rape, robbery, treason and fraud. No society could be built on such a basis".

Faithful Christians

We must realise that what makes us happy may not





necessarily be good. As faithful Christians, both the means and the end must matter to us. Unfortunately, this does not sit well with our current society – we want to have our cake and eat it as it were. We want a society built solely on allowance without restriction.

We often regard boundaries and limitations as the antithesis of satisfaction. The sense of boundaries is foreign to the modern man's concept of happiness, since "freeing oneself of all inhibitions" is thought to be the pinnacle of true satisfaction. Remember the mantra of the sexual revolution, with its ideology of free love and "do your own thing"? We see traces of it in today's culture.

Do these satisfy? Consider the pursuit of happiness in the sexual revolution; where did that lead to? Inclusive sex wasn't enough anymore, it progressed to the use of drugs to compensate for what sex could not ultimately deliver. And when one woman wasn't enough, more women were added and then even those of the same gender.

The result of such pleasure seeking was not the initially

perceived highway to happiness. Ironically, it was the cul de sac of despondency.

As mentioned earlier, the desire for happiness is a normal human inclination. However, it should be a desire that drives us to pursue something of greater eternal significance instead of the fleeting.

C.S. Lewis once said:

"If I find in myself a desire which no experience in this world can satisfy, the most probable explanation is that I was made for another world". I would also argue that the means to happiness ought to be pursued with another world in mind. Chesterton along the same line said this which is of worth to consider, "I came to feel as if magic must have a meaning, and meaning must have someone to mean it. There was something personal in the world, as in a work of art; whatever it meant it meant it violently".

The violent passions and wanton desires that rage in us, crying out to be fully satiated, are tell-tale signs of our deep and utter need for a saviour. They are but spiritual bread crumbs, clues in God's grand scheme that would ultimately lead us to the bread of life that ought to drive us to our knees with the humble realisation

"man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of the living God".

I close with the celebratory words of Augustine:

"This is the happy life, to rejoice in you, of you and for you. This is the happy life, and there is no other".

Paul Lewis is a Staff Worker for Universities and Colleges Christian Fellowship in Kingston, Jamaica, where he also resides. He has aspirations of becoming a Christian Apologist and he loves reading especially topics like: History, Philosophy and Theology. You can follow him on twitter @VeritasDeiVinci.

Paul Lewis' previous articles may be viewed on this link.

Link to article:

www.christiantoday.com.au/news/happiness-a-futile-pursuit.html



Elvis: Little Known Facts

Did you know that Elvis's favourite board games were Scrabble and Monopoly?

What about TV? Elvis enjoyed watching Monty Python and saw the movie "Monty Python and the Holy Grail" at least five times.



by **Liz Campbell**
This article first appeared in "A Life Overseas: the Missions Conversation"

Introduction

"We run the place ya know" said the gunman, casually revealing his semi-automatic weapon with extended magazine. The midnight air, pregnant with tension and the smell of weed, wrapped darkness around both him and my husband on the deserted road leading down into Majesty Gardens.¹

David drew a breathe, "Actually, God runs the place," he said calmly, his eyes carefully reading every flicker on the gunman's face.

As he spoke, two more men emerged from the shadows, one close, one farther off.

"So can God save your life?" the gunman glared menacingly, drawing closer.

"Yes" David said, meeting his gaze, "He can."

Did he believe those words in that moment? He said he did, but did I, soon after when he arrived home to tell me what had happened?

As the words left his mouth, another car turned into the alleyway further ahead, its headlights draping light over the darkness. The bright light seemed to confuse the gunman. He didn't know where to look, and he and his friends grew visibly agitated.

"Squeeze it now man, squeeze it," urged one of his friends. But

the gunman, confused by the lights like an animal in a headlight glare, had already moved his pistol from my husband to the oncoming car.

Seeing his opportunity, my husband calmly put the engine into gear and drove off past the oncoming car. It was only after he was around the corner and on the open stretch that he began to shake all over. When he returned home to our one room flat in Trenchtown and told me his news, calm had almost returned to his body.

But in me the storms were just beginning.

I had left my family half a planet away and come here to work alongside my new husband in Trenchtown, Jamaica. What if Jesus didn't have our backs?

That night led me on a long journey with God, trying to find reassurance against a backdrop of violence, crime and fear.

Ten years later we are still here, and I am still on this journey.

Violence in Jamaica

Violence has a long history and a short fuse here in Jamaica, especially in the inner city communities where we work. Despite a population of just 2.9 million people, Jamaica has one of the highest (per capita) homicide rates in the world. In 2015 alone there were 1,205 murders (that's more than three each day), 1,069 shootings, 589 aggravated assaults, 577 rapes, 1,904 robberies and 1,777 break-ins². In 2013 there were ten thousand cases of reported child abuse³.

My husband David has been caught in crossfire twice (once with an armoured vehicle), held up at gunpoint twice, witnessed a beheading, carried victims of abduction and rape to counsellors, lost friends to violence, spoken at the funerals of the youth he was working with, and counselled gunmen against retaliation in heated situations.

"Can God save your life?" is a very real question for us as a family and one that I have faced again and again over the last ten years.

I recently asked my husband this question again, and without hesitation his emphatic answer was "Yes!" He can say this so confidently because his experience so far has proven God's faithfulness in this area. God can



save his life because He already has.

We work alongside missionaries who have reported bullets 'pinging' away from them as they were caught in gun fire, as though an invisible shield was protecting them.

After my husband was caught in crossfire between an armoured police vehicle and gunmen one evening, a friend overheard some young men in the community saying "Bwoy, 'dat white man must really a'serve God, because so many bullets a'fly and not even one catch 'im!"

So, if we work for God does that mean we are invincible to human violence?

Are Christians Invincible to Violence?

I wish I could tell you that I could confidently say that God will always protect us from everything we fear, from all pain and violence. But I can't.

It is true that He has. I and my husband and many other missionaries we know can retell many stories of God's protection: bullets missing their target, gunmen avoided, lives saved. But it doesn't always end this way.

In April 2016, two American missionaries, Randy Wentzel and Harold Nichols, were violently murdered here in Jamaica. Despite the fact that Jamaica is in the top five nations for homicide rates in the world, their deaths shocked Jamaicans.

Last year in Haiti another missionary, Roberta Edwards was shot and killed as she sat behind the wheel of her car.

In July 2016, trainee missionaries Jamison and Kathryn

Pals and their three very young children, were killed in a car accident on their way to language school in preparation for the mission field.

Does this mean that somehow God let them down? Did Jesus not have their backs just as my deepest fears suspect?

The truth is actually much larger than either of these answers tell us.

God's Promise

God doesn't promise to save our life. He can save our life. But the Bible does not promise safety, comfort or stressless living. What it does promise is God's presence with us.

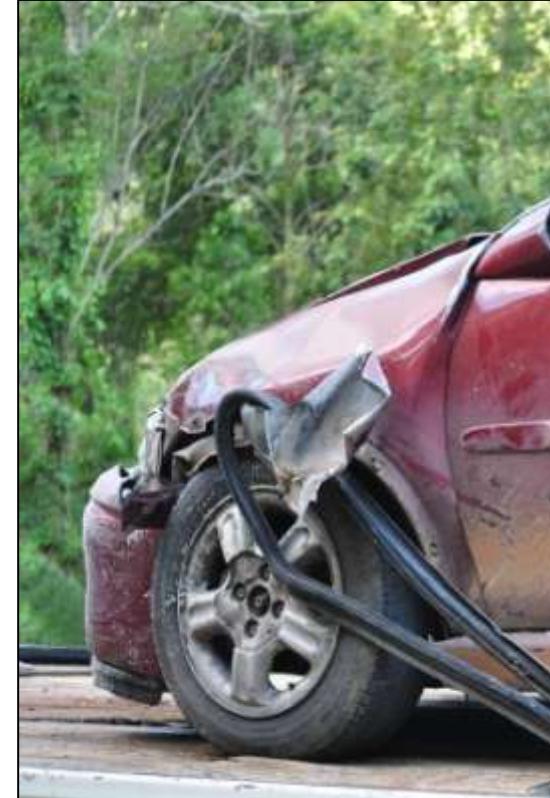
Daniel walked through the lions den, and Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego went through the furnace. God was with them, walking closely alongside them, strengthening them and encouraging them. In these cases God did save their lives; yet the prophet Isaiah was cut in two, and James was killed while Peter miraculously walked out of jail.

There were many cases of lives miraculously spared among the early Christians, yet all but one of the disciples would eventually suffer a violent death. In the first 200 years of Christianity, four million Christians were killed under the Roman empire.

Had God saved just a few, only to neglect four million others?

No. In all these cases God kept his promise, the promise of His presence with us.

Jesus knows what pain and suffering feels like, intimately from inside the frail shell of human existence. He has done it, and when each one of us walks



through white waters of any kind, he is walking with us, walking in us, walking us through, out into either every day life or eternal life.

Randy Wentzel, Harold Nichols, Roberta Edwards and the Pals family were not alone when they were taken violently from this world. Jesus was with them, there, in their last moments, walking closely alongside them, strengthening them and encouraging them just as he had been throughout every other day of their entire life and ministry. They were never alone.

Can God Save Your Life?

The gunman's question 'Can God Save Your life?' holds within it an assumption. His question assumes that life is all we have to lose and that he and his gun ultimately have power over this. This gunman and his friends lived in the reality of the darkness of this world, a choice which ultimately led to their demise less than a year after their interaction

with my husband. But we live in another reality.

In that moment, when the gunman asked that question, gun in hand, David had to choose which reality he would live in. He had to choose where his eyes fell and what his heart believed. Which was more real in that moment, the barrel of a gun or the face of Jesus?

Where does real power lie? We often live, as the gunman's words imply, feeling that our lives are the most important thing we have to lose. We feel that suffering is wrong, like Jesus somehow should prevent us ever experiencing pain or loss. Fear has a power that can easily drown out God's voice. It is our enemy's greatest weapon against us.

In the past year we have seen as never before, that we are in a world rocked by violence, a world torn apart by war, pain and fear. An estimated 115-250 people a day lost their lives in the Syrian conflict, 80 died in France under the wheels of a terrorist's truck, 49 were shot dead in Orlando. Teenage gunmen, terrorist rampages, racial violence, police shootings: our world is bracing for the next suicide bomber to blow themselves up for religious extremism, for someone to mow down victims in the name of prejudice and hate.



Theologian Tom Wright writes,

The Christian Vocation is to be in prayer, in the Spirit, at the place where the world is in pain, and as we embrace that vocation, we discover it to be the way of following Christ, shaped according to his messianic vocation to the cross, with arms outstretched, holding on simultaneously to the pain of the world and the love of God."

Jesus is no stranger to suffering. What can we say to a suffering world if we flee from suffering ourselves? Like Jesus, we are called to give our lives for love. Not in comfortable Christendom, reading books about faith, but in the gritty, messy, sometimes violent battleground of human life, living in the reality where God is King, no matter what the outcome of the battle in front of us may be.

The war is already won.

Conclusion

Can God save your life?

He has. Jesus is with us; the Son of God who laid the foundation of the universe. A gunman with a pistol looks pretty small from that perspective.

No bullet will take you without God already having prepared that moment from the beginning of time to be your homecoming to Him, with Him, and in Him.

Jesus is with us. He can save our life, and He can walk alongside us as we live and as we die (as He did) for love.

If we are brave, we are not brave because we presume we are invincible, we are brave because we live in a reality where God is King and Jesus is walking with us all the way.

"For the Spirit God gave us does not make us timid, but gives us power, love and self-discipline. So do not be ashamed of the testimony about our Lord or of me his prisoner. Rather, join with me in suffering for the gospel, by the power of God."

2 Timothy 1:7-8 [NIV UK]

Biography: Liz Campbell is an Australian, married to a Brit, and living in Jamaica. Together Liz and her husband David have been working with vulnerable inner-city Jamaican children, families, and communities for the past ten years (through the mission organisation 'Fusion') while also homeschooling their two beautiful children. Liz's passion is for human beings, particularly restoring hope and wholeness to broken lives and broken communities. She writes monthly about life as a human being at: seeingbreathingliving.com. Further stories, photos and information about David and Liz's work is available at: fusionjamaica.org

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Words of Wisdom

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

Anonymous

21 Sure-fire Ways to Alienate and Discourage the Singles in Your Church

Here's an easy 'how-to' guide to guarantee you'll easily alienate and discourage the singles in your church. Pastors, leaders and married couples within your congregation should be appraised of the correct procedures.

Let's begin with one that seems to come so naturally within some churches:

1. The Pastor should always keep the focus of their church on the significant people within your church, ie the married couples:

- (a) if there's an engagement or a marriage, reinforce with the congregation the undeniable truth that our highest aim (after being a Christian) should be marriage;
- (b) regularly provide sermons about the duties of a Christian wife and/or husband and connect that with the relationship between Jesus and the church; and
- (c) every mother's day, father's day, or whenever there's a birth, share a talk about the significance of parenthood, within marriage of course.

2. Never share a sermon about the roles which singles might play in the church, and instead:

- (a) the Pastor should remind singles as often as possible (with a wink and a nudge) that they know that singles are probably too busy looking for a significant 'other' to put time towards important church tasks and activities; and
- (b) never suggest that God used single people in the Bible in amazing ways such as Paul, Jeremiah and that other guy ... who was that? Oh yes, Jesus.

3. On the rare occasions a Pastor does mention singles, they should always:

- (a) remind everyone that singles are desperate for marriage;
- (b) suggest that singles can't control their sexual urges unlike married people who never think about sex because they already have a spouse;
- (c) encourage them to work towards becoming the best wife/husband possible;
- (d) and while not saying it out loud, suggest that singleness is kind of like a disease and marriage is the cure; and
- (e) while they're waiting for 'the one,' they can take on the ministries which couples shouldn't be expected to do eg child-minding during the church service, kid's clubs and youth groups and any menial tasks (see following segment.)



4. Everyone should be aware that singles are generally only good for certain tasks within the church:

- (a) at least the church is guaranteed that there'll always be someone to do the tedious and less important jobs like gardening, cleaning and church maintenance and looking after the children's ministries;
- (b) the important roles and tasks within the church will then be available to those who have proven that they're trust-



worthy and mature: the married people;

- (c) encourage the single women and widows to form a sewing or quilting club or similar kinds of 'girly' hobbies to keep them occupied, besides it will help them to feel useful rather than just spending their time looking out of windows, sighing and day-dreaming about when their prince will come;
- (d) encourage the older widows and widowers to mentor the younger singles because that's all the old people can really do now they're no longer married and are lacking in any real skills and abilities, except perhaps for serving in the kitchen after church;

- (e) avoid assigning any tasks to divorcees who have demonstrated clearly by their failed marriage that they're lacking in maturity and therefore can't ever be trusted with anything - then they can spend that time figuring out what their sins were and where they went so horribly wrong; and

- (f) remind the singles on a regular basis that when they get married, they can finally be trusted to take on the more vital roles within the church because it's essential that they're never allowed to forget what their most important aim in life is (oh, after God that is.)

5. Make sure that the parishioners recognise how incomplete the singles in their midst are. The couples should pray for a Christian partner for those poor, desperate singles, and specifically that God will help the individual to figure out where they're going wrong. Couples should regularly point out to the individuals what their particular faults are so they can fix their emotional, sinful, mental and relational issues and be worthy of getting married, otherwise God will continue to punish them with singleness.

6. Discourage singles from believing that God has a purpose for them while they are single. We all know that they're just incomplete, useless individuals until they get married when at last they'll come to know God's purpose for them.

7. Remind singles that sex is wonderful within a marriage and if they'd only snaffle up a partner, they could learn all about it. Reminders should be included in sermons and conversations about how beautiful intimacy is (within marriage) because otherwise the singles might forget what they're missing out on. This will encourage them to work extra hard to find that elusive partner.

8. When it comes to ministry work besides working with children, encourage the singles:

(a) if they're protestants, to think about switching to the Catholic church, where the options for singles are more clear-cut; or

(b) to seriously consider missionary work, because everyone knows that it's pretty much the only thing at which they're going to any good - besides, at least in a foreign country they won't make a mess of things ... with anyone important.



9. When it comes to singles activities or groups, church leaders should:

(a) if necessary, encourage the singles to start up their own Bible Study, but only if it's led by a married couple whose maturity will help keep things on track and ensure the singles keep their hormones under control;

(b) if the Bible Study goes well, the singles will hopefully pair off, get married and then start a new Bible Study for married people on their own;

(c) sigh loudly and roll your eyes whenever the singles ask to hold an event or to use the church building for a single's activity so it will be clear how much of a bother it is;

(d) make it plain that you're uncomfortable with singles groups because they're only a 'meat market' and can't possibly be any source of help or encouragement for the singles in their Christian walk or when they're having struggles - because everyone knows that when you're single you don't have any real problems;

(e) if they're annoyingly persistent about having an activity, urge them to find another location and hope they'll stop bothering you with it, because they should understand that you're married and have more important things at home and at church to focus on; and

(f) make sure you 'forget' to include the notice about the event in the church bulletin.

10. When singles ask for counselling or for help:

(a) they should be placed towards the bottom of the list of tasks because everyone knows that singles don't have any real problems and if they do have any issues, they'll be fixed once they're married; and

(b) never provide counselling for a single person of the opposite sex unless your spouse sits in on the appointment because you don't want to encourage the single person to fall in love with you or be tempted because hey, you're in a position of power and authority and will obviously prove irresistible to them.

11. Whenever a new single person attends your church, invite them to lunch at your home and organise for another single person of the opposite sex from your church to attend. Any awkwardness will eventually be overcome when they fall in love. You don't need to take into consideration whether they have anything in common because as everyone knows, they're both so desperate, they'll take anyone.

12. The Pastor and church leaders shouldn't discourage the thinking of some singles:

(a) that other singles of the same sex are competition;

(b) that it's acceptable to ignore singles of the opposite sex if they aren't suitable marriage material, and to treat them with condescension - they certainly wouldn't want the other person to get any romantic ideas; and

(c) that there is only ever going to be one person in the entire world for them.

13. Singles should be discouraged from:

- (a) coming across as too happy, friendly or smiling because people will think the single person wants to romantically pursue them, even if that person is married; nor
- (b) striking up a conversation with a married person of the opposite sex - and if they do, not to be surprised if their spouse possessively grabs hold of their partner's arm in a clear 'hands off' signal.

14. Ensure that most church resources, courses, dvds and church camps/conferences:

- (a) are about relationships and maintaining a healthy marriage; or
- (b) are about snapping up a spouse:
 - (i) in which the women should appear more submissive (particularly if they have a strong personality) and not show off her intelligence because it will scare off potential mates; and
 - (ii) which encourage the men to just be themselves because there's generally an over-abundance of single Christian women so the guys can have their pick of them; but.
- (c) don't provide anything about marital break-ups because you don't want to encourage divorcees to think that your church believes that divorce is acceptable under any circumstances.

15. Discourage singles from becoming foster parents or adopting orphaned children because they'll never be able to provide a balanced parenting role for them without a partner, and then the child will grow up with problems.

16. Regularly encourage singles by:

- (a) asking them "Have you found a boyfriend/girlfriend yet?"
- (b) requesting that the widows and widowers in the church set up blind dates for their younger counterparts, and that way both groups will feel useful and wanted;
- (c) implying that they're single because they're too picky and should be happy just to take anyone who's a Christian;
- (d) quoting verses at them about being patient in the Lord, focussing on Him, and praying more earnestly;
- (e) reminding them that perhaps the reason they're still single is because God wants to teach them something important so they'll develop into a more marriage-worthy person;
- (f) suggesting that the reason they're still alone is because they are committing a sin;
- (g) encouraging them to lose weight or wear nicer clothes so they'll be more attractive, or perhaps to improve their personality if they're 'facially unfortunate'.
- (h) telling them to stop looking or appearing desperate, because the moment they do and start accept being single, their spouse will suddenly appear!
- (i) suggesting ways they can find a partner such as Christian dating websites, Bible college or Christian singles camps where they'll find a smorgasbord of potential partners; and
- (j) reminding them often about how much more fulfilled and contented they'll be when they're married so it's worth fixing up any of their small, existing problems while they wait for 'the one.'

17. When pastors and married church leaders meet to discuss hiring a new pastor to a church, they should never consider a single person for the role because:

- (a) a single Pastor will be too focussed on finding a spouse and not on the church family;
- (b) they won't be able to relate to the important people within the congregation, ie the married couples;
- (c) they'll be too focussed on sex;
- (d) they've demonstrated their immaturity simply by not being married, and the longer they remain unmarried, the more likely this will prove to be true;
- (e) they have a problem with their sexuality or perhaps they like little children which is why they're not married;
- (f) they're likely to cause trouble by dating someone within the church and then have to be fired when it all falls to pieces or it will cause the women to start bitching amongst themselves; or
- (g) the married parishioners will leave and go to another church where the married pastor understands them.

18. In the same vein, if there are any other positions that become vacant within the church, discourage any of the single people from applying for what is obviously an important role and should therefore go to a married person.

19. Talk to the singles as if you understand everything they're going through because:

- (a) you were single once and remember what it was like, well sort of, and it was only thirty years ago;
- (b) all of the issues you dealt with when you were a teenager are

still relevant today and nothing has changed; and

(c) although you were married when you were nineteen, you're sure issues for older singles, divorcees and widows/widowers will be exactly the same as for single teenagers.

20. Whenever you organise groups for Bible Studies or adult Sunday School etc:

(a) lump like-groups together such as married couples, teenagers, old fogies and singles into their separate groups because they'll be able to relate better to each other;

(b) never consider that mixing up the groups could be beneficial, eg providing insights into the experiences, life challenges and wisdom of different people; and

(c) don't hold group meetings at the home of a single person because it's probably messy or not set up for more than two or three people.

21. Remember to always treat singles as if they're part of your church family: the same way that you treat that weird old bachelor uncle of yours who walks around in his dressing-gown muttering to himself, or your spinster aunt who everyone calls the 'crazy cat lady.'

[END]



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Do you like this humorous mug from the first picture of this article? I'm considering adding the 'Singleness' image as well as several similar ones about 'Spinsterhood' and 'Bachelorhood,' on products in my online stores in the coming months. Let me know if this is something that you'd like to buy. © Vicki Nunn, Editor



Email me: spagmag@yahoo.com.au

Q. What was Elvis Presley's first #1 hit song?

A. Many might suggest that it was "Heartbreak Hotel," which was released in early 1956, but it was instead a song released in the previous year that made it to #1 on the country charts: "I Forgot to Remember to Forget." "Heartbreak Hotel" made it to #1 on the pop charts not long afterwards.

Q. In what year was Elvis inducted into the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame?

A. 1986 - the first year that Hall of Fame was established. In that initial year they inducted a total of ten singers/musicians.

Q. In what year was Elvis inducted into the Country Hall of Fame?

A. In 1988.

Just to finish, a couple of tough ones:

Q. What was the very first Elvis song to make it onto the pop charts?

A. It was his 1954 song "I Don't Care If the Sun Don't Shine" which he recorded at Sun Records. It went to number 74 on the charts.

Q. What was his last song on the charts after his death?

A. It was Spankox's remix of Elvis's song "Baby Let's Play House" which reached 84 on the pop charts in the UK in 2008, although it's probably not going to be the last.

Q. What was Elvis Presley final #1 song after his death?

A. One of Elvis's last #1 songs was a JXL remix of his song "A Little Less Conversation" in 2002 which was a hit in many countries the world. In the UK though, there were three reissues of previous songs that reached #1 only in that country: "Jailhouse Rock"/"Treat Me Nice," "One Night," and "A Fool Such As I," in 2004.



A-Musings

by Vicki Nunn

Many years ago I began dating a man that I'd met through friends at a nightclub. We'd been going out for a while, but had never actually danced together.

When we finally got up on the dance floor one night, I wanted to laugh out loud at his silly antics. "What a clown!" I thought, "He's certainly got the wackiest sense of humour."

After two minutes, it became evident that he was in fact being quite serious... and I was left stunned by the sheer uncontrolled mayhem of his dance movements. My boyfriend's dancing was so atrocious that he was in danger of seriously maiming people within three metres of himself.

