

Inside **Life**

What's it
all about,
Alfie ?

My son the TEACHER



IN THIS
ISSUE:

WHEELS
Making life
run better



The bank of TIME

Inside Life

A magazine of understanding

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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 seeks 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: What can be more delightful than a beautiful new baby? Our cover baby's wide-eyed and innocent expression suggests the questions "Why am I here? What is my life all about? I didn't ask to be born, but now I am here, is there a meaning and purpose for my life?"

Photo by George Crux

On May 15, 2006, New Zealander Mark Inglis achieved the momentous feat of climbing Mount Everest on two artificial legs, becoming the first double amputee to reach the summit. This brought back memories of the first-ever successful ascent of the world's highest mountain by Sir Edmund Hillary in May 1953.

What is the reason for the success of heroes such as these? How are they able to battle so valiantly against such formidable odds?

No doubt there are a number of reasons for their steady, unflagging zeal in performing such amazing feats, but perhaps the main explanation is that they were working towards a *goal*. Their eyes were focused on a dream, a vision, a purpose that inspired them to carry on to the finish.

It's the same with great teams such as the All Blacks and Team New Zealand. The goal of winning the World Cup, or the America's Cup, spurs them onward. They push themselves to the limit, straining with all the energy and effort their bodies can bear, because they have a goal to accomplish, a purpose to achieve.

A purpose like this can give great motivation to life; can give us a reason for living. On the other hand, as they say, if we don't know where we're going, we'll most likely end up somewhere else!

What about you? Do you have a goal or purpose you are working towards? We can set ourselves many types of goals as we journey through life, and these can spur us on to fulfil various achievements. But what about the purpose of our life *as a whole*? Is there an overall goal for your life? Is there a reason you are alive? Does life have a deep overarching meaning – a grand purpose that urges you onward?

Our lead article, on page 3, tackles this important question. An accompanying article by John Halford



addresses a question raised by a 99 year old lady in a retirement home: "Why has God let me live this long? What's the point?"

Later in the magazine Dennis Gordon, a Wellington marine biologist, approaches the subject of life's meaning from another angle, as he discusses the way it plays out in a family with a "special needs" child.

Our lives are all made up of a rich tapestry of diverse interests and activities, and we look at a number of these areas in our other articles.

Auckland retired nurse, Gael McInnes continues her series on health issues with some advice on winning the war against worry. Regular contributor Dexter Faulkner explains

how people are like wheels. And we round off this edition with practical advice on financial and time management.

We hope you find something of interest and value in this issue. Please let us know what you think — we welcome questions, comments and suggestions on how we can make the magazine more helpful to you. Please feel free to contact us at **Inside Life**, P.O. Box 2709, Auckland 1140.



What's it all about, Alfie?

By Rex Morgan

The 1966 movie *Alfie*, starring Michael Caine, was a resounding success on its release and became a classic, prompting a remake in 2002 with Jude Law in the lead role. The catchy tune of the Hal David and Burt Bacharach hit song of the original movie has achieved enduring popularity. Many people can hum the tune and remember the opening words, "What's it all about, Alfie? Is it just for the moment we live?"

In this song, the character Alfie stands for all of us. We can even change the question by rearranging two of the letters of his name, to make it, "What's it all about, a life?"

That's a good question. In fact, it's an age-old question that has exercised the minds of untold numbers of thinking people throughout the centuries. What is life all about? Should we just live for the moment, or is there much more to it than that? Does each person's life, and the life of mankind as a whole, have a special purpose, an overriding meaning?

It's an important question – surely the most basic and foundational question we can ask. A question that is very well worth considering.

In his book entitled *My Confession*, the great Russian author Leo Tolstoy asked, "What is the meaning of my life? What will come of my life? Why does everything which exists exist and

why do I exist?" He spent many years searching for the answer to this quandary and in the end could only conclude that the solution was found in religion – it had to do with God.

When you think about it, Tolstoy's conclusion makes some sense. If there is a God, surely he would have a purpose in creating life? But what if there is no God, as so many people believe? Logic suggests that if there were no Creator, then the only explanation for the universe is that it got here by chance. In that case, it is devoid of meaning or purpose – it is just something that "happened" – nothing more than a serendipitous cosmic "accident". However the universe began, whether with a "big bang", with the development of life through millions of years of evolution, or in some other way that is yet undiscovered, this has all been the result of a process of random chance, if there wasn't a creative mind behind it.

Renowned palaeontologist Stephen Jay Gould championed this conclusion when he wrote: "We are here because one odd group of fishes had a peculiar fin anatomy that could transform into legs for terrestrial creatures. We may yearn for a higher answer, but none exists."

