

# *Inside* Life

SUFFERING  
- WHY?



IN THIS  
ISSUE

ROADS

to  
nowhere

COOL STUFF  
about  
LOVE &  
SEX



LOOKING  
on the  
**BRIGHT**  
side



# Inside Life

A magazine of understanding

Volume 1, Number 4



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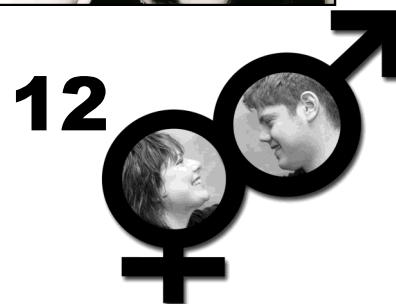
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### Inside Life

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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.

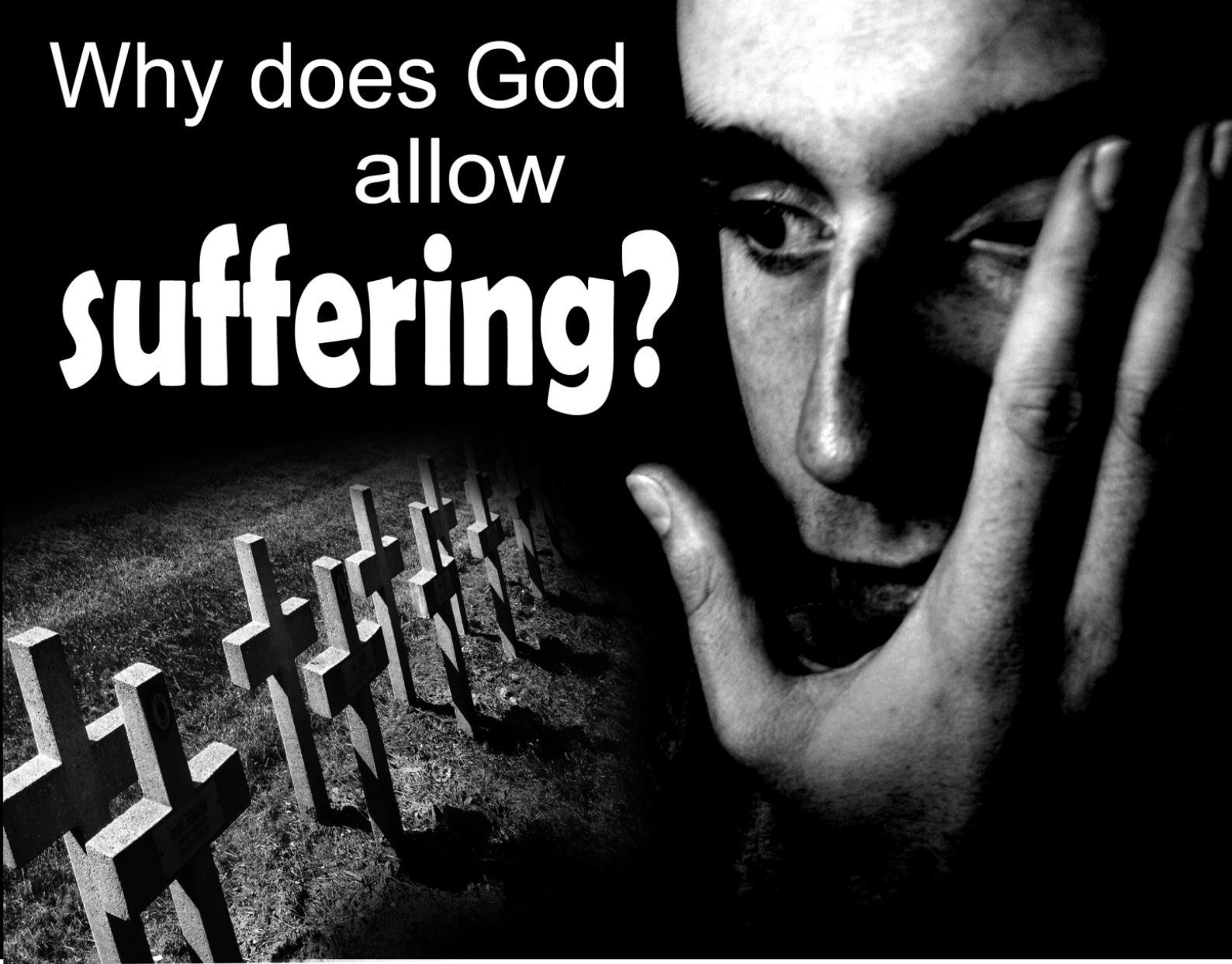
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**Our Cover:** This montage pictures suffering of many kinds. Droughts, warfare, car accidents, the death of loved ones — life can sometimes be cruel and unfair. This gives rise to the question that has so often been asked by hurting people: how can a loving God stand by while such suffering takes place?



# Why does God allow suffering?



By Rex Morgan

**If there is a loving God, why is there so much suffering in the world?**

Why would a God of love allow such tragedies as the infamous Boxing Day tsunami, the flooding of New Orleans, and the brutal loss of hundreds of innocent civilian lives in the recent Israel-Lebanon conflict?

This question is the commonest objection levelled at Christianity. If there is a God, why doesn't he stop the hurting? If he is a God of love, he must hate suffering, and if he is all-powerful, he must be able to get rid of it. So why doesn't he?

The larger the tragedy, the more attention it attracts, but actually there is no need to stress numbers in order to use suffering to argue

against God's existence. Surely just *one* untimely death is enough to make the point? The death of one patient cruelly taken by cancer raises the question of why a loving God would allow such inequity. And death isn't necessary either. The detection of the tumour and the pain experienced before that gives ample basis for the question.

## **If suffering was abolished**

Let's suppose that God were to wipe out all evil and suffering, so the world could be fair as we would like it to be fair. That means, for starters, that he would have to put a stop to all accidents causing injury and suffering.