I blushed with shame and humiliation... How could I face people once they knew I was dating someone who danced like a spastic chicken? (One gets upset over such important issues when one is young.)

I never did go dancing with him again, and despite his complete and utter lack of grace and anything remotely resembling a dancing ability, we still dated for almost two years.

Dancing is a funny thing isn't it: we each have our own ideas about what are acceptable dancing styles and what are not, especially when it comes to our parents. It doesn't matter how talented our parents are (even if they're operators of a dancing school) when we're in our teens, anything our parents do, especially dancing, is always going to cause us complete and utter humiliation.

Is it just me, or did everyone else grow up with at least one other relative who enjoyed embarrassing us with their outlandish dancing style when we were out in public or at parties? Or was that just lucky me?

When it comes to more mature people, we know that they're older simply by their dancing styles. That idea got me thinking: could our walking

style also suggest something about dancing?

Most of us at some time have found ourselves in that situation when we're walking towards someone and then comes that moment when we almost bump into the other - we each try to move out of the way of the other person, but sometimes begin moving in the same direction, and end up doing a strange, awkward little dance as we try to step around each other. Backwards and forwards we go, mirroring each other's steps and mumbling an apology when we finally get by? It almost seems like some kind of terrible waltz don't you think?

So then I thought, what other parts of life are like a dance? Could walking barefoot on the bitumen on a hot summer's day be likened to a 'Polka'?

Would we seem to be doing the 'Cha Cha' when an insect gets under our clothing?

'Tap' might seem to be an appropriate style the moment a cockroach enters our line of vision.

What about those instances when we slip-over in the bathroom, or take a tumble down the steps, desperately flailing our arms about as we try to regain our balance - could we appear to be doing the 'Jive'?

I personally think the 'Bump' from the 1970s was invented by someone who'd spent way too much time endeavouring to stay upright on public transport. (If you're under the age of 40 you're probably wondering what the heck 'the Bump' is, and now you've automatically relegated me to the 'old fogey' category haven't you?)

There are times I've seen girlfriends of mine doing 'The Twist' in those dreadful dressing room as they try to see if they can pull on the smaller sized item of clothing they deluded themselves into believing would actually fit them. Perhaps someone could also invent a new dance called 'The Mangle,' based on women trying on full-piece swimsuits.

This whole thought process had begun when we were having renovations done at a previous workplace. Two workers were talking as they were placing cables up into the ceiling cavity near my desk.

At one point I was reminded of Chubby Checker and said, "It sounds like you're giving dance instructions."

This was in response to the comment one of the workers had called out to his mate holding the other end of the cable:

"Just twist again, like you did last time!"

[END]



Is the World Going Down the Gurgler?

A History of Global Living Conditions in Five Charts

Introduction by Vicki Nunn

With all of the terrible things happening in our world from militant Islam and terrorism to nuclear testing; from the ongoing threats of war to persecution to the millions of desperate, fleeing refugees; from the sexualisation of our children and adults through to increasing narcissism and lukewarm Christianity; and from the increasing millions of annual abortions through to the acceptance of euthanasia, to many Christians it can seem like our world is falling to pieces and that year by year, our world is going down the gurgler.

Through social media and the general media, we are daily bombarded with discouraging newsfeeds and negative information, with the suggestion that there is no hope for our future, and yet there is some quite startling statistical information that reminds us that during the last two centuries, the world in some vitally important ways, has actually improved significantly.

I hope that you find the following article and charts from Max Roser reassuring, that your hope for the future will be renewed and that you're encouraged to continue contributing to making the world a better place. We have, and we can continue making a difference, both as individuals, as communities and as countries.

A History of Global Living Conditions in Five Charts



by Max Roser

(This is the introduction to Our World in Data, a web publication that shows how global living conditions are changing.)

A recent survey asked "All things

considered, do you think the world is getting better or worse, or neither getting better nor worse?" In Sweden ten percent thought things are getting better, in the US they were only six percent, and in Germany only four percent. Very few people think that the world is getting better.

What is the evidence that we need to consider when answering this question? The question is about how the world has changed and so we must take a historical perspective, basing the answer upon the world as a whole and include the entire world population. The answer must consider the history of global living conditions – a history of everyone.

I. Poverty

To see where we are coming from we must go far back in time. Thirty or even fifty years are not enough. When you only consider how the world looked during our lifetime it is easy to make the mistake of thinking of the world as relatively static – the rich, healthy and educated parts of the world here and the poor, uneducated, sick regions there – and come to a false conclusion that it always was like that and that it always will be like that.

If we take a longer perspective, it becomes very clear that the world is not static at all. The countries that are rich today were very poor until just very recently and were in fact worse off than the poor countries today.

To avoid portraying the world in a static way – the north has always been much richer than the south – we have

to start two hundred years ago, before the time when living conditions really changed dramatically.

Researchers measure extreme poverty as living with less than \$1.90 per day. These poverty figures take into account non-monetary forms of income – for poor families today and in the past this is very important, particularly because of subsistence farming. The poverty measure is also corrected for different price levels in different countries and adjusted for price changes over time (inflation). Poverty is measured in so-called international dollar which accounts for these adjustments.

The first chart shows the estimates of the world population living in extreme poverty. In 1820 only a tiny elite enjoyed higher standards of living, while the vast majority of people lived in conditions that we would call extreme poverty today.

Since then the proportion of extremely poor people has fallen continuously. More and more world regions have become industrialised and thereby increased their productivity which made it possible for more people to rise out of poverty: In 1950 three-quarters of the world were living in extreme poverty; in 1981 it was still forty-four percent. For the last year, research suggests that the portion of the population in extreme poverty has fallen below ten percent.

That is a huge achievement! For me as a researcher who focuses on growth and inequality, it is perhaps





the biggest achievement of all in the last two centuries. It is particularly remarkable if we consider that the world population has increased seven-fold over the last two centuries (On our webpage, you can switch to the 'absolute' view to compare the numbers.)

In a world without economic growth, such an increase in the population would have resulted in less and less income for everyone. A seven-fold increase in the world population would have been enough to drive everyone into extreme poverty. Yet, the exact opposite has occurred. In a time of unprecedented population growth our world managed to give prosperity to more people and to continuously lift more people out of poverty.

Increasing productivity was important because it made vital goods and services less scarce. That means

there was more food, better clothing, and less cramped housing. Productivity is the ratio between the output of our work and the input that we put into our work; as productivity increased, we benefitted from more output, but also from less input – weekly working hours fell substantially.

Economic growth was also very important because it changed relationships between people. For a long time the world existed as a non-growth world, ie the only way for someone to become better off was for someone else to become worse off. Our own good luck was our neighbours bad luck.

Economic growth changed that. Growth made it possible that we became better off when others also became better off. The ingenuity of those that built the technology which increased productivity – the car,

machines, and communication technology – made some very rich, while at the same time it increased the productivity and income of others. It is hard to overstate how different life in zero-growth and a positive-growth economy are.

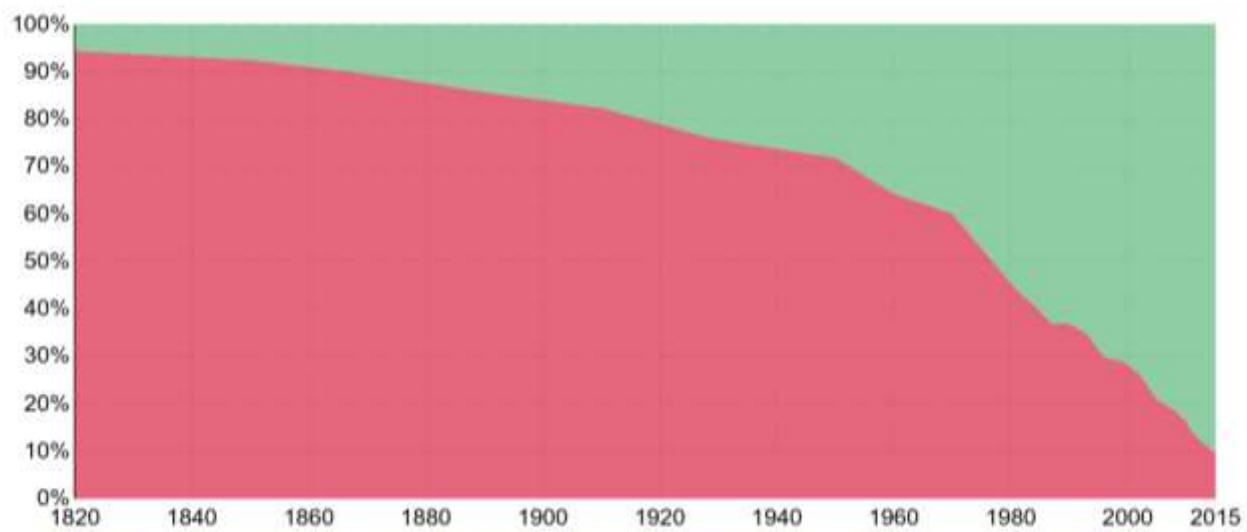
Unfortunately the media is obsessed with reporting single events and with things that go wrong and don't give enough attention to slow developments that reshape our world.

With the empirical data on the reduction of poverty, it becomes evident how a news report on global development would look. The headline might read "The number of people in extreme poverty fell by 130,000 since yesterday" and they wouldn't have this headline once, but every single day since 1990. On average, there were 130,000 people fewer in extreme poverty every day.

World population living in extreme poverty, 1820 to 2015

OurWorld
in Data

Share of people living in extreme poverty Share of people not in extreme poverty



Data source: World Poverty in absolute numbers (Max Roser based on World Bank and Bourguignon and Morrisson (2002))

OurWorldInData.org/a-history-of-global-living-conditions-in-5-charts/ • CC BY-SA



II. Literacy:

How did the education of the world population change over this period? The chart below shows the share of the world population that is literate over the last two centuries. In the past only a tiny elite was able to read and write. Today's education – including in today's richest countries – is again a very recent achievement. It was in the last two centuries that literacy became the norm for the entire population.

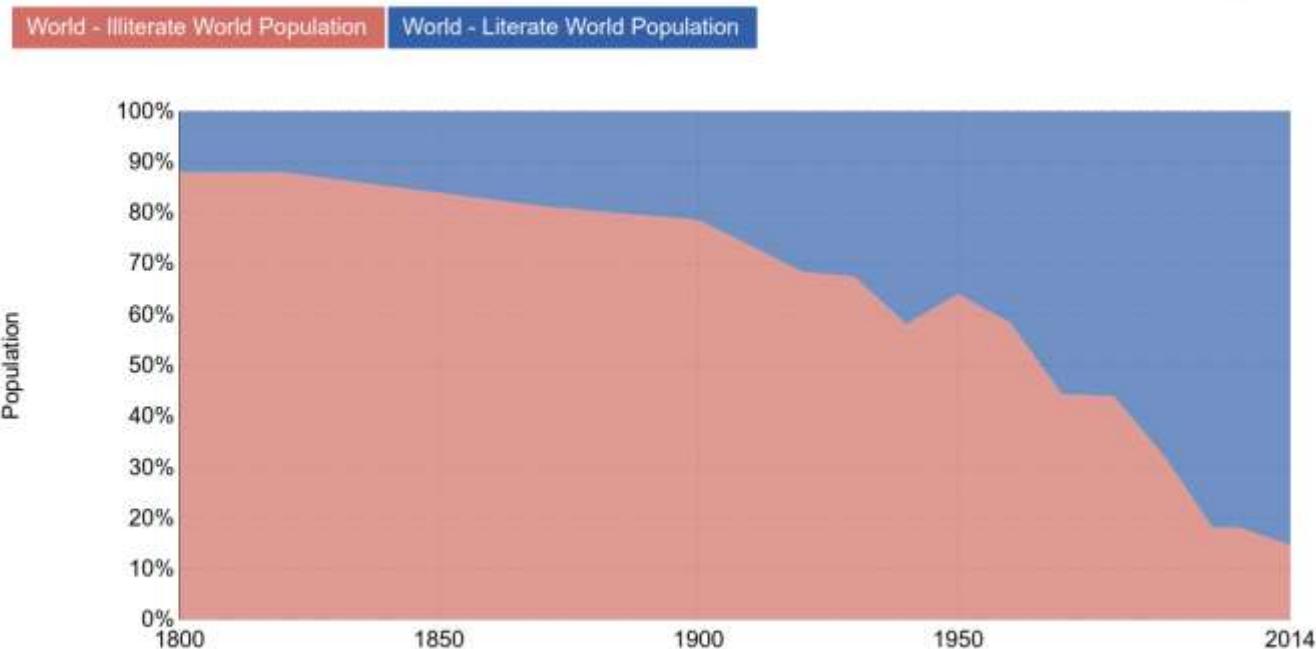
In 1820 only every tenth person was literate; in 1930 it was every third and now we are at eighty-five percent globally, ie if you were alive in 1800 there was a nine in ten chance that

you weren't able to read. Today more than eight out of ten people are able to read. And if you're young, chances are much higher that you can read, since the majority of today's illiterate people are old.

If you think science, technology, and political freedom are important in solving the world's problems and that it helps to read and write to do this, then look at the figures in absolute numbers. Today there are 5.4 billion people older than fifteen years (as the chart shows), of which eighty-five percent are literate, ie 4.6 million people. In 1800 there were fewer than one hundred million people with these skills.

Literate and illiterate world population, 1800 to 2014

Our World
in Data



Data source: Literate World Population (Our World In Data based on OECD and UNESCO)

OurWorldInData.org/literacy/ • CC BY-SA



III. Health

One reason why we do not see progress is that we are unaware of just how bad the past was.

In 1800 the health conditions of our ancestors were such that around forty-three percent of the world's newborns died before their fifth birthday. The historical estimates suggest that the entire world lived in poor conditions; there was relatively little variation between different regions, and in all countries of the world more than every third child died before it was five years old.

It would be wrong to believe that modern medicine was the only reason for improved health. Initially rising prosperity and the changing nature of

social life contributed more than medicine. Improvements in housing and sanitation increased our chances of surviving infectious diseases to reach old age. Healthier diets – made possible through higher productivity in the agricultural sector and overseas trade – made us more resilient against disease. Surprisingly, improving nutrition and health also made us smarter and taller.

But surely science and medicine mattered as well? A more educated population achieved a series of scientific breakthroughs that made it possible to reduce mortality and disease further. Particularly important was the discovery of the germ theory of disease in the second half of the

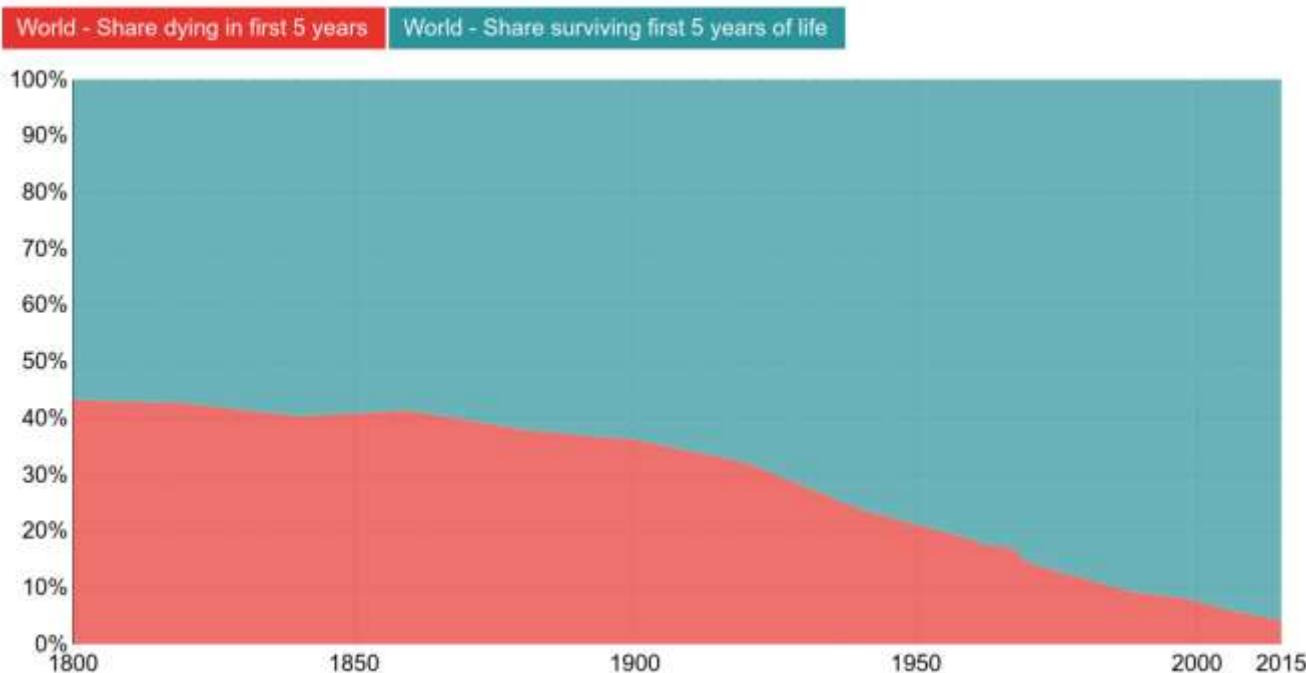
nineteenth century. In retrospect it is hard to understand why a new theory can possibly be so important. At a time when doctors did not wash their hands when switching from post-mortem to midwifery, the theory finally convinced our ancestors that hygiene and public sanitation were crucial for health.

The germ theory of disease laid the foundation for the development of antibiotics and vaccines, and it helped the world to see why public health is so very important. Public health mattered hugely: everyone benefits from everybody else being vaccinated, and everyone benefits from everybody else obeying the rules of hygiene.

Global child mortality, 1800 to 2015

Share of the world population dying and surviving the first 5 years of life.

Our World
in Data





With these changes, global health improved in a way that was unimaginable to our ancestors. In 2015, child mortality was down to 4.3% – ten-fold lower than two centuries ago. We have to take this long perspective to see the progress that we have achieved.

IV. Freedom

Political freedom and civil liberties are at the very heart of development – as they are both a means and an end for development. Journalism and public discourse are the pillars on which this freedom rests, but qualitative assessments of these aspects bears the risk that we are mistakenly perceiving a decline of

liberties over time when on the Polity IV index shows it's the least problematic of the measures that present a long term perspective.

In fact we are raising the bar by which we judge our liberty. Quantitative assessments can therefore be useful when they help us to measure freedom against the same yardstick across countries and over time.

Various attempts to measure the types of political regimes that govern the world's countries and to capture something as complex as a political system is necessarily controversial, and there's no way around that. In this analysis I will rely on Polity IV

index as it is the least problematic of the measures that present a long term perspective.

The index measures political regimes on a spectrum from +10 for full democracies to -10 for full autocracies; regimes that fall somewhere in the middle of this spectrum are called anocracies. To this I added information about the world's countries that were ruled by other countries as part of a colonial empire.

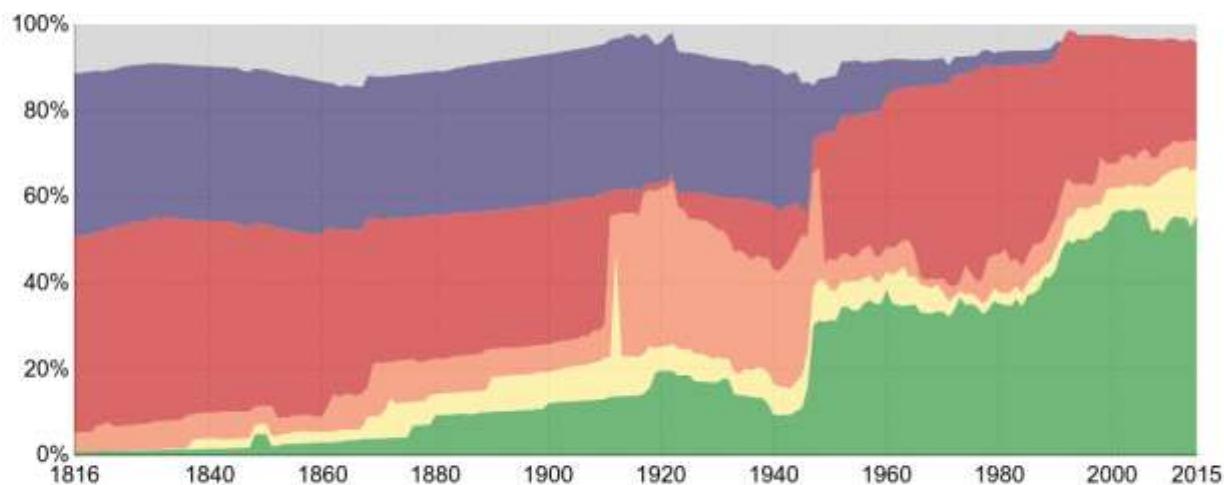
Again I want to give a time perspective to get an idea of how political freedom has changed over the last two hundred years.

The chart shows the share of

Number of world citizens living under different political regimes

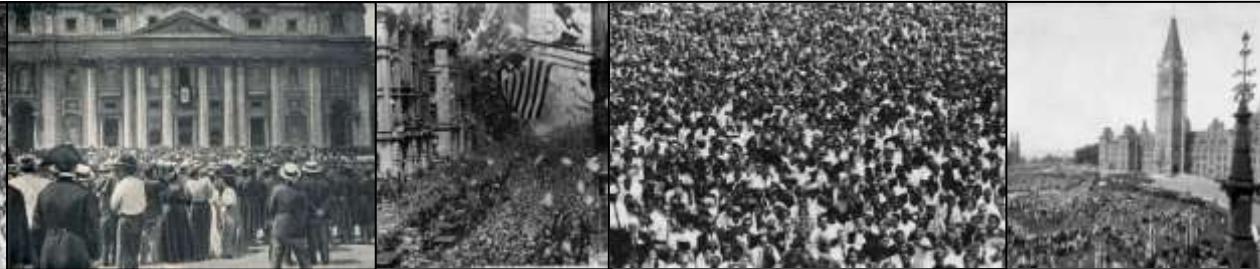
The Polity IV score captures the type of political regime for each country on a range from -10 (full autocracy) to +10 (full democracy). Regimes that fall into the middle of this spectrum are called anocracies.

OurWorld
in Data



Data source: [World Population by Political Regime they live in \(by Our World In Data\)](#)

OurWorldInData.org/a-history-of-global-living-conditions-in-5-charts/ • CC BY-SA



people living under different types of political regimes over the last two centuries.

Throughout the nineteenth century more than a third of the population lived in colonial regimes and almost everyone else lived in autocratically ruled countries.

The first expansion of political freedom from the late nineteenth century onward was crushed by the rise of authoritarian regimes that in many countries took their place in the time leading up to the Second World War.

In the second half of the twentieth century the world changed significantly: colonial empires ended, and more and more countries became democratic:

The share of the world population living in democracies increased continually. Particularly important was the breakdown of the Soviet Union which allowed more countries to democratise. Now, more than every second person in the world lives in a democracy.

The huge majority of those living in an autocracy – four out of five – live in one autocratic country: China.

Human rights are similarly difficult to measure consistently over time and across time. The best empirical data show that after a time of stagnation, human rights protection improved globally over the past three decades

V. Population

If you click on 'Absolute' in any of the previous charts (on our webpage) you can see the increase of the world population over the last two centuries. The world population was around one billion in the year 1800

and has increased seven-fold since then.

Population growth increased humanity's demand for resources and amplified humanity's impact on the environment. But this increase in the world's population should evoke more than thoughts of doom and gloom.

First of all, this increase shows a tremendous achievement - it indicates that humans stopped dying at the rate at which our ancestors died for the many millennia before.

In pre-modern times fertility was high – five or six children per woman were the norm. What kept the population growth low was the very high rate in which people died and that meant that many children didn't reach reproductive age. The increase in the world population followed when humanity began to win the fight against death. Global life expectancy doubled just over the last hundred years.

Population growth is a consequence of fertility with a simultaneous decline in mortality. The fast population growth occurred when fertility was still as high as it was in the unhealthy environment of the past, but mortality had declined to the low levels of our time.

