

Inside Life

**Is there life
after death?**

Inspired to forgive

Christian leaders behaving badly

Reducing family arguments

Issue 34
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Inside Life

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Inside Life is a magazine of understanding. Rather than just reporting on life, **Inside Life** seeks to delve inside the marvellous mystery that is life, to discover what it is all about. What does life mean? Where did it come from? How can we make the most of it?

Inside Life provides insight and answers to life's deep questions and challenges, and aims to provide articles of lasting hope, help, and encouragement for successful living in today's fast-moving world.

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Our Cover: *Monuments and tombstones mark the places where human beings are put to rest after their lives end. But what happens after that? Is the grave the absolute "dead end"? Or is it a doorway to another form of existence beyond this life? Our lead article examines this question that has challenged the minds of humankind down through the centuries.*

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Is there life after death?

by Rex Morgan

American comedian Woody Allen is quoted as saying: “It’s not that I’m afraid to die. I just don’t want to be there when it happens”.

Just like Woody Allen, we may not want to be there when our death happens. Dying is something we try to put off as long as possible. But unfortunately we must all attend our own funeral. We are all terminal, you might say. As some wit has put it: “Death is responsible for 100% of all recorded fatalities worldwide. And it has no cure”.

There is a story about an old lady who went to a monumental mason to order a stone for her husband’s grave. After explaining that all she wanted was a small one with no frills, she told him simply to put the words “To my husband” in a suitable place. When the stone was delivered, she saw to her horror this inscription: “To my husband—in a suitable place”.

But seriously, what happens when we die? Do we go to another “suitable place”? Is death the end of everything—or the beginning of something new and exciting? When your coffin is buried six feet under, or slides into the crematorium, is that the finish, and you’ll never know anything else? Or will there be another life? If we will continue to live in some shape or form, what will it be like?

People have always wondered about questions like this. One of the most well known writers on the subject of death and dying, Dr Elisabeth Kubler-Ross, wrote: “Since the dawn of humankind the human mind has

pondered death, searching for the answer to its mysteries”.

Some beliefs about death

The pyramids of ancient Egypt are impressive testimonies to belief in the next life. The Egyptians mummified dead bodies because they thought the body had to be preserved and protected so the person’s soul could live forever. They built enormous pyramids to protect the bodies of their kings. Beside the mummies they placed offerings of food and drink and items of value to the king, so he could use those things in the afterlife. Some of the tombs were surrounded by a large number of graves of servants, often women and dwarves, who were sacrificed to serve the kings in their next life.

Buddhists believe that existence is a continuing cycle of death and rebirth. Each person’s position and

well being in life is determined by his or her behaviour in previous lives. For example, good deeds may lead to rebirth as a wise and wealthy person. As long as people remain within the cycle of death and rebirth, they can never be free of pain and suffering. But they can break out of this cycle by eliminating any attachment to worldly things, thereby gaining a kind of perfect peace and happiness called Nirvana.

Hindus postulate that when the body dies, the soul is reborn, or reincarnated, as either an animal or a human being. As with Buddhism, it is considered that our deeds determine how our souls will be reborn in our next incarnation.

Islam teaches that Allah will judge everyone after their death and, according to their deeds on earth they will be sent to heaven or hell. The Muslim heaven is a garden



The pyramids of ancient Egypt are impressive testimonies to belief in the next life.



Down through history millions of people have believed in an afterlife, and this has been of great comfort to them. Is this just a fanciful illusion, or is there some basis for this belief?

with flowing streams, luscious fruits, richly covered couches, and beautiful maidens.

The traditional Maori belief was that on death the soul left via Cape Reinga for Hawaiki, the land of the ancestors. If the rituals of death weren't properly performed, the soul might return as a wandering spirit to trouble those living.

So there have been many ideas and beliefs put forward to explain what happens after death, and these traditions have been accepted by millions of people. I think most of our readers would agree that some of the beliefs mentioned above are patently wrong. For instance, it is clear that the Egyptian dead didn't take the opportunity to avail themselves of the food and drink left

body.

It is axiomatic that for anyone who believes only in a physical world, death is the end and there is nothing else beyond it. Many people see it that way. But there are others who are not satisfied by that concept. In fact, down through history millions of people have believed in an afterlife,

for them. Their personal objects have been found in the tombs untouched (except by tomb robbers!).

Other ideas are harder to refute. For instance the ancient Persians believed the soul crossed over a bridge where for three days the good and evil spirits struggled for it. To the modern New Zealander, this doesn't sound like a plausible scenario, but can it be proved or disproved? Not really, because after physical death any further activity of the "soul" is a matter of the "spirit world", and is not something that can be observed through any of the five senses.

No physical answer possible

This is the great difficulty with trying to identify what happens after death. All we can see physically is that the heart stops beating, the lungs cease breathing, and the body becomes a lifeless, motionless corpse. No scientific observation or experiment can determine what happens to the person after that. The body is dead, but what about the person who has just died? Does that being continue to exist? If so, it can only be in some spiritual way, invisible to our physical senses, involving the soul which (or who) was in that

and this has been of great comfort to them. Is this just a fanciful illusion, or is there some basis for this belief?

Christians believe that there is a spirit world in addition to the physical creation we see around us. They believe that a God lives in this spiritual realm, and created the physical universe. A reason for believing in the existence of this God was presented in a previous *Inside Life* article, entitled “What happened before the Big Bang?”¹ If there is such a God, and he created human beings, obviously he would know the answer to the age-old mystery of what happens after death. Since scientists don’t have the tools to observe or determine the answer, it is interesting to look at what God says about it. His view on the afterlife is outlined in the Bible.

Christians believe the Bible was inspired by God, and is in fact a handbook he has given to humanity as the source of truth on many aspects of human existence. A previous *Inside Life* article entitled “The Bible: Holy or Holey?” presented a case for the veracity of the Bible.²

In considering the question of what happens after death, it is only fair to have a look at what the Bible says about the subject. If there is no God, then there is no life after death—end of story. But if there is a God, what does he say about what happens after death? It’s worth a look at, because it is the only viable alternative to the notion that life comes to a complete dead end when we shuffle off this mortal coil.

A realistic view of life

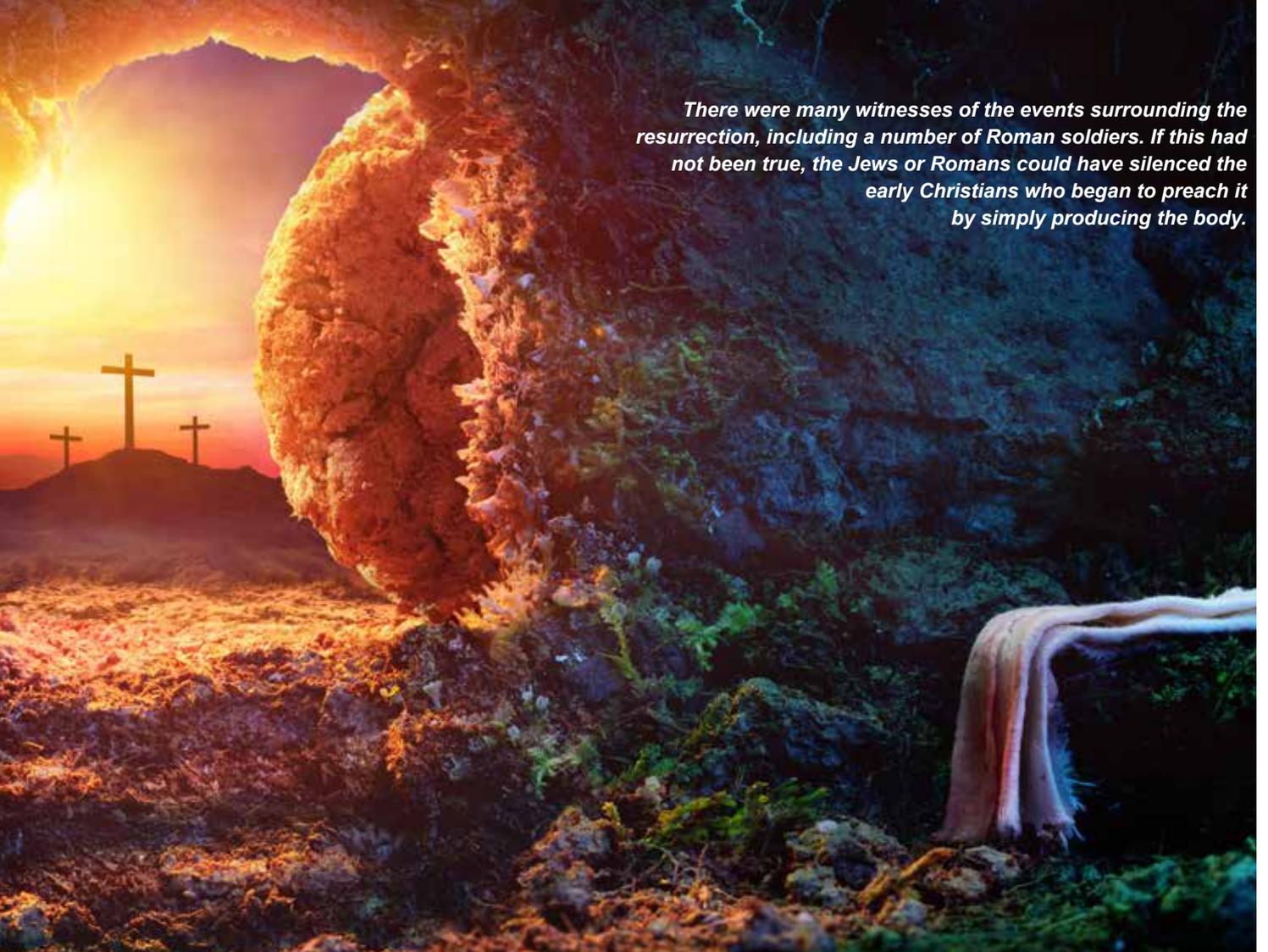
The Bible is very practical and realistic in its acceptance of the temporary nature of physical life. In its opening pages, talking of the creation of Adam and Eve, it says that we are made of the dust, the elements of the earth.³

A poetic expression of the fleeting nature of life was penned by the psalmist in these words: “As for man, his days are like grass, he flourishes like a flower of the field; the wind blows over it and it is gone”.⁴ Another biblical author wrote: “Why, you do not even know what will happen tomorrow. What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes”.⁵

We are like the puff of vapour that forms when we exhale on a cold



The Bible view is that each of us is pretty insignificant in the grand scheme of things, when you think of us in comparison to the vastness of the universe...paradoxically the Bible shows God attaches infinite worth and value to every human being.



There were many witnesses of the events surrounding the resurrection, including a number of Roman soldiers. If this had not been true, the Jews or Romans could have silenced the early Christians who began to preach it by simply producing the body.

morning, a fleeting wisp of wind that disappears almost instantaneously.

The Bible view is that each of us is pretty insignificant in the grand scheme of things, when you think of us in comparison to the vastness of the universe, and in the light of the countless aeons of history. A humbling perspective, but hard to argue with. Yet on the other hand, paradoxically the Bible shows God attaches infinite worth and value to every human being. But that is another subject.

“Everyone has to die once”⁶ is the candid declaration of the scriptures. The Bible often alludes to the transience of life. But it also goes on to refer to what happens after death, and it is the only book with the authority to do so, if indeed it was inspired by God, as only he could be privy to the answer to a question like this!

Thousands of years ago, the Old Testament writer Job asked the

question: “If we humans die, will we live again?”⁷ He proceeded to give the answer that he expected one day to be resurrected. “I know that God lives, and eventually he’ll take his stand on earth. And I’ll see him, see God myself, with my very own eyes. Oh, how I long for that day!”⁸

Many other Bible passages talk about the hope of this resurrection. One of the most well known is Paul’s statement: “In a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet, the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable...Then the saying that is written will come true: ‘Death has been swallowed up in victory’”.⁹

Jesus Christ is quoted as saying: “I tell you the truth, a time is coming when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God and those who hear will live. Do not be amazed at this, for a time is coming when all who are in their graves will hear his voice and come forth...”¹⁰

But Jesus went beyond just talking of this as a far-off future hope and dream. He showed how it worked in practice by actually resurrecting someone!

Resurrections that have already happened

Four days after the death of his friend Lazarus, Jesus confidently approached the cave which was his tomb and called for him to come out. The Bible records that “the dead man came out, his hands and feet wrapped with strips of linen, and a cloth around his face”.¹¹

Later, Jesus himself, after being crucified and buried for three days was also resurrected.

Most worldviews have to base their belief in the afterlife on untested faith, but the leader of the Christian Church has actually “been there, done that”! Jesus died and later came back to life again.

The resurrection of Jesus isn't simply a fanciful notion. It is an historical event recorded by a number of authors in documents dating from the first century AD, when it occurred.

There were many witnesses of the events surrounding the resurrection, including a number of Roman soldiers. After this amazing occurrence a writer stated that over 500 people had seen the risen Jesus, and that most of them were still alive at that time.¹² If this had not been true, the Jews or Romans could have silenced the early Christians who began to preach it by simply producing the body. The early church members were so convinced of the veracity of the resurrection that they died in their thousands for that belief.

If it was possible for Jesus to be resurrected, it is possible for others to rise again, and in fact that's what the Bible says will happen to everyone who has ever lived: "As in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive".¹³

Even before he had resuscitated Lazarus from the grave, Jesus said to his sister: "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies".¹⁴

What kind of life will people be resurrected to? A clue is found in the most often quoted Bible verse of all: "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life".¹⁵

This promise of eternal life is stated as only being for those who believe in Jesus. But another Bible passage says that "all will be made alive",¹³ meaning that every human being who has ever lived will be resurrected. What will happen to those who don't believe in Jesus? If they are resurrected, but not to eternal life, to what sort of life will they rise? And what will the "eternal life" promised to the believers be like? That's another fascinating topic. If you would like further information

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(corner Dominion Rd and Brixton Rd)
Saturdays at 2.00 pm.

Contact: Rex Morgan, ph. 09 489 8910

Rotorua: Contact Peter Lindop, ph. 07 349 2272

Wellington: "Thumbs Up" Hall

5 Elizabeth Street, Petone

Saturdays at 2:30 pm.

Contact: Dennis Gordon, ph. 04 386 2094

Invercargill: Contact: Les Evans, ph. 03 218 7020

Other NZ locations: Small groups meet regularly in other cities nationwide.

For details, contact Dennis Richards,
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on these questions, please write to
PO Box 304055, Hauraki Corner,
Auckland 0750.

In summary, there are two general viewpoints on the question of what happens after death. For atheists, this natural lifespan is all there is, and there is no hope for anything beyond it. However, for Christians there is the hope of a resurrection and eternal life beyond that. And as we have discussed in this article, there is historical evidence that this belief is true.

Humankind, uniquely among life forms on earth, possesses an innate sense of the infinite. We seem to be hardwired with the need to extend this wonderful consciousness we now experience. Whether you believe the claims of Christianity or not, surely it is worth looking very carefully at them before you have to attend your own funeral?

Notes

¹ *Inside Life*, issue 25. For a free copy, please write to P.O. Box 304055, Hauraki Corner, Auckland 0750.

² *Inside Life*, issue 2. Free copies available at above address.

³ Genesis 2:7.

⁴ Psalm 103:15.

⁵ James 4:14.

⁶ Hebrews 9:27 (The Message version).

⁷ Job 14:14 (The Message).

⁸ Job 19:25-26 (The Message).

⁹ 1 Corinthians 15:52.

¹⁰ John 5:25-28.

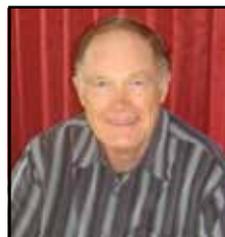
¹¹ John 11:44.

¹² 1 Corinthians 15:6.

¹³ 1 Corinthians 15:22.

¹⁴ John 11:25.

¹⁵ John 3:16.



Rex Morgan, the editor of Inside Life, and his wife Marilyn live on Auckland's North Shore. Rex has

worked in Christian ministry and office administration for over 30 years and has contributed articles to a number of international publications. Rex can be contacted at rex@gci.org.nz

Why should anyone embrace their faith?



Christian leaders behaving badly

by Rusty Wright

Ravi Zacharias, the popular Christian faith defender, was exposed posthumously as a sexual predator. This sex scandal has created international turmoil. If Christian leaders are hypocrites, why should anyone give their beliefs a serious look?

Sadly, the faith landscape is littered with fallen leaders, from clergy sex abuse to the affairs of Carl Lentz, Jim Bakker, Jimmy Swaggart, and countless others.

Disclosure: I knew Ravi professionally, though not well. I appreciated his communication skills, but did not always agree with his content or presentation manner. I remain grateful for his kind, personal condolences and encouragement after my first wife left me. I was unaware of his sexual misconduct until the news broke. And, of course, I'm deeply concerned for his victims.

Sexual predator's handbook

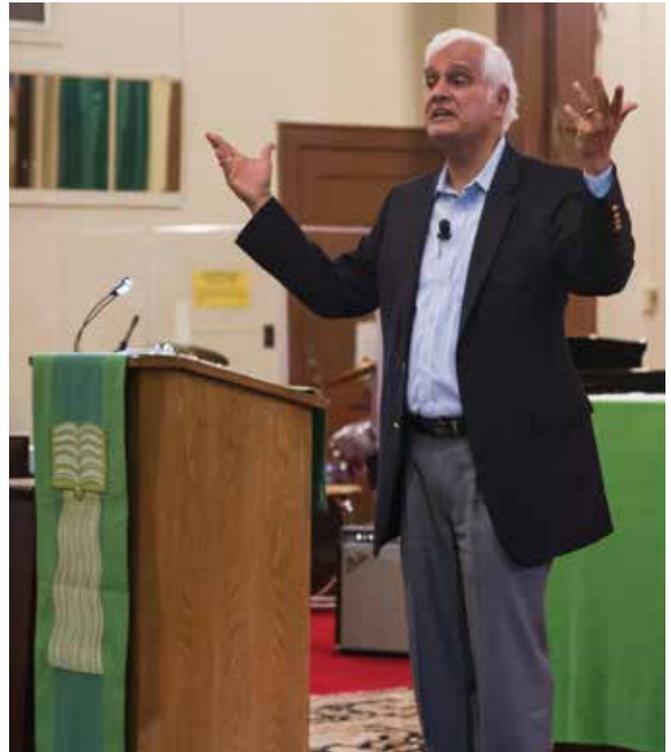
Parts of the responsibly written investigative report commissioned by Ravi Zacharias International Ministries (RZIM) after his 2020 death read like PG-13 examples from a predation handbook. His modus operandi included grooming women for sexual favours; providing financial support (sometimes using ministry

funds); extramarital relations; nude phone pics; multilingual seduction lines; and more. He even called one sexual partner a "reward" for his Christian service.

Though RZIM's board has now issued a statement of contrition, it appears some senior leaders resisted corporate transparency as the scandal unfolded. Internal whistleblowers may be among the real heroes in this story.

Whistleblowing

For instance, RZIM public relations manager and spokesperson Ruth Malhotra wrote a letter to the board chair detailing misrepresentation, intimidation, and cover up: "There have been numerous times over the past three years when I've had to push back on direction from Ravi and the senior leadership so as not to make statements—or have statements attributed to



Ravi Zacharias, world-renowned author and philosopher, speaks to approximately 180 troopers and families at the Naval Station Guantanamo Bay Chapel, 17 September 2013.

me—on behalf of the ministry that I don't believe or can't defend."

So, should we reject a belief system because its leaders misbehave?

Feet of clay

Personally, I abandoned devotion to superstars—secular or Christian—long ago. Too many feet of clay. Following reasonable leaders, yes. Unquestioning fealty, no. Jeremiah, an ancient Jewish prophet, wrote: "The heart is the most deceitful thing there is and desperately wicked. No one can really know how bad it is!"

I decided it's not just faith, but the object of faith that's important. If I swallow two white tablets to treat my headache, I'm placing faith in those tablets. If they are aspirin, they might work. If I grab roach poison by mistake, I could get sick.

Faith's object

I would suggest that Jesus is a worthy object of faith. Peter, one of his closest friends, said, "He never sinned, nor ever deceived anyone". If your roommate says that about you, you must be pretty special. He was. He practiced and taught humility and compassion, washing his disciples' feet, and aiding a shunned leper. During his youth, learned leaders marveled at his wisdom. In his adulthood, officers sent to apprehend

him returned empty-handed, exclaiming: "Never has a man spoken the way this man speaks".

As a skeptic, I learned that many evidences support Jesus' claims to deity, notably his resurrection. That, plus his character, are why I chose to follow him. But I still have unresolved matters.

Unanswered questions

When I see God, items on my long list of questions for him will include a heartbreaking and unwanted divorce, betrayal by trusted coworkers, my second wife's cancer death, and all sorts of disappointing human behaviour and natural disasters.

Yet in Jesus' life, death, and resurrection, I've seen enough to believe that, as one of his early followers wrote: "God causes

everything to work together for the good of those who love [him]."

Should Ravi's—or other Christian leaders'—moral flaws dissuade one from trusting Jesus? My vote is to evaluate Jesus, while mourning and confronting his misbehaving followers. Some have noted that RZIM's leadership culture welcomed tough questions about Jesus, but not about Ravi. For the organisation to regain its integrity, that ethos must now change.

Rusty Wright is an author and lecturer who has spoken on six continents. He holds Bachelor of Science (psychology) and Master of Theology degrees from Duke and Oxford universities, respectively. www.RustyWright.com

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This article first appeared on WashingtonExaminer.com

Let's talk about... pornography



by Marcus Mak

Let's talk about sex, baby", are lyrics from the controversial song of the same title by American hip-hop trio Salt-N-Pepa. It was released in 1991 and was not actually about sex but the fact that sex was "a subject that nobody

wants to talk about."¹ Despite its controversy, it achieved great success, with number one hits in many countries.

Let's talk about a related subject, one that is also financially successful and has billions of online hits each year. It, too, is a subject that nobody wants to talk about. In fact, in my 38 years

of life, it has never been talked about by any teacher or medical professional, by my parents, or any other significant adult in my life.

Why are they avoiding an issue that has already become a toxic global epidemic? Why are they seemingly ignoring a question that members of the UK Parliament

say should be treated as a public health hazard?² It is an activity millions are engrossed in, but few are actively discussing its dangers.

It's time we did. So, let's talk about pornography.

Pornography is hugely successful because it is highly pleasurable. It entices people to tap into one of the strongest forces known to humankind: our sexual desire.

People are, by nature, hedonistic. We make decisions based on what will bring us the most pleasure. We are, at our core, a pleasure seeking and loving people. Ask yourself this question: why do you do what you choose to do, even if you do not like it? Pleasure will be at the root of every answer. If you hate your job for example, you still do it for a paycheck every month, which allows you to buy and experience the things you enjoy. Everything we choose to do is a means to pleasure.

But what if this particular pleasure is doing you and the world more harm than you could ever imagine—would you still do it? What if this unreal fantasy, this little bit of fun, is ruining relationships between men and women? Would you still do it?

The harmful effects of pornography are well documented. We aren't able to cover every detail in this short article, but here are just a couple of examples:

- Pornography damages your mental health. Brains that have

been saturated with pornographic images have their arousal pathways rewired. The neurotransmitter dopamine is responsible for giving you a feeling of exciting pleasure, which porn triggers.³ The more pornography a person watches, the greater the stimulation required to reach the same level of excitement. This means that over time, the regular viewing of hard-core adult porn begins to lose its attractiveness and appeal. The brain needs newer and more exciting images to enable production of dopamine at the same level. This can lead a person to consume more extreme forms of porn such as violence, rape, incest, bestiality, and potentially, child pornography. It is a risky, downward, dehumanising spiral.

- Pornography negatively impacts romantic relationships. Men, so saturated with images of porn, want to act out the images and scenes lodged in their minds; women can start to believe they have to become like porn actresses in order to please their partners. These effects lead us to act in ways we never intended: using others for our own sexual pleasure and gratification. Pornography doesn't teach you about genuine, selfless, mutual love making, it can only show you how to use others purely for your own selfish pleasure. Yet, according to the BBC,⁴ it is the main source of sex education for many young people.

Looking back on my younger life, I am now able to see that I was trapped by pornography, caught

in a cycle of addiction, too easily pleased by images of others having sex, but always left yearning for something else. I didn't realise it at the time, but there was something else, something infinitely more satisfying out there. And it turns out it could completely satisfy me—mind, body, heart, and soul.

My hunger for that unknown more, a spiritual hunger you could call it, led me to search other paths, other ways of fulfilling what was missing in my life. It drove me to read the Bible and return to church, hoping that Jesus would have the answer. He not only had the answer, he was the answer. Over time, I began to learn and actually experience the reality of who I was and why God made me. He made me for pleasure: his pleasure and mine. I was made to delight in and enjoy God in a loving and life-giving relationship. As I grew in my friendship with God, slowly but surely the pull and power of pornography lost its grip and appeal. He helped me to fight this new and most iniquitous drug, freed me from the chains of addiction, and showed me what true fulfilment really was.

Notes

¹ <https://www.rollingstone.com/music/music-lists/salt-n-pepaour-life-in-15-songs-111537/lets-talk-about-sex-1991-119673/>

² <https://endsexualexploitation.org/articles/parliament-pornpublic-health-hazard/>

³ <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/men/thinking-man/10441027/How-porn-is-rewiring-our-brains.html>

⁴ <https://www.bbc.co.uk/bbcthree/article/bb79a2ce-0de4-4965-98f0-9ebbcfcc2a60>

Where to get help:

If you're struggling with porn, a number of helpful resources are available at

<https://www.dia.govt.nz/Youth-and-porn-resources>

The Light Project is a charitable trust founded in 2017 by a small team of sexual and public health experts. The project is a pilot project that aims to help youth, their whānau, schools, and wider communities to positively navigate the new porn landscape in New Zealand. They are keen to hear from anyone needing help, and can be found at

<https://thelightproject.co.nz>

Turn, turn, turn

by Maggie Mitchell

The Byrds released a song in 1965 entitled *Turn! Turn! Turn!* written almost a decade earlier by Pete Seeger, a song-writer known for his protest songs.

In turn, he lifted his lyrics, almost word for word, from a short book in the Old Testament—Ecclesiastes. This book is squeezed between the better-known book of Proverbs and the somewhat raunchy Song of Solomon. They are known as the Wisdom Books. Traditionally all three books are claimed to be written by King Solomon who lived about 1000 years BC.

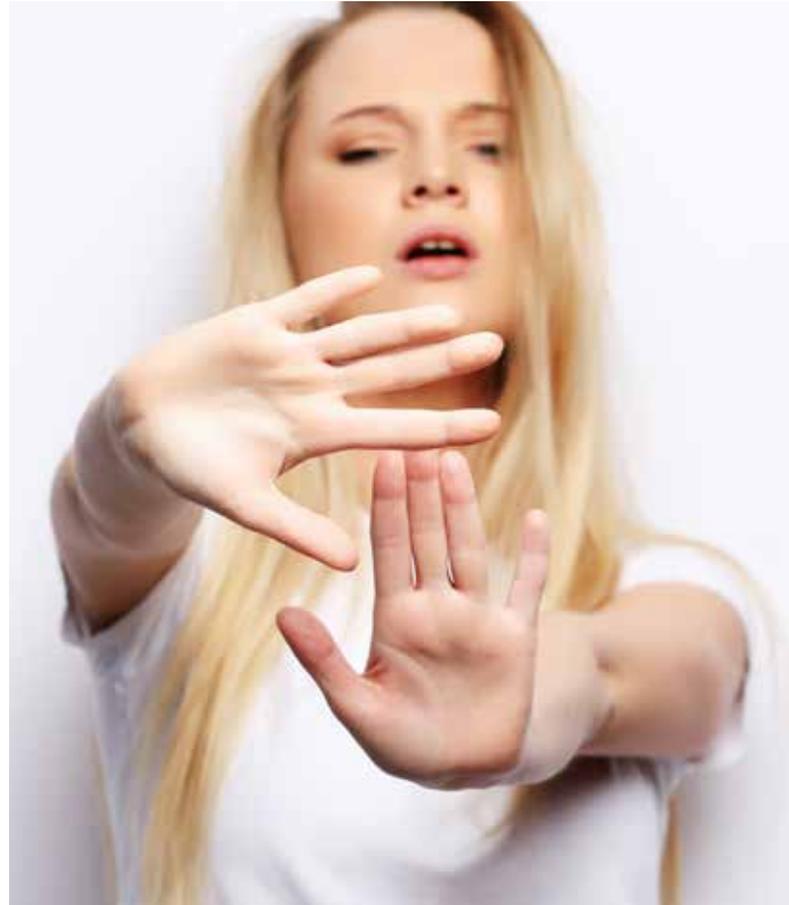
These words, from the first thirteen verses of chapter three of Ecclesiastes, were read at a funeral I recently attended. As with all funerals taking place at this time, it was “socially distanced”. Nine of us were scattered around a crematorium chapel that normally would have accommodated over one hundred people. Although I knew the words from this passage, they rang more clearly than ever before as I sat alone. When Pete Seeger wrote his song, he was mindful of the huge problems facing the world over 60 years ago. In a 2006 interview about the song he said: “This world has to stick together”. It was the only way he saw it as surviving. But as I heard the words, they seemed to have been written for this very moment we are living through.

We cannot turn our backs on the line: “A time to be born, and a time to die”. This has for ever been the case, but it is thrown into harsher perspective as we read the statistics on worldwide deaths from COVID-19. And many of those deaths could be seen as out of time. But in the middle of this rampant

pandemic, new life is happening. Children are being born. So that takes us to verse four: “a time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn and a time to dance”.

The fifth verse hit home with its immediacy—“A time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing”. It could have been a line from a 2021 Government paper advising us on limiting the spread of this virus. We are withholding from embracing so many people that we long to hug. In doing so we have come to realise just how frequently we did—without thinking. We truly have to “withhold” ourselves and look forward to when it is “a time to embrace”, and we can enjoy that warmth of human contact.

Verse seven admonishes that there is “a time to keep silence, and a time to speak”. Our all-pervasive media often magnify the voices of those who speak words of hatred or anger. Twitter, at its worst, has become a platform for shouting, but during the 2006 interview Pete Seeger made the comment: “We have to lower our voice. How can we say what needs to be said...without making ‘them’ so angry they will walk out?”



“... a time to refrain from embracing.”

This centuries-old passage of poetry remains wisdom for our time. It acknowledges the faulty wisdom that leads to hate, war, killing, weeping, and mourning, but juxtaposes each of these against the more hopeful evidence of birth, healing, laughter, love, and peace. To this Pete Seeger added the simple words of the chorus: “Turn! Turn! Turn!”

It demonstrates a message of hope: that as the seasons turn, so our world will turn to better times. This time, this season, is outlined in the last book of the Bible. In Revelation the “time to weep” is over when we are told: “God will wipe away every tear from their eyes...the former things are passed away.”

Unmasked!

by James Henderson

Am I the only one to get confused when wearing a mask? A few weeks back I got very excited when one of my favourite coffee shops reopened and so I rushed into town to go there.

I had my face mask on when I ordered my flat white. I tried to pay by using my phone, but it would not process. What was the problem? My phone's security works by facial recognition and the mask obscured my face!

I felt flustered and peered intently at the phone, thinking at any moment it was going to allow me in. People in the socially distanced line behind me were sniggering as they watched, and I too began to laugh.

Masks have a fascinating history and were worn for all sorts of reasons, such as protection and entertainment, and they still are. I remember watching a movie which featured a masquerade, a party game during which people wore elaborate masks in order to conceal who they were.

The idea goes back to the theatres of ancient Greece and elsewhere, where actors would don a mask to get into character. Typically, they'd use a mask that featured a recognisable attribute of the role they were playing.

The famous Noh masks from Japan would demonstrate different emotional expressions, depending on the angle of view. Perhaps, if we're honest, we all try to put on

metaphorical masks to protect ourselves or to hide who we are deep inside.

Some years back a friend of mine, who knew I was a Christian, asked me about God. What is he like? Would he please come out from behind his mask and identify himself?

My friend was being sarcastic, but I had an answer. Jesus came, I said to him, to show us who God is, to reveal how God's main quality is love. It's something worth noting. If we want to know what God is like, how he thinks and how he cares for us, we look to the life of Jesus. God is not hidden behind some mask...

Jesus is God unmasked.



Inspired to forgive



by Barry Robinson

Most people have someone who is an inspiration in their lives—maybe it is a parent, or a teacher, or some charismatic character from the pages of history. One person who has inspired me is Corrie Ten Boom. Corrie was born into a Christian family in Amsterdam in 1892.

When the Netherlands was invaded by the Nazis in 1940, the Christian beliefs of Corrie's family led them to protect Jews and members of the Dutch resistance and, after hiding them within their house, they passed them on to the underground network. It has been estimated that Corrie was involved in saving the lives of 800 people.

Sadly, in February 1944, her family was betrayed, arrested, and taken to prison. From there she and her sister Betsie were sent to the Ravensbrück concentration camp, where women prisoners were either used as forced labour or executed. Here the health of Betsie deteriorated, and she died on 16 December 1944. Just fifteen days later, due to a clerical error, Corrie was released. The following week all the women in her age group were sent to the gas chambers. After a painful journey back to the Netherlands, she was reunited with the surviving members of her family and opened her home to those in need.

In 1947, Corrie had an incredible experience. She went back to

Germany and spoke about God's forgiveness at a church in Munich. She said: "When we confess our sins, God casts them into the deepest ocean, gone forever". After her talk, a man approached her and said: "A fine message, Fräulein! How good it is to know that all our sins are at the bottom of the sea!" Corrie immediately recognised him as one of her captors and her blood ran cold. He said: "You mentioned Ravensbrück in your talk. I was a guard there, but since that time I have become a Christian. I know that God has forgiven me for the cruel things I did there, but I would like to hear it from your lips as well. Fräulein, will you forgive me?"

Corrie recounted that this was one of the most challenging things she had ever been asked to do. Her sister had died in that place, and now an SS officer complicit in her death was standing before her asking for her forgiveness. She who had just been preaching about forgiveness now had the most difficult task of all—to forgive. This is how Corrie describes what happened next:

I had to do it—I knew that. The message that God forgives... [is]...that we [also] forgive those who have injured us... And still I stood there with the coldness clutching my heart. But forgiveness is not an emotion—I knew that too. Forgiveness is an act of the will, and the will can function regardless of the temperature of the heart. "Jesus, help me!" I prayed silently. "I can lift my hand. I can do that much. You supply the feeling." And

so woodenly, mechanically, I thrust out my hand into the one stretched out to me. And as I did, an incredible thing took place. The current started in my shoulder, raced down my arm, sprang into our joined hands. And then this healing warmth seemed to flood my whole being, bringing tears to my eyes.

"I forgive you, brother!" I cried. "With all my heart!" For a long moment, we grasped each other's hands, the former guard, and the former prisoner. I had never known God's love so intensely, as I did then. But even then, I realized it was not my love. I had tried and did not have the power. It was the power of [God].

Reading that account, I had to ask myself: "Would I have forgiven this man if I was in Corrie's position?" In a world where there is so much pain, hurt and misery, I've learned that unforgiveness consigns me to that destructive cycle, but forgiveness enables me to be released from that downward spiral. Corrie's life-story has inspired me to realise, that with God's help, I can break free and forgive others.

If there is someone in your life that has hurt you, why not take some time to investigate the same God who helped Corrie forgive?—it might just be the most liberating thing you could do.

This article was inspired by *Tramp for the Lord* by Corrie ten Boom with Jamie Buckingham, a bestseller since its original publication in 1972.

It's only a number...

by Ian Woodley

Is age only a number? Perhaps. But why do so many people wonder what happens when their number is up?

I've just clocked up my fiftieth year. Trained as an accountant, I have told the story behind numbers for most of my working life. I have analysed the results of departments and companies, trying to understand what their published numbers represent. Then recently a simple number caught me by surprise. Fifty. Yes, just 5-0—fifty.

I felt ambushed by this small value. Why? I've never paid much attention to my age before. I never felt angst at 30 or 40. But on this occasion, my analytical side caught up with me—I have clearly lived more than half of my potential lifespan. Maybe I will get to 100, but the odds are against me. Especially when I remember that my Dad died before his 70th birthday.

If there is an afterlife, then perhaps my analytical side would put all this into a new perspective. Indeed, the old Christian hymn “Amazing Grace”, which I have sung at a couple of funerals, gives an interesting thought. The writer, John Newton, refers to 10,000 years being a mere drop in the ocean of time that would begin in the life that follows death. This hymn gives a Christian take on the afterlife that I personally find satisfying. But other versions of life after death have been proposed, ranging from the Vikings' Valhalla to the mysterious ghostly life of old Jedi, as seen in the Star Wars saga.

Of course, there are some who suggest that this life is all there is; when you die, you just end up being



fertiliser for the daisies. Someone I know well vacillates between two contrasting views. Often they think there can't be a heaven as it “would be terribly crowded” (as they put it). But then when they talk of their spouse, who passed away a few years ago, they are always described as “looking down on us”. And that got me thinking: I feel that having a belief in an afterlife brings hope. You may well disagree with me on the specifics of such matters, but if you think that there is life after death, then you have something to look forward to. I certainly have something to look forward to. In that sense, both you and I have an inner hope that gives me energy for today.

Perhaps you look forward to seeing loved ones who have passed away? I certainly want to catch up with my Dad. I find this gives me encouragement,

that the pain of missing him is only temporary, even if I do live for another 50 years. This is why I think my friend vacillates between two views. The first view (no heaven) offers only the pain of loss. The second view (some kind of heaven) places balm on their wounds, that one day they will meet their spouse again. And that makes everything worthwhile. Personally, I think there are only a few convinced atheists in the world. Most people without faith are agnostic: they don't see evidence for an afterlife, but don't want to rule it out. Why would you? Although vague, even agnostic views supply a little hope. If I may be bold: if you are agnostic, why not check out why the Christian faith has such a strong view of life after death? You may not be convinced, but you may just find that your hope is a little bit stronger than before. I miss my Dad, but my hope in an afterlife brings much soothing balm to my soul.

Reducing family ARGUMENTS

by Richard Fowler

Growing up as one of six children made for a very interesting home life. Plus, we were all very energetic and loud. Thinking back, I don't know how my parents did it! I remember arguments of all sorts: "Why did he get more than me?" or "That's mine, give it back!" I can still hear the echoes from my youth.

But apparently, when it comes to arguments, we were not alone. And neither are you. On average, families spend 49 minutes arguing each day.¹ It works out that parents have 2,184 arguments with their children (aged two to 12) every year.

As a teacher of teenagers in a mainstream school, I would say this

only increases in adolescence. The default setting of defiance seems to be triggered by puberty.

But is there a way to reduce arguments? A way to get our time back? Just think what you could do with an extra 49 minutes a day!

I'm not going to give you a lecture on parenting techniques, or the insider's guide to the psychology of a teenager. Instead, I will share something a lot simpler and leave each to decide how best to deploy this idea. It was a piece of wisdom I once read which on the surface appears to be so obvious.

"Fathers [and mothers], do not provoke your children to anger."²

Simple thought. Maybe too simple. But effective. I've seen hundreds of adult-child interactions. But I've noticed something: the interactions that end in arguments

are usually because someone has said something that provoked an escalation.

In any family confrontation the adults are game changers. And one way I've learnt to change this game and avoid provoking children is to make them feel they have been listened to. Reflecting what they are thinking and feeling back to them with my words does this. It lowers the emotion in any situation and helps them feel understood. You are now in a better position to move forward.

You can change your relationship with your children by seeking first to understand and then be understood.

Notes

¹ <https://www.msn.com/en-gb/lifestyle/pregnancy-parenting/families-spend-average-of-49-minutes-a-day-arguing-study-claims/ar-BBL7uhu?ocid=s>

² Ephesians 6:4



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