

Inside Life

Issue 35
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**Not-so-random
acts of kindness**

Power over life and death

DONATIONS

The age of rage

Sea glass and suffering

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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: *September 1st is "Random Acts of Kindness Day" in New Zealand. Our lead article argues it is even better to aim for "regular" rather than "random" acts of kindness. Scientific research shows that kindness is a worthwhile daily lifestyle, benefiting its givers as well as its recipients.*

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Not-so-random Acts of kindness

by Rex Morgan

Have you heard of “random acts of kindness”? Have you ever received one? Or given one to others?

The concept began in California in 1982 when a journalist, Anne Herbert, jotted the phrase “practice random kindness and senseless acts of beauty” on a restaurant placemat. Ten years later she wrote a book recounting true stories of random kindness.

The idea caught on, was taken up by a number of media outlets, and began to appear on bumper stickers and the like.

A Random Acts of Kindness Foundation was established in the USA in 1995. It is a non-profit organisation with the mission of inspiring others to make spreading kindness a priority. It has a website¹ offering free resources to encourage and educate the public about the power of kindness to change the world, under the slogan “Making kindness the norm”.

In 2007, the concept made its way to the big screen. In the film *Evan Almighty*, God, played by Morgan Freeman, tells Evan the way to change the world is by doing one random act of kindness every day.

NZ website

New Zealand has its own Random Acts of Kindness website (rak.co.nz), established by a group of four friends in 2004. One of them was stuck in Auckland traffic one afternoon and watched some irate drivers ahead of him getting into a bit of a road rage fracas. He asked

himself the question “What would it be like if on one day every person in New Zealand was kind to a stranger?” This led to the founding of the first Random Acts of Kindness (RAK) Day in NZ, in 2005. This was in fact the first RAK Day in the world, and NZ is still the only country in the world with a national RAK Day that touches the whole country.

Co-founder of RAK Day in NZ, Megan Singleton, says: “We chose 1 September to be RAK Day, as it was easy to remember: the first day of spring. Then we set out to let the country know and to inspire Kiwis to come up with some fun and crazy ways to surprise and delight others. For no reason at all”.

Singleton urges Kiwis to become “RAKtivists”. “We’ve never needed RAK Day more than in these Covid times”, she remarks. “It’s a fantastic concept because, let’s face it, everyone could do with a little kindness in their life—it’s contagious.

A smile from a stranger, a cupcake, or someone paying for your coffee—it’s the unexpected that brightens your day, giving you a warm fuzzy, that’s the key. RAK Day is a simple way for businesses and individuals to step outside of their comfort zone and to see for themselves that giving is even better than receiving!”

Two thousand years ago the Bible declared that “it is more blessed to give than to receive”.² Modern research has shown up the accuracy of this statement by proving scientifically that kindness is beneficial to our health. The RAK Foundation website cites many of these benefits, including decreased stress, anxiety and depression, boosted happiness and pleasure, and even lower blood pressure.

Benefits of kindness

According to research from Emory University, when you are kind to another person, your brain’s



Try out this kindness idea: take the time to really listen to someone.



Another kindness idea: be a blood donor.

relationships. He has coined the word “kindfulness” to describe being constantly mindful of being kind to others. “No matter what you do, do it with kindness”, he urges.

Research findings

Numerous studies have been carried out on the health effects of kindness. Here are some of the findings.

- “About half of participants in one study reported that they feel stronger and more energetic after helping others; many also reported feeling calmer and less depressed, with increased feelings of self-worth”, noted Christine Carter of the UC Berkeley, Greater Good Science Centre.⁸
- The Integrative Psychological and Behavioural Science Study in 1998 concluded that “Perpetually kind people have 23% less cortisol (the stress hormone) and age more slowly than the average population”.⁹
- In a University of British Columbia study, a group of highly anxious individuals performed at least six acts of kindness a week. After one month, there was a significant increase in positive moods and relationship satisfaction, and a decrease in social avoidance.¹⁰

pleasure and reward centres light up, as if you were the recipient of the good deed, rather than the giver. This phenomenon is called the “helper’s high”.³

Talya Steinberg, Psy.D, wrote in *Psychology Today*: “Numerous studies have shown that receiving, giving or even witnessing acts of kindness increases immunity and the production of serotonin. This feel-good chemical heals your wounds, calms you down, and makes you happy...Even just thinking and talking about kindness can improve happiness and peace”.⁴

As well as stimulating serotonin, performing acts of kindness “helps boost your psychological health by activating the release of dopamine, the feel-good neurotransmitter in the

brain”, stated Lizette Borrelli, in the *Medical Daily*.⁵

According to David R. Hamilton, PhD, writer, columnist, speaker, and “kindness scientist”,⁶ acts of kindness create emotional warmth, which releases a hormone known as oxytocin. Oxytocin causes the release of nitric oxide, which dilates (expands) the blood vessels. This reduces blood pressure and, therefore, oxytocin is known as a “cardioprotective” hormone. It protects the heart by lowering blood pressure.⁷

