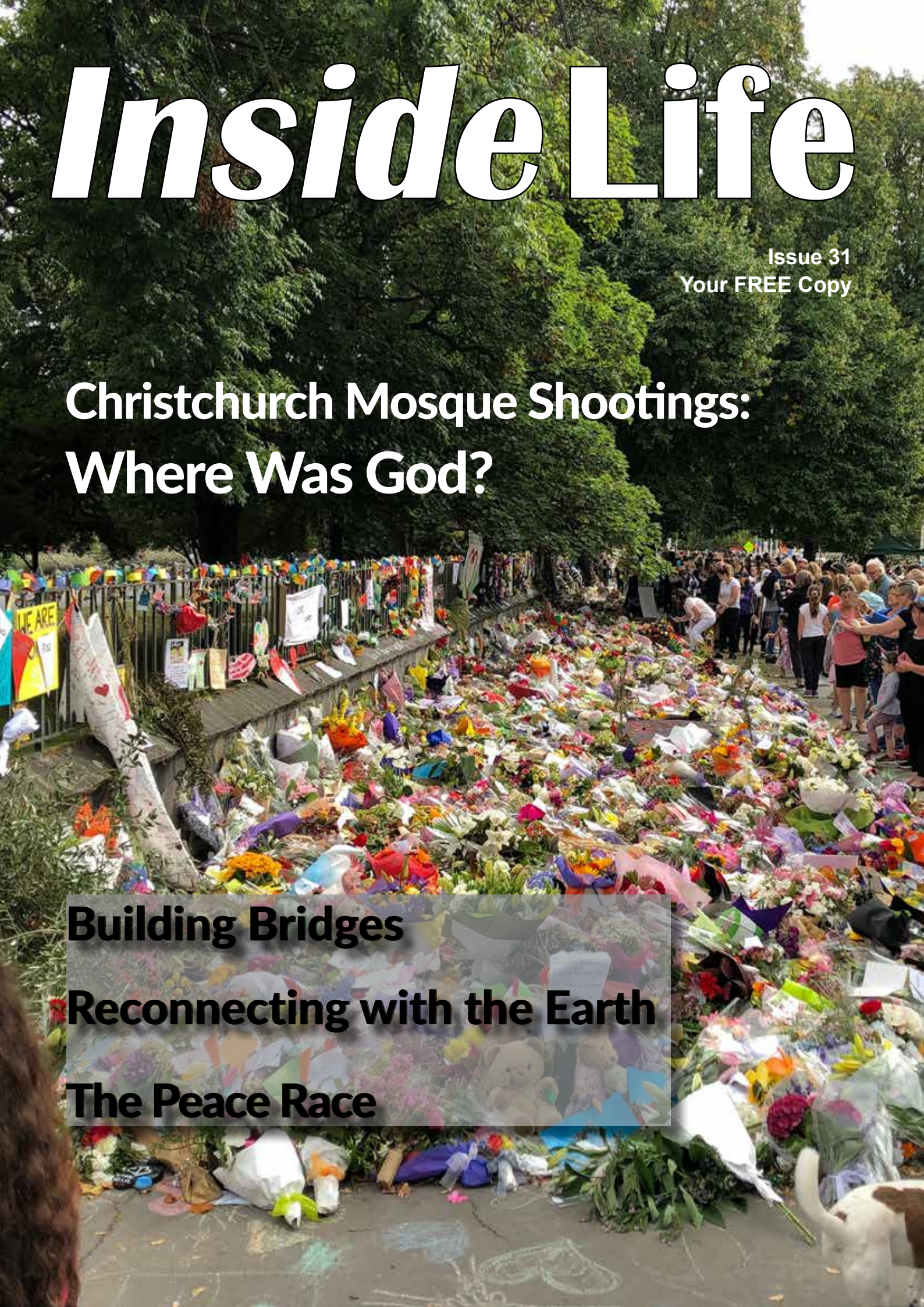


Inside Life

Issue 31
Your FREE Copy

Christchurch Mosque Shootings: Where Was God?

Building Bridges
Reconnecting with the Earth
The Peace Race



CONTENTS

-
- 3** Christchurch Mosque Shootings: Where Was God?
-
- 7** Can You Murder a Robot?
-
- 8** Joining Hands
-
- 9** Building Bridges
-
- 10** Mission to Earth
-
- 12** Reconnecting with the Earth
-
- 14** The Peace Race
-
- 15** Choose the Give Way

Inside Life

PO Box 304055, Hauraki Corner, Auckland 0750

Phone: 09 489 8910

Email: insidelife@gci.org.nz

Website: www.insidelife.org.nz

Editor: Rex Morgan

Graphic Design: Philip Baldwin

Printed by Inkprint Ltd

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.

Inside Life is published three times a year, free of charge, as a community service.

© Grace Communion International 2019.

All rights reserved.

ISSN: 1177-3693

Our Cover: The author of our lead article suggests that a better question to pose than 'Why does God allow suffering?' is to ask, 'What can we do about suffering?' This flower memorial on Deans Ave following the Christchurch shooting on 15 March 2019 is a demonstration of Kiwi "compassion in action". People flooded the gates of mosques across New Zealand with floral tributes and went out of their way to show support towards, and solidarity with, the Muslim community.