How would God do this? Somehow, he would need to snatch sharp objects out of our hands before we cut ourselves with them,

or maybe turn knives into marshmallows at the point of contact. He would need to somehow take over the controls of vehicles, or change their speed or trajectory so they would never crash. He would even have to prevent our mouths from uttering unkind words or cutting comments that cause hurt.

To make changes like this, God would have to modify the laws of physics and chemistry, and the natural laws of cause and effect, so they would apply in different ways at different times. This would make life difficult if not untenable, because we depend on these laws being consistent.

Next, God would need to eliminate diseases such as cancer. To do this, he would have to prevent people from smoking, drinking too

much alcohol, and eating unhealthy foods. How many people would be happy to be censored like this?

To get rid of all sorrow and suffering he would even need to abolish death. Or would it be sufficient to simply allow people to pass away peacefully in their sleep at the age of 100? Perhaps even that may not be good enough, as there would still often be sorrow in the lives of those left behind.

If we want God to prevent disasters, we need to think about the specifics

**This question is the commonest objection levelled at Christianity. If there is a God, why doesn't he stop the hurting?**

of this. Which disasters should be eliminated? Those that take hundreds or thousands of lives? Yes, certainly. But what about events that snuff out just *one* life? Yes, that is a cause of suffering too. Okay, what about a rainy day when a rugby match is planned? Would God have to avert inconveniences like that too, because they can result in difficulties for people?

"If I ruled the world, every day would be the first day of spring", declares a popular song. But if there were no winter, what would this mean? It would be great if the weather everywhere was perfect all the time, but there would be no such things as deserts, and no continent of Antarctica. Would it be possible to have any snow-covered mountains if cold temperatures were prohibited because they cause suffering?

Of course, it isn't only human beings that suffer. Wildlife and the plant world also suffer the ravages of natural disasters as well as human mismanagement of the environment. But we humans are self-aware creatures who have to grapple philosophically with the reality of pain and our own error-prone human

nature. How did it come to be this way?

### **How it all began**

The Bible offers a theological explanation, in the account of Adam and Eve in the early chapters of Genesis. In the history of interpretation of these chapters, Adam and Eve have been taken to be genuine historical characters or metaphors for the first sentient human beings. Either way, there was a point when homo sapiens became both reflectively self-aware and aware of the divine - something not possible for animals. With this awareness came the important understanding that we have choices - we can be autonomous.

But that autonomy comes with a price. In the biblical account, Adam and Eve were given a simple two-choice test of obedience to the divine will. They were free to eat of every tree in the Garden of Eden, except for one. God warned them against taking of the "tree of the knowledge of good and evil", representing the way of deciding for themselves how to run their lives rather than following God's instructions. He warned them that if they made that choice, the result would be suffering and death.<sup>1</sup>

God could have done it in a different way. He could have *forced* them to make the right choice. But how would *you* like to be forced by God not to make any wrong choices in life? Would you like him to muzzle your mouth whenever you were about to take that second piece of cake, block your hand from picking up an extra can of beer, or miraculously turn the excess ice cream in your plate into a fresh green salad?

God made human beings with free will, the ability to make our own decisions and choices. If we didn't have the freedom to make conscious choices and to err, we would be no more than mindless robots or automatons, pre-programmed to act in a certain way. We would be mere puppets, with someone else pulling the strings.

Without the ability to make choices, we wouldn't truly be able to love. Sincere love can't be coerced. It

involves a decision, a choice. In order to have meaningful love we must also have the potential to hate, to hurt, to ignore.

So we see that the absence of free choice would prevent suffering in our lives, but it would also prevent us from knowing love and many of the other attributes of mind and character that make us humans.

God didn't force Adam and Eve to obey him, and he hasn't forced anyone since. However, everyone has in effect made the same choice as Adam and Eve, preferring at times to go their own way rather than God's.

The entry of moral evil into human affairs led to all sorts of hardships, affecting even the natural world in which humans had to eke out a living. So it is today. Additionally, we live in a world that is subject to natural catastrophes, some of which are beyond our control, others of which are exacerbated by our activities. It won't always be this way, however. The apostle Paul, writing in the New Testament, commented "For the creation was

**The absence of free choice would prevent suffering in our lives, but it would also prevent us from knowing love.**

subject to frustration...in hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God".<sup>2</sup>

As discussed in our previous article, "What's it all about, Alfie?",<sup>3</sup> God created human beings with the incredible potential of sharing the whole universe with him for all eternity. God wants us to have a relationship with him as his family forever, in a world of love, peace and joy. He wants to see us decide of our own free will to live that way, so he knows we will be happy doing that forever. In order for us to make this choice, there must be an alternative available. So God allows

suffering to be present in the world.

The words of Paul referred to above point out that this is a temporary state of affairs. The time will come when such suffering and sorrow comes to an end.<sup>4</sup>

### God suffers too

As a God of love, kindness and compassion, God actually *hates* suffering. He certainly didn't want mankind to choose the wrong way. The Bible states that God was "grieved that he had made man on the earth, and his heart was filled with pain".<sup>5</sup> It assures us that he "did not willingly bring affliction or grief to the children of men".<sup>6</sup>

He is not untouched or unmoved by pain and suffering. "I take no pleasure in the death of anyone, declares the Lord".<sup>7</sup> He doesn't remain aloof and removed in a remote "ivory tower" letting humans suffer while he looks on either approvingly or helplessly. In fact, incredible but true, he voluntarily subjected *himself* to human suffering to his great cost. He suffered greatly, and continues to suffer today.

In the person of Jesus Christ, God came in human flesh and suffered the pain and sorrow we experience. Jesus was described as "a man of

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sorrows and acquainted with grief".<sup>8</sup> He was ridiculed and mocked, beaten up and tortured so that he was barely recognisable, nailed to a cross and murdered with public humiliation and extreme agony.

We certainly can't accuse God of not being willing to suffer as humans do, and of not understanding our troubles!

## PAIN: FOE OR FRIEND?

Pain is something nobody likes. The searing pangs of an acute toothache, the pulsating throb of a headache, the nagging ache of arthritis... all we want is for it to end as soon as possible. How many tons of painkiller tablets are taken every day in order to deaden and stave off the torment of pain?