Dr Hamilton has authored 11 books, including the Amazon bestseller, *The Five Side Effects of Kindness*. His studies show that kindness makes us happier, slows ageing, is good for the heart, and improves

A dose of “happy hormones”

Did you know you have a quartet of chemicals coursing through your bloodstream, known as the “happy hormones”? These chemicals, which promote happiness, pleasure and other positive moods and feelings, include:

Dopamine: Also known as the “feel good hormone”, dopamine is associated with pleasurable sensations, as well as learning, memory and more;

Oxytocin: Often called the “love hormone”, oxytocin helps promote trust, empathy, and bonding in relationships;

Serotonin: A powerful antidepressant, which helps regulate your mood as well as your sleep, appetite, digestion, memory, and learning ability;

Endorphins: The body’s natural painkillers, produced in response to stress or discomfort, flooding us with a sense of euphoria known as “the runner’s high”.

The acronym for these four wonderful helpers is D.O.S.E., and clearly we can all do with a generous dose of them! The more of these hormones our body produces, the better we feel.

Scientific studies have shown over and over that all four of these helpful hormones are stimulated by acts of kindness. You have most likely noticed that you feel good after showing kindness and helping someone in some way. The kinder you are, the more these good hormones will flow inside you, making you feel happier and healthier!

The accompanying article delves further into the science and benefits of kindness.

• Dr. Stephen Post of Case Western Reserve University School of Medicine found that when we give of ourselves, everything from life satisfaction to self-realisation and physical health are significantly improved. Mortality is delayed, depression is reduced, and well-being and good fortune are increased.¹¹

Witnessing kindness

What is more, these benefits are reaped not only by those who practice kindness, but also those who witness kindness, according to Natalie Angier, writing for *The New York Times*. “Witnessing acts of kindness produces oxytocin, occasionally referred to as the ‘love hormone’, which aids in lowering blood pressure and improving our overall heart-health. Oxytocin also increases our self-esteem and optimism, which is extra helpful when we’re anxious or shy in a social situation.”¹²

“One good deed in a crowded area can create a domino effect and improve the day of dozens of people!” according to Jamil Zaki, Assistant Professor of Psychology at Stanford University in an article for *Scientific American*. “The positive effects of kindness are experienced in the brain of everyone who witnessed the act, improving their mood and making them significantly more likely to ‘pay it forward’”.¹³

No wonder renowned writer Henry James said: “Three things in human life are important. The first is to be kind. The second is to be kind. And the third is to be kind”. Aviator and author Amelia Earhart observed: “A single act of kindness throws out roots in all directions, and the roots spring up and make new trees”.

American author and motivational speaker Leo Buscaglia, also known as “Dr Love”, commented: “Too often we underestimate the power of a touch, a smile, a kind word, a listening ear, an honest compliment, or the smallest act of caring, all of

Some kindness ideas to try out...

Carry out a random act of kindness, with no expectation of reward, safe in the knowledge that one day someone might do the same for you.

Diana, Princess of Wales

Small gestures can really brighten someone else’s day. Here are a few ways you can spread smiles and kindness wherever you go.

- Give an unexpected compliment.
- Make a handmade card.
- Volunteer at a local foodbank.
- Call and chat to someone you think might be lonely.
- Pick up litter in your local area.
- Smile at everyone you encounter.
- Let someone go in front of you in a queue.
- Help someone struggling with their grocery bags.
- Stop to assist someone who looks lost.
- Take the time to really listen to someone.
- Donate flowers to a rest home.
- Give another driver the right of way.
- Pass along a compliment to staff at the supermarket.
- Learn CPR.
- Turn the lights off when you leave a room.
- Wash a friend or family member’s car or bike for them.
- Buy a lottery ticket and give it to a stranger.
- Leave a surprise in a library book.
- Give away your parking spot.
- Bake someone a cake.
- Give blood.
- Offer to buy a drink or some food for a homeless person.
- Spend time to get to know your neighbours.
- Address a waiter or server by name.
- Donate clothes to a charity shop.
- Offer to help someone.
- Carry in a neighbour’s rubbish bin.
- Treat someone to a coffee or tea (even a stranger).
- Leave a place better than the way you found it.

which have the potential to turn a life around”. Kindness can change someone’s whole life for the better!

Regular rather than random

If showing kindness is so positive and beneficial, why only have just one Random Acts of Kindness Day each year? Surely we should do it more often!

Modern science has discovered the many benefits of being kind, but

when you look at the Bible, it turns out that God knew a long time ago about the benefits of kindness, and encourages us to engage in regular rather than random acts of kindness.

