

Issue 6
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Inside Life



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SUPERHERO
STILL NEEDED?



LIVING IN
LUXURY'S LAP



Jesus Christ 
SUPERS **AR**
or SUPERSTITION ?

Inside Life

A magazine of understanding

Number 6, July 2007

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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: An Easter scene in Sicily. Jesus Christ, the man who died on a cross as a lowly criminal 2,000 years ago has had a massive impact on history. He is still loved and worshipped by hundreds of millions of people almost two millennia after the fateful day of his crucifixion. Our lead article asks what is so special about Jesus Christ.

Photo © Giovanni Rinaldi. Agency: iStockphoto.

Jesus Christ — Superstar, or Superstition?



By Rex Morgan

It would be hard to find anyone who hasn't heard of Jesus Christ. His is probably the most famous name in history — he stands out as the most influential person ever to have walked the earth.

But *did* he walk the earth? Was Jesus really an historical person, or is he just a legendary figure?

The 1970s rock opera *Jesus Christ Superstar* asked the question “Do you think you're what they say you are?” Millions worship him as their “Saviour”, claiming that he was resurrected from the dead. Others say he was no more than a wise and respected teacher. Dan Brown's novel, *The Da Vinci Code*

posits that he was a mere mortal who married Mary Magdalene and fathered a child.

Who was — or is — Jesus? Is he a Superstar, the Son of God and Saviour of mankind, or is this all just superstition?

What does history say?

Jesus' life is recorded in some detail in the Bible, but that is no surprise as the writers were his followers. If such a significant person existed, surely other writers would have referred to him?

Actually, he wasn't all that important at the time. He was an itinerant preacher who enjoyed limited popularity for a very short time

Who was — or is — Jesus? Is he a Superstar, the Son of God and Saviour of mankind, or is this all just superstition?

within a small community in a remote province on the eastern edge of the vast Roman Empire. Very little literature of that time has survived to the modern day.

However, there are some notable references to Jesus in some of the oldest literature we possess.

Tacitus, a Roman historian writing around AD 115, reported on the Emperor Nero's decision to blame the Christians for the fire that destroyed Rome in AD 64 in the following words: “Nero fastened the guilt and inflicted tortures on the Christians. Christus (the Latin spelling of Christ), from whom the name had its origin, suffered the extreme penalty during the reign of Tiberius at the hands of one of our procurators, Pontius Pilatus...”¹

Suetonius, another Roman historian contemporary of Tacitus, tells us that in AD 49 “Since the Jews were constantly causing disturbances at the instigation of Chrestus (a common misspelling of the name of Christ), he (the Emperor Claudius) expelled them from Rome.”²

Another Roman writer, Pliny the Younger, who was governor of

From B.C. to A.D.

A daily reminder of Jesus Christ's pivotal role in world history is found in the way dates are calculated. The term “B.C.” means “Before Christ”, and “A.D.” means after the birth of Christ, from the Latin “Anno Domini”, meaning “In the year of our Lord”. History has been divided in two by the birth of Christ!

The use of B.C. and A.D. for numbering calendar years was developed by Dionysius Exiguus in 525 A.D. However, an error was made in pinpointing the year of Christ's birth. Scholars later discovered that Jesus was actually born around 4-6 B.C., although the historical details are too sketchy to determine the exact date.

In recent years, the terms B.C.E., meaning “Before the Common Era” and C.E., signifying “Common Era”, have increasingly been used as alternative dating forms. These terms have especially been preferred in academic circles, and in formerly Communist countries, such as China.

One of the major reasons for this new nomenclature is to counter the influence of Christianity. But the number of any given year is identical, no matter what term is used. (E.g. the year 2007 A.D. is the same as the year 2007 C.E.) So even if the terms B.C. and A.D. are replaced by B.C.E. and C.E., the dates will still refer back to the birth of Jesus!



Christ the Redeemer?

The statue of Christ the Redeemer in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, was chosen in a July 2007 online poll of 100 million voters as one of the New Seven Wonders of the World. The statue weighs 700 tons and stands 38 metres tall.

The title "Christ the Redeemer" refers to the Christian belief that Jesus came to earth as the Redeemer of mankind, saving humanity from the penalty of its sin.

The statue is truly a magnificent monument. But is Jesus Christ really the Redeemer of mankind? The accompanying article explores the historicity of Jesus, and the validity of his claims.

Photo from www.new7wonders.com. Used by permission. Copyright 2000-2007 New Open-World Foundation, Switzerland.

Lucian of Samosata, a second century Greek satirist, wrote "The Christians... worship a man to this day – the distinguished personage who introduced their novel rites, and was crucified on that account."⁶

What would you say if you heard someone on the street, or maybe one of our politicians in the Beehive, declare loudly "I am the way, the truth and the life. No one can come to God but by me."⁷

So there are indeed a number of historical evidences that Jesus actually did live, in addition to the many pages recorded in the New Testament gospels. These biblical references constitute valid evidence of Christ's historicity too. The New Testament has been shown to be a genuine, accurately transmitted historical record, with thousands of manuscripts extant today, dating as far back as AD 100.

What an outrageous claim! You would probably have questions about the speaker's sanity.

But that was only one of the claims of Jesus. He also claimed to have shared the glory of God before the world began.⁸ He claimed to have been alive before Abraham, who lived around 2,000 years earlier.⁹ He claimed to be a heavenly king.¹⁰ He claimed that he was going to die and come back to life.¹¹ And after that, he was going to return to earth again to judge the world.¹² He claimed to be able to forgive sins, something that only God can do.¹³ He even claimed that he could give people everlasting life.¹⁴

The list of staggering claims goes on and on.

He claimed that he was "the Christ, the son of God."¹⁵ He claimed to be one with God.¹⁶ And he even claimed he was worthy of worship.¹⁷

A line from *Jesus Christ Superstar* says "He's a man, he's just a man". If Jesus was just a man, all of the claims listed above are lies, because clearly he represented himself as more than just a man; he made himself out to be God.

Many people feel that Jesus was a good man, a wise and peace-loving

There are indeed a number of historical evidences that Jesus actually did live, in addition to the many pages recorded in the New Testament gospels.

Now, let's return to the question posed in *Jesus Christ Superstar*, "Do you think you're what they say you are?"