What we've seen in country after country over the past two hundred years is that once women realised that the chance of their children dying declined substantially, they adapted and chose to have fewer children.

This transition from high mortality and fertility to low mortality and fertility is called the demographic transition. In those countries that industrialised first, it lasted at least from the mid nineteenth century to the mid twentieth century, and it took ninety-five years for fertility to decline from having an average of more than six children to having less than three children per woman in the UK.

What we can see in countries that followed was that they sometimes achieved this transition much more quickly: South Korea went from more than six children per woman to less than three in just eighteen years, while Iran achieved this in just ten years.

*...global
population growth
peaked half a
century ago.*

Just as particular countries went through this transition, so the world also went through this transition. Global fertility has more than halved in the last fifty years, from more than five children per woman in the early 1960s to below 2.5 today. This means that the world is well into a demographic transition and that global population growth peaked half a century ago.

Now as we see fertility declining everywhere, we come to an end of the population growth: while the global population quadrupled over the course of the twentieth century, it's unlikely to even double over this current century. By the end of the century the UN expects a slow annual population growth of 0.1% although demographers from IIASA expect an end of population growth around the year 2075.



VI. Education

None of the achievements over the last two centuries could have been made without the expansion of knowledge and education. The revolution in how we live was not only driven by education, it also made education more important than ever.

We know that education is on track to improve globally. Contrary to many other social aspects where forecasts are of limited use, I think education is an aspect where we can make some useful projections about the future. The reason is that the educational composition of today's population tells us something about the education of tomorrow – a

literate young woman today will be a literate old woman in 2070 and a student with secondary education now will be a graduate with secondary education in the future.

Today, the younger generation is much better educated than the older generation, and as class sizes decrease, existing schools can provide better education for the following generations.

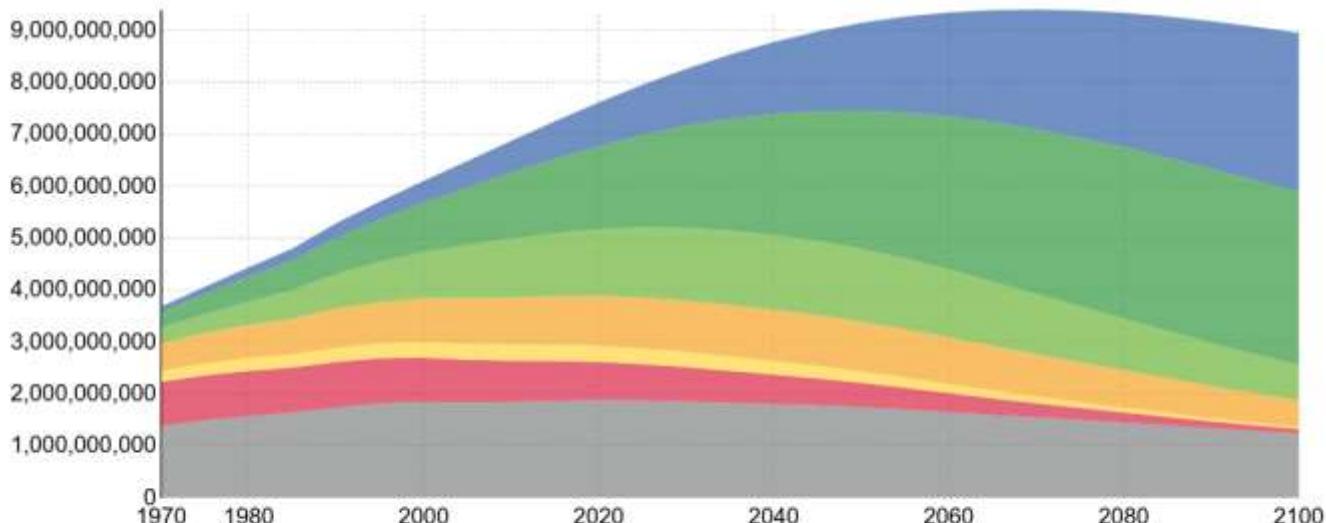
The final chart shows the projection of the IIASA institute for the likely size and the educational composition of the world population until 2100. It is an interesting look into the future: with today's lower global fertility the researchers expect that the number of children will decline from

Projected world population by level of education, 1970 to 2100

OurWorld
in Data

This visualization shows the Medium projection by the International Institute for Applied Systems Analysis (IIASA). The researchers who created this projection describe it as their "middle of the road scenario that can also be seen as the most likely path".

Under 15 No Education Incomplete Primary Primary Lower Secondary Upper Secondary Post-Secondary



Data source: IIASA (Global Projection – Medium SSP2) OurWorldInData.org/projections-of-future-education/ • CC BY-SA



now - there will never be more children on the planet than today. As mentioned before, the IIASA researchers expect the world population to peak in 2070 and to decline thereafter.

Focusing on the educational breakdown, the projection suggests that by 2100, there will be almost no one without formal education and there will be more than seven billion minds who will have received at least secondary education.

With the great importance of education for improving health, increasing political freedom, and ending poverty this projection is very encouraging.

VII. Why Do We Not Know How Our World is Changing?

The motivation for this history of global living conditions was the survey result that documented the very negative perspective of global development that most of us have. More than nine out of ten people do not think that the world is getting better. How does that fit with the empirical evidence?

I do not think that the media are the only ones to blame, but I do think that they are to blame for some part of this. This is because the media does not tell us how the world is changing, instead it tells us what in the world is going wrong.

One reason why the media focuses on this negativity is that the media focuses on single events and single events are often bad - look at the news: plane crashes, terrorism attacks,

natural disasters, election outcomes that we are not happy with.

Positive developments on the other hand often happen very slowly and never make the headlines in the event-obsessed media.

As a consequence of the media and an education system that fails to present quantitative information on long-run developments, a large majority of people are completely ignorant about global development. Even the decline of global extreme poverty - by any standard one of the most important developments in our lifetime - is only known by a small fraction of the population of the UK (ten percent) or the US (five percent). In both countries the majority of people think that the share of people living in extreme poverty has increased. Two thirds in the US even think the share in extreme poverty has 'almost doubled'. When we are ignorant about global development it is not surprising that few think that the world is getting better.

The only way to tell the history of everyone is to use statistics, only then can we hope to get an overview over the lives of the twenty-two billion people that lived in the last two hundred years. The developments that these statistics reveal a slow and steady transformation of our global living conditions. They are reported in this online publication ([Our World in Data](#)) which my team and I have been building over the last few years. We see it as a resource to show these long-term developments and thereby complement the information in the

news that focus on singular bad events.

The difficulty in telling the history of how everyone's lives have changed over the last two hundred years is that we cannot pick individual stories. Stories about specific people are much more engaging. We like those personal stories, but they cannot be representative of how the world has changed. To achieve a representation of this overall change we have to tell many, many stories all at once, and that's where statistics come in.

To make it easier for myself and for you to understand the transformation in living conditions that we have achieved, I've summarised the charts in which I translated this two hundred year history as the history of a group of one hundred people to show how their lives would have changed if they lived through this transformative period of the modern world.

[Here's a link where you can download the two hundred year chart in high resolution to print out.]

VIII. Why it Matters that We Don't Know How Our World is Changing

The successful transformation of our living conditions was possible only because of collaboration. Such a transformation would be impossible for a single person to accomplish. It was due to putting our collective minds and our collaborative efforts together to bring about such an improvement.

There are big problems that remain. None of the above should

give us reason to become complacent. On the contrary, it shows us that a lot of work still needs to be done – accomplishing the fastest reduction of poverty is a tremendous achievement, but the fact that one out of ten people still lives in extreme poverty today is unacceptable.

We also must not accept the restrictions of our liberty that remain in the world. It's also clear that humanity's impact on the environment is at a level that is not sustainable which is endangering the biosphere and climate on which we depend. We urgently need to reduce our impact.

It is far from certain that we will make progress against these problems – there are no iron-clad laws that would ensure that the world continues this trend of improving living conditions, but what is clear from a long-term perspective is that the last two hundred years brought us to a better position than ever before so that we may be able to solve these problems together.

Solving big problems requires a collaborative undertaking, and people that are able to work together today are a much, much stronger group than ever before on this planet. We have seen the change over time, and the world today is healthier, richer, and better educated for our efforts.

For our history to be a source of encouragement we have to know our history. The story that we tell ourselves about our history and our time matters. Our hopes and efforts for building a better future are inextricably linked to our perception of the past and it's important to understand and share information about global development up to now.

A positive outlook at our efforts and those of our fellow man is vital if we are to gain perspective in our ongoing endeavours. It is essential to understand that we've come a long way in improving living conditions and must continue working together for improvement in the future which will be both a means by which we show respect for others and as a

means of self-improvement.

Freedom is impossible without faith in free people, and if we are not aware of our history and believe the opposite of the truth, we risk losing faith in each other and in the future of mankind. [END]

Biography:

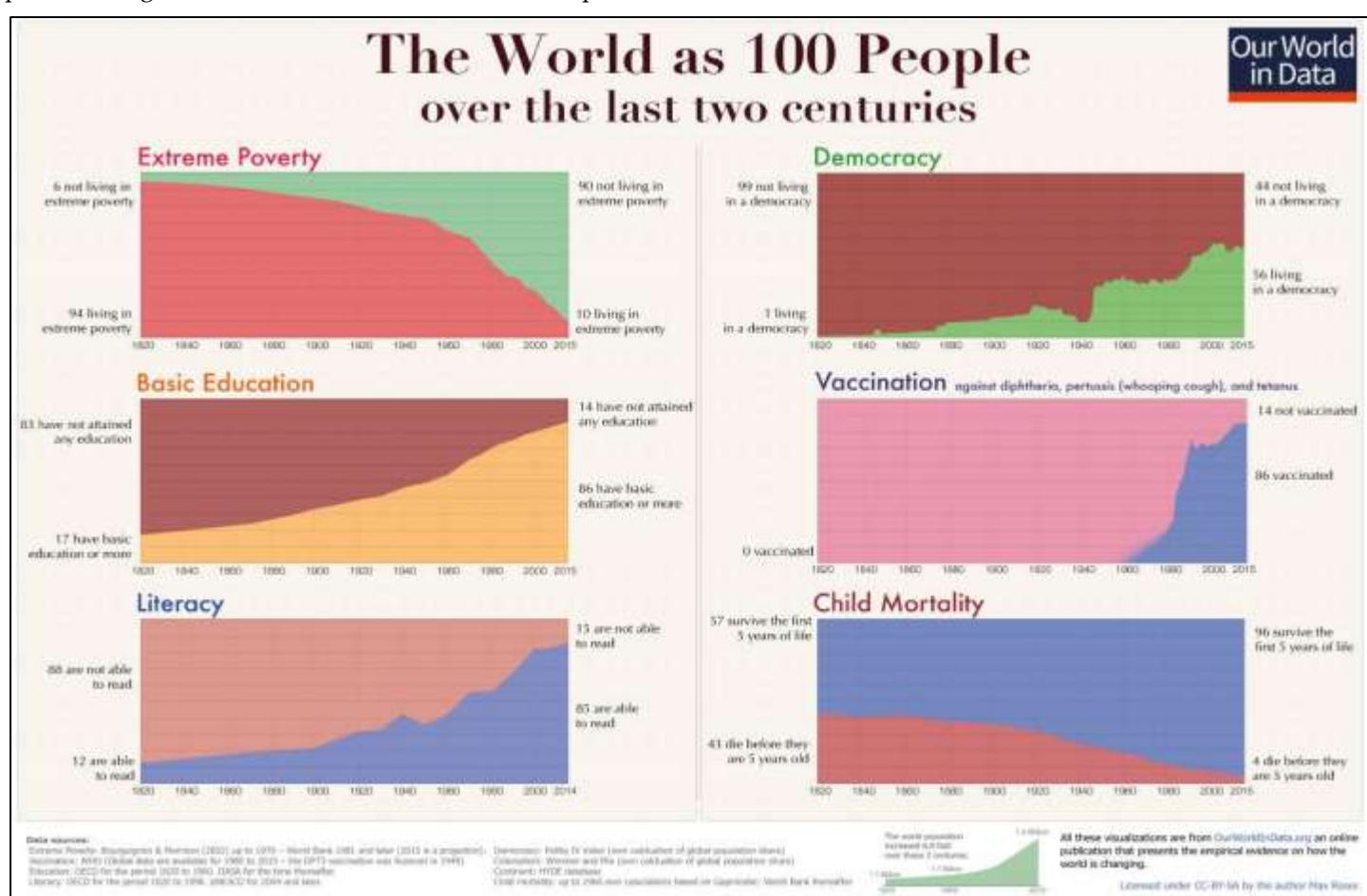
Born in 1983 in Kirchheimbolanden in Germany, Max Roser grew up with two sisters and a brother, and spent much of his youth playing the guitar in a band with friends.

An economist working at the University of Oxford, his research interests are the growth and distribution of global living standards. Most of his research is concerned with inclusive and sustainable growth. These interests relate to his studies: with a BSc in geoscience, a BA and an MA in philosophy, Max has an MSc in economics, and a doctorate from the University of Innsbruck, Austria.

Bibliography:

Link to website:

www.ourworldindata.org/a-history-of-global-living-conditions-in-5-charts/



A Non-Traditional Blessing

by Sr. Ruth Fox, OSB

May God bless you with **discontent** with easy answers, half truths, superficial relationships, so that you will live from deep within your heart.

May God bless you with **anger** at injustice, oppression, abuse, and exploitation of people, so that you will work for justice, equality, and peace.

May God bless you with **tears** to shed for those who suffer from pain, rejection, starvation and war, so that you will reach out your hand to comfort them and to change their pain to joy.

May God bless you with the **foolishness** to think you can make a difference in this world, so that you will do the things which others tell you cannot be done.

If you have the courage to accept these blessings, then God will also bless you with:

happiness: because you will know that you have made life better for others;

inner peace: because you will have worked to secure an outer peace for others;

laughter: because your heart will be light; and

faithful friends: because they will recognise your worth as a person.

These blessings are yours - not for the asking, but for the giving - from One who wants to be your companion, our God, who lives and reigns, forever and ever. Amen



Biography: Joseph Kolapudi

Born in Australia to Indian parents, Joseph has been a lover of

books and writing for as long as he can remember. From a young age he enjoyed biographical stories of people who influenced the world which inspired him to turn to writing. When he became an author at 17, he realised that his ability encouraged the passion of others, and was a gift that couldn't be ignored. His first job as a journalist for an online publication opened his eyes to the influence that he could have on a wider audience. This eventually led to an interest in writing internationally for the academic world.

He graduated from the Queensland University of Technology with a

degree in business management and HR, which interestingly provided a way to understand people from their own unique perspective, a skill that would prove helpful in his writing later on. Desiring to combine his experience in academic writing as well as an interest in sharing people's stories and connecting with them, he pursued a theological degree from Fuller Theological Seminary in Southern California.

It was here that he realised that writing was more than a pastime and was also an art-form that could have a global influence on the way people perceived themselves, their society, and the culture around them.

He completed his master's in International Development and Urban Studies, and began to look into combining his skills and writing experiences which led him to the US, Center for World Mission where he

could help developing relationships between international organisations, missions' agencies, social enterprises, the US government, and local initiatives.

Joining the international missions' agency, Interserve, provided an opportunity to return to India, where he is currently working with Olive Technology in the role of a Business Analyst. A surprising bonus has been the opportunity to write website articles about reaching a more academic audience, while also reviewing project proposals for Christian ministries all over India. He also regularly contributes articles of a reflective nature for Christianity Today Australia, both local and international print magazines. Joseph's latest venture includes becoming a regular contributor to SPAG Magazine. [END]



Up Close and Personal with Aussie Wildlife

~ Tiger Quoll (*Dasyurus maculatus*) ~

The Tiger Quoll is the largest carnivorous marsupial found on the Australian mainland and is classed as 'near threatened.'

There are several quoll species though the Tiger Quoll is the biggest with the males weighing an average of 3.5kg and the female around 1.8kg. They are found as far north as southern Queensland right down the east coast into Tasmania. While once they were found also in Victoria and South Australia, European settlement has impacted their range. There is a pocket of the endangered subspecies *Dasyurus maculatus gracilis* found only in one area in north Queensland.

With reddish brown fur and white spots, the Tiger Quoll is the only one of its species with spots on its tail as well as its body.

They prefer damp eucalyptus forests and generally hunt for their food higher up in the trees, though they will sometimes scavenge from dead animals including cattle, dingoes, kangaroos and feral pigs. The main part of their diet includes lizards, insects, snakes, possums, small wallabies, wombats, pademelons, birds, platypus, rabbits, small mammals, crayfish and occasionally, even small poultry.

While adults are nocturnal, young Tiger Quolls will sometimes venture out of their burrow in daylight hours.

After birth, the young ones spend a short time in their mother's pouch. They're entirely dependent on their mother during the first fifty to sixty days when they're completely blind. By the time they

are around three months of age, they have usually become quite independent of their mother.

Male Tiger Quolls can have a home range of around 128 hectares.

[END]



(*Dasyurus maculatus*)

Author: Joshua Cuningham dated: 13 August 2012 under the Creative Commons Attribution 2.0 Generic license. Photo is unaltered. Available: <https://www.flickr.com/photos/34547543@N05/3208125391/>



(*Dasyurus maculatus*)

Author: Michael J Frimholtz dated 27 March 2011 under the Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 4.0 International license. Photo has been cropped. Available: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Spotted_Tail_Quoll_2011.jpg

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"God made earth creatures in a vast variety of species: wild animals, domesticated animals of all sizes, and small creeping creatures, each able to reproduce its own kind. God saw that His new creation was beautiful and good." Genesis 1:25 [VOICE]

Words of Wisdom

"The essence of Lutheran theology: It's all about God, not about me. And even when it isn't about God, it's about my neighbour, not about me. It's never about me." Gordon Straw

Can just 60¢ a day really help?

Yes it can! The basic operating costs per quarter to provide SPAG Magazine free are around AU\$550. If just **ten** people could contribute **60¢** a day for a year, our basic operating costs would be met. Would you consider being one of those ten people? (Perhaps you could ask nine people from your church or singles group to make up the remainder.)

60¢/day x 10 people/year = operating costs

Your generous contribution can make a big difference! You can purchase items from our online store: www.spagmag.com/shop.

Other costs:

Could you be one of ten (x10) people to help with each of our annual costs? (in Australian currency)

(a) Fonts, graphics & software	2¢/day = 14¢/wk
(b) Fonts, graphics & software	2¢/day = 14¢/wk
(c) Aust Religious Press Assoc membership	2¢/day = 14¢/wk
(d) Cartoons	3¢/day = 21¢/wk
(e) Website costs	3¢/day = 21¢/wk
(f) Postal box rental	3¢/day = 21¢/wk
(g) Printing & stationery	3¢/day = 21¢/wk
(h) Promotion of SPAG	7¢/day = 49¢/wk
(i) Office equip/computer	<u>24¢/ day</u> = \$1.68/wk
TOTAL	49¢/day day = \$3.43/wk

Why should you help?

All ongoing costs are presently borne by our Editor, Vicki Nunn who struggles on a small disability pension, and yet she currently receives no wages for the hundreds of hours she puts into this magazine. That's right, she doesn't get paid **and** the costs come out of her pocket so that SPAG Magazine is published - for free. It's almost like she pays you to read it ☺!

Consider also that in the past year we've spent around \$2,000 for a new computer and monitor, and while we've received some donations (thank you very much!), we still need to find around \$1,700 to cover the full replacement costs.

Would you make a commitment to help us?

Email us: spagmag@yahoo.com.au and let us know how you'd like to become a regular supporter. Bank details are as follows:

Name: VS Nunn
BSB: 014125 (ANZ Bank)
Account: 289007034

Are there other costs not shown here?

Yes, we haven't included insurance nor wages, which means that those who contribute their time and talents, don't get paid.

There is No 'I' in 'Anxiety'. No. Wait.

There Totally is. Oh Gosh!



by Sam Burrows

Press Service
International
Columnist

I'm a worry. Seriously.

This summer, while most of my friends seem to have been prancing around on beaches and smiling for cameras, I've spent most of my time creating a vast array of situations in which all the good things in my life could be taken away from me due to unforeseen external factors.

My mind is convinced that the universe picks on me, and that I'm destined for catastrophe. I suffer from anxiety for a bit, every year or so.

Somewhere along the line, probably as a result of some repressed traumatic incident from my childhood, I developed an inclination for my mind to prefer a particular neural pathway. This puts me on constant high alert.

Phone calls terrify me as potential bringers of bad news, babies scare the heck out of me due to their dropability, and the other day I heard a noise and panicked because I couldn't work out whether it was my phone, work computer, Macbook, Skype, Facebook, Instagram, email or TV. Luckily it was just my fire alarm.

Sometimes it turns into social anxiety, and the fun really begins. Negative past experiences tell me that talking to girls will result in being compared to a rat like that time when I was twelve years old, or that on a date I'll say something totally bizarre like that time I

asked my lady friend across the table what the plural of foetus was. She wasn't impressed. (It is both foetuses and foeti by the way - I researched afterwards).

I've literally trained myself to droop my eyelids when talking to strangers to disguise the panic and hide the crazy before I go back home to research lung disease while also discovering that the back pain that I'm assuming is caused by my worry could be spinal stenosis, fibromyalgia or spondylitis.

If I can't think of anything to worry about I usually just arrive at the inevitable conclusion that I will probably die really soon because there's no way that things stay good for long. It is usually at this point that I grab a beer and vow to name my firstborn Lorezepam if I survive.

Pill Poppers of the Pacific

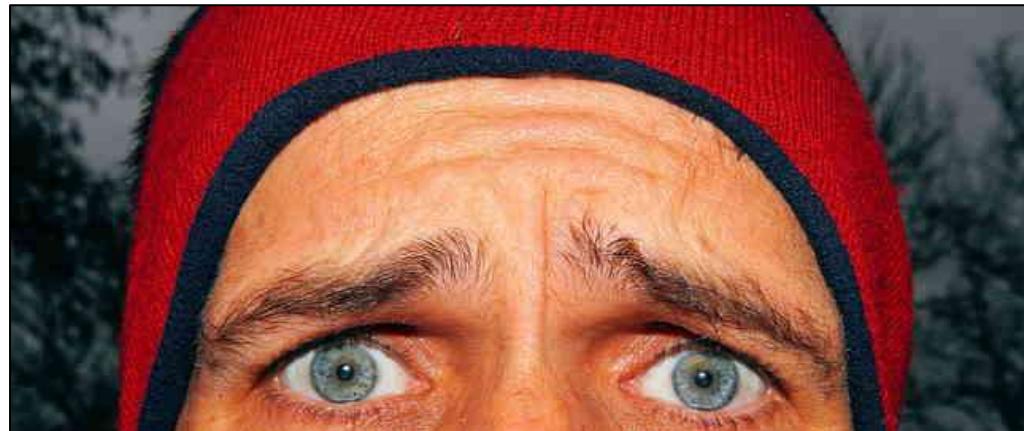
Originally I was reluctant to be this open about my mental issues, concluding that if people knew I was like that then everyone would be freaked out, would slowly stop talking to me, leaving me isolated and destined to fall into an escalating drug addiction and die

painfully and quietly with only cats as friends. But it turns out that New Zealand has a bit of an issue. It turns out that twenty-five percent of the population is probably just as nuts as I am.

According to a study reported on in the Sunday Star Times, last year 784,000 Kiwis were prescribed drugs for depression, insomnia and anxiety. This is up fifty percent since 2007 putting us in the high end of the world spectrum for anxiety and depression.

Anxiety is driving a significant amount of behavioural and emotional problems in children and there are dangers that we are too readily turning to a pill to be the messiah of our minds. With a growing trend like this, you've got to ask what's behind it, and then how best to address it. It appears to be the plague of the next generation for the West, like smallpox. Just more panicked and less itchy.

