

Inside Life

Issue 16 Your *FREE* Copy



Rugby & Religion
The Great
Game of Life

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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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This Issue: Last year New Zealand hosted a highly successful and memorable Rugby World Cup tournament. The matches were played and followed with a level of devotion verging on religious fervour. Our lead article examines parallels between rugby and religion, and considers how some aspects of the game with the oval ball can be used to inform 'play' in the much more important game in which we all participate—the 'game of life'.

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Rugby and Religion:

The Great Game of Life

By Rex Morgan

For an exciting, exhilarating six weeks, New Zealand was gripped by Rugby World Cup fever. Hordes of loyal fans converged on packed stadia, huge crowds gaped at giant screens in fan zones, tourists criss-crossed the country in campervans, pubs burst at the seams, flags and bunting magically sprouted up everywhere. It was six weeks of 'rugby heaven'.

'Heaven' is an appropriate description, in view of rugby's oft-observed status as the 'unofficial state religion' of New Zealand. And indeed rugby can be compared to religion in many ways.

Expensive grandstands soar into the air like cathedrals. Crowds of 'disciples' fill the 'pews', rising in unison to the Mexican waves and exulting at the thrilling plays. Punters coming from all over the world to view the matches are like pilgrims visiting holy sites, the 'hallowed turf' of famous grounds like Eden Park (a modern day 'Garden of Eden'?). National anthems are sung with the stirring devotion of hymns of praise. The battle is intense; the fields are 'sprinkled with the sacrificial blood of the martyrs'. Top players and heroes of the past are adored like saints. The Webb-Ellis Cup is sought as desperately as the Holy Grail.

A painting of Jesus as an All Black was displayed at Wellington's Cathedral of St Paul during the tournament. Artist Don Little said that he had painted the piece after wondering



whether rugby had become the new religion in a country that had largely turned away from the faith. An Australian rugby fan purchased the picture.¹

Religious historian Professor Peter Lineham, speaking to Kim Hill on national radio summed it up succinctly: 'Rugby is not just a game. It's a religion'.²

It is interesting to note also that New Zealand is by no means alone in this regard. A quick Google search shows people in South Africa, Australia, Ireland, Wales, England, and France have also likened the game with the oval ball to a national religion!

Notre Dame du Rugby

One remarkable example of the religious overtones associated with rugby is found at a chapel in France called 'Notre Dame du Rugby'.

The church is decorated with hundreds of rugby shirts in glass cabinets. Four stained-glass windows feature images of the Virgin Mary in various rugby poses, including a line-out, a scrum, and a cradling of the

infant Jesus with a rugby ball in his hands. A framed prayer at the altar translates into English:

Virgin Mary, who taught your child Jesus to play at your knee, keep a maternal watch over the game of these grown-up children.

Be with us also in the great scrum of existence, so that we may come out winners in the great game of life, giving an example—as on the field—of courage, zest and team spirit, in the word of an ideal in your name. Amen.

References to 'the great scrum of existence' and 'the great game of life' can serve to move our focus from the limited arena of the game of rugby to the far more important issue of life in the real world.

While rugby is spectacular, having its triumphs and challenges, in the end it is 'just a game', providing only a temporary escape from the serious business of life. When it comes to the business end of life, rugby doesn't have the answers we need.



Richie McCaw, All Blacks captain, is all smiles as he stands with the Webb-Ellis Cup, the trophy awarded to the winner of the Rugby World Cup.

It was wonderful to see the All Blacks win the coveted trophy, but in four years' time the prize will be up for grabs again. This is one aspect where religious faith promises so much more than sport. Rugby games are over all too soon; wins are recorded, but the teams must play again. The glory of victory soon wears off, as it is eventually followed by inevitable defeat. Christianity, on the other hand, has to do with eternal, spiritual things, and promises lasting benefits—a trophy that will 'never fade away'.³

Don't get me wrong—rugby is wonderful as recreation. It is an exciting diversion that is rightly played with vigour and followed with passion. The Rugby World Cup was a series of wonderful spectacles that enthralled and inspired the nation—the stadium of 4.5 million'. But wasn't it only a diversion from the real business of

life? The fervour of sports conquest soon wears off in the cold hard light of issues like economic uncertainty, relationship problems, crime, education, and natural disasters.

To face these aspects of life we need something more substantial than a game in a sports stadium. We need a power that plays out in the stadium of everyday life.

We read about a power that does just that in the Holy Bible. And believe it or not, the Bible itself makes close comparisons between sports events and religion. It shows the way that principles learned in physical sports like rugby can be utilised in our everyday living. Of course, rugby was unknown at the time, but the Bible highlights examples from the sports of the day: boxing, wrestling, and athletics.