Amazing Claims

What, or who, did Jesus say he was? A quick overview of the New Testament reveals that Jesus made some startling claims about himself.

Bithynia in Asia Minor, referred to the Christians in a letter to the Emperor Trajan in around AD 112. "They were in the habit of meeting on a certain fixed day before it was light, when they sang in alternate verses a hymn to Christ, as to a god, and bound themselves by a solemn oath... never to commit any fraud, theft or adultery..."³

The Jewish historian Flavius Josephus, writing around AD 93, referred a couple of times to Jesus in his work, *Antiquities of the Jews*. In one section he referred to James "the brother of Jesus who was called Christ".⁴ Another passage states: "About this time there lived Jesus, a wise man... When Pilate condemned him to be crucified, those who had come to love him did not give up their affection for him... And the tribe of Christians, so named from him, are not extinct at this day."⁵

There are also references to Jesus in the *Talmud*, a collection of Jewish rabbinical writings compiled from AD 200 to 500. Many of these references were derogatory, as the rabbis were antagonistic to his teachings, but they do help establish his historicity.

teacher who taught helpful moral principles. But if he claimed to be God when he was only a man, he was telling a blatant lie, deceiving his followers, and therefore could *not* be an honest and good man.

Noted author C.S. Lewis brought out this point tellingly in his book *Mere Christianity*. "A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic -- on the level with a man who says he is a poached egg -- or he would be the devil of hell. You must take your choice. Either this was, and is, the Son of God, or else a madman or something worse. But let us not come with any patronising nonsense about his being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us."

There are only three possibilities. Because of what he said, Jesus was either the Lord, a liar, or a lunatic.

True or false?

Let's consider the possibilities logically. When Jesus said "I and the father are one" he was claiming to be God. This statement was either true or false. There isn't any alternative.

If it is true, then he is the Lord. If it is false, either he knew it was false, in which case he was a liar, or he didn't know, in which case he was a lunatic. There just isn't any alternative.

So we are left with three possibilities. Because of what he said, Jesus was either the Lord, a liar, or a lunatic.

Let's look at the options. Firstly, was Jesus a liar?

If he was, then he was a particularly evil and villainous liar, deliberately misleading millions of

The God Delusion?

Oxford University Professor Richard Dawkins published a bestseller entitled "The God Delusion" in 2006. The book contends that belief in a supernatural creator is a delusion.

To Dawkins, Jesus Christ is a superstition rather than a superstar. He says, "Faith is the great copout, the great excuse to evade the need to think and evaluate evidence. Faith is belief in spite of, even perhaps because of, the lack of evidence."

Christians hotly debate Dawkins' stance, and rather than evading evidence, they claim to be able to provide abundant evidence for their beliefs. The accompanying article considers some of the evidence for Christian belief in the historicity of Jesus.



people to trust their lives to him, and even to die for him. And of course he died for his teachings himself, an incongruous thing to do if he was a liar, because he could have easily changed his story and lived. There was no motive for him to lie – his claims brought him hatred, rejection, misunderstanding, persecution, torture and death.

Actually, few people claim Jesus was a liar. Even sceptics agree that he had a pure and noble character. He taught high principles of honesty, love and virtue, and by all accounts lived a morally faultless life. It doesn't make sense that such heartless hypocrisy and deceitfulness would come from someone who was as unselfish, loving, caring, compassionate and careful about the truth as Jesus was. It just doesn't fit his psychological profile.

Was Jesus a lunatic? Once again, his character demonstrated the opposite. He was a man of wisdom, logic, mental health and creativity. How could a madman possibly have come up with the consistently pure and noble teachings of Jesus? Those teachings, such as the Sermon on the Mount, are still today regarded as a paragon of moral principles.

Jesus was continually challenged

by the highly educated scholars and lawyers of his day, but he always responded with quick and intelligent answers that amazed and outwitted them. In the face of tremendous pressure he remained calm and composed. He didn't display any of the characteristics of imbalance or abnormality that point to insanity.

There isn't even a shred of evidence that Jesus was either a liar or a lunatic. This leaves just one alternative, that he is who he said he is, the Lord.

But let's examine this a little further. Is there any other evidence to demonstrate Jesus was more than just a normal human being? Yes, there are at least a couple of things that indicate he is divine. Firstly, he fulfilled hundreds of prophecies written about him prior to his birth. Secondly, after he died he came to life again.

Predicted centuries in advance

Books proved to have been written hundreds of years before Christ's birth state that a Messiah was to come who would be a Jew¹⁸, a descendant of King David,¹⁹ and would be born to a virgin,²⁰ in Bethlehem.²¹ Other predictions stated he would ride into Jerusalem

on a donkey,²² would speak in parables,²³ and would be betrayed by a friend,²⁴ for 30 pieces of silver.²⁵ Yet other prophecies recorded that he would die with criminals, pierced in the hands and feet, with his executioners gambling for his clothing,²⁶ that none of his bones would be broken,²⁷ and that he would be buried in a rich man's tomb.²⁸

There are literally *hundreds* of such predictions in the Old Testament, and Jesus fulfilled every one of them! Professor Emeritus of Science at Westmont College, Peter Stoner, used the aid of 600 students to carefully calculate the probability of anyone conspiring to fulfil these prophecies. He conservatively estimated that the chance of one man fulfilling just 48 of the recorded predictions was one in 10¹⁵⁷, an almost inconceivably large number.

One of the prophecies written by King David about 1000 years before Jesus was born stated that he would be resurrected from the dead.²⁹ This is probably the most difficult prophecy for someone to engineer of his own accord. If it is true, it is really worth sitting up and taking notice of. Think of it – do you know anyone who has come back to life after being dead several days? It is a stupendous proof that there is something very special about this man, that he is a superstar rather than a superstition – if it is true.

So is there any evidence for this astonishing claim, that Jesus was resurrected?