The study suggests that while medication helps, it doesn't fix the deeper causes of mental disorders. With the fast pace of modern society and the complexity it





brings, doctors are finding it is far more simple to just throw drugs at patients rather than addressing underlying issues. While a small percentage of depression is actually caused by a chemical imbalance, quite frankly, Prozac is cheaper than sorting out someone's marriage.

"Make Me Happy. Make Me Feel Good."

But perhaps these are all the wrong questions. In the early 90s, influential pastor Eugene Peterson once addressed the question, "Do pastors face more difficult problems today than in previous generations?" He responded by saying, *"I know this is a mixed-up, difficult, damaged generation. But it's arguable that the main difference today is not how much people are hurting, but how much they expect to be relieved from their hurting."*

"The previous century suffered just as much; in fact, probably much more. Just think of all the illness, death in childbirth, infant mortality, plagues. The big difference today is that we have this mentality that if it's wrong, you can fix it. You don't have to live with any discomfort or frustration. And the pastor is in the front line of people who get approached: 'Make me happy. Make me feel good.'"

Perhaps the real issue here is that we are constantly bombarded

with narratives about human experience that insist that life should be about one carefree road trip after the next and to expect life to be a fulfilling and exhilarating journey of adventure. That to experience anything else, to suffer, is in fact wrong.

Maybe that's the issue: we've convinced ourselves that suffering isn't supposed to happen to us, that it's not necessary, and it makes it difficult for us to understand our suffering God. We are certainly not okay with not being okay, so we try to make it stop rather than dealing with it. We avoid the source. Not that I would know any better, I have panic attacks over non-existent problems.

I don't think you can just swallow your brokenness away.

(I'm not on drugs, kids.)

Biography:

Sam Burrows is an ex-Middle School teacher (he made it out alive) who is currently working in Young Adult ministry while completing a Graduate Diploma in Theology at Laidlaw College. In his spare time he likes to pretend to be a rock star and writes for enjoyment and in order to impress a potential wife.

Sam Burrows previous articles may be viewed at:

www.pressserviceinternational.org/sam-burrows.html

Article source: www.christiantoday.co.nz/news/there-is-no-i-in-anxiety-no-wait-there-totally-is-oh-gosh.html



Middle East Christianity, Threatened

The film, *Faithkeepers*, shares about the shocking decline of Christianity in the region, and the stories of many Christian refugees fighting for their faith.

[\[Link\]](#)

'If I speak of Islamic violence, I must speak of Catholic violence,' says Pope

Pope Francis shares why he chooses not to comment on Islamic violence, claiming that each religion, Catholicism included, has violent extremists within.

[\[Link\]](#)

Christians fasting, praying in China as new wave of 'severe' persecution looms

Church leaders in China pray fervently as soon-to-be laws are being passed that will result in severe persecution for Christians. Despite this, Christianity in the country seems to be spreading rapidly.

[\[Link\]](#)

Churches should reach out to Muslim refugees with love, Christian author says

Tom Doyle spoke to CBN news, encouraging and challenging fellow Christians to not fear Muslim refugees, but rather to share the love of God with them in the wake of crisis.

[\[Link\]](#)

Muslims converting to Christianity in Nigeria, despite brutal persecution

Often overlooked by media, Northern Nigeria has faced unspeakable persecution for decades from Muslim extremist groups. Churches continue to expand as more Muslims turn to Christ despite the possible consequences.

[\[Link\]](#)

Should "13 Reasons Why" never have been told?

Hit Netflix series, "13 Reasons Why" tackles heartbreak themes including suicide and sexual assault. Reviews have been mixed, some saying the show has brought them great comfort, while others saying the gruesome details have triggered them negatively.

[\[Link\]](#)



Are Your Prayers at Risk of Becoming Babbling?



by Lisa Copen

Have your prayers gone from true conversation to just babbling? Lisa shares.

"And when you pray, do not keep on babbling like pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words. Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask Him"

Matthew 6:7-8 [NIV]

When my son was 11, he could say the same five words repeatedly for hours - literally, if he wanted something. I would try to converse and ignore it for awhile, but eventually I would blow. Ironically, I usually knew what he is going to ask from the beginning. His babbling was not about conveying a desire, but to wear me down and hear himself talk.

What are your prayer requests like? We are told to pray continually - but this means conversing with God - not trying to wear Him down. I've known people who pray for healing for years, yet their prayers have gone from asking for God's mercy to a habit of babbling. Their relationship with the Lord has become empty.

God knows our requests before they are spoken. Prayer is not necessary for God to hear us, but rather it is a gift given to us so we commune one-on-one with the Holy Father. We need prayer, which includes the act of surrender and praise.

Unanswered prayers are not unheard prayers. Since God knows our prayers before we speak them, it

is impossible for them to be unheard. Yet we can believe that if we are more efficient in our request, He will hear us. So why not repeat it again and again until we get what we want?

This is what we are being warned of - babbling. The Greek word is "battalogesete" and means to stammer. Other translations say to avoid "heaping up phrases" [AMP], "rattling off long prayers" [PHILLIPS], and "vain repetitions" [KJV].

I like how The Message summarises this scripture:

"The world is full of so-called prayer warriors who are prayer-ignorant. They're full of formulas and programs and advice, peddling techniques for getting what you want from God. Don't fall for that nonsense. This is your Father you are dealing with, and He knows better than you what you need."

Matthew 6:7-8 [Msg]

Prayer: Father, I want to talk with You - not just talk to You. I long to hear Your voice in my life. Hearing my own voice repeat what I want or need over and over will not draw us closer, but only give me a false sense of conveying my desire to You.

Teach me how to pray so that it brings me closer to You. Hearing my own voice babble will not fulfil the intimacy with You that I seek. Amen

Do you ever find yourself babbling to God? He wants us to pour out our heart to Him, but we must also be aware of saying the

same words over and over can be a form of laziness. How can you use the Word to change your prayer from babbles to communion with Him?

Song Link: I loved the lyrics of this song and how we often don't know what to pray. We can raise our hands though - even in the middle of the chaos and the floods in our life. Enjoy this touching song, "All I Need" by the Rhett Walker Band. - Lisa

About the author:

Lisa Copen is the founder of Rest Ministries and she lives in San Diego with her husband and son. Be encouraged by one of her books today! 100% proceeds go to Rest Ministries. You might like to check out "Why Can't I Make People Understand?" which is available in the Rest Ministries shop.

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[NIV] Holy Bible, New International Version®, NIV® Copyright ©1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.® Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide.

[MSG] The Message Copyright © 1993, 1994, 1995, 1996, 2000, 2001, 2002 by Eugene H. Peterson

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[PHILLIPS] The New Testament in Modern English by J.B Phillips copyright © 1960, 1972 J. B. Phillips. Administered by The Archbishops' Council of the Church of England. Used by Permission.

[KJV] King James Version uncopyrighted



Good Grief: Getting Over Rover

Why Our Grief Over a Dog Is So Intense



by Frank T.
McAndrew
PhD

(This article first
appeared in
Psychology
Today)

What is it About Dogs, Exactly, That Make Them So Precious to Us?

My wife and I recently went through one of the more excruciatingly sorrowful experiences of our long married life: the euthanasia of our beloved dog, Murphy.

Losing a dog is hard enough; setting the time and date in advance and then counting down the hours that we had left with her was almost more than we could bear. I still get choked up when I remember making eye contact with Murphy moments before she took her last breath: she flashed me a look that was an endearing blend of confusion mixed with the reassurance that all was well because we were both by her side.

When people who have never had a dog see their dog-owning friends mourn the loss of a pet, they probably think it is a bit of an overreaction. After all, it is "just a dog." Fortunately, most are too polite to say this out loud. But those of us who have loved a dog know the truth: Your own pet is never "just a dog."

Rudyard Kipling captured this sentiment in a stanza of his poem "The Power of the Dog":

*When the fourteen years which
Nature permits
Are closing in asthma, or tumour,
or fits,
And the vet's unspoken
prescription runs
To lethal chambers or loaded guns,
Then you will find – it's your own
affair –
But ... you've given your heart to a
dog to tear.*

Many times friends have guiltily confided to me that they grieved more desperately over the loss of a dog than over the loss of friends or relatives.

Research has confirmed that for most people, the loss of a dog is in almost every way comparable to the loss of a human loved one. Unfortunately, we do not have the corresponding cultural grief rituals to help us get through the loss of a pet, which can make us feel more than a bit embarrassed to show too much public grief over our dead dogs.

Why Dogs Are Special?

What is it about dogs, exactly, that make them so precious to us?

For starters, dogs have had to adapt to living with humans and they have done it very well - they are the only animal to have evolved specifically to be our companions and

friends. Anthropologist Brian Hare has developed the "Domestication Hypothesis" to explain how dogs morphed from their grey wolf ancestors into the socially-skilled animals with whom we now interact in very much the same way that we relate to other people.

In fact, our relationships with dogs can be even more satisfying than our human relationships, if for no other reason than dogs provide us with such unconditional, uncritical positive feedback.

As the old saying goes, *"May I become the kind of person that my dog thinks I already am."*

Interacting with dogs makes us feel good, and just looking at them can make us smile. Dog owners score higher on measures of well-being and, on average, they are happier than people who own cats



and those who own no pets at all.

Dogs seem to feel the same way about us. They have been selectively bred through generations to pay attention to us, and MRI scans show that dog brains respond to praise from their owners just as strongly as they do to food - for some dogs, praise is an even more effective incentive than food. Dogs recognise people from their faces and can learn to infer human emotional states from facial expression alone. Studies also indicate that dogs can understand human intentions, that they try to be helpful to us, and that they will even avoid people who do not cooperate with us or treat us well.

Dogs communicate with us as no other animal does. They are skilled at comprehending spoken words and using their own vocalisations to communicate with us in return.

Our strong attachment to dogs was subtly revealed in a recent study of "misnaming." This is what happens when you call someone by the wrong name, such as when parents mistakenly call one of their kids by a sibling's name. It turns out that the name of

the family dog frequently gets confused in the same mix as other human family members, indicating that the dog's name is being pulled out of the same cognitive pool in which the names of other family members are swimming around. Curiously, this rarely happens with cat names.

It is no wonder that we miss our dogs so much when they are gone.

Why Grief Over the Death of a Dog Is So Intense

Psychologist Julie Axelrod pointed out that the loss of a dog is so painful because we are not losing just one thing; we experience multiple losses at the same time.

We may be losing our primary companion, a source of unconditional love, a 'life witness' who provides security and comfort to us, and maybe even a protégé whom we mentor like a child. The loss of a dog seriously disrupts our daily routine, even more profoundly than the loss of most friends and relatives, and changes in lifestyle and routine are one of the primary building blocks of stress.

A recent survey of bereaved pet owners documented the common experience of misperceiving ambiguous sights and sounds as the deceased pet. This occurs most frequently shortly after the death of the pet, especially among individuals who had very high levels of attachment to their pets.

I miss my dog more than I can say, and yet, I

am sure that I will put myself through this ordeal again in the years to come.

I'd like to finish this essay with another stanza from the Kipling poem:

When the body that lived at your single will,

With its whimper of welcome, is stilled (how still!)

When the spirit that answered your every mood

Is gone - wherever it goes - for good,

You will discover how much you care,

And will give your heart to a dog to tear.

Biography:

Frank is an award-winning teacher who was born on a US military base in Germany and masqueraded as a college wrestling coach for almost 30 years. He and his wife Maryjo have two children (Tim & Maura) and one grandchild (Colleen).

He is the Cornelia H. Dudley Professor of Psychology at Knox College and a Fellow of several professional organisations, including the Association for Psychological Science (APS). He is an evolutionary social psychologist whose research is guided by the simple desire to make sense of everyday life, and he is currently studying gossip, aggression, and creepiness.

McAndrew's research has appeared in dozens of different professional journals and is regularly featured in popular media outlets such as NPR, the BBC, The New York Times, and NBC's Today Show. He has written for many popular print and online magazines, including Time, CNN, The Washington Post, Salon, Newsweek, The Daily Beast, PBS NewsHour, the Huffington Post, The New Republic, and Scientific American.

Article Source:

www.psychologytoday.com/blog/out-the-ooze/201701/getting-over-rover-why-our-grief-over-dog-is-so-intense dated 29 January 2017.



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Adam and Eve

by Lita Cosner



Periodically, there are bursts of articles about Adam and Eve. What does the Bible say about them? What was the historical Adam like? Did he even exist? What does genetics indicate about our first parents? Unfortunately, many conclude that Adam and Eve are myths; nothing more than characters in a fictional story. But Jesus and Paul believed they were real people, and they didn't hesitate to base key doctrines¹ on what Genesis tells us about Adam and Eve.

Creation of Adam and Eve

The Bible is clear that Adam had no human parents - Luke calls him the son of God because of this (Luke 3:38). In the Old Testament, the angels are called 'sons of God' for

the same reason - they are direct creations of God. On Day 6 after creating the land animals, God created Adam from dust then breathed life into him (Genesis 2:7). From the beginning, unlike animals (and angels), human beings were a mixture of physical and spiritual attributes. This made Adam fundamentally different from all the animals that God created, which is why none of them were suitable as companions for Adam. Naming the animals was a great object lesson for Adam to show him that he needed someone like himself, not animals. Up until now in the creation account, every time God saw something, it was good, but for the first time, God sees something that isn't good - Adam is alone. Creation is incomplete. This doesn't mean that God didn't foresee the need for a companion for Adam; it just means that now, when Adam realises his need, God is going to do something about it.

In the first - ever 'surgery', God removed a rib from Adam's side and from it He created a woman, who Adam named Eve. When Adam saw her for the first time, he recognised that she was not like the animals - she was a person like him. And Genesis affirms that like men, women are fully created in the image of God² (Genesis 1:26-27).

The Bible states that Eve was created to be Adam's 'helper' (Hebrew 'ezer'). While this is sometimes criticised as promoting

the view that women are chattels, this isn't the force of the word at all. Indeed, the Old Testament uses the same word when it describes God as a 'helper' (for instance, Exodus 18:4, Psalm 3:20; 115:9, Hosea 13:9). The idea is that women are equal in spiritual status to men and fulfil a critical role, without which humanity cannot function.

Does Genetics Show Adam and Eve Were the First Parents?

In recent years, evolutionists have used genetics to try to undermine confidence in the Genesis account of Adam and Eve. They claim that humans today are descended from a population of around 10,000 people around 100,000 years ago. However, these estimates are driven by evolutionary models and their inherent assumptions, and so can't be used to prove the very model it assumes.

Moreover, the genetic data can be used to support a straightforward biblical model, including a single starting couple (Adam and Eve), a restriction in the population (Noah's Flood) and a single dispersal across the planet (Babel). So one cannot conclude that the genetic evidence invalidates the Bible, when biblical geneticists have an explanation for the same data⁴.

The Image of God

Adam and Eve were uniquely created in the image of God, unlike the animals and the rest of the



physical creation. Many people try to equate the image of God to human abilities like abstract reasoning, or having a conscience, or the possession of an eternal spirit. But the language used seems to indicate that the image of God is a holistic trait, and therefore it's probably not possible to isolate a group of aspects that are 'the image of God' apart from the whole person. The simplest way to put the biblical concept is that Adam and Eve were created to be like God in certain ways, and to represent Him to the rest of creation as His stewards.

This means that they were endowed with the communicable attributes of God - these are the divine attributes that created beings can also have. They were morally perfect, they had free will, they could reason, and so on. In other words, they had the potential to be as much like God as it is possible for

physical created beings to be. But there are some attributes unique to God, such as unchangeableness, time-lessness, omniscience, omnipresence, and omnipotence. None of these characteristics were given to Adam and Eve even in their unfallen state. They were still subject to their limits as created beings.

The First Married Couple

Adam and Eve since they were the only people to be married before the Fall, they represent God's perfect intent for marriage - one man and one woman united in marriage for life⁵. This repudiates all sorts of sexual sins, from homosexuality to fornication to polygamy.

That Adam and Eve represent God's intent for marriage was illustrated when the Pharisees came to Jesus to ask Him about divorce. The Mosaic Law allowed for a man

to divorce his wife, so the Pharisees were concerned about the conditions under which one could divorce his wife. One way of thinking was that a man could divorce his wife for anything - even something as frivolous as burning his dinner, while others said that only serious sin like adultery warranted divorce.

But Jesus said that both sides were missing the point, because they were looking at a law that God gave to fallen people to limit evil. Basically, Jesus said that God gave them divorce through Moses because their hearts were hard, but that was never God's will in the first place. God's will was reflected in creation when He created Adam and Eve to be married to each other⁶.

Paul also points back to the creation of Adam and Eve, and for him, it's theologically significant that Adam was created first, then Eve, and this affects how the Church should be governed. While this passage is interpreted different ways by various theologians, it's clear that Paul was referring back to the historical fact of the creation of Adam and Eve⁶.

Relationship with God

God created Adam and Eve in His image so that they could enjoy a relationship with Him. They had the capacity to worship Him and commune with Him. They were created completely without sin - they had the ability to conform to God's standards perfectly. But they also had free will, so they were able to choose to disobey. This is important because any meaningful relationship would have needed the possibility of contrary choice.

What Did Adam and Eve Look Like?

Many picture books make Adam and Eve blonde and fair - skinned,

but when we consider that they were the ancestors of everyone who ever lived, it's easy to see that they probably did not look like that. Instead, they had to have a combination of genes that could give rise to all the traits that we see in human beings today (except a few that arose through mutation in localised areas post - Babel) - from very dark Africans to very pale Norwegians, and everything in between⁷.

So most likely Adam and Eve had middle-brown skin, hair, and brown eyes. Just like the parents of the 'two - tone twins⁸', they would have had the potential to have offspring both darker and lighter than themselves. And the genetic evidence⁹ matches what we would expect if we really were descended from two people only several thousand years ago.

The first couple was different from all people who would ever come after them in a couple of ways. First, they were created fully - grown; they were never babies and didn't have to develop through childhood and adolescence. Because of this, they didn't have navels¹⁰ - a navel is a scar where the umbilical cord attached while a person was in the womb. Adam and Eve never had umbilical cords, so they would not have had the scar from it.

And while they were in the Garden of Eden, they didn't have to wear clothes. Genesis tells us that they were naked, but weren't ashamed. Because there was no sin, there was no need for them to wear clothes. This also tells us that the climate was perfect for them, because they didn't need clothes to protect them from cold, heat, or bad weather.

A Perfect Home

Adam and Eve lived in Eden, a garden filled with all sorts of fruit

trees. It was their job to take care of the garden - an easy and pleasant task, and one that made sense, since they benefitted by being able to eat the fruit¹¹. And they enjoyed fellowship with God Himself¹².

While there were many sorts of trees in the Garden, only two are specifically mentioned. The Tree of Life was connected to Adam and Eve's continued immortality (see Genesis 3:22), but the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil was forbidden. They stood together in the middle of the garden.

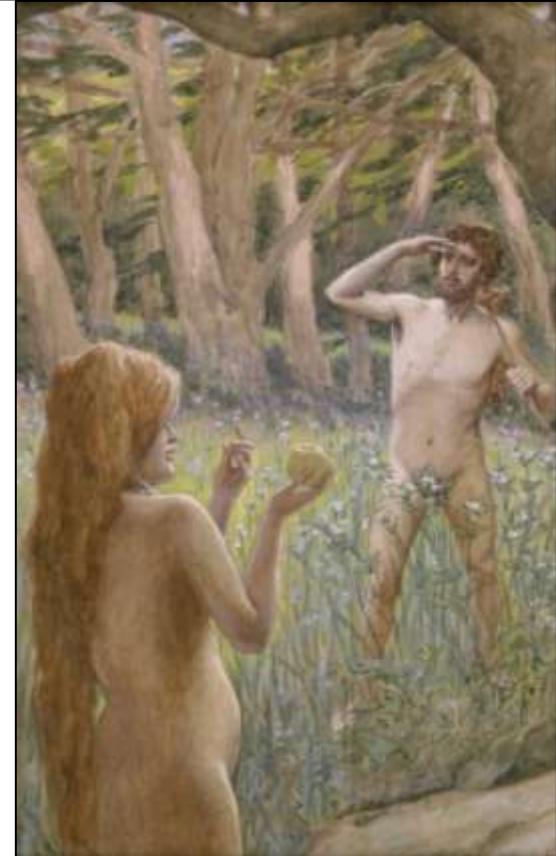
Adam and Eve Were the First Human Sinners

Unfortunately, Adam and Eve weren't in their perfect home for very long. The conditions for their continued stay there were very minimal, but it wasn't long before they began to question God's commands.

The Bible teaches that the serpent¹³, who was the craftiest of the creatures in Eden (and later revealed to actually be Satan; see Revelation 20:2), struck up a conversation with Eve one day, asking her if God had really said that they couldn't eat from any of the trees. What a ridiculous command that would have been!

Eve replied to the serpent that God had said that they could eat the fruit from the trees - just not from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. She said that God had commanded not to even touch it, which was interestingly nowhere in the original command to Adam; perhaps Adam had told Eve not to even touch it.

The serpent contradicted God's warning, saying that she wouldn't die - instead, something wonderful would happen - she would become just like God! He implied that God was depriving them of something



Do Men Have One Fewer Rib than Women?

Some people say that the creation account can't be true, because if it were men would have one fewer rib than women. But this is easily refuted - if a father lost his hand in an accident, would his sons all be born with only one hand?

It's notable that the critic is implicitly endorsing a largely discredited theory called Lamarckianism - inheritance of acquired characteristics. This was disproved even long before modern genetics showed us how traits are usually passed on from parents to children.

But interestingly, Adam may not have had to live his whole life with one fewer rib - the rib is one of the few bones that can regenerate, if it is carefully removed and the surrounding membrane is left intact.

(For more information see Regenerating ribs.)



good by keeping them from eating the fruit.

All this seemed to make sense to Eve - the fruit looked good, and even the name of the tree sounded good - after all, isn't knowledge about good and evil a good thing? So she disobeyed God and ate the fruit.

The text suggests that Adam was standing nearby for all of this, but he didn't intervene. When Eve offered him some of the fruit, he ate it. Right away they began to experience the consequences - they realised they were naked¹⁴, and it made them ashamed. They tried to make clothes out of fig leaves to cover themselves. Sin is why human beings wear clothes, and why nakedness is shameful; see for instance Genesis 9:21–23.

When God came to the Garden that day, they didn't enjoy the fellowship that they had been intended for - instead they were afraid and hid. Sin had separated them from God.

Adam and Eve Were the First to Receive the Gospel

God pronounced judgments on the serpent, Eve, and Adam. Because of sin, the serpent would crawl on his belly and eat dust, Eve and all women after her would have pain in childbirth¹⁵, and Adam and all of his descendants would experience painful toil on the earth until death.

But in the middle of these terrible pronouncements, there is a glimmer of hope. God says to the serpent, "I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel." He promised that a son (or male descendant) of Eve would claim victory over the serpent¹⁶.



We know that Eve received this promise with faith, because of her pronouncement when she had her first son, Cain. Most English translations say, "I have gotten a man with the help of the Lord." But literally, it reads, "I have gotten a man: Yahweh." This would have been cryptic to early readers of Genesis, but from our New Testament perspective, we can guess that Eve had a very sophisticated theology! She knew that the one to gain victory

over the serpent would be man and God. Of course, her theology was badly misapplied. But she applied her theology correctly when at the birth of her son Seth, she said, "God has appointed for me another offspring instead of Abel, for Cain killed him."

The use of "offspring" is the same as in God's pronouncement in Genesis 3. She understood that Seth's line would be the one from which the ultimate Offspring would come.

[END]

Notes:

- 1 See "The Use of Genesis in the New Testament" at www.creation.com/genesis-new-testament
- 2 See "The Bible's High View of Women Grounded in the Creation Account" at www.creation.com/bible-view-women
- 3 See "Regenerating ribs" at www.creation.com/regenerating-ribs-adam-and-that-missing-rib
- 4 See "The Non-Mythical Adam and Eve!" at www.creation.com/historical-adam-biologos
- 5 See "But from the beginning of ... the institution of marriage?" at www.creation.com/but-from-the-beginning-of-the-institution-of-marriage
- 6 See "One man, One Woman: Does the Bible really teach monogamy?" at www.creation.com/monogamy-bible-one-man-woman
- 7 See "Could Adam and Eve have given rise to all the 'races'?" at www.creation.com/adam-eve-races-genetics
- 8 See "Two-tone Twins" at www.creation.com/two-tone-twins
- 9 See "Is 'Mitochondrial Eve' Consistent With the Biblical Eve?" at www.creation.com/mteve-biblical-eve
- 10 See "Did Adam have a Belly-Button?" at www.creation.com/did-adam-have-a-belly-button
- 11 See "Did Adam and Eve Have to Eat Before the Fall?" at www.creation.com/did-adam-and-eve-have-to-eat-before-the-fall.
- 12 See "Was the Garden of Eden a 'sanctuary' from a hostile outside world?" at www.creation.com/eden-sanctuary
- 13 See "The Serpent" at www.creation.com/serpent2
- 14 See "Does God Care What I Wear?" at www.creation.com/clothes
- 15 See "Pain in Childbirth - Result of the Fall or Fear?" at www.creation.com/pain-in-childbirth-result-of-the-fall-or-fear
- 16 See "Eve's Offspring, the Serpent, and His Offspring - Part 1" at www.creation.com/offspring-1

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God Shines Most in Our Messiness



by Steven Lee

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February 2017

A recent bipolar diagnosis shocks the group. Cancer ravages the health of a young wife and mother. An impending divorce threatens to tear apart a marriage, family, and community. A member struggling with same-sex attraction searches for ways to share his struggle. The lone black man in the small group is peppered yet again with questions about racism. The single mom cries out for help with her teenage son. A young couple struggles to accept that they can't have biological children. The widow, married for more than six decades, gropes for reasons to go on. A father of six children shares the news of his recent layoff.

Life is hard and broken. Christian clichés aren't going to cut it in the unavoidable messiness of realities like these.

Community Is Messy

"Let God use the messiness to make you and others more like him."

Christian community — in the local church, in small group, missional community, or wherever else — is messy. If our friends are plunging headlong into a dark place, someone needs to go after them. And we have no quick fixes for the deep wounds we face: depression, anxiety, eating disorders, broken relationships, miscarriage, loneliness, unemployment, deteriorating health, wayward children, death of a parent, disability, and the list literally goes on and on.

Life is messy. For some of us, that scares us to no end. We don't know what to say, what to do, how to engage, or how to help. Many step into community tentatively, secretly hoping it will not be messy. We want good friends, loving community, and easy, comfortable, enjoyable conversation. But the reality is that every true Christ-centered community will have its difficulties.

Christian community, by necessity and design, is messy. We are sinners, the world is broken, and God is at work. In the gospel story he has written, his grace and love shine more beautifully than ever in the messiness of our lives.

Powerful Gospel

The gospel helps us to move from risk-adverse and messiness-avoiding people to those who lean into one another when the pain and confusion come. The gospel transforms naturally self-centered people into those who selflessly serve others. The gospel transforms, over time, a proud and arrogant man into a humble man willing to ask for help. The gospel turns an ingrown, self-absorbed group into one welcoming to the spiritual seeker. The gospel generates generosity in a community to help make the dream of adoption a reality for a couple. The gospel motivates a group to fold a widow in and become her new family. The gospel slowly mends a broken marriage through consistent Bible study, prayer, and encouragement.

In the darkest moments, the gospel of Jesus Christ shines its brightest and most brilliant.

"In the darkest moments of life

and ministry, Jesus Christ shines even more brightly and brilliantly."

The tragic irony is that we hide. We throw a rug over the vomit of our lives sitting in the middle of the room. We withdraw when our blood pressure rises. We recoil when tempers flare. We pull back when we've been offended. We lean away when sin is exposed.

In these moments, we must battle our natural instincts, and trust our growing gospel instincts, to lean into the mess. It's not easy. It's never easy. But as we lean in together with his people, guided by his Spirit, and dependent on his grace and help, God brings hope and healing.

Wanted: Broken People

God always works the mess for good, for those who love him. He has designed the body of Christ such that every member, even the broken ones — especially the broken ones — are needed. In God's plan, the broken and needy ones are often the ones we need most.

The apostle Paul says, "If the foot should say, 'Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body,' that would not make it any less a part of the body. . . . If the whole body were an ear, where would be the sense of smell?" (1 Corinthians 12:15, 17) [ESV]

We need every single part. We need the feet, even those with ingrown toenails. We need ears, mouths, and noses. No part is indispensable. That means we need the broken and hurting among us just as much as we need the spiritually mature. We need those who suffer from mental disability, physical



infirmity, or broken hearts as much as we need those who are doing well and flying high.

Some Sunday mornings, I sit next to a young man who has Down syndrome. He is filled with the joy of Christ and sings with more gusto than anyone around him. He has a bigger smile on his face than anyone I know, and he always greets me heartily. He serves me by reminding me of the excitement and exuberance that should accompany the worship of God with his people. This young man — who has lived all his life with a disability — reveals the beauty of joyful and uninhibited praise. He reminds me worship isn't about me, but God. I need that reminder. I need him.

Lean Into Community

Bearing one another's burdens and forgiving one another is messy. But let God use the messiness to make you and others more like him. "The eye cannot say to the hand, 'I have no need of you,' nor again the head to the feet, 'I have no need of you.' On the contrary, the parts of the body

that seem to be weaker are indispensable" (1 Corinthians 12:21-22) [ESV]

"God does his best work in and through us when we seek to serve one another, especially in our messiness."

Whether you are a hand, a foot, or a big toe with a bunion, the body of Christ needs you. It won't be easy — for anyone — but we need each other, and the reminder that God does his brightest work in our messiness. When we walk with one another through joys and trials, we'll better see the transforming power of the gospel.

God does his best work in and through us when we seek to serve one another, especially when we run out of answers, quick fixes, and clichés, so that we point others directly to Jesus and his cross.

Biography:

Steven Lee is the pastor of small groups and community outreach at College Church in Wheaton, Illinois, where he lives with his wife Stephanie and their four children. He is a graduate of Bethlehem College & Seminary.

Web Address:

www.desiringgod.org/articles/god-shines-most-in-our-messiness



Tantalising Trivia

* Peculiar Presleyisms *



Have you ever seen the stuffed cane toads dressed up in various outfits? Jamie Buchbaum of Cincinnati in Ohio took that concept to a new level with the creation of specialised costumes for cockroaches! One of the critters, that was lovingly named Elvis Proachley, had a microphone and guitar and was appropriately dressed right down to its blue-suede shoes!

There was a Mexican man who called himself El Vez and styled himself on the real Elvis. After the USA issued Elvis postage stamps, the Mexican gentlemen decided to put out his own line of stamps with pictures of himself in a famous Elvis pose. Whereas the US stamps had the usual mild glue on the back, El Vez put different flavours of glue on the back of his stamps including mild chilli, medium chilli and extra hot chilli.

At one time the Lloyd's Insurance Company provided a policy for a Memphis radio station which asked its audience to bring them conclusive proof that Elvis was still alive.

An inventor by the name of Richard Tweddell III developed a plastic garden mould which could be fitted over young vegetables as they were growing. Eventually the vegetable grew into the shape inside the mould, which had been especially developed by Tweddell. His special moulds were shaped like Elvis and he claimed that the vegetables even tasted better...Perhaps he grew some herbs and called it Elvis Parsley.



by Abel Lissnar

July 26BC

Murder of Dozens of Jewish Babies

Standing here amidst the tragedy that has occurred in Bethlehem today, I am appalled at the heinous crime committed against the most innocent of us by King Herod, the man placed into a position of power for our supposed protection.

There are trails of blood and red droplets everywhere on the streets, doorways and walls across this small town. Around me I see women splattered in the bright red blood of their murdered infants, as they hold close the mutilated little bodies, screaming out in their pain, agony, anger and confusion.

There was no warning. Just a single day had elapsed since the departure of the caravan of foreign dignitaries, returning to their homes in the east.

Then a garrison of Roman soldiers arrived here around midday. Going from home to home with military precision, they killed every child they could find to the age of two. Some infants were literally suckling at their mother's breasts, and were torn from them and killed before their mother's eyes.

Anyone who resisted was brutally beaten and some were put to death as they tried to protect their young ones.

The sound of wailing can surely be heard in Jerusalem 9km away. If our great God in heaven is real, then He must also be weeping at the great atrocity committed against His own beloved people, particularly against these innocent little ones.

It's now dusk, and the bright star that reappeared several nights ago in the skies above Bethlehem, has now gone, perhaps dimmed forever by the dark evil behind this merciless deed.

The Motivation for Murder

The last time I found myself in Bethlehem was when Caesar Augusta decreed that all citizens take part in the census. As you remember, we Israelites had to travel to our forefather's birthplace.

I'd been returning to Jerusalem after interviewing people in several surrounding towns and had stopped in this little town on my way home.

It was an odd night - every inn was packed with travellers and late in the evening everyone came outside to witness the bright star which had suddenly appeared

and almost seemed to hang over us. Some swore that its rays were focussed in one area.

On my way back to the inn, I came across an even stranger sight when I stopped in at the stables to check that my horse had been properly cared for. The shelter was filled with shepherds from the local area. One crazy old sheep-herder gleefully claimed that the Messiah had come, suggesting that it was the infant who had been born there earlier that evening to the young couple who'd sought refuge in that dirty place.

Recent Visit by Foreign Dignitaries

In recent days we received news at the Journal's offices that some dignitaries from the east had arrived to meet with Herod.

Sources from within the palace said the men were esteemed, wise and wealthy leaders from their respective countries, and had recognised that the enormous star that had suddenly appeared near Jerusalem those many months before was a portent.

After consulting various texts, writings and charts, they agreed that it was a sign of the birth of a great king, so they planned their long trip to Israel to worship him.

This omen had been the same bright star that I'd witnessed over Bethlehem almost two years ago.

Up until recently, the star had remained steadfast in the sky and we'd become so used to its presence that it was only when it abruptly disappeared that we wondered at its origins and significance.

After travelling for many months the Eastern visitors had finally reached Jerusalem and enquired about the newborn king with several of the city's leaders. Though they'd asked for an audience with King Herod, he remained unavailable.

Sources claim that Herod heard about the reasons for their journey and frantically consulted with the chief priest, head scribes and leading Jewish teachers about prophecies concerning a new king.

The Jewish leaders unanimously agreed that Micah's prophesy spoke of a Ruler who would come from Bethlehem in Judea that would become the shepherd of the people of Israel.

After that Herod agreed to an interview with the men from the east, but we were unable to learn exactly what was said in that private conversation. Later that same day,

the wise-men began to pack up their caravan, servants and camels.

In the evening, the star abruptly reappeared over Bethlehem, blazing in the sky and I felt strangely troubled.

After bribing a Roman soldier, I climbed to the top of the wall and looked southwards towards its light. There, the little town lay, bathed in the brilliant glow of the star. Below me I noticed the caravan making its way towards the town, and I determined to find out more.

Hastily I returned home, packed a bag, took my horse and exited via the Gate of the Essenes and followed them.

Where is the New Jewish King?

By the time I arrived, it was too late in the evening to conduct any interviews. The next morning when I arose, I discovered that the caravan and its wise-men had departed first thing that morning to return home.

Further enquiries led me to the home of a young couple with a toddler who were busy packing their meagre belongings and seemed anxious to be gone. I spied some jars of myrrh and frankincense in their belongings. The young wife quickly covered them up when she saw me eyeing them.

I wondered if this was possibly the same couple that I had seen twenty-two months before in the stable. The man admitted that they'd been in the town the first night the star was seen, but would tell me no more.

When I asked if they'd seen the eastern emissaries, the husband responded evasively, "What would such men want with me, a simple carpenter?"

Soon they were settled on their donkeys, leaving Bethlehem behind them and me with many unanswered questions.

Little did they know how fortuitous their escape had been, for it was just a day later that the massacre of the children took place.

I recalled that first night in Bethlehem, seeing the couple with their new-born baby in the stable, surrounded by shepherds and animals. It seemed appropriate then that if the prophecies could possibly be true, that the child who was one day supposed to become the shepherd of the Jewish people, had first been welcomed to the world and worshipped by simple shepherds.

[END]



A Veritable Miracle: Fine Tuning Without a Fine Tuner



by Rowan Forster

This article first appeared in 'Online Opinion' in December 2014

An edition of ABC TV's science program Catalyst from late 2014 was titled "Custom Universe - Designed for Us?"

Presenter and narrator Dr Graham Phillips began with this observation:

"If some of the laws that govern our cosmos were only slightly different, intelligent life simply couldn't exist. It appears the universe has been fine-tuned so that intelligent beings like you and me can be here. To write off the fine-tunings as mere coincidences seems far-fetched."

But atheists need not have feared that Dr Phillips was heading down a path towards intelligent design. After noting that "some take fine tuning as evidence that God created the universe", he added:

"You can imagine physicists'

horror at the thought!"

From that point on, he gathered a collection of almost uniformly non-theistic theories and opinions from mostly American academics and scientists in fields such as cosmology, astronomy, astrophysics and philosophy. Their contributions included the following, and each was delivered with a perfectly straight face:

"Anything that's possible will happen, right?" (Assoc Prof Charlie Lineweaver).

"It's true; aliens could have created our universe." (Dr Sean Carroll.)

"There is a real possibility that we are living inside some elaborate computer simulation that some futuristic kid has set up in his garage". (Prof Brian Greene).

"What does it matter if the origin of our universe was the big bang or a kid in his garage? We still have life as we know it, I've got my wife and kids, it's fun! I'm just going to live it as if it were real!" (Prof Greene again).

Good to see the detached,

rigorous, selfless, clinically objective, single-minded, scientific quest for truth is alive and well.)

Other enlightening contributions included:

"One explanation of the fine tuning is that's just how it is. Period. End of story. Accept it."

"Fine tuning could be nothing more than a coincidence."

"The reason the sun and moon are the same size in the sky just happens to be a fluke."

Cosmologist and prominent atheist Lawrence Krauss said in one breath:

"It's certainly fine-tuned so we can exist,"

and in the next:

"There is no evidence of design or purpose to our universe."

This apparent contradiction between acceptance of fine tuning and denial of design was not explained. There was no answer to the question, how is fine tuning not indicative of design - apart from it's just a fluke, that's just how it is, and what does it matter?

The one contributor who came the closest to making comprehensible, definitive sense was eminent physicist, cosmologist and astrobiologist Prof Paul Davies. Speaking of the finely tuned fluctuations evident in the formation of the universe, he said:

"They're absolutely crucial. If those variations weren't there, we wouldn't be here discussing it. So there seems to be a sort of Goldilocks zone of density contrast that makes things come out just right."

Elsewhere Prof Davies has written:

"The laws of physics seem to be the product of exceedingly ingenious design. There is powerful evidence that there is something going on behind it all. It seems as though somebody has fine-tuned nature's numbers to make the Universe. The impression of design is overwhelming."

In his book "Ideals and Opinions - The World as I See It," Albert Einstein expressed similar sentiments:

"The harmony of natural law ... reveals an intelligence of such superiority that, compared with it, all the systematic thinking and acting of human beings is an utterly insignificant reflection."

So, can there be "exceedingly ingenious design" without an exceedingly ingenious designer? Can there be so many instances of minutely precise fine tuning without a fine tuner?

In the case of any other observed phenomenon, such questions would be taken as rhetorical. For instance, would we have the four presidential faces on Mount Rushmore without the designers and the four hundred sculptors? Would we have St Paul's Cathedral without Christopher Wren, or the Sydney Opera House without Jorn Utzon? Would we have the Sistine Chapel ceiling without Michelangelo? Or the Messiah without Handel, Beethoven's fifth without Beethoven, Hamlet without Shakespeare, or the

Sermon on the Mount without Jesus? Or as William Paley asked, if we found a watch in a field, would we not assume a watchmaker?

Given the carefully calculated precision, unerring predictability and breathtakingly vast and intricate design of the universe, from sub-atomic particles to far-flung galaxies, it may seem puzzling why most of the scientists who appeared on Catalyst appeared to believe it makes more sense to believe that all of this resulted from a school kid's computer, or aliens, or some random, blind, unplanned, undirected, accidental cosmic fluke. Surely the odds against this would be truly astronomical.

Postscript: One text lists 32 finely tuned parameters in the universe without which life as we know it could not exist. They include factors such as the centrifugal force of planetary movements, the speed of light, gravitational force, electromagnetic force, the oxygen and carbon dioxide levels in the atmosphere, the Earth's distance from the sun, the Earth's gravitational interaction with the moon, the placement of Jupiter to protect the Earth, the thickness of the Earth's crust, the earth's axial tilt, the speed of the earth's rotation, the amount of seismic activity, the ocean to continents ratio, and many more. [END]

Biography:

Rowan Forster is a Melbourne-based writer and journalist. He's a former ABC radio and television news reporter, sports

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Did the King Know the King of Kings?

~ 40 Years Since Elvis's Death ~

by Vicki Nunn

Introduction

Elvis Presley was just forty-two when he died on 16 August 1977. This August marks forty years since his death and in this article we'll look into a portion of his early life, the impact of his music and performances on our society, and delve into answering the question: "Did the King know the King of Kings?"

The church and Christian faith played a significant role in Elvis Presley's life, especially in his formative years. It was in church that he discovered his passion for music, and gospel music in particular, which came to strongly influence his musical style. It was gospel music as well that came to impact his on-stage presence and performance.

Through most of his performing life and recordings, gospel songs and even older-style hymns were so important to him, that he consciously chose to keep them as part of his regular repertoire.

Out of his fourteen Grammy nominations, Presley won three, which were all gospel recordings. His final win was for "How Great Thou Art" on his 'Elvis Recorded Live on Stage in Memphis' album in 1974, just three years before his death.

There is enough evidence to confirm that Elvis Presley believed in God and while many of his Christian fans would like to believe that he was a Christian, we'll look at the available information to see if it's possible to determine the level of his faith, or if he had ever made a commitment to God.

The Early Years

Elvis Aaron Presley was the one surviving twin born to his parents Gladys and Vernon Presley in Tupelo, Mississippi on January 8, 1935. He

was to be their only child, and became particularly close to his mother.

While in Tupelo, the family attended the Assembly of God church where it became clear that the young boy (at the age of two) was keen on music. Gladys his mother recalled that Elvis:

...would slide down off my lap, run into the aisle and scramble up to the platform. There he would stand looking at the choir and trying to sing with them.¹

For his eleventh birthday, he received his first guitar, and while it wasn't the gift he wanted, Elvis received guitar lessons from two uncles and his church pastor, and quickly showed a passion for music, practising and singing every day.

His father Vernon was unsuccessful as a provider in those early years, and the family often had to seek help from others family members to obtain enough money to get by. In 1938, Vernon was sent to jail for eight months for cheque fraud. Perhaps his father's early lack of stability was the leading reason why he developed such a close relationship with his mother.

The Teenage Years in Memphis, Tennessee

The family moved to Memphis, when Elvis was thirteen, and a year afterwards, they shifted into a two bedroom apartment in the Lauderdale Courts which was a public housing complex. The family attended the local First Assembly of God church.

Elvis had been introduced to gospel music through his church attendance at the white church he attended with his parents and later with local black churches that he snuck off to attend. It was from both



Elvis's home when he was born in 1935,
in Tupelo, Mississippi



A very early publicity photo in 1956
for the CBS program Stage Show

of these that he came to develop quite a passion for religious songs along with a remarkable memory for them.¹

Slowly overcoming his shyness and his fear of singing in public, when he was eighteen he performed the new hit song "Till I Waltz Again with You" in the Humes's Annual 'Minstrel' show in early 1953. Of his performance, Presley later said

"I wasn't popular in school ... I failed music - only thing I ever failed. And then they entered me in this talent show ... when I came onstage I heard people kind of rumbling and whispering and so forth, 'cause nobody knew I even sang. It was amazing how popular I became after that."¹

By the time he finished high-school, Elvis recognised that music would be his career. While he was never formally trained, Elvis was keen on many different styles of music, and his knowledge of the blues amazed songwriters Mike Stoller and Jerry Leiber when they first met the nineteen year old singer.

The Early Recordings

Between 1953 and 1954, Sun Records recorded several songs by Presley that weren't successful. He was also unsuccessful in gaining a place as a singer in the Songfellows, a local vocal quartet where he was turned down "because he couldn't sing," though group member Jim Hamill later said it was because Elvis had no ear for harmony.²

Meantime he found a job as a truck driver for Crown Electric and not long after was once again rejected as a singer, this time with Smith's professional band. The group's leader Eddie Bond told him to stick with driving a truck:

"...because you're never going to make it as a singer."¹

Sun Record's boss Sam Phillips began looking for a white singer with the sound of a black performer who would appeal to a larger audience. On 5 July 1954, Phillips asked Presley to

record several songs and brought in upright bass player Bill Black and guitarist Winfield "Scotty" Moore to support the young man's singing.

For several hours Elvis played and sang many songs from his repertoire, but Phillips was still unhappy with the sound. As the evening drew to a close and they were thinking about heading home, Presley picked up his guitar and began to belt out the song "That's All Right." Taking their cue from Elvis as he was jumping around and acting silly, the two musicians joined in the antics. Impressed by what he was hearing, Phillips stuck his head around the control room door, and after telling them to begin again, recorded the music.

Three days later, the song hit the local airwaves and proved so popular that the phone-lines were jammed with callers asking for the identity of the singer. That marked the beginning of Elvis's rise to fame.

There are two world firsts which are attributed to Presley:

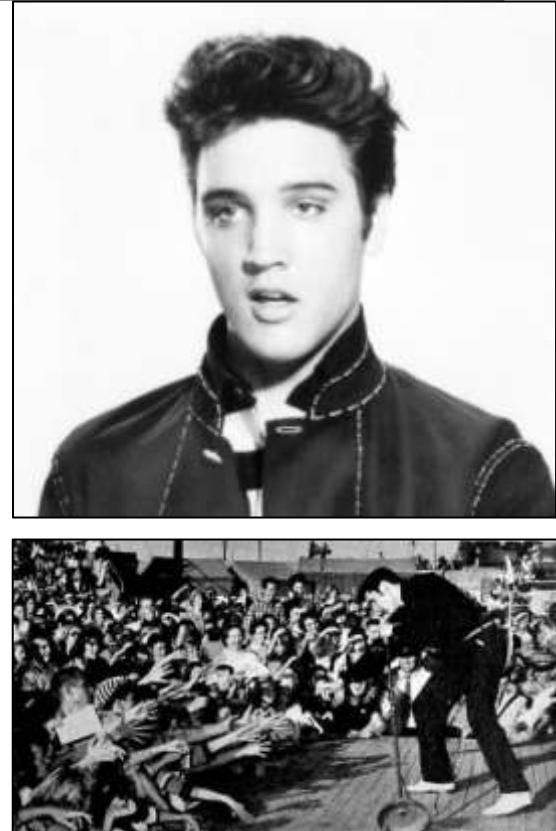
1. It was through his debut album, which featured Elvis singing and playing guitar on the cover, that for the first time, the guitar became the most popular lead instrument in music.
2. When his self-titled album was released on 23 March 1956, it became the very first rock 'n' roll album to reach number one on the Billboard chart.

Along with his music, his style and sound as well as his physical attractiveness, it was these 'firsts' that also contributed to his eventual popularity.

Evidence Supporting Elvis's Belief in God

In the 1950s Presley said:

"I ain't no saint, but I've tried never to do anything that would hurt my family or offend God ... I figure all any kid needs is hope and the feeling he or she belongs. If I could do or say anything that would give some kid



Performing live at the Mississippi-Alabama Fairgrounds in Tupelo, Mississippi, 1956.

that feeling, I would believe I had contributed something to the world."³

In 1957 in a Photoplay interview he said:

"No matter what I do, I don't forget about God. I feel he's watching every move I make. And in a way it is good for me."⁴

Also in that period he said,

"I believe in the Bible. I believe that all good things come from God. I don't believe I'd sing the way I do if God hadn't wanted me to."⁵

When he was dating Dottie Harmony in 1956, she later said

"We used to read the Bible every night, if you can believe that - he used to read aloud to me and then talk about it. He was very religious - there was nothing phony about that at all."⁶

Elvis Presley released the first of several gospel albums "Peace in the Valley" in 1957, and he continued incorporating gospel music in most of his performances until his death, including hymns like "How Great Thou Art."