The Modern View

Walter T. Stace, former Professor of Philosophy at Princeton University, summed up the modern view of the meaning of life in this

It's a very important question – surely the most basic and foundational question we can ask.

way: "The picture of a meaningless world and a meaningless human life is, I think, the basic theme of much modern art and literature. Certainly it is the basic theme of modern philosophy. According to the most characteristic philosophies of the modern world from Hume in the eighteenth century to the so-called positivists of today, the world is just what it is and that is the end of all inquiry. There is no *reason* for its being what it is... To ask any question about *why* things are thus, or what purpose their being so serves, is to ask a senseless question, because they serve no purpose at all."

The philosopher Bertrand Russell said about mankind, "His growth,



his hopes and fears, his loves and his beliefs, are but the outcome of accidental collocations of atoms..."

In 1988, Dr Hugh Moorhead, a Philosophy Professor at North-eastern Illinois University, compiled a book entitled *The Meaning of Life According to Our Century's Greatest Writers and Thinkers*. The 250 leading academics interviewed in this survey failed to come up with a viable answer. Many frankly admitted they just didn't have any idea.

Stephen Hawking, widely recognised as one of the foremost intellects alive today, stated in his book, *A Brief History of Time*: "If we find the answer to that (the question of why we and the universe exist), it would be the ultimate triumph of human reason – for then we would know the mind of God."

In other words, Hawking acknowledges that to find the meaning of life is to discover God. It is clear that if there is no God, the universe is a product of chance and therefore has no meaning. As far as purpose is concerned, in that case we would be no different than bugs which start out as eggs, grow into adults, in turn lay their own eggs and eventually are eaten by predators or die of "old age", in an endless cycle that repeats itself over and over without any meaning.

It is clear that if there is no God, the universe is a product of chance, and therefore has no meaning at all.

But somehow this doesn't seem good enough for us as humans. We have the amazing ability to think and dream and even to ask questions about the meaning of life. We can set goals and struggle to achieve

The World Stage

One of "the immortal bard" William Shakespeare's most famous speeches comes from *As You Like It*:

"All the world's a stage, and all the men and women merely players; They all have their exits and their entrances."

This is a description of life that makes sense, and has been quoted over and over in the centuries since it was written. But if life is a stage and all people are actors, is there a playwright?

All of Shakespeare's plays were created by the hand of the celebrated "immortal bard". Can it be that life, the greatest play of all, is the only play without an author? Is it simply a random sequence of events with each actor unaware of what is behind it all? Or is there a master playwright directing the performance — an overall plan giving it meaning?

Shakespeare, sadly, was as mortal as the rest of us, but is there a truly "immortal" bard behind the scenes of life? The accompanying article examines this question.

them. Surely we are different to the animals; surely there is meaning, purpose and value to our lives?

Noted writer C.S. Lewis touched on this concept with the following words in his book *Mere Christianity*: "If the whole universe has no meaning, we should never have found out it has no meaning: just as, if there were no light in the universe and therefore no creatures with eyes, we should never know it was dark. Dark would be a word without meaning."

So there are two alternatives. Either the world began by random chance, in which case life has no meaning, or it was created by a God, in which case it would seem likely that he did it for a reason and it does have meaning. As a matter of interest, let's follow that line of reasoning for a moment and assume that there is a God and that the Bible is his revelation to mankind. Is there something in the Bible to indicate God's purpose for making the world and is that purpose something that makes sense, that satisfies?

The Biblical View

According to opening passage of the

Bible, at the creation of the world God said "Let us make man in our image, in our likeness and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth and over all the creatures that move along the ground" (Genesis 1:26).

So God made man to live on a higher level than the animals. In contrast to the animals, man was made "in the image of God" — in other words, possessing godly attributes which weren't given to the animals, things such as the ability to think and reason abstractly, to imagine, to appreciate beauty, to love and to have a concept of and even a relationship with God.

One of these remarkable attributes was described by wise King Solomon, who said God had "set eternity in the hearts of men" (Ecclesiastes 3:11). That would explain our fascination with the vast and seemingly limitless universe and our ability to grapple with concepts such as infinity and eternity. No wonder we think about the desirability and feasibility of living forever. God has equipped

our minds to deal with these thoughts and concepts, of which animals have absolutely no inkling. The very fact we ask ourselves "What is the meaning of life?" highlights our remarkable capacity to contemplate and explore such intangible things.

Three thousand years ago, King David of Israel recorded his musings on the meaning of life in an ancient book of poetry. "When I consider your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place, what is man that you are mindful of him, the son of man that you care for him? You made him a little lower than the angels and crowned him with glory and honour. You made him ruler over the works of your hands; you put everything under his feet" (Psalm 8:3-6).