King Solomon, reputed to be the wisest man who ever lived, stated: “Those who are kind benefit themselves, but the cruel bring ruin on themselves”.¹⁴ In other words, if we are kind to others we are helping ourselves at the same time. Precisely



Be kind, New Zealand!

“Be kind. We will get through this together, so please be strong and be kind.” Those words of Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern, announcing New Zealand’s first Covid-19 lockdown in March 2020, have become part of New Zealand folklore. The “Be kind” catch cry has subsequently been often repeated in efforts to exhort the “team of 5 million” as we continue to confront the pandemic that has turned society on its head.

In today’s dog-eat-dog competitive environment, kindness to one another can so easily be overlooked and pushed out of the way. However, although it is often a scarce commodity, kindness is truly a quality of great value and worth.

Close your eyes for a moment and imagine a world in which every person and every nation practice genuine kindness all of the time. Just think what such a world would be like! There would be no more burglaries, rapes, child abuse, murders—in fact all crime would come to a sudden halt, as would all fighting and warfare. These harmful evils would completely cease if only everyone always treated each other with kindness. What a dramatically better world that would be!

Kindness is something we are all eager to receive from others, but not always that quick to reciprocate. “Be kind”. It sounds simple, even trite and superficial, but it’s not easy to put into practice. Why not? Because it involves thinking of the needs of others rather than ourselves. That demands a kind of discipline and sacrifice our egotistical human nature prefers to resist.

But when we do practice kindness, it is as beneficial to us as it is to those we help. In her decisions in handling the Covid pandemic, our Prime Minister has repeatedly stated that the government is being guided by scientific advice. Interestingly, we can also be guided by science when it comes to the practice of being kind. Scientific research has identified many benefits to be gained from exercising kindness. The accompanying article outlines a number of these.

If we let the science guide us, we will be eager to follow the catch cry: “Be kind, New Zealand!”

what recent scientific research has discovered!

The New Testament writer Paul said: “Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you”.¹⁵ Christians are admonished to engage in kindness and compassion as their everyday lifestyle. Kindness is one of the fundamental components of God’s nature. His sending of Jesus to be our Saviour was a remarkable act of divine kindness.¹⁶

Paul also exhorted his readers that “each of us should please our neighbours for their good, to build them up”.¹⁷ In other words, as Jesus himself put it, “Do to others what you would like them to do to you”,¹⁸ a statement so famous that it is known as the “golden rule”. That’s another way of saying that each of us should

engage in acts of kindness as a habitual way of life, regularly rather than just randomly.

The RAK websites include many suggested acts of kindness we can put into effect. We have listed some examples in the box on page 5. See how many of them you can incorporate into your lifestyle! There is no doubt that we would all be much better off if “random” acts of kindness were not so random, but rather, frequent!

Notes

- 1 <https://www.randomactsofkindness.org>.
- 2 Acts 20:35.
- 3 <http://www.ccnl.emory.edu/Publicity/MSNBC.HTM>.
- 4 <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/in-the-face-adversity/201211/practicing-acts-kindness>.

- 5 <https://www.medicaldaily.com/random-acts-kindness-sweet-emotion-helping-others-dopamine-levels-383563>.
- 6 <https://drdavidhamilton.com/>.
- 7 <https://drdavidhamilton.com/the-5-side-effects-of-kindness/>.
- 8 <https://www.amazon.com/Raising-Happiness-Simple-Happier-Parents/dp/0345515625/>.
- 9 <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/9737736/>
- 10 <https://psych.ubc.ca/news/kindness-may-help-socially-anxious-people-relax-says-new-research-by-dr-lynn-alden/>.
- 11 https://www.researchgate.net/publication/7840821_Altruism_Happiness_and_Health_It's_Good_to_Be_Good.
- 12 https://www.nytimes.com/2009/11/24/science/24angier.html?_r=1&partner=rss&emc=rss.
- 13 <https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/kindness-contagion/>.
- 14 Proverbs 11:17.
- 15 Ephesians 4:32.
- 16 Titus 3:4.
- 17 Romans 15:2.
- 18 Matthew 7:12.

The kindness jab?

Wouldn't it be great if kindness could be bottled up in a laboratory and made into a vaccine for mass inoculation? When you think of the ills and evils of society it is clear we need a generous dose of kindness to be injected into millions of people. People who receive the kindness jab would begin to spread regular acts of kindness, putting an end to arguments, hatred, bitterness and strife! Just imagine if a pandemic of coronavirus was replaced with a pandemic of kindness!

Kindness has a contagious quality about it: one act of love and kindness is prone to lead to another. But sadly, it is not easy to find kindness on a widespread scale. There are too many determined anti-vaxxers who resist the kindness vaccine in favour of the insidious disease of selfishness.