At a concert in South Bend, Indiana on 30 September 1974, three years before his death, Elvis noticed a sign held up by a fan that read something like "Elvis is the king," to which he responded by stopping the music and saying,

"The thought is beautiful dear, and I love you for it ... I can't accept this kingship thing, because to me there's only one, which is Christ."⁷⁸

He persistently sought the truth of God up until he died, though he was likely diverted from Christian and Biblical truth as he sought wisdom in new age concepts and books on eastern mysticism, encouraged by his guru Larry Geller. In the mid 1960s he was still calling himself a Christian and didn't believe that reading those types of books or looking into spiritualism or numerology was unchristian.

He once said to Geller,

"All I want is to know the truth, to know and experience God. I'm a searcher, that's what I'm all about."⁹

The one thing we do know for sure, is that Elvis Presley never rejected Christianity or God outright. He still occasionally expressed his desire to sing Christian songs and even said to actor Natalie Wood that:

"He felt he had been given this gift, this talent, by God. He didn't take it for granted. He thought it was something that he had to protect. He had to be nice to people, otherwise, God would take it away."¹⁰

At his first Christmas in Graceland in 1957, Elvis's aunt and uncle gave him a Bible which he kept with him all of his life. The bible was sold at auction in 2012 and was found to contain some of his personal thoughts and was well worn which certainly indicates that it was well used. Some of his favourite Bible verses were highlighted including a very telling verse from Luke 9:25:

"For what is a man advantaged, if he gain the whole world, and lose himself, or be cast away?"^{11,12,13}

Evidence Suggesting Elvis Wasn't a Christian

In Steve Turner's book "Hungry for Heaven" we learn that at the height of his rock 'n' roll fame, Elvis visited with his old minister in the late 1950s. Pastor James Hamill was the former minister of the First Assembly of God in Memphis and had known Elvis from childhood when he'd attended his own church.

At their meeting the singer said,

"Pastor, I'm the most miserable young man you've ever seen. I've got all the money I'll ever need to spend. I've got millions of fans. I've got friends. But I'm doing what you taught me not to do, and I'm not doing the things you taught me to do."

The concerned pastor then wrote to the Assemblies of God's General Superintendent saying that Elvis:

"...seems to be caught in a 'web,' spun by Satan and those around him who have suddenly brought him to fame and fortune."

He also recommended that they should pray earnestly for the musical star.⁵

Whereas Elvis had once been quite vocal about his Christian faith and belief in God in the first ten years, by the late 1960s and into the 1970s, those kinds of comments were less frequent in interviews and his discussions. This would certainly suggest that he had fallen far from the faithful, naive and God-fearing young man of those early years.

When Elvis first met his guru Larry Geller in April 1964, they talked for a couple of hours, and during that conversation the singer confessed,

"I swear to God no one knows how lonely I get. And how empty I really feel."¹⁵

This suggests why he endeavoured to find truth and fulfilment in other religions and concepts, including books such as Timothy Leary's "Psychedelic Experience."



Elvis Presley with his backup group for many years, The Jordanaires in 1957



Elvis and other recruits, being sworn into military service

Geller encouraged him to read books on theosophy, positive thinking, meditation, Judaism, Hinduism as well as Christianity, and Presley spent hours reading them, trying to find the purpose of his life. Whenever he went on tour, he took a large number of metaphysical books with him.

Despite his desperate search to fill that void, it appears that it was never fulfilled in any of the alternative religions or concepts Elvis pursued, but then neither did he seem to be able to fill that emptiness with Christ.

Living in the unreal and bizarre world of celebrity and fame; imprisoned in hotel rooms or his home because he was mobbed by fans wherever he went; taking copious amounts of drugs just to function; unable to live a normal life like anyone else; and seeking the illusive promise of contentment and peace that was alluded to in mysticism and other metaphysical topics; Elvis was a lost man.

The books the star read were often about quite complex topics and while they seemed to suggest that he might find purpose and peace through them by providing deep insights, the fact that he continued reading further, suggest the Presley was never able to achieve the kind of contentment he so desperately sought.

Instead of going back to the simple childlike faith suggested in the Bible, Elvis instead filled his mind with more and more knowledge, and less and less peace, and instead of drawing closer to God, the distance between them seems to have grown.

Elvis's Impact on the Younger Generation

There was much written in the media and elsewhere in the mid to late 1950s sharing extreme concerns about the impact of rock 'n' roll on the youth of the day. While it's difficult for those of us who weren't around in that era to understand or even imagine the sheer hysteria about rock 'n' roll music and Elvis which gripped the younger generation at the time. It alarmed leaders and parents because they believed it encouraged sexual promiscuity, depravity and even violence.

Historian Marty Jezer wrote,

"As Presley set the artistic pace, other artists followed... Presley, more than anyone else, gave the young a belief in themselves as a distinct and somehow unified generation - the first in America ever to feel the power of an integrated youth culture.¹⁶"

Many churches preached against rock 'n' roll, particularly in light of concerns with dancing, its links to sensuality and its impact on the moral fibre of believers. One southern church leader said that Elvis was leading the youth on a "march of destruction.¹⁷"

In some places rock 'n' roll music was banned on jukeboxes, and police stopped dances where the music was played.¹⁸ Even the phrase 'rock 'n' roll' was a direct reference to the act

of sex,¹⁹ and a Times writer in 1956 wrote that Elvis's "movements suggest, in a word, sex.²⁰" Cultural studies scholar Erika Doss said that "Elvis clearly violated mainstream sexual roles²¹" of the time.

Several religious leaders such as David Wilkerson, author of 'The Cross and the Switchblade' were very vocal and scathing in their attacks on Presley. Wilkerson commented that

"...rock 'n' roll was a godless cult,"

"Satan is now staging a rock and roll rally!"

"Satan has used rock and roll to imitate the work of God at Pentecost!"

"It's a supernatural manifestation from hell!" and

that Elvis "...received power from below.²²"

Elvis wasn't oblivious to the moral concerns being expressed about him and his music and knew that he was a particular focus of their attacks. He was distinctly uncomfortable with any negativity about him, particularly when he felt it was unwarranted, and his need to please others was one of the driving forces of his early life.

On January 6, 1957, he deliberately chose to perform the gospel song "Peace in the Valley" as part of his third performance on the Ed Sullivan Show. During that rendition, the camera focussed only on Elvis's body above the waist so that the viewers would not be concerned that he might make 'vulgar' movements with his hips. It was an attempt by Presley to placate the rising concerns of public leaders and parents who believed that he was a wicked rebel who wanted to destroy the morals of American youth.¹⁹

The concerns about the morality of rock 'n' roll music and its impacts weighed heavily on the minds of Elvis and several of his contemporaries at the time, especially those who like Elvis, had attended charismatic



Elvis wiping down the Company "D" sign (around 1958)



Elvis in the tank division in Germany.

churches and even sung there in their youth. Each were likely influenced by mixed-race services where up-beat music, clapping, dancing and even speaking in tongues was the norm.

Various writers have written on this subject and how it contributed to what the artists chose to record and perform, and sometimes impacted on how they conducted their life.²³

In an interview in October 1957 just prior to his appearance at the Pan Pacific Auditorium, Los Angeles, the singer was asked by interviewer Dolores Diamond of 'Dig Magazine,' why he moved his hips the way he did and Elvis replied,

"I wasn't aware of what I was doin' until people told me. I just sing like they do back home. When I was younger, I always liked spiritual quartets and they sing like that.²⁴"

She then asked how he felt about the critics who accused him of inciting juvenile delinquency. Presley replied

"I don't understand it. Delinquency to me means robbing, knife

fighting, and things like that. I've done nothing to cause that and I'd never set up a pattern like that for others to follow ... I always try to conduct my personal life to set a good example for them (my fans). I think about this all the time.²⁴

There were other church leaders though who didn't believe the publicised negative propaganda and one even applauded Presley for his abstinence from alcohol and cigarettes. In 1957 Rev Milton Perry, leader of Jersey City's Deliverance Temple noted that Elvis came from:

“...a home of Orthodox ‘sanctified Pentecostal’ parents who taught a boy to love and fear God.”²⁵

Rev Perry, a black minister who was quite vocal about racial equality, was impressed by the singer's conduct including Presley's beliefs on racial issues and his involvement with a local charity for orphaned black children²⁵.

Elvis had always believed in equality, possibly beginning with his love of music by black artists for whom he developed a deep respect. In a 1956 interview he shared about listening to the blues musician Arthur Crudup in his childhood. Presley said:

“...if I ever got to the place where I could feel all old Arthur felt, I'd be a music man like nobody ever saw.”²⁶

Interestingly, rock 'n' roll was having a positive impact on the integration of whites and blacks, at a time when a significant portion of the white population, particularly in the south, didn't want to change the status quo, preferring to look down on black people in their communities, a 'race of people' that they considered inferior.

In an interview in 1958, the Director of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference and civil rights activist, Minister Andrew Young said,

“...rock and roll did more for integration than the church and if I was going to choose who I was going

to let into the Kingdom ... I might have to choose Elvis.” He thought that “...Presley was a major bridge between the white and black worlds.²³

In a 1986 article, the soul singer Al Green who came from the south and loved listening to Elvis who had became popular when he was a child, said

there's a “...distinctive spirit in the South ... slaves didn't have much of anything, but they had God, and when they sang, what they sang was for Him, and it had meaning, and it had feeling.”²⁷

In an interview in 1972, Elvis said of his early church music experiences,

“We used to go to these religious singin's all the time. There were these singers, perfectly fine singers, but nobody responded to 'em. Then there were these other singers - the leader wuz a preacher - and they cut up all over the place, jumpin' on the piano, movin' every which way. The audience liked 'em. I guess I learned from them singers.”²⁸

Elvis's Middle Years

At that time, American men were expected to participate in the US Selective Service System for two years of active service, and four years in the reserves even though there were no conflicts at the time.

After his application to the military, Elvis was eventually conscripted to the army in January 1957. While both the navy and the air-force offered him special treatment he declined, preferring instead to be a normal G.I.

He deferred his application to complete the movie "King Creole," and then officially joined in March 1958.

In August the same year, his mother grew seriously ill and Elvis took leave to be with her. His mother died shortly after of heart failure at the age of forty-six. Presley was devastated. He had such a close relationship with her that from what



A publicity photo for the 1957 film “Jailhouse Rock”

we know of him, it's likely he never quite overcome her loss.

During his two year stint in the army, RCA continued to put out previously unreleased tracks of Elvis's that they'd accumulated in preparation for his absence, and despite no new recordings during his army stint, Elvis had a further ten top forty hits.

It was an enormously stressful time for the young man, unable to freely walk the streets of Friedberg, Germany where he was stationed, for fear of being mobbed. He had to hire bodyguards at his rented home for protection.

His sequestered lifestyle meant that he was unable to enjoy the simple pleasures that many young men from his unit took for granted, even though most nights he slept with a different girl. It led to greater feelings of intense loneliness which he never seemed to overcome in his life.

There was pressure from US leaders and the army for him to curb his behaviour, and after the exciting lifestyle prior to his service, the mundane army routines were likely to contribute to feelings of boredom and isolation. Additionally he was still mourning his mother.

It was during this time that Presley was introduced to amphetamines while on manoeuvres, and he came to enthusiastically believe that they were a great benefit to him by providing extra strength and energy.^{29,30} This was likely the source of his long-term drug addiction.

While a jeep driver with the tank division of the third Armored Division in Friedberg, Elvis met fourteen year old Priscilla Beaulieu whose stepfather was stationed there. What began as an innocent attraction and friendship, grew into a seven and a half year courtship. According to Priscilla, Presley maintained a chaste distance from the young girl until their wedding night.

From 1960 after completing his stint in the army was ended, Elvis had several more hit songs and recorded his first LP of sacred music called "His Hand in Mine." Despite the fact that the album wasn't rock 'n' roll, pop or country music, it reached number three in the UK and number thirteen in the US music charts, a remarkable achievement.

It was in the 1960s, that Presley's music output declined due to his heavy movie schedule, with up to three films in a year. The majority of the films were formulaic and uninspired, including the music-tracks and grew progressively worse with each year.

By 1967, although he wasn't enjoying his work he stayed on because he'd been contracted to complete the movies. Much to his frustration, because of his Manager's agreement with the film studio, he had no control of either the scripts or the songs.

By 1967, now in his early thirties and growing more distressed about the awful movies and songs in which he was featured, Elvis became so depressed that he turned to food for comfort.³¹ Packing on over ten kilograms just prior to commencing filming of *Clambake*, he was ordered

by film studio executives to lose the weight immediately.³²

It was likely at this point that diet pills were added to Presley's growing list of daily medications, a crutch upon which he'd continue to rely so that he could indulge in comfort food, in an attempt to mollify his deepening unhappiness.

Between 1965 and 1968, he had only one hit song. Many in the public no longer believed in him or his music, he lost many of his former fans, and some people thought that he'd simply lost his way. Some looked upon him as a joke after the prolifically awful movies and Elvis's songs. This was partially evidenced by the increasing failure of the movies and the songs and how decreasing numbers went along to see the films.

Don Siegel, the Director of one of Presley's only two dramatic roles "Flaming Star," was not impressed by his manager's handling of Presley's movie career. While the director believed in the young man's natural acting ability, later in 1971 referring to Colonel Parker, Siegel said:

"...he has not handled Elvis well as far as being an acting star. Elvis is kind of a joke in the industry as an actor."³³

This period contributed to the star's increasing stress levels and a driving desire to regain his popularity, and perhaps as a means of regaining the feeling that he had a purpose.

On 1 May 1967, after meeting more than seven years earlier, Elvis married Priscilla Beaulieu at the Aladdin Hotel in Las Vegas. Exactly nine months later, their only child Lisa-Marie was born.

During those first months of their marriage while Priscilla was pregnant, Elvis persisted in philandering and when confronted by his wife, denied it. Elvis spoke about separating from Priscilla two months before the baby was due but later changed his mind. Their marriage had



Elvis and his co-star Juliet Prowse in a publicity photo for *G.I. Blues* (1960)

all the markings of failure before it had barely begun.

Due to ongoing decline in sales, and the continuing failure of his albums, Presley's manager Colonel Parker turned his attention back to television. Elvis recorded a show in Burbank, California in June 1968, which eventually aired that December. It became known as the "68 Comeback Special."

The show was so successful that the album reached the top ten in 1969. Elvis was back!

Thrilled at his renewed success, Elvis continued recording and in June 1969 released "From Elvis in Memphis," and it was another success. Delighted, Presley agreed to perform fifty-seven shows in just four weeks at the International Hotel in Las Vegas, an enormously heavy schedule for any performer, and likely had a negative impact on his young marriage.

Elvis's Last Years

It is probably the latter half of Elvis Presley's life that is more well-known to most of us: his failed marriage, his drug use, poor health and early death paint a picture of man whose life was out of control. It is also during this period where to all appearances, he seemed to have

almost completely turned from his faith and his belief of God.

Although Elvis was enjoying a resurgence in his popularity and performing in public, his marriage was strained to breaking point. While Elvis told Priscilla that he loved her, it didn't discourage him from regularly sleeping around, and it's likely that she would have heard the talk about his many infidelities.

The heavy touring schedule contributed to the relationship breakdown as well. By 1971 after Elvis's affair with Joyce Bova, the couple were barely speaking and were no longer living together.

They officially separated in early 1972, and Elvis wasted no time in bringing home his new girlfriend Linda Thompson to live with him. Yet when the divorce was finalised in October 1973, it stilled rocked him to the core. Joe Moscheo of the Imperials (Elvis's backing group) said that Presley's marriage failure:

"...was a blow from which he never recovered.³⁴"

In February of the following year while performing, four men rushed the stage to attack him. The incident increased Elvis's stress and resulted in signs of extreme paranoia.

What Contributed to Elvis's Decline in Health?

For many years Presley resisted alcohol and recreational drugs. In the 1970s showgirl Cassandra Peterson encountered him when he was working in Las Vegas. She said:

"He was so anti-drug when I met him. I mentioned to him that I smoked marijuana, and he was just appalled. He said, 'Don't ever do that again.'³⁵"

Presley rarely drank because he'd seen several of his family members become alcoholics, and wanted to avoid the same outcome. He was against recreational drugs, not recognising that prescription drugs could be just as addictive and deadly. He was popping handfuls of pills a day - uppers to be able to perform,

downers to sleep, painkillers and more.

While Elvis had always been anti-drugs, in his own mind he believed that junkies were people who used recreational drugs, but didn't consider that anyone was a junkie if they took prescription drugs as he did.³⁶ When friends tried to bring the matter to his attention, Elvis would grow angry or simply dismiss their concerns, claiming that he had the drugs under his control.

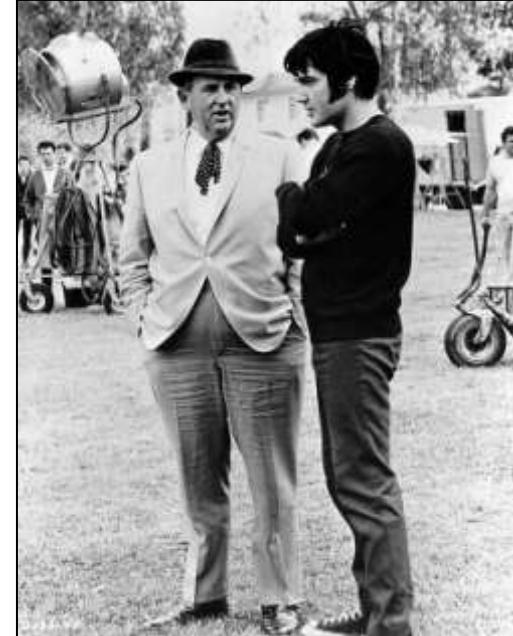
In 1973, after overdosing on barbiturates, Elvis was in a coma for three days and later in the same year was hospitalised due to a pethidine addiction.

Despite his increasing health issues and drug addiction, he agreed to more live shows in 1973 and 1974, with Colonel Parker booking more performances than ever before. There was further pressure between 1973 and 1976 with the singer recording around six more albums.

His unhealthy lifestyle also flowed into his eating habits and he became well-known for his partiality to southern fried foods³⁷ and Elvis' sandwiches were another example, although some of the stories that circulate have likely been exaggerated or made-up.

His health continued to decline and there was a further blow in August 1972, when three of Presley's former bodyguards who had been fired by his manager Colonel Parks, were about to release the book "Elvis: What Happened?" in which they spoke about his drug addiction.³⁸

In late 1976, he split-up from his girlfriend Linda Thompson and afterwards began cohabiting with his new girlfriend Ginger Alden. By early 1977, he was very unwell and losing a battle with his weight. Despite his determined efforts to meet his touring commitments, he often had to curtail his concerts, and disappointed fans at his concerts with his inability to perform well. At some, when he



Elvis and his Manager Colonel Tom Parker in 1969

spoke, he was impossible to understand due to the drugs and his poor health.

To comprehend what else contributed to Elvis's life spiralling out of control, we need to learn a little about what was going on in the background, particularly in relation to his Manager, Colonel Tom Parker and those who became known as the Memphis Mafia.³⁹

When Colonel Parker first began his association with Presley, he may have had every intention of doing what was best for the young singer, but as the years passed and more money was coming in, this appears to have degenerated into outright greed and exploitation.

Over the years, Colonel Parker increased his control over Elvis's career and by 1967 was taking fifty percent of the income from Presley's films, merchandise and recordings⁴⁰. By February 1972, Parker retained a third of the profits from the star's live appearances and increased that to half of the fees by early 1976⁴¹.

Parker appeared to have little concern for what Elvis wanted and seemed entirely focussed on what would bring in the most money, rather than what was best for the singer's career.

Parker's influence overlayed into more areas of Presley's life as well, such as refusing to renew contracts with people who he thought were influencing Elvis too much or by demanding higher stakes in the royalties of Presley's music collaborators. Additionally, Parker's negotiating tactics or sometimes his outright refusal to provide information to Elvis about offers he'd received for movie roles for him, ensured that as his manager, he retained his power over the artist's career and earnings.

Elvis wasn't ignorant of Parker's control, but did nothing about it. His inaction was possibly fuelled by fear, particularly after the downturn in his career in the sixties, and the likely shame of failure. Having grown up 'dirt-poor,' he had no wish to return to that condition nor subject his father, friends and family to living out their years in squalor."

Another reason may have been the star's increasing unhappiness and likely depression from which he was possibly experiencing limited enthusiasm and energy levels. This would also have made it more difficult for him to think clearly, let alone considering wrestling the strong-willed and domineering colonel for control.

According to Rolling Stone magazine, another major contributor to Elvis's stress levels and depression was his own father. Elvis had given control of his personal finances to Vernon Presley who was not only unqualified to do the job, he was also bad at it.

By the late 1960s and early 1970s, Elvis wanted to quit many times due to his unhappiness, rising self-doubt and dissatisfaction with his life and career.

His finances were so poorly managed and due to Elvis's undisciplined spending, the star found himself in debt. On top of that were expectations from his family and friends that he would continue to

support and help them, which forced him to give up any idea of quitting, at least until his finances were under better control.

At the same time, due to Parker's domination, Elvis was often unknowingly forbidden from collaborating with music writers of which Parker didn't approve and so Elvis's opportunity to sing new material or further develop his style was stunted.

In addition, Presley's desire to explore more serious acting roles and to improve his performing abilities were denied him.

These ongoing restrictions deprived Presley of the opportunity to develop his creative side which caused him considerable frustration, particularly as he was a virtual prisoner when he wasn't performing.

According to his wife Priscilla:

"Elvis detested the business side of his career. He would sign a contract without even reading it.³¹"

Marty Lacker one of Elvis's friends from the 'Memphis Mafia,' believed that Colonel Parker was:

"...a "hustler and a con artist. He was only interested in 'now money' - get the buck and get gone.⁴²"

The 'Memphis Mafia' were his closest circle of 'friends' who gained enormous control over him.³⁹ Journalist John Harris said that the singer was:

"Surrounded by the(ir) parasitic presence," and

"It was no wonder that as he slid into addiction and torpor, no-one raised the alarm: to them, Elvis was the bank, and it had to remain open.⁴³"

The pianist Tony Brown, who played regularly with Elvis during the final two years of his life, saw the singer's continuing decline. While those who really cared for him wanted to help him, they were unable to get close because of the Memphis Mafia.

Brown said:



Elvis and Priscilla in 1968 showing their newborn Lisa Marie to the public

"But we all knew it was hopeless because Elvis was surrounded by that little circle of people ... all those so-called friends.⁴⁴"

In an attempt to justify the group's influence, one of these 'friends', Marty Lacker, later claimed that Presley:

"...was his own man. ... If we hadn't been around, he would have been dead a lot earlier.³⁰"

Elvis Presley's Death

By August 1977, Elvis Presley's body was failing him. He had several serious conditions including liver damage, an enlarged colon, glaucoma, an enlarged heart, and high blood pressure. These may have been caused by, or at the very least contributed to, by his persistent use of large quantities of prescription drugs.

On 16 August 1977, when he was due to fly out to Memphis for a tour, his girlfriend Ginger found him found unconscious on the bathroom floor. Though attempts were made to resuscitate him, he was pronounced dead at the Baptist Memorial Hospital at 3.30pm.³⁰

The cause of death was listed as cardiovascular disease, though two later lab reports suggested polypharmacy may have been the main cause of his death, ie the overuse of prescription drugs. One report determined that there were "fourteen drugs in Elvis' system, ten in significant quantity."³⁰

What More Do We Know of Presley's Faith?

In one of his very early interviews in August 1956, Elvis spoke about a

green scrapbook his mother kept about him from newspaper clippings. He sent her the negative media comments and articles he came across so that when he returned home he could read them to see if there was some areas in which he needed to change or improve.

