

Inside Life

Issue 14

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Aggressive Atheists

**Give
Bad Habits
the Boot!**

**The Day
I Discovered
an
Unexploded
Bomb**

The Virtues of Suffering

Inside Life

A Magazine of Understanding

Number 14, March 2011

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Inside Life

PO Box 304055, Hauraki Corner, Auckland 0750
Phone: 09 489 8910

Email: insidelife@wcg.org.nz
Website: www.insidelife.org.nz

Editor: Rex Morgan

Graphic Design: Philip Baldwin

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***Inside Life** is a magazine of understanding. Rather than just reporting on life, **Inside Life** seeks to delve inside the marvellous mystery that is life, to discover what it is all about. What does life mean? Where did it come from? How can we make the most of it?*

***Inside Life** provides insight and answers to life's deep questions and challenges, and aims to provide articles of lasting hope, help, and encouragement for successful living in today's fast-moving world.*

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***Our Cover:** Disasters like the 2010 Canterbury earthquake always seem to raise the question: 'Why would a loving God allow such hurt and destruction to happen?' Our lead article, written by a Darfield resident who went through the quake and its after-shocks, reflects on the way suffering often brings to the forefront some of the finest qualities of human character—virtues such as self-sacrifice, kindness, generosity, hope, and trust.*

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The Virtues of... *Suffering*

By Philip Baldwin

My wife and I live in Darfield, Canterbury, and we are thankful that we suffered very little damage from the 4 September earthquake and aftershocks. Two weeks after the initial 7.1 magnitude tremor, though, we had what seemed to us an unusual experience. We received one of the food boxes that were packed by the Salvation Army for delivery by World Vision volunteers in towns like Darfield and Kaiapoi.

A young black man came to our door to give us what really seemed more like a pick-me-up box than a care

package—filled with essential toiletries, Kleenex, paper towels, hand sanitiser, several different kinds of chocolate bars, granola bars, marshmallows, hot chocolate and instant flavoured coffee, and a bottle of water. I would have tried more strenuously to send him away so that someone else could have benefited from the supplies, but my wife wanted to take the box, as she was already thinking about folks to give the supplies to. We learned from talking to him that he is Sudanese, a Christian, likely a refugee, and working as a missionary in New Zealand for World Vision. And we both had the

same reaction to the experience—‘How ironic!’

To think that someone who had probably suffered a great deal more than we had would be trying to help us Cantabrians after the earthquake, made me wonder again: ‘Why does the God we worship, who is supposed to be good and loving, let bad things happen?’ Why does God let the creation

**Grief knits two hearts
in closer bonds
than happiness ever can;
and common sufferings
are far stronger links
than common joys.**

Alphonse de Lamartine

rip people’s lives and homes and businesses and lands apart with earthquakes, floods, hurricanes, and tsunamis? Why does God let people abuse young, innocent, defenceless children? Why does God let the leaders of nations wage war on their own people, or the people of neighbouring countries?

These are much more than academic questions, because the problem of suffering sparks anger and bewilderment and frustration with God in the people who suffer and in those who have to deal with consequences of evil in our world. When we see the senseless carnage of war, or learn of horrific family violence and abuse, or live through earthquakes that destroy people’s homes and livelihoods, we are often moved to ask: ‘Where was God?’

We may point to the amazing blessing that no one was actually killed in the Canterbury quake, but the devastation and death toll in the Haiti and Chile tremors stagger the imagination. How do we put these economic and personal disasters



Susan Baldwin with a pick-me-up box delivered by a World Vision volunteer in Darfield, Canterbury, after the 4 September earthquake.

Helpful Thoughts on Pain and Suffering

*Life is 10% what happens to you, and
90% how you respond to it.*
Unknown

*Difficult times have helped me to understand
better than before, how infinitely rich and beautiful
life is in every way, and that so many things
that one goes worrying about are of no importance
whatsoever.*
Isak Dinesen

*My barn having burned to the ground,
I can now see the moon.*
Masahide, Japanese poet

*The deeper that sorrow carves into your being,
the more joy you can contain.*
*Is not the cup that holds your wine the very cup
that was burned in the potter's oven?*
Kahlil Gibran

What was hard to suffer is sweet to remember.
Seneca

*If you're going through hell,
keep going.*
Winston Churchill

Smooth seas do not make skillful sailors.
African proverb

He who has a why to live can bear almost any how.
Friedrich Nietzsche

*When written in Chinese the word 'crisis' is composed
of two characters: one represents danger
and the other represents opportunity.*
John F. Kennedy

*Do not free a camel of the burden of his hump;
you may be freeing him from being a camel.*
Gilbert Keith Chesterton

*The gem cannot be polished without friction,
nor man without trials.*
Confucius

God gave burdens, also shoulders.
Yiddish Proverb

into perspective with what we know of God?

