

***Inside* Life**

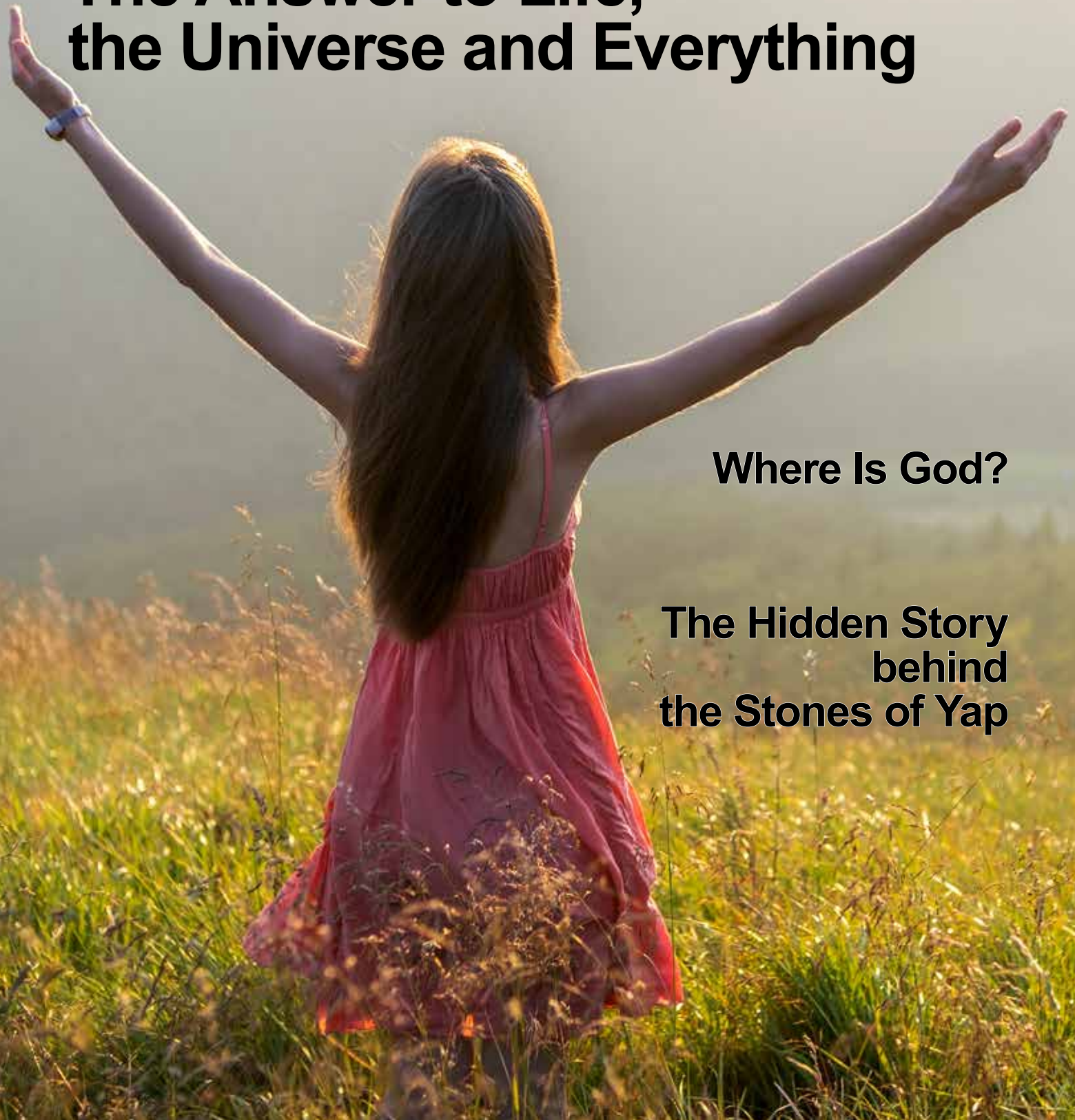
Issue 38
Your FREE Copy

At Last:

**The Answer to Life,
the Universe and Everything**

Where Is God?

**The Hidden Story
behind
the Stones of Yap**



Inside Life

A Magazine of Understanding

Number 38, June 2023

CONTENTS

- 3** At Last: The Answer to Life, the Universe, and Everything!
-
- 9** Pearls of Wisdom
-
- 10** The Hidden Story behind the Stones of Yap
-
- 12** Where's God?
-
- 13** Revenge Is Sweet...
-
- 14** The Elvis Movie: All Shook Up Meets Heartbreak Hotel

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 Good As Gold Media 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 twice a year, free of charge, as a community service.

© Grace Communion International 2023. All rights reserved.

ISSN: 1177-3693

Our Cover: What is the meaning of life? It's an age-old enigma that has exercised the minds of untold numbers of thinking people throughout the centuries. Our cover article tackles this challenging question.

Photo Credits

Cover: © bilanol.i.ua | Depositphotos_507627074
p. 4 © david5962 | iStock photo ID:93384991
p. 5 © alfie_66609441 | cinematerial.com
p. 7 © Sergey Khakimullin | iStock photo ID: 683539596
p. 9 © belchonock | depositphotos.com ID: 30411541
© Kryzhov | depositphotos.com ID: 158143984
p. 10 Picture courtesy of Yap Visitors Bureau
p. 11 Picture courtesy of Yap Visitors Bureau
p. 12 © fotokitas | depositphotos.com ID: 354864868
p. 13 © jazzikov | depositphotos.com ID: 1279082
p. 14 © themoviedatabase
p. 15 (top) © depositphotos.com ID: 9521318
(bottom) accessed at <https://lvccld.bibliocommons.com/list/share/1147440827/2034793879>

At Last: The Answer to Life, the Universe, and Everything!

by Rex Morgan

In Douglas Adams's popular 1979 science-fiction novel *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*, a group of hyper-intelligent beings demand to know "the answer to the ultimate question of life, the universe and everything" from a super computer called "Deep Thought". This super computer, the size of a small city, was specifically built to solve this riddle. Toward the end of the book, after 7.5 million years of calculations, the supercomputer finally reveals that the answer is "forty-two".