At one time there was a disapproving newspaper comment which claimed that while he'd started in a church choir, Elvis had forgotten all about his religion, so Elvis cut it out and sent it to his mother. Referring to it he said,

"I expected they'd start saying things like that. About me not being religious, I mean ... Well, I'm not exactly sure what they mean by 'religious' in that article ... so if they mean just going to church regularly makes you religious, then I guess I don't fit up to what they want. But I want you to know this. I believe in God, I believe in Him with all my heart. I believe all good things come from God. That includes all the good things that have come to me and to my folks. And the way I feel about it, being religious means that you love God and are real grateful for all He's given, and want to work for Him. I feel deep in my heart that I'm doing all this. And I pray that if I'm wrong in feeling the way I do, God will tell me. Because I owe everything that's happened to me to Him.⁴⁶"

Around the same time, when asked about if he'd changed since he'd become famous, Elvis replied:

"I feel the same now as I did five, ten years ago. The only difference I've felt since then is happiness, and that things have gotten better for me ... that God has blessed me and that He's given me a lot of the wonderful and good things in life. I hope I won't change. I hope I'll never be like some of the people I've seen, who forget that they never could have been successful or happy at all without God's help.⁴⁶"

Vernon Presley's Comments

In 1978 after Elvis's death, his

father Vernon was interviewed by Good Housekeeping:

"Elvis and I both wondered, over the years, whether his life would have been drastically different had his (twin) brother lived. I've concluded that it wouldn't have been, because I believe Elvis's career and contribution to the world were fated from the first. For during his early life, certain things happened which convinced me that God had given my wife and me a very special child for whom He had some very special plans."

Gladys and I were so proud of Elvis and enjoyed him so much that we immediately wanted more children. But, for reasons no doctor could understand, we had none ... There was no medical reason why my wife didn't conceive again, but she didn't.

When Elvis was about ten years old, the reason was revealed very clearly to me in a way that I can't explain - I can only say that God spoke to my heart and told me that Elvis was the only child we'd ever have and the only child we'd ever need. Elvis was a special gift who would fill our lives completely ... As soon as I realized that Elvis was meant to be an only child, I felt as though a burden was lifted. I never again wondered why we didn't have additional sons and daughters...

I was a deacon in the Assembly of God Church in East Tupelo and used to take Elvis to church with me every Sunday. Later, after we moved to Memphis, he was baptized into my church, yet neither the Assembly of God nor any denomination ever owned him completely..."

Vernon said that when Elvis was about six years:

"...he had developed acute tonsilitis with such high fever, he was on the verge of convulsions... Our doctor admitted that it was hopeless. 'Maybe you should call another doctor' ... My wife and I turned in prayer to the greatest healer of all, God. I do believe in prayer. I do believe in miracles, so



that day I prayed to God that He would miraculously heal our child ... by that night, I could see that Elvis was better. God had worked the miracle we'd asked for, again reassuring me that our son's life was special.

I don't mean that I knew that Elvis was going to be famous ... A person doesn't have to be a singer or a movie star or a president to fill an important role in the world. He can be a truck driver or a farmer or anything else and make his contribution. I only knew that Elvis had a contribution to make one way or another, that the Lord seemed to have His hand on him...

I am more heartbroken than I can express over Elvis' death, yet I'm comforted by the sure knowledge that my son was a gift from God and his life was always in God's hands. From one point of view, I would have wished him to live forever, yet I know that his early death, like all of his life, was a part of God's plan. I thank God that He blessed me with such a son.⁴⁷"

Conclusion

By all the evidence we've seen, it's clear that there were many factors which contributed to Elvis Presley's death including stress and overwork, strong grief due to his mother's death and his divorce, probably depression due to grief and other stressors, overuse of prescription drugs, possible mental instability, poor health habits and much more.

It is his faith in his later years though on which we are focussing, so

can we answer the question, "did the king know the King of Kings?"

Elvis's appears to have declined markedly, from the trusting, naive and joyous young singer that he was in his late teens and early twenties, to the lost, bloated, dazed, drugged, and at times incoherent and lack-lustre performer of his final months.

When I began this article I was surprised to learn about his early faith, as it was something that wasn't publicised in his final years when I was a teenager. Then I stumbled across a couple of surprising articles by Rev Rex Humbard and another by his stepbrother, Rick Stanley.

Rick was the son of Elvis's stepmother, the woman his father Vernon married after his mother's death. When Elvis was in his mid twenties, six year old Rick came to live with his family at a house next to Graceland.

When he was about seventeen, Rick (and eventually his younger brother David) became Elvis's aides.

Rick Stanley was a messed up, drug-addicted teenager by the time that Elvis died, and though at first he was angry at God for his stepbrother's early death, it was just two months later that he became a Christian and eventually cleaned up his life. Stanley is now a Christian pastor.

According to Rick, Elvis asked the television evangelist Rex Humbard and his wife Maude Aimee to see him after a show in Las Vegas (several months before his death.) Humbard confirmed this in a later interview, and said that in between shows, the three went into a quiet room and spoke on spiritual matters and prayed. Humbard took hold of Elvis's hands and said:

"Elvis, right now I want to pray for you."

Elvis replied "Please do," and began to cry.

Maude Aimee told Elvis:

"...If you fully dedicated your life

to God you could lead millions of people into the kingdom of the Lord."

Humbard said that Elvis began to weep, and the three held hands as they prayed. Then Elvis rededicated his heart to God.^{48,49}

A couple of months later, just two days before his death, Elvis's stepbrother Rick overheard Elvis praying:

"God, forgive me for my sins. Let people have compassion and understanding of the things I have done."

Then on the final night of his life, he heard Elvis pray:

"Dear Lord, please show me a way. I'm tired and confused, and I need your help."^{50,51}

While it's clear that Elvis lived a sinful, self-indulgent life, he was also a man who earnestly sought to know God, even if it was in the wrong places. He came to realise that they weren't able to satisfy the emptiness in his heart and soul and that nothing but God could fill that space.

In Psalms there is assurance for those who seek Him:

"For the Eternal will be a shelter for those who know misery, a refuge during troubling times. Those who know Your name will rely on You, for You, O Eternal One, have not abandoned those who search for You."

Psalms 9:9-10 [VOICE]

In Romans chapter two it speaks about those who have not heard the good news about Jesus Christ and know in their hearts and minds the difference between what is right and wrong.

I refer to these verses because it suggests that God will judge people on their hearts and specifically on their efforts to live decent and honourable lives. It also suggests that God will judge people on their desire to know Him and their efforts to seek Him:

"If one lives life without knowledge of the law - the teachings of the Torah - he will sin and die apart from



President Richard Nixon presents Elvis with a pair of cufflinks at the Oval Office, 1970

the law. If someone else lives life under the law, his sin will be judged by what the law teaches.

Here's my point: just because a person hears the law read or recited does not mean he is right before the one True God; it is following the law that makes one right, not just hearing it.

For instance, some outsiders who are not required to follow the law often live quite naturally by its teachings. Even though the law wasn't given to them, in themselves they have the law. Here's the thing: their lives demonstrate that God has inscribed the law's teachings on their hearts. On judgment day, their consciences will testify for them, and their thoughts will both accuse and defend them. This good news given to me declares that this affirmation and accusation will take place on that day when God, through Jesus, the Anointed One, judges every person's life secrets."

(Romans 2:12-16) [VOICE]

Was Elvis a Christian? Did he really turn to God in those weeks before he died?

Thankfully, it's not my place to make that judgement.

If Rick Stanley and Rex Humbard's testimonies are accurate, then more important than an answer to that question is the fact that we know the King of Kings knew him.

If Elvis is now in heaven, he will at last know contentment, peace, love and belonging with our forgiving and loving heavenly Father. [END]

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Reasons why it's good to be single:

Reason No. 34

At least when I'm talking to myself,
I'm guaranteed of an intelligent
and witty conversation
... well at least a witty conversation
... well, I can grunt.



Psalm 31:1-5

You are my shelter, O Eternal
One - my soul's sanctuary! Shield
me from shame; rescue me by Your
righteousness.

Hear me, Lord! Turn Your ear in
my direction. Come quick! Save me!
Be my rock, my shelter, my fortress
of salvation!

You are my rock and my
fortress-my soul's sanctuary!

Therefore, for the sake of Your
reputation, be my leader, my
guide, my navigator, my commander.
Save me from the snare that has
been secretly set out for me, for You
are my protection. I entrust my
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redeemed me, O Eternal, God of
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Wonda of Wisdom

"Love and ever more love is the only solution to every problem that comes up.

If we love each other enough, we will bear with each other's faults and burdens. If we love enough, we are going to light a fire in the hearts of others.

And it is love that will burn out the sins and hatreds that sadden us. It is love that will make us want to do great things for each other. No sacrifice and no suffering will then seem too much."

Dorothy Day



My name is Luda. I was born in Soviet Ukraine. In 1991, when the Soviet Union collapsed, many people, including my family, lost all their savings.

Many people lost their jobs. Those who managed to keep their job were not paid for months and months. I remember times when my Mum was paid March salaries in October. We were able to survive because we had land and could grow vegetables, fruit and grain. The only treat we would get when Mum was paid (once a month) was a tin of instant cocoa drink. I could never have imagined shelves of lollies and chocolates.

Me, my sister and brother hadn't had brand new clothes for years. We used to wear hand-me-downs and had to look after the clothes well if we wanted to be dressed. When Mum could buy us clothes, it was usually at least three sizes bigger, so we could wear it for a few years. In the tallboy I shared with my siblings, I had one shelf that fit all my clothes. That is how little I had.

Our toys were either wooden or stuffed. Between me and my siblings we had one box of toys. When I was about 11 years old, my mum bought me a cheap version of the Barbie doll. I looked after it like it was my most precious possession, as I knew I would not get a new one if that one broke (no matter the excuse). I rarely went to the toyshop. Shelves were full, but they had exactly the same item on every shelf, every time. I think they changed them monthly. So, one month there were skipping ropes on all the shelves, next soccer balls, then hula-hoops and so on.

There were times when the only thing we would get for Christmas were homemade cookies. There were never boxes and boxes of presents under our tree.



Luda and the Jewellery Set



Then, one Christmas at church, when I was about 13, I was given a green and red box. I was told that it came from the United States of America and had a special Christmas present just for me. I was very excited to open it. Inside were coloured pencils, toys, a t-shirt, some sweets, personal hygiene items and a card from the person who packed the box. One of the presents I received was a beautiful jewellery set (earrings and a bracelet), which I still have 17 years later.

I still remember the joy and excitement of receiving that special box. It was a great blessing to me and my siblings, who also received the shoeboxes full of goodies.

I was very grateful to the people who had spent their money to make my Christmas much happier. I still am. I treasure those memories in my heart and keep a part of the gift as a reminder that I need to help those less fortunate.

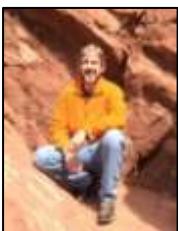
I arrived in Brisbane eight years ago to visit my boyfriend and stayed. I call Australia home now. When I first heard about Operation Christmas Child at Beenleigh Baptist Church, I knew I would be packing boxes for other children to spread some love and happiness.

I will keep doing it for as long as I live. It does not cost much to make someone feel very special. [END]



Now would be a good time to start getting your boxes ready. For more info go to: www.samaritanspurse.org.au/what-we-do/operation-christmas-child/

X-Plan: Giving Your Kids a Way Out



by Bert Fulks

First appeared on
Empty Stone,
February 2017

I get to spend an hour each week with a group of young people going through addiction recovery. Yes. Young people. I'm talking teenagers who are locked away for at least six months as they learn to overcome their addictions.

I'm always humbled and honoured to get this time with these beautiful young souls that have been so incredibly assaulted by a world they have yet to understand. This also comes with the bittersweet knowledge that these kids still have a fighting chance while several of my friends have already had to bury their own children.

Recently I asked these kids a simple question: "How many of you have found yourself in situations where things started happening that you weren't comfortable with, but you stuck around, mainly because you felt like you didn't have a way out?"

They all raised their hands.

Every single one of them.

In the spirit of transparency ... I get it. Though in my mid-forties, I'm still in touch with that awkward boy who often felt trapped in the unpredictable currents of teenage experiences.

I can't count the times sex, drugs,



and alcohol came rushing into my young world; I wasn't ready for any of it, but I didn't know how to escape and, at the same time, not castrate myself socially. I still recall my first time drinking beer at a friend's house in junior high school—I hated it, but I felt cornered.

As an adult, that now seems silly, but it was my reality at the time. "Peer pressure" was a frivolous term for an often silent, but very real thing; and I certainly couldn't call my parents and ask them to rescue me. I wasn't supposed to be there in the first place.

As a teen, forcing down alcohol seemed a whole lot easier than offering myself up for punishment, endless nagging and interrogation, and the potential end of freedom as I knew it.

X-Plan

For these reasons, we now have something called the "X-plan" in our family. This simple, but powerful tool is a lifeline that our kids are free to use at any time. Here's how it works:

Let's say that my youngest, Danny, gets dropped off at a party. If anything about the situation makes him uncomfortable, all he has to do is text the letter "X" to any of us (his mother, me, his older brother or sister). The one who receives the text has a very basic script to follow. Within a few minutes, they call Danny's phone. When he answers, the conversation goes like this:

"Hello?"

"Danny, something's come up and I have to come get you right now."

"What happened?"

"I'll tell you when I get there. Be ready to leave in five minutes. I'm on my way."

At that point, Danny tells his friends that something's happened at



home, someone is coming to get him, and he has to leave.

In short, Danny knows he has a way out; at the same time, there's no pressure on him to open himself to any social ridicule. He has the freedom to protect himself while continuing to grow and learn to navigate his world.

This is one of the most loving things we've ever given him, and it offers him a sense of security and confidence in a world that tends to beat our young people into submission.

However, there's one critical component to the X-plan: Once he's been extracted from the trenches, Danny knows that he can tell us as much or as little as he wants ... but it's completely up to him.

The X-plan comes with the agreement that we will pass no judgments and ask no questions (even if he is ten miles away from where he's supposed to be).

This can be a hard thing for some parents (admit it, some of us are complete control-freaks); but I promise it might not only save them, but it will go a long way in building trust between you and your kid.

(One caveat here is that Danny knows if someone is in danger, he has a moral obligation to speak up for their protection, no matter what it may cost him personally. That's part of the lesson we try to teach our kids - we are our brother's keeper, and sometimes we have to stand for those too weak to stand for themselves.



Beyond that, he doesn't have to say a word to us. Ever.)

For many of us parents, we lament the intrusion of technology into our relationships. I hate seeing people sit down to dinner together and then proceed to stare into their phones. It drives me nuts when my kids text me from another room in our house. However, cell phones aren't going away, so we need to find ways to use this technology to help our kids in any way we can.

Since first publishing this piece, I've seen an incredible amount of discussion about the pros and cons. Here are some of the questions folks have had:

Doesn't This Encourage Dishonesty?

Absolutely not. It actually presents an opportunity for you as a parent to teach your kids that they can be honest (something DID come up, and they DO have to leave), while learning that it's okay to be guarded in what they reveal to others.

They don't owe anyone an explanation the next day, and if asked can give the honest answer, "It's private and I don't want to talk about it." Boom! Another chance for a social skill life-lesson from Mom and Dad.

Does This Cripple a Kid Socially Instead of Teaching Them to Stand Up to Others?

I know plenty of adults who struggle to stand up to others. This simply gives your kid a safe way out as you continue to nurture that valuable skill.

What if This Becomes Habitual?

If you're regularly rescuing your

kid, hopefully your family is having some conversations about that.

If you don't talk about it or ask questions, how do they learn?

If you're building a relationship of trust with your kids, they'll probably be the ones to start the conversation. More importantly, most of these conversations need to take place on the FRONT-side of events.

Ever taken a cruise? They all make you go through the safety briefing in case the boat sinks. They don't wait until the ship's on fire to start telling you about the lifeboats. Talk with them. Let your kids ask questions and give them frank answers.

If They're Not Where They're Supposed to Be, Shouldn't There Be Consequences?

Let's be honest. A kid in fear of punishment is a lot less likely to reach out for help when the world comes at them. Admitting that they're in over their heads is a pretty big life-lesson all by itself. However, don't get so caught up in all of the details.

This isn't a one-size-fits-all scheme. Every parent, every kid, and every situation is unique. What it might look like in your family could be totally different from mine - and that's okay.

Conclusion

I urge you to use some form of our X-plan in your home. If you honour it, your kids will thank you for it.

You never know when something so simple could be the difference between your kid laughing with you at the dinner table or spending six months in a recovery centre ... or (God forbid) something far worse.

At the end of the day, however, the most important thing is that you're having some open, honest discussions with your kids. Keep building a relationship of trust.

This isn't the same world we grew up in. It's not like sneaking a beer at Billy's house anymore. Our kids face things on a daily basis that - given one bad decision - can be fatal. Don't believe me? I've been to funerals for great kids from awesome families.

Friends, it's a dangerous world, and our kids are out in it every day.

Prayers for strength and compassion to the parents out there as we all try to figure out this whole parenting gig - it never gets easy.

I beg you to share this piece. Talk about it with your kids. If this somehow gives just one kid a way out of a bad situation, we can all feel privileged to have been a part of that. [END]

(As seen on The Today Show, Mamatia, HerViewFromHome, Good Housekeeping, ScaryMommy, MomsEveryday, The Huffington Post, and numerous social and news media outlets.)

Biography: Teacher. Speaker. Business Owner/Manager. Writer. Musician. Founder/Director/Knucklehead, Empty Stone Ministry. Humble, wild-eyed follower.

Over 25 years ago, Bert began his journey into lay ministry (youth ministry; teaching Sunday school; leading camps/ retreats; praise band leader; ministry through drama and comedy; small group ministry; speaking to addiction recovery groups). Empty Stone Ministry grew from a time of desperate brokenness, in which along with God's healing came this particular mission.

Web Address:

www.bertfulks.com/2017/02/23/x-plan-giving-your-kids-a-way-out-xplan/





by Joseph F. Kolapudi
SPAG Journalist

Introduction

Over time, many people, especially in both Christian and academic circles, have asked the question: what are the apocryphal books, and do we even need them?

Far from being merely a historical question, this question digs deep into the antiquity, accuracy, and acceptability of literature that can be considered apocryphal in the first place.

One thing is for certain, the plausibility of using apocryphal books to add depth and meaning to a particular text, including Scripture, remains valid, even today.

What Are Apocryphal Books?

To examine this further, the definition of what even constitutes a text being 'apocryphal' needs to be considered. According to the Merriam-Webster dictionary, apocryphal¹ refers to a story or text of doubtful authenticity, often referring to or resembling the collection of writings known as the '*Apocrypha*'.

The Apocrypha is almost like the 'alternative canon' to the sixty-

six books that we know as the Bible, which form the authoritative canon. The canon itself has been subject to controversy over the years, and this is still is an ongoing argument.

As history shows, the formation of the Old Testament Canon and the New Testament canon occurred during different periods.

The Canon

The Old Testament was compiled from rabbinical teachers who began to piece together the Scriptures under three major subsections:

1. the law, or 'Torah', which included the book of Genesis through to Deuteronomy, also known as the Pentateuch;
2. the Prophets, which included the Book of Joshua, Judges, 1st and 2nd Samuel, 1st and 2nd Kings, and Isaiah through to Malachi; and lastly
3. the Writings, from the Book of Psalms, also known as the Psalter, Job, Proverbs, Ruth, Song of Solomon, Ecclesiastes, Lamentations, Esther, Daniel, Ezra, Nehemiah, and 1st and 2nd Chronicles.

These books were not categorised according to linear

time, but rather according to the theme or classification of the book, whether it was to do with matters of the law, or prophetic texts, or writings. As this was the case, it was not until around 100 A.D. that the Old Testament canon was finally completed².

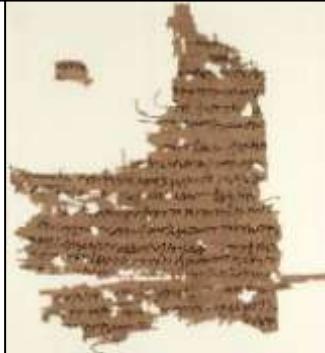
The New Testament, however, had a lot more revisions than the Old Testament, particularly due to the time period in which it was formed, which was still under the Roman rule of power.

One of the earliest recorded lists of the New Testament books was compiled by Marcion in approximately 160 A.D., a native of Pontus near the Black Sea, who was later excommunicated by the church as a heretic³.

According to Marcion, the Jewish canon was for the Jews only, and was not applicable to the Christian church, as the covenantal law was specifically made for the nation of Israel.

As a result, the formation of the first canon according to Marcion only consisted of the Gospel according to Luke, and the letters written to the churches by the Apostle Paul.

Later on, the church was challenged to form a more



'Susanna and the Elders,' etching by Lucas van Leyden

Part of the Septuagint text of the Story of Susanna

The Song of the Three Holy Children from the Bowyer Bible

The Gospel of Mary was found in a 5th century papyrus codex written in Sahidic Coptic

An illuminated manuscript from 1 Maccabees from the 12th century

complete canon, which was eventually drawn up by Eusebius, bishop of Caesarea, in 325 A.D., which came to be referred to as the Muratorian Canon.

That same year, the Council of Nicea came together to address certain heretical texts and theories that were to be debated and ultimately rejected.

Finally, in 331 A.D., it was the Roman emperor Constantine, (himself a Christian), who arranged for the publishing of a number of Bibles by Bishop Eusebius.

Why Do Apocryphal Books Still Exist?

So why is it, that even after both the Old Testament and New Testament canons were formed, that apocryphal writings still exist today?

Interestingly enough, some of the apocryphal books are referred to in the canonical books themselves. One of the reasons for this is due to the fact that Jewish writers were also great readers, relying on a variety of texts and historical literature, mainly due to the fact that at the time, there was no canon in existence. Hence, the writers of Scripture were able to access these additional writings and refer to them in their own writings as well.

This is exactly why the Roman

Catholic Church and Protestant Church began to make the distinction between their accepted canon; the former included the Apocrypha, which the latter did not.

Furthermore, the difference between extra-canonical, or extra-Biblical books, and the Apocrypha, became much more apparent.

As the extra-canonical books were excluded from the canon we have now, they became almost like an additional reading list, though they were not required as relevant reading material within the context of the church.

These are still considered important by some; as they are referred to within Scripture itself. Here are some of the numerous examples:

Bible Books	Apocryphal Book to which it refers
2nd Samuel & Joshua refer to	Book of Jasher
2nd Chronicles refers to	Story of the Prophet Iddo
1st & 2nd Chronicles	Book of Nathan
1st Chronicles	Book of Gad the Seer
2nd Chronicles	Book of Jehu & Sayings of the Seers
Jude & 2nd Peter	Book of Enoch

The Apocrypha itself became a point of contention within the

church, as to which books should be included and accepted alongside Scripture. In the end, the Catholic canon included these books: Wisdom of Solomon, 1st and 2nd Maccabees, Tobit, Bel and the Dragon, Judith, and Baruch. These make up the Apocrypha. However, there were certain extra-Biblical books that were not included in the Apocrypha itself, though referred to within the apocryphal books, which are:

Song of the Three Holy Children	Prayer of Manasses
History of Susannah	1st & 2nd Esdras
3rd & 4th Maccabees ⁴	

Despite the questions still surrounding the acceptability of the Apocrypha in current times, when most don't fully understand the canonical text, let alone any additional writings, what is for certain is that the apocryphal texts themselves are worth reading.

From a personal standpoint, I have read some of the apocryphal book myself, and they are quite interesting and very informative. However, discrepancies in certain sections of the text, as well as contradictions to the canonical books are easily recognisable, not to mention the historical divide that distinguishes the two.

As it stands, the apocryphal writings are worth reading, but not as a replacement to the



The Lost Apocrypha of the Old Testament

Page from the Book of Enoch in Greek

A page from the Book of Baruch

An engraving from the early 14th century showing debate about the books

Eleazar's exploit as described in 1 Maccabees 6:45

Scriptures themselves.