But pain isn't always a vexatious foe. Sometimes it can be a helpful friend. Pain often has a very useful role to play as nature's warning light. If it wasn't for the pain in your inflamed appendix it might well burst inside you and put an end to your life. A rush of pain warns you that your hand is too close to the hot stove, causing you to quickly withdraw it, instantly limiting further damage.

Pain serves as a signal that something is wrong — just like the smoke alarm in your home warns of impending disaster and gives you time to act.

Dr Paul Brand was an orthopaedic surgeon who worked with lepers in India for half of his life. He discovered that the reason leprosy patients lost fingers and toes was that they could not feel, and had no sense of pain. Those who got a piece of grit in their eye didn't realise it was there until it interfered with their vision. Then they rubbed it and painlessly scratched their eyes — until they went blind.

"As I study pain throughout the human body I gain deep respect for the Creator's wisdom", wrote Dr Brand in his book *In His Image*, which details many instances where leprosy patients suffered significant damage because they didn't feel pain.

When you think about it, maybe pain isn't all that bad after all. It warns us of danger, forces us to rest our weary bodies, and it can even save our lives!



As Jesus walked the earth and saw people suffering, the Bible says he was often moved to the very depth of his being by what he saw<sup>9</sup>. And he is still the same today. When he sees the suffering of the world, he suffers along with us<sup>10</sup>.

It's instructive to realise that even though he knew he himself was to become the ultimate victim of suffering, God still created a world in which suffering can exist.

### Things we don't understand

These reflections have attempted to investigate in general why a loving God allows suffering. But there is no way that we can identify the reason for all individual occasions of suffering. Far from it! We need to be careful about assigning specific reasons or meanings to tragedies and anguish. Suffering is painfully random in the world. Innocent infants suffer from terrible diseases. It is impossible to identify a specific cause for such events.

Wise King Solomon, under God's inspiration said that "time and chance" happens to all of us<sup>11</sup>. Some things are simply inexplicable.<sup>12</sup> This is because human beings are limited. We have to recognise there are many questions we can't answer yet.

If we could understand all of God's ways he would be no bigger than our mind, and not worth believing in. But we do know that he hates suffering even more than we do, and he looks forward to and will eventually bring about the time when it will cease. At the end of the Bible we read, "He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away".<sup>13</sup>

Since suffering is an inevitable part of life, perhaps a better question to pose than "Why does God allow suffering?" is to ask, "What can we do about suffering?"

The Bible gives plenty of instruction on how to respond to the problems of others. It encourages kindness, love, serving and helping the oppressed and burdened, the widows, the poor and needy. God

## FROM OYSTERS TO PEARLS

Large, well shaped pearls rank in value with the most precious gemstones. But they are quite different from other jewels. Most precious gems come from mines deep in the earth, but pearls come from the sea.

A pearl is formed when an irritant such as a piece of shell, bone, coral, or perhaps a tiny parasite, enters and lodges inside an oyster's shell. The mollusc reacts by beginning to coat the foreign object with a thin sheet of a substance called nacre. Over time, layer upon layer of nacre builds up to form a beautiful lustrous pearl.

Maybe we humans can learn a lesson from the humble oyster? When we are confronted by an irritating problem, rather than letting it get us down, it may help if we try to look on the bright side and think of it as an opportunity to build character. Perhaps we can use it to develop "pearl-like" qualities such as patience, tolerance and forgiveness?

It's amazing how something as ugly as an oyster is transformed into something as beautiful as a pearl! Wouldn't it be great if we could be transformed into something better than we are too?

You might like to think of the oyster next time something threatens to get under your skin!



reveals over and over again his compassion and love for those who are suffering, and his desire for us to do whatever we can to relieve the sorrows of our neighbours.

So we need to live with suffering in the meantime. But God has given us a wonderful promise that eventually a time is coming in which there will be no more suffering, no more pain and sorrow. We can thank God that the current temporary state of affairs will pass away, and a much better world is coming.

*If you would like to read more on this topic, please write for our free 8-page article on "Suffering".*

### Notes:

1. Genesis 2:16-17
2. Romans 8:20-21
3. "Inside Life" issue 3/2006 — For a free copy, please write to PO Box 2709, Auckland.
4. Romans 8:21; Revelation 21:4
5. Genesis 6:5-6
6. Lamentations 3:33
7. Ezekiel 18:32
8. Isaiah 55:3
9. Matthew 9:36
10. Matthew 25:35-45
11. Ecclesiastes 9:11
12. Ecclesiastes 8:17
13. Revelation 21:4

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# BIBLICAL PROPORTIONS ?



Tsunami damage photos courtesy Rod Matthews

By John Halford

**W**hen there is a major disaster, like the recent Indian Ocean tsunami, the media describes it as being 'of biblical proportions'. I suppose they feel that whereas ordinary catastrophes can be fitted into our own frame of reference, when something really awful happens, it can only be likened to things that happened 'in Bible times'.

Actually, we may have over estimated some of the great disasters mentioned in the scriptures, where hundreds of thousands of people seem to be involved. Many scholars doubt these huge numbers, claiming that we may be misinterpreting the use of the ancient languages. Like when we say 'I've told you a million times'. We know we don't mean it literally. But would someone two or three thousand years from now know that?

Be that as it may, why do we say that equally huge disasters, with massive casualties, are Biblical in proportion? It implies that it needs an act of God to produce a major disaster. That is nonsense.

Over a quarter of a million people died in the tsunami. That is tragic-

but many more than that have already died in the wake of the civil war in the Darfur region of central Africa. The mad man-made slaughter of Rwanda-Burundi ten years ago killed five times more than the Tsunami. No natural disaster was responsible for the tens of thousands who lost their lives in the 'ethnic cleansing' tragedy of the Balkans.

In 1937 the Japanese Imperial Army systematically slaughtered well over a quarter of a million Chinese in just one city. And we have recently commemorated the liberation of the mother of all man made disasters-the concentration camp at Auschwitz. All in all, the final death toll of the Second World War was about 60 million.