This outcome has become a part of popular culture to the extent that if you type "the answer to life, the universe, and everything" into the Google search engine (the primary source of all knowledge these days!), the solution given is 42.

No doubt Adams gives this light-hearted answer to dramatise the fact that the question is a mammoth one, seemingly defying all analysis and comprehension. When asked by fans where he came up with this number, Adams himself said it was a joke. Before his death in 2002 at the age of 49, he said: "It had to be a number, an ordinary, smallish number, and I chose that one".

But all joking aside, the meaning of life is actually a very important

question. It's an age-old enigma that has exercised the minds of untold numbers of thinking people throughout the centuries. What is life, the universe and everything all about? Is human life just an accident of "nature"? Should we just live for the moment, or is there more to it than that? Does each person's life, and the life of humanity as a whole, have a special purpose, an overriding meaning?

"The two most important days in your life are the day you are born and the day you find out why", wrote author Mark Twain. But is there anything to find out? Is there a reason why we were born?

In 1988, U.S. Philosophy Professor Hugh Moorhead compiled a book entitled *The Meaning of Life According to Our Century's Greatest Writers and Thinkers*. He asked 250 leading academics to respond to the question "What is the meaning of life?", and published their replies.¹

The Philosophers' Answers

Philosopher Carl Jung wrote back: "Really, I don't know what the meaning or purpose of life is, but it looks exactly as if something were meant by it".

Novelist Joseph Heller said he had no answers to the meaning of life "and I no longer want to search for any".

The World Stage

One of the "immortal bard" William Shakespeare's most famous speeches comes from *As You Like It*:

"All the world's a stage, and all the men and women merely players; They all have their exits and their entrances".

This is a description of life that makes sense, and has been quoted over and over in the centuries since it was written. But if life is a stage and all people are actors, is there a playwright?

All of Shakespeare's plays were created by the hand of the celebrated immortal bard. Can it be that life, the greatest play of all, is the one and only play without an author? Is it simply a random sequence of events with each actor unaware of what is behind it all? Or is there a master playwright directing the performance—an overall plan giving it meaning?

Shakespeare, sadly, was as mortal as the rest of us, but is there a truly "immortal" bard behind the scenes of life? The accompanying article examines this question.



Renowned Russian author Leo Tolstoy concluded that God had a purpose in creating life.

And poet and essayist T.S. Eliot responded that this is a question “which one spends one’s whole life in finding the answer for, and he is sorry he has not yet got to the point where he can sum it all up on a flyleaf”.

Just like Douglas Adams, these philosophers make light of the question to emphasise that it is so profound that they don’t have a clue about how to answer it! Many great minds have tackled this most basic of all questions, but it seems that none of them has yet come up with a widely accepted and truly satisfying answer.

Walter T. Stace, former Professor of Philosophy at Princeton University, summed up the modern view of the meaning of life in this way:

The picture of a meaningless world and a meaningless human life is, I think, the basic theme of much modern art and literature.

Certainly it is the basic theme of modern philosophy. According to the most characteristic philosophies of the modern world from Hume in the eighteenth century to the so-called positivists of today, the world is just what it is and that is the end of all inquiry. There is no reason for its being what it is.²

Noted palaeontologist Stephen Jay Gould wrote: “We are here because one odd group of fishes had a peculiar fin anatomy that could transform into legs for terrestrial creatures. We may yearn for a higher answer, but none exists”.³

Eminent British philosopher Bertrand Russell referred to the universe as “purposeless” and “void of meaning”. He said about mankind: “His growth, his hopes and fears, his loves and his beliefs, are but the outcome of accidental collocations of atoms...”⁴

However the universe began, whether with a “big bang”, with the development of life through millions of years of evolution, or in some other yet undiscovered way, this must have all been only the result of random chance, if there wasn’t a creative mind behind it. As far as purpose is concerned, in that case we would be no different than garden bugs which start out as eggs, grow into adults, in turn lay their own eggs and eventually are eaten by predators or die of “old age”, in an endless cycle that repeats itself over and over without any meaning.

But somehow this doesn’t seem good enough for us as humans. We have the amazing ability to think and dream and even to ask questions about the meaning of life. We can set goals and struggle to achieve them. Surely we are different to the animals; surely there is meaning,

purpose and value to our lives?

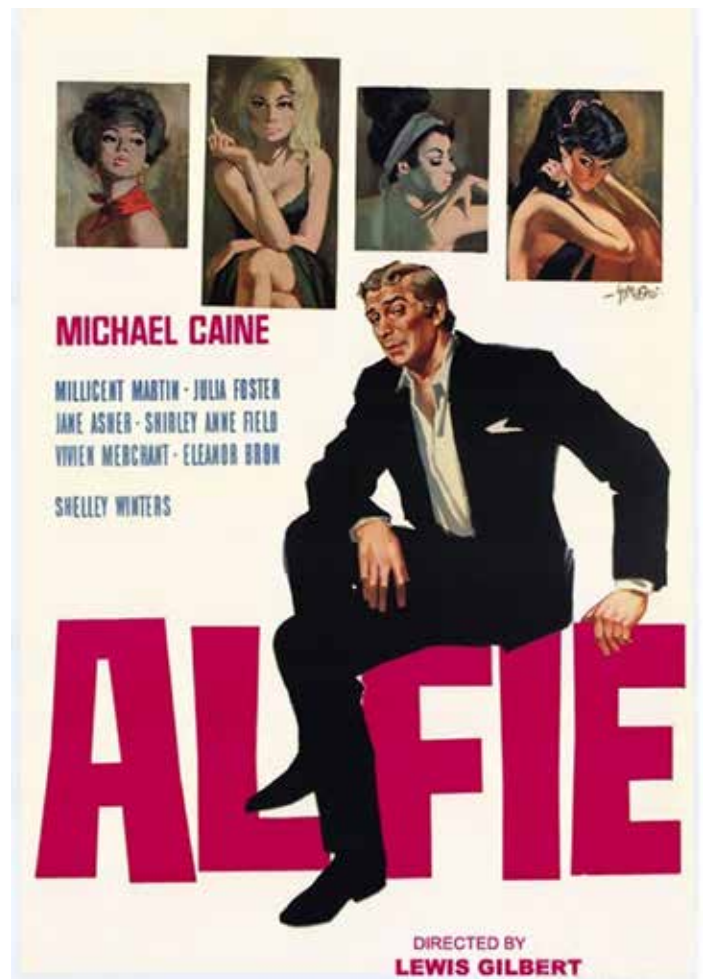
In his book *A Confession*, the renowned Russian author Leo Tolstoy asked: “What is the meaning of my life? What will come of my life? Why does everything which exists exist and why do I exist?” After spending many years searching for the answer to this quandary, in the end Tolstoy concluded that the solution was found in religion and faith—it had to do with God.

When you think about it, Tolstoy’s conclusion makes a lot of sense. If there is a god, surely he would have a purpose in creating life? But in the absence of a god, logic declares that the only explanation for the universe is that it got here by chance. In that case, it is devoid of meaning or purpose,

but something that just “happened”, nothing more than a serendipitous cosmic “accident”.

Celebrated writer C.S. Lewis questioned this scenario in his book *Mere Christianity*: “If the whole universe has no meaning, we should never have found out it has no meaning: just as, if there were no light in the universe and therefore no creatures with eyes, we should never know it was dark. Dark would be a word without meaning”.⁵

So we are presented with just two realistic alternatives. Either the world began by



What’s it all about, Alfie?

The 1966 movie *Alfie*, starring Michael Caine, was a resounding success on its release and became a classic, prompting a remake in 2002 with Jude Law in the lead role. The catchy tune of the Hal David and Burt Bacharach hit song of the original movie has achieved enduring popularity. Many people can hum the tune and remember the opening words: “What’s it all about, Alfie? Is it just for the moment we live?”

Interestingly, the lyrics of the hit vocal point to the biblical view of the meaning of life. They include the words: “I believe there’s a heaven above, Alfie”, and “I know there’s something much more, something that even non-believers can believe in”. This “something” turns out to be love. “I believe in love, Alfie.”

The Bible focuses on the overriding importance of love. It declares that God is love, and he made human life because of his love.¹⁶ He plans to share the universe with his children because he loves them. The reason God is having a family is no different from the reason we humans have families—because of love.

As another famous song accurately puts it: “Love makes the world go round”. Love is what makes life worthwhile and meaningful.

Hal David’s lyrics continue with the sentiment: “Without true love we just exist, Alfie”. When people find true love, it gives wonderful new meaning and purpose to their lives. No longer do they just exist, but suddenly there is a reason, a meaning for life.

The song continues: “Until you find the love you’ve missed you’re nothing, Alfie”. In other words, life has no meaning and we are of no value without love. The reference here is to love on the human level, which is vitally important, but the Bible talks about a “love that we’ve missed” which is even greater than that. People who read the Bible and understand it come face to face with the love of God. When they see that love demonstrated by the sending of Jesus into our world as a human being to die for us so that we can live forever as his brothers and sisters,¹⁷ they begin to see wonderful new meaning and purpose for their lives.



“Everything is Meaningless”

Believe it or not, a passage in the Bible says: “Meaningless, meaningless. Everything is meaningless”.¹⁸ The writer goes on to say that there is no meaning in wisdom, wealth or pleasure, because ultimately it all ends in death. You wouldn’t expect to find statements like this in the Bible!

The writer, King Solomon, a man highly respected for his wisdom, wrote these words out of frustration after spending a huge amount of time and resources in search of the purpose of life, and how to find true happiness. Solomon was an extremely wealthy king, and had plenty of resources to call on. So he was able to throw everything at this problem. He built mansions, gardens, parks, and vineyards. He bought more animals than anyone else in memory, had numerous slaves serving him, amassed piles of gold and silver, and even took on a harem, consisting of hundreds of women. “I denied myself nothing my eyes desired”, he said. Yet when he surveyed all of this, he concluded that it was all meaningless, and hadn’t brought happiness and fulfilment.¹⁹

So why is this story in the Bible? What can we learn from this experience?

There is one vital key at the end of this account that puts it all in perspective. The author begins to sum up: “Now all has been heard, here is the conclusion of the matter”.²⁰ Then he brings God into the picture, and declares that the whole duty of humans is to honour their heavenly father.²¹

The lesson is clear: apart from God, everything is meaningless. But with God in the frame, everything is full of meaning and life has a wonderful purpose after all.

“When I consider your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place, what is man that you are mindful of him, the son of man that you care for him?”⁸

random chance, in which case life has no meaning, or it was brought into being by a god, in which case it follows that he did it for a reason and it does have meaning.

As a matter of interest, let’s follow the latter line of reasoning for a moment and assume that God exists and the Bible is his revelation to mankind. Is there something in the Bible to indicate God’s purpose for making the world and is that purpose something that makes good sense?

The Biblical View

According to the opening passage of the Bible, at the creation of the world God said:

Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground.⁶

This declares that God made mankind to live on a higher level than the animals. In contrast to the animals, we were made “in the image of God”, in other words, possessing godly attributes which weren’t given to the animals, things such as the ability to think and reason abstractly, to imagine, to appreciate beauty, to love and to have a concept of and even

Mankind: Worthless or Priceless?

One of the greatest astronomers of all time, Carl Sagan, was interviewed by Ted Koppel on the U.S. Nightline TV programme just a few days before his death in 1996. He was asked if he had any final words of wisdom to share with the people of the earth, and this was his answer:

“We live on a hunk of rock and metal that circles a humdrum star that is one of 400 billion other stars that make up the Milky Way galaxy which is one of billions of other galaxies which make up the universe which may be one of a very large number, perhaps an infinite number of other universes. That is a perspective on human life and our culture that is well worth pondering.”

This perspective places us in a rather insignificant position — just a tiny, inconsequential speck buried in a vast universe.

It is interesting to contrast this view with that held by Christians and Jews, who believe a loving God designed this as a special planet carefully crafted to be a fitting home for the human beings who formed the pinnacle of his creative acts. Christians even believe that God himself stooped down to become a human being and suffered for each person he had created. This means we are so amazingly valuable that the incomprehensibly great God who created us was willing to die to save us! In that case we are priceless rather than worthless!

a relationship with God. Because of these god-like abilities, humankind was given authority over the animal world.

One of these remarkable human attributes was described by wise King Solomon, when he observed that God had “set eternity in the hearts of men”.⁷ That would explain our fascination with the vast and seemingly limitless universe and our ability to grapple

with concepts such as infinity and eternity. No wonder we think about the desirability and feasibility of living forever. God has equipped our minds to deal with these thoughts and concepts, of which animals have absolutely no inkling. The very fact we ask ourselves “What is the meaning of life?” highlights our remarkable capacity to contemplate and explore such intangible things.

Three thousand years ago King David of Israel recorded his musings on the meaning of life in one of his poems. Referring to God, he said: “When I consider your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place, what is man that you are mindful of him, the son of man that you care for him?”⁸

He went on to boldly respond to the age-old question about the purpose



One of our most remarkable human attributes was described by King Solomon, who observed that God has “set eternity in the hearts of men”.

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

of life: "You made him a little lower than the angels and crowned him with glory and honour. You made him ruler over the works of your hands; you put everything under his feet".⁹

This is a rather grandiose statement, claiming that everything is put under the control of mankind and we are crowned with glory and honour. But it is obvious that we don't have control of everything that happens around us, not even our own desires and emotions!

Later in the Bible, this statement is expounded with the note that although things aren't fully this way yet, David's poem foreshadowed or pointed to what will occur in the future.¹⁰ It goes on to repeat these astounding promises of glory and honour, and of ruling over everything in the universe. It adds that God is "bringing many sons and daughters to glory".¹¹

Children of God

The Bible refers in a number of places to humanity as "children" of God. For instance, the gospel of John, which speaks of Jesus Christ's time on the earth says:

Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God — children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God.¹²

Writing to the church in the city of Rome, the apostle Paul called his

audience "God's children" and went on to say: "Now if we are children, then we are heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory".¹³ In other words, the Bible shows the reason God created human beings is that he is producing a family, with whom he is going to share the universe! He is a God of love and wants to share all of his wealth and property with others.

Included in this promise is the opportunity to live forever. One of the most often quoted Bible verses says: "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".¹⁴

At the very end of the Bible, this amazing plan or purpose of God for mankind is repeated: "Those who are victorious will inherit all this, and I will be their God and they will be my children".¹⁵

What a marvellous promise! God is going to share everything he has with the human beings he has created. We are destined to inherit everything he possesses and live in an intimate family relationship with him forever. At last we have found the answer to life, the universe and everything. It is an inspirational and encouraging solution, and it was in the Bible all along!

In summary, there are two choices set before us. Either life, the universe and everything appeared by blind chance and therefore have

no intrinsic meaning, or God created us through his generosity, for the tremendous purpose of sharing the universe and his boundless love with us forever. It's quite a contrast, isn't it? What do you think makes the most sense?

Notes

- ¹ http://articles.chicagotribune.com/2002-06-03/news/0206030147_1_mr-moorhead-philosophy-answer.
- ² Walter T. Stace, "Men Against Darkness", *The Atlantic Monthly*, Sept 1948.
- ³ David Friend and the Editors of Life Magazine, "The Meaning of Life, Reflections in Words and Pictures on Why we are Here", 1991, p.3.
- ⁴ Bertrand Russell, *Why I am not a Christian*, Touchstone Books, New York, 1957, pp.106-107.
- ⁵ C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, Collins, Glasgow, 1978, p.42.
- ⁶ Genesis 1:26.
- ⁷ Ecclesiastes 3:11.
- ⁸ Psalm 8:3-4.
- ⁹ Psalm 8:5-6.
- ¹⁰ Hebrews 2:8.
- ¹¹ Hebrews 2:10.
- ¹² John 1:12-13.
- ¹³ Romans 8:17.
- ¹⁴ John 3:16.
- ¹⁵ Revelation 21:7.
- ¹⁶ John 3:16.
- ¹⁷ 1 John 3:1; 4:9-11; Romans 5:8.
- ¹⁸ Ecclesiastes 1:2.
- ¹⁹ Ecclesiastes 2:10-11.
- ²⁰ Ecclesiastes 12:11.
- ²¹ Ecclesiastes 12:13.



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. He can be contacted at rex@gci.org.nz



PEARLS OF WISDOM

by Cliff Neill

Some time ago I heard someone declare: “I’m as patient as an oyster!” This inspired me to spend some time and take a closer look at the lowly oyster and ask the question: “How is it patient?”

Pearls have been treasured for many centuries. They come from oysters far below the surface of the sea. A gemstone needs to be cut and polished to bring out its beauty, but pearls have no need of this treatment to reveal their loveliness. They emerge from oyster shells complete with a shimmering iridescence, an amazing lustre and a soft inner glow unlike any other gem on earth.

A natural pearl begins its life as a foreign body; a piece of grit or shell that enters the oyster’s shell and accidentally lodges itself against its soft inner body, where it cannot be expelled. To ease this irritation, the oyster takes defensive action to protect itself and begins to secrete a smooth hard crystalline substance called “nacre” or mother-of-pearl around the source of the irritation. This is a very slow process, but with great patience and determination the oyster will continue coating the irritant for many years and

the pearl inside will get larger and larger. The result is a lovely lustrous thing of beauty, a great prize for pearl fishers. These are termed “natural pearls”.

There are also “cultured pearls”, the result of impregnating oysters with a foreign body by hand and farming them to make money.

How something so beautiful emerges from an oyster’s way of protecting itself is one of nature’s loveliest surprises! But whether they are natural or cultured they all go through the same process—pain and patience!

Patience is an amazing asset in all kinds of situations. It suffers long and is kind, it doesn’t fly off the handle or get angry, it deals with difficult situations in a very gentle way, always deferring to others. Actually, the gift of patience is a pearl, a pearl of wisdom, a treasure well worth seeking out. Just imagine how much better this world would be if every human being was patient: no more road rage, no more checkout queue rows, no

more family arguments, no more pub fights. The list is endless.

How can we get more patience? An oft repeated aphorism says: “God give me patience, but do it right now!” Humorous, but also apt, in that it recognises the source of patience as God. The Bible reveals that patience is a gift from God, one of the fruits of his Spirit.¹

An oyster patiently produces pearls all by itself. With help from the Creator of everything, we can produce patience and other excellent fruits, such as joy, peace, love, kindness, goodness, gentleness, faithfulness, and self-control.²

Notes

¹ Galatians 5:22.

² Galatians 5:22.



If every human being were more patient, there would be no more road rage!

The Hidden Story behind *the Stones of Yap*

by Rod Matthews

Most people don't display their money in front of their home. But where it won't fit in the bank, and you can't lift it anyway, you don't need to worry too much about thieves. Money you can't easily move and don't normally use—what's the point?

Most likely Yap is a very long way from where you live. It is (or was) famous for its stone money. Yap is a small group of islands in the western Pacific with a population of around 12,000, making up one state of the Federated States of Micronesia. It's beautiful, remote, and its traditional money teaches a lesson for a lifetime—and I don't mean it has "In God We Trust" stamped on it. Actually, Yap does use the American dollar as its

primary currency, which does have that neglected message on the one-dollar bill.

The unique stone money of Yap is seen across the islands in most villages—large and small "wheels" of stone, with a hole in the middle. Large ones are often propped up outside homes, and some line roads as if they fell from the broken necklace of a giant woman, right out of Gulliver's Travels. Some are quite small, perhaps a couple of centimetres across, up to very large (well above the height of a man) and exceptionally heavy, and every size in between. Obviously the larger ones cannot be lifted by a single person. They must be carried or rolled on a pole through the hole.

Each individual stone has a specific value. Some are precious enough to buy a plot of land or a house.

However, you cannot tell the value of the stone by its size. A smaller stone could be worth much more than a larger one, even though it obviously it took much more effort to move the larger ones to their current location. So how do you tell?

Behind each stone is a story. It's a saga of a journey of challenges, of storms and endurance, of braving the elements and the open sea. For these stones do not originate in Yap. Most came from Palau, another group of islands 450 kilometres to the southwest. The stones were fashioned from the rock of Palau and then transported by rafts towed by open canoes, with outriggers and sails, by the courageous men of Yap, across vast distances of the western Pacific where the trade winds blow and there is an annual season of dangerous typhoons.



Plain sailing with a following wind, and you could be home in under a week, with never a doubt about the safe arrival of the stone "wheels". But encounter a storm, and the famed navigational skills and seamanship of the men from Yap were tested to the limit. Perhaps the canoe started to disintegrate under the weight of the stone and had to be repaired en route. Without doubt many such stones line the bottom of the Pacific along the route from Palau to Yap.

If the men had to wrestle the elements with all their might and skills to bring a stone home safely, then a higher value was attributed to that stone. A large stone that arrived after an easy trip was worth less than a smaller stone that endured tempest and trial, and perhaps nearly sank the canoe and its crew.

So, the lesson of the stone money is that you can't know its value by how big or heavy it is. Its value is inherent in its history. And that history isn't recorded in a certificate of authenticity but in the oral account of what it endured to get to where it is now. Of course, the history of many (perhaps most?) stones has been lost as they sit in the same place from generation to generation, once a symbol of triumph over the forces of life in the Pacific, and valued on the sacrifice of the men who brought them home. Now they are more decorative.

But when I wondered about the saga of the stones I was privileged to see personally when I visited Yap several years ago, it occurred to me that they contain a powerful lesson for each of us against judging by appearances. Looks often deceive. Like the stone money of Yap, the voyage of life that a person has experienced—whether been forced to take or chosen—is not printed on their forehead or tattooed on their arm.

The magnitude and scope of the mountains climbed and depths dived, the “snakes and ladders” of life, are known only to God, even if, in the safety of friends, parts of that journey are shared. The poverty-encrusted old man under the bridge, the weathered lines of the hunched grandmother, the sunken eyes of the cast-adrift teenager, the fear—and hope—of the refugee born to a family in a country he or she did not choose,



the tragic casualty of brutality who was in the “wrong place at the wrong time”, are so often the victims of presumptions and judgments and condemnations and dismissal.

We humans love ranking things, and people. Too often we make comparisons and attribute weaknesses so we feel better about ourselves, all based on scant facts and assumptions. How unfair!

Yet every person has a truly unique story and their looks tell us little. In the grand scheme of life here and afterwards, how personally grateful we can be that there is a God, who looks not on the outward appearances but on what cannot be seen: the heart.¹ The New Testament apostle Paul warned one of his congregations about comparisons based on looks and assumptions saying: “But in all this comparing and grading and competing, they quite miss the point”.²

Each man, woman, and child is a valuable treasure carved from the quarry of human life, and brought home across the stormy seas where “God is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish but everyone to come to repentance”.³

Seeing the formidable stone money of Yap, we can only be reminded of the value and respect, honour and love given to every human

being by the Creator, who made incredible sacrifices and gave up his own life that we should be brought safely home.⁴ We are not just an adornment to the front of God's house, placed there after a stormy journey, but a treasured member of his household forever: a child, yes, but a companion and friend, whom he wishes to love, and live and interact with forever.⁵

God's physical creation reflects his love of diversity and variation. With the divine perspective we see how God treasures each one of us, and therefore that perception should permeate our approach to one another.

The remarkable stone money of Yap, each piece with its personal history, stands as a physical monument to a greater spiritual truth that, if remembered in our daily walk, would preclude so much adverse comparison, aggravation, confrontation, and war.

Notes

- ¹ 1 Samuel 16:7.
- ² 2 Corinthians 10:12, the Message paraphrase.
- ³ 2 Peter 3:9.
- ⁴ John 3:16.
- ⁵ John 15:15.

Where's God?

by Richard Fowler

Have you ever played *Where's Wally?* Just think of the hours spent looking for the iconic red-and-white-jumpered man wearing Harry Potter-like glasses. I remember having competitions with my brothers to see who could find him first...if only I could have scanned quicker!

Now you can! Look no further (literally) because an AI robot has been created to find Waldo in seconds! This robot with an arm and hand uses artificial intelligence to scan all the faces on a page to pinpoint that face with rounded glasses and a hat.¹

When I heard this on the radio, it got me thinking. Finding God—or this higher force—can be a bit like *Where's Wally?*

Where is God amongst the smorgasbord of spiritual choices, in this pick 'n' mix, spiritual-supermarket society? Is there even an answer, or will we always be searching and never finding this spiritual Waldo?

Let's be real: it's hard to search and scan for God with so much choice out there. Do we even have the time to look at all the gods? I must admit, the Marvel films have got me liking the Norse god, Thor. Who doesn't like a dude with a hammer that no one else can pick up? But what about the Greek and Roman Olympian deities like Zeus, Ares, and Eris, the god of strife who liked creating mayhem amongst humans? Wonder Woman is not

bad either! Or maybe we can find God in the Pantheon, a Roman temple dedicated to all the pagan gods.

But what if, amongst all the options, we were to miss out one god, and this god happens to be the "right" God? Indeed, will we ever know the right, real, and true God, if there is one?

This is not a modern problem. About 2000 years ago, many Greeks in Athens also tried to cover every base in their search for who God is. In case they missed out a god in their search and worship, they created a place in Athens dedicated "to the unknown god". At this same time, came a famous seeker of God called Paul to this ancient equivalent of TED talks. It was a place called the Hill of Ares (or Mars): a place to look at the smorgasbord of gods, a place to hear of something new spiritually.

So Paul decided to bring something new. Seeing these people were playing the spiritual *Where's God?* game, he decided to share his life hack. He took to the hill and said:

The God who made the world and everything in it is the Lord of heaven and earth...[he] did this so that [we] would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from any one of us.²

He shared a unique idea. This unique God was not a distant, far away force or being that is hard to find. Actually, he is close to us. But how?

This is where Paul's life hack comes in. He explains this God of creation did something very different. Different from all other gods. He did not remain distant, elusive, or hide like our friend Waldo. This God took up residence with us on earth! Paul then explains why.

God wanted to get up close and personal, so he became human himself! No more distance, no more separation. A real God that we can relate to. This was new! This is still new amongst the many ideas about God today. His name? Emmanuel—a transliteration from Hebrew which means "God with us". Also known as Jesus.

But maybe a roll of the eyes is met with the reading of this name. "I already know of this god", you might say. But have you heard what makes him different?

Jesus, amongst other gods, is unique because instead of being a distant God, he decided to meet us where we are. Here on earth. Which means, he found us! He played the game in reverse: *Where's You?* He played the finder because we find it difficult to find him.

So, no artificial intelligence needed! If you're looking, remember, God is not far from you. Reach out.

Notes

¹ <https://www.independent.co.uk/life-style/gadgets-and-tech/wheres-wally-waldo-video-robot-ai-artificial-intelligence-arm-redpepper-rasberrypi-a8487596.html>

² Acts 17:24, 27. (NIV)

Revenge is sweet...

by Richard Fowler

But forgiveness is sweeter... and healthier for us.

We have all experienced, I'm sure, the kind of satisfaction that comes from indulging in a bit of one-upmanship by getting your own back after you have been wronged. After all, didn't they deserve it?

Maybe they did, but before your *nucleus accumbens* (part of the brain linked to the feeling of satisfaction) gets fired up by the feelings created by the act of revenge, press pause, and remember that there is something sweeter on offer.

In a recent *New Scientist* article, it was suggested that forgiveness may be a better option for you. After all, the consequences of revenge can sometimes get out of hand: with findings showing revenge as a causal factor for up to 20% of homicides worldwide each year,¹ so we might have to agree. But why do humans forgive in the first place?

Well, the article goes on to postulate something quite curious. According to Graham Lewton, the article's author, the reason that humans forgive is because of "an instinctive cognitive trait that evolved to lubricate our often-fraught social interactions".²

So, forgiveness is part of an instinctive cognitive tool-kit that has evolved to cool social disconnection? Really? Well, can we have a little more evolution, please (said with some satire)!

Sometimes I do have to smile when reading about alleged antecedents that apparently give evolutionary rise to *homo sapiens'*

most complex psychological functioning. Quite frankly, I don't know whether there is anything instinctive about forgiveness. But I can tell you that you may live longer if you practise unconditional forgiveness a little more.³

Unconditional! Now there's a word. And a word that leads you and me to the real reason why we should forgive, and why forgiveness could be easier.

When we learn to forgive, it has incredible ability to change you and the offender (if you want to read about how one woman forgave and befriended her brother's killer, read this⁴). Yes, it can help us live healthier and longer. But there's a greater instinct and reason for why we forgive others. And this is it:

Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you.⁵

Forgiveness can come from us because we too have also been unconditionally forgiven by Jesus, when he gave his life for us by dying on the cross so that our sins can be forgiven. In fact, this truth makes it easier to forgive. If we have done wrong, then it is easier to understand when other people wrong us. If we need forgiveness from God, let us also freely forgive others.

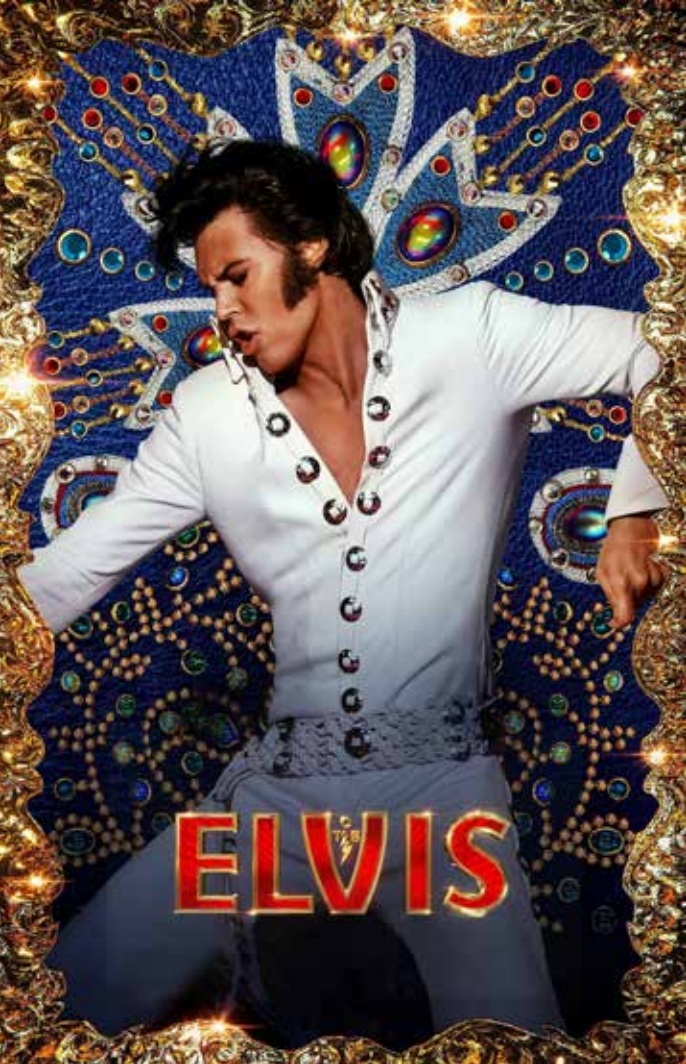
Simply put, forgiveness is the great leveller. It brings us all to the same place. I hope to see you there.

Notes

- ¹ <https://www.newscientist.com/article/mg23631561-100-effortless-thinking-it-pays-to-resist-revenges-sweet-taste/>
- ² Ibid.
- ³ http://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/entry/forgiveness-health-benefits_n_6029736
- ⁴ http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/resources/idt-sh/my_brothers_killer_is_now_my_friend
- ⁵ Colossians 3:13.



But, forgiveness is sweeter...and healthier for us, too.



by Rusty Wright

Elvis lives. At least in the hearts of his fans, and they are everywhere! Warner Bros. new movie, *Elvis*, extends the legacy. Why does the raven-haired, swivel-hipped crooner still fascinate millions nearly 45 years after his death?

Hundreds of Elvis fan clubs have spanned the globe from Memphis to Moscow, Africa to Australia, Belgium to Brazil, Sweden to Sri Lanka. Fandom is multigenerational, comprising not just his contemporaries; modest but noteworthy Elvis popularity even exists among Millennials and Gen Z.

The *Elvis* cast includes Austin Butler (*Once Upon a Time in Hollywood*) as Elvis, Oscar-winner Tom Hanks (*Forrest Gump*, *Philadelphia*) as Colonel Tom Parker, and Olivia DeJonge as Priscilla Presley. *Elvis* presents a fascinating glimpse into the

Elvis movie:

All Shook Up

meets

Heartbreak Hotel

star's passions and times. Like his life, the film is fast-moving, flamboyant, entertaining, permeated with pizzazz and pain.

Always on My Mind

Elvis Aaron Presley died on 16 August 1977, at 42. His songs still fill the airwaves. His face graces postage stamps and velvet paintings worldwide. Thousands trek to Graceland, his Memphis home, to pay homage to the King of Rock and Roll.

Impersonators abound. The “Flying Elvi” (plural of “Elvis”, get it?) combines skydiving with Elvis nostalgia. Merchants sell “Barbie Loves Elvis” doll sets, Elvis mouse pads, and Elvis wine. There’s a “First Presleyterian Church”.

Even academics are into Elvis. The University of Mississippi has held international conferences on Elvis Presley. Scholarly seminars included “Civil Rights: Martin Luther King, Jr., and Elvis”; “Elvis: The Twinless Twins’ Search for Spiritual Meaning” (Elvis’s twin

brother died at birth); and “Elvis ’n’ Jesus”.

America. What a country.

Stuck on You?

Many Graceland pilgrims display deep reverence with candlelight ceremonies, flowers and icons. Some fans talk to Elvis. One scholar at Mississippi’s International Conference on Elvis Presley noted that “without looking at spirituality, you can’t explain the Elvis phenomena”.¹

Do some have a psychological need to believe in Elvis? A southern California M.D. wondered if fans may be bonding with a romanticised part of their youth. And, he added: “People who don’t have God make a god out of all sorts of things”.

Are You Lonesome Tonight?

Does the Elvis craze suggest deep human longings? Some seek happiness through success, wealth or relationships. Probably everyone has at least one “Elvis” in their life: a person, idea, team, goal or possession that inspires

their devotion and quest for fulfillment.

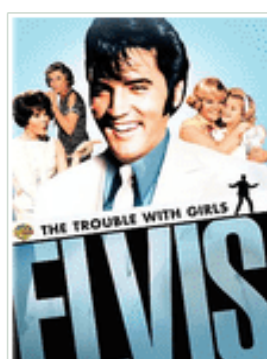
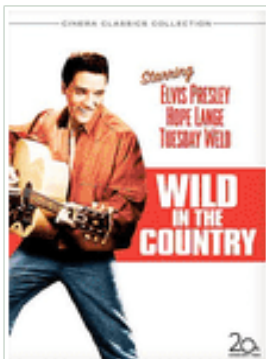
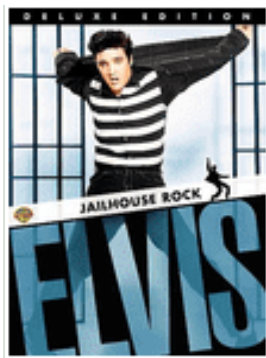
But human-based searches for ultimate happiness can be risky. There will almost always be someone richer, more intelligent or articulate, better looking or more popular than we are. Our teams will lose; our heroes will have flaws. Even if you reach the top...what then? The death rate is still 100%.

In the film, Elvis's manager Col. Tom Parker reflects near the end of the singer's career: "We are the same, you and I. We are two odd, lonely children, reaching for eternity". The movie

clearly portrays the impact of Christian faith on young Elvis, who, at a tent revival meeting, undergoes an ecstatic body-shaking spiritual experience that mimics—and possibly inspires—his adult stage performances.

He Touched Me

Probably few realise that Elvis's only Grammy Awards came for "How Great Thou Art" and "He Touched Me", famous songs of faith. The lyrics, which reflect his own spiritual roots, point to hope beyond human accomplishment.



Mark Anthony, one of the myriad Elvis impersonators, on stage during the "Surfers Paradise Elvis Birthday Bash", 7 January 2011, Surfers Paradise, QLD Australia.

The biblical God alluded to in these songs is described elsewhere as a friend of those in need. "The Lord is my shepherd", wrote an Israelite king. "I have all that I need".³

Spiritual matters, of course, can be controversial. Respected universities like Duke, Harvard, and Michigan study faith's impact on health. An increasing number of healthcare professionals emphasise "whole-person" care—seeking physical, psychological, and spiritual health.

Some counselors encourage their clients to get in touch with their "inner Elvis". As the world commemorates the forty-fifth anniversary of his passing, perhaps it would be more fruitful to look beyond our "inner Elvis" to Someone greater.

Notes

- 1 <https://probe.org/elvis-has-left-the-building/>
- 2 <https://www.everyperson.com/features/know-God.html>
- 3 Psalm 23:1.

Although he is remembered as a rock and roll superstar, Elvis Presley acted in an incredible 31 movies between 1956 and 1969! He starred alongside screen legends Ursula Andress, Ed Asner, Carolyn Jones, Dean Jones, Angela Lansbury, Walter Matthau, Mary Tyler Moore, and more.

Rusty Wright is an author and lecturer who has spoken on six continents. He holds Bachelor of Science (psychology) and Master of Theology degrees from Duke and Oxford universities, respectively. www.RustyWright.com
Copyright © 2022 Rusty Wright

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?
- ❖ Before the “Big Bang”
- ❖ Why Does God Allow Suffering?
- ❖ Is Death the End?
- ❖ What Is the Greatest Pandemic?
- ❖ 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:
