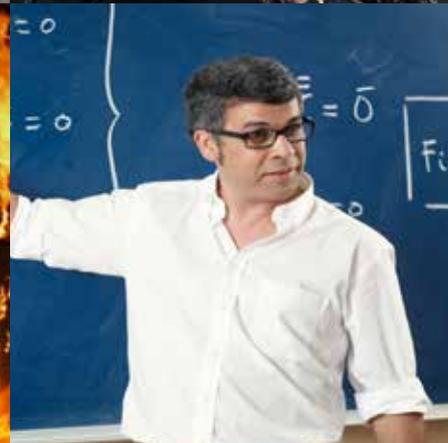


# InsideLife

Issue 23  
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## Who's Your Hero?



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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 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:** The word 'hero' can bring to mind people like sports stars, doctors, nurses, soldiers, scientists and astronauts. Our cover article argues that any of us can be a hero, and identifies one outstanding candidate as the greatest hero of all.

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# Who's Your Hero?

By Rex Morgan

A hush fell over the crowd. Thousands of eyes fixed on the ball as it raced from the bowler's hand. Whack! A huge heave from the batsman connected sweetly and smashed the ball heavenward. SIX! He had done it! Grant Elliot had won the Cricket World Cup semi-final for New Zealand. A new hero was born, according to a subsequent storm of newspaper headlines, TV and radio bulletins, and posts on social media.

But is that what heroism is all about? Does sporting prowess equate with heroism? What is it that makes a hero? Who's your hero?

The dictionary defines a 'hero' as 'one greatly regarded for outstanding achievements or noble qualities', whereas 'one capable of defeating competitors in sport' is termed a 'champion'.

Great sportspeople like Brendon McCullum, Ritchie McCaw, and Valerie Adams can rightly be described as 'champions', but to be a 'hero' involves more than that. Heroes are admired for their noble qualities, the inspiring example they set for others, and for doing things in a selfless and sacrificial way.

Remember Lance Armstrong, the road racing cyclist who won the Tour de France seven times, but was stripped of his titles after a doping scandal? Perhaps he may be called a cycling champion, but he lost any claim to 'hero' status when he was found to have used performance-enhancing drugs over many years, and to have lied about it.

On the other hand, someone like Austin Hemmings is an example of a true hero. In central Auckland in



*Disgraced cycling champion Lance Armstrong, seen here racing in February 2009, has lost his 'hero' status. As this article points out, high moral values are a vital attribute of a true hero.*

2008, Hemmings stood in front of a woman to shield her from a knife-wielding attacker when she cried out for help. After urging her to run for safety, Hemmings was stabbed to death.

In a similar incident in Auckland last year, Lucy Knight was brutally assaulted when she intervened to stop a bag-snatching in a shopping mall. Austin Hemmings and Lucy Knight have been widely lauded as 'Good Samaritans' and true heroes.

## Too Many Heroes?

It's possible to confuse heroes with celebrities. Modern society suffers from a 'celebrity culture', according to Lord Robert Winston, a high-profile British professor, scientist, and

television presenter. He believes the stars of the entertainment industry and the sports field are given recognition out of all proportion to their value or their attributes.

On a visit to this country in 2009, Lord Winston noted that he believes Kiwis ignore the worst behaviour of our sports stars and do not value intellectuals. 'New Zealand celebrates attributes which really aren't that important', he said, '... celebrity worship is a very good example of the lessening of genuine values in society'.<sup>1</sup> As someone has wisely observed: 'Celebrities make news, heroes make history'.

The word 'hero' does seem to be somewhat overused these days. Indeed, in today's news-hungry



*The 'S' on Superman's chest might just as well stand for 'Saviour': he always stands up to evil, protects the innocent, and fights for truth and justice.*

and flashy society it often isn't good enough to talk just about heroes. The term in vogue nowadays is 'superheroes'!

In this context, it is well worth noting that as the great tennis player Arthur Ashe stated: 'True heroism is remarkably sober, very undramatic. It is not the urge to surpass all others at whatever cost, but the urge to serve others at whatever cost'.

Ironically, true heroes are the type of people who don't really think they are heroes at all. They are often humble, self-effacing people who never want to take the credit—they are thinking of others rather than themselves.

A search of Google images for 'hero' brings up a plethora of pictures of Superman. He could well be called the archetypal hero of all time. Superman is a true legend, a global

icon. He always stands up to evil, protects the innocent, and fights for truth and justice. He is smarter, stronger, and more handsome than anyone else, and 'faster than a speeding bullet'.

The actor and film-director Christopher Reeve, famous for his movie portrayal of Superman, had some great insights into what makes a hero.

In 1995, Reeve was thrown head first from a horse in an accident that broke his neck and left him unable to move or breathe. In an instant, the one who starred as Superman was deprived of any strength and power, totally dependent on medical assistance even to draw breath. Reeve fought a heroic battle as a quadriplegic for nine years, courageously struggling against multiple health problems and lobbying extensively for people with spinal cord injuries. He died of a sudden heart attack in 2004 while co-directing a movie called *Everyone's Hero*. It has been observed with good reason that he was even more of a Superman in real life than he was in the movies.

On his website Reeve wrote:

When the first Superman movie came out I was frequently asked 'What is a hero?' I remember the glib response I repeated so many times. My answer was that a hero is someone who commits a courageous action without considering the consequences—a soldier who crawls out of a foxhole to drag an injured buddy to safety. And I also meant individuals who are slightly larger than life: Houdini and Lindbergh, John Wayne, JFK, and Joe DiMaggio.

Now my definition is completely different. I think a hero is an ordinary individual who finds strength to persevere and endure in spite of overwhelming obstacles.<sup>2</sup>

By that definition, each and every one of us can be a hero! And why not be inspired by people like Christopher Reeve to do our best to act energetically for the good of others? 'I want to democratise heroism to say any of us can be a hero', observed Philip Zimbardo.

Thankfully there are millions of unsung heroes in our world.

*Right: Nearly half of national essay contest writers named a family member as their personal hero, with 'my mum' coming well ahead in first place.*

In a national essay contest for high school students in the USA, [StageofLife.com](http://StageofLife.com), a writing resource centre for teens asked around 3,000 students to submit an essay on the topic 'Who is your hero?' Nearly half of the essay writers named a family member as their personal hero, with 'my mum' coming well ahead in first place. Other heroes such as Lady Gaga, Britney Spears, and Mahatma Gandhi were cited, but it's pleasing to see that close family members came out as leading role models in the majority of cases.<sup>3</sup>

It is a natural human trait to desire to be a hero. We all dream of being able to make the big difference at just the right moment to resolve a challenging situation. And there's nothing wrong with that, as long as

it isn't a matter of selfish pride and vanity. It's good to have the desire and ambition to help and serve others in special ways. The world would be a better place if each of us would try more frequently to be a hero to those around us.

It's good to ask the question 'What more can I do to selflessly serve and assist the people in my life?' We can resolve to be a true hero to our close family and friends.

### **The Greatest Hero of All**

Mother Theresa, Mahatma Gandhi, and Nelson Mandela are often listed as favourite heroes. They certainly deserve that accolade in view of their noble qualities and service for others.





*Although Jesus committed no sin, he sacrificed his life so that the sins of all mankind could be forgiven.*

But I'd like to submit that the greatest hero the world has ever seen is none other than Jesus Christ. Let's consider his credentials for this honour. Jesus is surely the most widely known person in history, with time itself being split into B.C. and A.D. in reference to him. He is admired and followed by millions of people who are happy to be called Christians, proudly wearing his name (sadly we often fail to live up to it, but you can't blame him for that).

Interestingly, the story of Superman borrows many elements from the life of Jesus. There are numerous parallels between the two stories. For instance, Superman's earthly parents were originally called Joseph and Mary, but the names were later changed to Jonathan (retaining Joseph as his middle name) and Martha.

Superman was sent to earth as a baby in a rocket ship shaped like a star, landing in a rural cornfield.

Christ's arrival was also heralded by a star seen by shepherds in a field. Superman was raised on earth in a backwater town called Smallville, reminiscent of Nazareth. Like Jesus, Superman grew up where people had no idea of his true identity, or his special powers.

Superman's family name, El, is a Hebrew word for God. Jor-El, the father, sent Kal-El, the son, to Earth to be a protector and to 'show them the way'. Clark Kent became

Superman at the age of 30, the same age Jesus started his ministry. Superman's mortal enemy is Lex Luthor. Reminiscent of Lucifer, who became Satan, Luthor is insanely jealous of Superman's powers, just as Lucifer is of God's.<sup>4</sup>

In the movie *Superman Returns* the voice of Jor-El said: 'They can be a great people, Kal-El. They wish to be. They only lack the light to show the way. That is why I have sent them you, my only son'. The 'S' on Superman's chest might just as well stand for 'Saviour', notes Cale Clarke in an article 'The Gospel According to Superman'.<sup>5</sup> Bryan Singer, director of *Superman Returns*, put it this way: 'Superman is the Jesus Christ of superheroes'.

In the 2013 sequel, *Man of Steel*, director Zack Snyder deliberately explored the biblical allegory, showing Clark Kent in a church with a stained-glass Jesus in the background and having Superman extend his arms like a crucifix in space before diving back toward earth.<sup>6</sup>

Just like Superman, the story of Jesus has been portrayed in many films. Bruce Marchiano, the Hollywood actor who played Jesus in *The Gospel of Matthew*, summed up Christ's life and character in this way:

Consistently, he spoke truth against a sea of opposition. Shockingly, he lived fully in his personal life exactly what he preached in public. Time after time, he stood heroically alone for what was right, regardless of what it might cost him. Without hesitation, he went out of his way to care for the most objectionable people of society, never turning a hungry soul away, always taking time to love an unlovable or care for an uncareable, knowing he would suffer ridicule and rejection for it. Humbly and openly, he marched across cultural barriers, decrying centuries of racist arrogance. Never a respecter of persons,

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unconcerned with status, wealth, gender, or popularity, he stood, champion and friend of the 'little guy'. And for all this and more, he constantly took it on the chin, keeping his mouth shut, his face set like flint, eyes riveted on his greater cause and mission.