**We don't need to blame God for misery and mayhem of 'Biblical proportions'. We are quite capable of doing it by ourselves.**

The most destructive force on the planet is not an earthquake or a tsunami. It is unrepentant human nature. We don't need to blame God for misery and mayhem of 'Biblical proportions'. We are quite

capable of doing it by ourselves. Perhaps what we should be saying is that the disasters mentioned in the Bible sometimes seem to be 'of modern proportions.'

Jesus Christ could have calmed the tsunami wave. But perhaps if we asked him 'Why didn't you stop it?' his answer might be 'Why don't you stop your destructive behaviour?'

In fact, it was.

## Sinners above all?

Jesus was once asked why God allowed people to be caught up in tragedy. The Romans had slaughtered some people even as they were conducting a religious service to honour God.

"About that time some people came up and told him about the Galileans Pilate had killed while they were at worship, mixing their blood with the blood of the sacrifices on the altar.

Jesus replied, as he often did, with another question. "Do you think those murdered Galileans were worse sinners than all other Galileans? Not at all. Unless you turn to God, you too will die.'

He then reminded them of a recent accident in Jerusalem. "And those



On the morning of 8 October 2005 the most devastating earthquake to hit Northern Pakistan & Kashmir caused extensive damage to life, property and the infrastructure. Measuring 7.6 on the Richter scale, entire villages and communities were wiped out. Survivors had to endure a chilled winter in the months ahead. Photo courtesy [www.humanappeal.org](http://www.humanappeal.org), ©Dimnetti; Agency: stockx-change.com

eighteen in Jerusalem the other day, the ones crushed and killed when the Tower of Siloam fell on them, do you think they were worse citizens than all other Jerusalemites? Not at all. Unless you turn to God, you too will die." He was referring not just to temporary physical death. He wanted them to avoid a far more drastic loss.

That may not sound very encouraging. But Jesus was helping them understand these events by shifting their question from 'Why didn't God stop it' to 'Why don't you stop it?'

Stop what? Stop living as we do; selfishly, greedily, only pausing to think of the consequences of our actions and the meaning and purpose of life when we are confronted with tragedy.

### Only human

Jesus used the accident at Siloam to remind them that life as we know it is fragile and temporary. We are not made to be indestructible. Not yet.

Jesus knew of another kind of life—a life that transcends the physical realm. He said, 'I am come that they may have life and that they may

have it more abundantly.' He meant eternal life — living forever, not subject to death, sickness, accidents, tsunamis or any of the other things that can eliminate our temporary existence. And that is what he wants for us.

We so easily forget the temporary nature of this phase of our existence. The human race has indeed carved out much of the earth, with freeways, canals, dams, tunnels and bridges. Just a few days before the tsunami, the highest bridge ever built was opened in France. Soaring 343 metres above the Tarn valley, it is certainly a wonder of the modern world.

We think we can conquer any obstacle, until the earth hiccups and a tsunami wipes out hundreds of years of progress in a few seconds.

**The 270,000+ killed by the tsunami is a shocking figure, but it is not so large compared to some of the man-made disasters.**

God's creation has a way of reminding us that we are still 'only human'. And until we learn to control ourselves, it is better we remain only human. The 270,000+ killed by the tsunami is a shocking figure, but it is not so large compared to some of the man-made disasters.

We are quite capable of mega-slaughter and destruction, without the help of nature. We are not yet ready for the full potential of eternal life. So God started us off in safe mode.

### Starting in safe mode

Have you ever started your computer in safe mode? It is what you do when something is going wrong,

and you need to work with your system with greatly reduced power. It can be quite a depressing experience.

Only some of your familiar programs work, and those that do seem to stumble along slowly and painfully. Graphics are grainy, without the vibrant colours and high resolution that most monitors are now capable of giving. It is computing, but not as we know it. But you need to operate in this 'low life' version while you are getting the bugs out of the system. With full power you could do some real damage.

There is a lot of power 'out there' in the environment in which we shall spend eternity. We are not ready to handle it. So God prepared a 'powered down' nursery in which we could spend this first, physical stage of life. It bears some resemblance to the 'real thing'. But all life in this temporary realm is subject to decay and eventually death.

### Back to normal

For a short time the world was united in trying to help the victims of the tsunami. It brought out the best in us. But it wasn't long before life returned to normal. Soldiers returned to fighting their civil wars. Arms dealers returned to selling their weapons to anyone able to provide the cash. Drugs barons, living in luxury, continued to slowly destroy the lives of vulnerable people.

Jesus came to show that there was another way to live to prepare for the real life he wants us to have.

He didn't promise that living his way of life would take Christians out of the world and all its pain and suffering. But by choosing to follow and obey him, people are given a whole new perspective on reality and an assurance of an eternal life in the world to come. Nothing that man or nature can do is able to stand in the way of that.

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# ROADS TO

# NOWHERE!

By Gael McInnes

**Anger, hatred, resentment.**

**A** Harsh words, but these feelings rage throughout the world, and rear their 'ugly head' every day in conflicts between individuals and countries. They rage in our local communities and in our families. Neighbours 'war' with each other, often over trivial annoyances. Families are in conflict because of money issues, divorce, drunkenness, abuse, or whatever. Time and again these feelings of anger, hatred and resentment arise from misunderstandings, or comments that insinuate jealousy, pride, arrogance, racism or just plain ignorance.

Our schools are full of angry children who are often in the middle of these conflicts, and the only way they know how to vent their feelings is through teasing, bullying and/or fighting. What does the future hold for them, if we adults can't get it right?

I hope you're not on one of these roads to nowhere!

Human nature is sensitive. We take to heart what is said, and inwardly 'stew' things over. Unfortunately, we humans don't talk much about what is bothering us, and this is when we begin to hatch 'revenge' plans. These revengeful thoughts and intentions can lead either to actual verbal or physical action, such as abusing, assaulting or even killing someone. What a tragedy if this happens.

Others literally let the anger, hatred

and resentment 'eat' away their bodies. A doctor once said, "The digestive tract mirrors with fidelity every emotional state."