Two thousand years ago the biblical writer James identified a lack of kindness as a root cause behind the troubles of humanity. "Where do wars and fighting come from?" he asked, and concluded that it was from human selfishness and greed, our innate resistance to acting with kindness and love towards others.¹

The Bible asserts that humans are just naturally like this,² and it has been that way throughout all of history.³ And haven't the annals of history proved this analysis to be true? An article in the New York Times estimated that "Of the past 3,400 years, humans have been entirely at peace for 268 of them. At least 108 million people were killed

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Wellington: "Thumbs Up" Hall
5 Elizabeth Street, Petone
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in wars in the twentieth century. Estimates for the total number killed in wars throughout all of human history range from 150 million to 1 billion".⁴

Thankfully, the Bible goes on to supply the solution to this dilemma. It claims that it is possible for humans to change! It is possible for us to become kind and loving on a regular basis.

Thousands of years of history testify to the fact that we can't do this on our own, no matter how hard we try. The Bible asserts that such love and kindness is available to us from a source beyond ourselves. That source is God, who gives kindness, love, peace and other beautiful qualities of character to mankind by means of a special helper known as the Holy Spirit.⁵

"Every good gift comes from above", affirms James, "from God, the father of light".⁶ Kindness, as well as qualities such as self-control, gentleness, and joy, come from the Holy Spirit, and God is pleased to give that Spirit to anyone who asks him for it.⁷

Would you like to have a kindness jab like this? For more information, please write to Inside Life, P O Box 304055, Hauraki Corner, Auckland.

Notes

¹ James 4:1-4

² Jeremiah 17:9

³ Romans 3:23

⁴ <https://www.nytimes.com/2003/07/06/books/chapters/what-every-person-should-know-about-war.html>

⁵ Galatians 5:22

⁶ James 1:17

⁷ Luke 11:13



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During the pandemic, more people have asked Google: “Does God exist?” than at any other time since 2004.

Searching for answers

by Peter Mill

Such is the power of Google and our confidence that it can give us the answers we so desperately seek, that people trust the world’s leading search engine with some surprisingly personal questions.

“Are my arms too skinny?” (Answer: If you can put your hand around your upper arm, yes.)
“What is the average weight of a panda?” (Answer: 70–100kg for an adult female.)
“Why is your face on your head?” (No sensible answers that I could find.)

Hilarious. But many people ask much more serious questions and one of those has been trending on Google during the pandemic. It’s this: “Does God exist?”

Now if you type that question into the big white Google search box, all kinds of search results come up. From actual websites with God’s exact address, to articles with compelling titles like, “Scientific Proof God Exists”, to a very interesting Twitter debate between Piers Morgan and Brian Cox. And plenty of weird and wacky stuff besides (well worth trying if you’re bored).

But for me as a self-confessed Christian, what is most interesting is this: why have more people asked that question during the pandemic than any time since 2004? And why did the numbers peak during arguably the worst part of the pandemic so far, right in the middle of February 2021?

It seems that when life is uncertain and people are afraid of the future,

that is when they start thinking about deeper, more spiritual topics. Questions like: “Where does evil come from?”, “What is the meaning of life?”, and “What happens when you die?”, along with arguably the biggest question of all: “Is there a God?”

Don’t get me wrong, I’m a huge fan of Google but when the chips are down and I want sensible answers to those searingly difficult questions we all have in times of stress, loss, uncertainty, hardship, failure, or bereavement, my faith and the supporting documentation that backs it up—the pages of the Holy Bible—has come through time and time again.

Why not give Google a rest for a bit? And search instead in the book that, according to many, has the best answers for every question in life.



Power over life and death

by Irene Tibbenham

The sight of the light disappearing so suddenly from our Hetty's eyes has haunted me ever since! I have made this trip to the vet too many times to want to remember, perhaps because our cats have all been older rescues.

Now when we have to euthanise a cat that is dying or in pain, I cuddle them close with their paws over my shoulders as life leaves their bodies and they die. I hope the process will be quick and quiet. Quick for the furry patient, as this somehow appears less painful, and quiet for me—reassurance it was painless—though the fact is, we never really know!

Lockdown has added further angst to this distressing process, with many vets not allowing owners to enter the surgery with their pets. In the case of our very dear Devon Rex, Boris, he was scheduled to be “put down” in the vet's car park. We even euthanised our Khaki Campbell duck when the vet found a tumour. This cost more than the duck's purchase price, so my husband wasn't impressed!

Many struggle as I do with the euthanising of a pet; of having power over the life of another living creature. They are part of your family. Whether walking through your legs whilst in the kitchen or making an appearance at a dinner party, they



are always present, always there. Until they're not.