This is a rather ambitious statement on the meaning of life, claiming that everything is put under the control of mankind and we are crowned with glory and honour. Yet we must admit there is no way we have control of earthquakes, volcanoes and tsunamis, let alone our own desires and emotions!

Later in the Bible, in the book of Hebrews (2:8), this statement is explained to mean that although these things haven't yet happened, David's poem was a prediction of what will occur in the future. The letter to the Hebrews repeats the promises of glory and honour and of ruling over everything in the universe. In speaking of these



Mankind: Worthless or Priceless?

One of the greatest astronomers of all time, Carl Sagan, was interviewed by Ted Koppel on the United States *Nightline* TV Program just a few days before his death in 1996. He was asked if he had any final words of wisdom to share with the people of the earth, and this was his answer:

"We live on a hunk of rock and metal that circles a humdrum star that is one of 400 billion other stars that make up the Milky Way galaxy which is one of billions of other galaxies which make up the universe which may be one of a very large number, perhaps an infinite number of other universes. That is a perspective on human life and our culture that is well worth pondering."

This perspective places us in a rather insignificant position — just a tiny, inconsequential speck buried in a vast universe.

It is interesting to contrast this view with that held by Christians, who believe a loving God designed this as a special planet carefully crafted to be a fitting home for the human beings who formed the pinnacle of his creative acts. Christians even say that God himself stooped down to become a human being and suffered for each person he had created. The implication of this is that we are so amazingly valuable that the incomprehensibly great God who created us was willing to die to save us! In that case we are *priceless* rather than *worthless*!

promises, this section states that God is "bringing many *sons* to glory".

Children of God

The Bible refers in a number of places to humankind as "sons of God" or "children of God". For instance, the gospel according to John, which speaks of Jesus Christ's time on the earth says, "Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God — children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God" (John 1:12-13).

Writing to the church in the city of Rome, the apostle Paul called the church members "God's children" and went on to say "Now if we are children, then we are heirs — heirs

of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory" (Rom 8:17).

In other words, the Bible shows that the reason God created human beings is that he is producing a *family*, with whom he is going to share the universe! He is a God of love and wants to share all of his wealth and property with others.

Included in this promise is the opportunity to live forever. One of the most often quoted Bible verses says "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" (John 3:16).

At the very end of the Bible, this amazing plan or purpose of God for

mankind is repeated: "He who overcomes will *inherit all things* and I will be his God and he will be my son" (Rev 21:7).

What a fantastic promise! God is going to share everything he has with the human beings he has created. We will inherit everything he possesses. According to the Bible, that is the meaning of life. What an awesome meaning and purpose it is! God made us to be his family, so he can share everything in the vast universe with us, forever!

So indeed, what's it all about, Alfie? Interestingly, the lyrics of the hit vocal point to the answer given in the Bible! They include the words, "I believe there's a heaven above, Alfie", and "I know there's something much more, something that even non-believers can believe in". This "something" turns out to be love. "I believe in love, Alfie."

The Bible verses we have just surveyed can be summed up in the word "love" too. God is going to

What a fantastic promise! God is going to share everything he has with the human beings he has created.

share the universe with his children because he loves them. The reason God is having a family is no different from the reason we humans have families – because of love.

As another famous song accurately puts it, "love makes the world go round". Love is what makes life worthwhile and meaningful.

Hal David's lyrics continue with the sentiment: "Without true love we just exist, Alfie". When people find true love, it gives wonderful new meaning and purpose to their lives. No longer do they just exist, but suddenly there is a reason, a



Cute and cuddly: A new life brings with it the hopes and dreams of another set of parents for every success for their child. On the one hand, a baby is almost totally dependent on its parents for even its most basic needs. On the other hand, he or she has a tremendous potential for achievement and accomplishment later in life. But does this life have any overall, lasting value and purpose?

meaning for life.

The song continues, "Until you find the love you've missed you're nothing, Alfie". In other words, life has no meaning and we are of no value without love. The reference here is to love on the human level, which is vitally important, but the Bible talks about a "love that we've missed" that is even greater than that. People who read the Bible and understand it come face to face with the love of God. When they find that love and see it demonstrated in the way that Jesus died so God can have a family with which to share the universe, they begin to see the real purpose and meaning of life. This changes the way they live.

Indeed there are two choices set before us. Either the universe and life appeared by blind chance and life is meaningless, or God created us through his love for the tremendous purpose of sharing the

universe and his love, with us. It's quite a contrast, isn't it? What do you think makes the most sense?

If you'd like to read more on this subject, please write to PO Box 2709, Auckland and request our free publications, *Life – whose idea is this?* and *Purpose – more than just a number*.