The tomb was empty

Jesus himself predicted his resurrection so clearly that the Romans made sure they carefully guarded the tomb in order to prevent the disciples stealing the body or claiming he had risen. When the disciples did start proclaiming that the tomb was empty, all the Romans needed to do was to reveal the body and the Christians would have been silenced. But realising the body

was gone, the authorities tried to explain it away by concocting a lie that the disciples had stolen it.³⁰

The argument that the disciples made up the resurrection story doesn't add up because they themselves didn't believe it, until Jesus himself convinced them it had happened. If they had invented the story, certainly they wouldn't have made women the first witnesses of the empty tomb and the risen Christ, as women's testimony wasn't accepted in that culture. And if they had made it up, would they really have died for such a lie? Each of the disciples was viciously persecuted and most were brutally murdered for their belief in Jesus.

All of them were suddenly transformed after the death of Jesus, from men who were fearful and desperately discouraged into men who confidently and boldly stood up, defying prison and death, for their master. How can that transformation be explained?

Prior to Jesus' death, they had all deserted him in fear of their lives, with Peter even swearing in cowardly fashion that he didn't know him. Amazingly, all of them were suddenly transformed after the death of Jesus, from men who were fearful and desperately discouraged³¹ into men who confidently and boldly stood up, defying prison and death, for their master. How can that transformation be explained? The only way that makes sense is that they had seen that Jesus was indeed resurrected.

In a letter written to one of the churches in Greece soon after the resurrection, Paul claimed that 500 people had seen the risen Christ.³² Many of those witnesses were still alive when Paul made this claim. If it was untrue, the sceptical Greeks could have easily disproved it. Paul himself was a violent oppo-

nent of the Christians, vehemently terrorising and killing them. But overnight he suddenly changed and began risking his life for the message he had hated so much. The reason he gave for this was that he had seen the risen Christ, and indeed there is no other way to make sense of it.

Interestingly, millions of other people since that time have claimed they also have a relationship with Jesus and he has transformed their lives.

This still happens regularly today. Former criminals, gangsters, liars and thieves have suddenly changed their lifestyles and started trying to be kind-hearted, generous and loving. This is only possible on such a wide scale because Jesus was resurrected, and is still alive today, and in a position where he can influence people's lives.

If you'd like more information on how Jesus works today, why not visit your local church this weekend? Or if you prefer, feel free to write to "Inside Life", P.O. Box 2709, Auckland, for more information.

Jesus Christ is not a superstition. There is ample proof that he lived, died and was resurrected. He is indeed the Son of God, a Superstar, the Saviour of mankind!

1. Cornelius Tacitus, *The Annals of Imperial Rome*, 15.44
2. Suetonius, *The Lives of the Caesars*, book 5.25
3. Pliny, *Letters*, 10.96
4. Flavius Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*, 20.9.1
5. Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*, 18.3.3
6. Lucian, *The Death of Peregrine*, 11.13
7. John 14:6
8. John 17:5
9. John 8:58
10. John 18:36-37
11. John 12:32-22
12. Mark 14:61-62
13. Luke 5:20-21
14. John 11:25
15. Matthew 16:16-17
16. John 10:30
17. John 20:28-29
18. Genesis 49:10
19. 2 Samuel 7:12
20. Isaiah 7:14
21. Micah 5:2
22. Isaiah 62:11
23. Psalm 78:2
24. Psalm 41:9
25. Zechariah 11:12-13
26. Psalm 22:16-18
27. Psalm 34:20
28. Isaiah 53:9
29. Psalm 16:10
30. Matthew 28:13
31. John 20:19
32. 1 Corinthians 15:6

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SUPERMAN RETURNS: SUPERHERO *still* NEEDED?

By Rusty Wright

Does the world still need a superhero?

Watch out, bad guys, as *Superman Returns* . . . fighting movie villains, rescuing the imperilled, desiring Lois Lane (now a single mum), saving the world.

The guy is everywhere. Superman's promotional ties include Burger King, Duracell, got milk?, even a dating website. NBA star Shaquille O'Neal has a Superman logo tattooed on his arm. Arch villain Lex Luthor hacked Superman's website, linking to his own MySpace.com webpage. Marketers work every angle.

Why has the Superman story remained so popular? What is it about the Man of Steel that captures the public imagination?

In the 1930's, the Great Depression had the world slumping. Fascist and Nazi menaces haunted Europe. Two Cleveland teenagers dreamed up a hero who would rescue the troubled, inspire hope, and set things right. The story was born.

In the new film, *Daily Planet* editor Perry White instructs his staff to cover everything they can about Superman's return. He especially wants to know, "Does he still stand for truth, justice, all that stuff?"

He does, and that's one reason Superman's appeal endures. Some — probably many — want to identify with someone bigger than themselves who embodies what's honourable, a hero to admire or emulate.

Look, up in the sky!

Lots of people need rescuing these days from crime on the streets and in the boardrooms, troubled relationships, terrorism, war, disease, nuclear threats. Superman has power. He cares for distressed people. And he's humble.

Plain, ordinary Clark Kent could be every human. His mild mannered disguise hides phenomenal abilities. Ever dream of your peers, your foes, or the world glimpsing the real you, the one with more to offer than ever gets appreciated?

My childhood heroes included Superman, the Lone Ranger, and

Zorro. I wore their costumes as I watched their television programs. Their struggles for good energized my youthful imagination.

Of course, not everyone believes the world needs saving. The new Lois Lane says, "The world doesn't need a saviour; neither do I." Superman tells her, "But every day I hear people crying for one."

Superman's biological father, Jor—El (voiced by the late Marlon Brando), prepared counsel for his child, Kal—El, whom he launched into space as their planet, Krypton, exploded. Of earthlings: "They can be a great people, Kal—El. They wish to be. They only lack the light to show the way. For this reason above all — their capacity for good — I have sent them you . . . my only son."

My only son . . .

Spiritual parallels have not been lost on media observers. *Rolling Stone* feels Brando's words "establish . . . (Superman) as a Christ figure." Jesus, of course, referred to himself as God's "only Son" sent to rescue the world: "I have come as a light to shine in this dark world, so that all



Jesus referred to himself as God's "only Son" sent to rescue the world: "I have come as a light to shine in this dark world..."

who put their trust in me will no longer remain in the darkness."

Superman creators Jerry Siegel and Joe Shuster were Jewish. "El" is a Hebrew word for "God." The biblical Moses' mother hid him in a basket in the Nile River to save his life.

Superman Returns director Bryan Singer, who is Jewish, acknowledges that biblical imagery — both messianic and Mosaic — have influenced the Superman saga. An adopted only child, picked on in youth, Singer says he's often felt like an outcast.