Rugby Strategies Applied to Life

The New Testament writer Paul brought out the principle that while there are many competitors in a running race, only one can be the winner.⁴ He recommends we should all live the whole of our lives in such a way as to win a prize. And he points out a welcome difference between sport and life: in the game of life there is no limit on how many people can be winners.

Paul suggests we should all learn lessons from the strict training that athletes undertake. Players are willing to spend many hours each week in rigorous workouts in the quest to represent their country in a rugby game. Shouldn't this inspire us to put our own great effort into living life in a moral and honourable way, endeavouring to show love to all around us, to help and serve others, and to build lasting relationships?

Christians Who Play Rugby

Nineteen sports chaplains were in attendance at the Rugby World Cup to offer pastoral care, a quiet prayer, or simply a cup of coffee. Dave Chawner, British coordinator for Rugby Union Chaplaincy stated: 'At least 25% of the squads involved in the tournament had some sort of regular prayer and/or Bible study'.¹

A surprising number of international rugby players are committed Christians. The legendary Michael Jones, widely recognised as one of the greatest players of all time, was so committed to his faith that he even refused to play games on Sundays. Jones says: 'Although I am truly honoured to represent New Zealand on the rugby field, my first allegiance is definitely to my Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ. People easily forget a player after he stops playing, but one thing I'd like to be remembered for is that I was a person who put God first before rugby'.

Once asked how a Christian like he could be such an uncompromising tackler, Jones famously quipped back with a Bible principle: 'It is better to give than to receive'!

One of the crowd favourites of the World Cup-winning All Blacks was Brad Thorn. He is another legendary figure, a 'dual international' who has played both rugby league for Australia and rugby union for New Zealand. Thorn became a Christian after asking a fellow team mate (Kangaroos front-row forward Jason Stevens) on a trip to the UK in 1997 why he didn't get involved with all the money, girls, and alcohol that come with top level rugby league.

'Jason stood out from the rest of the team', Thorn said. 'On tour we would cut loose and he didn't. When you are in a group, everyone says you are weak to not go on the beers, weak if you haven't slept with a woman. It's the opposite. Character is involved.'

Christianity doesn't prevent this big man from highly physical performances where he delivers bone-crushing tackles and aggressive driving charges. 'Before I play, I say a simple prayer, honouring God through the way I play, 100% aggression and physicality, but showing respect to your opponent afterwards whether I win or lose.'

Comparing rugby and religion, Thorn says: 'The things that help you be successful in football are to be humble, because that's how you learn; to persevere; to sacrifice for others, because the team's more important than yourself; to show courage; to show wisdom; and to be honest with your teammates. All of these things that are Christ's real nature seem to be the key things that make you successful in football'.²

Another player in the 2011 World Cup, Springbok Pierre Spies, shared his story in a recent book, *More Than Rugby*. One of the most imposing and explosive loose forwards that South Africa has ever produced, Spies makes no secret of the personal importance of his Christian faith. On his website he states: 'My message to you is that God has a plan for your life. He has a passion for you. Once you have decided to follow Him and live for Him, He will do more for you than you ever could have imagined'.

Inundated with invitations to appear as a guest speaker, Spies uses every opportunity to inspire young and old, not with talk of sport, but of life, faith, family, and love. He married the girl of his dreams, Juanne, in December 2008 and their dedication to Christ and Christian values serves as an example to young and old alike.³

Scottish representative in the 2007 and 2011 Rugby World Cups, Euan Murray is another player who has put his faith first and sport second by declining to play on Sundays. 'There is something far more important in life than the result of a game', he says.

These and many other players make no secret of the fact that they are devoted Christians, and that their religious faith has helped them not only in the arena of rugby, but much more importantly, in the great game of life.

Notes

¹ *Challenge Weekly*, 31 October 2011, p. 3

² *Challenge Weekly*, 29 August 2011, p. 16

³ www.pierrespies.co.za



One of the Bible writers uses the image of spectators watching an athletic contest to spur his readers on to living a life free of sin.⁵ Paul told his young co-worker Timothy that physical exercise benefits the body for a short while, but godliness—focusing on the ethical, moral, and spiritual aspects of life—is much more worthwhile because it brings promise of a better life beyond the grave, as well as benefitting our life right now.⁶

How can we have victory in the spiritual game of life? The Bible's answer is to look towards Jesus, the great champion who showed us the way to eternal life.⁷

Just as the All Blacks have a captain who leads from the front, Richie McCaw, so Jesus is a pace-setting spiritual leader—'the captain of our salvation'.⁸

Another sporting principle expounded by Paul is that of teamwork. The All Blacks display a blended mixture of players of different types. The nimble, speedy back line works in unison with the heavier, more solid forward pack, each player using his special skills for the benefit of the whole team. Similarly, in society at large, people have differing abilities,

opportunities, and viewpoints. Only by fitting in with others can we play to our best in the great game of life.

Paul cites the humorous illustration that if all of our body was an eye or an ear, for instance, how would we be able to eat or walk?⁹

Similarly, not everyone in a rugby team can be the goal kicker. Some of the All Blacks are forwards, some are wings, some are kickers, some sit out a game on the bench, but they all have their part to play in the team. We have our individual part to play in the game of life, and can help ourselves and others by being willing to tolerate and assist those who are different from us.

It was wonderful to see how New Zealanders as Rugby World Cup hosts supported the teams from other countries. Kiwis not only encouraged their own team, but warmly welcomed visitors from other nations and proudly displayed a variety of national flags. One of the primary teachings of the Bible is that humans are all one in God's sight.¹⁰ How wonderful if we were as generous and accommodating of others in all of our relationships, not just at Rugby World Cup time!

World In Union

The admirable sentiments called up in the Rugby World Cup theme song, 'World in Union', are strikingly similar to those found in Christianity:

Gathering together,
one mind, one heart
Every creed, every colour,
once joined, never apart
It's the world in union,
the world as one
As we climb to reach our destiny,
a new age has begun.

This could easily be a hymn sung in church. And indeed, that is a more likely place than a rugby field for these aspirations to be brought to their ultimate fulfilment. Christians aim to practice a life expressing values such as generosity, justice, truth, honesty, integrity, and love.

These are characteristics of the nature of God, who selected us all as participants in the great game of life. He gave us a coaching manual, the Bible, to show us how to 'play'. The game plan God lays out for us there opens up an understanding of life that rivals, and even surpasses, the thrill of rugby games. And it is capped off at the end with the golden trophy of eternal life.

If you would like to learn more about the joy of participating in the spiritual game of life, why not visit a church this weekend? Or, please feel free to write to us for more information.¹¹

Wouldn't it be great if we could all pay as much attention to the 'great scrum of existence', the 'great game of life', as we do to a comparatively short-lived and insignificant game of rugby!

This would truly make the world a better place.

Notes

- ¹ *Challenge Weekly*, 10 October 2011
- ² Interview on Radio NZ National, 24 September 2011
- ³ 1 Peter 5:4 (All scriptures from NIV unless stated otherwise.)
- ⁴ 1 Corinthians 9:24
- ⁵ Hebrews 12:1
- ⁶ 1 Timothy 4:7-8 (KJV)
- ⁷ Hebrews 12:1-2
- ⁸ Hebrews 2:10 (KJV)
- ⁹ 1 Corinthians 12:12-18
- ¹⁰ Galatians 3:28
- ¹¹ Write to *Inside Life*, PO Box 304055, Hauraki Corner, Auckland 0750.



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Punctuation is an essential—
if not always consciously
applied—part of our daily
communication. When we write,
those little dots, dashes, curls,
capital letters, and other marks
all provide powerful meaning and
direction. (And if you doubt the
power of a simple comma, consid-
er its influence over the meaning
of this sentence: ‘At various times
he ascribed his success to his
parents, Jean, and God’ versus
‘At various times he ascribed his
success to his parents, Jean and
God’)!)

Punctuation isn’t complicated, but it does exercise great power through the direction it provides and the meaning it helps create. And of course, the lack or misuse of punctuation creates confusion and misunderstanding—a little bit like leadership.

Let’s consider just six elements of punctuation—in this case as their principles might relate to leadership.

The Capital Letter

Capitals signal the start of a sentence. They also show respect for the names of people and places. Capitals give prominence. Leaders also give prominence by what (and who) they capitalise, what they show respect for, and where they choose to start things. Starting, naming, and focusing are everyday ways in which leaders ‘punctuate’ their mission, their methods, and their meaning.

The Full Stop

It brings a sentence to a close. ‘Enough of that, let’s move on to something else’, it says. As a general rule, the closer a full stop is to the start of a sentence, the easier the sentence is to follow and understand.

Being clear about commitments, completion, and conclusions is equally essential for clarity in leadership.

Of course, not every leadership commitment can be carried out with a simple start and stop. And so we have the comma.

The Comma

This sometimes bedeviling little mark has three essential roles: to separate introductory information in a sentence, to separate items in a list, and to insert explanatory or detailed information within a sentence. A tiny mark, but one whose placement—as our ‘parents, Jean and God’ example above highlights—can considerably alter meaning.

It’s important for leaders to be able to clearly connect and separate related events, activities, and issues—like items in a list. It’s also vital to give context to what you’re asking: providing introductory information, if you like, before articulating the specific request. And sometimes there are qualifying or clarifying directions, explanations, or requirements to be communicated.

Just as the comma is perhaps the most frequently misused punctuation mark, so too leaders can misplace, misuse, or mistime pauses and comments. More information is not necessarily better communication.

The Colon

There are also three key ways the colon is used: to introduce a word or phrase that serves as explanation, clarification, summary, or interpretation; to introduce a list; and to formally introduce a quotation. Colons illustrate and amplify.

Six! Leadership? Punctuation, Points:

Leadership is punctuated with colons when we clearly establish, explain, and enumerate. There’s a sense of order and rationale that a simple, clear list of ideas or explanations provide.

The Question Mark

The question mark is one punctuation point that probably needs more, rather than less, use in our workplaces—particularly in leadership. It invites a response, encourages engagement, and indicates an expectation of contribution.

‘When we become leaders, we feel that it is important for us to have answers rather than questions’, writes Michael Marquardt in *Leading with Questions* (2005). ‘The ability to ask questions goes hand in hand with the ability to learn. A learning organisation is only possible if it has a culture that encourages questions.’

The Spanish language does the question mark particularly well, placing an upside down version of it at the start of the sentence. This lets the reader know up front that what’s being said is a question, rather than requiring them to wait until the end of the sentence for that important context to be revealed.

¿It’s great, don’t you think? Perhaps there’s something in that for leadership communication, too.



Punctuation printing blocks for a vintage letterpress in a small wooden typesetter box.

The Exclamation Point

Finally! The exclamation point conveys surprise, anger, strong emotion, or enthusiasm. While most business writing should be free of exclamation points (and exclamations!), they can add appropriate meaning in informal ways (e.g., note the difference between emailing someone 'That's great' versus 'That's great!').

Two things about exclamation points and leadership: it's important to occasionally and selectively signal appropriate surprise, appreciation, disapproval, or enthusiasm by exclaiming; and, the more you do it, the less impact it has—just as it does in writing.

So that's the free punctuation lesson (and also a chance to shamelessly promote my fantastic half-day 'Writing for Results' workshop, but I'll refrain from an exclamation).

In summary, the six punctuation points of leadership remind us that (colon):

- Leaders should carefully identify what gets capitalised so it's clear

what the starting point is and who the key identities are.

- Leadership is as much about stopping as it is about starting (and you have to stop before you can start—just like a sentence).

- Leaders must carefully and clearly provide introductory information, separate issues and, as necessary, insert additional information.

- Leadership is about providing a sense of order and rationale by clearly and simply establishing, explaining, and enumerating.

- Leaders must ask and encourage questions. ¿What difference could that make?

- Leaders are expected to occasionally and appropriately exclaim their surprise, appreciation, emotion, disapproval, and enthusiasm (!).

The point is, leadership requires appropriate punctuation—otherwise leadership can feel like an awfully long sentence for followers. So, how will you punctuate your leadership opportunities?

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(contact: Rex Morgan, ph. 09 489 8910)

Rotorua: *Contact Peter Lindop, ph. 07 349 2272*

Wellington: *Thumbs Up 5 Elizabeth Street, Petone*

Saturdays at 2:30 pm.

(contact: Dennis Gordon, ph. 04 386 2094)

Invercargill: *The Southern Light Community Centre 64 Conon Street*

Saturdays at 1:00 pm.

(contact: Les Evans, ph. 03 216 3680)

Other NZ locations: *Small groups meet regularly in other cities nationwide. For details, contact Dennis Richards, ph. 06 353 6224 or visit www.wcg.org.nz.*

Faith on Prescription

By Joseph Tkach

Some atheists claim that belief in God is immature and subjective. They say that religion is for the hesitant, the guilt-ridden, the excessively timid, and those lacking clear convictions with which to face life. Some of these atheists even see religion as a cause of mental and physical illness. But a recent study done by the British charity, Christian Medical Fellowship, known as the CMF, showed otherwise.

Research suggests that faith is associated with longer life and a wide range of physical and mental health benefits.

Drawing on evidence from more than 1200 studies and 400 reviews, this study showed that, far from being bad for health, being a practicing Christian can have significant benefits to both physical and mental well-being.

Moreover, evidence from these studies and reviews has shown an association between a life of faith and a number of positive health benefits, including: protection from illness, coping with illness, and faster recovery from it.

In fact, of all the studies reviewed, 81 percent showed benefit and only four percent showed harm. The four percent were among religions who refuse vaccination and blood transfusions.

So what particular health benefits were identified in the report?

Here are a few:

- increased well-being, happiness and life satisfaction,

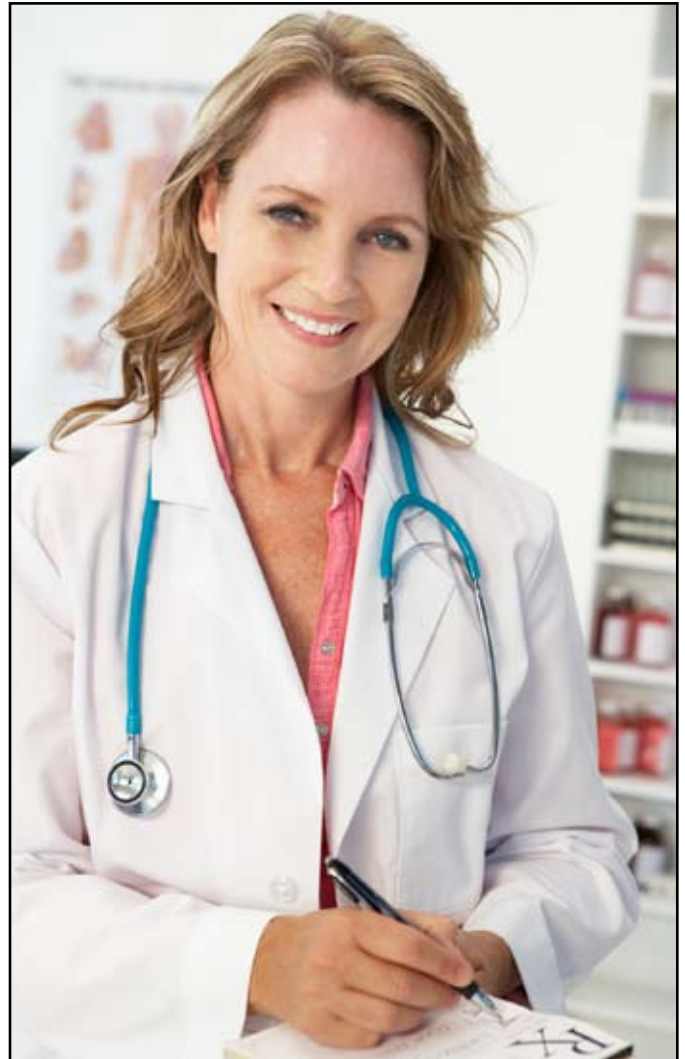
- lower rates of depression,
- less anxiety (and related illnesses),
- lower rates of alcohol and drug abuse, and
- better adaptation to bereavement.

One study of 21,204 adults showed that those who attended church regularly had a life expectancy up to fourteen years longer than those who did not.

The report goes on to suggest that modern doctors need to listen to their patients, 'who typically are more religious than their carers [caregivers]'. It suggests that doctors support spiritual care, because at a time of illness, spiritual issues often rise to the surface—questions of personal worth, mortality, and place in the world—questions only faith can answer.

There are strong links between emotional and physical health.

Even though faith can have a very positive influence on health, Christians should not claim that their faith is a guarantee of good health and well-being. That is not always the case. The gospel is not a 'name it and claim it' message about health and wealth. The gospel is about spiritual health and well-being.



Christians should not claim that belief in God is a guarantee of good health. But they can point out that the claim some atheists make about belief in God being bad for your health is simply not borne out by the facts.

The CMF report concluded that in contrast to the idea that the Christian faith is bad for your health, research suggests that faith is associated with longer life and a wide range of physical and mental health benefits.

This is a transcript of a weekly 'Speaking of Life' radio programme by Joseph Tkach, president of Grace Communion International.

For more information visit www.gci.org.

Mateship: ‘Imago Aussie’?

By Kerry Gubb

A few years ago a book was published about Australia, called *The Lucky Country*. Although the term found its way into our self-talk, we haven't been feeling so lucky lately. Early in 2011, in just one month:

- Flash floods inundated an area the size of France and Germany combined. Lives were lost, homes and crops destroyed.
- Cyclone Yasi ploughed across the Barrier Reef and the Queensland coast, leaving devastation in its wake.
- Raging bushfires took out homes and property on the edge of Perth.

It was a reminder that Australia is not a passive, easily tamed land. But when it does its worst to us, it seems to bring out the best in us. It also reminds me of why I'm so proud of my people.

Disasters tend to awaken the smouldering embers of the exocentric image of God in us.

'We're Aussies: we stick together' is felt, spoken, and lived out every time this unbroken mustang of a land fights back with fire, wind, or water. It's a national psyche we call 'mateship'. Mateship is our word for a phenomenon highly influenced by our land, our accumulated culture, our history, and our experiences together. Mateship is the 'Aussie spirit'. It's the Aussies' self-image: 'imago Aussie'. If you ever visit here, you'll probably find yourself called 'mate' by total strangers. Consider it a compliment.

Uniquely Australian?

I'm as fiercely proud of mateship as anyone. I have to disagree, however, with some who think it's unique to our country. We might be more open about it, but Australians are not the only ones who come together in a crisis and rise to the challenge of a natural disaster. Each nation, each community, neighbourhood, family, and couple has its own variation on the same broad theme. They might call it something else, and they will

Volunteers from the South Australian Country Fire Service are among the Aussies who willingly help out their mates in times of disaster.

display it in ways that reflect their own history, culture, and experience. But mateship is common to all who are made in the image of God. Because God—Father, Son, and Spirit—is mateship: relationship, community, communion. God is whatever words we use in our own languages and cultural contexts to convey the concept of ‘You are in me and I am in you. We stick together. I will never leave you, nor forsake you’.¹

Here’s the difference, though. That’s how God is all the time. Always has been, always will be. Outgoing love: an orientation that Tom Smail, with the help of Pannenberg, calls ‘the exocentricity of our humanity’.² We’re not like God all the time. In fact, we’re not like him most of the time, are we? That’s because in us the image of God (*imago dei*) is distorted and hindered by our self-centred, egocentric orientation. Only in rare moments does ‘the exocentricity that constitutes our humanity’ break ‘through the egocentricity that defies and denies it’.³

So for most of the time, we live egocentrically, giving little thought for community, while doing our own thing, enabled by our egocentric, individualistic, materially affluent life-

style, and unaware of the family two doors down on our street.

Until there’s a flood.

Until there’s a cyclone or hurricane

Until there’s a fire.

Disasters are just that. Nobody enjoys them. But they do tend to awaken the smouldering embers of the exocentric image of God in us. That’s when we might just think that the family two doors down might need some help. And in the briefest of time, from a street full of proximate but functional strangers, emerges a new entity: a community of friends—mates—lending each other a hand.

There were countless comments from the grateful owners of flooded and wind-ravaged homes about how overwhelmed they were to have people they’d never actually met, helping them clear out the rubble and restore their lives. It was incredibly uplifting to see it. As it was in the wake of Katrina and Ike. As it was after the California wildfires and the Haiti earthquake. As it was after the Boxing Day tsunami, or as the world held its breath for the trapped Chilean miners. As it was when the Student Army, the F Army, and heaps of Cantabrians ‘mucked in’ to help shovel liquefaction, distribute

food, and go door-knocking after the Christchurch earthquakes.

I’m fiercely proud of the way my people have responded to the unprecedented natural disasters of the last few months. Why shouldn’t I be? I’m an Aussie. I can’t help reflecting, though, that such outgoing, ‘exocentric’ community spirit comes not just from the fact that we are cast from an Australian mould, but it is something we share with all humankind. The Son of God didn’t just make us⁴—he became one of us, and still is, and it is in him that all of us ‘live and move and have our being’.⁵

Mateship, when all is said and done, may be not so much ‘*imago Aussie*’ as it is *imago dei*—the fact that we are made in the image of the Triune God himself.

This article was first published in the April-May 2011 edition of *Christian Odyssey* (www.gci.org/publications/odyssey). Kerry Gubb is a minister who lives in Brisbane, Australia.

Notes

¹ See Hebrews 13:5

² Tom Smail, *Like Father, Like Son: The Trinity Imaged in Our Humanity* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2005) p. 123

³ *Ibid.*, p. 124

⁴ Colossians 1:15-17

⁵ Acts 17:28



Queensland State Emergency Service volunteers are trained to rescue their ‘mates’ from rising flood waters.

Speed Bumps, Stepping Stones,

and Rock Walls



By Gael McInnes

Do you know what speed bumps, stepping stones, and rock walls have in common? They all have something to teach us about the challenges of life.

Recently, I took what I thought was a short cut across town and drove down a street that had nine speed bumps on it. Nine speed bumps! Not such a short cut after all.

Sometimes we come across frustrating 'speed-bumps' on the road of our everyday lives. How do we respond to these? Do we curse the people who put them there, stop and go no further, or even turn around and go back? The 'road that seems right' may offer us many options and require few sacrifices. Easy choices, however, should make us take a second look. We can ask ourselves: 'Is this solution attractive because it allows me to be lazy, doesn't ask me to change my life-style, or requires no moral restraints?' Often right choices require hard work and self-sacrifice. Be careful of short cuts; they can lead to trouble.¹

At times we might need to slow down, look back to see where we have been, check out decisions we have made, and perhaps get a new perspective on our situation.

Stepping stones are similar to speed bumps. I have done a lot of bush walking and tramping over the years, and I loved to challenge myself jumping from stone to stone over streams. I would eagerly start out stepping on stones within my stride, until suddenly I would approach one that was just too far away. This made me stop, survey the stream, and sometimes

backtrack to find another route. Other times I slipped on slimy stones in my eagerness.

There are many ways to get to our destinations in life. It may mean stopping, reviewing, 'recharging our batteries', and perhaps moving in a totally new direction. Life's like that. Sometimes we jump too quickly to conclusions about situations and people that can lead to lost opportunities, ruined reputations, and broken friendships—even divided families. Don't be too quick to rush into the unknown.²

Have you ever tried rock climbing? It's challenging, scary, fun, and yes, I've done it: not on an artificial rock-climbing wall, but up a real rock wall out there in the mountains. There are many ways up a rock wall. You have to keep three limbs attached at all times. Even though you are hooked up to a safety harness, the challenge is to reach the top safely.

You carefully survey the rock wall, looking for protrusions to either grasp with your fingers, or anchor with a foot. Sometimes that protrusion is just out of your reach, but you stretch until your body feels as though it's going to split, and then you grasp it. Now splayed against the rock wall, gasping for breath and with every muscle twitching, you have to do it again, and again, and again, until you reach the top. The reward? The view, a great sigh of relief that you made it, and of course, the exhilaration of abseiling down.

Whatever your life challenge is at present, take heart from a man named Paul. This early follower of Jesus Christ was persecuted, flogged, and imprisoned several times for his Christian faith, and even shipwrecked once. He survived the 'storms' that life threw at him and made the most of every situation he was in.³

Paul would 'take stock' and look around. When thrown into the dungeon, he didn't get disheartened. No! He looked around to see how he could be of use to his fellow prisoners. There was another way to look at his

life and circumstances. Paul also looked back. He looked at the way he had negotiated failures in the past, and realised he was now able to encourage others in similar situations. And Paul also looked ahead. He knew there was life after death—eternal life with his Saviour—so he wasn't afraid to die.⁴

We can take heart from Paul's example. There is no peace like the serenity you can have when you know your future is secure.⁵ Paul's faith was not in his circumstances, his many friends and associates, or even in himself. He was able to look back without regret, look around without fear, and look ahead without doubt, because of his trust in his Lord.⁶

There is no growth in life without challenges, and there are no challenges without change. I challenge you to use the 'speed bumps' in your life to slow down and reflect on where you are, the 'stepping stones' to pause and look for direction, and the 'rock walls' to strive to reach higher goals in life, as you become the person God intended you to be.

Notes

¹ Proverbs 14:12

² Proverbs 19:2

³ Weirsbe, Warren W., *The Bumps Are What You Climb On*. Baker Books, Michigan, 2002.

⁴ John 3:16

⁵ John 16:33

⁶ Proverbs 3:5



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Have You Brightened Anyone's Day Recently?

By Roy Lawrence

My wife and I are lucky enough to have a house by the sea, not far from New Brighton on the Wirral coast of England. Most days I go for a walk along the seafront. There I meet all kinds of people, who are also out to take the air.

They sometimes include a local cyclist who has come to recognise me. When he meets me, he always calls out: 'Good morning, Major!'

It is quite in vain that on more than one occasion I have told him that, though I was once in the army as a national serviceman, I never rose to the dizzy rank of Major. But it never seems to change his greeting.

He reminds me of an old nun in Liverpool who has the habit of addressing all clergy as 'Bishop'. I met her some years ago whilst leading a conference at the convent where she lives. She greeted me warmly: 'It is lovely to have you with us today, Bishop'. I explained to her that I was a fairly lowly Church of England Vicar, a very long way from being a Bishop, but soon she was at it again. 'Can I make you a cup of tea, Bishop? Is there anything you need for the conference, Bishop?'

'Sister, Sister,' I said. 'I really am not a Bishop.' Then she came clean. 'I know you're not', she said, 'but I call all clergy "Bishop". I find it brightens their day!'

Well, what about you and me? I wonder, have you and I managed to brighten anyone's day recently?

Two Timely Tales

There are various ways of doing it. It could be by something you say—as with the cyclist on the prom or the nun at the convent. Or perhaps by other instances, like these two that come to mind.

When our two sons were at school, we sometimes used to take them to a nearby café for tea and cakes. There we would be served by an elderly waitress, who adopted the practice of addressing all the schoolboys as 'Young Master'. It was regarded as something of a joke at school but you could see that quite a number of days were brightened by it. It may seem a small thing, but it is better to brighten someone's day than to darken it.

Perhaps even more important than the way in which we speak is the way in which we listen, or perhaps fail to listen.

If I go back in my own mind to my teenage days, I remember an occasion when I attended a residential conference. I knew absolutely nobody who was present. Everybody else seemed to me to know each other well. They were chatting away happily at lunchtime on the first day, while I sat on my own, feeling increasingly isolated and insecure. Then suddenly there was an elderly clergyman sitting next to me. He smiled and said: 'I don't think we have met yet. Tell me about yourself'. He was a brilliant listener, and in no time at all I found myself telling him all about myself. He seemed to find it interesting. In fact he seemed to find me interesting, and it was not long before my gloom started to lift, my day started to brighten, and from then on I began to enjoy everything that was to follow.



Little Things Mean a Lot

Quite little things can have the effect of brightening the day for someone. St David, the patron saint of Wales, seemed to know this well. It is said that his last words to his followers were: 'Do the little things in life'.

There is, I think, a secret behind the ability to brighten a day for others, whether by the way we speak, or by the way we listen, or by some small act of courtesy or care. It lies in believing that every human being is significant and worthwhile. The Bible tells us that we were all made in the image of God, and even though we have damaged and distorted that image, it is important to know that we can look for it in everyone we meet.

George Hoare, a British magazine writer, understood this very well. He used to quote a little poem, which had come into his mind one day when he was preparing to give a talk to a church group. It went like this:

I care not what a man may
be, as long as in him the Christ
I see.

George always looked for the Christ in everyone. I reckon that this was why, like so many others, I invariably felt better for being with him.

He used to make me think of some words of CS Lewis, the writer of the Narnia stories and *The Screwtape Letters*. I was deeply affected by CS Lewis in my earlier years, and my growth as a Christian was influenced by him in no small way. Once I was privileged to meet him.

Many of the things he said and wrote have remained fixed in my mind. One of them was this: 'After the blessed sacrament, the holiest sight your eyes will ever see is that of the person you happen to find next to you'. The world would become a better and brighter place, if we were all to accept this perspective.

So here's to CS Lewis and St. David and George Hoare and the elderly clergyman who listened to me at the conference. To the old waitress who called the school-boys 'Young Master' and the Sister in the Liverpool convent and my friend on his bicycle on the New Brighton prom.

If we learn from them, then, I think I can promise you, the world will light up just a little and, as the Chinese proverb puts it: 'It is better to light even a small candle than to shout curses at the darkness!'

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Canon Roy Lawrence has spent most of his life in the ministry working in Anglican churches in the North of England, as well as serving

as a hospital chaplain. A well-known Christian writer and broadcaster, Roy has authored fourteen books.

You Better Slow Down

By David L Weatherford

Have you ever watched
kids on a merry-go-round,
Or listened to rain
slapping the ground?
Ever followed a butterfly's
erratic flight,
Or gazed at the sun
fading into the night?

*You better slow down,
don't dance so fast,
Time is short, the music won't last.*

Do you run through each day
on the fly,
When you ask 'How are you?',
do you hear the reply?
When the day is done, do you lie in your bed,
With the next hundred chores running
through your head?

*You better slow down, don't dance so fast,
Time is short, the music won't last.*

Ever told your child, we'll do it tomorrow,
And in your haste not seen his sorrow?
Ever lost touch, let a good friendship die,
'Cause you never had time to call and say 'Hi'?

*You better slow down, don't dance so fast,
time is short, the music won't last.*

When you run so fast to get somewhere,
you miss half the fun of getting there.
When you worry and hurry through your day,
it's like an unopened gift thrown away.

Life is not a race,
so take it slower,
Hear the music
before the song is over.

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