Some of the early reformers, including Martin Luther, had issues dealing with some of the claims of canonical Scripture, especially the latter half of the New Testament, which included books such as Jude, Peter and Revelation. According to Luther, these books should not have been included in the canon, whereas certain books in the Apocrypha ought to have included⁵.

Others, such as the Jewish historian Josephus, rejected the Apocrypha outright and clung to the canonical Scriptures. Nevertheless, it can be seen that both hold the valid point that the canon, regardless of which books are included or not, is vital to the strengthening of faith and a great encouragement to those who read it.

Although the Apocrypha includes a lot of incendiary ideas, perhaps it is necessary to examine these in light of Scripture as we know it, in order to discern the differences and learn from them.

It is an elementary notion to think that the Apocrypha holds no standard of truth and should be eliminated completely, instead, those who do read it should perhaps do so with a grain of salt.

The search for truth is still

something that people have been looking for ever since the age-old question was asked by the Roman proconsul Pontius Pilate, "What is truth?" Indeed, how one approaches this, what is worth believing, and how the truth is often portrayed are all aspects that one must consider when examining the truth itself. Only then can one truly believe.

Choosing whether to believe that the Apocrypha is authoritative or not is certainly at the discretion of the reader, since throughout the history of the church, this has been a timeless, age-old question that has plagued the minds of many.

However, examining the evidence, it can be concluded that although not 'Scriptural' in the sense of the word, the Apocrypha should be considered historical reading that is beneficial for further study alongside Scripture itself.

As time has proved that the truth alone triumphs, the litmus test of history points to the fact that the past does have an effect on the present reality, as well as future events.

What we choose to believe is of imperative importance that has a bearing on our lives and on the lives of those around us. To this

end, we ought to heed the words that Scripture reveals to us, and be mindful of the fact that as we continue to move toward a time when truth is seen as relative and lesser than, those who firmly believe the truth are more than blessed.

The canonical relevancy of the Bible shows this to be true, despite notions to the contrary that seek to distract and detract from this reality. For the truth uplifts those who believe in it, and inspires those who seek it. It is this conviction that inspires others, as it is the truth that indeed sets us free. [END]

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¹ Apocryphal (n.d.), https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/apocryphal?utm_campaign=sd&utm_medium=serp&utm_source=json_ld, accessed 19/05/17.

² Kent, C., The Formation of the Old Testament Canon, http://biblehub.com/library/kent/the_origin_and_permanent_value_of_the_old_testament/xiii_theFormation_of_the.htm, accessed 19/05/17.

³ Hoover, R., How the Canon was Formed, <https://www.westarinst.org/resources/the-fourth-r/how-the-canon-was-formed/>, accessed 19/05/17.

⁴ The Old Testament Canon and Apocrypha., <http://www.bible-researcher.com/canon2.html>, accessed 19/05/17.

⁵ Why Do Some Bibles have a section called the Apocrypha? <https://www.biblica.com/bible/bible-faqs/why-do-some-bibles-have-a-section-called-the-apocrypha/>, accessed 19/05/17.



Introduction to Sirach,
codex sinaiticus from
4th century

Judas Maccabeus Pursues Timotheus from
1 Maccabees 5:28-44

The Testaments of the
Twelve Patriarchs

Judith with the head of Holofernes
from Judith chapter 14

In the second books of Esdras, the prophet dreams of a
three-headed eagle



The Creative Urge: I've Learned to Go With the Shunts

by Margaret
Frost

Introduction

What does that mean, to 'go with the shunts?' It started when I was just a very young Christian, God teaching me to trust His 'Shunts.'

You may know what I mean - in the middle of doing something, the thought comes, "Get the washing off the line."

"What?" I respond.

If I don't heed the Shunt, five minutes later it's raining and I'm kicking myself.

I have learnt over the years to go with His, "Hey listen to me!" Shunts.

Obedience to the Word and His leading and guiding is a lifelong journey of learning to trust and obey. Peace in every facet of our being depends on this. To be fully who I'm designed to be, relies on this.

"For You shaped me, inside and out. You knitted me together in my mother's womb long before I took my first breath."

I will offer You my grateful heart, for I am Your unique creation, filled with wonder and awe.

You have approached even the smallest details with excellence; Your works are wonderful; I carry this knowledge deep within my soul.

You see all things; nothing about me was hidden from You as I took shape in secret, carefully crafted in the heart of the earth before I was born from its womb.

You see all things; You saw me growing, changing in my mother's womb;

Every detail of my life was already written in Your book; You established the length of my life before I ever tasted the sweetness of it.

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

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

Psalm 139:13-18 is very inspirational for me because I see God creating, putting me together in my mother's womb. I am very visual so I imagine in my mind's eye, Him deciding what

would be my talents and abilities to be included in my makeup.

He gave me a very strong creative gift and that has expressed itself in many different ways over the years. Besides art, God's Shunts have led me to explore ceramics, ticket writing, sewing, patchwork and patchwork patterns, designing and making special event clothing for clients - very exciting stuff for me!

Many times an opportunity presents itself, a 'shunt,' and after I get over the thought, "You've got to be kidding me!" If I then decide to give it my best shot, I know full well from experience, my learning curve is then going vertical. Only He knows what I am capable of, and what I am not. (I certainly did not get the technology app installed at my conception, I know that for sure.) I am a Creative and at the moment an Artist - who knows what else He has in store for me?

The Keys

This year I came across an advertisement for the Mandorla Art Award. Australia's most significant thematic Christian Art Prize. This year's theme was 'The Resurrection'. The main prize was \$25,000! Was this a Shunt?

I looked at the prize winners from the previous award and I was totally and absolutely intimidated. What on earth could I do? The answer came, "Hands



and keys." But how? Months went by and nothing I thought of seemed right. I did nothing!

I went to the biblical concordance and there it was: the words I had been given!

"I'm alive, I died, but I came to life... See these keys in my hand? They open and lock death's doors, they open and lock Hell's gates."

Revelation 1:18 [MSG]

Just weeks before the due date I decided to 'give it my best shot' and see what happened. The painting would be of life size pierced hands holding the keys: life size, so people could relate to the size, and maybe imagine how it would have felt if it had been their hands.

What sort of hands was the question? I took photos of hands, my husband's, my son's and mine. They had to be big capable hands, and as my son, a boilermaker said, "his fingernails would be really short" Jesus was a carpenter by

trade, and used to hard work. The work had started.

'The Keys' was chosen as a finalist out of hundreds!!! It was sold on opening night and then 'The Keys' was also chosen to go on tour.

Only God knows the outcome of going with the Shunts. I stand in awe!

Go With the Shunts!

Recently I started a painting and then realised it was suicide related.

There is a lot in the news at this time and I had lost a brother to suicide a long time ago as well. I had a Shunt to create a positive response to the dark thoughts that attack the mind. I also had my own perfectionist pressure to make sure it was right. A life could depend on it.

So I asked questions about the wisdom of the wording I wanted to use. That in hand, I finished the painting, '...but what to do with it

now?' was the question.

Weeks later we were asked to pray for a guy who was suicidal. I wondered if this was the reason for my painting? I could give it away to someone who had need of it.

So I broached the subject with his friend and the painting was delivered to the guy. I was later told that he was stunned that it was exactly what his therapist had told him to get: something bright coloured, with encouraging wording he could see every day.

He was blown away that someone had painted it for him, and kept saying "I do not deserve this!" He put it up where he could be encouraged by it every day.

How good is God!? I was thrilled and so very humbled to be part of what God was doing. Go with the Shunts!

Learning to Trust God

Do I always get it right? The answer is no. I'm like everyone



"The Keys" by Margaret Frost

The Resurrection - The Keys

"I'm Alive. I died, but I came to life ... See these keys in my hand? They open and lock Death's doors, they open and lock Hell's gates."

Revelations 1:18 [MSG]

Christ's rough carpenter's hands, pierced by a cruel crucifixion, holding the keys to Death and Hell for which he willingly paid the ultimate price on the cross. He showed the holes in his hands as evidence.

Heaven's golden key, resting on his belt, has the eleven apostles and Jesus at the top in pearls surrounding the heart of God, with the cross which opens the Way.

The coarse fabric in his robe, because Mary at the tomb on the third day thought he was the gardener.

The black background gives way to the Light of Life and the proof of His Lordship.

else in the 'Learning to trust God's Leading' class - learning as I go. Knowing when I get it wrong I am not condemned but forgiven and helped back up again. In fact, years ago, I was asked to be our Aglow treasurer but gave it up when my husband said he was not doing it again! That was another app I did not have installed at conception.

I learn a lot and each day is a new day to practice. Putting God's word into action is a long term process for every day

application. I want to hear the words:

"Well done, good and faithful servant, you have used every talent I gave you."

Conclusion

What if you think you have no talent! I beg to differ! Please read Psalm 139:13-18 as I did.

We are all unique - think about that! 'One of a kind,' put together in our mother's womb with all sorts of gifts and talents to delight our heart and His. Seek them out!

Ask yourself, "What do I love to do?" Start a list and see where it takes you: building stuff; making stuff; cooking; music; singing; numbers; words; or whatever floats your boat.

We have a marvellous Creative God who wants us to explore who we really are and make the most of what he has given us. Not a copy of someone else! A totally individual unique you!

I have no idea what I am capable of, but He does, and I do not want to miss a thing! I know that it gives Him joy when I follow his leading and guiding as His child. So I will

continue to go with the Shunts.

I want Him to happily say:

"That's my Girl!"

[END]

Biography:

For as long as I can remember I've had a strong God-given creative gift, that has joyfully expressed itself in many ways; drawing, painting, ceramics, designing and making patchwork wall hangings and Special Event clothing. More recently I have started painting seriously again. I enjoy working in watercolour but also use acrylic, ink, watercolour pencils, and pastels, appreciating each for their versatility.

I was the winner of the Local Artist Award in the 2012 Rio Tinto Alcan Martin Hanson Art Awards (Gladstone).

My visual representation of the industrial activity in the Gladstone region, 'Hi Vis Invasion', is included in the Gladstone City Art Collection.

My paintings hang in business premises and private homes both locally and overseas.

I'm a member of the Art Street collective and on-line gallery.

www.artst.com.au/artist-margaret-frost.html

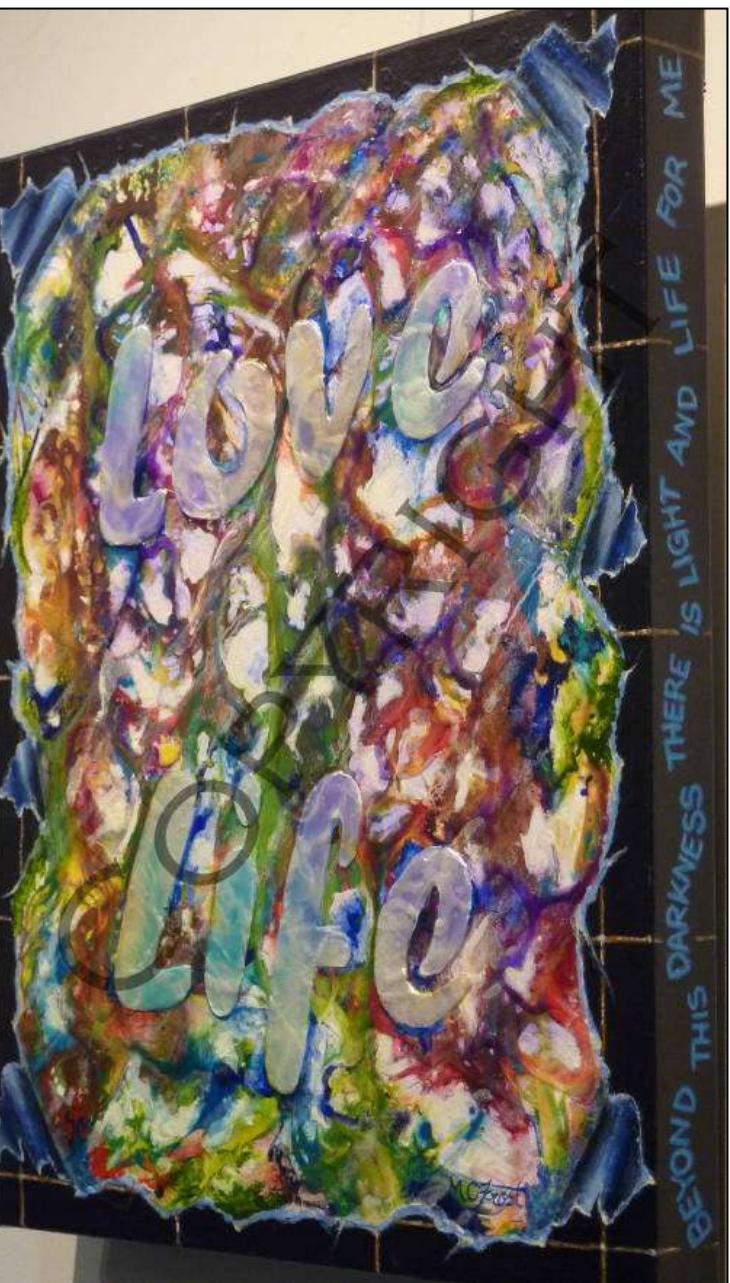
I've used a diverse range of subjects for my works from nature to abstract. I am inspired by anything that hits my emotional button at the time and needs to be explored.

I continue to learn and grow as an Artist and am looking forward to what the future holds. Life is such an adventure when I explore the possibilities.

This quote by Danny Kaye inspires my creativity:

"Life is a great big canvas, and you should throw all the paint on it you can."

"The Struggle" by Margaret Frost





MAIN COURSE:

Avocado, Bacon and Eggs (serves 2)

Ingredients:

1 whole avocado
2 long pieces of streaky bacon
One boiled egg
Toothpicks for holding bacon in place while cooking

Instructions:

Boil the egg in water, peel and set aside

Halve the avocado, remove the seed then gently remove the skin. Place the boiled egg in the hole where the seed was and then press the two halves of the avocado together.

Wrap the avocado in the bacon and pin in place with toothpicks as needed.

Fry in coconut oil (or butter) until the bacon is cooked through, then serve with a salad or vegetables of your choice.



LOW-CARB RECIPES

Easy recipes for one or two people, with regular supermarket ingredients. All recipes have been tried and tested, right in Christie's Kitchen!

DESSERT:

Crème Sirop D'érable (serves 2-3)

(Maple Syrup Creamy Dessert)

Ingredients:

1½ tsp gelatine
½ tbsp natural vanilla
½ tsp stevia (100% stevia, eg Sweet Leaf)
100-120ml boiling water
600ml full-fat (heavy) cream
Sugar-free maple flavoured syrup

Instructions:

Pour the hot water into a bowl and quickly whisk through the gelatine until dissolved. Add in the stevia and the vanilla and whisk in. Slowly pour in the cream and whisk it through.

Wipe the inside of the ramekins with a little butter of coconut oil. Pour the cream mixture into individual ramekins and place into the fridge to set for at least 3 hours. When ready to serve, place a bowl or plate over the top of the ramekin and gently tip the ramekin over. (If you have trouble getting it out, run hot water over the outside of the ramekin.)

Finally pour a good drizzle of sugar-free maple flavoured syrup over the top, being mindful that the sauce can often be intensely sweet.

Alternate berry topping (instead of maple syrup):

You'll need to give yourself an extra 3-4 hours to set the berry component. Begin with the berry part first. Whisk 1½ tsp of gelatine through 100-120ml of hot water. Purée a cup of berries then mix through the hot water and gelatine and add a little stevia if you like it a bit sweeter. Oil the ramekin, pour in the berry sauce and set in the fridge for 3-4 hours. Once set, follow with the creamy part of the dessert as shown above.



Puzzle Page

PUZZLE 1: The Bald and the Beautiful Word-search

Step 1: This word-search is made more difficult by the fact that you have to figure out FIRST the names of thirty-two (32) people in the Bible who were tall, short, beautiful, handsome, were hairy, had long hair or were bald, as well as those who the Bible mentions were bearded. Keep track of how many names you find, so you can be sure to find all 32 of them in the list.

Note that four of the men listed have both their Jewish names and Babylonian names included separately in this list (totalling eight names.)

You might like to team up with a friend and challenge each other to see who can find the most complete list.

Step 2: Lastly, locate their names in this puzzle. Note that the names may also read upside down and back-to-front.

*** To get you started, here's an easy name, though you might stumble on his alternate name. Do you know the name of the handsome Israelite who spent a night with some hungry lions? This man also had an alternate name given to him by the king of Babylon, and this name is included separately.*

M	H	L	E	I	N	A	D	A	S	L	E	M	H	U	B	R	B	L	R	D	S	L	O
A	H	U	I	H	N	E	I	E	S	V	E	S	U	D	E	S	A	Q	E	T	H	K	H
K	H	A	S	S	E	L	V	M	E	E	I	U	T	C	L	A	U	S	A	A	C	T	J
E	O	S	I	H	E	E	A	H	S	H	A	N	M	H	T	E	A	M	B	B	A	I	E
O	H	G	I	R	A	B	D	I	O	N	I	S	S	A	E	M	A	I	A	I	H	E	S
E	E	N	E	L	A	D	G	A	M	Y	R	A	M	N	S	R	S	H	L	G	S	E	U
G	A	I	H	N	E	Z	R	R	S	A	U	G	V	O	H	H	E	O	S	A	E	Y	S
E	A	K	I	N	D	D	A	A	H	A	N	A	N	I	A	H	G	B	M	I	M	A	I
Z	Z	A	C	C	H	E	U	S	C	A	S	L	S	G	Z	G	H	L	E	L	M	O	A
R	A	I	S	D	N	E	B	U	C	H	A	D	N	E	Z	Z	A	R	S	K	C	A	E
S	N	M	O	L	A	S	B	A	T	H	S	H	E	B	A	D	O	N	I	J	A	H	I
O	L	H	A	J	I	L	E	I	K	E	Z	E	H	E	R	B	A	L	M	L	I	H	S

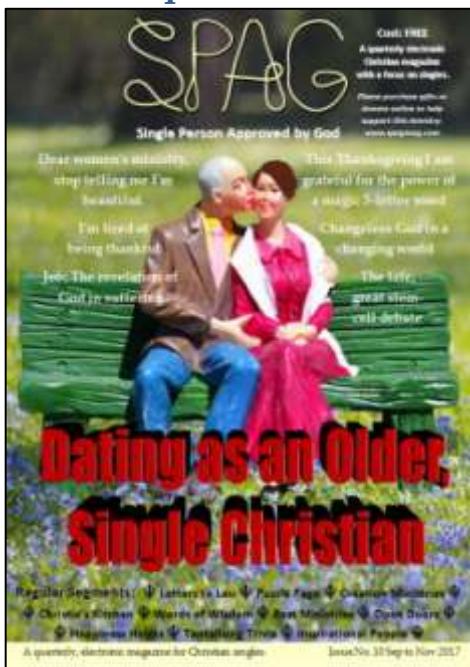
PUZZLE 2: Utterly Unusual and Unique Words

Can you determine the five following unique English words by their description?

1. A nice easy one to begin - this is the only word in the English language that ends with the letters 'mt,' and refers to something that occurred during the night.
2. This word is almost the opposite of the previous, because it's the only English word that begins with 'tm,' and describes inserting one or more words between one word to make a new phrase or word, eg adding the word 'so' between 'whatever' and we get 'what-so-ever.'
3. This unusual word has three Ys in it and describes a rare astronomical event, ie when three celestial bodies align in a row such as the sun, the moon and the earth.
4. Can you think of an English word that possesses x, y and z in their correct alphabetical order? This unusual word is a medication which was developed in the 1950s that helps reduce anxiety and discourages sneezing!
5. This common five letter word sounds like a letter of the alphabet. Its first meaning was completely different to its current meaning. It originally referred to the tail of a mythical beast in paintings from the Medieval period, but later with some French influence, it became the meaning of something often quite annoying, that we know today.

Answers on next page.

Next quarter's issue:



"**Cheap grace** is the grace we bestow on ourselves. Cheap grace is the preaching of forgiveness without requiring repentance, baptism without church discipline, communion without confession... Cheap grace is grace without discipleship, grace without the cross, grace without Jesus Christ, living and incarnate.

Cheap grace, is to hear the gospel preached as follows: "*Of course you have sinned, but now everything is forgiven, so you can stay as you are and enjoy the consolations of forgiveness.*" The main defect of such a proclamation is that it contains no demand for discipleship.

In contrast to cheap grace, costly grace confronts us as a gracious call to follow Jesus, it comes as a word of forgiveness to the broken spirit and the contrite heart. It is costly because it compels a man to submit to the yoke of Christ and follow him; it is grace because Jesus says: 'My yoke is easy and my burden is light.'"

Dietrich Bonhoeffer

Puzzle Answers

PUZZLE 1: The Bald and the Beautiful Word-Search - names and locations within the puzzle (see puzzle layout table below on the left):

<i>Handsome Men</i>	<i>Beautiful Women</i>	<i>Long Hair</i>	<i>Other Physical Traits</i>
Mishael (V9, NW) Meshach (<i>ie Mishael</i>) (V8, N)	Hananiah (J8, E) Shadrach (<i>ie Hananiah</i>) (D3, SE)	Esther (L1, SE) Abishag (U3, SW) Bathsheba (H11, E) Rebekah (Q6, SE) Queen Vashti (S2, SW) Tamar (U2, SW) Sarah (later Sarah) (I9, N) Abigail (U3, S)	Absalom (I11, W) Nebuchadnezzar (F10, E) grew long hair after he went mad Samson (S3, SW) was tall with long hair Samuel (P6, NW) had long hair because he was a Nazarite Mary Magdalene (N7, W) had long hair which she used to wipe Jesus' feet
Daniel (H1, W) Belteshazzar (<i>ie Daniel</i>) (P1, S)	Adonijah (P11, E) David (King) (H5, N) King Saul (C8, N) was both tall and handsome Moses (J6, N) was handsome as a baby		Jesus (X3, S) was bearded Ezekiel (M12, W) was bearded Elijah (H12, W) was hairy Esau (O10, NW) was hairy Elisha (F7, NW) was bald Goliath (R8, NE) was tall Zaccheus (B9, E) was short
Azariah (H8, NW) Abednego (<i>ie Azariah</i>) (I11, NW)			

A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L	M	N	O	P	Q	R	S	T	U	V	W	X
1 M H L E I N A D A S L E M H U B R B L R D S L O																							
2 A H U I H N E I E S V E S U D E S A Q E T H K H																							
3 K H A S S E E L V M E E I U T C L A U S A A C T J																							
4 E O S I H E E A H S H A N M H T E A M B B A I E																							
5 O H G I R A B D I O N I S S A E M A I A I H E S																							
6 E E N E L A D G A M Y R A M N S R S H L G S E U																							
7 G A I H N E Z R R S A U G V O H H E O S A E Y S																							
8 E A K I N D D A A H A N A N I A H G B M I M A I																							
9 Z Z A C C H E U S C A S L S G Z G H L E L M O A																							
10 R A I S D N E B U C H A D N E Z Z A R S K C A E																							

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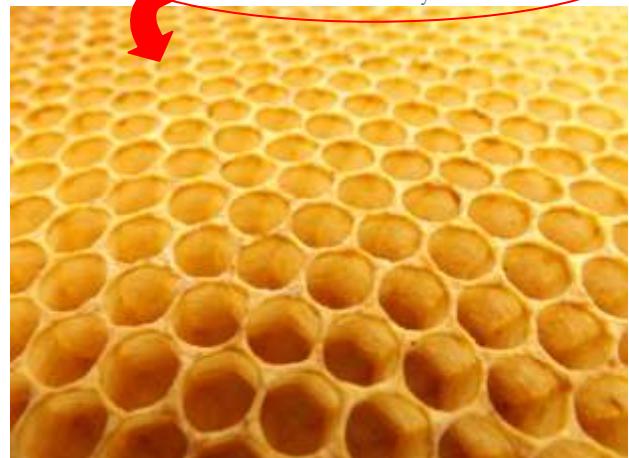
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What is it?

Did you guess this issue's 'What is it?' (p6)

Answer: honeycomb.



The Three Sisters
Blue Mountains, NSW Australia