Photo Credits

- Cover 123RF Image ID 122641766 © Kate Cremisino
p. 3 123RF Image ID 126612489 © Sheryl Watson
p. 4 123RF Image ID 52910336 © Leo Lintang
p. 5 123RF Image ID 92012626 © Vasyi Dolmatov
p. 6 123RF Image ID 19625466 © belchonock
p. 7 Originally posted to <https://flickr.com/photos/129781651@N05/15844794490>;
accessed on commons.wikimedia.org
p. 8 Accessed at www.duluthnewstribune.com/opinion/4387969-his-own-words-i-have-dream
(credit: Wiki Commons)
p. 9 123RF Image ID 29327183 © stanciuc
p. 10 Accessed at apod.nasa.gov/apod/ap051224.html
p. 12 123RF Image ID 35800977 © Jozef Polc
p. 13 123RF Image ID 125924274 © Hans Christiansson
p. 14 123RF Image ID 85783943 © Allan Swart
p. 15 123RF Image ID 90183549 © alexmillos



Christchurch Mosque Shootings: Where Was God?

Flower Memorial on Deans Ave, Christchurch, following the March 2019 shootings.

by Rex Morgan

On 15 March 2019 a terrible tragedy changed New Zealand forever. A terrorist brutally attacked praying worshippers at two mosques in Christchurch, killing 51 innocent victims. It was a day of grief, shock, and unspeakable heartbreak for those affected and their families whose lives were suddenly devastated.

Many people have asked the question: 'Where is God when tragedies like this occur?' Christchurch had already experienced more than its share of disaster with widespread destruction and 185 deaths in the shattering earthquakes of 2010 and 2011.

It's easy to wonder what kind of God would allow tragic events like these. Multiple thousands of people around the world suffer and die in earthquakes, cyclones, droughts, wars, and mass killings, and God doesn't appear to lift a finger to help.

This question is the most common objection levelled at Christianity. If there is a loving God, why is there so much pain and hurt in the world?

If he is a God of love, he must hate suffering, and if he is all-powerful, he must be able to get rid of it. So why doesn't he?

The larger the tragedy, the more attention it attracts, but actually there is no need to stress numbers in order to use suffering to argue against God's existence. Surely just one untimely death is enough to make the point? The death of one patient cruelly taken by cancer raises the question of why a loving God would allow such inequity. And death isn't necessary either. The detection of the tumour and the pain experienced before that give ample basis for the question.

If suffering were abolished

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

How would God do this? Somehow, he would need to snatch sharp objects out of our hands before we cut ourselves with them, or maybe turn knives into marshmallows at the

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

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

Next, God would need to eliminate diseases such as cancer. To do this, he would have to prevent people from smoking, drinking too much alcohol, and eating unhealthy foods. How many people would be happy to be censored like this?

To get rid of all sorrow and suffering he would even need to abolish death. Or would it be sufficient to simply allow people to pass away peacefully in their sleep at the age of 100? No doubt that wouldn't be good enough—even that would cause sorrow in the lives of those left behind.



God made human beings with free will. We are more than mere puppets, with someone else pulling the strings.

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

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

When you think about it, you begin to realise that a world free from the potential for suffering would be a world lacking in challenges, a world of the boring and predictable.

It is only fair at this point that we should have a look at God's

viewpoint on this topic. What does he say about it? To see that, we need to look at the Bible, the book in which he reveals his way of thinking and acting.

How it all began

The Bible records that the first two humans, Adam and Eve, were given a choice. They were free to eat of every tree in the Garden of Eden, except for one. God warned them against taking of the 'tree of the knowledge of good and evil', representing the way of deciding for themselves how to run their lives rather than following God's instructions. He warned them that if they made their own choices, the result would be suffering and death.¹ As we all know, they promptly made the wrong choice, and the rest, as they say, is history.

God could have done it in a different way. He could have forced them to make the right choice. Or he could have left them without a choice in the first place.

But how would you like to be forced by God not to make any wrong choices in life? Would you like him to muzzle your mouth whenever

you were about to take that extra piece of cake, block your hand from picking up another can of beer, or miraculously turn the excess ice cream in your plate into a fresh green salad?

The Bible shows that God made human beings with free will, the ability to make our own decisions and choices. If we didn't have the opportunity to choose, we would be obliged to live God's way all of the time. This would make us no more than mindless robots or automatons, pre-programmed to go a certain way. We would be mere puppets, with someone else pulling the strings.

Without the ability to make choices, we wouldn't truly be able to love. Sincere love can't be coerced. It involves a decision, a choice. In order to have meaningful love we must also be able to hate, to hurt, to ignore.

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

God didn't force Adam and Eve to obey him, and he hasn't forced anyone since. However, everyone has in effect made the same choice Adam and Eve made, to go their own way rather than God's way. People ask: 'Why doesn't God come and do something about the evils in the world? Why does he hide himself?' But in fact, it isn't God that is hiding. Rather, humans as a whole have thumbed their noses at God and asked him to get out of their lives. When Adam and Eve told God they didn't want him around, he honoured this by adopting a largely 'hands off' policy.