Rex Morgan, the editor of "Inside Life", and his wife Marilyn live on Auckland's North Shore. Rex produced 264 issues of a family newspaper from the age of 12 through 19, and has contributed articles to a number of publications since. Rex can be contacted at : rex@wcg.org.nz



Tired of Life, With Everything to Live For

By John Halford

As a member of our local Ministerial Association, I take my turn with a Bible Study at one of the local retirement homes. Folks in these parts tend to live a very long time, and some of the residents are well into their eighties and nineties. And their minds are still sharp.

On one evening last February, a lady who will be 100 next year asked me, "Why has God let me live this long? What's the point?"

How do you answer that?

I told her I would need to think about it. A week later I was still thinking.

When we met together again I said, "I don't have an answer to your question. But let me show you some things in the Bible that I bet you didn't know were there."

I asked the group to turn to the Book of Ecclesiastes. It took a few moments to find it. Many of us, even if we have been Christians all our lives, don't really know our way around the Old Testament.

Unlike the Proverbs, which are aimed at young people, Ecclesiastes seems to be directed at old folks. The author—it was probably King Solomon—looks back on a long and eventful life. He had "been there, done that" and got just about every T-shirt. He contemplates not only his considerable achievements, but also the futility of it all. It makes for a surprising book. I like it in Eugene Peterson's *The Message* version, which makes the frank, almost cynical observations even more down to earth.

It begins, "Smoke, nothing but smoke...There's nothing to anything—it's all smoke" (1:1-2), and continues

"What's there to show for a lifetime of work, a lifetime of working your fingers to the bone? One generation goes its way, the next one arrives, but nothing changes—it's business as usual for old planet earth" (verses 3-4).

It continues in this vein through 12 chapters of what seems like glum world-weariness.

"Everything's boring, utterly boring—no one can find any meaning in it... Boring to the eye, boring to the ear. What was will be again, what happened will happen again" (1:8-9).

"I tried my level best to penetrate the absurdity of life. I wanted to get a handle on anything useful we mortals might do during the years we spend on this earth" (2:3).

"But when I looked, I saw nothing but smoke. Smoke and spitting into the wind. There was nothing to any of it. Nothing" (2:11).

"Search as hard as you like, you're not going to make sense of it. No matter how smart you are, you won't get to the bottom of it" (8:17).

As we read these words, everyone murmured in agreement. "Yep—that is how it is." "He got that right." "Yes sir. I feel like that too sometimes."

"But, what are things like that doing in the Bible?" someone asked. "I always read the Bible for encouragement. This seems so pessimistic."

"But it is how you feel sometimes, isn't it?" I asked. They agreed. Whoever wrote this book certainly understood what it was like to get old. These physical frames, in which we spend the first few decades of life, are not meant to last forever:

"In old age, your body no longer serves you so well, Muscles slacken, grip weakens, joints stiffen...The shades are pulled down on the world. You can't come and go at will. Things grind to a halt...you're well on your way to eternal rest, while your friends make plans for your funeral" (12:3-5).

They laughed at that. It was so true.

"Well," I said. "That's the best I can do. I haven't answered the question, but this book shows that it is not wrong for you to ask it. Although the Ancient of Days never experiences senility or the other effects of old age, he has anticipated the kind of things we worry about in the later years.

Ecclesiastes is a reminder that you are 100 percent alive until you are 100 percent dead. So, *"Even if you live a long time, don't take a single day for granted. Take delight in each light-filled hour, remembering that there will also be many dark days and that most of what comes your way is smoke" (11:8).*

Eventually it will all become clear. This life, even if it seems to drag on and on, is only the opening notes of a symphony God intends to share with us for eternity. *"The last and final word is this: Fear God. Do what he tells you. And that's it. Eventually God will bring everything that we do out into the open and judge it according to its hidden intent, whether it's good or evil" (12:13).*

It seems that the weary old cynic who wrote Ecclesiastes ended up trusting in God's grace.



John Halford is a writer and editor, currently living in the USA, but writing for and editing magazines and articles on several continents. He can be contacted at john.halford@wgc.org

Wheels

By Dexter H. Faulkner

Did you ever stop to think what it would be like if no one had invented the wheel? How different our life would be!

Modern civilization depends upon the wheel. Imagine what would happen if all wheels suddenly disappeared.

Skateboards would come to a screeching halt. So would roller skates. And bikes, automobiles, trucks and trains. Motors could not function, and so planes would cease to fly and most ships would go nowhere.

Many things we use every day besides transportation vehicles would have to be abandoned if there were no wheels.

Hair dryers and electric shavers wouldn't work. Nor would drills, vacuum cleaners, blenders — in fact, nothing electric would work because there would be no electricity.