Being with them through death is part of this journey. For some, seeing a pet die brings them closer to the reality that we as human beings will also one day die. We may even have been present with a precious person on their death bed, and perhaps we question what is next. What really happens when we die? In fact, is there even a “next”?

For Christians, the answer is, yes, there is a next, and that next is something we have in our hands. Just as we have the power over the life and death of our animals, we have the power of life and death over ourselves.

Perhaps this sounds too far-fetched, or maybe you would like to know how, or even why. A wise man once wrote: “Those who find me, find life”.¹ So who is this “me”?

This was spoken by Jesus Christ. Becoming a follower of Jesus is how we exercise the power of life and death over ourselves. Many years ago, the Son of God died to save us. Implausible as it may sound, he came back to life that we might have eternal life.²

Yes, you read that right. Finding Jesus and following him is the path to living, the power over life and death. I don't know the future of our beloved pets when they die, because no-one knows.³ But I do know that as God loves each of us, he also loves the whole of his creation.

Notes

¹ Proverbs 8:35.

² John 10:28.

³ Ecclesiastes 3:21.

Anger: taming the beast

THE AGE OF RAGE

by Richard Fowler

I never thought I would see something like this...

As I stood there, two police officers were restraining him, and another one was on hand just in case. I remembered, only the day before, teaching this student about main and subordinate clauses. But, in this classroom, he was about to learn a very different lesson.

And then it happened...

His anger took control and he kicked-off, again.

The officers had warned him. And so down he went, hard. Head on the floor. Third officer holding him, too. And the handcuffs came out. And the boy whom I taught literacy was learning the consequences of his uncontrolled anger.

As I tried to reassure him, I realised that this was the inevitable result of his frequent, unconstrained outbursts of anger exhibited when he did not want to do something (that day it was enough to have the police called in). But what had just played out in front of me echoed of emotional reactions beyond the four walls of that room.

Anger is a modern-day pandemic. Let's face it, *Angry Bird* is not just a counter-intuitively cute cartoon bird (recently made into an animated film); he is fast becoming a cultural symbol that tells us something about the direction of our emotional trends. From increasing numbers of school students having anger problems (some of whom I work with) to the national increase in domestic violence, it seems that we are becoming an angrier nation. An article in the *NZ Herald*

in September last year explained that not only had domestic violence increased in 2020, but the brutality of attacks and severity of injuries was significantly worse, according to victim advocates. "A huge and continuing rise in calls for help and reports of strangulation becoming 'commonplace' are causing huge concern as support service staff scramble to make sure each victim gets the help they need."¹

Maybe most of us will not end up in handcuffs, but our expression of this emotion is something that we can't ignore, even if "keep calm and carry on" is our mantra. Anger affects all of us, and we need to know how to tame this beast.

Perhaps you have problems controlling your anger or are one of the approximately 30% of people who know a close friend or family member who does. Then, for you, I would like to unpack this thing called anger and suggest some possible ways forward.

Anger, of course, is not necessarily a bad emotion. We have it for a reason: it informs, it motivates, it shows that we care. But the problem is in how we react when we feel this emotion, and the length of time we stay angry. These are the areas we need to change.

But why do we need to change if anger is a natural emotional response to situations and stimuli? Well, let's take our red-feathered friend, *Angry Bird*, for a moment. With over 33 million views of the trailer, we have had the opportunity to see how his uninhibited and



Our national fuse is becoming shorter, as increasing incidents of "road rage" show.

imbalanced expressions of anger leads to others getting hurt and to their avoiding him. Uncontrolled anger means that, at the end of the day, relationships suffer.

Unchecked, anger leads us to exactly where the wise, two-foot high, green sage of *Star Wars*, Yoda, said it would: "...anger leads to hate...hate leads to suffering", and then you are well and truly on the "dark side"! In changing, we protect our relationships and ourselves.

Here's an example of what happens when it goes unchecked. Ironically, this incident happened whilst sitting in the cinema after watching the new *Star Wars* film, *Rogue One*. My friend and I were about to see the dark side of someone's anger!

During the film, my friend had asked me a few questions about the plot. Talking is never a good idea in the cinema, but I responded as if I were some font of knowledge on *Star Wars*. Unbeknown to us, this was noticed by a man sitting in the row in front. After the film had finished, I saw him approach us. I knew what was coming. As the word "sorry" came out of my mouth, a torrent of rude words came out of his. I guess he had been bubbling away for most of the film and now had a chance to vent...and vent he did.

Our national fuse is becoming shorter. So, how can we lengthen our fuse and develop a greater control over our anger. Here are five principles in the acronym, A.N.G.E.R.