This was truly a man among men, bigger than life itself yet as down-to-earth as it gets. This was the ultimate definition of masculinity, the very personification of character and integrity. He was the human coming-together of everything that is truly noble, good and honourable. We all go crazy for the big-screen hero. But take a look at Jesus—storming in against overwhelming opposition, giving his literal all, his very life—to rescue the helpless, the widowed, the orphaned, the crushed, the rejected, the despised. I don't know about you, but in my book, that's the living definition of 'hero'—the true definition of hero.<sup>7</sup>

Every other human hero made (or makes) mistakes. But Jesus stands out head and shoulders over anyone

else because he never did anything wrong. High moral values are a vital attribute of a true hero. Jesus is the epitome of standards in this area, laying out the highest set of ethics and virtues ever presented—values that are prized by millions of people to the present day. He lived a pure and a selfless life, constantly teaching, healing, and helping those around him. Although he committed no sin, he sacrificed his life so that the sins of all mankind could be forgiven.

Historian Philip Schaff considered Jesus so amazing that he didn't believe humans could have made up such a story. He wrote:

A character so original, so complete, so uniformly consistent, so perfect, so human and yet so high above all human greatness, can be neither a fraud nor a fiction. The poet...would in this case be greater than the hero. It would take more than a Jesus to invent a Jesus.<sup>8</sup>

Jesus is uniquely placed to be a true hero because he was God as well as man. This makes him alone worthy

# Why Would Anyone Want to Be a Christian?

In several nations it is illegal to become a Christian. But people become Christians anyway, despite penalties and even threats of death. Thousands of believers are killed each year, yet more people become Christians.

Christianity can spread even when it is persecuted. That is the way Christianity started—Jesus was killed as a political criminal. In the first 200 years after his death, thousands of Christians were killed as the Roman Empire tried to exterminate this new faith.

Millions of people become Christians each year. Scientists, farmers, historians, and clerks—people from all walks of life—become Christians. Why? This article gives several reasons. You can see whether any of them make sense to you.

Check out the article at: <https://www.gci.org/gospel/whyanyone>

of ‘hero worship’. He was able to perform powerful miracles, such as feeding thousands of people with a few small pieces of bread and fish, walking on water, turning water into wine, and even bringing back from the dead someone who had been in a tomb for four days. Not one of his miracles was done for his own benefit; all were for the good of others, including the healing of scores of sick and dying people.

What a remarkable hero! In fact, Jesus is manifestly worthy of the modern appellation—‘superhero’! Wikipedia states that ‘a superhero is a type of heroic character possessing extraordinary talents, supernatural phenomena, or superhuman powers, and dedicated to a moral goal or protecting the public’. By this definition Jesus is the ultimate superhero.

But one important factor sets Jesus clearly apart from other superheroes. All of the others are fictional characters, but Jesus really did live and do these things. Some question his historicity, but there is ample historical proof of his life and the things he did and said.

The Wikipedia article, ‘Historicity of Jesus’, surveys a great deal of material in this regard, concluding:

‘There is near unanimity among scholars that Jesus existed historically’. There is of course plenty of evidence in Christian sources such as the writings of the New Testament, but Jesus is mentioned in the works of first-century Roman historian Josephus and the second-century Roman historian Tacitus, among other places.

Classical historian Michael Grant wrote:

If we apply to the New Testament, as we should, the same sort of criteria as we should apply to other ancient writings containing historical material, we can no more reject Jesus’ existence than we can reject the existence of a mass of pagan personages whose reality as historical figures is never questioned.<sup>9</sup>

A large number of websites lay out various proofs of Christ’s historicity,<sup>10</sup> including one which concludes:

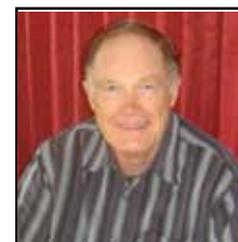
There is overwhelming evidence for the existence of Jesus Christ, both in secular and biblical history. Perhaps the greatest evidence that Jesus did exist is the fact that literally thousands of Christians in the first century A.D., including the twelve apostles, were willing to give their lives as martyrs for

Jesus Christ. People will die for what they believe to be true, but no one will die for what they know to be a lie.<sup>11</sup>

Why do literally millions of people choose of their own free will to follow Jesus and look up to him as their hero? Why not read about his life and see what attracts people to him? Read through the books of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John in the Bible. Each can be read in one sitting. After carefully considering these, ask yourself the question: ‘Who’s my hero?’

## NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> <http://www.stuff.co.nz/science/3155697/Worship-of-Kiwi-celebrities-a-false-idolatry>
- <sup>2</sup> <http://www.chrisreevehomepage.com/stillme.html>
- <sup>3</sup> [http://www.stageoflife.com/Who\\_Is\\_Your\\_Hero.aspx](http://www.stageoflife.com/Who_Is_Your_Hero.aspx)
- <sup>4</sup> Isaiah 14:12-14
- <sup>5</sup> <http://www.thefaitheexplained.com/blog/the-gospel-according-to-superman/>
- <sup>6</sup> For other examples, see for instance <http://wakeup.unhypnotize.com/superman-jesus-similarities-24-revealed/>
- <sup>7</sup> Bruce Marchiano, *In the Footsteps of Jesus*, Harvest House Publishers, 1997, p. 141.
- <sup>8</sup> Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 1910, p. 109.
- <sup>9</sup> Michael Grant, *Jesus: An Historian’s Review of the Gospels*, 1977.
- <sup>10</sup> See for instance <http://www.bethinking.org/jesus/ancient-evidence-for-jesus-from-non-christian-sources>; [http://www.insidelife.org.nz/files/8698/IL\\_issue\\_06.pdf](http://www.insidelife.org.nz/files/8698/IL_issue_06.pdf)
- <sup>11</sup> <http://www.gotquestions.org/did-Jesus-exist.html>



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# What Are You Worth?