Electrical power, you see, is produced by turbines and generators that depend on the principle of the wheel. So out go the lights, televisions, video games, computers, refrigerators — everything using electricity.

Of course almost all industry would stop, since machinery wouldn't work. And present-day farming and food distribution methods depend so heavily on the wheel that without it you would soon find yourself with very little to eat.

Yes, the wheel is vital to the modern world. It makes things go easily and smoothly.



Sometimes people are referred to as "wheels." "So-and-so is a big wheel," you've probably heard someone say. That means that the one in question makes things happen — sometimes for good, sometimes for bad, but there is nevertheless action, movement.

How about you? Are you a "wheel" in the right sense? Do you make good things happen more easily? Do you cooperate with others in achieving worthwhile goals? Are you easy for others to turn — to cause to function? Or are you an obstacle like a flat wheel or a sticky wheel or a wheel that is missing?

Wheels make it possible to lift and carry heavy weights and burdens. They cause things to move smoothly and quickly. They make life easier for people. Do you?

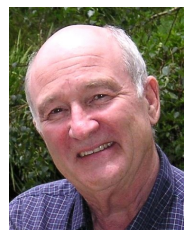
The saying is true that the "squeaky wheel gets the grease". Are you always squeaking, demanding attention for yourself? Or can you turn

quietly most of the time, doing your part to facilitate things, to move them along in the right direction?

Next time you use something on wheels or with wheels, notice how the wheels busily spin away, doing their part to make the whole mechanism work.

Ask yourself if you function like that at home, at work, in school, in group activities or wherever your cooperation is needed. If not, isn't it time to become cooperative and helpful like a well-oiled, smoothly running wheel?

Dexter H. Faulkner and his wife Shirley live in southern California. He is a retired journalist who contributes to several publications worldwide. If you desire to correspond with him his email address is faulknerdh@hotmail.com



Conquer the worry habit!

By Gael McInnes, RGON, RM, BHIth Sc.(Nsg).

How's your week been?

Did you get done all you wanted to, or do you feel you haven't achieved much at all?

Did you actually set any priorities?

Perhaps your week has been thoroughly wretched; you have been desperate to keep in control, but no control...out of control...

The Oxford dictionary defines worry as, "to give way to anxiety or unease, to allow one's mind to dwell on difficulty or troubles."

So what's disturbing your tranquillity and enjoyment? Are you trying to figure out tomorrow's problems today?

Worry, anxiety and fear occur when you spend today's strength and energy trying to get tomorrow's answers!



Change is an inevitable part of life



Change is an inevitable part of life. We're being shaped every minute we live. Every thought, every decision, every action, every emotion, every response is shaping us into one kind of person or another. You need to get comfortable not knowing why something happened, not knowing how long it's going to take and not knowing what you are going to do.

We all get backed into corners at times – the kids have been sick, work is piling up around the house, the report the boss

wanted yesterday – the list goes on. You need to be careful that you're not saying to yourself things like...

"I can't do this, I don't have the experience in this area, I can't do this by myself", and other negative self-talk.

You won't be in your present situation forever. Just because you can't see a way out, doesn't mean there isn't one. Everything you and I are going through right now will eventually pass! You need to tackle one day at a time. There are many demands on our time, our money, our skills, and there is fierce competition in the work place. We 'stuff' ourselves with information that we may never have to call on, but which we 'might' need. This only causes overload...anxiety...worry...panic...help!

Stop! Take stock. What's important in your life and that of

It is said that J. Arthur Rank, an English executive, decided to do all his worrying on one day each week. He chose Wednesdays. When anything happened that gave him anxiety and annoyed his ulcer, he would write it down and put it in his worry box and forget about it until the next Wednesday. The interesting thing was that on the following Wednesday when he opened his worry box, he found that most of the things that had disturbed him the past six days were already settled. It would have been useless to have worried about them!

your family? You need to have balance, keep it, and have fun along the way. Life's too short. What are your priorities just now?

Here are some tips to help conquer that worry habit.

- ◆ Don't whip yourself into a frenzy about things that you could have done better.
- ◆ Write a 'to do' list. Plan ahead for the week.
- ◆ What's most urgent? Rank the priorities and the time frames.
- ◆ Believe in yourself. Believe that you do best what you feel best about.
- ◆ Be 'present-minded' – get on with the task at hand and try not to procrastinate.
- ◆ Don't feel bad if you have to ask for help.
- ◆ Praise yourself when you have completed a task and cross it off the list.

There are so many 'unwritten' expectations in life. You must choose what to do now, and where to go from here. My favourite biblical book, *Proverbs*, (3:5-6) states "Trust in the Lord with all your heart; do not depend on your own understanding. Seek his will in all you do, and he will show you which path to take." (*The Living Bible* version.)

You need to get to a stage in your life when you can say to yourself, that you have done a really great job today and enjoyed every minute of it. You will then know that you have conquered the worry habit!



Gael McInnes, who lives in South Auckland, is a recently retired nurse and midwife, experienced in holistic care. Gael worked in diverse health arenas and taught at tertiary level.

Wise Words on Worry

"Worry is like a rocking chair: it gives you something to do, but it doesn't get you anywhere."

— *Source Unknown*

"What worries you, masters you."

— *Haddon W. Robinson*

"If you can't sleep, then get up and do something instead of lying there worrying. It's the worry that gets you, not the lack of sleep."

— *Dale Carnegie*

"Worry is wasting today's time to clutter up tomorrow's opportunities with yesterday's troubles."

— *Source Unknown*

"Every evening I turn worries over to God. He's going to be up all night anyway."

— *Mary C. Crowley*

"Worry pulls tomorrow's cloud over today's sunshine."

— *Chuck Swindoll*

"Don't worry about what's ahead. Just go as far as you can go - from there you can see farther."

— *Cited in "Bits & Pieces"*

"Worry often gives a small thing a big shadow."

— *Swedish proverb*

"Blessed is the person who is too busy to worry in the daytime, and too sleepy to worry at night."

— *Unknown*

"The reason why worry kills more people than work is that more people worry than work."

— *Robert Frost*

"Do the thing you fear to do and keep on doing it... that is the quickest and surest way ever yet discovered to conquer fear."

— *Dale Carnegie*

"Worry is interest paid on trouble before it is due."

— *Source Unknown*

"Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear... Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life? Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own."

— *Jesus Christ, Matthew 6:25-34*



MY SON THE TEACHER

By Dennis Gordon

As human beings, we tend to reject, fear, or avoid what we don't understand. Such were my own feelings concerning mentally handicapped people. Looking back, it was partly the result of a one-time childhood exposure to a group of handicapped children who were visiting the same sports event as our school class. I found myself reacting negatively to their behaviour and appearance, which were outside my normal experience. This was the 1950s — a time when people not as 'normal' as the rest of us lived in institutions and didn't interact much with society.

Early-established prejudices are not readily overturned unless they have to be. In my forties I was blessed with a third son, Adrian, who turned out to have a genetic abnormality that results in, among other things, retarded intellectual development. The circumstances of his birth and first 18 months were a trial — a premature delivery with complications, slow weight gain and inability to breast-feed, hypercalcaemia, three hernia operations, and the discovery that he had Williams Syndrome. This condition is marked by the loss of some genes from one of the chromosomes of every chromosome 7 pair in his body. Only some of the roles of these genes are known. One is to make elastin, a protein that is found in connective tissues, arterial walls, and the dermis of the skin, and its lack contributes to the facial characteristics that make every Williams kid look as if they belong to the same family.

Our experiences in the neonatal unit, and subsequently, have allowed my wife and me to share in the distresses of other parents, giving us more understanding and compassion for sufferers of disabilities. We were also to learn that life with Adrian would bring self-discovery, acceptance, and the overturning of some prejudices.

I like the descriptor 'special needs'. That exactly describes Adrian and all children like him.

First, let me tell you what Adrian is. He is all boy. He is social, outgoing, fun-loving, empathetic, and compassionate. Curiously, these attributes are said to be characteristic of Williams kids generally. Perhaps because of them, and to our great relief, Adrian was readily accepted, even loved, by the teachers and children at kindergarten and primary school. Now 13 and attending high school, Adrian has only the abilities of a 6-year-old in most tasks: vocabulary, reading, counting, drawing, and bodily coordination.

I like the descriptor 'special needs'. That exactly describes Adrian and all children like him. He *is* a 'normal' human being. He just operates at a level that is according to his personal abilities. He laughs, he cries, he plays, he interacts. He thinks, learns, reasons, schemes, and solves problems. Above all, he loves and thrives on love.

Because his needs are obvious it is easy to respond to them. I have been gentler, more merciful, understanding, and forgiving with Adrian than with my two older boys. Perhaps this comes with age and experience, but there's no doubt that his very needfulness evokes my compassionate response. One begins to look at all 'special-needs' people in a different way.

Actually, my relationship with Adrian has helped me to understand a lot about God. Although we human beings are remarkable creatures with extraordinary quality of mind, behaviourally we can be a pretty pathetic lot. We are so error-prone, so susceptible to character weaknesses like pride, lust, greed, and just plain orneriness that I often wonder why God bothers to deal with us. No human is immune to messing up, and that includes the most upright members of society — the Bible makes a startling assertion about this: "There is none righteous, not one", wrote Paul the Apostle to Christians in first-century Rome. None? That's something to think about.