A = ACCEPT

How many times have you heard yourself say: "I can't believe he or she..." in some outburst of indignation because of someone else's action? Well, why don't you start believing because, apparently, they did. Oh, and get this, maybe we do those things, too! Do we always need to be in a state of shock when those annoying things happen? We all make mistakes and do things without considering other people's

feelings. Yes, people's actions can be, okay, selfish at times, but at the end of the day, pretty human after all! It's called being human and we need to accept the imperfections of our humanity. Be more accepting of people's mistakes and you will find yourself getting less angry.

N = NO TO STORY

Say no to your narrative. We are brilliant at writing our own version of events when something goes wrong: we always cast ourselves as the victim, not the perpetrator. Try saying no to your automatic victim response. Why? Because reinforcing your own narrative that writes you as the victim, creates a downward spiral leading to feelings of injustice as you play the mental court scene over and over in your head. This only gives fuel to your anger and frustration. You may be the victim, but recasting yourself as the victim only creates room for bitterness, and when bitterness has taken control, you will find yourself in prison instead of the other person.

G = GIVE IT AWAY

If playing the judge ourselves is emotionally unhealthy, who can be the judge? The simple answer is God. But before you dismiss this as a bunch of theoretical, religious mumbo jumbo, I want to share why giving your anger to God is incredibly helpful. In a long-term sense God is the only one who can bring true justice to a situation, and all will be judged by God. But, I know, that doesn't solve the here and now. So, what about the short-term benefit? When you give anger to God by telling him about it, or knowing that your situation is thought about by God, then it means the anger can go somewhere. No longer does it have to be locked up inside, swirling around in your head, but rather, it has a way out.

E = EDIT YOUR EXPECTATIONS

We live in a world of instant gratification: faster broadband, self-service check-outs, priority boarding



Wait. If it is possible, don't make a decision in anger.

at the airport. This has conditioned our expectations. And our expectations become our perceived reality of how things should be. If you expect something to be a certain way or people to act in a certain way then, sure enough, that will be the reality you will see or experience. The only thing is, life is not predictable; people and situations don't play by our expectations. Sometimes your internet drops, people turn up late, an elderly person takes more time at the check-out. That's life! So, what can we do? Whatever situation you go into, at work or at home, prepare yourself for the things that may not work out, consider what might go wrong. Think of what you could do, have solutions ready.

R = RESPONSE

Delay your response when angry. Your response will determine your relationships, period! Don't destroy them. If you have to take action or make a decision, buy yourself time: wait. If it is possible, don't make a decision in anger. We all make better decisions when anger is not trying to hijack our choice.

The biblical admonition of James, written 2000 years ago, is still very relevant for us today: "Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to become angry".²

Notes

¹ <https://www.nzherald.co.nz/nz/domestic-violence-increases-rapidly-in-new-zealand-strangulation-beatings-commonplace-in-2020/TKNYCLLUVQMBANS4QNXFXORLLM/>.

² James 1:19.

I read the Bible— every word



by Micah Ward

I set out a few years ago to read the entire Bible. That's right, everything from "In the beginning" to "Amen". I have finally finished that quest, every single word. Since I am not a scholar, I am going out on a limb here, but bear with me and let's see if I can make sense of what I read.

Reading the entire Bible isn't something you decide to do over a rainy weekend. It took me two years to read from cover to cover. This isn't like binge watching the *Tiger King*. I began by reading two chapters a day, one from the Old Testament and one from the New Testament. The New Testament is much shorter, so when I finished it, I simply started it again while I toiled on through Numbers, Deuteronomy, both Samuels, both Kings, both Chronicles. (I have to be honest. It

was tough getting through certain parts of the Old Testament.) I admit skimming through the sections which outlined who begat whom and who they begat after that. Then after finishing the New Testament a second time I decided to concentrate on the Old Testament, and by then I was into the prophets who, in line with their titles, prophesied. A lot. Now I can see where the old-time fire and brimstone preachers got their sermons. But I also realised that each one of these books contained the message that God would rather forgive us and have us reach out to him than rain down all that destruction upon us. Love and forgiveness. That is what really stuck with me from my trip through the Bible.

Another favourite from the Old Testament, and not just because we share the same name, is the prophet Micah. In the sixth chapter of his book, the prophet

is expounding on what it is that God wants from us. The answer starting with verse eight is: "to be fair and just and merciful, and to walk humbly with your God". As far as being a template for how to live life, that's a pretty good one.

As templates for life go, though, it is hard to beat the teachings of Jesus. The New Testament is the story of Jesus and the beginning of Christianity. There are some confusing thoughts about Jesus. Some believe he is the son of God and a separate entity from God. Others believe he is God in human form and, even more confusingly, that Jesus is both. I don't know, and I'm not going to worry about it. I just like what the New Testament says: that Jesus is "the Way". It is simple to say, as many Christians do, that the way to get to heaven is to believe in him. And that brings up two questions: what is that

way of Jesus, and what exactly is heaven?