By Joseph Tkach

A few years ago, a lock of Elvis Presley's hair that had been preserved by a fan was sold at auction for \$15,000. Recently someone paid more than \$20,000 for a set of Winston Churchill's false teeth. And Emperor Napoleon's toothbrush sold for \$21,000.<sup>1</sup>

You and I are not so famous, and no one would pay anything like that for something that belonged to us. But have you ever asked yourself: 'What exactly am I worth?'

Well, I'm afraid that in terms of the actual value of the constituents of our bodies, the answer is not much. Our bodies are mainly common chemicals, such as oxygen, carbon, hydrogen, and calcium, which are not really expensive. There are also trace elements, which raise the value a little, but not by much. When you add it all up, the total value of the chemicals we're made of, at today's prices, is only about four dollars and fifty cents.

Humbling, isn't it? It's something to think about the next time we start to get the big head. Chemically we are only about as valuable as a Big Mac combo or a Starbucks Frappuccino. But, of course, that's not the whole story. There is much more to a human being than just the price of the chemicals that make up his or her body.

The monetary value of anything depends on what people are prepared to pay for it. Obviously someone put immense value on owning Elvis's hair or Sir Winston's teeth, and they were willing to invest a large sum for those items. But the Bible tells us that Someone has put

a far greater value on every human, and that Person paid the highest possible price for us. I'm talking, of course, about God, who loves us all and wants to spend eternity with us.

But in the way the gospel is often presented, you'd think God has to be convinced to love us by good works and obedience. Nothing could be further from the truth! Jesus said that it is his Father's 'good pleasure to give us the kingdom'.<sup>2</sup>

He also said:

For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.<sup>3</sup>

So many people think they're condemned until they can be good enough to save. They think God doesn't want them unless they can measure up. But Jesus said

otherwise. God wants us. He wants every person, including you. He said:

Father, I want those you have given me to be with me where I am, and to see my glory, the glory you have given me because you loved me before the creation of the world.<sup>4</sup>

God doesn't have to be convinced to want us. He doesn't have to be persuaded to save us. He wants us so much that he gladly paid for us with his life. It was a heavy price to pay, but he obviously thought we were worth it.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> All values expressed in US dollars.

<sup>2</sup> Luke 12:32

<sup>3</sup> John 3:16-17

<sup>4</sup> John 17:24

This is a transcript of the weekly 'Speaking of Life' radio programme by Joseph Tkach, president of Grace Communion International. For more information visit [www.gci.org](http://www.gci.org).



God doesn't have to be persuaded to save us. He wants us so much that he gladly paid for us with his life.

# Age Shall Not Weary Them

By Gethin Russell-Jones

I'm 55 this year. Not really a cause for jubilation on my part; growing older is probably a source of misery for most people. Mind you, I remember a time when 21 seemed ancient and 30 was associated with moribund ageing. I can barely remember my first-and-twentieth birthday, although I am assured it most certainly happened.

Ageing is an inevitable aspect of life. It's a process which affects all existence. And as far as I am aware, there has never been a species which rejuvenates instead of deteriorating.

The only exception I can think of is entirely fictional.

*The Curious Case of Benjamin Button* was originally a short story penned by F. Scott Fitzgerald and later in 2008, an award-winning film starring Brad Pitt and Cate Blanchett. It's the story of a man who is born with the body of a seventy-year-old and gets progressively younger as the years go by. But if you think that Mr Button enjoys an unending state of eternal youth, then you will

be disappointed. Sadly he dies of old age as an infant with dementia. Truly the stuff of nightmares.

## Living Longer

However, even though we are ageing, it seems that globally we are living longer lives. Here are some figures from the United States. In 1925 average life expectancy was 59. In 1955, thanks to new vaccinations, this rose steeply to 70 years of age. Then in 1985, after a series of successful public health campaigns about the dangers of smoking and obesity, the median age climbed to 75. Today that age has risen to 79, thanks to better drugs and early diagnosis. Who knows what that number may be in another generation's time? Anecdotally many people are predicting that the children being born in the western hemisphere today may experience 100 years as an average age.

Even as I write this article, two news stories have today attracted considerable attention. One concerns Peggy Seeger, a well-known American folk singer whose career spans five decades. She is currently in her 80th year and touring. She's thinking about retiring although she's not sure when that will be. The other features Mieko Nagaoka, a 100-year-old Japanese woman who has become the first centenarian to complete a 1,500m freestyle swim in a 25m pool. She only started swimming at the age of 82,

and she intends competing until she is 105!

Thus it comes as no surprise that the study and science of ageing is gathering pace and making some remarkable discoveries. Scientists at the University of Texas Health Science Centre are experimenting on a compound called Rapamycin. It's being used on mice, whose average life span is 2.3 years. To be specific, Rapamycin is being used on Mouse UT2598. Compared to its fellow rodents, the intervention of this compound means that this attractively named animal could well live beyond four years. That may not sound like a great deal, but translating that to human years would result in a leap from the current average of about 80 years to 100. Rapamycin could be a game changer.

Other ground-breaking research is looking at the impact of 'telomeres' on shortening life. Even though it sounds like a type of seafood, we all have these deep in our bodies. Telomeres are part of our genetic makeup in a way I can't even begin to understand. Each time a cell divides, the telomeres send a signal that the process is over and leave a signature dash. Ageing makes these dashes shorter, although another enzyme called 'telomerase' compensates by making them a bit longer again. However, for people suffering with immune disorders, telomerase apparently doesn't kick in. It is hoped that if this lack can be corrected in those suffering with key disorders, then not only will it help them, but it could delay ageing in everyone.

## Mindfulness an Antidote?

A recent edition of *Time* magazine contained a series of articles on the science of ageing. I was mesmerised



Peggy Seeger and Marcy Marxer, *Girls with Guitars*

by one topic in particular. Namely the impact of meditation on reducing stress and inflammation. Now this is important since stress and inflammation are no friends of the ageing process. Here's a quote from *Time* journalist, Jeffrey Kluger.

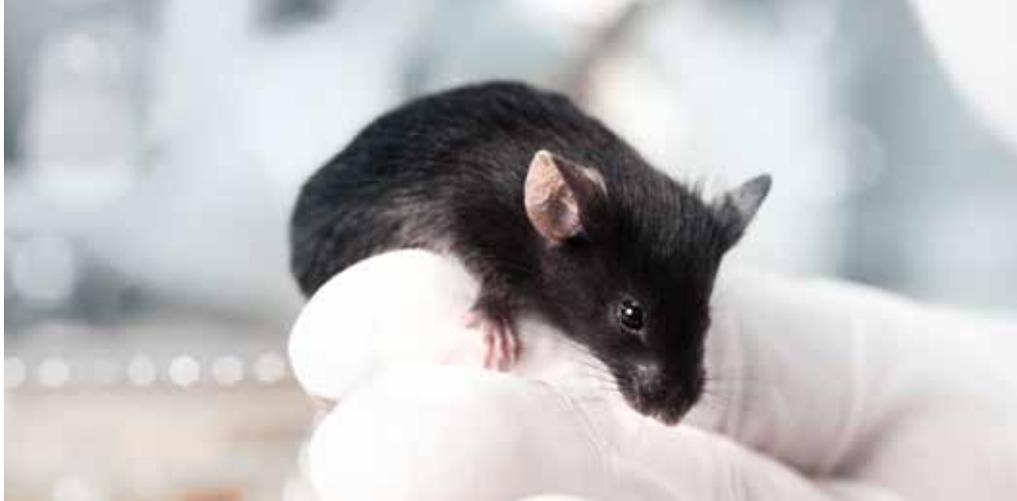
Consider one study, for instance, showing that even a single day of a mindfulness meditation practice can down-regulate a gene that codes for inflammation—one of the greatest drivers for ageing. Or the one showing that reducing stress can reduce the cellular damage from the highly reactive oxygen atoms known as free radicals. Or the research that found, most remarkably, that the telomeres within your cells, the little cuffs that cap chromosomes and erode your lifespan, can actually be made to grow longer, provided your mind is in the right state to make it happen.<sup>1</sup>

Now these are not flaky ideas but serious research in receipt of millions of dollars of public funding. And the same issues are being raised in the UK as well. Happiness and wellbeing have become government backed initiatives, telling us that a happy life often involves exercise, de-stressing, and prayer. For example, the National Health Service website, [www.nhs.uk](http://www.nhs.uk), includes tips on how to reduce stress by including what it calls 'mindfulness' in our daily lives. The site quotes Mark Williams, Professor of Clinical Psychology at the Oxford Mindfulness Centre.

He says:

Mindfulness can be an antidote to the 'tunnel vision' that can develop in our daily lives, especially when we are busy, stressed, or tired.

It's easy to stop noticing the world around us. It's also easy to lose touch with the way our bodies are feeling and to end up living 'in our heads'—caught up in our thoughts without stopping to notice how those thoughts are driving our emotions and behaviour.



*The intervention of Rapamycin on Mouse UT2598 means that this attractively named animal could well live beyond four years, unlike its fellow rodents.*

An important part of mindfulness is reconnecting with our bodies and the sensations they experience. This means waking up to the sights, sounds, smells, and tastes of the present moment. That might be something as simple as the feel of a banister as we walk upstairs.

Another important part of mindfulness is an awareness of our thoughts and feelings as they happen moment to moment. Awareness of this kind doesn't start by trying to change or fix anything. It's about allowing ourselves to see the present moment clearly. When we do that, it can positively change the way we see ourselves and our lives.

Studies have found that mindfulness programmes, where participants are taught mindfulness practices across a series of weeks, can bring about reductions in stress and improvements in mood.<sup>2</sup>

### Living in the Moment

Particularly intriguing is the connection between physical and mental health. Advocates of positive thinking have argued that you can think your way out of dark times by the power of optimism, reprogramming your mindset. But mindfulness is different. It is based in living in the moment, accepting your feelings and reactions without analysing them or trying to change them, simply being present to

yourself and the world now, without worrying about what may happen next.

And it all reminds me of Jesus' words:

Therefore do not be anxious, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' For the Gentiles seek after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you. Therefore do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble.<sup>3</sup>

Millennia before research into ageing, stress, and mental health, Jesus seems to have captured it all. Essentially, he argues that the good life is lived in the present in utter dependence on God. Anxious neither for the future or regretting the past, rather treating each moment as a sacramental gift to be experienced.

I think he might have been on to something.

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> *Time*, February 23 – March 2, 2015

<sup>2</sup> [www.nhs.uk/conditions/stress-anxiety-depression/pages/mindfulness.aspx](http://www.nhs.uk/conditions/stress-anxiety-depression/pages/mindfulness.aspx)

<sup>3</sup> *Matthew* 6.31–34

Gethin Russell-Jones writes from Wales. This article was first published in *The Plain Truth*, Spring 2015. Reprinted with permission.

# Science Increasingly Makes the Case for od

By Eric Metaxas

In 1966 *Time* magazine ran a cover story asking: 'Is God Dead?' Many have accepted the cultural narrative that he's obsolete—that as science progresses, there is less need for a 'God' to explain the universe. Yet it turns out that the rumours of God's death were premature. More amazing is that the relatively recent case for his existence comes from a surprising place—science itself.

Here's the story: the same year *Time* featured the now-famous headline, the astronomer Carl Sagan announced that there were two important criteria for a planet to support life: the right kind of star, and a planet the right distance from that star. Given the roughly octillion (1 followed by 27 zeros) planets in the universe, there should have been about septillion (1 followed by 24 zeros) planets capable of supporting life.

With such spectacular odds, the Search for Extra-Terrestrial Intelligence (SETI), a large, expensive collection of private and publicly funded projects launched in the 1960s, was sure to turn up something soon. Scientists listened with a vast radio telescopic network for signals that resembled coded intelligence, not merely random. But as years passed, the silence from the rest of the universe was deafening. Congress defunded SETI in 1993, but the search continues with private funds. As of 2014 researchers have discovered precisely 'bubkis' (0 followed by nothing).

What happened? As our knowledge of the universe increased, it became

clear that there were far more factors necessary for life than Sagan supposed. His two parameters grew to 10, and then 20, and then 50, and so the number of potentially life-supporting planets decreased accordingly. The number dropped to a few thousand planets and kept on plummeting.

Even SETI proponents acknowledged the problem. Peter Schenkel wrote in a 2006 piece for *Skeptical Inquirer* magazine:

In light of new findings and insights, it seems appropriate to put excessive euphoria to rest . . . We should quietly admit that the early estimates . . . may no longer be tenable.

As factors continued to be discovered, the number of possible planets hit zero, and kept going. In other words, the odds turned against any planet in the universe supporting life, including this one. Probability said that even we shouldn't be here.

Today there are more than 200 known parameters necessary for a planet to support life—every single one of which must be perfectly met, or the whole thing falls apart. Without a massive planet like Jupiter nearby, whose gravity will draw away asteroids, a thousand times as many would hit Earth's surface. The odds against life in the universe are simply astonishing.

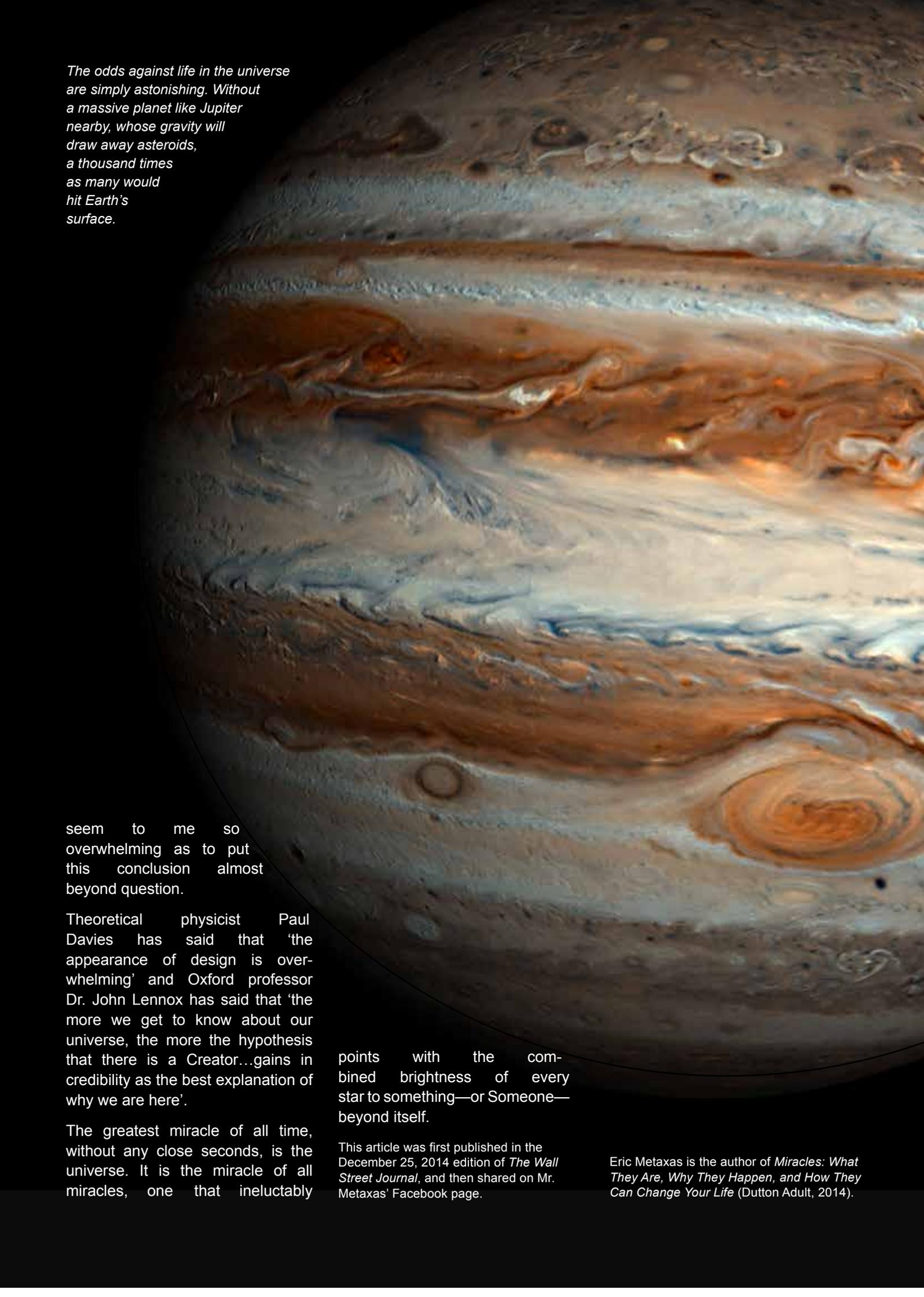
Yet here we are, not only existing, but talking about existing. What can account for it? Can every one of those many parameters have been perfect by accident? At what point is it fair to admit that science suggests that we cannot be the result of random forces? Doesn't assuming

that an intelligence created these perfect conditions require far less faith than believing that a life-sustaining Earth just happened to beat the inconceivable odds to come into being?

There's more. The fine-tuning necessary for life to exist on a planet is nothing compared with the fine-tuning required for the universe to exist at all. For example, astrophysicists now know that the values of the four fundamental forces—gravity, the electromagnetic force, and the strong and weak nuclear forces—were determined less than one millionth of a second after the big bang. Alter any one of their values, and the universe could not exist. For instance, if the ratio between the nuclear strong force and the electromagnetic force had been off by the tiniest fraction of the tiniest fraction—by even one part in 100,000,000,000,000,000—then no stars could have ever formed at all. Feel free to gulp.

Multiply that single parameter by all the other necessary conditions, and the odds against the universe existing are so heart-stoppingly astronomical that the notion that it all 'just happened' defies common sense. It would be like tossing a coin and having it come up heads 10 quintillion times in a row. Really?

Fred Hoyle, the astronomer who coined the term 'big bang', said that his atheism was 'greatly shaken' at these developments. He later wrote that a common-sense interpretation of the facts suggests that a super-intellect has monkeyed with the physics, as well as with chemistry and biology.... The numbers one calculates from the facts



*The odds against life in the universe are simply astonishing. Without a massive planet like Jupiter nearby, whose gravity will draw away asteroids, a thousand times as many would hit Earth's surface.*

seem to me so overwhelming as to put this conclusion almost beyond question.

Theoretical physicist Paul Davies has said that 'the appearance of design is overwhelming' and Oxford professor Dr. John Lennox has said that 'the more we get to know about our universe, the more the hypothesis that there is a Creator...gains in credibility as the best explanation of why we are here'.

The greatest miracle of all time, without any close seconds, is the universe. It is the miracle of all miracles, one that ineluctably

points with the combined brightness of every star to something—or Someone—beyond itself.

This article was first published in the December 25, 2014 edition of *The Wall Street Journal*, and then shared on Mr. Metaxas' Facebook page.

Eric Metaxas is the author of *Miracles: What They Are, Why They Happen, and How They Can Change Your Life* (Dutton Adult, 2014).

# Growing Old: Bitter or Better?

By Lianne Trevarthen

Some old women and men grow bitter with age. 'The more their teeth drop out the more biting they get', said George Dennison Prentice. There is an expectation of bitterness and hopelessness that tends to colour our view of old age, not with bright laughter, sunshine, and hope, but with the grey of despair and regret. While you might think you will never be like that, what are you doing now to stop growing bitter with age?

We can prepare for growing older by living our lives now in a fruitful way, growing in wisdom, investing

our time in things that matter. Time is short, and wisdom helps us use what little time we have to its fullest.

In ancient Israel there was a king, Solomon, renowned for his wisdom, who wrote:

Happy is the man who finds wisdom,  
and the man who gains understanding;

For her proceeds are better than the profits of silver,  
and her gain than fine gold.

She is more precious than rubies,  
and all the things you may desire cannot compare with her.

Length of days is in her right hand,  
in her left hand riches and honour.

Her ways are ways of pleasantness,  
and all her paths are peace.

She is a tree of life to those who take hold of her,  
and happy are all who retain her.<sup>1</sup>

Why do we disregard this precious gift of time? Why carry on as if we will never get old, and waste our lives 'living for the moment' and on things that have no lasting value? We reap what we sow, and it is better to avoid the pitfalls which can lead to us bearing sad consequences later in life. Make the best use of your talents while you can, and use them as the lining of your future.

Growing old gracefully is possible!

What does growing old gracefully look like? It is beautiful! Novelist Victor Hugo said: 'When grace is joined with wrinkles, it is adorable. There is an unspeakable dawn in happy old age'.

Put aside regrets, seek forgiveness for things you did or didn't do, accept what can't, or couldn't, be changed, and keep moving forward.

Nineteenth century American poet and novelist, Thomas Bailey Aldrich, wrote: 'To keep the heart unwrinkled, to be hopeful, kindly, cheerful, reverent—that is to triumph over old age'.

Which would you rather be as you grow old? Bitter or better?

## Note

<sup>1</sup> Proverbs 3:13-18



*'When grace is joined with wrinkles, it is adorable. There is an unspeakable dawn in happy old age.'*  
Victor Hugo

# After Death—Then What?

By James Henderson

It was a dark and gloomy Scottish November night, with a full moon obscured eerily by the clouds that hung motionless in the heavens. In the ruins of the old castle four students walked briskly to meet the midnight deadline. A streetlight shone dimly against a lonely wall, and near the bottom of the wall there was the small oblong-shaped hole that people talked about.

The story was that the place had been haunted since the time of the Reformation, and that on some nights, at twelve midnight precisely, a ghastly handshake would be given to those who reached inside the slot. 'There's no such thing as ghosts', insisted Roberta as she inserted her hand into the void.

I had been waiting. It was freezing, but I had soaked my right hand in a puddle, so it was suitably colder and decidedly clammy. From the other side of the wall I shook Roberta's hand. I heard her scream, and I cackled for effect.

We enjoy pranks and jokes about it, ponder it in rituals, and sing about it with inspirational songs. We can speculate about it and it can ignite our imagination. Movies and TV series dramatise it, books are written about it, and philosophers go on endlessly about it. It's said that more people believe in some form of it than in God.

So, what do you think? Is there something after death? The very idea can fill us with both dread and comfort, with horror or delight. What would it be like? What awareness would we have? What memories? 'Would you know my name if I saw you in heaven?' we're asked in the

lyrics of Eric Clapton's 'Tears in Heaven'.

Most religions profess that there is a future of sorts, and that often it is determined by how well we behave now. For the most part, apart from some branches of Christianity and, of course, atheism, the quality of the afterlife is determined by the effectiveness of our efforts in this life.

One of the original writers of the Bible, a man called Paul, taught that the future of the dead could be understood only through the experience of Jesus Christ, who was crucified and rose from the grave. Christ himself gave a cautionary tale based on the then contemporary views of the netherworld, but his listeners did not accept what he had to say. 'They will not be convinced', said Christ, 'even if someone rises from the dead'.<sup>1</sup>

Paul's point was that Jesus, the Son of God, did rise from the dead, and, because of that, there is hope for the living and the dead. Just as surely as we all die, he explained, so we shall all come alive again because of Jesus. Paul wrote: 'For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive'.<sup>2</sup> It's an unconditional statement, not determined by what we do or don't do, or by what we believe or don't believe. It's a gracious act of God.

Christians embrace the idea that when we die, we are safe with God, and that there is a glorious new world to come. The late John Stott, who was a compelling public speaker and a prolific writer, told the story of Joni Eareckson Tada in his book, *The Incomparable Christ*. Joni was paralyzed from the neck down after a diving accident in 1967. The lively, adventurous teenager became a total quadriplegic. It was a devastating blow.



Joni Eareckson Tada, 2013

In the course of time Joni found hope and comfort in the Christian faith through the words of the Bible. She was convinced that after death there would be a wonderful eternity with Christ. She said: 'I have hope for a future now...it's a time, after my death here, when I'll be on my feet dancing'.<sup>3</sup> With reference to the resurrection she continued:

Imagine the hope this gives someone who is a manic depressive. No other religion, no other philosophy promises new bodies, hearts, and minds. Only in the Gospel of Christ do hurting people find such incredible hope.<sup>3</sup>

That works for me. When it comes to the afterlife there are two basic options: either there is something or there is nothing. In the certainty of faith I believe there is something, and it's better and greater than we can possibly imagine.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Luke 16:31 NIVUK

<sup>2</sup> 1 Corinthians 15:22

<sup>3</sup> John Stott, *The Incomparable Christ* (Inter-Varsity Press, UK, 2001) p. 151.

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