Our mental processes can also be upset – thoughts becoming distorted and irrational. Joints can become riddled with arthritis. The list goes on. These emotions of anger, hatred and resentment are disease producing. The Bible says, "As he thinks in his heart, so is he".<sup>1</sup> The more you think about what is on your mind when you are angry, the more ideas (often bizarre) you have. Another warning from the Bible: "And don't sin by letting anger control you."<sup>2</sup>

Hatred consumes the consumer! Elsie Robinson put it like this: "But even if our rage seems fully justified, and our plans succeed beyond our blackest hope, we will never get even. For life doesn't work that way. Instead of finding peace, renewed self-respect, and healing of our hurt, each attempt at revenge leaves us frustrated and cheated. Instead of punishing our enemies, we have simply played our own debasing game and sold ourselves down the river."<sup>3</sup>

Jesus said, "Whoever is angry with his brother without a cause will be sentenced by God."<sup>4</sup> The modern sentences by God present as inner decay (illnesses), frustration, conflict and neurosis. If you give out hate, you will become hateful. If you are resentful, you will be resented. If you do not like people, you will not be liked by people. That is the sentence of God, and it is going on in people's lives all around us. How sad.

Here's another helpful statement from the Bible: "As water reflects a face, so a man's heart reflects the man."<sup>5</sup>

Howard Thurman says, "If we nourish within our hearts hate and fear and self-centredness, we shall spend our days stumbling in the dark. Why? Because hate, fear, and self-centredness are not the way to live. Life doesn't work that way."<sup>3</sup>

As someone has said, "Revengefulness is a powerful poison. It will destroy you if you try to repress it, and it will destroy you if you express it in action."

Why is it that in human history peace treaties have lasted only on average 2½ years? One reason is that they were often founded on revenge! You can have peace or revenge, but you can't have both. They are incompatible!

We must see the effects these feelings have on us. Holistic care responds to the physical, emotional, social and spiritual needs. It's no good working out at the gym and getting your body into shape, or eating healthily, if your emotions are in turmoil, or you have no friend because you can't relate to people socially, or if you have unmet spiritual needs.

The body is made for good will, not ill will. So if you have a problem dealing with feelings such as anger, hatred and resentment, it is well worth considering making a choice to change your attitude for the better. This may mean talking to someone about how you feel and why, and seeking help to work through these

feelings. It may even involve confronting the person/s who have caused the problem, and forgiving them, or asking for forgiveness if you have hurt them. Saying 'I'm sorry' can be the most healing words you could ever say.

The Bible is full of helpful suggestions. When Paul wrote to the Ephesian Church he said, "Get rid of all bitterness, rage, anger, harsh words and slander, as well as all types of evil behaviour. Instead be kind to each other, tender-hearted, forgiving one another, just as God, through Christ has forgiven you." <sup>6</sup> James said to his people, "My dear brothers (and sisters), take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry, for man's anger does not bring about the righteous life that God deserves." <sup>7</sup>

E. Stanley Jones reminds us: "Love is positive; hate is negative; love heals; hate wounds; love lasts; hate stings itself to death." <sup>3</sup> Love and concern for others is the only way to keep families and nations together. Love holds a person together.

Go out with love within and the world will be lovely. It will respond in love and your road will lead to a healthy emotional outlook.

#### Notes:

1. Proverbs 23:7, NKJV
2. Ephesians 4:26, NLT
3. Quoted in "The Way", by E. Stanley Jones. (H&S, London, 1952)
4. Mathew 5:22, NLT
5. Proverbs 27:19, NLT
6. Ephesians 4:31-32, NLT
7. James 1:19-20, NLT



**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.



# LOOKING on the BRIGHT side



By Joanna D'Costa

**A stone in our path can be considered a stumbling-block or a stepping-stone.**

It all depends on the way we look at it. If you have a lemon, how about making lemonade? Looking at the bright side of things can make the difference between success and failure in life.

*Doubt sees the obstacles,*

*Faith sees the way.*

*Doubt sees the darkest night,*

*Faith sees the day.*

*Doubt dreads to take a step,*

*Faith soars on high.*

*Doubt whispers, "Who believes?"*

*Faith whispers, "I".*

I don't know who wrote this poem but I thought I would share it with you because I feel it is full of truth. When things aren't going too well it's very easy to get negative. We start thinking the whole world is against us and nothing will ever go right again. But given time things generally work out. It's during times like this, reading a poem like the one above helps to get things back into perspective. Things won't immediately work out on simply reading the verse, but it helps us stop to consider whether we are looking at everything from the right

angle. More often than not we aren't.

#### Pessimism as a lifestyle

Unfortunately, there are many of us who seem to get much more satisfaction from looking on the dark side of life than we do from seeing if there is a ray of hope.

We have all heard about the person who sees the glass of juice as being half empty rather than half full. We waste our time regretting what is lost rather than enjoying what is still there.

There are many of us who always look at life through pessimistic eyes, who are determined to cast a shadow on even the brightest day. We look for difficulties rather than opportunities. Often the difficulties become so great that any opportunity that might have been there sadly disappears. But difficulties are there to be overcome, not given in to.

#### Does faith help?

Some people think that if we firmly believe in God and are full of faith, we will never face any difficulties – never have any financial worries, never fall ill, and so forth. I

personally believe that although God doesn't cause difficulties to come upon us – that is usually our own doing – he does allow things to happen to us. He has the power to remove all things in our path but sometimes chooses not to – for our own good.

### **Difficulties can be growth opportunities**

Instead of viewing an obstacle as a *trial*, try looking on it as a *challenge*. A slight change in one's approach makes such a world of difference! Trials and difficulties if looked upon in the right perspective can be seen as opportunities to learn and grow. If everything goes too smoothly how can we ever be challenged to better ourselves? Even gold needs to be refined through the test of fire.

When we get ill, for instance, our reaction is to rail against fate, to resent bitterly such untimely interference with life's routine. Yet our illness can confer substantial benefits. It blamelessly releases us from a too-busy world, sharpens our mental and spiritual perceptions and permits a clearer perspective on our lives. Illness induces humility, gives us time to examine our inner selves and often scares us into reforming ourselves.

### **Every cloud has a silver lining**

Many have used their sick-bed as a place to wonder and dream. In 1873 American physician Edward Livingston Trudeau went as a young doctor to the mountains where he expected to die of tuberculosis. He did not die. As he lay in bed he had a vision of a hospital to help others. He raised money and laboured and his dream became the great sanatorium at Saranac that has



helped thousands of tuberculosis patients. Trudeau's affliction turned an unknown doctor into a physician of worldwide fame.

Florence Nightingale, too ill to move from her bed, reorganised the hospital system of England.

### **Attitude matters**

Life can be so much more happy, untroubled and fulfilling if our attitude towards it is optimistic - if we can look on the bright side of it. This does not mean we should be unrealistic and ignore the difficulties, but rather concentrate on any good that might come out of any situation we might be in.

Several months ago there was a burglary at our home while we were in it. It was a very traumatic experience and we had two choices – to dwell on the dark side or to see if there was any good in this seemingly dire situation. Surprisingly, there was plenty to be joyful about. All we lost was material things and no one was hurt.

The thieves showed us the weak spots in our security, which we were able to strengthen. Our faith in the police force was renewed – they were very cooperative, kind and concerned. They still patrol around

our home on a regular basis, especially at night.

Finally what touched us the most was the overwhelming love, support and concern shown to us by our entire neighbourhood. Who could imagine that so much good could come out of a burglary? Personally, I feel that seeing the bright side helped us recover faster and we have been able to put the situation far behind us.

We need to adopt optimism as a standard or pessimism will be justified. Pessimism engenders despair, which in turn gives way to misfortune and failure. If we believe we will fall we will fall. The world is not perfect and we will suffer misfortune, but we can rise above any problem that comes our way - by the way we approach it!

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# Cool Stuff about LOVE & SEX



By Rusty Wright

**P**ssst! Hey, kids! Want to hear some really cool stuff about love and sex that you might never hear from your parents?

Listen up! (But...how about closing your ears for the next few seconds?)

Hey, parents! Want to learn how to talk to your kids about sex in a way they will understand and relate to? Keep listening.<sup>1</sup>

OK, kids. You can listen again.

"A fulfilling love life. How can I have one? How can I get the most out of sex?" University students worldwide ask these questions. As I've spoken on their campuses, I've tried to offer some practical principles because I believe both pleasure and emotional fulfillment are important facets of sex. These principles relate to teens, too. Teens of all ages.

Sex is often on our minds. According to two psychologists at the universities of Vermont and South Carolina, 95% of people think about sex at least once each day.<sup>2</sup> You might wonder, "You mean that 5% of the people *don't*?"

Why does sex exist? One of the main purposes of sex is pleasure. Consider what one wise man named Solomon wrote. Writing sometimes in "PG" (but not "R-rated") terms, He said:

*Drink water from your own cistern, and fresh water from your own well.*

*Should your springs be dispersed abroad, streams of water in the streets? Let them be yours alone and not for strangers with you. Let your fountain be blessed, and rejoice in the wife of your youth. As a loving hind and a graceful doe, let her breasts satisfy you at all times. Be exhilarated always with her love.<sup>3</sup>*

Solomon's ancient love sonnet, the "Song of Solomon," is one of the best sex manuals ever written. It traces the beauty of a sexual relationship in marriage and is an

**Sex is often on our minds. According to two university psychologists 95% of people think about sex at least once each day.**

openly frank description of marital sexual intimacy. You might want to read it yourself. (Would it surprise you to know that it's in the Bible? You can dog-ear the good parts.)

Another purpose of sex is to develop oneness or unity. Fifteen hundred years before Christ, Moses, the great Israeli liberator, wrote, "For this reason a man shall leave his father and his mother, and be joined to his wife; and they shall become one flesh."<sup>4</sup> When two people unite sexually, they "become one flesh."

A third purpose for sex is

procreation. That, of course, is how we all got here. You learn that in first year biology, right?

OK, so sex is for pleasure, unity, and procreation. But how can people get the most out of love and sex?

## How to Have a Most Fulfilling Love Life

One way not to have a fulfilling love life in marriage is to concentrate solely on sexual technique. There is certainly nothing wrong with learning sexual technique--especially the basics--but technique by itself is not the answer.

The qualities that contribute to a successful sex life are the same ones that contribute to a successful interpersonal relationship. Qualities like love, commitment, and communication.

Consider love. As popular speaker and author Josh McDowell points out, those romantic words, "I love you," can be interpreted several different ways. One meaning is "I love you *if*--If you go out with me... if you are lighthearted... if you sleep with me." Another meaning is "I love you *because*--because you are attractive... Strong... intelligent." Both types of love must be earned.

The best kind of love is unconditional. It says, "I love you, *period*. I love you even if someone better looking comes along, even if you change, even if you have zoo

breath in the morning. I place your needs above my own."

One young engaged couple had popularity, intelligence, good looks, and athletic success that seemed to portend a bright future. Then the young woman suffered a skiing accident that left her paralyzed for life. Her fiancé deserted her.

This true story--portrayed in the popular film, "The Other Side of the Mountain"--was certainly complex. But was his love for her "love, period"? Or was it love "if" or love "because"? Unconditional love (or "less-conditional", because none of us is perfect) is an essential building block for a lasting relationship.

Unconditional love with caring and acceptance can help a sexual relationship in a marriage. Sex, viewed in this manner, becomes not a self-centered performance but a significant expression of mutual love.

Commitment is also important for a strong relationship and fulfilling sex. Without mutual commitment, neither spouse will be able to have the maximum confidence that the relationship is secure.

**Good communication is essential. If a problem arises, couples need to talk it out and forgive rather than stew in their juices.**

Good communication is essential. If a problem arises, couples need to talk it out and forgive rather than stew in their juices. As one sociology professor expressed it, "Sexual foreplay involves the 'round-the-clock relationship.'"<sup>5</sup>

Often students ask, "What about sexual activity before marriage?" More on that controversial topic next.

#### **Why Wait?**

After I'd spoken in a human sexuality class at Arizona State University, one student said, "You're talking about sex within marriage. What about premarital

sex?" He was right. I was saying that sexual intercourse is designed to work best in a happy marriage and recommending waiting until marriage before experiencing sex.

This view is, of course, very controversial. You may agree with me. Or you may think I am from another planet, and I respect your right to feel that way. Here's why I waited.

First is a moral reason. According to the perspective I represent, the biblical God clearly says to wait.<sup>6</sup> Some people think that God wants to make them miserable. Actually, He loves us and wants our best. There are practical reasons for waiting.

Premarital sex can detract from a

strong relationship and a fulfilling love life. Too often, it's merely a self-gratifying experience. After an intimate sexual encounter, one partner might be saying, "I love you" while the other is thinking, "I love it."

Very often premarital sex lacks total, permanent commitment. This can create insecurity. For instance, while the couple is unmarried, the nagging thought can persist, "If he or she has slept with me, whom else have they slept with?" After they marry, one might think, "If they were willing to break a standard with me before we married, will they with someone else after we marry?" Doubt can chip away at their relationship.

Premarital sex can also inhibit



Photo © Agency stockxpert.com

communication. Each might wonder, "How do I compare with my lover's other partners? Does he or she tell them how I perform in bed?" Each may become less open; communication can deteriorate and so can the relationship. Premarital sex can lessen people's chances to experience maximum oneness and pleasure. I'm not claiming that premarital sex eliminates your chances for great sex in marriage. But I am saying that it can introduce factors that can be difficult to overcome.

A recently married young woman told me her perspective after a lecture at Sydney University in Australia. She said, "I really like what you said about waiting. My fiancé and I had to make the decision and we decided to wait." (Each had been sexually active in other previous relationships.) She continued: "With all the other tensions, decisions and stress of engagement, sex would have been just another worry. Waiting 'till our marriage before we had sex was the best decision we ever made."

**Often sex brings emptiness rather than the wholeness people seek through it.**

Wise words. I waited because God said to, because there were many practical advantages, and because none of the arguments I heard for not waiting were strong enough.<sup>7</sup>

#### **The Vital Dimension**

So far we've looked at "Why sex?", "How to have a most fulfilling love life," and "Why wait?". Consider now the vital dimension in any relationship.

Powerful emotional factors can make it difficult for teens to wait until marriage for sexual intercourse or to stop having sex. A longing to be close to someone or a yearning to express love can generate intense desires for physical intimacy. Many singles today want to wait but lack the inner strength or self esteem. They may fear losing love if they postpone sex.

Often sex brings emptiness rather than the wholeness people seek through it. As one TV producer told me, "Frankly, I think the sexual revolution has backfired in our faces. It's degrading to be treated like a piece of meat." The previous night her lover had justified his decision to sleep around by telling her, "There's plenty of me for everyone." What I suspect he meant was, "There's plenty of everyone for me." She felt betrayed and alone.

I explained to her and to her TV audience that sexuality also involves the spiritual. One wise spiritual teacher understood our loneliness and longings for love. He recognized human emotional needs for esteem, acceptance, and wholeness and offered a plan to meet them. His plan has helped people to become brand "new persons" inside.<sup>8</sup> He promised unconditional love to all who ask.<sup>9</sup>



Once we know we're loved and accepted, we can have greater security to be vulnerable in relationships and new inner strength to make wise choices for safe living.<sup>10</sup>

This teacher said, "You will know the truth, and the truth will make you free."<sup>11</sup> Millions attest to the safety and security He can provide in relationships. His name, of course, is Jesus of Nazareth. Though I had been a skeptic, I placed my faith in Him personally my freshman year in college. Through a simple heart attitude, I said, "Jesus, I believe you died and rose again for me. I ask you to enter my life, forgive me, and

give me the new life you promised." He forgave all my flaws--and there were (and are) many of those. He said His own death and resurrection--once I accepted His pardon--erased my guilt.<sup>12</sup> That was great news!

Marriage with Jesus involved can be like a triangle with God at the apex and the two spouses at the bottom corners. As each partner grows closer to God, they also grow closer to each other. Life doesn't become perfect, but God's friendship can bring a vital dimension to any relationship.

#### **Parents and Kids**

A nationwide survey of teens asked the question, "When it comes to your decisions about sex, who is most influential?" Forty-nine percent of teens responding said it was their parents. The next closest response was "Friends" (16 percent). Eleven percent said the media influenced their decisions about sex the most. Only 5 percent said it was their romantic partner.<sup>13</sup> Kids, lots of your peers think that it is important to consider how their parents feel about sex.

And teens feel that talking with their parents about sex can make important sexual decisions easier. In a subsequent national survey, teens overwhelmingly expressed that they could more easily postpone sexual activity and avoid getting pregnant if they could only talk about these matters more openly with their folks.<sup>14</sup>

But there's a problem. Too many parents are unaware how important what they think about sex is to their teens. Parents often think that their teenagers' friends are the strongest influence on their teen's decisions about sex. Yet teens don't consider their friends as being nearly as influential as parents think they are.<sup>15</sup>

And mum, you are really, really important!

A major report based on two University of Minnesota studies involving national data found that teens having close relationships with their mothers are more likely than teens lacking close relationships with their mothers to delay first intercourse. The report authors note,





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"previous studies have shown that mothers tend to have a greater influence than fathers on teens' sexual decision-making."<sup>16</sup>

What can a parent do to help their teens develop positive, healthy sexual attitudes and behaviour? Here are some ideas:

Develop close, loving relationships with your kids from the time they are young. Model the types of behaviour

and attitudes you wish them to emulate. Listen to them and treat them with respect. Talk about sex, your own values, and why you hold them. Help your teen think through their life goals, including education, and how teenage sexual activity might affect their dreams. Discuss what types of media are appropriate for your son or daughter to consume.

Making sexual decisions can be hard for teens today. Parents and teens can help each other by becoming close friends and by communicating. It's not always easy, but the rewards can be significant.

#### Notes

1. Parts of this article are adapted from Rusty Wright, "Dynamic Sex: Unlocking the Secret to Love," Every Student's Choice, 1996 and Rusty Wright, "Safe Sex?", Cross & Crescent LXXXI:4, Winter 1994-95, pp. 19-21.
2. Kathleen Kelleher, "Entertaining Fantasies? Don't Worry, Everyone's Doing It," *Los Angeles Times*, August 15, 1995, E1. She cites Harold Leitenberg of the University of Vermont and Kris Henning, "now at the University of South Carolina Medical School".
3. Proverbs 5:15-19 NASB.
4. Genesis 2:24 NASB.
5. Emily Dale, Ph.D., Department of Sociology and Anthropology, Illinois Wesleyan University, Bloomington, Illinois, 1975.
6. 1 Corinthians 6:18; 1 Thessalonians 4:3.
7. For a summary of arguments for premarital sex, with responses, see Wright, "Dynamic Sex: Unlocking the Secret to Love," op. cit.
8. 2 Corinthians 5:17 NLT.
9. John 3:16; 13:34-35; 17:20, 23, 26; 1 John 4:7-21; 5:14-15.

10. Acts 1:8; Ephesians 5:18; Galatians 5:16-24; 1 Corinthians 6:18-20.

11. John 8:32 NASB.

12. Luke 24:44-47; Colossians 2:12-14.

13. "Faithful Nation: What American Adults and Teens Think About Faith, Morals, Religion, and Teen Pregnancy," The National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy, September 2001, p. 5; <http://www.teenpregnancy.org/resources/data/pdf/keeping.pdf>.

14. "With One Voice 2002: America's Adults and Teens Sound Off About Teen Pregnancy," The National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy, December 2002, pp. 2, 26, 27; [http://www.teenpregnancy.org/resources/data/pdf/WOV2002\\_fulltext.pdf](http://www.teenpregnancy.org/resources/data/pdf/WOV2002_fulltext.pdf).

15. Ibid., pp. 2, 22-23.

16. "Teens' Closeness With Their Mothers Linked to Delay in Initiation of Sexual Activity, Study Says," Kaiser Daily Reproductive Health Report, September 5, 2002, [http://www.kaisernetwork.org/daily\\_reports/print\\_report.cfm?DR\\_ID=13275&dr\\_cat=2](http://www.kaisernetwork.org/daily_reports/print_report.cfm?DR_ID=13275&dr_cat=2). The words quoted are those of the Kaiser Report summary of what the University of Minnesota research authors communicated.

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## The Key to Successful Financial Planning

*By Trevor Blanchard*

**B**efore you undertake any major borrowing you will need to produce a budget to satisfy a lender of your ability to meet your financial commitments.

Most people prefer to shy away from this exercise as "too hard" and leave it to the lender to satisfy themselves of your borrowing ability based simply on your income. However, a prudent borrower would prefer to establish to their own satisfaction that they could afford the proposed level of borrowing.

To do this, there is one simple exercise

you should undertake, and that is quite simply to find out how much you are spending. Sure, you know what your power and water is costing, your rates or rent, insurances and other monthly payments.

But what about those small unmeasured items? For instance, it's instructive to consider the question: How much did you spend today?

Keep a record of all the small items such as a newspaper \$1.50; lunch \$7-10; car parking \$10+. These together with coffee, \$3-4 (x3?), could easily amount to \$30+, which over the course of a week mounts up to \$150! Add to that the after-work gathering on Thursday or Friday night and you could easily have spent



something in excess of \$200 on nothing "measurable".

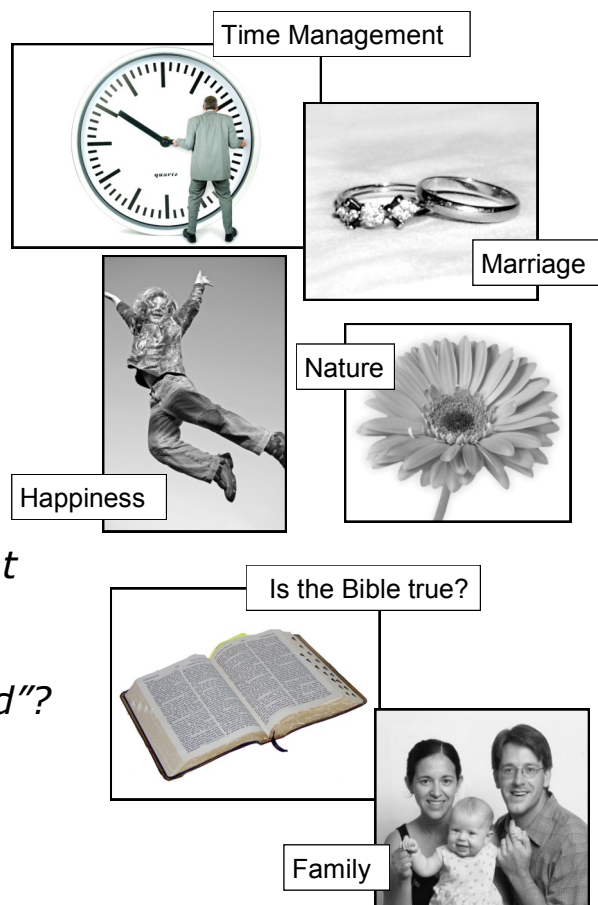
The first essential in creating a budget is to know where your money is going. When you ascertain and quantify this you may be dismayed at the substantial sum of money which has literally "slipped through the fingers".

Do you remember your grandmother or maybe your mother telling you as a youngster "Take care of the pence and the pounds will take care of themselves"? Although the pounds and pence have long since been replaced by dollars and cents, and even our 5 cent pieces are now obsolete, that advice is as pertinent today as it was in bygone days.

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

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

- *Coping with Change*
- *Steps to Financial Security*
- *The Bible — Myth or Authority?*
- *Valuing Teen Age*
- *Depression — the Black Plague*
- *Keys to Success*
- *Who Is Jesus?*
- *Astrology and the New Age*
- *How to be Truly Happy*
- *The Answer to Crime*
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