Freedom of Choice

For the most part Christians believe that God has given us the freedom to choose our actions as well as the responsibility to live with the consequences of them. Story after story in the Bible clearly gives witness to this freedom: think of Cain and Abel, Joseph and his brothers, David and Bathsheba, even the divisions in the early church at Corinth.¹

God could have determined, at the beginning, that there would be no conflict between peoples; he could have protected little children so that none would ever be brutalised; he could have structured the earth and organised it so that floods, droughts, volcanoes, and earthquakes would never have happened. There are many things God could have done, but he seems to prize free will enough not to step in directly to constrain the activities of his creation (as far as we can tell), no matter how destructive, evil, frightening, or perverted they seem to be.

And it's worthwhile to remember that God has given the whole of his creation this freedom to act. Some people find this particularly difficult to accept, but there is no running away from the reality that our world, the world God has created for us, is full of good things and bad, blessings and heartache, unpredictable joys and unexpected sorrows.

Interestingly, people don't ask the soul-searching 'Where is God?' question when they fall head-over-heels in love or win the lottery or are bursting with pride at the birth of a grandchild! But when bad things happen we are very quick to ask where God is—after all, we want to have someone to blame for earthquakes, floods, tsunamis, and drought. It is also interesting that bad events are called 'acts of God', but he doesn't receive similar credit for good things that happen!

It seems that God's creation is free to be itself, and to express its freedom, through the unpredictability of weather, the centuries-long cycles of climatic change, and the gradual movement of tectonic plates. For some reason, God thinks that is good, and I'm not the only person to believe that this kind of world, a world of unpredictability, a world of time and chance, mirrors the freedom that God has given humans to choose between good and evil in all sorts of situations.

Virtues Brought Out

As much as the natural forces of this earth can bless us or cause us to suffer in a variety of ways, they give us cause to express virtues like self-sacrifice, kindness, generosity, hope, and trust. The recent earthquake in Canterbury brought out these virtues in the volunteer spirit of people who gave up their own time to help with the clean-up efforts, the neighbours who started to

look out for one another during the aftershocks, a number of shops that decided to share their trading space with neighbours or competitors who lost their own buildings, the gifts of food and shelter that were given to people whose homes were no longer safe to live in, and the growing community spirit of Canterbury residents, church congregations, and local councils that committed to rebuilding homes and churches and landmark buildings.

By anybody's reckoning generosity, kindness, and self-sacrifice are a few of the noblest features of humanity, and not just by chance, they are among the characteristics that God seems to value in human beings, too. Where would the virtues of self-sacrifice, kindness, generosity, even hope and trust, be needed in a

world without risk or uncertainty, danger and calamity? And what would be the point of love? Because love isn't just a matter of getting along when everything is going smoothly: love is made real in suffering and loss, self-sacrifice, and generosity.

When the apostle Paul writes to one of the earliest Christian churches in Corinth, he



God has given us the freedom to choose our actions as well as the responsibility to live with the consequences of them.

praises the generosity of some Macedonian Christians who had unexpectedly been generous to other Christians who were in need, even though they themselves were poor.² Paul goes on to suggest

that the Corinthians can learn from God's provision for ancient Israel when those people gathered manna during the exodus:

...The goal is equality, as it is written: 'The one who gathered much did not have too much, and the one who gathered little did not have too little.'³

In the same way God provided for every one of the Israelites who

**We have no right to ask
when sorrow comes,
'Why did this happen
to me?'
unless we ask the same
question for every moment
of happiness that comes
our way.**

Unknown

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Christchurch neighbours work together to clean up the sand and clay that were liquified by the earthquake, exploding through the topsoil in geysers, and accumulating on properties in the Eastern suburbs.

gathered manna in the wilderness, Paul seems to be saying that you and I can have a part in balancing out some of the unfairness in this life. Our generosity allows us to imitate, you might even say 'participate in', God's provision for others when we help them in their suffering.

God Suffers, Too

'Oh, really', people might say. 'If God thinks suffering is so great, why doesn't he just come down here

and go through the kind of suffering that the Haitians, or Chileans, or even some of us Cantabrians have gone through?' In fact, that is exactly what he has done: Jesus, the Son of God, was willing to live as one of us, to walk through human life and sympathise with our suffering, to experience evil and pain and the sharpness of death, and ultimately

to sacrifice himself and make a pathway to resurrection and new life for us. Jesus' most demanding expression of Christian love illustrates just this truth: 'Love one another as I have loved you...greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends'.⁴

Every problem has in it the seeds of its own solution. If you don't have any problems, you don't get any seeds.
Norman Vincent Peale

I suggested above that God's creation behaves in such a way that love, sacrifice, devotion, kindness, and generosity exist as our response to suffering and calamity. Humans believe that it is important to care for one another, help one another, encourage one another, and stand by one another—even when that caring or encouragement might seem to have no tangible reward, even when that devotion or solidarity can bring the prospect of further suffering. And Christians believe that God in Jesus

has understood, experienced, and lived just this kind of human suffering. Our willingness to help the people around us is an extension of this 'laying down your life' that Jesus taught and accomplished himself. For us, this is not necessarily in the sense of physical martyrdom, but in our willingness to offer our time, our emotional support, and our physical resources to other people.

The Anglican Bishop of Christchurch, Victoria Matthews, has challenged her seventy-one parishes in Canterbury to live out this kind of generosity by giving \$100,000 out of their own financial blessings for rebuilding and relief after the Haitian earthquake's devastation. As of this writing, it appears that the bishop's goal has been exceeded by at least \$44,000.

When our question is, 'Why does God allow bad things to happen?', we focus on the problem, not the solution. The solution to suffering comes from our willingness to be generous to those in need, like the Christians in Macedonia were, like Cantabrians have been, like the young Sudanese fellow is doing—to be a blessing to the people around us who are struggling through the difficult circumstances of life.

Notes

¹ Respectively, Genesis 4:1–9; Genesis 37, 42–45, 50; 2 Samuel 11; 1 Corinthians 1:10–17, 3:1–9, 11:17–22.

² 2 Corinthians 8:1–12.

³ 2 Corinthians 8:14–15, quoting Exodus 16:18.

⁴ John 15:12–13.



Philip Baldwin lives in Darfield, Canterbury, where he moved from Canada with his wife Susan in 2009. He has served as a school teacher and a pastor, and is an amateur musician, and Macintosh enthusiast. He can be contacted at philipjamesbaldwin@gmail.com

A Premature Goodbye— Is It Really the End?



By Simon Williams

Ashes to ashes, dust to dust!', Jane¹ shrieked as the curtain drew round before the coffin. Her beloved husband and best friend, Stephen,¹ had been snatched from her at the age of only 43, his body destroyed by an aggressive cancer diagnosed barely five months earlier. They had been together for twenty-three years.

It was standing room only in the Chapel of Rest. Friends, family, and work colleagues unexpectedly brought together to pay their respects. I was ushered into a corner near the front exit where the mourners would file out. Surveying the scene of subdued faces, I could sense the pained expressions as people fondly recalled their memories of Stephen, and then pondered why it had happened to him.

Originally a chef, Stephen later worked with vending machines on

London Underground and became a technical expert. It was in this role that I had worked with him over a period of seven years. Always pleasant, always likeable, always with a 'can do' attitude, Stephen was willing to go above and beyond to install and maintain machines in the rugged subterranean environment. In the early days he had played a pivotal role in the team which installed nearly 1000 machines right across the network, reaching almost every station. Sometimes he

would work for three days and nights without a break to get the machines in place. For years night shifts had been the norm. Yet he found time to share himself with others, to help and support them, to have a laugh, and to look after Jane and the horses they together delighted in keeping. His eulogist described him as 'an ideal friend'.

But now it was all gone. The vending machines had been consigned to the scrap heap a couple of years before, victims of the 'de-cluttering' needed to cope with increasing passenger numbers. The vending team had been disbanded. Now brought back together one last time, it was clear their lives had taken very different paths. Stephen had taken voluntary redundancy and worked part time for a friend until his illness. One former colleague had set up a property-development business which had sadly collapsed in the 'credit crunch'; another was supplying plumbing and solar heating, also struggling in the economic downturn. Only one remained in the vending industry, providing stock for machines at Heathrow Airport.

Stephen's hobby was visiting the battlefields and graves of France and Belgium, learning what others had sacrificed in the cause of freedom. It was fitting, then, that Stephen should be laid to rest on the 90th anniversary of the Armistice. Yet so sad that he also should now be numbered among those whose lives were taken prematurely. As we observed the two minutes silence, I pondered the question 'Why?' The pained faces around indicated no one had an answer.

But then my thoughts returned to some of the words cited in the funeral service:

- 'Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?'
- 'The Lord is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in love.'
- 'In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you.'
- 'For the Lamb at the centre of the throne will be their shepherd; he will lead them to springs of living water. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.'

Could there be an answer after all, somehow, somewhere, some way? Could there be something more than Stephen's few years of life? Could he and Jane yet have a future? I resolved to investigate further.

Notes

¹ Not their real names.

Simon Williams lives in Cambridgeshire with his wife and baby daughter. He has worked at London Underground for over twelve years.

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If you would like to investigate this question further, please write to *Inside Life* for a copy of our previous issue featuring the article 'Is Death the End?' See back cover for details.

Aggressive Atheists

By Joseph Tkach

I believe that most atheists are really agnostics. In times of crisis, for example, they, like everybody else, tend to resort to prayer. When the chips are down, they hope a merciful and benevolent God is there for them.

But some of those whom we might call 'aggressive' atheists are different. They like to use science and logic to try to convince believers why they should stop believing. Using science and logic, they argue, it is impossible to prove that God exists.

Richard Dawkins, for example, has compared the idea of an imagined Flying Spaghetti Monster to belief in God. God is no more real or provable by conventional means of proof than a flying spaghetti monster, he argues. It is just made up.

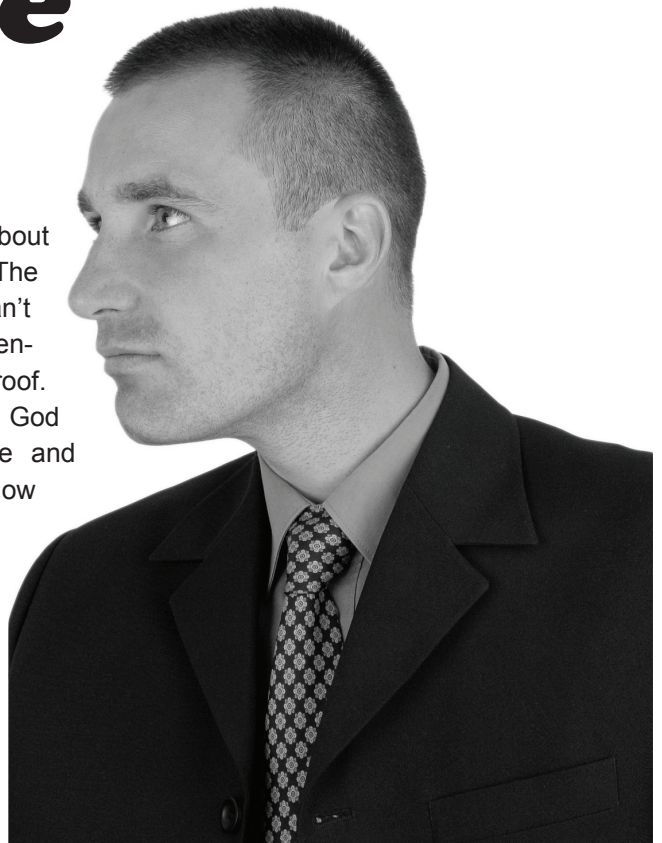


The existence of God can't be proven—or disproven—by conventional means of proof or scientific study.

He's right about one thing. The existence of God can't be proven by conventional means of proof. You can't prove God exists using science and logic. You can only know God by faith, not by scientific study. You can only know God through God's own revelation of himself, not by mathematics, logical deduction or the scientific method.

But what these aggressive atheists don't like to admit is that just as the existence of God cannot be proven through science and logic, neither can it be disproven through science and logic. They have no more grounds to disprove God's existence using conventional means of proof than we believers have to prove God's existence using science and logic.

The tools of belief in God are revelation and faith, start to finish, not science and logic. The atheist has no basis to disprove what can only be held true by faith. The Flying Spaghetti Monster and other such analogies are not valid analogies for belief in God because they miss the very heart of why so many people believe.



God's personal revelation of himself through Jesus Christ makes sense of the world. It assures us that we matter, that we are not here by accident, and that we were created on purpose and for a purpose. It makes love matter, because by faith we hold that God made us because he loves us, and in that love he will make us into people who can love like he loves.

Aggressive atheists can scoff about the lack of scientific proof for the existence of God, but they are looking in the wrong place. By standing on their premise that God doesn't exist, they miss the still small voice of revelation, and the personal joy of knowing God and knowing God knows them.

I like to say that in the end, there is really only one kind of atheist: those who will one day come to faith. That's my prayer.

This is a transcript of a weekly 'Speaking of Life' radio programme by Joseph Tkach, president of Grace Communion International. For more information visit www.gci.org.

My son, Johnathan, had a bad day at preschool the other day. I didn't realise how bad, however, until I tried to drop him off the next morning and he panicked. I leaned in to see what was wrong, and he gripped my neck with a death hug, buried his head in my shoulder, and refused to let go.

This wasn't like him. He had never complained before when I dropped him off, and he had never seemed to care when I left. In fact, he loves school. Just a couple of weeks earlier, when we were touring the place, he nearly cried when his mother and I made him leave. Yet, here he was, clinging to my neck for dear life, terrified I would go without him.

So why was he scared? The day before, a couple of kids had refused to play with him. That's it. They hadn't threatened him, laughed at him, or bullied him. They'd simply excluded him. I hadn't thought much of it when he told me the previous night. After all, that's what kids do, right? It didn't seem like a big deal. Yet, here I was late for work, hugging my boy for dear life, and terrified because I knew I had to leave him.

I'm not sure why I was surprised by his reaction. Our need to be included is fundamental to our humanity. It isn't secondary or nice to have. It's hard core—right up there with our need for oxygen, food, and morning coffee. Okay, the last one might just be me. But the rest are common to all people.

It reminded me of the incident between Taylor Swift and Kanye West at the MTV VMA awards last year. Taylor, a 17-year-old country music star, was accepting an award for best female video. She had just started to explain how much it meant to her to be accepted by

'mainstream' music, when rap star Kanye West took the microphone from her. He then explained that she really didn't belong there after all. Actually, he said that Beyoncé deserved the award, but I'm sure Taylor and the rest of America heard: 'You're not in the same league as Beyoncé.

You don't belong'. Understandably, Taylor broke down and was seen crying with her mother backstage.

Fortunately, the story didn't end there. Beyoncé received another award later in the evening, and she took the opportunity to tell everyone how much she related to Taylor. Beyoncé explained that she'd been a teen when she received her first VMA, and she remembered what it was like. She then invited Taylor back onstage to have her moment. Her message to Taylor was clear: 'You do belong. You're one of us. You're included'.

My son, Johnathan, had a similar moment. Before I could figure out how to escape his grip, another little boy saw him clinging to my neck and asked, 'Is his name Johnathan?' Surprised that he knew my son's name, I said, 'Yes, what's yours?' He told me. Then he started telling

Blessed Are the Includers



Johnathan all about the stuffed animal he was carrying. Slowly and gently, Johnathan released his grip. Then he faced the boy and started telling him about his toys. A few moments later, as the new friends were playing, I slipped away without my son ever noticing.

Never forget the importance of inclusion.

I'm not going to end this article with a lecture on ways you can and should make others feel included. You're smart enough to figure that out on your own.

All I'm going to say is, 'Blessed are the peacemakers'.

Now, I think I'll go buy a Beyoncé album.

This article was first published in *Christian Odyssey* magazine (www.christianodyssey.com). Reprinted by permission.

Give Bad Habits the Boot!

By Chris Widener

Everybody has bad habits. Everybody. Now, granted, some people have fewer than others and some people's bad habits are more grating than

those of others, but we all have them. What is great is that we don't have to! Imagine a life where you couldn't change. What kind of life would that be? But we can change, so let's get started!



There are two kinds of bad habits: those you know you have, but others may or may not know about; and those you don't know you have that everybody else knows you have! For the sake of everybody involved, we ought to get rid of them all, right?

Well, how can I get rid of a bad habit if I don't know I have it? It's simple, but hard: ask somebody to be brutally honest with you! You might think, 'Yeah, but I'll be embarrassed'. Would you rather everyone talk behind your back? Get up the courage and ask. Ask somebody who loves you and has your best interest in mind. Be gracious and don't defend yourself. Just accept what they say and work on it.

What about the bad habits we know about (which are all of them, once your good friend tells you about the ones you had missed yourself)? Those are the tough ones. How do I know they are tough? They must be tough if you know about them, and yet you still have them! If they weren't tough, they would be former bad habits! Got me? Good!

So, how do you break a bad habit? How do you give it the boot? Here are a few things that must be a part of the plan in order to see that it is gone forever!

You must want the bad habit to go!

That's right: some people want their bad habits to stick around. I have seen grandparents choose alcohol over their grandchildren. I have seen smokers continue smoking while watching their parents die of emphysema. The first step is to go deep into the recesses of your heart and ask, 'Do I really want to give this up?'

- 1. You must want the bad habit to go!*
- 2. List all of the reasons you want to quit your bad habit.*
- 3. Make a choice.*
- 4. Take action.*
- 5. Tell somebody.*
- 6. Pick yourself up after failure.*
- 7. Reward yourself.*

List all of the reasons you want to quit your bad habit

Make them positive. Make the list long! Start with the really powerful and dramatic reasons, if you need to. Then memorise the list. Commit all those reasons to your memory. You are making connections between stopping the bad behaviour and the good things you will get from doing so.

If you want to lose weight, then picture yourself slim and looking good in skinny-people clothes! If you want to stop smoking, picture your wife actually kissing you, rather than sending you to the bathroom to brush your teeth first!

Make a choice

Once you've made the decision and listed your reasons, your choosing comes down to one thing: an act of the will. Choose to do it. Say to yourself throughout the day, 'I am choosing to...' Eisenhower rightly said, 'The history of free men is written not by chance but by choice, their choice'. It is your choice. You can write your history.

Take action

This point is tricky because there are two different philosophies about it. According to one, you must take massive action. Go all or nothing.

Using the weight loss example, you would go spend \$500 to join a gym, rework your schedule and hit the treadmill every day for a year. You would get rid of all fat in the house. This 'go all out' strategy works for some people.

Others would burn out this way, feel like failures, and be worse off than before. If you are one of these, you should start out slowly, taking baby steps, and working diligently toward a planned goal. This kind of person decides to start walking three days a week, and limits dessert to two nights a week, down from seven.

See how it works? Either way is acceptable—all or nothing, or slow and steady—as long as you get to the goal you have set.

Tell somebody

Your best ally is an accountability partner. Tell them your goal, and tell them your plan. Write it down for them, and have them ask you at regular intervals about your progress. This will prove invaluable!

Pick yourself up after failure

Inevitably, people have setbacks when they are trying to break bad habits and develop new ones. The key is to have setbacks, but not turnbacks!

Pick yourself up and get going again. You may plan to lose 30 pounds, and after losing fifteen, you eat a gallon of ice cream. When that happens, don't feel bad and give up! Reset your goal for another two weeks and get going again.

Chalk your setback up to experience! Say to yourself, 'Sometimes you win and sometimes you learn'.

Reward yourself

You should regularly congratulate yourself by rewarding yourself with some gift to yourself. Start with little gifts for small victories, and plan a big gift when you are finally, completely over the bad habit.

Is it that simple? Most of the time, no. Bad habits are hard to break. There are so many intangibles in changing behaviour, that it would be hard to cover them all in an article like this. But here is a simple and workable plan that will help you make great strides, if you are willing to apply the principles.

Get going! Give those bad habits the boot! Good luck!

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The Day I Discovered an Unexploded Bomb

By Roy Lawrence

It was back in the days of World War Two when it happened. My memories of the war are childhood memories, because I was a boy at the time, but they are still surprisingly clear. Of course, as a child I was kept well away from the front and the fighting. But from time to time the war came to me.

I lived with my mother and father in a village called Davyhulme on the outskirts of Manchester.

Night after night enemy planes used to fly overhead on their way to bomb the industrial complex at Trafford Park, a few miles away. If they failed to drop all their bombs on Trafford Park, they would get rid of them on

their way home, and so occasionally a bomb would fall somewhere near our house.

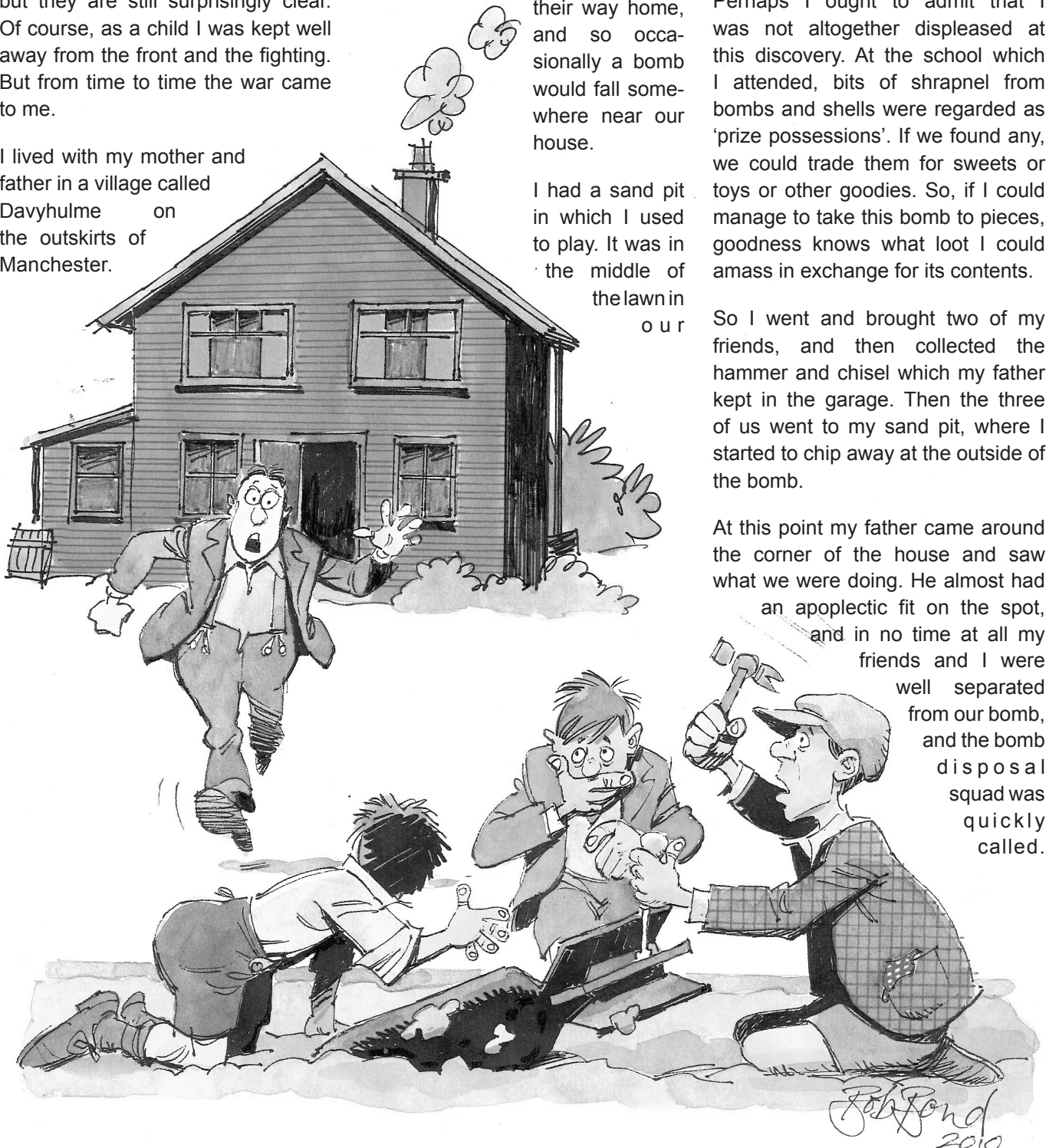
I had a sand pit in which I used to play. It was in the middle of the lawn in our

back garden. One morning when I went out into the garden, I found to my total astonishment that there in the middle of my sand pit was an unexploded bomb!

Perhaps I ought to admit that I was not altogether displeased at this discovery. At the school which I attended, bits of shrapnel from bombs and shells were regarded as 'prize possessions'. If we found any, we could trade them for sweets or toys or other goodies. So, if I could manage to take this bomb to pieces, goodness knows what loot I could amass in exchange for its contents.

So I went and brought two of my friends, and then collected the hammer and chisel which my father kept in the garage. Then the three of us went to my sand pit, where I started to chip away at the outside of the bomb.

At this point my father came around the corner of the house and saw what we were doing. He almost had an apoplectic fit on the spot, and in no time at all my friends and I were well separated from our bomb, and the bomb disposal squad was quickly called.





Violent video games have the capacity to be an unexploded bomb.

When the bomb disposal squad arrived, they crawled on their stomachs across the lawn, and then slowly and delicately made the bomb safe.

I suppose I felt a bit peeved about the whole incident. Our fun had been spoilt. Our liberty had been infringed. But of course my father was absolutely right. If he had not acted so promptly, I could very well not have been here to tell the tale.

A Parable for Our Time

The reason I am retelling this tale now is that, not only is it a good yarn, a good 'Boys Own' story, but

is interlaced with pornographic sites. Each of these is like an unexploded bomb, full of potential to damage our lives. But there is no shortage of people who find themselves playing with these sites and slaving over them. It is a great mistake. Those who toy with pornography are all too likely to find that very soon, they are themselves the ones who are being toyed with. Pornography can so

easily become an escalating addiction. We can go from the net to sex shops and to a pornographic lifestyle, which is self-destructive, as well as potentially harmful to others.

To take another example, many children seem to have a great liking these days for violent video games. They plead for their parents to buy them, and parents often do so, just for the

sake of a quiet life. But each one has the capacity to be an unexploded bomb, and you never know when fantasy violence will spill over into the real thing. We were all appalled when it was reported not long ago that two children had bullied and tortured two others almost to the point of committing murder. Not surprisingly, it was found that they had every opportunity to fantasise about violence in their own home.

Recently the media here in the United Kingdom have reported research has revealed that Britain is becoming what is termed 'a more liberal, tolerant, and relaxed society'. The radio programme in which I heard the report was full of self-congratulation, and seemed not to see the unexploded

bomb concealed beneath the statistics. It is apparent, however, to anyone looking around with open eyes that once you abandon a commitment to

basic moral standards, once you ignore biblical teaching about right and wrong, once you start treating the concept of 'sin' as an irrelevance or a joke or just plain bad taste, the consequences are chaotic and explosive: socially, medically, economically, and in all sorts of other ways.

A Personal Unexploded Bomb?

Still, let's put aside for a moment reflections about our society and about the world generally. Let's apply all this at a rather more personal level. What about you and me? Do we have unexploded bombs of our own which we are playing about with? Are we toying with some private sin? Perhaps taking pleasure in a prejudice of some kind? Or in conceit? Or spite? Or some sort of impure thought sequence? Or what about dishonesty? It need not necessarily be financial, but could perhaps involve stealing credit or kudos—or

...once you start treating the concept of 'sin' as an irrelevance or a joke or just plain bad taste, the consequences are chaotic and explosive...



Pornographic web sites are like unexploded bombs, full of potential to damage our lives.

even time—which does not rightly belong to us?

Every personal sin has the capacity to be an unexploded bomb. We toy with them at our peril. So, is it time for a bomb hunt? If so, what shall we use as a bomb detector?

There is no shortage of bomb detectors in the Bible. How about the Ten Commandments, for instance? They can be found in their original form in Exodus, chapter 20, verses 1-17, and the art of using them is to see and apply the principles which underlie each one. So for instance, when we read the sixth commandment, 'Thou shalt do no murder', we can find that this is highly relevant to us, even if we are not killers in any crude sense.

This is a world in which many die needlessly. We belong to the third of the world which is well-fed, even overfed. But another third goes hungry daily, and a further third experiences such extremities of starvation that people habitually die of malnutrition. We could do something about it by helping organisations which care for the sick and starving. But do we? And what about the mental and spiritual equivalents of murder? Do we promote peace, or do we bear hatred in our hearts and injure others by word or deed? Are we guilty of

'character assassination'? Do we ever indulge in malicious gossip? Or at a more literal level, have we worked out how we feel about abortion or the needless slaughter of animals?

Perhaps you would rather find your bomb detector in the New Testament.

If so, how about 1 Corinthians 13, the famous chapter built around the phrase, 'Love is...'? All we have to do is to change the words: 'Love is...' to 'Am I...?' or 'Do I...?' 'Am I patient, am I kind? Do I know no jealousy? Do I make no parade, never give myself airs? Am I never selfish? Am I never glad when others go wrong?' And so on.

The best of all bomb detectors is Jesus himself. He has promised his followers, 'I am with you always, to the end of the age'.¹ If we have claimed this promise and allow him to walk with us through life, all we have to do is to ask ourselves, 'When I am with Jesus, can I feel at ease if I do this, think that, say the other?' If not, we



Are we guilty of 'character assassination' or malicious gossip?

will have found an unexploded bomb in the sand pit of our soul.

What if you try this out and find one? We are often unwilling to find these unexploded bombs because we are not sure what should come next, but the answer is surprisingly simple. Jesus is not only the supreme bomb detector, he is also the world's greatest bomb disposer. All we have to do is to step aside and allow him to deal with the situation. We have to pray, 'Deliver us from evil', and we have to mean it. For he can take your personal unexploded bomb and mine into his scarred hands and carry it well away. And if that weren't enough good news, there is more. For, before long, those same scarred hands will bring us something infinitely better than the unexploded bomb to put in its place.

Notes

¹ Matthew 28:20

This article was first published in the Summer 2010 edition of *The Plain Truth* (www.plain-truth.org.uk). Reprinted by permission.



We can do something about hunger, malnutrition, and starvation by helping organisations which care for the sick and starving.



Canon Roy Lawrence has spent most of his life in the ministry working in Anglican churches in the North of England, as well as serving as a hospital chaplain. A well-known Christian

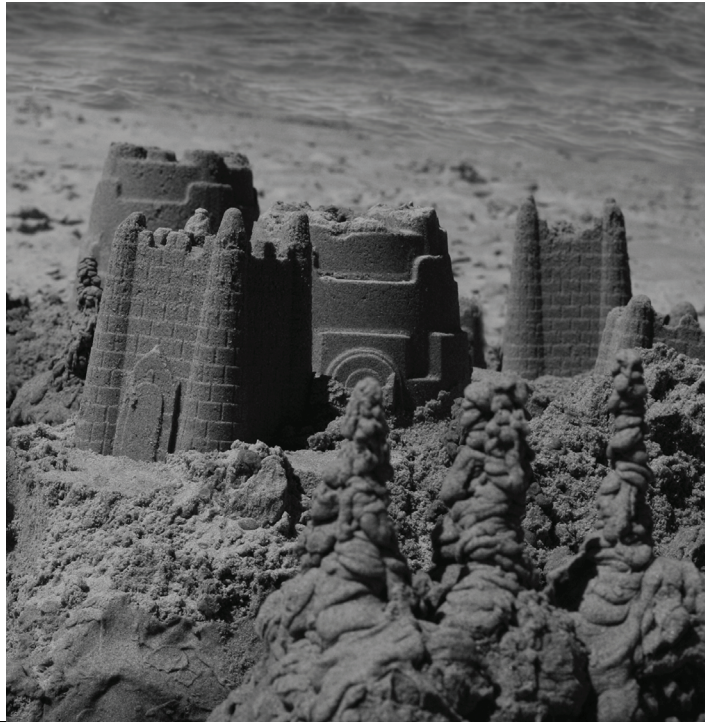
writer and broadcaster, Roy has authored thirteen books.

Take Time

(excerpted from Denis Waitley's 'Safari to the Soul')

When we were five years old, one year represented twenty percent of our total lives. At fifty, a year represents two percent, or one-fiftieth, of our life experience.

No wonder it took so long for holidays to arrive when we were in primary school—and little wonder also that after age fifty, when a year represents such a small portion of the time we've already spent, it goes by in a seeming blink of an eye. It's a little like a videotape speeding up as it rewinds and accelerating almost wildly near the end of the reel. So goes your remaining time as it dwindles down.



Take time to hear a robin's song each morning
Take time to smell the roses as you go
Before you leave, please say 'I love you'
To the ones you know
Take time out for a sunset
And its afterglow

Take time to climb a tree with kids this summer
Explore each country back-road you can find
And take a moment now and then
To build a castle in the sand
Take time to hike that mountain
When you can

Take time to play, your work can live
without you
Give up the urgent for the afternoon
And take a loved one by the hand
And slowly gaze at that full moon
Don't let this minute pass you
For the years go by too soon

And make each day 'safari' day
Before this moment slips away
Take time to live.

Denis Waitley

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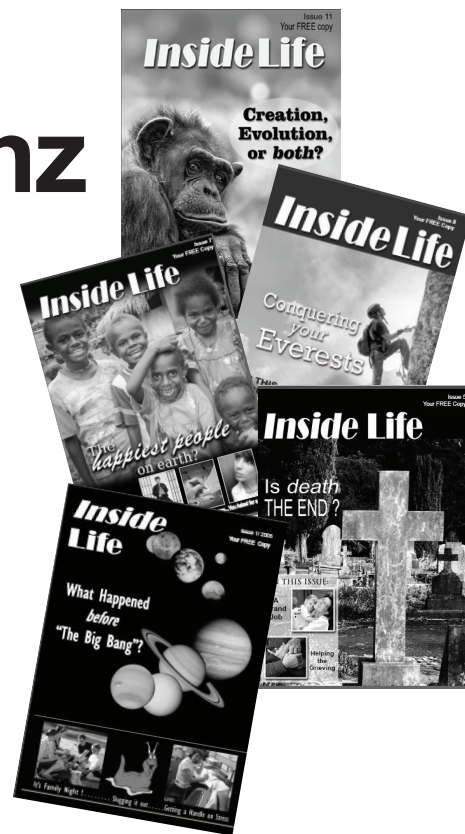
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