How does Superman inspire him? "I think most people do believe in that kind of integrity and virtue," Singer observed in a documentary. "They want to see goodness. People have a deep need to believe that it exists out there."

Superhero — a real one — still needed.

Anyone out there "still stand for truth, justice, all that stuff?" Anyone qualify as "the Light of the world"?

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BUDGE IT WITH A BUDGET !

By Trevor Blanchard

How often have we heard from our friends or relatives that they couldn't afford a holiday this year because of unscheduled expenses? Perhaps the real reason was that they weren't working to a budget?

Sadly, the very use of the word "budget" raises thoughts of someone who is on rather limited income. But no, a budget is simply a *plan*, and planning is for everybody who wants to know where their money is going. It's a worthwhile idea for all of us to work to a plan to enable us to enjoy various pleasures such as an overseas holiday, upgrading the family car, or carrying out improvements around our home.

A budget involves just two steps. Firstly, establish your fixed outgoings such as mortgage or rent payments, insurances, rates, school fees if applicable. Secondly, calculate your variable expenses — food, cleaning,

electricity, water, vehicle running costs, and that great variable — "personal" expenditure.

It is this last item we need to look at closely because it is usually an "on demand" item. It's a good idea to keep a note of your actual daily expenditure for a period of time. You may be very surprised at how much of your total income is accounted for in this "personal" area!

How many coffees did you purchase this week? How much did car parking cost you? Did you buy your lunch, or snacks? Maybe a magazine? What did drinks after work cost you this week? All these are variable items over which you have direct control. This is the area where savings can most easily be made, so choose where your priorities lie and you may discover there is sufficient surplus to achieve some of your dreams.

Living in the modern world, particu-



larly in a city, places many temptations before you, all seeking to encourage you to part with your hard-earned money. Why are the shopping malls so attractive? To get you to go there with the family for something to do. Count the cost later if you fall for this one!

Budgeting is not about going without certain pleasures, although sometimes that is necessary. It is about knowing where your money is going and choosing your priorities. So if you want to achieve your dreams by pushing over a financial obstacle, the best way to budge it is with the aid of a budget!

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



LET THERE BE.... *LIFE!*

By Dennis Gordon

Imagine you are a space traveller. You and your companions have been specially selected to colonise a planet identified as possibly having potential to support your kind. Now, after many years – and untold distances behind you – your destination comes into view, a tiny speck, all but concealed by the radiance of the star around which it orbits.

Very soon, the distinctive life-supporting attributes of the new planet become apparent, especially the presence of water. It is evident in the fluffy white vapours of the atmosphere, the turquoise and aquamarine of seas and oceans, and the various hues of green smudged across the brown and red earth of continents.

This will be your new home, an unexploited jewel of a planet that surely holds promise for your race's survival. Now, to explore – for you must accurately survey its potential and report back so that others can follow you.

Your spacecraft descends low into

the atmosphere – you are now just a few kilometres above an ocean. The watery expanse is amazing, and winds ruffle the surface into white streaks and plumes. Now these are seen to converge upon a shore and you track a coastline for some distance. Unbroken forest lies below, giving way to grassy meadows and a broad meandering river. Far off are snow-clad mountain peaks. You descend even lower. Look! There are creatures, herds of them, their different sizes and colours revealing much variety, even from this altitude.

You and your companions are excited! You must land, and explore. There is so much to learn about your new home. Some of the plants must surely be cultivable and provide new foods. Perhaps some of those animals might be able to be domesticated. There must also be micro-organisms that could be cultured for various uses. You have a relatively small window of time to conduct a planetary inventory, to survey, build, farm, and prepare for others to follow. You land, open the air locks, and take your first breath of a life-supporting atmosphere.

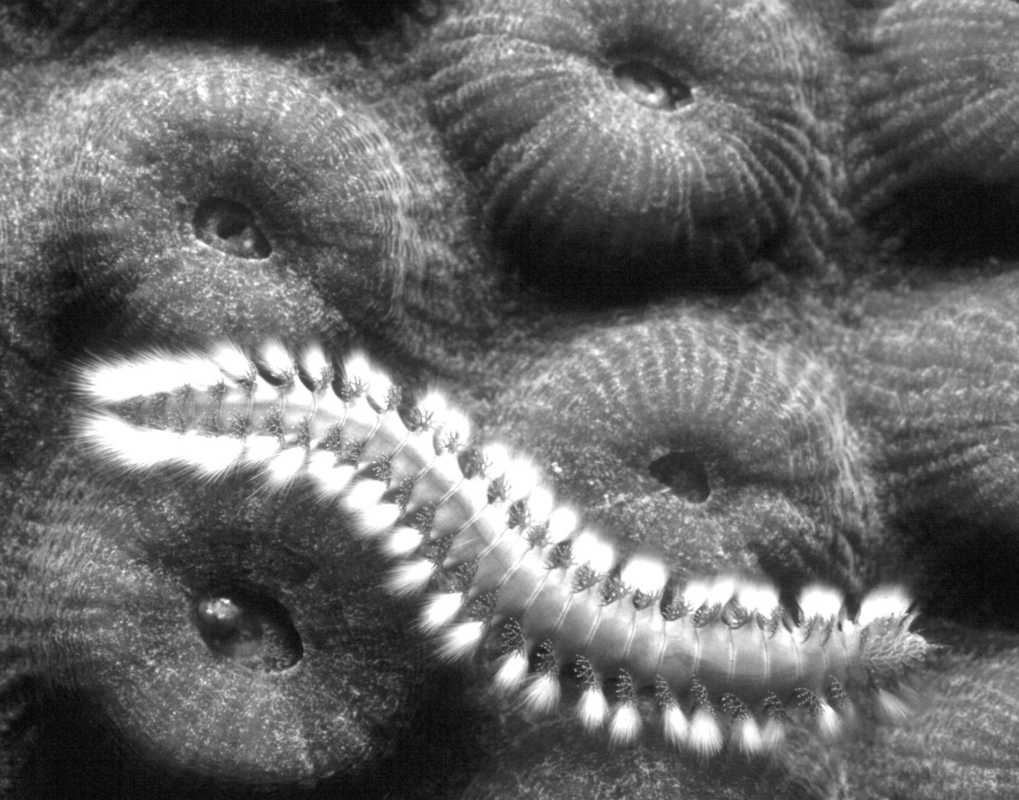
In the months that follow, you and

Photo Credit: NASA

your companions thoroughly investigate this wondrous planet, splitting into teams, using smaller shuttles for transport to its furthest reaches – its icy poles, its highest mountains, its deepest ocean trenches. Nowhere escapes your scrutiny. You must determine all this planet's resources and ascertain if there is any threat to your long-term survival. Each team contributes to the detailed written report, which you prepare for codifying and transmitting to those who must follow you. To preface this report you record the following message:

An abundance of life

'The most outstanding attribute of this planet is its *life* – more than you can imagine, and everywhere. We have found living cells within the surface layers of rocks in icy polar wastes, in boiling waters on the flanks of volcanoes, in deep-sea mud, in salty brines in deserts, and in the atmosphere above the highest mountains. Despite our technology, I am embarrassed to report that we have not completed an inventory of life forms. So far we have catalogued in detail 1.75 million species. We have actual samples of



This marine creature is a young Bearded Fireworm, about 2 inches in length. The worms can grow to be 4-6 inches. The white bristles surrounding the worm can cause a painful burning sensation and irritating wound. The background is a colony of coral polyps. Photo by Beverly Speed, agency Dreamstime.com

these, and of several hundred thousand more that we have not yet fully characterised. Our extrapolations suggest there are at least 14 million species, but the number could be as high as 100 million, not including myriads of micro-organisms with fuzzy species boundaries.'

'Life on this planet can be classified into at least six kingdoms. The lowliest kingdom includes the smallest living cells. We have named this kingdom "Bacteria". Their diversity and ubiquity are staggering. We have cultures of 333,000 different kinds so far and our tests show that a significant number have value to medicine and even in rendering certain plant and animal products into useful foodstuffs. Some of the larger kinds have blue-green pigments and resemble algae. One, which we have called *Spirulina*, shows great promise as a food supplement.'

'There are at least three kingdoms of single-celled animals and plant-like organisms, the latter being algae of different kinds. Some of these can occur in such numbers as to discolour ponds and lakes and huge areas of the ocean. In fact, we saw some of these blooms when we first flew over the planet and wondered

what they were. Other species in these kingdoms are multi-cellular and much more complex in structure. They are best developed in streams and rivers and along the coasts of the sea as seaweeds, in hues of green, red, and ochre. And, yes, we can use many in foods and medicines. What a wonderfully fruitful planet this is!'

Let me tell you about the creatures that walk, crawl, swim, and fly across the face of this planet. Their variety is astonishing.

Wait, there's more

'But there is more. The plant kingdom that dominates the land includes herbs and trees that yield fragrant spices as well as edible roots, fruits, seeds, and leaves. By a stunning quirk of chemistry, their green pigments are able to convert the light energy of this planet's star into chemical energy that is used to grow their cells. This energy is transferred to the creatures that eat them. It is further transferred to members of the unique kingdom of organisms that degrade dead plant

and animal bodies. These "fungi", along with bacteria, recycle nutrients and energy – a trick we have been able to exploit since many fungi can be easily cultivated. And, yes, they too have much potential for food and medicines!'

'But let me tell you about the creatures that walk, crawl, swim, and fly across the face of this planet. Their variety is astonishing. The lowliest, which live in the sea, are scarcely creaturely at all, having no real tissues or fixed form and are somewhat spongy in texture. Yet our analyses show they have the same proteins as other animals, reproduce sexually, and produce larvae.

Somewhat more advanced are headless creatures with stinging tentacles. Many of their kind have a mineral skeleton and form huge reefs along the coasts of several continents and around ocean islands. Some related jelly-like forms live in the open ocean.

There are myriads of worm-like creatures, among which there are at least a dozen major body designs, all very different from each other.

On land, the most abundant creatures that creep and swarm and fly are six-legged. We have catalogued 865,000 species of these hexapods so far and the end is not in sight!

The most advanced group of animals on this planet have an internal skeleton with a well-developed cranium and brain and live in all environments.

Finned species swim in rivers and oceans. Those that have limbs – four, with generally five digits (yes, like us) are amphibious in water bodies on land or scaly-skinned and more terrestrial. One group has taken to the air; their forelimbs having been transformed into wings. They are masterful in flight – ethereal and aesthetic.'

'You will be intrigued by a class of hairy creatures that give birth to live young which the mothers suckle from special glands on their chest. These include those grazing herds we first saw from cruising altitude. And also the largest of all creatures,

much larger than our shuttles, that live in the sea, their bodies streamlined and their limbs like flippers. Other species fly, some burrow, and some are arboreal. And here is a surprise – some nearly resemble us! Only they are hairier, but they have sophisticated group behaviour and a rudimentary intelligence. These caricatures of our kind are a good omen. This planet begins to look like it was made just for us!

The Creator of life is profligate and unbounded in creativity. It is estimated that 99.9% of all life that has ever lived is extinct.

Well, the report is imaginary, but all the statistics are real. They reflect our true state of knowledge about life on Earth. There is so much more to learn. If Mars were, unexpectedly, to yield huge diversities of microscopic organisms in its soils, earth scientists would launch a costly research programme to study this new life. Yet we have catalogued only a small fraction of the life that is on our own planet.

The Creator of life is profligate and unbounded in creativity. It is estimated that 99.9% of all life that has ever lived is extinct. If all the species that we know of from the fossil record (a fraction of the total) were suddenly revived they could not all co-exist with those that now live. From the moment the young earth was hospitable enough to yield the earliest forms of microbial life, Providence was at work. Life flowed, streamed, and positively flooded this earth in number and variety beyond imagining. And if we humans revel and delight in it, do not be surprised – we were meant to and we should.

Does God like worms?

What does life on earth tell us about God? Twentieth-century geneticist, J.B.S. Haldane, quipped that it reveals God has 'an inordinate fondness for beetles'. For it is true that, among the many different zoological orders, the hexapod order

Coleoptera (beetles) has more species than any other (around 400,000 species described so far). One of my colleagues (by profession I am a marine zoologist) has his own version of Haldane's quip, that God has an inordinate fondness for worms, arguing that a vermiform (worm-like) body is found in creatures differing more from one another in their fundamental body design than fish do from turtles and giraffes.

So what to you might be just a worm could be to my colleague an example of *Platyhelminthes* (flatworms and tapeworms), *Nemertea* (ribbon worms), *Gnathostomulida* (lesser jaw-worms), *Acanthocephala* (thorny-headed worms), *Gastrotricha* (hairy-bellied worms), *Nematoda* (roundworms/eelworms), *Nematomorpha* (horsehair worms), *Priapulida* (little penis worms), *Kinorhyncha* (mud dragons), *Annelida* (segmented worms, including earthworms and leeches), *Sipuncula* (peanut worms), *Echiura* (spoonworms), *Phoronida* (horseshoe worms), *Chaetognatha* (arrow worms), or *Hemichordata* (acorn worms). And, says my colleague to underscore his point, there are vermiform vertebrates – like eels, *Caecilians* (burrowing legless amphibians), and snakes.

But it isn't just beetles and worms. One could argue, from the botanical



realm, how much God likes orchids and daisies, for there are around 20,000 species in each of these great plant families.

Geneticist J.B.S. Haldane quipped that God has 'an inordinate fondness for beetles', with around 400,000 species described so far...

Incidentally, among the worm *phyla* are thousands of species of parasites, many with such complicated life-cycles that zoologists need the forensic skills of a Sherlock Holmes to unravel them. Repugnant they may seem, but we are now learning that parasites are critical in structuring and regulating ecosystems. At least some individuals (in some cases most individuals) of almost all species of life have some parasites, and there can be parasites of parasites!

Among the most mind-bending creations is the *Echinodermata* ('spiny skins'). Here are creatures shaped like stars (starfish), spheres (sea urchins), cylinders (sea cucumbers), and tulips (sea lilies). Their curious anatomy and their intricate skeleton of tiny ossicles, fitted together like the pieces of a 3-D jigsaw puzzle, have challenged all but the most dedicated specialists – which is why the late Libbie Hyman, author of a magisterial series of textbooks on the invertebrates, wrote: 'I hereby salute the echinoderms as a noble group especially designed to puzzle the zoologist'.

Loving life

What does life tell us about the Creator? Truly, if we humans revel in the creation, even more does God – in its variety, beauty, and functionality, with all of the curlicues and extravagances of design.

But here's a better question – What does the Creator tell us about life? In an allusion to the Genesis story, a biblical author wrote concerning Jesus Christ: 'All things were made through him, and without him nothing



was made that was made. In him was *life* ...' Another passage states about Jesus: 'All things were created through him and for him. And he is before all things and in him all things consist'. We ponder these words when we think about the 'how' of creation.

When Jesus 'became flesh and dwelt among us', he said of himself, 'I am the way, the truth, and the *life*,' and 'I have come that they may have *life*, and that they may have it more abundantly'. He had in mind a kind of life different from that of plants, animals, and even humans. He was talking about transformed life – the eternal life of the Kingdom of God. The nature of this life was something the late Christian writer C.S. Lewis

Great fleas have little fleas upon their backs to bite 'em,
And little fleas have lesser fleas, and so *ad infinitum*.
And the great fleas themselves, in turn, have greater fleas to go on;
While these again have greater still, and greater still, and so on.
— Augustus De Morgan: *A Budget of Paradoxes*.



tried to picture, as he sought to understand things from Heaven's perspective. In his classic book *Mere Christianity*, he explained how the life of Jesus and his death on the cross works to spread through all of humanity, past, present, and future. Through him, all of humanity is effectively 'saved' to experience a transformed, eternal life. All we have to do is appropriate that salvation.

In explaining this effect, Lewis used this picture: 'There was a time when every man was part of his mother, and (earlier still) part of his father as well – and when they were part of his grandparents. If you could see humanity spread out in time, as God sees it, it would not look like a lot of separate things dotted about. It would look like one single growing thing – rather like a very complicated tree. Every individual would appear connected with every other.'

Connections

This is a picture that every biologist can appreciate by analogy. All the kingdoms of life are genetically connected through a genealogy of continuous existence from bacteria to humans. Appropriating biblical language, biologists call it the 'Tree of Life'.

This continuity explains why animals and plants have bacterial genes in their cells and why even creations as disparate as bananas, roundworms, and humans share tens of thousands of other genes. This perspective explains the view of many Christian scientists and the major denominations – that life's

variety has evolved, through geological time, under-pinned and upheld by the Life giver.

And here we are talking about biology, not the atheistic philosophy of evolutionism. Aptly, the word 'evolve' stems from a Latin verb, *evolvere*, meaning to unroll. It is a moot point whether *every detail* of this creative biological process was deterministic. Did God, in love, endow the creation with 'the freedom to be and to become' ['Let there Be ...!'], as Anglican theologian, Sir John Polkinghorne, expresses it?

Wondrously, the creation culminated in *Man* - a creature gifted with the image of God.

In speaking of the foreknowledge of a God who is outside of time, C.S. Lewis explained, concerning human freedom and human actions, 'He knows your tomorrow's actions ... because he is already in tomorrow and can simply watch them. In a sense he does not know your action till you have done it: but then the moment at which you have done it is already 'now' for him.

By analogy, in this view, evolutionary events are in the continuous 'now' of God's existence. These events are the expression of his will and what he wills he creates. Wondrously, this creation culminated in *Man* - a creature gifted with the *Imago Dei* – the image of God. The fullest expression of this image was *the man*, Jesus Christ, through whom the whole connected creation will be redeemed. Then, we shall know *real* life.

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Living in *Luxury's* lap!



By Gael McInnes

When I stepped off the plane at Kathmandu, Nepal, I was speechless because as we landed, I spied soldiers in sentry boxes along the runway.

Sure the country had had some Maoist incursions, but this?

I wasn't prepared for the level of poverty and hardship that I saw. It was like stepping back into the 14th century. The bazaars were colourful and noisy, and there were plenty of bargains, but I had to watch where I walked, as sacred cows and goats left dung everywhere!

The temples were foreign to my



Young girl in Nepal carrying her infant brother. Photo by Gael McInnes

Christian upbringing, and having sacred monkeys living in them also brought rather a filthy environment, which to me detracted from the temples' 'beauty' and purpose. There were so many ancient forms of art and architecture to be seen in this country. The linger of heavy diesel fumes from aging and noisy vehicles and 'put-puts', filled the air and my sinuses.

As I travelled down to Pokhara Valley on a winding one lane road, I was amazed at the beauty of the landscape. The Himalayas are truly majestic. The terraced fields were either being worked by oxen and hand made ploughs, or individuals – mainly women, using small hand held hoes. A back breaking job. Terrace after terrace being worked by families trying to make a living and put food on the table.

A section of the sealed road was being 're-chipped' by a couple of men. Others were breaking the rocks by hand into smaller stones and chips, and yet another was heating bitumen with fire under a cut down 40 gallon drum. I was told that certain families took responsibility for sections of the road near to where they lived. A far cry from the sophisticated road work teams in New Zealand.

Houses were made of hand made bricks, mud and some thatching, with living quarters upstairs, and animals underneath. The warmth from the animals would rise to help warm the occupants above. Puts a

new meaning on heat ventilation, doesn't it? Even with these harsh surroundings, I found the Nepalese people very friendly, and they appeared happy.

My 'Hotel' accommodation was a challenge, as a shower consisted of a pipe poking out of the wall, absent of shower rose, and a bucket. Cold water only!

What if you had to live under a sheet of corrugated iron held up by a stick, as I saw a woman holding a baby do in India?

I could go on, but I'm not one to complain, just explain. I have travelled to other countries like India and Thailand and throughout the Pacific Islands, and I'm amazed at the resilience of the people. Experiencing 'other cultures' gives me a great sense of appreciation for what I have in New Zealand. I can live quite happily without luxuries.

What is a luxury anyway? It's something that we choose in the way of luxurious comfort, be it our homes, the contents, our food, cars, or clothes, so we can get enjoyment from them. A luxury is often said to be self-indulgence. Luxuries mean different things to different people.

To me luxury is having a roof over my head, clothes on my back, food in the stomach, family, friends, and living in a country free from war.

When we had the power blackout a few short years ago, there was an uproar. People couldn't watch television, play their favourite music or use their computers or internet, or heat their meals in the microwave. They complained about not being able to boil a kettle. Be grateful you had a kettle to boil, a TV to watch, power most of the time, or power at all!

People these days moan about being without their luxuries. Try living somewhere where you don't have power, where water is scarce and food mainly comes in tins, or what you can catch from the sea, or gather from the bush. Yes, I have done that. I worked as a nurse for 3 years on an isolated Aboriginal settlement on the Cape York Peninsula, in Northern Queensland. The only luxury was a house and a comfortable bed. It was a humbling experience. Kerosene lamps gave night light, a primus cooker heated the kettle and cooked the meals, and at times water was rationed to a bucket a day per person. Being brought up to rely on tank water supplies prepared me for this. It was not a burden to have a 'bucket bath'. The sea was on my doorstep.

I believe we take our luxuries for granted. What if you had to live under a sheet of corrugated iron, held up by a branch stick, as I saw a woman, who was holding a baby, do in India? What if you had to go out and cut your wood from scarce resources, and cart it on your back, trekking uphill, as I saw in the Himalayas? A daily necessity so you could boil your kettle and cook, let alone keep you warm.

How about the job of mixing cow dung with straw, and making cow 'patties' to throw handfuls onto the side of your mud house to dry. Again, a necessity for fuel in isolated parts of India, as most of the trees have been destroyed and used for fuel, but never replaced. How about leading your oxen around in a circle all day, drawing water from deep wells for crops and personal use? Yes, I've seen all that, and it makes me grateful that I live in a country of plenty.

Of course the greatest blessings in life are not based on economics. What price can you put on freedom, friendship, family and health? Here in New Zealand most of us are blessed with abundance of these things as well as economic plenty.

Have you ever thought about what luxuries you might be able to do without, so you could perhaps sponsor a World Vision Child, or give to

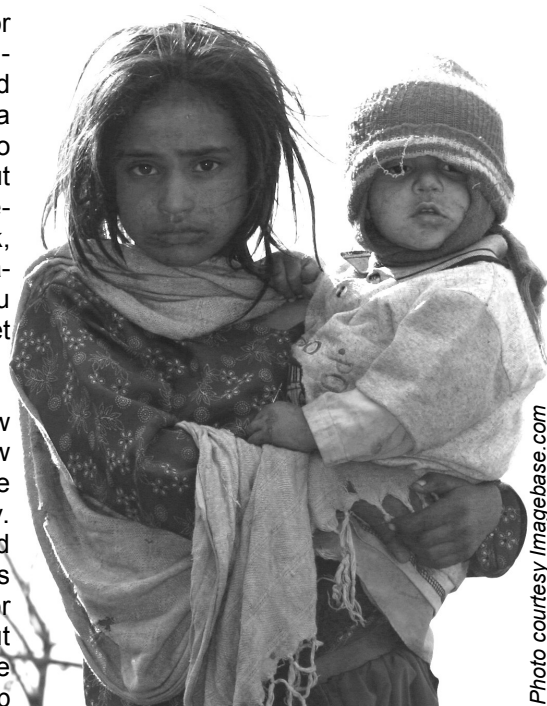


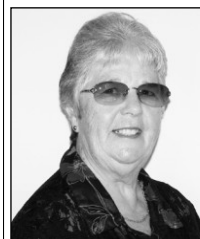
Photo courtesy Imagebase.com

some other worthy cause, either overseas, or in your local community?

Have you ever thought about what luxuries you might be able to do without, so you could perhaps sponsor a World Vision Child, or give to some other worthy cause?

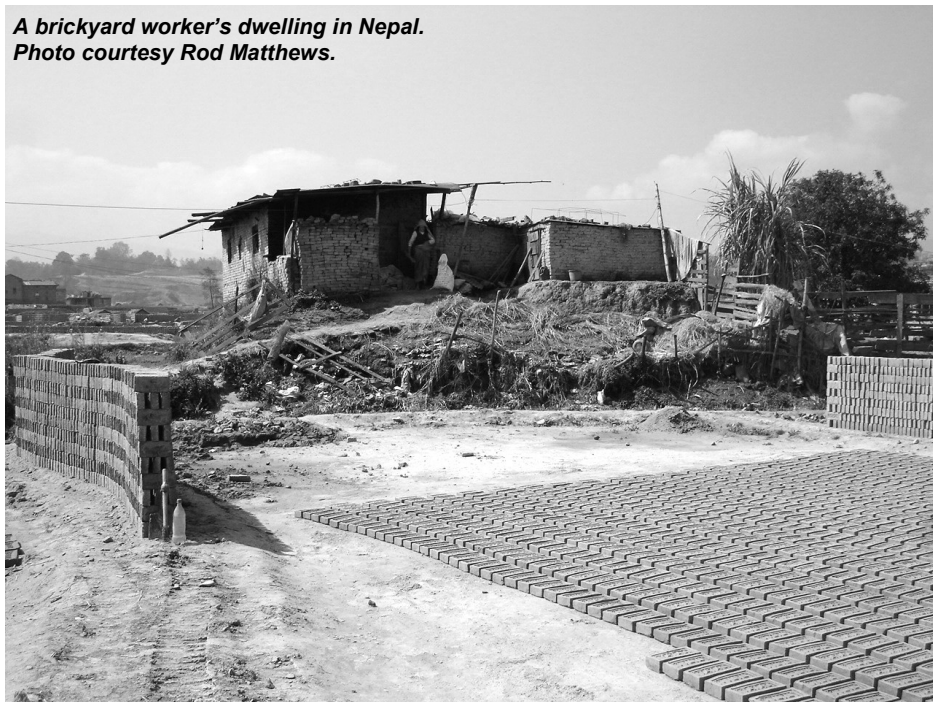
Take time to ponder the plight of others not so well off as yourself. There are needy people everywhere. There might even be a needy family living next door to you! Is there some way you can step outside your comfort zone from time to time, to experience how others live? I hope you are thankful for what you have.

We are indeed living in the lap of luxury!



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. Gael can be contacted at: gaelmcinnes@xtra.co.nz

A brickyard worker's dwelling in Nepal.
Photo courtesy Rod Matthews.



The Jam Jar and the Coffee Cups

A professor was speaking to a group of business students and, to drive home a point, used an illustration those students will never forget. As he stood in front of the group of high-powered overachievers he said, "Okay, time for a quiz" and pulled out a very large jam jar and put it on the table in front of him. He also produced about a dozen fist-sized rocks and carefully placed them, one at a time, into the jar.

When the jar was filled to the top and no more rocks would fit inside, he asked, "Is this jar full?"

Everyone in the class yelled, "Yes!"

The professor replied, "Really?"

He reached under the table and pulled out a bucket of gravel. He dumped some gravel in and shook the jar, causing pieces of gravel to work themselves down into the spaces between the big rocks. He then asked the group once more, "Is the jar full?"

By this time the class was on to him. "Probably not," one of them answered.

"Good!" he replied, reaching under the table and bringing out a bucket of sand. He started dumping the sand in the jar and it went into all of the spaces left between the rocks and the gravel. Once more he asked the question, "Is this jar full?"

This time the students replied with a unanimous "Yes!"

The professor then produced two cups of coffee from under the table, and poured the entire contents into the jar, effectively filling the empty space amongst the sand. The students laughed.

"Now," said the professor as the laughter subsided, "I want you to recognise that this jar represents your life. The rocks are the important things – your family, your children, your health, your friends, your education, your dreams. If everything else was lost and only they remained, your life would still be full.

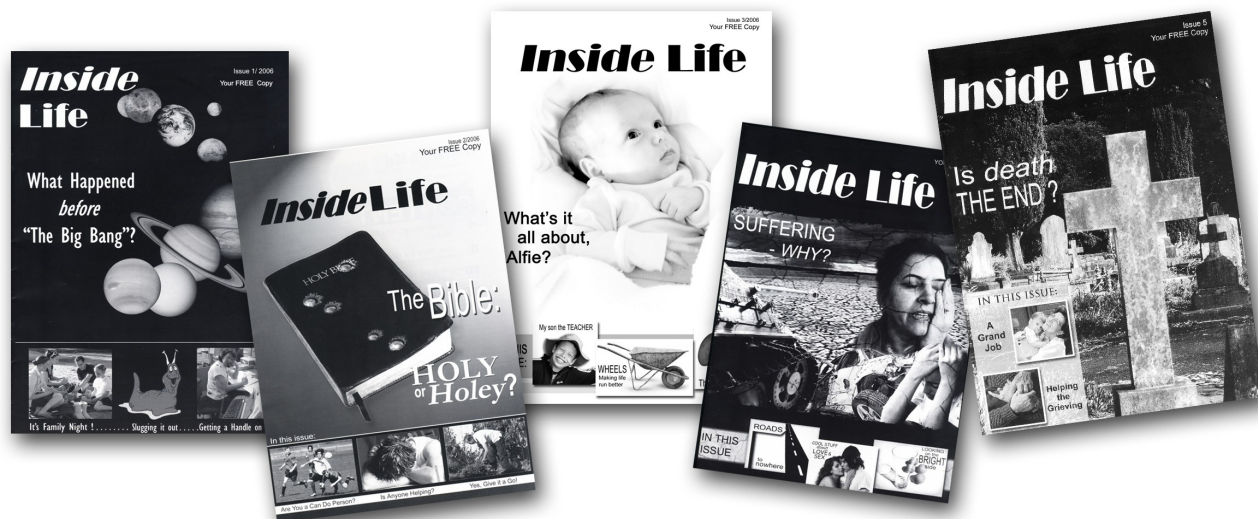
The gravel is the other things that matter, like your job, your house and your car. The sand is everything else – the small stuff. "If you put the sand into the jar first," he continued, "there is no room for the gravel or the rocks. The same goes for life. If you spend all your time and energy on the small stuff you will never have room for the things that are important to you.

"Pay attention to the things that are critical to your happiness. Play with your children. Take time to get medical checkups. Take your spouse out to dinner. Visit a friend in hospital. There will always be time to vacuum the floor and watch the TV soaps. Take care of the rocks first – the things that really matter. Set your priorities. The rest is just sand."

One of the students raised her hand and inquired "What about the coffee?" The professor smiled. "I'm glad you asked. It just goes to show that no matter how full your life may seem, there's always room for a cup of coffee with a friend."

— Author Unknown

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