Dennis and Brenda Gordon with Adrian.

When I observe the blatant

Williams Syndrome

Williams Syndrome (WS) was recognised only relatively recently. In 1961, J.C.P. Williams, a Dunedin heart specialist, noted that some of his pediatric patients shared many characteristics. In addition to some cardiovascular problems, they had elfin facial features and seemed to be mentally retarded. Since that time physicians have noted other traits, all apparently linked to a variable number of genes lacking from a region of chromosome 7. WS is not a new condition, however. It exists in all ethnic groups, at a nominal level of occurrence of about one in every 20,000 births worldwide. It has been suggested that Williams people were the inspiration for folk tales about elves, pixies, and other 'wee people'.

WS is just one of many genetic conditions that affect neural development. Researchers are finding that integrated studies of Williams and other syndromes are helpful in exploring how genes affect brain development and behaviour. In short, our special-needs brothers and sisters are helping us to learn more about ourselves as human beings.

There are active WS associations in many countries, including New Zealand. Enquiries can be made to: NZ Williams Syndrome Association, 19 Skibo St, Dunedin. A NZ website is being developed.

crassness and casual immorality on prime-time television and in popular magazines these days, and see people poisoning their minds and bodies with drugs and drunkenness, I think God must consider human beings as quite spiritually retarded. That would seem to be a more serious condition than mere mental retardation. Actually, one of ancient Israel's prophets quoted God as declaring human nature to be a kind of sickness — "The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure". Perhaps this explains another observation made by Paul to the church in Rome — "The sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so." From God's perspective, the human condition is pretty serious, terminal in fact.

Fortunately, God fully understands our condition, how it came about, and how to effect a cure. Christians believe that, in the person of Jesus, God himself experienced the human condition. He did not sin, but he knew temptation. He grieved about human suffering to the point of anguish. He cared so much he even bore our sinfulness personally, suffering torture and death to rescue us. Accepting his sacrifice personally, and admitting our need for God then to dwell in us through the Holy Spirit, is the cure to our otherwise incurable 'heart' condition. It does require, however, that each of us admits that we are indeed spiritually

retarded and need help.

Actually, God loves all human beings. But the ones he finds particularly irresistible are those who admit they have 'special needs' and want to become his children. At one level, this world is an incubator for the children of God, a kind of spiritual neonatal unit in which God sees little ones who are fighting to survive. This includes the worst of us — God knows what makes us the way we are. And his heart is captured by our vulnerability.

As the father of a special-needs child, I can identify with the words of the psalmist in the Bible: "As a

Actually, God loves all human beings. But the ones he finds particularly irresistible are those who admit they have 'special needs' and want to become his children.

father has compassion on his children, so the Lord has compassion on those that fear him; for he knows how we are formed." Adrian is only now beginning to understand his condition and explain it to people, but he has always recognised his need for help, and my wife and I can't help but respond. And neither can God to anyone who recognises a need for *his* help in conquering character weaknesses that arise from our human nature.

Dennis Gordon, who lives in Wellington with his wife Brenda and 13-year-old Adrian, is a marine biologist at a Crown Research Institute. He also serves on the Council of Wellington Churches. Dennis can be contacted at gordonfamily@paradise.net.nz.





What's Happening to my Investments?

By Terry Villiers

Most of us are understandably concerned at the drop in value of any of our investments. "Why has my superannuation/pension/managed fund value gone backwards this year? What should I do about it?"

On the one hand, fund managers, advisers, and finance writers say things like, "Look to the long term". "Keep to your game plan." "Don't panic and bail out at the bottom of the market", and so on. But aren't they really just looking after their own interests, making sure we leave our (sometimes diminishing) money with them?

Perhaps — but there is a more fundamental question we need to ask. *Am I investing or speculating?*

Investing is placing your money thoughtfully and carefully, knowing who and what you are investing in, being aware that markets will go up and down. Having investigated, you have confidence the manager or business you have partnered with will produce a viable return in the long run. So an investor (1) knows what he is investing in, and then (2) ignores the urge to respond to the short term.

Speculating, on the other hand, is opportunity focused. It isn't so much concerned with what or where the money is placed — as long as it yields a profitable return. It looks for winners, for the latest tips, for new information, and is as ready to exit a position as to enter it. A speculator (1) trades on the short term, and (2) looks to beat the odds.

My advice? If you're a speculator, stick to the TAB where the odds are decidedly better! But if you're an investor, do your homework. Know what and who you are partnering with when you are placing your hard-earned savings. Have confidence in the long-term prospects and resist the urge to respond to the short term, however much you're tempted.

Terry Villiers is a Certified Financial Planner and member of the Financial Planning Association of Australia.

Save As You Earn

By Trevor Blanchard

New Zealanders are constantly being admonished for their poor savings record, both by the Government and by the Governor of the Reserve Bank.

What can we do about this, given that there are very few of our population who do not have a mortgage and probably other debt in addition? This means that direct saving is unlikely to be a practical option.

There is one way however that will enable a mortgage holder to save a significant sum over the term of the loan. This is achieved by changing the mortgage payment frequency from monthly to fortnightly. This results in 26 payments annually, equivalent to 13 monthly payments rather than 12 if paid monthly. The effect is to reduce the repayment term because you will pay less interest over the term of the mortgage. This produces a significant saving to the borrower.

Let me illustrate how this is achieved:

A mortgage of \$250,000 for 20 years at 7.5% interest will involve monthly mortgage repayment instalments of \$2015.20. Interest paid over the term of the loan amounts to \$233,642. Now, if repayments were made on a fortnightly basis of \$1007.60, the loan would be repaid in 16 years and 9 months. However, the interest content of the payments would be \$188,772.

The interest saving is impressive, and of course the term of the mortgage is shortened appreciably. All this at an additional cost of \$2015.20 per annum, there being an equivalent of 13 months when paying fortnightly.

It is worth your while to change your repayment authority so that mortgage payments can be paid fortnightly. No approval of the lender should be necessary, but it would be courteous to advise them of your proposal.

The rewards are well worth a little effort!

Trevor Blanchard is a retired bank manager, with 50 years' experience in the banking and finance industry.



Imagine there is a bank that credits your account each morning with \$86,400. It carries over no balance from day to day. Every evening it deletes whatever part of the balance you failed to use that day.

What would you do? Draw out every cent of course! Each of us *has* such a bank. Its name is TIME! Every night it writes off as lost whatever you have failed to invest to good purpose.

It carries no balance, allows no overdraft. Each day it opens a new account for you. Each night it burns the remains of the day. If you fail to use the day's deposits, the loss is yours. There is no going back. There is no "drawing" against tomorrow. You must live in the present on today's deposits.

Invest it so as to get the most in health, happiness and success! The clock is running. Make the most of it today.

To realise the value of one year, ask the student who failed an exam.

To realise the value of one week, ask the editor of a weekly newspaper.

To realise the value of one day, ask a daily wage earner with kids to feed.

To realise the value of one hour, ask the lovers who are waiting to meet.

To realise the value of one minute, ask the guy who missed the train.

To realise the value of one second, ask the person who just avoided an accident.

To realise the value of one millisecond, ask the athlete who got a silver medal at the Olympics.

Treasure every moment you have. Remember that time waits for no one.

Yesterday is history, tomorrow is a mystery, and today is a gift — that's why it's called the present!

"Inside Life" has been unable to identify the author of this article, which has appeared in various forms. We would be happy to publish details of original authorship.



Do What Counts!

At the end of the day you ask yourself, "What did I do today?"

You're tired, you've worked hard, you know you've done a lot, but what? Why does it seem like trivia took over and the things you really wanted to do got pushed further into the background?

Time management books tell us that too often the *urgent* takes priority over the *important*. One way to look at the problem is to ask what's important, what's strategic, what matters long-term. Those are the things we have to prioritise in order to deal with the tyranny of the immediate.

Simply put, we have to "do what counts".

Daily goal or "to-do" lists can be helpful in keeping us focused. But these need to be framed in terms of "what counts" - and that requires that some things that compete for our heart, mind, time and attention simply don't count in the bigger scheme.

What did you do today that counts? What will you do tomorrow that counts?

Because it all adds up to - or takes away from - an effective life, it's important to "do what counts".

Coming up in future issues of ***Inside Life***...

- *Coping with Change*
- *Steps to Financial Security*
- *The Bible — Myth or Authority?*
- *Valuing Teen Age*
- *Why Does God Allow Suffering?*
- *Depression — the Black Plague*
- *Keys to Success*
- *Who Is Jesus?*
- *Astrology and the New Age*
- *How to be Truly Happy*
- *The Answer to Crime*
- *Giving the Gift of Encouragement*
- *The Marvellous Human Mind*
- *Overcoming Loneliness*
- *Would "God Defend New Zealand"?*
- *After Death — Then What?*



Time Management



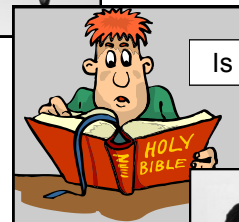
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