The Bible isn't really detailed about what heaven will be like. I tend to think of it as a state of being completely in the presence of God. How will that manifest itself? Will it be streets of gold and angels playing harps? Will it be ten-mile runs on beautiful trails where no one gets tired, and calorie-free pizza and beer are in endless supply at the end? I have no idea. I just trust that it will be more wonderful than we can ever imagine. And hell? I guess that would be the opposite. An existence totally devoid of the presence of God and all that such an existence would imply. So, how do you get to heaven? The Gospel of John says that Jesus is the Way.

The first four books of the New Testament are known as the gospels. They are the eye-witness accounts of the life and teachings of Jesus written by some of his best friends. I have read these four books several times and paid particular attention to what Jesus

says. You and I and the lady on the next barstool can all read the same passage and come up with different interpretations. But to me there are three main points that Jesus makes in his teachings.

Point 1 is love. When Jesus was asked what the greatest commandment was, he said it is to love God with all your heart and soul, but he went on to point out that the second greatest commandment is love others as yourself. Then he said that nothing else in the whole Bible is more important.

Point 2 is forgiveness. Jesus was asked if we should forgive those who sin against us seven times. Jesus said to forgive seven times 70. He was making the point that you ought to forgive an endless number of times. It should also be pointed out that in the Lord's prayer Jesus taught us, there is the line where we ask God to forgive our mistakes as we forgive the mistakes others make. In other words, we are asking God to forgive us only to the same extent as we are willing to forgive others. Wow! Think about the implications...

Point 3 is judgment. Jesus was not too keen on hypocrites and those who were quick to judge. Consider the passage where he cautions us to remove the log from our own eye before we help our brother remove the speck from his. Or the story of the woman about to be stoned to death and Jesus responding to her accusers by saying the one without sin should cast the first stone. No stones were cast and Jesus declined to judge the woman. Instead, he forgave her sins and told her to sin no more. What does this tell me? That our actions should be guided with love and forgiveness. Those are my quick and short impressions from reading the entire Bible.

I will continue to read it and try to gain additional insight and understanding. But the Bible does, without a doubt, say some very basic things that we should never forget.

We should love others as ourselves. There are no exceptions to that, by the way. We should forgive others who have done us wrong, no matter how hard it is to do so. And, finally, we should go easy on how we judge people. We never know what is going on in someone's life. So, give them the benefit of the doubt.

Our actions should be guided with love and forgiveness.



MILLIONS of names on Mars...

(and somewhere else)

by Richard Fowler

Watching with eyes wide open, I was captivated by the first-ever recording of a spacecraft landing on Mars.

Seeing the Perseverance rover filmed parachuting, then descending by “sky crane”, onto the red dusty surface of this strange world, you couldn’t quite believe what you were watching happened some 212 million kilometres away. This was NASA at its best, but not far behind is Elon Musk’s SpaceX whose goal is to colonise the place! An achievement that would make humans a multi-planetary species.

For those who are happier on terra firma, there’s a simpler way to get you to Mars. Well, at least your name, that is. Over 16 million have already signed up and got their “boarding pass” for the next trip.¹ This time, 10.9 million names were

stencilled by electron beam onto three fingernail-sized silicon chips and sent to Mars.

But have you ever asked what it would mean if we did colonise another planet? What would it mean to export humanity? You know, warts and all. Yes, we have a lot going for us, a lot to give, but what about all of the other stuff? The icky, bad things, the stuff we get wrong. Thinking about it. I’m not sure whether “human” is a very good brand to export to the final frontier.

I’m not throwing stones at my own species, but let’s face it, we wouldn’t want to export Covid, would we! As I write we have a powerful reminder of its destructive potency as the USA reflects on passing 500,000 deaths from this wretched virus. Ironically, this is similar to the number of US names currently signed up to go on the next trip to Mars via micro-ship (...I mean chip!). Actually, on second thought, with so much death and

despair, I wonder whether leaving this planet for another is actually a good idea. Is being a multi-planetary species our only hope for the future?

As I consider the names, and lives, of those who have boldly gone where no man has gone before (to quote Captain Kirk), now cradled in a crater on Mars, I am reminded of another source of hope. Another place where our names are etched. A place of safety and comfort, a place where those who die from Covid are not forgotten.

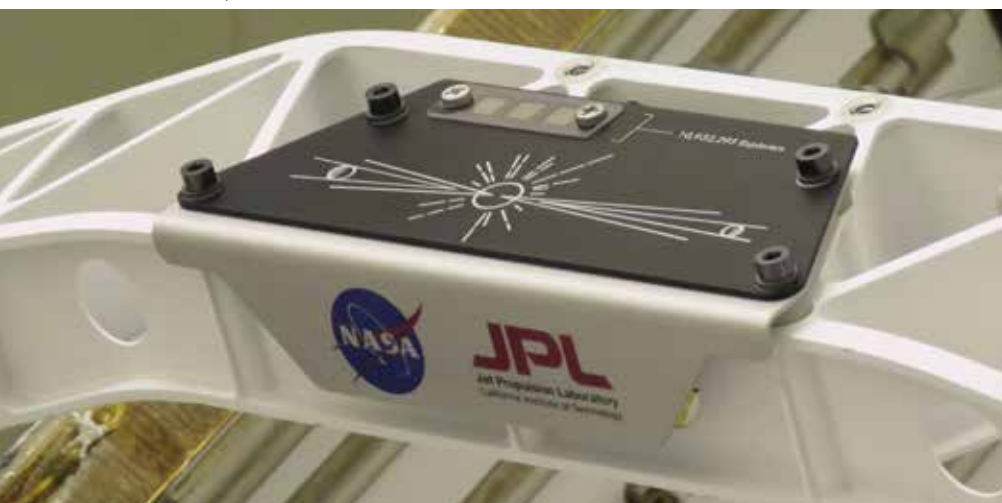
Coming from the lips of a star-gazing prophet who asked whether he too was forgotten by his God, his answer came in beautiful poetry: “Can a mother forget the baby at her breast and have no compassion on the child she has borne?” God replied: “Though she may forget, I will not forget you! See, I have engraved you on the palms of my hands”.² I don’t suppose I know all of what this means, but I know if my name is in God’s palm, then I can have hope. And I believe you can, too.

We are a peculiar species. Simultaneously full of wonder and woe. We can send the etched names of millions to Mars, yet we are plagued by problems we can barely solve. It’s not being a multi-planetary race that gives me hope, it is knowing our names are written on the palm of God’s hand. Meaning, we are not forgotten even in the toughest of times.

Notes

¹ <https://mars.nasa.gov/participate/send-your-name/future> .

² Isaiah 49:15–16.



A placard commemorating NASA’s “Send Your Name to Mars” campaign was installed on the Perseverance Mars rover, including three fingernail-sized chips affixed to the upper-left corner of the placard featuring the names of 10,932,295 people who participated in the campaign.

Sea glass and suffering

by Jackie Mill

I love to walk along a beach, revelling in the long, isolated stretches of sand and rocks, the wind sometimes caressing gently or greedily tearing at clothes and hair, and the water incessantly restless. It is never the same but always exhilarating. A few times the waves have rushed in unexpectedly and I have had to dance quickly to safety, or go home with slightly sodden feet.

It is there where the water meets the shore that there are the most exciting finds: a beautiful, polished pebble; a fragile shell which is miraculously whole; or the best treasure of all, a piece of sea glass.

If I spy one of these rare treasures, I quickly pick it up and check to see if it is a “keeper”. A keeper has to be smooth with no sharp edges. The best bits are coloured and somehow translucent when held up to the sunlight. It is in the sunlight that they are at their best. Their once bright colours somehow softened by the rough treatment in the sea, muted by their harsh treatment, yet still beautiful.

If I deem it worthy of taking home, I slip it into my pocket where my fingers enjoy the cool smoothness, and with lifted heart I go in search of



more. I've become a bit addicted to searching for sea glass when I walk. Sea glass is a bit like shoes: you never have enough.

Those gem-like slivers of glass make me think of people. I am often struck by how some people seem to grow through their suffering. Life tosses them about unfairly, but somehow their true beauty shines through despite it. It is as if they become more beautiful, more precious, because of their suffering. Those that weather life's storms become easier to love and to hold, while others seem to have everything they want, yet still have sharp edges that make them more demanding, more selfish, and more difficult to love. They cut at others with their unkindness. They are not quite ready yet and still have some bits that needed smoothing out.

People ask: if there is a God, why does he allow suffering? I don't have the answer, but I wonder if it has something to do with growing through suffering. Maybe there are things we need to learn through suffering

that we cannot learn anywhere else. Don't get me wrong. Too much suffering often breaks people like the shells and glass that become small grains of sand if they are beaten against the rocks too much. No one wants to suffer, but maybe if we can see it as an opportunity to grow and learn, something beautiful can come as a result.

My friend Jilly loves sea glass too but she doesn't just collect it like me. She makes beautiful things out of the treasures she finds on the seashore. She is highly skilled and can turn broken bits of pottery and glass into something wonderful. One day she gave me a gift of an angel made from things discarded by the sea. Somehow it is more precious because its beauty was hard won, the result of suffering.

I am inclined to believe that God is highly skilled and can turn our suffering into something precious and of infinite value. Sea glass is one small piece in the puzzle that makes me more and more certain of that.

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