

Inside Life

**The Book
That Changed the World**

**A Wedding Ceremony
for Today**

**Put Some ZIP
into Your Relationships**

Rescue Mission

Issue 15
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Inside Life

A Magazine of Understanding

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CONTENTS

The Book That Changed the World	3
Laugh a Little—It's Good for Your Health	9
Trinkets, Trash...and Treasures	10
A Wedding Ceremony for Today	11
Put Some ZIP into Your Relationships	13
Rescue Mission	15

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.

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

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Our Cover: This year marks the 400th anniversary of the 1611 publication of the King James Version of the Holy Bible. Our lead article traces the history of this, the most widely circulated and influential book of all time. Why have so many people given their lives to promote and defend the distribution of the Bible?

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The Book That Changed the World

By Rex Morgan

May 2, 2011 marked the 400th anniversary of the publication of the King James Version of the Bible (KJV). The anniversary was celebrated with a number of special events, including the production of a 90-minute movie, 'The Book That Changed the World', featuring acclaimed actor John Rhys-Davies. In April, Taranaki Cathedral Dean Jamie Allen read the entire KJV aloud non-stop (except for 5-minute breaks each hour), a marathon feat that took more than three days.

The KJV has been described as the most important and influential book of all time. More copies have been printed than of any other book in history—over a billion copies have been sold—and it has been translated into more languages than any other book. It has exerted unparalleled influence on English culture in nearly every sphere, including education, law, literature, government, art, science, and religion. It has served as a life-transforming source of inspiration and comfort for millions of people.

'No other book of any kind ever written in English, perhaps no other book ever written in any other tongue, has so affected the whole life of a whole people as this authorised version¹ of the Scriptures has affected the life of

the English-speaking peoples', said US President Theodore Roosevelt.

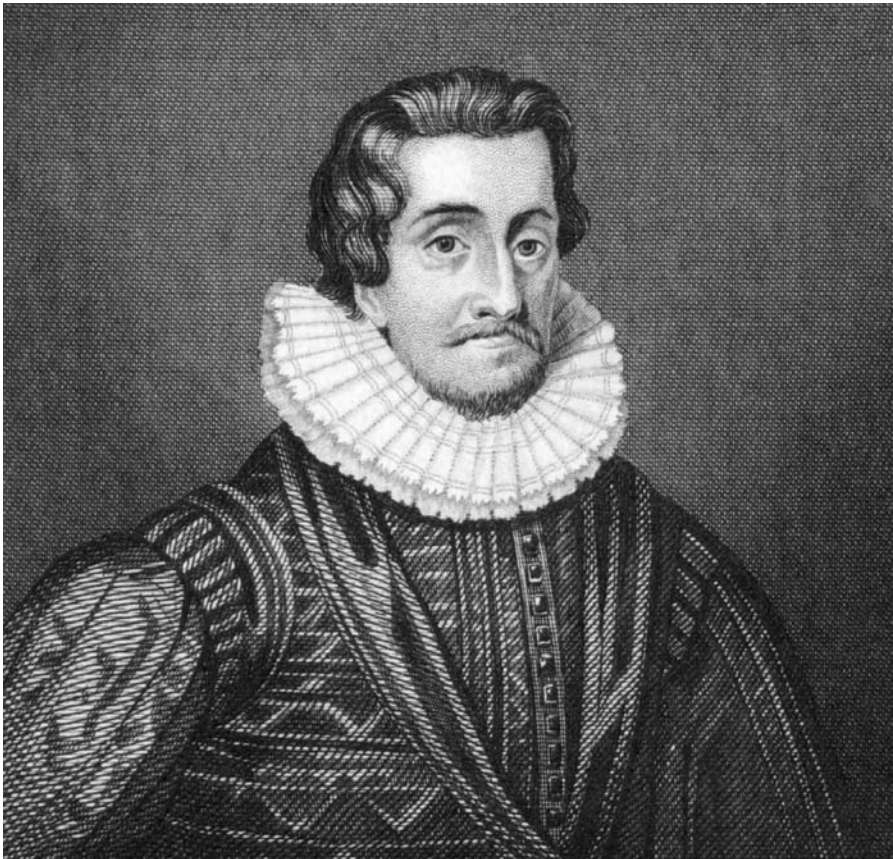
It is fascinating to look at the story behind the development of this extraordinary book.

Early Translations

Before the introduction of the KJV in 1611, there had been a few attempts to translate the Bible, or portions of it, into English. Until that time the Scriptures were only available in the original Hebrew or Greek, or a Latin translation (the Vulgate) made in AD 405. In medieval times, church services were conducted in Latin, and were unintelligible to most parishioners.

The first complete English translation of the Bible was completed by John Wycliffe, an Oxford master and theologian, in 1382. This was before the invention of printing, so copies had to be written out by hand. People would pay to be able to read it for an hour, and it is said that a load of hay was sometimes given for a few pages of it. The religious authorities of the day, however, didn't want the Scriptures to be publicly available, and forbade people from reading the Bible in English under penalty of death. Wycliffe died in 1384, and even 40 years later church officials showed their contempt for his work by digging up his bones and burning them!

The next effort to translate the Bible into English was made by a gifted scholar, fluent in eight languages, William Tyndale. His work was also vehemently opposed by the church of the time. He was forced to flee the country and do most of his translation in hiding in Germany. He completed the New Testament in 1525. Printing from movable type had recently been invented² so Tyndale had a



King James the First of England, from an engraving done in 1830, and published in London by Thomas Kelly.

printer in Cologne produce 6,000 copies. The job was interrupted when opponents raided the print shop. Tyndale, however, heard of their plans, and escaped with the pages already printed. A printer in the city of Worms finished the job, and the copies were smuggled into England in barrels of flour and bales of cloth. Most of them were found by the religious authorities and burnt outside St Paul's cathedral.

Agents were sent to Europe to catch Tyndale, and he was imprisoned in Belgium in dreadful conditions for a year and a half before being tried for treason and heresy. While in jail he requested a Hebrew grammar book and dictionary so he could continue translating the Old Testament. In 1536 he was publicly strangled with a rope and burned at the stake. His last words were 'Lord, open the King of England's eyes'.

It wasn't long before Tyndale's dying prayer was answered. Within months of his death King Henry VIII encouraged the distribution of English Bibles. This resulted in the production of several other versions, including the Coverdale Bible, the Geneva Bible, and the Bishops' Bible.

Enter King James

In 1603, on the death of Elizabeth I, James VI of Scotland ascended the throne of England as James I, and became the first monarch to unite Scotland, England, and Ireland as Great Britain. He was also the founding monarch of the American colonies, giving his name to Jamestown, Virginia. He was a talented scholar and wrote several books and articles on poetry, law, politics, and religion. He became patron for one of his most famous subjects, William



Modern translations of the Bible that owe their existence to the King James version (centre): The Message, The New English Bible, The Revised Standard Version, and The New International Version.

Shakespeare, who wrote the play *Macbeth* specifically for King James.

King James was the victim of a number of assassination plots, including Guy Fawkes' infamous 'gunpowder plot', an attempt to kill the King and all of the ruling elite in one stroke by blowing up the House of Lords on 5 November 1605. The plot was exposed, and Fawkes, along with a number of co-conspirators, were brought to justice.

A year earlier King James had appointed around 50 leading scholars to a committee charged with preparing an official translation of the Bible into English to replace the current translations. Because some were considered to be inaccurate, and others biased, the foremost linguists and biblical experts in the country were carefully chosen to compare and draw on all of the extant translations, as well as the Hebrew and Greek originals. They were divided into six teams in three different cities.

Each group was given sections of the scriptures to tackle, with each eventually cross-checking the work of the others. Each committee included scholars with diverse religious views to ensure no doctrinal slant would dominate. Never before had such an amount of careful labour been expended on an English Bible.

After several years of meticulous editing work the scholars had completed a version that was accurate and beautiful in the resonant and dignified tones of its prose, and notable for the richness and majesty of its style. Its elegant and stately language and rhythmic prose made it a delight to read, and hear being read. It was dedicated to 'the most high and mighty prince James, by the grace of God King of Great Britain, France and Ireland, defender of the faith', as can be read in its preface.

Actor Charlton Heston wrote in his autobiography: 'the King James translation has been described as the

only great work of art ever created by a committee...Over the past several centuries it's been the single book in most households, an enormous force in shaping the development of the English language. Carried around the world by missionaries...Exploring it...was one of the most rewarding creative experiences of my life'.

The KJV didn't take long to gain popularity with the masses, becoming the Bible of the English-speaking people. As the British Empire spread around the world, the KJV went with it, playing a foundational part in the culture, education, and governmental systems of many nations. Art, literature, and music have been profoundly shaped by language and stories from the Bible.

The KJV provided the English language with hundreds of now well-known phrases such as 'let there be light', 'eat, drink and be merry', 'my cup runneth over', 'bring hither the fatted calf', 'a fly in the ointment', 'my brother's keeper', 'new wine in old bottles', 'fought the good fight', 'out of the mouth of babes', 'give up the ghost', 'salt of the earth', 'to set one's teeth on edge', 'the land of the living', 'from strength to strength', 'by the skin of one's teeth', 'lamb to the slaughter', 'chariots of fire', 'good Samaritan', 'how are the mighty fallen', 'an eye for an eye', 'turn the other cheek', and 'pride goes before a fall'.

David Crystal's 2010 book *Begat* posits that the KJV has contributed more to English than any other literary source.

Modern Translations

It was more than 250 years before a serious attempt was made to displace the long-lasting KJV with an updated translation, the English Revised Version in the 1880s. The English language is constantly changing, so there is a need to provide translations that take advantage of contemporary vocabulary and idiom. This has given rise to a flurry of other translations in recent years. But not until the

popularity of the New International Version (NIV) of 1978 did any other version seriously rival the KJV. Sales of the NIV began surpassing those of the KJV in 1988, but the KJV is still being published and sold a full four centuries after its origin.

In addition, we now have the wonderful modern world of the internet, and the Bible is now available on dozens of websites, on Facebook, and even on Twitter. A 'Twitter Bible' published in Germany summarises the over 30,000 verses of the Bible into around 4,000 short 'tweets'.

Interestingly, even the renowned atheist Christopher Hitchens in a recent article pointed to the importance of the KJV in our language and culture. 'It's near impossible to imagine our idiom and vernacular, let alone our liturgy, without it. Not many committees in history have come up with such crystalline prose... The translators' legacy remains...a giant step in the maturing of English literature.'³

Another notable atheist, Richard Dawkins, wrote in *The God Delusion*: 'The King James Bible of 1611 includes passages of outstanding

literary merit in its own right, for example the Song of Songs, and the sublime Ecclesiastes...But the main reason why the English Bible needs to be part of our education is that it is a major source book for literary culture...Surely ignorance of the Bible is bound to impoverish one's appreciation of English literature... [An] atheistic world-view provides no justification for cutting the Bible, and other sacred books, out of our education'⁴.

What about You?

You probably have a Bible somewhere in your home, but have you ever read it? The fact that so many versions have been printed, so many copies sold, and so many lives lost getting this book to us, indicates there is something very special about it.

Reading the Bible can appear to be a daunting task, in view of its large size and its apparently difficult language. But in fact it contains relevant and interesting information on such topics as friendship, sex and marriage, the use of money, habits and character traits, resolving interpersonal conflict, principles of health, and many practical questions of everyday living. It

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5 Elizabeth Street, Petone

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One of the most familiar passages in the language of the King James Bible: Ecclesiastes 3

has changed so much over 400 years that the language of 1611 is somewhat obscure to modern people. For a first-time reader, I would recommend the use of a more recent version, such as the *New International Version*⁷, or the *New King James Version*⁸. Other examples such as the *Good News Bible*⁹ and *The Message*¹⁰ version employ even easier-to-read, contemporary, colloquial idiom.

Much more important than which version you use is the decision to actually put your nose into the Bible and have a read! That could well

includes a record of history, and also looks ahead to the future. It provides an understanding of why the world is in the condition it is, and why humans do the things they do.

The most remarkable feature of the Bible is that it claims to be divinely inspired. If that is correct, then clearly it is a critically important book. Regardless, it is well worth reading because of its significance in the world of literature. As you read it, you can evaluate for yourself whether it is genuine and God-given.⁵ If you never sample it, how can you know for sure?⁶

So why not have a read of the Bible?

An investment of just 10 to 15 minutes a day would enable you to complete the Bible in about a year. But there's no need to make such a big commitment if you don't want to. Even reading one or two chapters is better than nothing.

Where to Start?

But where to start? The Bible is divided into two sections, the Old

Testament, covering history from creation until the time a few centuries before the birth of Jesus Christ, and the New Testament, starting at Christ's birth, recording his life and teachings, and then moving on to the development of the church he founded. It is a good idea for the new reader to jump to the second section to begin with, as the New Testament is shorter, faster moving, and more easily applicable to today's society.

The Bible doesn't have to be read from beginning to end—it is fine to skip from one part to another, following what is of interest at the time. You could start by reading a simple love story such as the book of Ruth, just a few pages that can be read in one sitting. Or you could focus on one of Jesus' miracles, such as the healing of Lazarus in John 11. You can browse through a list of wise principles of living, such as Proverbs 15 or Colossians 3. When you open it up and start reading, you might find it hard to put down! The Bible is fascinating and filled with human interest.

Much as I have lauded the KJV in this article, it is true that English

open up to you a whole new world of understanding as you encounter the message of the Kingdom of God, including timeless principles and insights on living a happier and more successful life.

The acronym 'Basic Instructions Before Leaving Earth' has fittingly been applied to the Bible. It does contain important guidelines for living, and it also includes information about eternity, life beyond the grave. This is one area where the Bible is uniquely qualified to speak. Since it claims to be the word of God, it speaks out on spiritual issues, presenting knowledge that can't be found anywhere else. It tells us things about our inner thoughts and motivations, and also speaks of a world beyond the bounds of physical existence. So it has some surprises in store, some fascinating revelation for people who have not read it before.

The Best Translation

The story is told of four pastors who were discussing the merits of the various translations. One said he liked the KJV best because of its simple, beautiful English. The next one said

What Famous People Have Said about the Bible...

Abraham Lincoln: 'In regard to this Great Book, I have but to say, it is the best gift God has given to man... But for it we could not know right from wrong'. (Barack Obama took the oath of office on the same KJV that had been used by Abraham Lincoln in 1861.)

George Washington: 'It is impossible to rightly govern the world without God and the Bible.'

Queen Victoria: 'That book is the secret of England's greatness.'

Charles Dickens: 'The New Testament is the very best book that ever was or ever will be known in the world.'

Theodore Roosevelt: 'A thorough knowledge of the Bible is worth more than a college education.'

William Gladstone: 'I have known ninety-five of the world's great men in my time, and of these, eighty-seven were followers of the Bible. The Bible is stamped with a Specialty of Origin, and an immeasurable distance separates it from all competitors.'

Napoleon Bonaparte: 'The Bible is far more than a book to me; it speaks to me as if it were a person. This book surpasses all others. I never omit to read it, and every day with some pleasure. Alexander, Caesar, Charlemagne and I myself have founded great empires... upon force. Jesus alone founded his empire upon love. None else is like him; Jesus was more than man.'

Sir William Herschel: 'All human discoveries seem to be made only for the purpose of confirming more and more the truths contained in the Sacred Scriptures.'

Jean Jacques Rousseau: 'The Gospel has marks of truth so great, so striking, so utterly inimitable, that the invention of it would be more astonishing than the hero.'

Lord Tennyson: 'Bible reading is an education in itself.'

Immanuel Kant: 'I believe that the existence of the Bible is the greatest benefit to the human race. Any attempt to belittle it, I believe, is a crime against humanity.'

Robert E. Lee: 'In all my perplexities and distresses, the Bible has never failed to give me light and strength.'

Victor Hugo: 'England has two books; the Bible and Shakespeare. England made Shakespeare, but the Bible made England.'

Cecil B. DeMille: 'After more than 60 years of almost daily reading of the Bible, I never fail to find it always new and marvellously in tune with the changing needs of every day.'

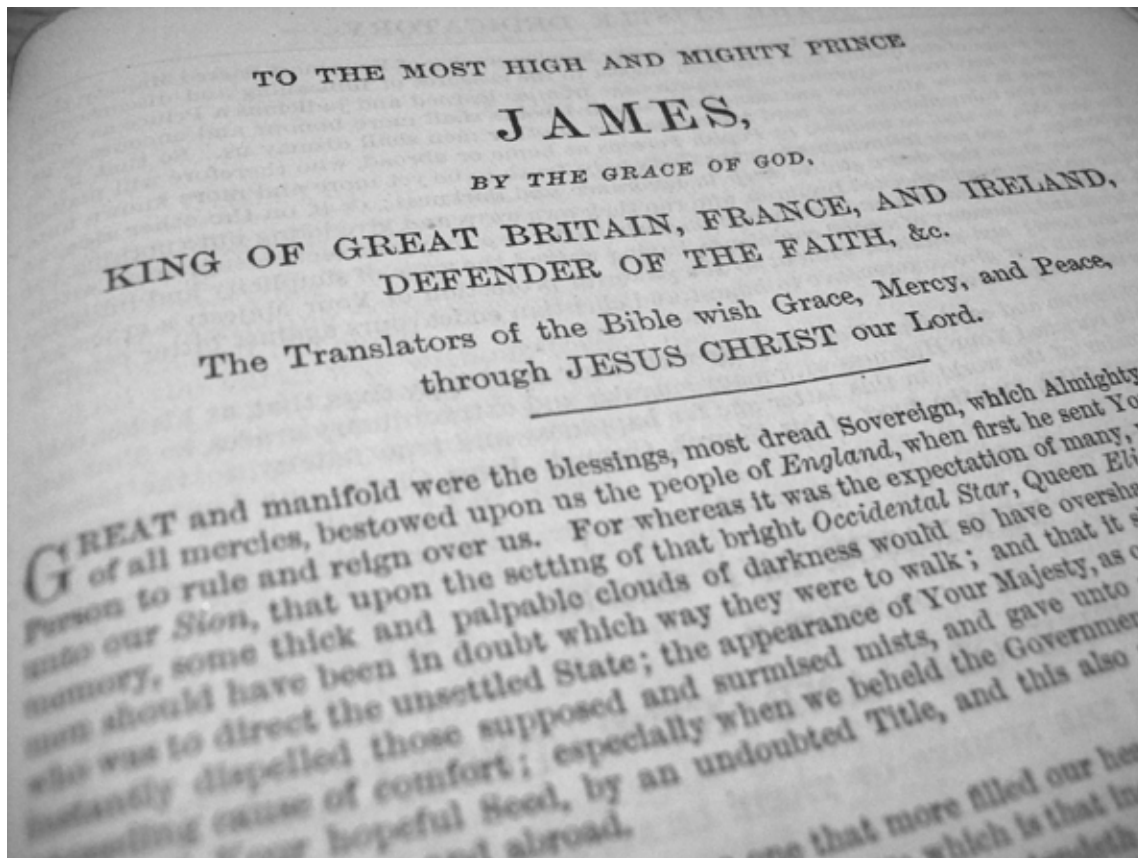
he preferred a more scholarly edition that was more literal and closer to the original Hebrew and Greek. The third said he liked *The Message Bible* because of its up-to-date vocabulary. The fourth minister was quiet for a moment and then said: 'I like my mother's translation best'.

Surprised, the other men said they didn't know his mother had translated the Bible. 'Yes', he replied, 'she translated it into life, and it was the most convincing translation I've ever seen'.

In that regard, one useful modern version worth noting is called *The Life Application Bible*¹¹. This includes helpful marginal notes guiding the reader to gain more from the reading, and focusing on how to put the words into practice in everyday life.

Why have so many—indeed, several millions over the past two millennia—been prepared to defend this book with their lives?¹² What ethics, teachings, lives, and narratives could possibly have motivated people to do this? In view of the amount of blood, sweat, and tears shed in order to get this once-forbidden book into our hands, and the witness of many famous people as to its value¹³, isn't it time you opened up a copy of the Bible?

If you start reading, and come across questions or need help, please feel free to contact us here at *Inside Life* and we'll do our best to assist. Or why not go to a local church, and see if they can be of help?



The translators' dedication of the King James Bible

Don't let this wonderful resource go begging! The Bible has transformed the lives and thinking of multiple thousands of people. The 'book that changed the world' can also change you!

Notes

- ¹ The KJV is also commonly called the 'Authorised Version' because of its royal commissioning.
- ² The printing press was invented in Germany by Johannes Gutenberg around 1440. His first printed book was the Bible, in Latin.
- ³ Christopher Hitchens, 'When the King Saved God', *Vanity Fair*, May 2011.
- ⁴ Richard Dawkins, *The God Delusion*, Houghton, Mifflin Co., pp. 340-344.
- ⁵ The Bible itself asks the reader to 'prove all things' (1 Thessalonians 5:21 [KJV]) and speaks of people who 'searched the scriptures' to establish the truth (Acts 17:11 [KJV]).
- ⁶ It is outside the scope of this article to address the accuracy of the Bible, but previous *Inside Life* articles have covered this issue. If this subject is of interest, please write to us for copies of our articles 'The Bible, Holy or Holey?' and 'Can We Trust the Bible?'

- ⁷ A top-selling translation prepared by a team of 115 scholars in 1978.
- ⁸ A revision of the KJV published in 1982.
- ⁹ An easy to read version using simple everyday language. Published by the American Bible Society in 1976.
- ¹⁰ A highly colloquial paraphrase reading like a novel, even omitting verse numbers. Translated by Eugene Peterson, and first published in 1993.
- ¹¹ A study Bible available in several versions, including the KJV, NKJV, and NIV. Each translation comes with over 10,000 study notes that help readers to understand the Bible and make it relevant to life in the 21st century.
- ¹² See http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Persecution_of_Christians.
- ¹³ See p. 7.



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@wccg.org.nz.

Laugh a Little— It's Good for Your Health

By Rusty Wright

Had a good laugh recently? Need one? Stressful days can invite comic relief. Doctors realise that laughter can enhance physical and mental health. Now it seems even looking forward to laughter can be good for you.

WebMD reports that Lee Berk, MD, a University of California Irvine medical professor, and his associates have for years investigated how moods affect immune systems and illness. They've found laughter has a role in fighting viruses, bacteria, cancer, and heart disease.

Stress can hamper your immune system; a good chuckle can help it. Berk found earlier that watching a one-hour humorous video reduced stress hormone secretion and helped the immune system counter viruses and bacteria.

But there's more: Berk now says the mere anticipation of laughing can help. He studied ten men, measured their stress signs, and told them that in about three days they would see a humorous video. In each man, spirits lifted before viewing the video.

Two days before the viewing, depression was down 51 percent, confusion 36 percent, anger 19 percent, fatigue 15 percent, and tension 9 percent. Right after the viewing, depression and anger were both down 98 percent, fatigue 87 percent, confusion

75 percent, and tension 61 percent.

Berk feels anticipating humour brightens life and affects health. He calls this influence the 'biology of hope'. Berk says: 'Positive anticipation of humour starts the ball rolling in a sense, in which moods begin to change in ways that help the body fight illness. We believe this shows that even anticipation can be used to help patients recover from a wide range of disorders'.

The moral: planning humour can benefit your health. Watch a funny movie, or spend time with humorous people. Tell your boss, professor, clergy, or club chairperson to liven up their speeches a bit if they want healthy employees, students, or members. Put laugh-breaks on your calendar, since anticipation is part of the therapy.

A Jewish proverb observes: 'A cheerful heart is good medicine, but a crushed spirit dries up the bones'. Paul, a first-century follower of Jesus, emphasised hope: 'May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope....' Those biblical writers have good advice, practical stuff for everyday life.

The other day, a friend sent what he claimed were comments from civil-service performance evaluations. Maybe because I've encountered a groundswell of administrivia-creating



bureaucrats recently, some of the remarks left me roaring with laughter, and I felt much better. With apologies to the many capable civil servants, do you know anyone like this?

'Since my last report, this employee has reached rock bottom and has started to dig.'

'I would not allow this employee to breed.'

'This young lady has delusions of adequacy.'

'He sets low personal standards and then consistently fails to achieve them.'

'Got a full six-pack, but lacks the plastic thing to hold it all together.'

Those biblical writers would probably tell me to pray for those who hassle me, advice I should heed. But this laughter-break lifted my spirits and got me going again.

So, laugh more. You'll like it. And say, have you heard the one about...?

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

Trinkets,
and

Trash...



Treasures

By John McLean

Late in 2010, Australia experienced the worst floods in its history, followed by cyclones, while other parts of the country have had devastating bushfires. Property has been destroyed, homes ruined, lives have been lost. We have witnessed surges of water hurling cars as if they were toys, washing some houses away, wrecking others, uprooting trees, destroying roads, railway lines, and bridges. It has been tragic, sad, and heartbreaking.

Yet in the midst of it all, we have also seen amazing courage, selflessness, cooperation, and service. People standing in the midst of their ruined homes, facing the loss of possessions, valuables, and the work of a life-time have smiled, cried, smiled again, and said that life goes on. They have pitched in to help strangers and communities. Neighbours who had previously had only a nodding acquaintance with one another cleared muck from one another's homes together. The 'Mud Army' of volunteers embodied the spirit that rose in response to the challenge presented by this devastating natural calamity.

In a crisis, we know, deep down, that people matter more than things. Indeed, at such times it seems we can be clear and certain that family,

friends, mateship, community, and helping one another are the things that really matter.

Terry Sweetman, writing in the *Sunday Mail* (16 January 2011), after describing his own experience with the Brisbane flood, expressed it cogently: 'Materially we are briefly impoverished. Spiritually we are enriched—now and forever. In exchange for some trinkets and trash devoured by flood waters, we have found some treasures we have forgotten existed....My pledge is that we will never again neglect the garden of friendship from which we have harvested so much kindness'.

In the Sermon on the Mount, probably the best known of Jesus' teaching, Jesus makes the observation that life is more than possessions and eating and drinking. He isn't saying that eating and drinking and our material possessions are unimportant, just that there is more to life than these things. He isn't condemning working, earning, going into business, saving, building a house. He is saying that there is more to life than these things.

Deep down, we know this to be true. In times of crisis, the distractions and details of everyday life, the tyranny of the urgent and the pressures of the present seem to fall away and we see, just that much more clearly, just how true it is—life is more than things. What really matters are our relationships.

God is a relational Being. He is love. And deep down in the human heart

there is a need for friendship, fellowship, relationship—a need for love. We know it. We get so busy we forget it, or so distracted by the teeming trivia of life that we are not conscious of it, but we know it to be true.

The story of the Bible is not about a harsh, judgmental God who can't wait to smite us. It's about a God who reveals himself in Jesus as one who endures all the reality of human life along with us—its ups and downs, pain and celebrations. It's about a God who loves us, and in his grace wants to share his life with us. It's good news in the midst of all the bad news.

Scientists tell us that we are at our happiest when we are helping others. Interesting, isn't it? Not when we are busy accumulating, acquiring, defending, and protecting the 'stuff' of life. When Jesus encourages us to seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, he is talking about our focus, our priorities in life. And then he says we won't need to worry about all the other stuff—it will be provided.

He is telling us how to simplify the complexities in life—by prioritising the things that really matter.

If life is truly more than material trinkets and trash, why do we spend so much time and effort dedicated to their pursuit? If the treasure of life is spiritual, relational, why not make that our focus and priority? And at the heart of this is the treasure of a relationship with God. 'Your Father

(cont. on p. 11)

A Wedding Ceremony for Today

By Jonathan Buck

I have performed many weddings using the following ceremony, which I wrote originally for my daughter and her husband several years ago. Before each wedding, I ask the couple getting married to read through the ceremony, and if they see anything they think could be improved or adjusted, to let me know. As a result, the ceremony now contains the unique touch of many couples.

I think it's a lovely ceremony because it moves with the culture, but never strays from the bedrock reasons for marriage. Here it is:

Marriage is amazing. It's the most ancient and revered tradition known to humanity, a wonderful institution that has survived and flourished through the centuries, providing enormous happiness and fulfillment for billions of us humans. And even in its rather battered state today, marriage continues to attract

millions of couples, eagerly seeking the treasures it contains.

So, what is it about marriage that makes it so appealing? Simply put, it is the freedom that comes from knowing you are loved—and will always be loved, despite all your obvious imperfections—for nothing more than being you. We crave that love as children from our parents, as teenagers from our friends, but in marriage we find it at its best in this

one incredible person who willingly and publicly declares that he, or she, will love you and cherish you for the rest of your lives together.

And what more could we want in this human existence of ours? At the very roots of our being, this is what we were created for: to



give and receive love, believing love can tackle and overcome every obstacle, every mistake and every disagreement. And the overwhelming evidence that this is true—that such a love really exists—can be seen in all those marriages that survive and even flourish in the most trying of circumstances.

Trinkets (cont. from p. 10)

has been pleased to give you the kingdom', Jesus said (Luke 12:32).

The kingdom is relational—sharing the life of the Father, Son, and Spirit. Through Jesus, we share in this life, and in this righteousness. (It's not a matter of working harder to become more righteous by ourselves; it's participating in the righteousness of

Christ.) No wonder Jesus' repeated admonition here is 'don't be overly anxious', or simply, 'don't worry'.

If our priorities are spiritual, kingdom-focused, we can get on with life, a life of love and service. Through his incarnation (becoming one of us), Jesus has redeemed all of life, so we can by all means enjoy the physical while we have it. But at the same time we can set our hearts on the imperishable,

the permanent, the eternal. Life is more than stuff, possessions. It's about people, grace, kindness, and love. It's about enjoying relationship with God and one another. Why wait for a crisis?

This article was published in the April-May 2011 edition of *Christian Odyssey* (www.gci.org/publications/odyssey) under the title 'Blessing in Disguise'. John McLean is Australian National Director of Grace Communion International, formerly called the Worldwide Church of God.

Such an incredibly successful design surely tells of a brilliant designer, with something wonderful and inspiring in mind. But what is it? Well, the Bible tells us that marriage was God's idea, and he designed it for one very basic and simple purpose: to help us humans experience the kind of love he made possible, and the amazing sense of freedom his love creates.

That's why love is so important. It opens the door to a freedom you may not have believed possible: the freedom to be utterly real, totally transparent, and even vulnerable with each other, without any fear or embarrassment whatsoever. It is for this kind of freedom that marriage was created—where there are no demands, no expectations, no guilt-trips—just the overwhelming sense of relief and peace of mind that you are loved, no matter what.

That's what marriage offers, and to help you experience it to the full, God will give you all the

support you need. If you ever want to know if God is real and that he really cares for you, just ask him for the love that will keep your marriage together and watch what happens!

And what kind of love does God have on offer? It's the kind of practical, enduring love that will keep your relationship intact and your friendship growing, because it's a love that's patient and kind; it doesn't bear grudges or remember wrongs; it isn't sarcastic, arrogant or accusing; it doesn't get jealous or short-tempered; it's a love that forgives, trusts, and perseveres through thick and thin. That's the love God offers—and it's there for the asking at a moment's notice for both of you—to enable you to grow closer, not further apart, as time goes by.

Hopefully, then, it dawns on you at some point in your happily married lives—as this one dear person keeps your need to be loved constantly fulfilled—that this is life at its best, and the way

life is meant to be. So, on behalf of God, can I pass on his thanks and congratulations to you both for being so willing to experience what he wants for you. And all it takes from now on is this: that you will be faithful to each other, come what may, just as God is forever faithful to you.

An exchange of vows then follows, then a prayer by me, the familiar exchange of rings, kiss, signing forms, publicly announcing the couple as officially married, and off they go for congratulations all 'round.

Many people have asked me afterwards where I got the ceremony from. I tell them it came from thinking about my daughter and the people she would have at her wedding. They were like her, young and turned off religion, but still open to the magic of marriage. It was that magic I wanted to capture, for their sakes, because marriage still can be amazing.

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Put Some ZIP into Your Relationships

By Chris Widener

Relationships are really what makes the world go around, aren't they? I mean, good, positive, healthy and meaningful relationships provide us with the richest experiences we have here on this old earth of ours. Your loving spouse who shares everything with you; that best friend who connects with you like few others do; the people at work who appreciate you and help you to become the best that you can be. These are the things that bring joy to life!

But...relationships can also be the bane of our existence! What really brings more pain in this life than a broken relationship, especially when it isn't just broken, but downright ugly!

So, it behoves us to do all that we can to keep our relationships zipping right along, doesn't it? If we put the very best into our relationships, we can almost guarantee getting the very best out of our relationships!

Through the years, I have spent hundreds of hours working with people in their relationships: marriages, friendships, working relationships, and social relationships. Through it all I have seen some wonderful things and some terrible things. It truly has been the good, the bad, and the ugly!

But I have been able to find three core elements in successful relationships. These are things that, when

done over time, begin to create for us the kinds of relationships that we truly desire. They are the kinds of relationships we have always dreamed of.

The key to remembering these three items is the acronym Z.I.P., which stands for three things you can do—and begin to do immediately—to improve any and all of your relationships. They are:

- Put some ZEST into your relationships,
- Cultivate more INTIMACY in your relationships,
- Develop a PURPOSE in your relationships.

Let's take a closer look at each of them.

Put some ZEST into your relationships

By zest, I primarily mean fun. Relationships were meant to be fun! We wouldn't have been made with the capacity to have fun if relationships weren't supposed to have a little zest in them!

Think about it: don't you usually start out healthy relationships with a lot of fun times? Whether it is going out to dinner or a ballgame, spending time playing a game, or even just having a lively talk, you usually want fun to be a major part of the relationship. Fun is some of the glue that bonds the relationship.

But as life goes on, specifically in a marriage, but in all relationships really, the fun starts to go by the wayside. More and more it can be about getting the job done, whatever the job may be.

To restore the relationship, to put a little zip into it, we need to reintroduce the idea of 'zest'.

What about you? Have you lost the zest? What can you do to get it back? Think of a specific relationship you have. What were the fun things you did at the beginning of the relationship that acted as the glue that bonded you together? Now, commit to doing those again, and see if your relationship doesn't begin to soar again! If you can, develop new fun things to do together so you can both start an adventure of fun together!

Cultivate more INTIMACY in your relationships

Let me make a couple of clarifications. First, I don't just mean intimacy in the currently common understanding, that is, sexual intimacy. I mean for all intents and purposes, taking your relationship to a deeper level. Second, I don't mean that you have to start doing group hugs with your workmates, or having revelation sessions where the tears flow freely.

What I do mean is that every relationship that is mutually satisfying has a level of depth to it that provides meaning. This is really what the search is for in our relationships—meaning.

Remember when you first started your relationship, whether with your spouse or friend. All of that time was spent opening up, telling who you are, where you are from, what your likes and dislikes are. There was a deep sense of satisfaction with the relationship—that is why it continued. You liked who they were, and you enjoyed being known by them.

But then something happened. You got to a certain level and the pursuit



can accomplish, not only for those involved, but also for a greater good.

Let's face it, when people have a common purpose, they feel like they are part of a team, and they feel bound together in that relationship. Even when people may be disappointed in the people they are in relationship with, if they have a purpose, such as raising the children, they are much more likely to stick it out. Purpose creates bonds.

So what happens if we are proactively involved in seeking out a common purpose with those we want to have a relationship with, or those who we already have a relationship with, but we would like to see it go deeper? Well, it gets better and stronger.

Think about your strongest relationships. Aren't they centred around at least one area of purpose or a common goal?

What about a relationship that has cooled? Think back, and see if perhaps you used to have a common purpose that has gone by the wayside.

And what of your desire to see a relationship grow? Take some time to begin to cultivate a common purpose. Sit down with that person and tell them that you would like to have some common goals, some purposes that you pursue together. As you develop these, you will see your relationship strengthen in ways you never imagined!

Let's recap: You want your relationships to show a little 'zip'? Then put a little ZIP in them:

- ✓ Put some ZEST into your relationships,
- ✓ Cultivate more INTIMACY in your relationships, and
- ✓ Develop a PURPOSE in your relationships.

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of depth ended. You stopped sharing feelings, likes, and dislikes. You stopped sharing joys and dreams and fears. Instead, you settled into routine. The daily grind took over, and you stopped knowing one another and simply existed together.

Now don't get me wrong, every time you get together doesn't have to be deep. Remember, I advocated in the previous paragraphs just having plain old fun sometimes. But there is a need for regular times of intimate connection where we go deeper with others.

This is particularly hard for many of the male species, and it is not only possible, but healthy and necessary! If we want to have the kinds of relationship we were made to have, we have to open ourselves up to having others know us, and for us to know others.

Truly meaningful relationships come when we are loved and accepted for whom we are at our core, not simply for acting the right way in a relationship so as to keep another person in it.

Think about the relationships where you would like to see improvement. Take some time in the coming weeks and months to spend time just talking and getting to a deeper level in those relationships. Specifically, let other people deeper into your world. You can't force others to be more intimate, and you certainly can't say, 'Let's get together and have an intimate conversation', because that would be too contrived. But you can make a decision for yourself that you will let others into your world. Perhaps this will be the catalyst for them doing the same.

You can guard yourself from intimacy but then you won't go much deeper, and you will feel a longing in your heart for more. Or you can begin the deepening process and see your relationships change for the better.

Develop a PURPOSE in your relationships

The most meaningful relationships we have are those that are held together by a common purpose and vision for what the relationship

Rescue

Mission

By Joseph Tkach

For weeks, the miners trapped underground in Chile captured the hearts and imagination of people around the world. Utterly helpless to do anything about their plight themselves, they had no choice but to rely on the efforts of others who worked day and night to rescue them.

In many ways, the plight of the miners is an allegory of the spiritual condition of all humanity. Spiritually speaking, all of humanity has been trapped in a life-threatening environment. The Bible calls it 'sin and death'. Like the miners, we are utterly helpless and unable to do anything about our dire predicament. Just as the cave-in cut off the miners from the outside world, sin is a barrier, keeping people from the life God created them to have. But there is good news—a rescue is under way!

I am sure that as they waited for rescue, the miners carefully explored their options. They had picks, shovels, and some quite sophisticated mining equipment. Could they dig their own way out? Perhaps they tried. But the reality was that no amount of work on their part would have been enough. They were in too deep. For them, the only hope was help from above from those who cared.

All humans are in the same condition spiritually. There is nothing we can do to save ourselves. We can't dig our way out of the deep pit of sin and alienation from God that we're in. But God can, and has, reached down to us in our plight and rescued us though Jesus Christ.

What a great relief it must have been for the miners when, after seventeen days cut off from

everything, that first narrow borehole broke through. Although it was not large enough to get them out, it was a means by which food, air, and news could reach them, as well as a source of hope and encouragement through the long months of waiting. As I thought about it, I realised that each of those boreholes was like the gospel—a conduit through which God sends us the good news of our rescue from sin and death, together with sound spiritual nourishment and hope.

Sadly, the gospel is often misused to spread a negative message of condemnation, fear, and spiritual intimidation. It is like sending the trapped miners a steady stream of information about what was going wrong and how bad their situation was, demanding evidence that they fully understood their plight, that they really wanted to be rescued, and even that they start living as though they are already on the surface before the rescue could proceed.

But Jesus didn't wait until humans proved anything. He died for us while we were still sinners, as Paul tells us twice in Romans 5.

Wouldn't it have been wonderful if a survival expert could have projected himself through one of the slim boreholes, to wait with the miners, to pray with them and to reassure them of the reality of their rescue? That would have been an act of great sacrifice—to leave the world of light and fresh air to share the dim, narrow world of the trapped miners. And that is exactly what Jesus did for our world of sin, leaving the glory he shared with the Father to come and share with us the trials of human existence.

Those who believe that good news—the gospel—can see past the gloom of the moment and know that the joy of rescue is ahead. The gospel is good news, not bad news. It's all about grace and truth and hope, not fear and worry and uncertainty.

After all, that's why the angel told the shepherds, 'Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. Today in the town of David a Saviour has been born to you; He is Christ the Lord'.

Joseph Tkach is President of Grace Communion International, formerly called the Worldwide Church of God.

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