It can't be said that God is the creator of evil. He did create the possibility of evil—that is essential in order for free will to be present. But it was humans who actualised that possibility.

Pain: Foe or Friend?

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

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

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



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

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

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

God suffers, too

As a God of love, kindness, and compassion, God actually hates suffering. He desperately desired that humans would not choose the wrong way. The Bible states that God was 'grieved that he had made man on the earth, and his heart was filled with pain',² and it assures us that he 'did not willingly bring affliction or grief to the children of men'.³

God is not untouched or unmoved by pain and suffering. 'I take no pleasure in the death of anyone, declares the Lord'.⁴ He doesn't remain aloof and removed in a remote 'ivory tower', letting humans suffer while he looks on either approvingly or helplessly. In fact, incredible but true, he voluntarily subjected himself to human suffering to his enormous cost. He suffered greatly, and continues to suffer today.

In the person of Jesus Christ, God came in human flesh and suffered

the pain and sorrow we experience. Jesus was described as 'a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief'.⁵ Although he did nothing to deserve it, he was ridiculed and mocked, beaten up and tortured so that he was barely recognisable, nailed to a cross, and murdered with public humiliation and extreme agony.

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

As Jesus walked the Earth and saw people suffering, the Bible says he was often moved to the very depth of his being by what he saw.⁶ And he is still the same today. When he sees the suffering of the world, he suffers along with us.⁷

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

Things we don't understand

These reflections show in general why a loving God allows suffering. But this doesn't mean we can identify the reason for all individual occasions of suffering. Far from it! We must be careful about assigning specific meanings or reasons to tragedies and anguish. Suffering is painfully random in the world. Innocent infants suffer from terrible diseases. It is impossible to identify a specific cause for such events.

Wise King Solomon, under God's inspiration, reflected that 'time and chance' happens to all of us.⁸ Some things are simply inexplicable.⁹ This is because human beings are limited. We have to recognise there are many questions we can't answer yet. If we could understand all of God's ways, he would be no bigger than our mind, and therefore not worth believing in. But we do know that God hates suffering even more than we do. The Bible doesn't shy

You are invited to come and meet the sponsors of *Inside Life!*

Grace Communion International holds services in many of New Zealand's largest cities. If you would like more information, please don't hesitate to contact
Dennis Richards, ph. 06 353 6224
Rex Morgan ph. 09 489 8910
or visit www.gci.org.nz

away from mention of suffering. It confirms that suffering is always with us as the natural state of affairs in the present age.¹⁰ But it goes on to declare that this is just a temporary situation,¹¹ and makes a firm promise that a time is coming when there will be no more suffering, pain, and sorrow.¹²

Since suffering is an inevitable part of life at this time, perhaps a better question to pose than 'Why does God allow suffering?' is to ask, 'What can we do about suffering?' and 'What can we learn from it?'

The Bible gives plenty of instruction on how to respond to the problems of

others. It encourages kindness, love, serving, and helping the oppressed and burdened, the widows, the poor, and the needy. God reveals over and over again his compassion and love for those who are suffering, and his desire for us to do whatever we can to relieve the sorrows of our neighbours.

A salutary example of compassion in action was evidenced after the Christchurch mosque killings. Kiwis flooded the gates of mosques across the country with floral tributes and went out of their way to show support towards, and solidarity with, the Muslim community. Over a million dollars was swiftly raised

for the victims. 'Love travelled faster than bullets', wrote one reporter.

While it is possible for good to come out of suffering, generally it is an unhappy and unwanted part of life. However, suffering is the inevitable product of a world where God has given his children the freedom to make their own decisions. Even he himself has joined humanity in experiencing extreme suffering. Far from disproving God's existence, it shows his love for humanity that he wants us to live with free will and choice rather than functioning as mindless robots. But thankfully God promises that sorrow and distress won't be around forever. A better world is coming, where suffering will be a thing of the past.¹³

NOTES

- ¹ Genesis 2:16-17.
- ² Genesis 6:5-6.
- ³ Lamentations 3:33.
- ⁴ Ezekiel 18:32.
- ⁵ Isaiah 55:3.
- ⁶ Matthew 9:36.
- ⁷ Matthew 25:35-45.
- ⁸ Ecclesiastes 9:11.
- ⁹ Ecclesiastes 8:17.
- ¹⁰ Romans 8:18-21.
- ¹¹ Romans 8:21-25.
- ¹² Romans 8:21; Revelation 21:4.
- ¹³ Revelation 21:4.

From Oysters to Pearls



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

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

builds up to form a beautiful lustrous pearl.

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

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

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



Rex Morgan, the editor of Inside Life, and his wife Marilyn live on Auckland's North Shore. Rex has

worked in Christian ministry and office administration for over 30 years and has contributed articles to a number of international publications. Rex can be contacted at rex@gci.org.nz

Can You Murder a Robot?

by Richard Fowler

The idea of robots and humans living side-by-side is becoming less sci-fi and more of a reality. But what are we to think when we hear of the ‘murder’ of a hitchhiking robot?

