

# *Inside* Life

**COMING  
IN THE  
CLOUDS?**  
*Will Jesus  
Return?*

A journey  
with cancer



'tis the  
season!



# Inside Life

A magazine of understanding

Number 9, December 2008



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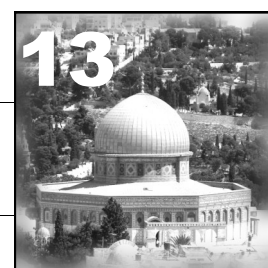
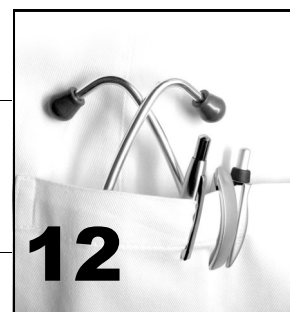
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#### Inside Life

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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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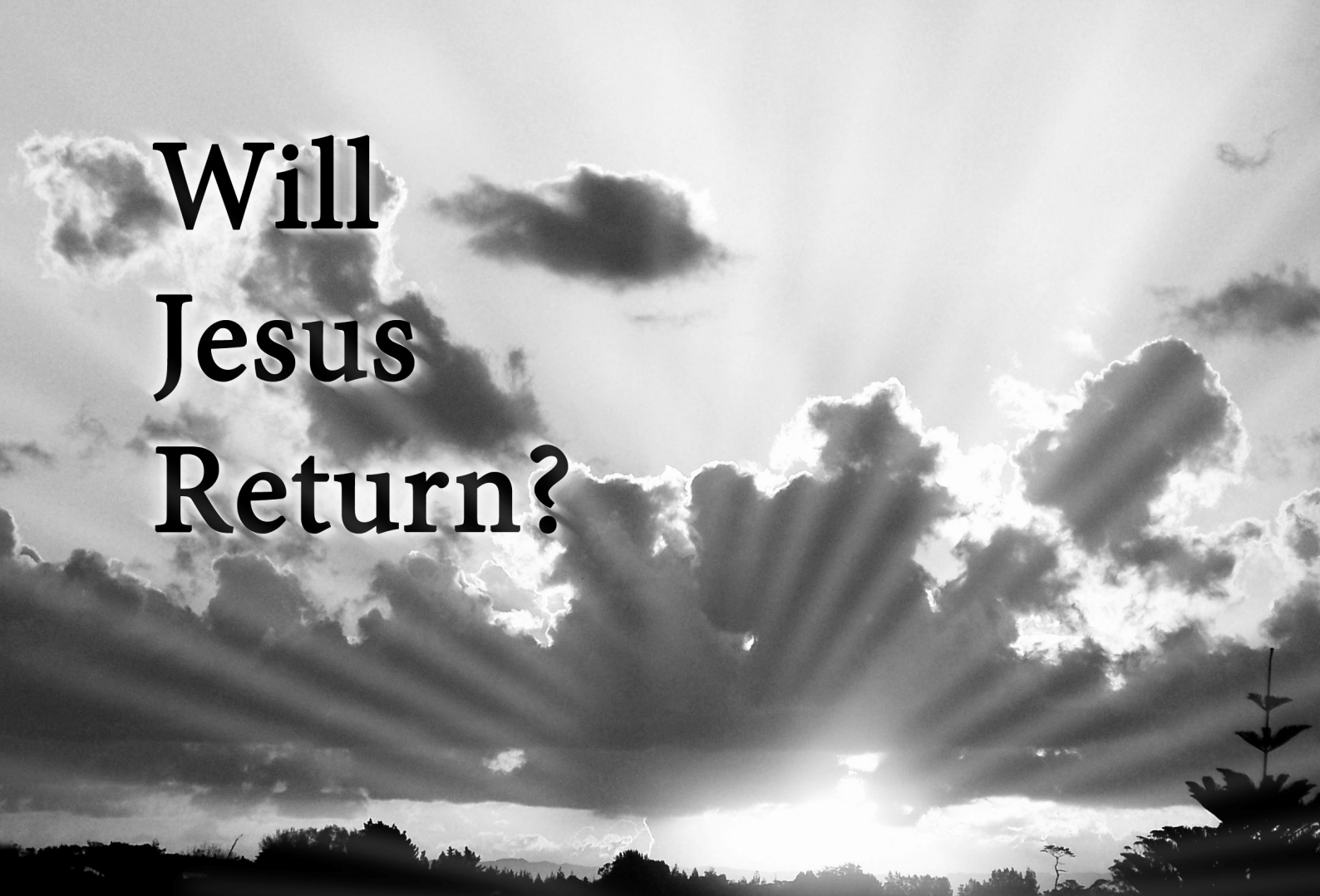
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**Our Cover:** Christmas time recalls the coming of Jesus as a small baby in a Bethlehem manger two millennia ago. After around 33 years on earth, Jesus was taken up into heaven in the clouds. As his disciples watched Jesus ascending, two angels announced that he would come back to earth again in the same way he had gone.

Will this really happen? If so, when? What will it be like? Our lead article focuses on the "second coming" of Jesus Christ.

Cover image adapted from cemetery statue photo by Judi Seiber, Ohio, USA, courtesy Stockxchg.

"Gloria in Excelsis" graphic on page 4 © L Trevarthen  
Article page 8 "Tis the Season to be Stressed Out" first published in "Living Today" magazine, Nov-Dec 1998. Used by permission.



# Will Jesus Return?

By Rex Morgan

**M**ost people are aware that Christmas is associated with the birth of Jesus Christ in Palestine just over 2000 years ago.

Interestingly, it is impossible to prove Jesus was born on December 25<sup>th</sup>. No one knows for sure the actual day or month of his birth, or even the year for that matter.

But there is plenty of evidence that he did in fact live. He is mentioned by several Jewish and Roman historians and writers of the first two centuries after his birth.<sup>1</sup>

Since his departure there have been regular rumours that Jesus is about to return. Before the end of the first century, various Christian leaders predicted this would happen suddenly and soon.

## A litany of failed predictions

In the second century, prophets of the Montanist movement predicted that Jesus would return sometime during their lifetime and establish the New Jerusalem in the city of Pepuza in Asia Minor. In AD 365 a bishop named Hilary of Poitiers announced that the world would end that year.

**What a woeful series of false alarms, unfulfilled expectations, broken hopes and dreams! But does the fact that so many miscalculations have been made mean that Jesus won't return? Is the whole idea of his return a colossal hoax?**

As AD 1000 approached, many Christians in Europe predicted the return of Jesus and the end of the

world on the first of January. An army of pilgrims sold their belongings and trekked to Jerusalem to await Christ. Later, during the great plague of 1348-1352, prophets said the end was at hand and Christ would appear within ten years.

Reformist Hans Hut rounded up 144,000 "elect saints" to prepare for Jesus' return in 1528. The famous explorer Christopher Columbus wrote "The Book of Prophecies" around the year 1500, including a prediction that the end of the world would occur in 1658.

One of the more bizarre "false alarms" occurred at Leeds in 1806. A hen laid eggs bearing the words "Christ is coming". Many visited the spot and "found religion". Then someone discovered that the ink-inscribed eggs had been forced up into the chicken's body!

John Wesley said the end would come in 1836. A New York farmer,

# Peace On Earth — When?

At the birth of Jesus Christ, a group of angels sang the immortal words, "Glory to God in the highest, peace on earth and goodwill towards all men" (Luke 2:14). This mantra is often quoted around the Christmas season. According to the *Santa's Warehouse* website: "People decorate their homes and give gifts each year at Christmas time to celebrate 'peace on earth and goodwill towards all men'".

But no matter how hard we try, we don't seem even to be able to achieve peace in many of our families and neighbourhoods, let alone on global scale! And this gloomy situation prevails even though Jesus has come and gone. Where is the "peace on earth" the angels promised at his coming?



A study of the Bible as a whole reveals that Jesus didn't come -- the first time -- to bring peace. In fact, he promised the very opposite would occur. Although it isn't as well known as the "peace on earth and goodwill to men" citation, Jesus said "Do not suppose that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I did not come to bring peace, but a sword." (Matthew 10:34)

Interesting words indeed to be voiced by someone known as "the Prince of Peace"! The Bible shows that the reason for Christ's first coming was not to set up his world-ruling Kingdom. If he had been attempting to establish world peace at that time, he has certainly been a failure!

However, the good news is that Christ is going to come *again*, and this time the mission *will* be to bring peace on earth.

Along with numerous other Bible promises, the angelic refrain "peace on earth and good will towards men" is a prophetic pronouncement that won't be fulfilled until Jesus' second coming.

Flags of the nations displayed at the United Nations office in Geneva, Switzerland. The United Nations organisation was founded in 1945, right after World War II, in an international effort to achieve world peace. The founders envisaged that the organisation would act to prevent conflicts between nations and make future wars impossible. However, although the body is subscribed to by 192 member states, including nearly every recognised independent state in the world, there are still several dozen ongoing conflicts that continue to rage around the globe. Sadly, the words penned almost 3,000 years ago by the Bible prophet Isaiah and quoted a millennium later by the apostle Paul to describe the nature of mankind have demonstrated their truth throughout the centuries and are still valid today: "And the way of peace have they not known" (Isaiah 59:8; Romans 3:17).



Photo © Rex Morgan 2008

## FLAGS OF THE NATIONS

William Miller proclaimed Jesus would return on March 21, 1843, based on his study of Old Testament prophecies. When this didn't happen he predicted a new date of October 22, 1844, and hundreds of followers sold their property and possessions and gathered to meet Jesus. His failure to arrive that evening became known as "The Great Disappointment".

After 14 years studying Bible prophecy, Edgar Whisenant, a former NASA engineer, announced the return would be on September 12, 1988. He published a book entitled "88 Reasons why the Rapture could be in 1988", which sold 4 million copies.

Later, a Korean prophet encouraged 20,000 Christians to leave school or quit jobs and await the end, which he believed would be at midnight on October 20 or 28, 1992.

More recently, Mark Biltz, Pastor of El Shaddai Ministries, predicted September 30, 2008 as the potential day of the second coming of Jesus, based on the timing of four lunar eclipses.

What a woeful series of false alarms, unfulfilled expectations, broken hopes and dreams! And the examples listed above are only a small selection of the dates that have been set and failed.

But does the fact that so many miscalculations have been made mean that Jesus won't return? Is the whole idea of his return a colossal hoax?

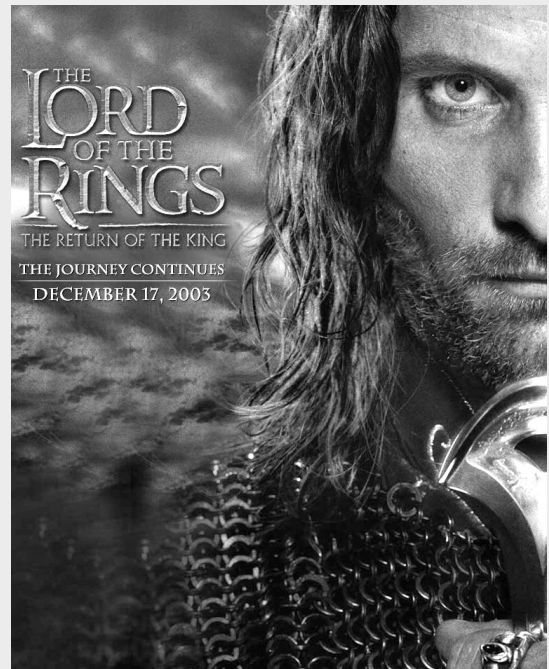
### What did Jesus say?

The only authoritative way to answer that is to look at what Jesus himself said in the Bible. When you look at the scriptures, you quickly find that the Bible doesn't support any of the failed dates mentioned above. In fact, to the contrary, the Bible clearly states that no one knows the date of Christ's return.<sup>2</sup> That is one statement which has certainly proved to be accurate! It is instructive to note that all of the so-called "prophets" who have tried to

# The RETURN of the KING

The 2003 fantasy film *The Lord of the Rings: The Return of the King*, directed by Peter Jackson, was one of the

most critically acclaimed films and greatest box-office successes of all time. It won all eleven Academy Awards for which it was nominated, putting it in a tie with *Titanic* and *Ben-Hur* for the most Academy Awards ever won. It also won the Academy Award for Best Picture, the only time in history a fantasy film has achieved this.



Although the movie didn't focus at all on this aspect, it is interesting to note that J.R.R. Tolkien, author of the epic book on

which the movie was based, was a Christian, and Christian themes often play in the background of his writings about Middle Earth. There are certainly spiritual parallels to be noted in *The Return of the King*. The most significant of these is that Jesus Christ, who came to earth 2000 years ago, has promised to return as a conquering King.

The first time Jesus came as a meek "lamb to be slaughtered". But his second coming will be in spectacular style. The apocalyptic language of the biblical book of Revelation portrays him as thundering across the heavens on a white horse accompanied by a dazzling army of angels, with special effects that will make Peter Jackson's work seem like a kindergarten play.

It is then that Christ will take up his rightful place of reigning over the world as "King of Kings and Lord of Lords". Christians look forward eagerly to this time when the troubles of the world will be put to rest at last and the world will be at peace.

set a date for the second coming were flying in the face of what the Bible itself says!

But again, does the failure of these numerous predictions mean Jesus is not actually going to return? When you look at what the Bible states in that regard, you find the answer is clearly "no". Indeed, the scriptures insist that he *is* going to return, but that nobody knows when it will be.

Forty days after he was crucified

and resurrected, Jesus was taken up into a cloudy sky, with his disciples looking on, incredulous. As they stood there in amazement, two angels declared that "this same Jesus will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven".<sup>3</sup>

This is one of many clear predictions in the Bible that Jesus will return, although it nowhere reveals *when* he will come back. It does however give some hints,



# “And he shall reign...”

Handel's *Messiah* is a majestic work often performed at Christmas time. The completion of the score of this great oratorio in just 24 days is considered to be one of the most incredible achievements in the entire history of music.

One of the most well-known and beloved sections of the work is the *Hallelujah* chorus. Many people recognise the music and can even quote some of the lyrics. “And he shall reign for ever and ever...”



The *Messiah's* libretto is taken from Bible passages referring to two separate appearances of the Messiah, Jesus Christ, on the earth. Some of the arias, such as *Behold, a virgin shall conceive*, relate to Jesus' first coming. Others, including *The trumpet shall sound*, point to events that have not yet happened, but will take place at the Messiah's future return.

At the London premiere of the *Messiah* in 1743, King George II was reputedly so moved by the magnificence of the masterpiece that he spontaneously rose to his feet during the singing of the *Hallelujah* chorus, capped off by the powerful words “...and he shall reign for ever and ever!” The entire audience, naturally, followed suit. Ever since that day, it has been customary for the audience to stand whenever the “Hallelujah Chorus” is sung.

These words certainly don't apply to any human king or government. None of us lives forever! And sadly, humanity's governments have left a woeful trail of mismanagement and corruption down through the centuries. But a government is coming that is foreshadowed by the words and sentiments of the *Hallelujah* chorus. Jesus Christ, at his second coming, is the one who “shall reign for ever and ever”.

*First Presbyterian Church choir in Northville, Michigan USA singing Handel's "Messiah", photo ©Tricia Tompson*

some indications of what the world will be like prior to the second coming. Bible prophecies proclaim that it will happen at a time when hatred, crime and violence will be rampant. There will be a series of droughts, disease epidemics and earthquakes, and a great time of world trouble. The world will be at war.<sup>4</sup>

Conditions like this have often occurred throughout history, which helps explain why so many false alarms have been sounded. But such conditions are certainly in evidence today, so it would be foolish to ignore the possibility that Jesus could return in our lifetime.

## What will it be like?

Is the return of Jesus something we should look forward to? What will it be like?

The first time he came, much to the dismay of his followers, Jesus didn't make any attempt to overthrow the government of the day. His Jewish compatriots were smarting under the heel of the Roman Empire, but he didn't seek to redress that. He simply carried out a modest and unpretentious teaching operation, in a very localised region of the world. When he was apprehended by the Jewish and Roman authorities and falsely accused of blasphemy and sedition, he didn't speak up strongly in his own defence, or rally his supporters for a rebellion. Instead, he meekly allowed himself to be brutally beaten, humiliated and crucified, without any resistance.

But according to the Bible, the next time Christ comes will be

astounding in its contrast. The symbolic language of the book of Revelation pictures him making a dramatic entrance, shining brilliantly astride a stunning white stallion romping across the heavens with an entourage of dazzling angels, so that no one on earth can miss his arrival.<sup>5</sup>

Hundreds of Bible predictions provide descriptions of this momentous event. They explain it will bring an end to war, using the poetic image of swords being beaten into ploughshares and spears into pruning hooks.<sup>6</sup> Then will follow an unprecedented time of global prosperity, with health, education, security, justice and international harmony achieving heights of excellence never attained before.<sup>7</sup>

For thousands of years mankind has dreamt of world peace and happiness for all, but this has consistently eluded us. There has hardly been a single decade in all of history when there hasn't been a war going on somewhere. The scourges of drought, crime, drugs, corruption and poverty have devastated nations and shattered millions of lives. Mankind seems powerless to bring a halt to the unremitting advance of these serious ills.

In order to achieve lasting peace and prosperity for everybody on

planet Earth, it is clear that we need help from beyond ourselves. Thankfully, there is a source of such help. Jesus has promised to return to Earth and deliver a new administration of love, joy and peace. We don't know when it will happen, but for the sake of humanity and the planet we have so greedily abused and ill-treated, it can't happen soon enough!

#### References:

1. For detailed evidence of Jesus' life on earth, please write for a copy of our article *Jesus Christ – Superstar or Superstition?*

2. Matthew 24:36, 42
3. Acts 1:11
4. Matthew 24:7, 21
5. Revelation 19:11-16
6. Isaiah 2:4
7. Isaiah 9:7

Rex Morgan, the editor of "Inside Life", and his wife Marilyn live on Auckland's North Shore. Rex has worked in office administration and Christian ministry for over 30 years and has contributed articles to a number of international publications. Rex can be contacted at: [rex@wcg.org.nz](mailto:rex@wcg.org.nz)



# A "New World Order"

The long-running war in Iraq began with the invasion of Kuwait by Saddam Hussein in August 1990. After annexing Kuwait, Saddam's 120,000 troops and 850 tanks rolled on south to threaten Saudi Arabia.

US President George Bush Snr urgently gathered a coalition of allies to send troops to block Saddam's path. In September 1990, President Bush addressed Congress:

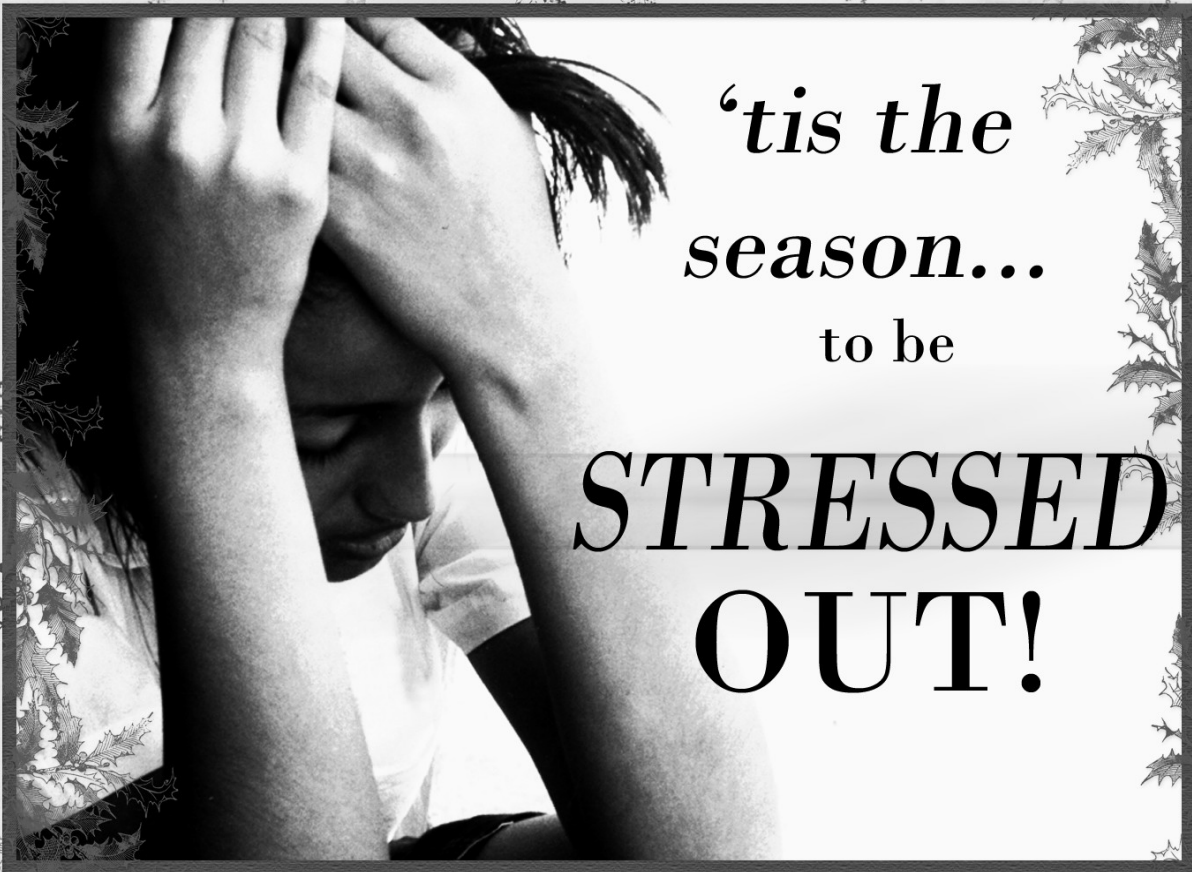
"A new partnership of nations has begun, and we stand today at a unique and extraordinary moment. The crisis in the Persian Gulf, as grave as it is, also offers a rare opportunity to move toward an historic period of cooperation. Out of these troubled times new world order can emerge: a new era—freer from the threat of terror, stronger in the pursuit of justice and more secure in the quest for peace. An era in which the nations of the world, east and west, north and south, can prosper and live in harmony.

"A hundred generations have searched for this elusive path to peace, while a thousand wars raged across the span of human endeavour, and today that new world is struggling to be born. A world quite different from the one we've known. A world where the rule of law supplants the rule of the jungle."

Unfortunately this bold dream has not been realised. Twenty years later, far from bringing a new era of world peace, in fact the same Persian Gulf War is still being fought! So much for the visionary dreams of mankind's leaders. All the way through our troubled and turbulent history, the promised land of humanity's dreams has remained but a taunting mirage.

But there is yet real hope for a new world order of justice and peace for all. Mankind has shown that despite all of our good intentions, we just aren't capable of bringing about utopia, or anything remotely approaching it. But God, the one who created us, does have the power to do it. And he has given us his word in the Bible that things are going to change. Jesus Christ is going to come back and wage the final war to end all wars, the famous "battle of Armageddon". Then he will establish a "new world order" that will more than fulfil the greatest aspirations of all mankind.





*'tis the  
season...  
to be*

# **STRESSED OUT!**

**MERRY CHRISTMAS**

**T**he jingling of bells many of us hear at this time of year isn't coming from a mythical sleigh being pulled across the sky by reindeer. It's more likely to be the jangling of our frazzled nerves!

The cost of the Christmas season isn't only tallied up on credit card dockets; it costs us time, patience, and peace of mind.

"Peace on earth and goodwill to all ..."? Puh-lease!

It can be a season of great stress. Think of the host of stressful situations the season brings with it:

- ◆ Christmas parties
- ◆ Shopping
- ◆ A houseful of sometimes unwanted visitors
- ◆ Spending day after day with family members who are normally at work or school all day
- ◆ Having relatives staying over

◆ The change from a work routine to holidays

One frequently-used stress scale (see box on page 9) suggests that the combination of situations that occur at this season of the year may add up to a more stressful experience than losing your job!

Once upon a time only engineers worried about stress.

And they didn't suffer from it, their buildings and roads did. Their job was to make sure their constructions could withstand anticipated stresses. Today that engineering principle seems like such a good idea that a whole industry has been developed to help us "stress engineer" our lives.

We have stress counselling, stress leave, stress consultants, stress management, stress release techniques and stress seminars. It's a serious business.

Some estimates suggest that stress is the underlying cause of up to 80 percent of visits to doctors. One

doctor on the Internet offers a list of 70 stress-related diseases: from angina to vascular headaches and everything in between.

So who gave us all this stress?

## **The "invention" of stress**

Probably a man called Dr. Hans Seelye should take some of the blame. He "invented" the word in the 1930s and coined its most popular definition: "the non-specific response of the body to any demand made upon it."

Those "demands" may be anything that requires the body to respond, react or adapt: a threat, an opportunity, a change, a surprise. Stress can be good: good stress is called "eustress"; and stress can be bad: bad stress is called "distress".

One of the most common misunderstandings about stress, according to doctor and author John Tickell, is that stress is "out there".

"There is no stress out there to be under, because stress is in here," he



## Stressed out?

In 1967 Doctors Thomas Holmes and Richard Rahe of the University of Washington, created what they called a Social Readjustment Rating Scale in which they gave numerical values to different types of stressful situations. They suggested that the accumulation of "life change units" in any 12-month period correlated to the potential for stress-related illness. The accompanying scale has been adapted from the original 43-point Holmes-Rahe scale, (published in the *Journal of Psychosomatic Research*, Vol. 11, no. 2, 1967).



Life Event	Impact
Death of spouse	100
Marital separation	65
Death of a close family member	63
Major personal injury or illness	53
Marriage	50
Fired from work	47
Marital reconciliation	45
Retirement	45
Major change in the health or behaviour of a family member	44
Pregnancy	40
Sexual difficulties	39
Gaining new family member	39
Major change in financial status	38
Death of close friend	37
Change to different line of work	36
Taking out a mortgage or large loan	31
Trouble with in-laws	29
Outstanding personal achievement	28
Spouse beginning or ceasing to work outside the home	26
Change in residence or school	20
Major change in usual type and/or amount of recreation	19
Major change in eating habits	15
Vacation	13
Christmas season	12

*SCORING (based on original Holmes-Rahe scale of 43 elements):*

*Less than 150 points: low chance of illness*

*150 - 299 points: 50/50 chance of illness*

*Over 300 points = high chance of illness*



explains in his book *A Passion for Living* (Formbuilt, 1992). "Stress is an internal phenomenon. What's out there is called pressure. If you put the same pressure in front of six people, how come you get six different stress responses? Because of individual choices. Same pressure--different responses."

Pressure and our response to it--two of the critical elements of the stress equation.

The pressures we face in our lives--the "stressors"--are usually external events, situations or environments, but there are also internal or self-induced pressures that can compound those events. We've all heard the saying, "You're putting too much pressure on yourself."

### Consider these "internal stressors":

- ◆ Some lifestyle choices put

pressure on our bodies and minds: poor diet, lack of sleep, taking on too many responsibilities, not exercising.

- ◆ How we think about ourselves: telling ourselves we're no good, presuming failure or inability, comparing ourselves negatively to others, focusing on shortcomings.
- ◆ Unrealistic expectations: perfectionism and always trying to please others are two common types.

### Now consider these "external stressors":

- ◆ People: aggressive or hostile words and behaviours toward us (or others), not meeting our expectations, being unpredictable.
- ◆ Environment: noise, lack of

personal space, pollution.

- ◆ Life events: death of loved one, change in finances, change in or loss of job, marriage, divorce, separation, child leaving home, problems at school or work, birth of child, relocation.
- ◆ Minor irritants: changes in schedule, running out of milk, spilling coffee, losing glasses, appliance failure, missed TV show.

In each of these types of situations the stress event--whether internally or externally generated--produces an involuntary response in our bodies, as Dr. Selye noted.

The stress reaction is simply the body's way of protecting itself from real or perceived impact. This response includes the adrenal glands producing the hormones adrenaline and noradrenalin which

**"Worry has been described as 'the interest you pay on a debt you may never incur'"**

are released into the bloodstream. This "adrenalin rush" stimulates the heartbeat and raises blood pressure. The liver releases sugars to make more energy available and breathing quickens. Our senses are heightened and we are mentally on "high alert".

"Just as a racing engine will eventually rattle apart if it is constantly revved up and never maintained or allowed to rest, the human body and mind will inevitably rattle apart if placed under constant, intense stress," says *The Complete Life Encyclopaedia* (Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1995). This is where we get "stress-related illnesses" from; things like ulcers, high blood

pressure and skin irritations.

Given that the body's responses are a preparation for action--the old "fight or flight" syndrome--Dr. Selye recommended giving the body an outlet for that energy. Going for walk, a run, even punching a boxing bag can release the energy the body has fired up inside. The alternative--keeping the energy bottled up--is what can lead to illness (see boxes).

Of course, the ways in which we respond vary--and can be controlled, adapted and developed--depending upon the impact of factors including how informed we are about the situation we're facing and what if any previous experience we've had with it, the support network we have about us (and how well equipped they are to help us deal with the situation), and how much personal control we feel we have in the situation.

"Life is 10 percent what happens to us and 90 percent how we respond to it," wrote Richard Koole, *Outsmarting Stress: Biblical principles for handling life's pressures* (Kregel Publications, 1993).

#### **We need to develop:**

##### ◆ **Awareness**

Acknowledging the reality of the stressors in our lives is an important first step in managing lifestyles that are increasingly taking their toll on our physical, emotional, mental and spiritual health. Once we can admit that there are situations and circumstances that are putting pressure on us we need:

##### ◆ **Appropriate Planned Responses**

"Next time this situation arises, I'm going to ...." It's a simple way of asserting at least some control and limiting the "hyped-up" physical and

## **Things you can do to *reduce stress***

These are some of the most commonly prescribed responses to stress:

- \* Say "No" -- it's okay to be pleasantly assertive.
- \* Exercise regularly -- go for a walk, a swim, a bike ride.



- \* How much sleep do you need? (not how much do you have time for?) Get it.
- \* Take a break during the day -- stop for lunch, take a five-minute time-out, walk outside and stretch. Have some fun -- enjoy your hobby, go to a movie or play, go on a picnic.
- \* Laugh -- now do it again!
- \* Meditate.
- \* Nourish your body with a healthy diet -- reduce caffeine, fat, alcohol and sugar.
- \* Change or leave hazardous or destructive environments.
- \* Be realistic -- set some achievable goals.
- \* Identify the pressure(s) you're facing -- what can you do about it/them?
- \* Be positive -- refute and argue with negative and self-condemning assertions you make to yourself.
- \* Face reality -- acknowledge the money, personal, relationship, or time problem and then seek ways to address it.
- \* Express and explore your faith -- if you don't have any, learn about it! Prayer draws upon divine support.
- \* Develop a support network -- share your fears with family and friends who are supportive, positive and mature (and be part of their support, too!).
- \* **Remember: STRESSED is just DESSERTS spelled backwards...**

## Common *Symptoms of* *Stress*

**Physical:** fatigue, headache, insomnia, muscle aches/stiffness (especially neck, shoulders and low back), heart palpitations, chest pains, abdominal cramps, nausea, trembling, cold extremities, flushing or sweating and frequent colds.

**Mental:** decrease in concentration and memory, indecisiveness, mind racing or going blank, confusion, loss of sense of humour.

**Emotional:** anxiety, nervousness, depression, anger, frustration, worry, fear, irritability, impatience, short temper.

**Behavioural:** pacing, fidgeting, nervous habits (nail-biting, foot-tapping), increased eating, smoking, drinking, crying, yelling, swearing, blaming and even throwing things or hitting.

emotional response to the situation. "People who feel in control of life can withstand an enormous amount of change and thrive on it," wrote Dr. Joan Borysenko in *Minding the Body, Mending the Mind* (Addison-Wesley Publishing Co., Inc., 1987). "People who feel helpless can hardly cope at all."

### ◆ **A Support Network**

This can be hard to do in a transient, busy society. And it can be dangerous to assume such networks are in place. Are you part of someone else's? A healthy support network should probably include:

### ◆ **Family, Friends, Faith**

Family, friends and faith. Too often the first two bring unintended and unwanted stress at this season of the year. But faith can make the difference, because faith in the person who came into our world as that little baby in the manger in Bethlehem 2,000 years ago really does show the way to "peace on earth and goodwill to all."

## Simply meaningful

It was the first Sunday in a long time where we had no commitments. No work, no meetings, no visitors — no nothing!

We bravely gave the kids a "children's choice" day where they could decide, within reason, what the family would do. The possibilities were endless, providing that whatever they chose cost no more than \$5.00 (total!) and required driving no more than 20 kilometres! Perhaps a swim at the beach, a bike ride, or flying the kite at the park.

They chose to stay home. To go nowhere. To visit no one. Just to play and be with the family, all day.

Like adults, children get caught up in the busyness and complexity of modern life. Their daily schedules are often packed with school, sport, music and other activities, leaving very little time just to simply enjoy "being". Our kids can be stressed out and burned out before they leave primary school!

We all need time just to relax, to enjoy simple pleasures, and to take the time to explore the world around us.

And there's an added element to having some "down" time as well: it gives us space to think or talk through issues of importance and reflect on them, not just muddle through life, make uninformed decisions, or lurch from crisis to crisis.

If we're constantly surrounded by clutter or immersed in the busyness of daily existence, there is rarely time to soak up the simple joys of life. And there is even less time to contemplate anything truly deep or meaningful, to set goals and direction for our lives, to contemplate the future, to dream, and to hope.

It's too easy for our lives to fill up with physical details, drowning us spiritually and emotionally, and numbing our minds, bodies and souls.

Most of us long for meaning and purpose, for something beyond the daily grind that is encouraging, uplifting, and healing. Some words in the Bible are of interest in this regard.

"Life is not defined by what you have, even when you have a lot... there is far more to your inner life than the food you put in your stomach, more to your outer appearance than the clothes you hang on your body. Look at the ravens, free and unfettered, not tied down to a job description, carefree in the care of God. And you count far more... what I'm trying to do here is get you to relax, not be so preoccupied with getting so you can respond to God's giving..." (Luke 12:23-28).

Take the time to relax and enjoy life in a simply meaningful way.

- Simone Worthing



*Take time to relax*

# A Doctor's Journey with Cancer

By Rusty Wright

**W**hen you suddenly learn you might have only 18 months to live, it's a good time to sort out what really matters in life.

Last December, Yang Chen, MD, dismissed an aching pain under his shoulder as muscle strain. Five weeks later, as the pain persisted, a chest x-ray brought shocking results: possible lung cancer that might have spread.

A highly acclaimed specialist and medical professor at the University of Colorado Denver, Yang knew the average survival rate for his condition could be under 18 months. He didn't smoke and had no family history of cancer. He was stunned. His life changed in an instant.

"I wondered how I would break the news to my unsuspecting wife and three young children," he recalls. "Who would take care of my family if I died?"

## Swirling Vortex of Uncertainty

When I heard his story, I felt a jab of recognition. In 1996, my doctor said I might have cancer. That word sent me into a swirling vortex of uncertainty. But I was fortunate; within a month, I learned my condition was benign.

Yang did not get such good news. He now knows he has an inoperable tumour. He's undergoing chemotherapy. It's uncertain whether radiation will help. Yet through it all, he seems remarkably calm and positive. At a time when one might understandably focus on oneself, he's even assisting other cancer

patients and their families to cope with their own challenges. What's his secret?

I learned about Yang's personal inner resources when we first met in the 1980s. He worked at the Mayo Clinic and brought me to Rochester, Minnesota, to present a seminar for Mayo and IBM professionals on a less ponderous theme, "Love, Sex and the Single Lifestyle." With the audience, we laughed and explored relationship mysteries. He felt it was essential that people consider the spiritual aspect of relationships, as well as the psychological and physical.

Later he founded a global network to train medical professionals how to interact with patients on spiritual matters. Many seriously ill patients want their doctors to discuss spiritual needs and the profession is taking note.

## Reality Blog

Now a patient himself, Yang exhibits strength drawn from the faith that has enriched his life. He has established a fascinating website ([www.aDoctorsJourneyWithCancer.net](http://www.aDoctorsJourneyWithCancer.net)) to chronicle his journey and "offer hope and encouragement to others." The site presents a compelling real-life drama as it happens.

As a follower of Jesus, Yang notes biblical references to God's "light shining in our hearts" and people of faith being "like fragile clay jars containing this great treasure." He sees himself as a "broken clay jar" through which God's light can shine to point others who suffer to comfort and faith.

As he draws on divine strength, he reflects on Paul, a first-century believer who wrote, "We are pressed on every side by troubles, but we are not crushed. We are perplexed, but not driven to despair."

A dedicated scientist, Yang is convinced that what he believes about God is true and includes information about evidences for faith. He's also got plenty to help the hurting and the curious navigate through their pain, cope with emotional turmoil, and find answers to life's perplexing questions about death, dying, the afterlife, handling anxiety, and more.

With perhaps less than 18 months to live, Yang Chen knows what's most important in his life. He invites web surfers to "walk with me for part, or all, of my journey." If I'm ever in his position, I hope I can blend suffering with service while displaying the serenity and trust I observe in him. Visit his website and you'll see what I mean.

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# I Preached the Sermon on the Mount

By Ken Slade

**I**srael. Golan Heights. Syria. Lebanon. These are some of the places surrounding Capernaum, the base area from which Jesus Christ ministered almost 2,000 years ago.

It's an area that today – as then – bristles with military tension and the ever-present potential of terrorist activity. Hardly the world of peace he preached about!

It's not number one on most tourist itineraries either, yet here we were, an oddly mixed busload of 28 people from several different nations.

Our cheerful, confident Israeli tour guide, Reuben, had already demonstrated a flare for re-creating the "feel" of historic events in his beloved homeland. A few days earlier, as we looked down from the dizzy heights of the fortress Masada upon the remnants of surrounding Roman encampments, Reuben had excited our imaginations with the impassioned exhortation of the zealous Jewish leader who encouraged 1,000 of his followers to embrace death rather than Roman desecration in AD 73.

The words from Masada live on in local history books, but the wider world has not felt their power. Jesus' words, on the other hand, rippled across the nearby Sea of Galilee and across the centuries have communicated an attracting power that draws to Israel many thousands of people from all nations every year, despite the continuing visible

presence of military forces prepared for immediate deployment.

After we had climbed the mount by the Lake of Galilee, our guide asked – with an amazing theatrical talent to tease us – if we had ever seen a Jew carrying a New Testament Bible. No? His hand slid into his backpack and withdrew a black leather book.

## The way to world peace

"These words of Jesus on this mount are not religious", Reuben stated boldly. "If only all mankind would listen to them and live by them, the world would have peace."

There was silence on the mount as these words hit our consciences. Standing in a land engulfed for so long by war and violence, we struggled to deal with the impact of Jesus' vision of peace.

I was standing nearest our guide. He thrust the shiny black book at me. "I want you to read Matthew chapter 5 to us all," Reuben said. "It will explain why I brought you here."

"Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted. Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled. Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy. Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God. Blessed

are the peacemakers, for they will be called the sons of God. Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven" (verses 3-10).

These eternal truths floated quietly from the printed page to the hearts of my companions. Our attention was riveted on the simplicity of the message.

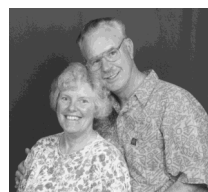
Reuben was right. This is the way to peace for all people. The words of peace I had spoken to a busload of 21<sup>st</sup> century tourists had begun to turn the world upside down nearly two millennia ago. They had offered hope to an oppressed people.

They still do when one is bold enough to trust the author of eternal life and let him live them from within our hearts.

"Hey, Ken!" called out Stephen, a South African member of our tour group. "I got it all on my tape recorder. They'll never believe this when they hear it back home – Jesus' Sermon on the Mount with an Aussie accent!"



Photo of Jerusalem © Jim Wood 2008



Ken Slade is a retired lecturer in media who lives with his wife Joy in Bendigo, Victoria, Australia



# Cultivating Friendships



By Gael McInnes

## **D**o you keep in touch with friends?

Class reunions, photo albums, long-time friends -- thinking about such things awakens memories and stirs emotions. The past is a kaleidoscope of promises, failures, victories and embarrassments! Sometimes we want to forget the painful memories.

Unfortunately, some people let a poisonous root of bitterness over disappointments or broken relationships grow into resentment, or nurse a grudge over past hurts. Bitterness can bring with it jealousy and dissension, but it only consumes the individual who holds it.

There is a time to remember. Mistakes should not be repeated and commitments made must be fulfilled. However, memories of special events can encourage us and move us to action.

"One of the most precious gifts God has given us is the ability to remember. There are plenty of hurts and disappointments in life that we

should forget. But good memories become a treasure chest of priceless reminders of relationships shared and joys experienced."<sup>1</sup>

That's where friends come in. Friendships make life enjoyable and difficult times bearable. Friendships are tested and strengthened by hardships. "There are 'friends' who destroy each other, but a real friend will stick by in all situations."<sup>2</sup>

"Walk with the wise to become wise. Associate with fools and we are likely to get into trouble and make foolish decisions."<sup>3</sup>

I'm sure you have experienced good friendships, but also encountered 'so-called-friends' who have used and possibly abused you. "A true friend is loyal."<sup>4</sup>

Truth guides loyalty. What is your source of truth? Mine comes from the Word of God, the Holy Bible. This book is filled with inspirational ways to help me become a loyal friend. My loyalty to God and his loyalty to me guide me through the conflicting demands of human relationships.

## Happy Reunions

In the past year I have attended a number of reunions and met up with many friends who have played a significant part in my life.

A recent visit to Australia saw me meet with my retired Chief Flying Instructor. Ken<sup>5</sup> and his wife moved to New South Wales last year to be close to their children. They are both in their early eighties, but have settled in well and have become part of their community already. They are friendly and active people.

Ken encouraged me when I was undertaking my Private Pilot's Licence (PPL), and having problems with learning to land. He took over from another instructor, and had a lot more faith than I did in my capabilities. Completing my PPL set me up with much more confidence to tackle further adventures in my life. I got involved in flying competitions and continued to fly for pleasure for over twenty years.

This confidence eventually led me to take up post-graduate nursing and university studies, with success: all because of Ken's belief in my abilities.

I also visited two other long time friends in Melbourne. Kate<sup>5</sup> is a 'pen-pal' of 55 years. We connected at age 10-11, through a request Kate made to the 'National newspaper of the country', for a Christian girl who was interested in collecting stamps. It did reach *The New Zealand Herald* and my Bible class teacher cut it out and offered it to one of us. I accepted and we have been friends ever since.

We first met in our early twenties,

*My flying instructor's belief in me and encouragement helped me complete my Private Pilot's Licence. This set me up with much more confidence to tackle further adventures in life*



and have done so on regular occasions as we have traveled to each other's countries. Kate and her husband have five children, one named after my elder brother, because they liked the name. We correspond by email now. Our mutual Christian faith and interests in Guiding and Girl's Brigade kept us connected. We have also walked similar spiritual paths. We can pick up our conversations where we last left off. It's wonderful.

Beth<sup>5</sup> is another friend of forty two years. Her husband to be, Keith<sup>5</sup>, and I were working for the Anglican Church at Lockhart River Aboriginal Mission in Northern Queensland. Beth came up to join him and they were married there. I was their bridesmaid. Again, our Christian faith and similar interests are what has kept our friendship going.

Even though Beth and Keith are now divorced, I have kept in touch with both. God has guided me through the maze of personal dilemmas in their situation. I did not take sides. They have remained friends too. I was able to spend time with Keith as well as Beth, as he now has advanced cancer and his time is short. We were able to say our goodbyes. I'll be there for Beth and her three children when Keith dies.

I have also attended my Church's 40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary celebrations, my Nursing 50<sup>th</sup> Jubilee, the 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the New Zealand Christian Writers' Guild and a family 50<sup>th</sup> Jubilee. You can imagine the chatter of many voices as we recalled the 'good old days'. It's these friendships that help make life enjoyable.

### Friends in need

Throughout my fifty years working as a nurse, I have met many hundreds of people, delivered countless babies, and taught hundreds of students of nursing, but I have only made a few special friends. They are the ones I have worked closely with over the years. We have supported each other through many a trial and illness. We make sure that we connect regularly. The fact that life seems to be moving so rapidly these days, and seems to be crowded out

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## REUNION



with work and other activities, is all the more reason that we need to make the time to cultivate friendships.

Friendships make difficult times bearable. The biblical book of Job tells the story of Job, a man of God, a prosperous farmer who tragically lost everything – his children, servants, livestock and herdsman. He became physically sick – covered in boils. In his grief and illness, three of Job's friends came to visit him, but Job wasn't up to talking. They sat with him, in silence for seven days!<sup>6</sup> Could you do that?

When a friend is sick it is important to 'be there'. Friends in need don't have to have all their questions answered, as much as they need to have someone listen. Make a point to be with those in pain, but let your presence be your strongest statement. Don't give up on your friends, and don't use them to your advantage. Cultivate your

friendships and become a loyal friend; keep in touch by email, a note, a phone call or text message.

*"It was only a brief little note,  
Or a word that was prayerfully spoken,  
Yet not in vain, for it soothed the pain  
Of a heart that was broken."<sup>7</sup>*

Are you cultivating your friendships and keeping in touch?

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1. *Our Daily Bread* 16/08/2007
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3. Proverbs 13:20
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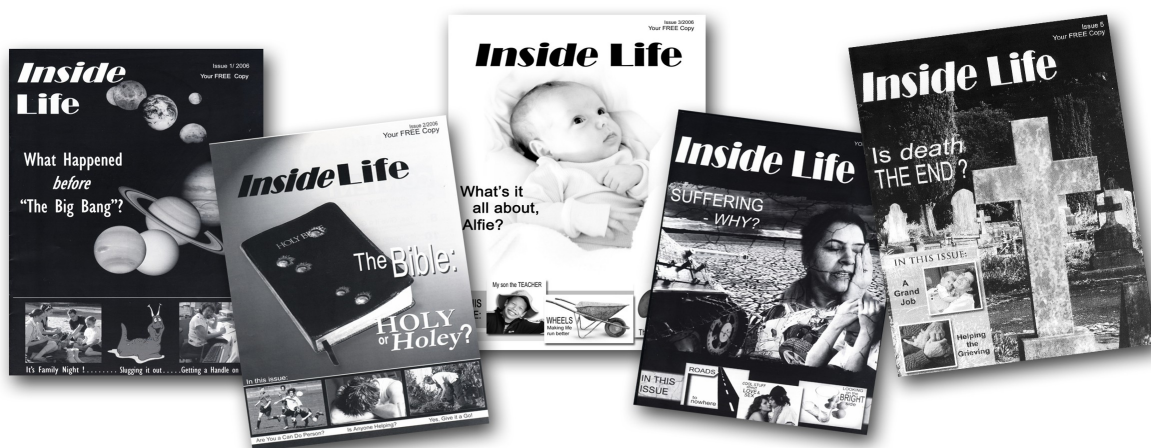
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- ◆ What's it all about, Alfie?
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