Hitchbot was its name – and I use ‘was’ intentionally, because this roaming robot was killed. As part of a project run by Ryerson University in Toronto, Canada, Hitchbot, a scrapyard-looking bot, fitted with GPS, was picked up by members of the public and taken wherever they were going. The bot, with a cake container for a head, became quite popular. But then one day the worst fears of its creators came true. Some unknown person or persons decided to take Hitchbot’s life!

Hitchbot was found with its arms and legs ripped off and head missing. The lead researcher, Dr Frauke Zeller, and her team mourned the loss but were always aware this could be a possible outcome.

But it raises an ethical question: can you actually murder a robot?

The question is a philosophical one and forces us to ask what makes us human in the first place. Certainly, it was an act of vandalism. But murder?

Humans are called *sapiens* for a reason. Meaning ‘wise’ in Latin, it distinguishes humans from other creatures. ‘But’, I hear you say, ‘these robots are increasingly intelligent (wise), so what’s the difference?’ Good point.

We can connect with them, but can they connect with us?

I think the answer to that is found in this statement by Prof. Rosalind Picard, who leads the Affective Computing Lab, at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology: ‘We are made for relationships, even us [sic] engineers, and that is such a powerful thing that we fit machines into that.’¹ Yes, we can become attached to people and even robots, but robots don’t have the emotional faculties to reciprocate the same feelings and emotions.

We are sentient beings and they are not. A robot cannot experience the joy of love or know what it feels like to be happy. You might be able to hug and high-five it, but it will not understand or feel the emotion behind your hug or smile.

Still, someone could argue that increasingly the programming of algorithms can lead AI (artificial intelligence) robots to respond in ways that show they have learnt something about our emotions, like noticing our tone of voice if we are sad (this kind of reciprocal learning was explored in the recently released film *Life Like*).

But even here there is something missing: choice. Whereas our little friend Hitchbot was limited by the coding programmed into it, we humans have the autonomy to choose.

As humans, we choose how we respond to others. We choose to care, choose to love. Really, love can only exist in the realm of choice. Does it not follow that authentic relationships can only flow out of choice? It’s what makes us human: freewill and agency. This is the sole privilege of a human, and will never be that of a mechanic, algorithm-imprinted piece of metal.



Hitchbot goes to an exhibition in Toronto in 2014.

Maybe there’s a bigger question still: where did this choice come from? Where do you get free will and agency from? Were we programmed?

Some would suggest that free will can only come from a place of equal free will. Surely, freedom can only beget freedom. So, is being human, in fact, a reflection of a place where equal free will and agency exists?

If so, is that where God comes in?

NOTE

¹ www.bbc.co.uk/news/technology-47090174

Joining Hands



by Ian Woodley

I'm not one for listening to famous speeches, but there is one particular public address that I am always all ears for. Delivered in 1963, Martin Luther King's speech, 'I have a dream', is electrifying. King called for the end to racism in America, together with better justice and economic rights for all.

One section, near the end, really speaks to my heart: 'I have a dream that...one day right here in Alabama little black boys and black girls will be able to join hands with little white boys and white girls as sisters and brothers'. This causes me to reflect. For some 13 years after this speech, a little white boy and a little black boy played together during the long, hot, summer holidays. The little white boy was me. Anthony was the little black boy.

I can't boast. It wasn't until years later I discovered that, in our innocence, we were breaking boundaries. It didn't last; we drifted apart. My parents moved house and Anthony and I went to different schools. About 10 years later, we would spot each other at the

swimming pool. Anthony played water polo, which followed after my course in life saving. But we felt no need to renew our friendship.

How is it that Anthony and I played together peacefully when so many communities in the world are divided by racism? I believe the ingredient that creates this division is fear. I am so grateful that no-one had filled either of our hearts with mistrust before we met. Why such fear exists is the result of complex factors. Once fear of the other takes hold, racism is the result and a false notion enters our hearts. By removing equal rights from our fellow human beings, we somehow believe we are protecting ourselves.

But why is it that we should treat one another equally?

In 1963 King hoped the USA would live out the fullness of one particular phrase from the United States Declaration of Independence: 'We hold these truths to be self-evident: that all men are created equal'. King's speech was delivered before the recent advances in genetics, so he took his stance based upon the religious idea that all humanity is the offspring of one particular couple.

Being a Christian preacher, he would have used their biblical names, Adam and Eve. Black or white, King believed a shared parentage ruled out any bias based on the colour of one's skin. But was King right? Are we all equal?

The Smithsonian National Museum of Natural History website states: 'The genetic difference between individual humans today is miniscule—about 0.1% on average'. This makes me breathe a sigh of relief. For yes, Anthony and I are exactly the same, except for some tiny differences which are only 'skin deep'. We are equal. Martin Luther King's speech is still there to spur me on. 'Let freedom ring!' was his great rallying cry. Wouldn't it be wonderful if the world was truly free of racism? That humanity was free from the fears that underlie all such mistrust? That everyone felt free to extend equality to all other human beings?

Of course, we need not just wait for this to happen; we can begin to build this today. I dream that one day, all the world will cry out the final words of King's speech: 'Free at last, free at last, Great God almighty, we are free at last!'

Building Bridges



by Cliff Neill

The Kanchanaburi War Cemetery contains the remains of 6,982 Australian, Dutch and British war prisoners who lost their lives during the construction of the Death Railway over the River Kwai.

Eric Lomax's experiences as a Japanese prisoner of war in Southeast Asia during World War II are chronicled in his memoirs, *The Railway Man*. Like so many he was the victim of the Japanese obsession to build the infamous railway link between Burma and Siam, now Myanmar and Thailand.

He writes with brutal reality about the unspeakable cruelty exacted by the camp guards and military police on allied prisoners. Not surprisingly he found that his entire life was haunted by this experience, in particular by the memory of the young Japanese translator Nagase Takashi, who worked for the interrogators, and who became the focus of Lomax's pent-up rage, bitterness, and longing for revenge.

Years after the war, Mrs Patricia Lomax wrote to Nagase, having read a book he had written, entitled *Crosses & Tigers*, in which Nagase had included a chapter about the torture that Eric Lomax had received from the Japanese military police.

After some correspondence by mail with Nagase, he and Eric decided to meet. Lomax and his wife travelled to the former prisoner of war camp at Kanburi, a short distance from the station platform on the River Kwai Bridge. Eric and his wife had lunch at the River Kwai Restaurant and met its remarkable proprietor, Tida Loha, who told them that she had given Nagase, who had become a Buddhist, a plot of land next to the bridge to build what he called a Temple of Peace.

For years he had worked for peace and implored the Japanese Government to come out, face the world, and apologise for the crimes committed against British POWs during that awful time on 'the Death Railway', as it was called.

They met on the dreaded bridge that epitomised all of that suffering. Eric took the hand of his former captor and in Japanese said: 'Good morning, Mr Nagase. How are you?' He writes about that first meeting: 'He looked up at me; he was trembling, in tears, saying over and over, "I am very, very sorry!" Somehow, I comforted him saying something like: "It is very kind of you to say so". We talked for a long time and seemed to be happy in each other's company and we found that we had a lot in common: books, teaching, and world history'.

Somehow during this emotionally charged meeting in that place of terror there developed an extraordinary bond between this former captive and his torturer, which culminated in an act of forgiveness on Lomax's part. For the first time in half a century he was able to let go of his need to settle old scores. Instead he found reconciliation and a new beginning.

These two men became firm friends for the rest of their lives and they visited each other often in the joy of forgiveness.

Someone said once: 'When I forgive someone, I set a captive free and that captive is me!'¹

There are some words that we humans have difficulty in saying, for example:

'I'm sorry, please forgive me'; 'I love you'; and most importantly, 'I forgive you!' But why is forgiveness so very important? It's because in forgiveness a special power is released and reconciliation happens, peace of mind returns, prisoners are set free, burdens are cast down. Joy fills the lives of those who are forgiven and those who have received that amazing gift of forgiveness.

There is indeed power in forgiveness. Despite the excruciating pain as Roman soldiers pounded large metal spikes through his hands and feet, Jesus was thinking of forgiveness. Before his death he uttered this prayer: 'Father, forgive these people because they don't know what they're doing!'² And upon his death forgiveness was indeed ours, for you, me, and everyone else on planet Earth, for all eternity, because that amazing prayer was answered by his Father, showing that 'mercy always triumphs over judgement'.³

At the end of the day, the only people we can really change are ourselves. Forgiving others is first and foremost the healing of our own hearts, because when we plan to get even with someone, we are only allowing that person to continue to hurt us.

Let us be free of that and live in the spirit of forgiveness!

NOTES

¹ This is a paraphrase of a quotation from a book by Lewis B. Smedes, *Forgive and Forget: Healing the Hurts We Don't Deserve*.

² Luke 23:34, New Living Translation.

³ James 2:13, New International Version.

MISSION TO EARTH



by Rex Morgan

This past July the world celebrated the 50th anniversary of the Apollo 11 moon landing. What a milestone event this was in humanity's history!

'Apollo 11 is the only event in the 20th century that stands a chance of being widely remembered in the 30th century', pronounced US Vice President Mike Pence.

'It was the most complex and technically advanced feat in human history', noted Rocket Lab founder Peter Beck.

The Apollo programme employed 400 000 people at its peak, all of them working towards a common goal. This was teamwork, vision, collaboration and sheer tenacity on a new scale, and that's what inspired me most.

More inspiring still is what that common goal meant to everyone on Earth, not just those involved in the programme. It unified people in a way that almost nothing else has, and it continues to today. We feel like we went to the moon—like humanity went—not just a nation.¹

Events of this magnitude, especially when outer space is involved, can draw our attention upward from our ordinary earth-bound perspective to focus on a grand, transcendent, cosmic scale.

It's hardly surprising that Neil Armstrong and Buzz Aldrin had only been on the lunar surface for a few minutes when Aldrin enthused: 'I'd like to take the opportunity to ask every person listening in to pause for a moment and contemplate the events of the past few hours and to give thanks in his or her own way'.

Then, on the silent surface of the moon, 400 000 kilometres from home, he read a verse from the

Bible and took communion, the bread and wine representing the body and blood of Jesus, sacrificed for humankind.

'In the one-sixth gravity of the moon, the wine slowly curled and gracefully came up the side of the cup', observed Aldrin. 'I gave thanks for the intelligence and spirit that had brought young pilots to the Sea of Tranquillity. It was interesting for me to think: the very first liquid ever poured on the moon, and the very first food eaten there, were the communion elements.'

Two years later, astronaut Jim Irwin, the first man to drive the moon buggy, when standing on the moon and looking back at the Earth, was able to close one eye, hold up his thumb and cover our entire planet. Every mountain, every valley, every city, every person, every ocean on the Earth was lost behind his thumb! He said it made him feel 'terrifyingly small'.

Doesn't that help put things into perspective?

In the context of the infinite universe around us, human beings are exceedingly puny and insignificant. Looking at it from his viewpoint, the Creator God states: 'Heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool'.²

As Apollo 11 headed back to Earth, Aldrin read aloud an Old Testament scripture on a worldwide broadcast: 'When I consider the heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars which you have ordained, what is man that you are mindful of him?'³

The three astronauts aboard the Apollo 8 mission in 1968 were moved to read from the biblical book of Genesis on live TV as they orbited the moon. William Anders began the most watched television broadcast of the time: 'We are now approaching lunar sunrise, and for all the people back on Earth, the

crew of Apollo 8 has a message that we would like to send to you. "In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth..." The astronauts proceeded to recite verbatim the first 10 verses of Genesis chapter 1.

Sadly, a group of atheists responded by suing the US government for allowing this proclamation. But the suit failed.

The Apollo 8 crew were the first ones to take a photo showing our beautiful blue and white planet rising above the bleak grey lunar surface. The photo, captioned 'Earthrise', gives us ample cause to wonder at the rare and precious jewel that is our home. Could this 'Goldilocks Zone'⁴ planet situated exactly the right distance from the sun and moon, and perfectly positioned to possess multiple characteristics without which life would be impossible,⁵ have possibly evolved this way without the guidance of a powerful God behind the scenes?

And what about the brilliant human mind power behind the technology that carries us to the moon and beyond? Could the ability to think, to reason, to imagine, to dream of travelling to the ends of the universe really have developed in a totally physical way? Or does it bear the stamp of something intangible, even spiritual? Is a thought simply a physical thing? If so, how can we have a thousand thoughts in our minds at the same time? Thoughts don't take up any space or any time. They seem to transcend the physical, extending into the spiritual realm.

The 'Earthrise' photo inspired David Bowie's classic song 'Space Oddity', reflecting on the brilliant technology that transports us into space, along with the incongruity of why we are doing so. What is the point of conquering outer space when we clearly don't yet have control over inner space—the

place in our hearts and minds that gives rise to unwelcome traits like hatred, anger, lust, and greed? Again, these are feelings, emotions, and sensations that seem in essence to be spiritual rather than physical.

The Bible has a lot to say about the 'inner' or 'inward person' that forms the central individuality of each of us. God offers to strengthen and empower us internally by coming in a spiritual way and dwelling in our innermost being and personality.⁶ This is referring to a space mission in the reverse direction, with God coming down to Earth and dwelling in us!

But the most dramatic and significant space mission of all was when God came from heaven and landed on our planet in the form of Jesus Christ. He loved the world so much that he sent Jesus to live on Earth and even go through death to forgive our sins and open to us the door to eternal life.⁷ Now, in the form of the Holy Spirit, he continues to live within us.

The words from the Apollo 11 space mission that ripple throughout history are Neil Armstrong's famous 'One small step for man; one giant leap for mankind'. But God's landing on Earth 2000 years ago was an even greater leap for mankind!

NOTES

¹ *The Weekend Herald*, July 20, 2019.

² Isaiah 66:1.

³ Psalm 8:3–4.

⁴ The Goldilocks Zone refers to the habitable zone around a star where the temperature is just right—not too hot and not too cold—for liquid water to exist on a planet.

⁵ Astrophysicist Dr Hugh Ross has catalogued 38 cosmic characteristics that must have values falling within narrowly defined ranges for life of any kind to exist, in his book *The Creator and the Cosmos*, Navpress, 1993.

⁶ Ephesians 3:16, *The Amplified Bible*.

⁷ John 3:16.

Reconnecting with the Earth

by Richard Fowler

There's a danger of losing our tenure on this planet.¹

Scary thought! These are the words of scientist James Lovelock, one of the most influential environmental thinkers of our time. Aged 99, he is gentle and unassuming but has powerful ideas. One of them being that climate change will wipe out most of us in this century.²

Maybe you, like me, in the constant stream of the global warming rhetoric, find it hard to separate the hot air from the 'so what can I do on a personal level' stuff? I think this is where Lovelock's

ideas can help. I like them for their simplicity in the midst of a hugely complex global problem.

Lovelock calls his idea 'Gaia Theory'. Widely debated by scientists, he believes the Earth is a self-regulating system, that the Earth—Gaia—is alive like any other living thing. Gaia looks after us. In support of this view, he argues: 'The Earth has an impossible atmosphere... the odds against it run into countless billions-to-one against'.³ Lovelock elsewhere hypothesises that because we have not looked after Earth, the system is out of balance. What does he suggest we do to help the system re-adjust? We must reconnect with nature.

Machines, technology, and cities have taken our attention, separating us from mother nature. We have left our first love for the love of another. Maybe this terrestrial cheating has led us to neglect that which cares for us, the Earth. But can we do something?

Reconnecting is about where we direct our interest and attention. When we give appropriate attention to our relationships, they thrive. In the same way, Lovelock suggests taking more of an interest in the natural world: in plants, animals, and things that grow naturally, paying attention to the life around us. This can work on a simple level.

The night I watched Lovelock being interviewed, I realised I had



been stuck indoors giving all my attention to my computer screen. I couldn't remember the last time I had gone for a walk. I knew I needed fresh air and a change of environment. That night I went for a long overdue walk.

I noticed my breathing, the stars and moon, the stillness and silence. I felt lighter, more relaxed. The stress I had experienced by the incessant use of my laptop subsided. I looked up at the infinitely complex universe and my perspective changed. I connected with nature and something more spiritual than just the next thing in my inbox. I walked past some litter. This time I had time to do something about it. I placed it in the nearest recycling bin. I was taking care of what takes care of me.

When we take time to reconnect with nature we notice more. And in noticing we can make changes to help our home become a better home.

Maybe you believe, like James Lovelock, that Earth is a living holistic organism that, with a little TLC, is able to self-regulate and repair itself. Or like me, as a Christian, you believe that a vastly superior intelligence designed our incredible universe to do that self-regulation and repair work. Either way, I would argue that reconnecting with nature is healthy for us and our planet.

This week take time to reconnect with the natural world.

NOTES

- ¹ www.bbc.com/ideas/videos/theresa-a-danger-oflosing-our-tenure-on-this-plane/p06yyqvc .
- ² www.theguardian.com/theguardian/2008/mar/01/scienceofclimatechange .
- ³ www.bbc.com/ideas/videos/theresa-a-danger-oflosing-our-tenure-on-this-plane/p06yyqvc .

A Climate of Change

by Peter Mill

Hardly a day goes by, it seems, without climate change featuring in our news reports. Recently the Guardian newspaper in the UK announced it has updated its style guide to introduce terms that more accurately describe what it sees as the environmental crisis facing the world.

Instead of 'climate change' which editor-in-chief, Katharine Viner thinks sounds rather passive and gentle, the preferred terms are 'climate emergency', 'crisis' or 'breakdown', with 'global heating' being favoured over 'global warming'.

Are these concerns exaggerated? Not according to many. In another recent high profile story, The UK Environment Agency warned that the impact of a forecast global temperature rise of 4°C could lead to whole communities having to move away from coasts and rivers,

meaning that villages and even towns could be abandoned.

As a Christian, which to me means a follower of Christ, my knee-jerk reaction when I hear these disturbing reports is to ask myself what would Jesus think about it all? How would he react? What would he say or do?

On the subject of climate change, he is silent in the gospels. Perhaps not surprising when you consider how different a place the world was 2000 years ago. Yet in his famous Sermon on the Mount, he made this simple, yet profound statement: 'In everything, do to others what you would have them do to you'.¹

The implications behind those words stretch far beyond our management or mismanagement of the environment. How do we deal with the impact of climate emergencies such as flood or drought, crop failures or disease epidemics on those who are least able to cope, the world's poor?

NOTE

- ¹ Matthew 7:12.





The Peace Race

by James Henderson

Mutually Assured Destruction.

MAD. It sounds scary, doesn't it? Are you in a relationship like it? What about the friends you hang out with? Do you build up or destroy each other?

MAD, however, is not about any of those things. It's a political term. And it's not about the endgame of Brexit and Europe. Have you heard of it? The doctrine of Mutually Assured Destruction held that—for two sides with large nuclear stockpiles—if one side launched a first strike on the other, the other side would retaliate. The resulting nuclear war would totally annihilate both sides. Knowing this, both sides would be deterred from launching a first nuclear strike.

For a while this madness was seen as a deterrent to war. It describes a lose-lose situation, and therefore why not have an arms race to equip yourself above anyone else? No one is likely to win, anyway. Two men thought this was utter nonsense and decided to do something about it. They were two Presidents, one of the USSR and the other of the USA. They seemed like giants on the world scene. Gorbachev and Reagan were the Putin and Trump of their time. Eventually, after a few false starts, in 1987, Gorbachev and Reagan agreed to halt the arms race by eliminating all land-based

missiles in their respective countries. It was called the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty (INF Treaty, for short), but now, in 2019 both the US and Russian presidents have said that their nations will honour the INF treaty no longer, President Trump suspending it on the 1st February and President Putin on the 2nd. Each claims different reasons for doing so, and there's been an accompanying war of words.

Where does that leave us? Will there be an arms race once again? A return to the madness of MAD?

Personally, I remember the Cold War tensions that existed before the Reagan-Gorbachev discussions began. I was for nuclear disarmament and was among the many teenagers and twenty-somethings who began to learn the Russian language just in case. For all that he achieved in helping end the Cold War, Gorbachev was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize, and, in his 1991 acceptance speech, he said that in 'preparing for my address I found in an old Russian encyclopaedia a definition of "peace" as a "commune"—the traditional cell of Russian peasant life. I saw in that definition the people's profound understanding of peace as harmony, concord, mutual help, and cooperation. This understanding is embodied in the canons of world religions and in the works of philosophers from antiquity to our time'.¹

I like his thought that peace is related to community. We might battle with

ourselves inwardly over something, but real war and real fighting breaks out in community. Without people there'd be no war, and without people there'd be no peace either. How we exist in community is the starting point. Gorbachev made me think of my own belief system when he said that the idea of communal peace was embodied in the canons in world religions. Embodied means 'is fleshed out in', 'finds expression in'.

What about Christianity? One of its proponents, a first-century writer called Paul, said this to those who would follow Christ: 'If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone'.² He's right, isn't he? We can live peaceably, and so much depends on us.

Maybe we need a new race. This time a race to peace more than a new arms race. How can it begin? Of course, we hope and pray, and sometimes doubt, that it'll happen in the community of politicians and world leaders. But is there something we do at the local level where we live, in our families, and in our work places? Of course, there is.

Please join me. Let's race to peace together.

NOTES

¹ www.nobelprize.org/prizes/peace/1990/summary/

² Romans 12:18, New International Version.

This article was first published in the March/April 2019 issue of *Because* magazine (www.because.uk.com). Reprinted with permission.

CHOOSE THE

by
James
Roberts

My wife and I took a vacation in New Zealand in 1987. We rented a camper van on the South Island and began our adventure on the seaside routes. We were struck by two particular highway signs that kept turning up. One was 'Metal Surface'. It warned that we were about to run off a paved highway onto a gravel road. OK, we learned that 'metal surface' just meant 'pavement ends'. We paid dearly for our encounter with 'metal surfaces' with the loss of our 'windscreen', but that's another story.

The other sign we got familiar with was 'Give Way'. This turned out to be the equivalent of our American 'Yield right of way' sign. You are expected to stop at an intersection, and if opposing traffic is coming, you let them pass first. So we learned about the importance of 'Give Way'.

The signs also reminded us of a statement I once heard made by a church minister that there are two ways of life: the 'give way' and the 'get way'. I have learned that he was definitely right about this principle and life choice. It pays to live the 'give way'. I have spent 50 years proving this truth.

For example, at one stage on our New Zealand trip, we were following a winding river road in our camper. Suddenly we came upon a hard

right turn onto a bridge across the magnificent river.

The unusual and shocking thing about this bridge was that the roadway immediately coincided with a railway! Our only choice was to straddle the rails and head on across the bridge. What do we do if we encounter an oncoming train that claims priority over the bridge way?

It was a very long bridge. We could not even see the other end. But about half way across, we realised there was a turnout. It could be used by someone who suddenly realised that they were about to encounter an oncoming train committed to using the only roadway available across the bridge. We quickly got the point about what 'Give Way' meant. You had best pull your little vehicle over and let the locomotive pull its carriages on across.

So that is life, isn't it? Haven't we all encountered people who were intent on ploughing their own way through life in spite of obstacles in their path? Have we been unwilling to yield to the 'Give Way' signs in life and try to surge on to the goals we have in mind? Are we so intent on 'getting' what we want that we won't surrender and yield ourselves to other's needs and priorities?

Choices. Lifestyle. In retirement (or should I say 'retirement'), I have learned an important principle. If I stick to a 'give way' lifestyle, I'll be willing to surrender the road to someone else for a while. If I insist on 'getting' my own way, I am probably headed for a train wreck!

Visit our website:

www.insidelife.org.nz

to access the articles previously published in **Inside Life**

Important questions covered in previous issues of *Inside Life*:

- ❖ Can We Solve the Mind-Body Problem?
- ❖ The Bible—Holy or Holey?
- ❖ What's it All About, Alfie?
- ❖ Why Does God Allow Suffering?
- ❖ Is Death the End?
- ❖ Jesus Christ—Superstar or Superstition?
- ❖ Who Are the Happiest People on Earth?

Back copies of these issues are available free of charge from

Inside Life, PO Box 304055, Hauraki Corner, Auckland 0750



Yes, please send me a **FREE** subscription to **Inside Life**

Please send your request to: **Inside Life**, PO Box 304055, Hauraki Corner, Auckland 0750

Name: _____

Address: _____

Phone: _____

E-mail: _____

Please include back copies on the following topics:
