

Giving the language of love



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Sternity

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Dear Friends,

here is so much I want to share with you in this last quarter of the year, and what a year it has been! 2020 might be a year many will want to forget, but I expect our experiences will be seared on our memories for years to come.

A quick thank you to those who participated in the survey about this magazine. We have heard clearly that while the size is cumbersome, you love Bible Society's stories. The more stories of transformation we tell, and you share, the more people will respond generously to the need, and the work of Bible Society will continue to spread.

Translation work is at the heart of Bible Societies around the world. The evidence is overwhelming that when a person hears of God's love spoken to them in their mother tongue, the impact can be life changing. It is in that context that I am so excited to share with you that Bible Society Australia is now funding two translation projects in Indonesia (read more on page 5). One of these language groups, Kodi, has no Bible translation available yet. The other project is to help complete the Old Testament translation of a Mori language, which would give one group of the Mori people a full Bible. Praise God for these opportunities.

I also want to tell you about the Solidarity Fund, established by the United Bible Societies fellowship, to support our fellow Bible Societies whose work and survival have been deeply impacted by the ongoing pandemic. On behalf of our donors, we have given \$500,000 of undesignated monies to assist. We have been able to do this because many of you are happy to tick the Where Needed Most boxes in our appeals. This frees up the funding to achieve exactly that – to give where needed most. Thank you!

Finally, I want to draw your attention to an infographic you will find in on page 7, which summarises our key outcomes in the last financial year. The more detailed Annual Review will be available on our website in late November. Please look out for it.

Wishing you God's blessings in this time,

Grant Thomson CEO, BIBLE SOCIETY AUSTRALIA



Front Cover: Reverend Lois Nadjamerrek at the launch of the Kunwinjku New Testament translation in 2018 at Gunbalanya, Northern Territory.





Heart language: Launch of Pitjantjatjara Shorter Bible in 2002 (top and bottom right), installing the new Bible app this year.

New app Opens The Bible to First Peoples

Rebecca Abbott

he Bible is coming to life for thousands of First Nations people through a new app in one of Australia's most used Indigenous languages. Alongside other projects such as the ongoing Nyoongar tranlation work, the newly released Pitjantjatjara Bible app enables listeners to pass on Bible stories in their heart language - as well as serve to strengthen literacy levels among communities which use it.

"The beauty of the app is it actually highlights the text as it's being spoken aloud," says Dave Barnett, translator and Bible engagement coordinator for Bible Society Australia. "So it's going to be a great literacy aid. If people don't know how to read [Pitjantjatjara], they can follow along on the app and hear the Scriptures being read aloud."

The app features a dramatised audio recording of the New Testament in the

Pitjantjatjara language. It also allows users to search for and play verses and chapters. In addition, the app includes links to the Pitjantjatjara hymn book, other devotional materials and to Christian YouTube channels.

Pitjantjatjara is the first language of about 3000–5000 Aboriginal Australians, with up to another 5000 people speaking it as their second or third language. "It's one of the strongest languages in central Australia," says Barnett, who learned the language while working as a school teacher in remote north-west South Australia, from where the language originates – the Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara (APY) Lands.

Barnett explains how the language has spread: "Because people are so transient these days, they travel far and wide. So you've got a large [Pitjantjatjara-speaking] community in Port

OPEN THE BIBLE IN AUSTRALIA







Word work: Pitjantjatjara translation team from Ernabella, 2002 (top left); Bible translator Inawinytji Stanley enjoys the app (top right); the Kriol Audio Workshop in Darwin, 2020 (bottom).

Adelaide, Port Augusta, rural South Australia, Northern Territory, Western Australia."

Barnett has been involved in the Pitjantjatjara Bible translation project since 2015. Made possible by your support, Bible Society Australia is proud to be able to help First Nations people connect with God's word in their heart language.

After the full New Testament translation was released in audio format in 2018 – a task involving more than 40 Pitjantjatjara speakers and 500 recording hours – Barnett has seen firsthand the impact it has made in local communities.

"When we finished the New Testament recording, we put it on these devices called Proclaimers ... We were living in Ernabella [APY Lands] at the time, and one day we had 15 local kids on our trampoline, all having a great time."

"I went outside and just as a bit of an experiment, I pressed play and put [the Pitjantjatjara audio Bible] on. Within seconds, the kids were dead silent. Every one of them stopped and listened to the Scriptures.

"These were 6 to 8-year-old kids who didn't know how to read. They were absolutely amazed to hear these Bible stories in their language." Noting that stories are passed down orally in

Noting that stories are passed down orally in traditional Aboriginal culture, Barnett continues,

"For a lot of these kids, these were brand new stories. They'd never heard them before, and they were fascinated to hear, in their language, stories about Jesus and the disciples."

Barnett expects that through the app, which makes the audio Bible easier to access, many more people will hear the Bible in their heart language.

"It opens up so many possibilities that we haven't had in the past. You have people who don't have the printed word for reasons of cost or access. But even when they're living remotely, most have Wi-Fi and internet connection, so now they can access the Scriptures."

The app will continue to be updated, and it's likely the Pitjatjantjara Old Testament and Prayer Book will be added when their translation work is complete. In the meantime, Barnett and others are rolling out the app in communities by helping people install it and share it.

"The other day I was ... helping a lady renew her driver's license. There was a long queue, so while we were waiting we were listening to the Scriptures on her phone.

"Then another Pitjatjantjara lady came in, and she couldn't believe the first lady could hear this on her phone. We installed [the app] on her phone, and she said she was going to go home and put it on her kid's phone ... Word spreads pretty quickly."

Will you help First Peoples access the word of God?

\$25 Helps to translate one verse.

\$50 Helps to pay the stipend for a translator.

\$120

Helps a community record and share scripture in their heart language.

PLEASE GIVE NOW

Use the DONATION FORM on the back page, call 1300 BIBLES (1300 242 537) or visit biblesociety.org.au/sowtranslation

OPEN THE BIBLE AUSLAN



John Harris and Peter Bonser at last year's launch of digital Auslan translations.

Hear the good news of Auslan translations

When the history of AUSLAN Bible translations is written one day, 2020 will be marked as a truly significant year. And it's not because of COVID-19.

Instead, historians will record how a longserving, experienced translations team planned and prepared to pass the baton of AUSLAN translations for the Deaf on to a new team. "The old committee had to be folded up, in a sense," says John Harris, Bible translation consultant with Bible Society Australia. "People have died or we've all got very elderly – I just turned 80. Mac's the same. So there needed to be a new committee."

"Mac" is the project's chair, Mac Adams, who was born profoundly deaf and has been involved in the Auslan Bible Project right from the beginning. Harris himself has also been involved since the start, after he was approached in 1996 by Christians in the Deaf community to help them translate the Bible into Auslan.

One of the people who approached him was the late Betty Bonser. Along with her son Peter and his wife Judy, Betty has also played a major role in the project since its beginning. Harris said Peter and Judy - while being hearing people themselves - have "dedicated much of their lives" to helping see this project through.

As a team, they have achieved a huge amount including full translations of biblical books Ruth, Jonah, Luke and John, an abridged version of the books of Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy, and some of Paul's letters – plus a few extras, like parts of the Gospels covered in Matthew and Mark which are not in Luke or John.

Along this journey – helped by generous donations by Bible Society Australia supporters like you – the dedicated team innovated and improved the process of translations for the Deaf. Sometimes, the Auslan team were even leading the rest of the world.

Harris refers to a new document of procedures

created by the team and notes: "Hidden in that is [a procedure for] the using of the final video draft as the auto cue." This, he explains, is the result of an idea from the Deaf translation team – to use video drafts during the translation process, rather than written notes. "They found themselves looking at their last video of themselves signing – they just stood there, correcting themselves – and thought 'Well, why don't we use that as our prompt all the time?" Harris says.

Back then, the technology didn't really exist, so a television was set up beside the camera – still a far cry from someone holding up handwritten notes on butcher's paper which they had used previously. But nowadays an autocue makes it even easier.

"That was our team who thought of that – and everyone in the world learned from us," Harris says.

Now, a new committee of keen people interested in carrying the work forward is rising up. But the older, experienced guard will stay in place for now, with Adams as chair and Harris as consultant – and the future is exciting.

"The new committee is charged with the responsibility of coming up with creative ways to use the material to increase Bible engagement," Harris explains. "That might be material directed to children, or to young people, or someone else."

He mentions that an Easter project is planned. And, in the meantime, the existing team will continue to pass on the knowledge they've acquired from almost 25 years of AUSLAN translations, familiarising the new crew with techniques, processes and lessons learned.

So far, the transition is going smoothly – even when team meetings were forced onto Zoom by the pandemic. "COVID, in some ways, has enhanced our work," Harris says. "Because it's a visual thing, we found that Zoom is a very good way for a Deaf committee to meet."

Will you help the Deaf communities in Australia gain access to the lifegiving word of God in sign language?

PLEASE GIVE NOW

Use the DONATION FORM on the back page, call 1300 BIBLES (1300 242 537) or visit biblesociety.org.au/sowtranslation

Gaining God's word in your heart language - for the first time

A church community (above) and children (below) in the Kodi-speaking region of Indonesia.

A carpenter in Indonesia became a Bible translator, to share scripture with his own community.

Stop to imagine what it's like for a pastor to preach in a dialect different to the one spoken by his local congregation in Indonesia. People in the Southwest Sumba region speak Kodi and one church leader can actually see how his not-quite-right words cause people to tune out.

"When I preached in Indonesian or the closest dialect, the congregation mostly keep chewing betel leaf and areca nut (a local habit)," shares this Kodian pastor. But the difference is clear and swift when speaking in their heart language.

"It is a different story if I preach in Kodian; they are seriously listening to my preaching."

Stop to imagine now what it will be like for the Kodi people to read and hear God's word ... in their own language. They have long prayed for this precious gift. For while the two major local languages in Sumba have had Scripture already translated, Kodi speakers have not.

Thanks to your generous support, Bible Society Australia has helped the Indonesian Bible Society start work this year on the first ever Kodi Bible translation. It is expected to be completed by 2025. Also this year, the IBS started the Bible for Children in Kodian.

In the Central Sulawesi region of Indonesia, Pak Josep had never stopped to imagine he would become a Bible translator. But out of his love for God's word and his own language, former carpenter Pak Josep accepted the responsibility of joining the team updating the Bible in the dialect of Upper Morian.

A quiet man, Pak Josep joyfully shares how thankful he is to be in the team. "I do not have any theological background, but I translate the Bible. What a privilege!" he said repeatedly.

During a two-week translation session, Pak Josep had to return home after his wife became ill. The rest of his team were saddened by the struggles of their friend but, in spite of such circumstances, they enjoyed being together and praying for each other and the project. Sometimes, discussions around translation could become heated with disagreements, but this allows the team to learn more about humility and openness.

The New Testament in the Morian language was first published in 1949. But, 70 years later, there are many words which are no longer used and have vanished. There are two Morian dialects – Upper Morian and Lower Morian (Ngusumbatu). Since 2004, the Indonesian Bible Society has been supporting teams revising the New Testament in Morian and it has already published a Ngusumbatu update in 2010.

Pak Marto coordinates the translation team that Pak Josep is part of. He knows the Morian language and is also a meticulous observer of the translation work. He frankly reported that there have been problems along the way, such as when "we can't find any synonym or the perfect idiomatic words in Morian. There are 32 dialects in Morian. Thus, we decided to use the Ngusumbatu dialect which is the *lingua franca* among the Morian."

Despite the challenges, Pak Marto focuses upon the eternal difference he can help to make through the translation team. "I was glad and become enthusiastic when translating the Bible. I imagine that my work with other team members will be a blessing to the Morian [Bible] which will be read by our future generation."



Will you help the Kodi and Mori peoples of Indonesia hear and read the word of God in their heart language?

PLEASE GIVE NOW

Use the DONATION FORM on the back page, call 1300 BIBLES (1300 242 537) or visit biblesociety.org.au/sowtranslation

Stormy Waters

At some stage, you will need to reconcile two truths: The first is you are sacred and precious to God. The second is you will experience significant grief and suffering. I'm inviting you to share the journey of my four-year battle with cancer. It's the story of an ordinary person in the grip of an extraordinary God ... who has led me to wonderfully surprising places.

Devotion 1

1 Samuel 17:45

David said to the Philistine, "You come against me with sword and spear and javelin, but I come against you in the name of the Lord Almighty, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied."

These devotions will not be a truth-denying, triumphalist, super-spiritual rave. I will be brutally real with you, because I want you to be surprised and encouraged by a story of the relentless grace of God.

I have cancer. It is throughout my body. There is nothing special about that. Almost half of us will die of the disease. What is special is that I can say: The last four years I have battled the disease have been the most joyful, peaceful, miraculous and productive of my life.

And that's the difference God makes!

When David, a shepherd boy, stood in front of Goliath, the three-metre tall battle champion of the Philistine army, he had nothing going for him – other than God was with him.

And that changed everything. **Prayer:** Dear Father, don't let me lag behind you and your purposes ... or run ahead of you. Please keep me beside you so that I can know your presence and strength.

Devotion 2

Psalm 1:1-3

Blessed is the one who does not walk in step with the wicked or stand in the way that sinners take, or sit in the company of mockers, but whose delight is in the law of the Lord, and who meditates on his law day and night. That person is like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither - whatever they do prospers.

I loved God before I got cancer, and I continue to love God now I have cancer. Having cancer didn't cause me to suddenly become "more spiritual." It did, however, test my faith . and I have grown a deeper relationship with

God as a result

I find myself increasingly guilty of acts of spontaneous worship, and I "cat-nap" pray tĥroughout the day.

It's good to be able to meet suffering with a robust faith born of a lifetime's heritage of knowing God. Why? Because it has grown my roots

Suffering and grief will test you. So let's agree to grow our roots down deep into God and drink deeply of the source of life, so that when the searing heat of suffering comes, we flourish. Let's be the tree that is planted by the water.

Prayer: Dear Lord Jesus, thank you for allowing the circumstances that have caused me to walk in a deeper relationship with you. I love being with you.

Devotion 3

John 11:33-35

When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who had come along with her also weeping, he was deeply moved in spirit and troubled. "Where have you laid him?" he asked. "Come and see, Lord," they replied. Jesus wept.

The shortest verse in the Bible is "Jesus wept," and it is an extraordinary verse. Why on earth did Jesus weep when he saw the grief of two sisters for their dead brother Lazarus? Jesus already knew that he would raise Lazarus back to life. Jesus wept because he shared the hurt the sisters were feeling. He wept because that's what love does. You cannot love and not weep at a loved one's grief. And in the same way, God weeps with you in your grief ... even though he knows he will make all things new at the end of time

When my wife Mary and I had a "wobbly" moment of tears at the thought of me dying, God was crying too. The wobble didn't last long, and we ended up eating toast and ginger marmalade together in the kitchen at 4 am - apractice I can commend!

Prayer: Dear Jesus, you share my grief in every way because you love me. I now choose to share my life with you in every way – and count it a privilege.

Devotion 4

Ephesians 6:19-20

Pray also for me, that whenever I speak, words may be given me so that I will fearlessly make known the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains. Pray that I may declare it fearlessly, as I should.

In his book *A Grief Observed*, C.S. Lewis talks about the death of his beloved wife, Joy, from cancer. At one point, he wonders at the cruelty of God who could allow Joy to nearly get well ... only for her to be snatched back into the jaws of cancer again ... and then to die. It is hard for those who watch. But may I speak as one who has cancer? My "take" on it is different from that of Lewis. I see things quite the reverse. It has been the prayers of friends and loved ones – working in harmony with God's purposes

- that has snatched me back from death and enabled me to engage in further mission ... be that writing another book, or whatever. Quite simply, I feel "carried" by their prayers ... and it is an extraordinary experience. So, be assured: no prayer is ever wasted. I have relied on them - and I say this as someone who may die soon.

Prayer: Dear Father, I love the way you choose to work through the prayers of your people to fulfil your purposes. Thank you for the team that surrounds me and carries me with their prayers.

Devotion 5

Psalm 32:6-7

Therefore let all the faithful pray to you while you may be found; surely the rising of the mighty waters will not reach them. You are my hiding place; you will protect me from trouble and surround me with songs of deliverance.

I've asked Mary, my wife, what I might say that is helpful from her perspective, as she has had to live with the prospect of losing her husband to cancer for the last four years. "Tell them," she said, "that God is my hiding place. God is my 'safe place."

So there you have it.

Mary has discovered something very special. God has not rescued her from her circumstance but has lifted her above the circumstance, so she views it from God's perspective, i.e., from the safety of his love, and from a position of confidence in his ultimate plans. This has enabled her not to be crushed under her circumstances, but to sit over them with God albeit sometimes with tears.

It is a good place to be.

Prayer: Dear Father, thank you that I can hide in the safety of your love anytime, anywhere, and in any situation. Please lift me into your presence when danger threatens.

Devotion 6

2 Timothy 4:7-8

I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day – and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing.

You may not finish life feeling you have realised all your ambitions. The mere fact that you are a Christian in a post-Christian world will mean that your heart will still ache for the millions around you who don't yet know God. You will continue to be appalled at the godlessness you see, and feel grief at the meaningless hedonistic culture that is overtaking the next generation. This is situation "normal" for Christians.

We understand that perfection won't come until Jesus comes again and inaugurates the kingdom of God. The fact is, we can only "succeed" in the things we have control over. We need to come to the door of death having faithfully attempted the things God has called us to do ... and having grown a character that is godly, wise and loving. Then we can say with a

clear conscience, "I have finished the race." **Prayer:** Dear Father, my heart breaks at what I have not seen completed. But my heart thrills at what you will complete. Thank you for letting me see into the future so I can rejoice in it.





A YEAR IN REVIEW

MISSION EXPENDITURE

TOTAL DONATIONS

\$13,900,000

0.76¢ of every dollar goes toward mission



TRANSLATION

Australian Remote and Indigenous Ministry Support

From May-July 2020, the aboriginalbibles.org.au website had 96,500 views of an Indigenous translation or downloaded a book of Scripture. Four more languages were made available on the website.

Vietnam The first draft

of Matthew, Luke, John (4-11), and Romans (3-11) in a **minority Vietnamese language** was completed.

DISTRIBUTION

Nicaragua 92,800 Bibles

or Scripture portions given out to families of children with cancer and in hospital.

🏲 Australia

More than **455,000 Christian** children's books sold through Koorong.

140,000+ Bibles sold and distributed in Australia.

80,000 new Bibles printed through BSA Publishing.

≥ Iraq 2,400 families

received packages containing food, hygiene items, Bibles, and Scripture items.

> Just under **150,000 pieces of Scripture** made available through BSA Scripture Grants.

Approximately **35,000 pieces** of Scripture went to Indigenous communities and ministry partners.

China 76,500 free Bibles

given to the rural poor.

254,000 Christmas little books

(Who, What, Why, How of Christmas) and **131,000 copies** of the little book, Who, What, Why, How of Easter given out.



PRAYER POINTS: NOVEMBER-FEBRUARY

Pray with us

NOVEMBER 15 - 21

Please pray for literacy programs and classes throughout Laos. Thank God for the enthusiasm churches have shown towards them. Pray that participants develop a deeper relationship with God.

Australia – Chaplaincy

Please pray for all seafarers reached through the Chaplain and Parachurch Grants Program. Pray also for the dedicated port chaplains and that each Bible given will be read, understood and cherished.

NOVEMBER 22 – 28

Iyanmaı Please pray for the Learning through Listening program. Pray that as participants learn, they would engage in God's word and deepen their knowledge of him. Pray the program will be well established in rural areas and accepted by the local people.

Australia – Donor Support Please pray for the BSA donor support team who work hard to provide information and assistance to donors. Pray they would be patient and kind as they work together to take calls and answer questions.

NOVEMBER 29 – DECEMBER 5

Please pray for the Arab Israeli Bible Society, working hard to reach the 1.7 million Arab citizens of Israel. Pray for the recovery from the dreadful fires which ravaged the country in October.

Australia – RIMS

Please pray for the translation of the Old Testament into Pitjantjatjara. Thank God for the launch of the Pitjantjatjara Hymnbook published by Bible Society, and for interest in singing the traditional hymns in language, which inspire the translation work.

DECEMBER 6 - 12

ameroor

Please continue to pray for those in the Far North of Cameroon who suffered the loss of two Parkwa literacy teachers in August and September, killed by Boko Haram. Pray for their devastated families.

Australia – Koorong Please pray for the work of the Koorong bookstores around the country and online. Pray that the Bibles and Christian resources they provide would lead to people Opening The Bible - and sharing in the love of God this Christmas season.

DECEMBER 13 - 19

Please keep praying for Syria. Please pray for the

children of Syria, who are undergoing unspeakable trauma. Thank God for the Art And Play Therapy for Children that Bible Society is running, and for their goal to provide therapies that don't require words.

Australia – CPX

Please pray CPX would be able to have a good impact in secular media over the Christmas period, and that through its podcast, articles and radio appearances, many people would engage with the Christmas story.

DECEMBER 20 – 26

Please pray for those in Iraq who are displaced, and that many would hear the good news of Jesus as his birth is celebrated this week. Pray for Bible Society as they distribute Scriptures and relief packages to widows, orphans, the underprivileged, and refugees.

Global – Christmas week

Please pray this week for believers and seekers of God in China, Pakistan, Cambodia, Laos, Vietnam, Myanmar, countries in the South Pacific, South Africa, Mozambique, Suriname, Ghana, Zimbabwe, Cameroon, Egypt, Arab-Israel, Lebanon, Syria, Nicaragua and Slovenia. Pray that all would find joy in God's presence as we celebrate our Saviour's birth.

DECEMBER 27 – JANUARY 2 Norldwide

As we move into a new year, please pray that, globally, all countries and peoples would be able to move out of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Australia – Chaplaincy and Parachurch Grants

Please pray for prison chaplains and those they minister to. Pray that the Lord will make a noticeable and lasting change in prisoners' lives through His Holy Spirit.

JANUARY 3 – 9

outh Af

Please pray for the work of the Bible Society through World Hope Ministries, who distribute God's word to the inmates of South Africa's prisons. Pray that God's word would bring transformation amongst them.

Australia – Eternity podcast network

Thank God for the increasing popularity of the *Eternity* podcast network. Pray the easy listening but in-depth stories covered in the podcasts – including *Undeceptions, Salt* and *With All Due Respect* – would be a blessing to all who listen.

JANUARY 10 - 16

Please pray that the 'Literacy for Life' project would

impart literacy skills as well as improve the standards of living for individuals, homes and communities.

Australia – Bibles in Schools Pray that God would provide and bless Scripture teachers all around the country as they sacrificially give of their time preparing and giving Scripture lessons this year.

JANUARY 17 - 23

ambodi

Please pray for the 'Learning through Listening' program. Pray that as participants learn, they would engage in God's word and deepen their knowledge of him. Pray the program will be well established in rural areas and accepted by the local people.

Australia – RIMS

Please pray for Bible Society's recording and distribution of audio Scriptures among those with low literacy skills who live in remote communities.

JANUARY 24 - 30

Lebano

Thank God for the literacy work in Lebanon among refugees. Pray that God's love will be revealed to children who have come from desperate situations.

Australia – Eternity

Thank God for the way in which *Eternity* provides opportunities for Christians to celebrate what God is doing outside their local church.

JANUARY 31 - FEBRUARY 6

Nicaragua

Please pray for the volunteers at the La Mascota Hospital for children with cancer in Nicaragua.

Australia – Daily Bible

Please pray for the Daily Bible resource produced by BSA, that it might successfully encourage a Daily Bible reading habit for Aussie Christians.

FEBRUARY 7 - 13

'ietnan

Please continue to pray for the literacy project in Vietnam, which has been restricted by COVID-19. Thank God the staff have taken the opportunity to prepare study materials. Please pray for new classes to begin and that halted classes can resume.

Australia – BSA Publishing Please pray for the Bible and resource development work that will continue over the summer: a new CEV Catholic Encyclopedia for Catholic primary schools; a new tri-service devotional for the Australian Defence Forces; and new editions of the Surfers' Bible.



My dad is a pastor and he had an affair AJ's personal story of family breakdown and forgiveness



Eternity won the 2020 Gutenberg Award for overall excellence in religious communication, the top prize at the Australasian Religious Press Association Awards.

OBADIAH SLOPE

Dear Fitzy

Obadiah is grateful to his former SMH colleague Peter Fitzsimmons for this quote from the great Arsenal football coach Arsene Wenger.

"Sometimes I feel I'm scared for having only done football in my life. So, when I speak to God, it's a bit pretentious. It's just that if God exists and they have a test to see if you go to hell or to heaven, it might look ridiculous to only have dedicated your life to winning football games."

Your prophet thinks that if Fitzy thinks printing great Christian testimony is the best way to be critical of us, we just want him to keep right on!

Two archbishops walked into

a synod and ...

Your prophet reads widely, including a bloke called "bathwellschap" (BWC) who blogs the general synod (church parliament) of the Church of England. At the last socially distanced meeting, the still new Archbishop of York (don't ask me to explain why England has two of them) gave a rousing speech on why he hates the coronavirus. Then BWC goes on: "There was a bit of a kerfuffle when a staff member intervened to sanitise the desk before the Archbishop of Canterbury followed on. But Justin (the Archbishop) dissolved any embarrassment with a gag about it being "a tradition of the church since the 12th century that after York has spoken, the lectern has to be cleaned before Canterbury can speak."

Yes, an Anglican joke.



Covidity

In case you have not seen them, funny pew signs have been all over Facebook with this selection from Redeemer Presbyterian, New Orleans:

"I have prepared a place for you: Just not this pew." "Jesus sat the 5000 down in rows. But not this one."

"Reserved for Elijah only."

"Remember when the Lord put a 'flaming sword' at the entrance of the Garden of Eden so Adam and Eve couldn't go there? Flaming sword' can also be translated as (whatever you have taped off the pew with)?

"Zacchaeus climbed a sycamore tree to get a better pew. This pew was not it."

Covidity 2

Obadiah's church took drastic action. The pews have gone on a break and we have plastic chairs spaced 1.5 metres apart. It works, but feels weird. And not as funny as those pew signs.



We have reviewed each of these organisations against a set of standards relating to governance, transparency and accountability. By meeting or exceeding all these standards, they have demonstrated their commitment to integrity and trustworthiness, and earned the right to display the CMA Standards Council 'Accredited' seal.

Choose to support any of our partners and be assured that your generosity will be well used in God's work. CMA Standards Council 1300 CMA 300 (1300 262 300) www.cmasc.net.au

TESTIMONY

God can restore what is broken even my family



Rebecca Abbott WRITER hen AJ's father – a respected church minister – had an affair with another staff member, the lives of his entire family fell apart. "When I was 12 years old, I have a very clear memory of my mum and dad getting called into my dad's office – the church office. They were supposed to be gone for five or ten minutes, but they were gone for four hours," Alexander Boland, known as AJ, tells *Eternity*.

"So [my brother and sisters and I] just waited and waited. And when they came home, it was very clear that something had gone horribly wrong and that life wasn't going to be the same." It wasn't long before AJ's world – as a happy,

It wasn't long before AJ's world – as a happy, home-schooled pastor's kid, along with his older brother and four younger sisters – was radically changed.

His father had to leave the church – meaning the family lost their only source of income, along with most of their friends. They moved from their home on the West Coast of Canada to the other side of the country to live with AJ's grandparents, who had kindly offered to support them.

"It was foundation shattering on many levels. My parents' marriage obviously went through extraordinary strain and pain and confusion, after having six kids and my dad being a very well-known minister. But then there was also the faith side of things, not only the relationship with my father. [I began to question] what is real faith?" says AJ, who had a relationship with God as far back as he can remember.

....

The greatest impact of the affair and its aftermath, according to AJ, was on the family's mental health. "My dad had mental health struggles most his life, which led to him sort of living two lives – with his work at church, and then the life at home ..."

"That mental illness got absolutely amplified. He became heavily medicated and emotionally cut off for somewhere between five to eight years before there was real progress made in his mental health." He continues: "Most of my siblings began to

He continues: "Most of my siblings began to struggle immensely with fear, anxiety, depression and addiction. It was a hard slog."

AJ himself succumbed to anxiety and depression, and wrestled with a pornography addiction.

"I remember my mum used to say to me, after that point, that I was a time bomb. I'd hold stuff in trying to cope, trying to make everything okay in

Continued next page →

"My Mum gave me the way to answer the big questions you'll have to wrestle with God. That's been a huge part of my journey."

→ From page 11

my mind and I just couldn't. Every now and then I would have to go on a screaming fit or put a hole in the wall to release all the frustration and confusion. "I was trying to make sense of how my hero, my

"I was trying to make sense of how my hero, my dad – and my leader in faith, my family's leader – could do that. I couldn't make sense of it."

By the time AJ turned 14, he had become "quite an insulated, introspective" teen who "thought a lot deeper than all of my friends".

"I was trying to answer questions they had never considered, like why am I alive? That comes with depression as well. I was asking big-picture questions: What's the point of this? Where do I go from here? What's my purpose?

"My friends were just playing basketball and concerned about whether or not they're going to get picked for the A team."

AJ's feeling of isolation was exacerbated by the fact that he had been "thrown into a big public school", where he was "the only Christian among my friends, and where I didn't have a church family or community."

But rather than falling away from God, AJ says the difficult situation actually served as the "pressure cooker that drove me to faith". He describes one particular "catalytic moment" during that time: "I was reading my Bible, and the more frustrated I got, the more I read it, just demanding answers from God. And I stumbled upon Philippians 4:6 – a portion of Scripture that says, 'and the peace of God that surpasses all understanding will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus'.

"I remember reading that and I got so angry at God and at my parents who were my Christian leaders at the time. I ripped into my mum's room and let her have it, saying 'This says we're supposed to have peace, but you don't have it, my dad doesn't have it. Our family's a mess.'

"After I berated her, she quietly and humbly said, You'll have to seek God and let him speak to you because I don't have an answer for you' ...

"That was sort of a catalytic moment. She gave me the way to answer the big questions – you'll have to wrestle with God. That's been a huge part of my journey – wrestling with God, wrestling with my emotions, my own proclivities."

The more AJ sought God in prayer and Bible reading, the more he began to trust God, even in the midst of his messy family situation.

the midst of his messy family situation. "I found out that he is peace – that God is peace, Jesus is peace. And I'm peaceful as long as I am close to him. And my problems are handled and managed as long as I am close to him."

Over time, the brokenness of AJ's family also started to mend. Today, he says his parents' marriage is in "an incredible place" – thanks to his mum's "willingness to extend forgiveness and mercy", his dad's "true repentance" and God's "grace, mercy and radical provision".

Noting that he has his parents' blessing to share their story, AJ says: "My mum said the other day on the phone that it took her 30 years to become best friends with my dad, but it was worth the 30-year wait, so that's where they're at right now, which is incredible ... God was able to use that soft clay and build [their marriage] back up."

While AJ, his brother and sisters all had times when their relationship with their parents was severed, they have all reconnected with them.

severed, they have all reconnected with them. Significantly, the Christian faith of most of AJ's family has blossomed through adversity.

His dad is again leading at a church on Canada's West Coast, where his family moved back to before AJ's final year of school. His brother is now a worship leader at a church in Toronto, one sister is a full-time missionary, another is doing a church

Continued next page →



→ From page 12

internship and worship leading, and his youngest sister is also a worship leader, while AJ's fourth sister is still working out her faith journey with his help.

As for AJ, back when he was 20, he met Aussie Bible college graduate Madison. They married after a nine-month courtship and moved to Australia, where they both spent a couple of years studying at Hillsong College in Sydney.

Now, they have two children – one-year-old Smith and three-month-old Mahoney (left). AJ, now 26, is undertaking an internship with Bible Society Australia. Afterwards, he hopes to embrace his calling to full-time ministry.

"I was discouraged from the thing that God made me for because of what happened [with my dad], and it's taken me the better part of a decade to come to terms with that and just accept that's what I'm made for," he says. "But what makes me want to get up in the

morning is to see people encounter Jesus and grow

in Jesus and become a genuine disciple of Jesus. "My dream and my passion for my children is

that they'd both be able to say, 'I want to live just like my dad.' That's not the story I was given. "But I was given something else to set me up for

a win, which is don't hide your brokenness, learn genuine repentance, learn what it actually means to be a broken human who needs a Saviour and then gets saved ...

"As painful and hard as my journey was, I couldn't change it because of what it fashioned in me – the values for authenticity, a genuine redemptive encounter with God and a fearlessness when it comes to facing sin."

when it comes to facing sin." AJ concludes: "I heard it said recently that it's not the Christians who hide their sin, but it's the ones who are honest about it and then get redeemed from it who give the most glory to God. And that's the testimony of my family."



The gospel is a hit on TikTok



John Sandeman

t's not just dancing videos. TikTok – the short video app that boasts about 800 million active users worldwide, and that at least part of the US Government thinks is a threat to national security – has something even more powerful on it: the gospel.

It's a rare blessing from COVID, says Operation 513, a bunch of street evangelists, named for Matthew 5:13–16 – "You are the salt of the earth." They seek to preserve their saltiness in actively spreading the gospel through street preaching, tracts and gospel-laden conversations.

What does a street preaching crew do during a coronavirus lockdown? Operation 513 pivoted rapidly with TikTok gospel videos racking up many hundreds of thousands of views.

"We try and put the gospel in each of our TikTok videos, because we want people to grasp the gospel from it – one of the videos has over 700k views," says 513's Ryan Hemelaar.

Operation 513 rapidly cracked the TikTok formula. The videos can only be a maximum of one minute so, in each video, they aim to include the reaction of the other person.

"Being able to see the person we speak to is also key. Something intriguing, something that will make a person want to watch the whole thing. "For example, one of our videos that has almost 500k views is of an atheist young lady I spoke with who said 'If God is real I wouldn't be poor' – an outrageous statement, but with a helpful reply to her, the video exploded with views and comments.

"We have six of us regulars [all from Brisbane] who hit the virtual streets every day on Omegle, but also with a handful of others who join on different days when they can."

Omegle is a website that makes it easy to chat to other people across the world. As COVID lockdowns began in March, an Operation 513 team member remembered Omegle was a place where people could chat about anything.

"We thought, 'Let's give it a shot!' This was the last Monday of March," Hemelaar recalls. "And to our surprise, people on there were willing to chat." "The online outreaches are usually between three to eight hours in length each day."

Operation 513 started doing this every day, before streaming some conversations live on YouTube and Facebook. They hope other followers of Jesus will pray live for their online evangelism, or be encouraged by seeing the good news proclaimed in such a social-media-friendly way. "In July, we thought 'Why not make a oneminute summary of some of our chats and post it on to TikTok?' That was a hard feat getting the clip down to a minute in length, but we did and posted on TikTok our first clip. To our surprise, it took off. Each day the clip was going up and up – thousands of views each day – to where that first clip is now at 200,000 views.

"Then we decided to post two new clips every day and more and more people started following us and watching the clips. Almost daily, we are getting messages from our viewers that the one-minute videos coming up on their TikTok 'for you' page have been such a help to them – and that many have come to grasp the gospel and now believe it for themselves."

As COVID restrictions lift, Operation 513's Brisbane and New Zealand teams are back on the streets. But these days, they will still be seeking souls online too. •

Eternity

Two Bible workers martyred

Boko Haram in Cameroon kills "the engine of the local church."

Claire Bedot

wo facilitators from the Bible Society of Cameroon's literacy program in the Far North region have been killed by Boko Haram over the past few weeks. After a two-year lull, attacks by Islamic militant group Boko Haram in that region are on the rise again, and are claiming many victims. Among the lives recently lost were two literacy facilitators from the Bible Society of Cameroon's Alpha Program in the Parkwa language. One of them

died in early August and the second in mid-September. Jonas, 42, an elder in the Union of Evangelical Churches in Cameroon, was killed on the night of August 8 while standing guard outside the church with three other people. Patrice*, who lives opposite the church, describes what happened.

site the church, describes what happened. "Boko Haram usually turn up in the villages at around 10pm so when it got to 11pm those on guard thought they weren't coming – so they fell asleep. They didn't fire their weapons in the air or light torches, which they usually do, so Jonas was taken by surprise in his sleep. The other two managed to escape but Jonas was shot in the head twice."

Jonas, who leaves behind a widow and seven children, was highly thought of by his community. "We've lost the engine of the church a very

"We've lost the engine of the church, a very dynamic and helpful man, an exceptional and diligent facilitator who really knew how to teach," adds Patrice. "It's thanks to him that many Christians here can read and write."

The church's pastor confirms Patrice's words but is still in shock, too overwhelmed to be able to talk about what happened. Marcel*, one of the translators working on the Parkwa Bible, was almost killed by Boko Haram last October. He was a friend of Jonas and describes him as hardworking, someone who was calm and serious in everything he did.

Many people have fled their villages since the attacks resumed in the region. Boko Haram members have warned those who have chosen to stay that they will continue to bury their dead because "living on the mountainsides doesn't mean you're in heaven." In other words, they are not beyond Boko Haram's reach.

After Jonas's death, the church built his family a hut at the top of the mountain, which is more difficult for Boko Haram to get to. Olivier*, the Bible Society's delegate for the Far North, North and Adamaoua regions, went to visit his widow. "We found her absolutely devastated by the

"We found her absolutely devastated by the terrible loss she has suffered, but also ill because the humidity on the mountain attracts insects and reptiles," says Olivier. "They are living in a terribly precarious state. One of the children has festering wounds on his legs and two of them had left for a town 27 kilometres away to find plastic – so that the family can lay it beneath their bed mats, to insulate them from the ground."

On September 18, barely 40 days after Jonas's death, Boko Haram killed yet another literacy facilitator, Joseph.

A catechist in the Catholic Church, Joseph was 43 and had eight children. He was a friend of

OBITUARY



Jonas. Marcel was among the group who went to collect Joseph's body.

"The villagers were hiding in caves," he says. "One of Joseph's children was sick and crying. Fearing that they would be discovered, some of the villagers asked Joseph to take his wife and child and return to his hut. That's where Boko Haram found them. His wife was able to escape with the child, but not Joseph. We have lost one of our best Parkwa literacy teachers."

In the village, people live in fear. They can flee ... but where to? What would they live on? There is flooding in the area, and living conditions are extremely difficult. Diseases are decimating the population and famine is rising due to a ban on cultivation in the area surrounding the village – this is to ensure that anyone approaching can be seen. But people have nowhere to go.

"After the murder of our two team members, who were responsible for preparing the community for the arrival of the Bible in Parkwa, our task becomes even more urgent," says General Secretary of the Bible Society of Cameroon. "It is this Bible that will bring hope and heal the wounds of the Parkwa-speaking people. "The translation of the Bible into the Parkwa lan-

"The translation of the Bible into the Parkwa language is truly taking place under the most painful conditions. Even at the official ceremony to launch the translation project, we had to leave the village in a hurry because we were warned of a possible attack by Boko Haram.

"You know, when God sends you on a mission, he doesn't say what conditions you will face when you go. He says, 'Go, I'm sending you.' He sent us to this people and we must accomplish our mission. We are convinced that, with him, we will complete our mission, despite the actions of the enemy."

Please pray for our Parkwa-speaking brothers and sisters, that God will intervene for these people who have seen their men die and for all those in the Far North who have been bereaved due to the actions of Boko Haram.

Please lift up these families who have lost everything and for the Bible translators who are so distressed by what has happened that they are finding it difficult to concentrate. May the Lord's name be glorified and give us victory, so that his children can finally live in peace and safety. •

* Names changed to protect identity.

Claire Bedot works with United Bible Societies and is based in France.

MORLING COLLEGE SPONSORED PAGE

Serving in God's strength

Gayle Kent

When Mark De Guzman enrolled at Morling in 2017 he was committed to see what God wanted to teach him and be open to where God would lead him. He could not imagine the personal challenges that would face him during his studies, the ways that God would use his study to transform him, or that four years later he would be church-planting a new community of faith and seeking recognised Accreditation with the Baptist Association of NSW and ACT.

Mark's story reflects the apostle Paul's declaration of hope and dependence; that "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me" (Phil 4:13). During his studies at Morling, Mark faced several personal challenges, including significant and ongoing health issues. There were times when Mark was unsure if he would be able to complete his Diploma and it was difficult to see how and where God would use him. Mark, however, held onto God's promises and faithfully relied on God's strength.

relied on God's strength. As he looks back, Mark can see that his studies, and the deep connections he formed with lecturers and classmates, were used by God to equip him and deeply nurture his spiritual life. Mark says that he "saw God's hand moulding me into becoming the person that he wanted me to be: a servant, a friend of the homeless and vulnerable, a listener to the broken hearted and an encourager to the sick".

This servant-hearted transformation is evident in Mark's leadership and ministry at the newly formed Cornerstone Christian Fellowship in



Mark baptises a woman who came to faith at Cornerstone Church.

Blacktown, Sydney. This new church community is reaching out with the love of Christ. They seek to follow the ways of Jesus; to show love, hope and worth to those they meet. Mark hopes that the men and women they serve will come to know the transforming power of the gospel in all areas of life, and that they will be empowered to be able to help others in the future.

help others in the future. Without God's strength, Mark knows that the unpredictable and often difficult nature of ministry would be too much for him. He still struggles with his own health, and regularly does not have the energy to do all that he wants to do. Nevertheless, he remains steadfast to his commitment to grow deeper in faith and service. He continues to rely in Christ who gives him the strength.

He serves a God who can do more than he can imagine!

Mark's ongoing story is a witness to the ways that God can use theological study to equip and transform followers of Jesus to impact the world. We hope that our new scholarship program will enable women and men who have not had the opportunity to come to Morling to study.

opportunity to come to Morling to study. If you are open to where God could lead you, join us for the next Morling Open Night on 28 November.

We would love to explore this with you.

Gayle Kent is the Chief Community Life Officer at Morling College. In this role, and as a lecturer, she loves seeing students and staff grow in faith and follow Christ.

morling.edu.au/scholarships



MOORE COLLEGE SPONSORED PAGE

2020 – The Year I Didn't Anticipate

Marian Guthrie

COVID aside, 2020 isn't the year I'd anticipated. You see, my plan for 2020 was to embark on a Master of Creative Writing at Macquarie Uni. Instead, I'm studying part-time at Moore Theological College and working part-time as a Ministry Apprentice at my church. But I'm not the typical Ministry Apprentice, they're usually in their early to mid-twenties. I'm in my mid-fifties, a Mature Age Ministry Apprentice, a M.A.M.A. Thirty years earlier, my husband and I had

planned to go into ministry, but I was scared, was comfortable in my life and wasn't sure that God could or would supply all our needs. For my sake and the sake of our marriage we aborted those plans

In the following years God taught me His deep love, faithfulness and mercy. But most importantly, His trustworthiness. When we miscarried our first baby, He carried me in my grief. When I watched my husband struggle as he extricated himself from a business, He carried us both. When one of our teenage children spiralled into depression and we were buffeted, pummelled and thrashed, He carried us all. God taught me that He was trustworthy.

Three years ago, driving back from celebrating my brother-in-law's 60th, my husband confessed, "I don't want to be an accountant for the rest of my life ... what if we moved out of Sydney ... and were useful in a church somewhere ... I don't know where, just somewhere.

I glanced across at my husband and asked, "How



soon would you like to move?" With the ribbon of road stretched out before us, we spent the next few hours blue-sky thinking. By the end of our journey, we had a five-year plan. I returned to my studies and my husband

returned to work. Nearing the end of my degree, my professor approached me to enrol in a Master of Creative Writing. It was flattering, alluring and exciting. I began the process of applying. On the eve of submitting my application,

without reproach or incrimination, my husband reminded me, "You know next year will be the third year of our five-year plan?"

Just a gentle, calm reminder. That's all it took. I hit the delete button on my application. Instead, I applied to Moore and spoke to my church about a Ministry Apprenticeship. We figured these would be better use of my remaining time in Sydney rather than a Master of Creative Writing, especially as the course best suited to me at Moore was only taught in the classroom, faceto-face. There was no online option.

God wasn't wrangling me, but He was orchestrating behind the scenes to make sure I'm where He wants me. Four weeks after I started at Moore, COVID forced college to teach all its courses online. To me, there's a certain irony in that. Onsite or online, I've been immersed in God's word and his people that's instrumental and invaluable. And as for being a M.A.M.A. in a COVID world, it's exciting, exhausting, exhilarating, exasperating.

2020 hasn't been the year I anticipated—it's been better. As for what lies ahead, I can't imagine but I know God is loving, faithful, merciful and above all trustworthy.

moore.edu.au/advanced



Study the Women's stream of the Advanced **Diploma of Bible, Mission and Ministry**



COLLEGE

Eternity

ROOKWOOD SPONSORED PAGE

Rookwood General Cemetery makes live streamed funeral and cremation services more affordable

The rising cost of funerals is driving some families in to debt. Also known as funeral poverty, it is a globally recognised societal issue, bringing the days of elaborate funerals to an end.

^aCemetery capacity in metropolitan Sydney is estimated to reach exhaustion by approximately 2050. This scarcity of cemetery land will only increase the risk of funeral poverty for Sydney communities," said Crystal Lindsay, Director of Client Services at Rookwood General Cemetery.

As with many things, funeral services have had to change to keep the community safe in the time of coronavirus. Accordingly, Rookwood General Cemetery has therefore implemented several initiatives that enable visitors to implement social distancing, whilst also creating opportunities for family and friends to say goodbye.

Tamily and friends to say goodbye. With many families doing it tough during this time, Rookwood is trying to ease some of the burden. After community consultation, they have reduced the price of hiring the All Souls

ceremonial venue for funeral services. The All Souls has live streaming to help you connect with friends and family anywhere in the world. Weekday services are now \$620 (previously \$950).

Within the All Souls, a cost-effective cremation service is also offered. This service is akin to a regular cremation; however, the casket is moved to



All Souls ceremonial venue interior.

an offsite cremation facility once the ceremony is finished. This process provides value for money for both Rookwood and the community, as a cremator does not need to be maintained.

"For many families, the ritual of a funeral is recognised as a necessary part of the grieving process, particularly in these difficult times," continued Ms Lindsay. "Our responsibility, as a not-for-profit Crown cemetery manager, is to make the burial or cremation experience as easy as possible for families. We provide live-streaming services from the All Souls for no additional cost to families, so they can connect, support and grieve together after losing a loved one."

Rookwood is one of the oldest, largest, and most multicultural cemeteries in Australia. Its vast and historical landscape is one of Sydney's most significant heritage sites, providing services for a range of culturally diverse communities.

One of the standout structures at Rookwood is the art deco All Souls building. Built in the 1950s, this beautiful facility combines heritage charm with state-of-the art furnishings and facilities, including TV screens inside and out, video streaming capability and disability access.

To complement the cremation service, Rookwood offers a range of unique memorial areas, from rose gardens and monumental gardens, through to niche walls. This range enables families to create a fitting tribute that is as unique as the loved one they are commemorating.

"Rookwood's cremation service and associated memorial areas are created with dignity and affordability in mind. As an organisation, we believe that urgent action is required to ensure that all communities have access to affordable funeral and cremation services," said Ms Lindsay. "Our cremation service and live streaming capability is a small step to minimising funeral debt and creating affordability for families."

For more information visit

rookwoodcemetery.com.au or call 02 8575 8100



We're here to support you and your family.

To ease the burden during this difficult time, we have reduced the price of hiring the All Souls for funeral and memorial services.

Our All Souls venue has live-streaming to help you connect with friends and family. Weekday services are now \$620. (Previously \$950).

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ALPHACRUCIS SPONSORED PAGE

Three students with three callings answer: "What are you created for?"

It was 2015, in Ho Chi Minh City in Vietnam, when a massive prayer meeting laid hands on Kha Nguyen. In that moment, he knew he was called to ministry. He jumped on a plane and landed (figuratively, not literally) at Alphacrucis College (AC) in Australia. We had a quick chat with Kha between music, work and study and asked him: "What are you created for?" Kha's face lit up when he exclaimed: "Music is my passion. And AC has a Bachelor of Ministry with a worship major, so I knew that was where I was meant to be." While he was studying, Kha worked in IT.

He was bringing his faith to work while learning more about his faith, and he realised there's more to his calling. "There's more to ministry than just within the church setting, and AC really helped me understand that and shift my worldview."

As a result, Kha is now studying a Bachelor of Business with AC and hopes to be an entrepreneur after his studies.

Abigail Comafay also recognises the importance of a Christian worldview. When we asked Abigail "What are you created for?" we got the sense that she is wise beyond her years. Exactly the kind of person you want training to be a counsellor. Abigail answered: "I know I'm created to help people. I was studying the same degree at another university when the lecturer said that our worldview affects everything we do,



Kha Nguyen, Abigail Comafay and Ethan Entz - students at Alphacrucis.

especially in this job. At that moment, I realised I needed to find a new place to learn that aligns with my worldview. After asking around, I found Alphacrucis and I've never looked back."

Abigail is thriving as AC helps integrate a Christian worldview into her counselling training and looks forward to graduating soon.

Which brings us to Ethan Entz, whose freelance videography business is thriving! A Canadian who now calls Australia home, Ethan says studying business at AC Brisbane had a profoundly positive impact on his life. "The course on entrepreneurship was of particular importance for me because it reframed my thinking around what it takes to start a business, develop ideas, to scale and grow, and to innovate. This was all relevant to me because I work as a freelance business owner. I walked out of the course with my perspective expanded, my confidence boosted, and my mind far more well-attuned to the market and for the good ideas that can exist today. As a result, my business has grown both financially and in influence, and I have a clear idea of what steps I want to take in the future. AC helped me to apply my faith to freelancing and encouraged me the whole way."

What are you created for? At AC, our mission is to help you discover and be equipped for your calling. Head over to ac.edu.au to find out more or give us a call on 1300 228 355. We'd love to hear your story.

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JARS OF CLAY

If God doesn't hate my body, why should I?

For half of her life, Jenny has battled with herself about how she looks. As a Christian woman, she wants her body image to be shaped by the truth. But the truth has been hard to find, even in church circles.



MUSICIAN AND WRITER

m 14 and it's the day of my best friend's birthday party. It's late September and the afternoon air is warm. I slip on my new singlet. It's ocean blue with white vines wrapping the hem, cropped just below the belly button. I love it. I look in the mirror and my singlet doesn't sit flat. I tug at it, trying to make it sit right. Hot tears start to sting my eyes and I can feel the lump in my throat start to grow and take up my airways. I need to fix this. I walk down the hallway and into the kitchen. Opening the medicine cabinet I find bandages and quickly stuff them into my pockets before running back to my room. Taking my singlet off, I wrap the bandages, starting at my ribs. I pull them as tight as I can, round and round. Tighter and tighter. Thinner. Thinner. Thinner. I tape it off and slip my singlet back on. Better. Skinnier. I slip a hoodi over the top. Now I can go to the party.

At the party, the bandages start to hurt. I feel them cutting into my skin. I keep my jumper on and pretend I'm happy. We talk about the previous weekend. The one where we all bought singlets. "I'm wearing mine!" I say, before I realise the implication. "Oh cool, let's see," a friend asks. My face flushes as I think about the bandages under my singlet. I pull the edge of my singlet out to show him. "That's basically it," I say. "I have to pee." In the bathroom I start to peel away the bandag-

In the bathroom I start to peel away the bandages. Relief washes over my body. My skin is red and raw from where the bandages have rubbed and pinched my skin. I breathe deeply, savouring the sweetness of an ordinary breath. I grit my teeth against the pain and bury the hollowness I feel, and I wrap myself back up to look like the other girls.

I was 14 when I started wrapping my stomach in compression bandages, embarrassed and disgusted that my stomach wasn't flat. One year later, I started counting calories. I was 18 when I was first praised for losing weight before my year twelve formal. I was 19 when I bought diet pills online. I was 21 when I started restricting, binging, purging and exercising excessively. I have never been praised more, or received more compliments than I did when I was seeking to destroy my body. Never has anyone in my faith community questioned my intentions or my faith when they saw these changes in me. Never have I received counsel about what God thinks about my body when I have waged war against it year after year. When it came to my body and how I treated it, God was outside the bathroom.

What has been most confusing for me, as a woman who holds firmly to the Christian faith, is the acceptance and praise of my shrinking body within the Christian community and the inherent acceptance of society's ideal. Somehow every woman I know has compartmentalised their faith from their body.

For a community that is told to reject the culture around us, we're just as caught up in the dieting and body ideals, the fat shaming and body judgement, the pride of appearance.

Every now and again we get hints of how we should be thinking about our bodies. The Psalms talk about how we are fearfully and wonderfully made. That God loves and knows our bodies intimately, down to the very number of hairs on our head. The lovers in Song of Songs speak poetically and adoringly of each other's physicality. Genesis talks about the creation of humans as the pinnacle of everything God has made. Made in the very image of God himself. In her book *Wanting to Be Her: Body Image Secrets Victoria Won't Tell You*, Michelle Graham writes that "God drew on his own splendour to create your body."

The apostle Paul tells us in 1 Corinthians our bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit.

Yet despite these seemingly clear messages in the Bible, body image is a subject buried in the church. We talk about the body in reference to the things it does. The way it gives us physicality, that we are called to give in service to God. The physical body also has a lot to answer for, but only really as an extension of the heart ... the things that come out of a person's mouth come from the heart, and these defile them. For out of the heart come evil thoughts – murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, slander.

God cares what we do with our bodies, but does he care how we think about them?

In the 30 years I've been a part of the church, I've never heard anyone explain to me the theology of body image. I spoke with other women, who

JARS OF CLAY



Photo: Esther Maria

like me, felt there was a significant divide between their faith and the way they thought about their bodies.

So I went searching and thought I had found the answer when I came across the growing body-image movement. An answer I very quickly found myself evangelising with zealousness. This is the good news. Repent of diet culture and believe! Body positivity, body acceptance, body neutrality, radical love of the body.

This movement is all about opening up the conversation about body diversity. The problem is with society, not with our bodies. Body positive activists rally against the prevailing messages that fat is bad and skinny or fit is good. They point out that this message of a body ideal has harmed a large proportion of the population by constantly telling them that their bodies are wrong and bad: that *they* are wrong and bad.

I have been deeply invested in this cultural shift because I am sick of hating my body and myself. I jumped at the opportunity to get out of the selfhate game and leapt excitedly into a world that seemed to align more with my Christian values. A world where all bodies are worthy, good and celebrated. I wanted desperately to learn to love my physicality because it's what moves me through this world. My working legs mean I can walk my dog. My hands help me to play guitar and write. My lungs help me breathe. My arms and voice I can raise in worship to the God I love. Yes, the body is magnificent.

But has embracing this movement caused me to still be polarising, just with the opposing view? Have I exchanged one moralism for another, rather than looking to my own faith and worldview for answers? I find myself on Instagram and Facebook disagreeing with the underlying message that body positivity is promoting. As it champions your right to be proud, to claim your identity in being fat, curvy and big, this seems to be promoting the same thing as diet culture – it's just disguised differently. However, it's still an identity and selfworth built on pride. A pride which can never satisfy or rest from comparison.

How do I reconcile all these concepts with my faith? I want to do away with the current trend and land on the eternal and divine perspective of the body.

I often scour the internet looking for books that seem at least vaguely theologically sound and helpful. But it's much easier to find books like *The Ten Commandments of Ultimate Health, The Makers Diet* and my personal favourite, *The Daniel Fast*. Daniel was a prophet in the Old Testament, who asked for a diet of vegetables and water, rather than defile himself with the rich food and wine from the king's table. The chief eunuch was concerned Daniel would become weak and their king would behead the eunuch for Daniel's diet. Yet, after ten days, the chief eunuch found Daniel and his friends stronger and healthier than the young men who had eaten the king's food. Application?

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JARS OF CLAY



Photo: Esther Maria

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It's obvious – eat like Daniel and you too can look youthful and healthy!

So diet books are rife in the Christian world as well, but where's the Christian version of body-positivity?

In all my searching for the Christian answer, I never considered looking at the Bible. It seemed too obvious and, in all honesty, like it wouldn't provide a very satisfying answer. I talked to my minister who, you guessed it, encouraged me to look at the Bible and pursue the question of identity and to beware moralism.

Even though I was brought up in a world wrapped up in the Bible and in Jesus' mercy and grace, the world still seeped in. My mum was critical of her body and weight. My dad was critical of my appearance: too fat, too skinny, too many pimples. I became critical of my body and weight. We looked at society and we found ourselves lacking, when we should have looked to Jesus and seen that we were fully loved and fully known.

I used to wish I was one of those people who found Jesus later in life; sometimes, I still do. That I would have this life-changing moment where the veil was lifted and I saw the world anew. But I grew up in a Bible-believing, church-every-week household, where grace was said around the dinner table and I would often wake-up to find my mum reading her Bible in the kitchen. I was given the freedom to question reality, and I did, renouncing my faith on a number of occasions. Yet when I looked critically at the world and at the Bible, I kept coming back to it and deciding this is the truth, whether I like it or not.

I long for the fresh perspective that Anna McGahan woke up with after ruminating on words from the book of First Corinthians. *Do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received as a gift from God?* (see 1 Corinthians 6:19) After years of tormenting and beating her body into submission, she awoke to truly see her body as a temple, a gift given to her to cherish and grow.

As she writes about in her memoir *Metanoia*:

A Memoir of a Body, Born Again, she became a servant to her body instead of a slave-driver. McGahan perceived something that I think many of us lose when we look to society for answers about body image. As she examined her body in light of her new found faith and trust in Jesus, she saw her body as God saw it. She saw it as a home for his Spirit, a place he himself created, and saw that is was good.

From my endless googling, *Metanoia* is only one of three books I found that, in part, talk about body image from a Christian perspective. The other two were Graham's *Wanting to Be Her* and Tim Keller's *The Freedom of Self-Forgetfulness: The Path to True Christian Joy.*

Three books that say "You don't need to change and you are worthy as you are because God says so." Books that don't actually have the message I was hoping for. Instead, they have something better.

A new, renewed view on the body such as McGahan has is referred to as "self-forgetfulness" in Keller's book. A self-forgetful person is filled up by Jesus. Being loved and known by him means these people are not puffed up by others, nor are they deflated by them. They are people who see their reflection in a shop window and don't admire or cringe at it. Idealistic mush? Yes it is, but it's possible. This of course goes deeper than an issue of liking our physical bodies – this goes right to our very identity. Which is the same for McGahan.

In becoming a Christian, her whole perception of who she was changed in a very real way. Her new-found relationship with her body is an outworking of that change.

In the book of 1 Chronicles, King Solomon built a temple in which the ark of the covenant could be placed. The ark held the Ten Commandments etched into stone which God gave to Moses on Mount Sinai. The temple was ornate, priceless and incredibly breathtaking. A temple for God himself to dwell in. Now, we are that temple. God has chosen to dwell in us. He does not place demands on us to change in order for the Spirit to reside. He does not require us to fulfil a societal standard. He requires us simply to be willing.

requires us simply to be willing. Have I handed my body, my pride, over to God? Do I view my body as a sacred place he has chosen for his Spirit to dwell, and does that fulfil me? Can I look in the mirror and be satisfied with who I am, knowing I was created with an intention and purpose beyond my physicality?

So it turns out my minister was right when he said to look into identity. Smart guy. I wanted to yell and shake people out of their

I wanted to yell and shake people out of their diets and their obsession with this ideal of how bodies should look, but my alternative to diets and the thin-ideal was just another form of moralism and had the same prideful identity.

Reading McGahan's book was like the opening of the floodgates that led me back to the Bible. She speaks so poetically of how the Bible led her to a true understanding of her body for the first time. Yes, God does care how I think about my body. He has always cared. He cares that I understand that I am fearfully and wonderfully made.

When I look into the Bible, I see God declare that my body isn't just good, it's very good. When I am struggling to accept my body, when I wish it were different, I remember that I was handcrafted by God. I see in the Psalms that I am made of the same splendour as that of the mountains. Who am I to say the creator of the world got it wrong? I haven't had a McGahan-esque moment, where

I haven't had a McGahan-esque moment, where God has healed me of body image issues overnight. I still sway violently between taking pride in the way I control my body and taking pride in letting it go. But in between those moments I can hear God calling me to a more wonderful way.

Jenny Denny is a musician and writer based in Sydney. She has just released her debut EP, Sad Songs From a Happy Life. She spends far too much of her time Instagramming her dog.







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FEBC AUSTRALIA SPONSORED PAGE

Some things will always remain the same ...

These things are still the same - love, joy, peace. "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness and faithfulness." Galatians 5:22

2020 has brought with it a record-breaking amount of change and devastation, but there is one thing that will never change; the message of Christmas.

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The Good News can be heard through every barrier, in every nation, tribe and tongue.

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Each person is valued, important and loved by their Heavenly Father and can know real joy and peace within. COVID-19 has brought with it immense

COVID-19 has brought with it immense suffering and devastation. Our hope is that we can in some small way bring a transformation to many through our ministry. By partnering with FEBC, you will be transforming lives and providing the gift of peace at a time when so many desperately need it.

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We can still give hope, peace and love this Christmas

EEB

AUSTRALIA



Going twice ... do I hear another \$10,000?

John Sandeman

ast month we sold our home of 35 years. That has the peculiar trauma of getting rid of hundreds of books – okay, the ones I have not read for years and will never read again – and three decades of clothes. But it was sort of

liberating, once we determined to get rid of "stuff." It also fits with the Christian story of leaving other "stuff" behind – and of not being attached to things.

We had about four skips worth of stuff from a regular-sized house and garden. That must say something about owning too much stuff. But what came next was more challenging. The auction. And it feels kind of different when it is the property you are selling, not one you are buying.

I discovered the arcane rituals of a world I had never encountered before. When someone comes along and creates an imaginary family in your house ... because we'd never have covered each bed with a white doona. Never had a glass table. Or so many mirrors.

And then there's fixing the things I had never got around to: the light fitting that had fused, the cupboard doors that would swing open, the daggy fly screens.

Not to mention the great kitchen disaster of 2020. Don't ask.

And then gardening to show off the size of the property, whereas before we had liked our jungle. And going through all of this makes me think how weird the world of church must be to those who have never encountered it before.

I have a real respect for all those people who showed skill in guiding us through the sale. I mean, our real estate agent, who I will call Peter (because that's his name), worked with us gently for three years.

And hopefully that sort of careful welcome and encouragement is what happens with church too. In whatever form your church gathering is happening in, at the moment. Back to the auction. We had done the

Back to the auction. We had done the wrong thing, selling before we bought, and buying just before the pandemic, and selling once everyone could spell epidemiologist.

We were inside the front room and I was scared, as the auctioneer, James, began. There was a silence that seemed to go on for millennia, as James cajoled the first bid. It started slowly. I got so nervous that I walked out to the back. I returned as bidding edged towards our reserve, and, yes, kept going.

It's hard in this situation to want the best for everyone. That's what a Christian should do, right? To love the others – the bidders, just as one loves oneself. To want a fair price. I was calm and prayerful in the days before. Well, almost.

But on auction day it was hard, to love all. To wish good on everyone. How does God do it? •

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OPINION

The unnecessary battle over wokeness

Dear right wing and left wing: You shouldn't define Christians by their politics.

John Sandeman

verything has a golden age. "If only the modern Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement was like Martin Luther King Jr's civil rights era demonstrations" is a thought expressed by Christians frustrated by the leftists – either Marxists or post-Marxists – who are part of #BLM.

But look inside King's movement and you soon find a communist. Stanley Levison, a Jewish auto dealer from New York, had been in charge of the secret finances of the CPUSA (the Communist Party). He then became a fundraiser for King's SCLC, as well as his accountant, ghostwriter and a key advisor. CIA documents suggest Levison was a KGB operative. He also was the chief reason the FBI started their intense surveillance of King.

The point is not to debate King's life, but that this info (the details of which are still disputed) strongly resembles the reasons given for keeping away from causes such as racial justice. We can't use words like "black lives matter," the conservative memes suggest, because there are Communists involved.

Yet, there always will be leftists around social movements. They are often the "canaries in the coal mine" – if one can talk about coal these days - who signal a social issue. And it needs to be said that activists for causes like "right to life" have the same, often lonely, role of afflicting the comfortable middle.

"The Fundamentalist War on Wokeness is a War on Christian Love" is how outspoken evangelical theologian Michael Bird recently characterised the tendency of Christians to see the ideology of some protagonists as the reason NOT to support social causes. "I know wokeness, believe me, I live in Melbourne, comically known as Melbingrad, one of the wokest cities in the world, where the government is so progressive it makes California look like Alabama," are the words of someone who can really grab readers.

But the meat of Bird's piece on the Patheos site is summed up by: "The whole anti-woke and anti-critical race theory trope strikes me as not so much interested in opposing progressive authoritarianism and its divisive racial politics, as much as it serves to deny ethnic minorities have any grievances and white churches have any responsibility to do anything about it.

"In my mind, acknowledging the reality of racism, discrimination and injustice – whether historical, cultural, institutional – and determining to change it, does not require adherence to a Marxist narrative, or becoming Woke. Rather, it is the outworking of the liberal political tradition rooted in a Christian worldview where everyone should have the same rights, freedoms and opportunities."

Bird said it better than I can. Despite what the apostles of "liquid modernism" (a term Rod Dreher endorses in *The Benedict Option*) insist upon, recognising injustice and doing something does not require signing up to a complicated ideology.

require signing up to a complicated ideology. That ideology could be intersectionalism – the joining together of the causes of oppressed races, sexual minorities, and any other group seeking liberation, which sort of replaces the proletariat (working class) who – according to Hilary Clinton, at least – are "deplorable."

It could be critical race theory. It could be green pantheism. It could be what that term "liquid modernism" tries to capture, an endless shape-shifting protest movement. While Christians do not need those ideologies to care about injustice, their insights and the research which accompanies these movements can be invaluable.

Canadian theologian John Stackhouse has written a series of short columns "Postmodernity, Critical (Race) Theory, Cultural Marxism, and You" to guide a Christian response. He's worth reading for establishing that Critical Theory and postmodernism cannot both be right.

He's in bypass mode as regards the ideologies, but wants us to glean insights:

"Postmodern doubt is appropriate, from a Christian point of view ... Still, God didn't need postmodern theorists to acquaint him with the limitations of human knowledge and leadership. And God has given us what we need to know in order to be whom we need to become and in order to do what we need to accomplish. God has given us inspired Scripture, yes, but also Godself as ever-present Teacher, Guide, and Adjudicator ... "As for Critical Theory, its basic premise can

"As for Critical Theory, its basic premise can hardly be disputed from a Christian vantage point. Power does tend to corrupt, as (the Christian) Lord Acton observed. And we can simply assume that every institution harbours corrupt motives and modes, every sector of life is warped by the powerful in their own interest."

Christians have the means to examine the myths and self-justifications of the power structures of the world with as much insight as any postmodernist to reveal the gaps, contradictions, implausibilities and synthetic nature of our culture. Christians have the means to examine the world

christians have the means to examine the world as critically as any critical theorists – and we should be attuned to the injustice to be observed. In fact, we should have an even clearer, and more accurate picture of what is wrong in the world.

The battle over wokeness is a false battle. It divides Christians falsely into two camps – those who want to put energy into opposing abortion, and those who want to oppose racial inequality or campaign for refugees. But Christians don't have to pick political sides this way. You won't have to look far to find a Christian who wants less abortion and more refugees. Or pornography to be curbed, and renewable energy encouraged. Most of us I suspect will find that we are a bad

Most of us I suspect will find that we are a bad fit for any political party. Something will not feel right, even as we vote. And, yes, there also will be some Christians who will feel right at home in various of the parties. Some will be candidates and MPs. I hope they will have friends across the aisle.

But like those who don't quite fit in a party, they will know their ultimate loyalty is not with their party. •

BOOKS

The lyric police of Hillsong

Robert Fergusson is passionate about wanting you to get what the Bible is on about

John Sandeman

illsong Teaching Pastor Robert Fergusson's most widely known work does not have his name on it. Every Hillsong song has passed through the hands of Robert and his wife Amanda for a sign off.

I asked him if that was a hard job. "I wouldn't say it was hard so much as delicate," he responds. "We are affectionately called the lyric police by the songwriters. And if you think about it, writing a song is a very personal and onerous experience.

"So, for someone to be given permission to change it, challenge it, requires a measure of delicacy. We've got some amazing songwriters who are humble enough to submit their songs and say, are they okay? And I just see that as an immense privilege to talk to them about what I think is good theology. What I think is clear.'

He says they say "no" quite a lot. "We are looking for something that, well, we can defend from the Bible. Other people may not like it. And we say to people, you don't have to sing it,

but if we can defend it from the Bible, then we let it through.

"But we're also looking for clarity. So sometimes we just feel that a line is not clear, and it needs to be clarified. So, we will question lines and say, this could be made clearer, or we'll allow this, but you will get some criticism for it. So, we do a lot of to and fro, backwards and forwards. Very rarely do we just say, 'that's brilliant."

But his main job is preaching. How is the task of getting people to trust the Bible going? Has a more hostile world and postmodernism made it harder? "Well, often the proof of the pudding is in the eating. The Bible says 'taste and see that the Lord is good.' And so how do you measure the Bible's impact on people's lives? Well, ultimately you measure it by changed lives.

"There is an old adage that says a man with experience is never at the mercy of a man with an argument, so once a life has been changed by the Bible, it doesn't really matter how many critics or cynics appear. They say, 'well, my life has been changed' – but you're absolutely right; we live in a very truth-challenging world. The postmod-ern generation has for the most part abandoned the idea of absolute truth. But my feeling is that declare the truth, declare the Bible, declare Jesus Christ, declare our faith, and he will change lives and then their stories will speak for themselves." Fergusson observes: "If you just shut your eyes

and are in a prayer meeting, and there are 10 people praying, you can almost certainly work out which denomination they come from? Prompted to pick out a word to describe

Hillsong, he picks "passion."

"We're passionate about our faith, passionate about love, we're passionate about life, and one of

our mottos is: we love God, we love people, and we love life.

Searching around, I offer him another word to describe his church – one that Fergusson ac-cepts – "unapologetic." "I think when it comes to the communication of truths, and that's what my book Are You Getting This? is all about, I think İ have learned to be unapologetic about my faith in Christ and unapologetic about my faith in the Bible and that's part and parcel of what, not just our church, but hopefully most churches are."

The book ... In which Fergusson reveals he owns a rather ancient chewed pencil. He's kept it from his school days. It's a reminder of when he did "not get" what a computer teacher was trying to tell the class. He did not get it. He remembers the pain and pencil chewing frustration of that, so he's written *Are You Getting This?* as a book on making sure you actually communicate.

He tells stories. It is his way of preaching mostly. Which is to say he has a narrative arc to his talks, with all the devices of a good story, a hero, a quest, and the "universal plot" of home, discovery and return. In fact, the whole book is set out like a story - with 20 insights that Fergusson assures us can be read in any order.

The first chapter "Passing On" convinces me. It's about passing on a story – one of the many he tells is this: "When I asked a Rabbi how he implemented this idea of passing on covenant values to another generation, he showed me a mezuzah. A mezuzah which means 'doorpost,' is a small receptacle which every Jewish household is required to affix to the doorposts of their homes This mezuzah contains a scroll, and on this scroll

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two passages from Deuteronomy are inscribed. These are the passages that refer to the passing on of their creed and covenant values.

'The Rabbi told me that he had put Disneyinspired mezuzahs on his children's bedroom doorposts and used them as height markers. Each time his children grew, he would move the mezu-zah. He would use this as an opportunity to tell his children the story of Israel."

It seems to this reader that the organisation Fergusson has been part of shaping for decades -

Hillsong – has been good at passing on its story. Which story? As the "are you getting this" book goes around its own storytelling arc, you come across nuggets like this advice for public speakers that is pragmatic and deep at the same time. "You cannot share a lesson you haven't learned or a revelation you haven't received. You cannot promote an idea you are neither passionate about nor practise. Jesus Christ talked about what he knew and what he lived. There was no gap between his life and his message. He was a man of integrity."

Talking to me, Fergusson is like many teachers from many denominations - who have taught the Bible for decades. He exudes it. And he wants to teach you how to preach it authentically – in a way that means the audience "gets it."

Asked if the "traditional sermon" is shape shifting into something else - like a good communicator, Fergusson answers a slightly different (and

better) question. "When I'm teaching on preaching, which I do each year through our students, I compare preach-ing to making a cake and I go down the front row of the students and I ask people, 'what is your favourite cake?' And one will say a carrot cake, one will say a chocolate cake, one will say some other national dish. And I say, there's nothing wrong with having those favourites, but what makes a cake? A cake is not whether you like it, or whether it looks good or whether your nation accepts it as the best cake.

What makes it a cake are the ingredients and there are a number of ingredients that make a good cake and a number of ingredients that make a good sermon. If it doesn't have the Bible in it, it's not a sermon. If it doesn't have Jesus in the centre, it's not a sermon, if it's not empowered by the Holy Spirit, it's not a sermon. If it's not personal, it's not a sermon.

"So, these are foundational ingredients that you would find in Acts 2, or Acts 10, or Acts 7, the sermons in the Bible. But reality is, one cake is going to look different from another. So, I'm very cautious and I'd say that is the right type of cake. It's better to say what's in it."

Are You Getting This? is available at Koorong.



OPINION

Make Jesus Great Again, everyone

Tim Costello

n Acts 1:6 we have the very last question asked by the disciples before Jesus ascended to heaven. Curiously it was "Lord, are you at this time going to restore the Kingdom to Israel?" Jesus treats this as if they had asked "Lord is it now that you're going to make Israel great again?" He buys none of this religious nationalism and says "that is not for you to know but you will be my witnesses to the ends of the earth."

The gospel is when the Holy Spirit empowers us to "Make Jesus Great Again" in every culture. It is not to make any nation great again.

The gospel is internationalist because everyone is made in the image of God. Pentecost is the birth of that multicultural church that fans out from Jerusalem but does not seek the restoration of Jerusalem or making Israel Great Again.

In India, Hindu nationalism under PM Modi to restore India's Hindu identity and greatness is making it very difficult for Christians and other religious minorities. The same is happening in Russia, Turkey and China. And American evangeli-cals should remember that MAGA is not the vision of the gospel. We need the state to be neutral in not imposing any religious narrative through law. Fueling religious nationalism by a dominant narrative enforced through law leaves Christians very vulnerable where they are a minority and can then see them really persecuted. The state should remain neutral to all overarching interpretations of meaning because then faith can flourish.

In November, I am addressing 70 Liberals from the moderate wing of the party on the topic of religious freedom. I will tell them that for some years I have been worried about how rapidly our culture is retribalising. It has worried me that Christians are caught up in this as much as any secular group. Sometimes it is called identity politics. It is the dissolving of larger narratives into a group identity narrative. And the group identity characteristically sets itself off as a victim that is persecuted at the hands of other groups. I think this really hit me when I made some

remarks last year published in The Guardian that Christians are not persecuted in Australia and I could show them plenty of places in other nations where they are persecuted. The response was immediate condemnation from some Christian quarters who were sure that I was wrong and

convinced that they were victims of a secular hostility. I agree that there definitely is secular hostility but that is not the same as persecution where we cannot preach or worship freely or run Christian schools. And this conclusion was born out by the Philip Ruddock-led enquiry into religious freedom in Australia. That is not to say we should be concerned to ensure that our laws allow Christian schools and Christian NFP's to hire Christians and in that sense discriminate in employment but to hype this debate or frame it as persecution is counterproductive.

What is really going on is the sweeping retribalising that reinforces identity mindsets of persecu-tion. David Brookes (Republican in his politics) is one of my favourite US authors; he writes the following in his book The Second Mountain: "Tribalism seems like a way to restore the bonds of community. It certainly does bind people together. But it is actually the dark twin of community. Community is connection based on mutual affection. Tribalism, in the sense I am using it here, is connection based on mutual hatred. Community is based on common humanity: tribalism on a common foe. Tribalism is always erecting boundaries and creating friend/enemy distinctions. The tribal mentality is a warrior mentality based on scarcity: Life is a battle for scarce resources and it's always us versus them, zero sum. The ends justify the means. Politics is war. Ideas are combat. It's kill or be killed. Mistrust is the worldview of tribalism. Tribalism is community for lonely narcissists. These days, partisanship for many people is not about which political party has the better policies. It's a conflict.

Pentecost was putting an end to tribalism and elevating Jesus - the Saviour of all ethnicities, languages and cultures. We model and proclaim this salvation to the ends of the earth. We refuse to retreat into a tribal victimhood by claiming persecution or confusing the gospel as imposing a religio-nationalistic vision.

Tim Costello is the executive director of Micah Australia and a Senior Fellow of the Centre for Public Christianity.

CENTRE FOR PUBLIC CHRISTIANITY

Save us from our SUVs

Barney Zwartz

any years ago I had a blog on matters of religion and faith at *The Age*, which attracted some fierce criticism, mostly from committed atheists. But the blog that most offended believers was when I suggested that Christians who drove only in the city and suburbs could not justify owning large four-wheel drives, or SUVs as we now call them.

It followed a suggestion from Melbourne Anglican Archbishop Philip Freier that year to his synod that watering down the Scriptural teaching on the dangers of wealth was our greatest spiritual blindness.

I wrote that it was harder to imagine a more "me first, up yours" statement to the rest of the world than driving a big SUV. They take up extra space on the road and in carparks, they weigh a lot, use a lot of fuel, have high greenhouse emissions, are dangerous to other road users and also to their own drivers, who seem more than most to believe they can behave with impunity – all claims endorsed by the Australian Academy of Science at the time. I concluded: "Plenty of other cars may represent an egotistical self-indulgence, but few have the environmental footprint these monsters do."

That was in 2007, and clearly even then I was Don Quixote tilting at monstrous fast-moving windmills (but at least Don Quixote was pure of heart). It is an argument I have since lost resoundingly. I know that considerable work has gone into reducing SUVs' environmental footprint, that design has become more family friendly, and many smaller models are now available, which are just another form of 2007's station wagons, but my criticisms remain when it comes to the larger versions. And now they are endorsed by an astonishing finding by the International Energy Agency, reported last month by *The Guardian*.

The IEA found SUVs were the second largest cause of the global rise in carbon dioxide emissions over the past decade (behind power generation), eclipsing all shipping, aviation, heavy industry and even trucks. If all SUV drivers banded together to form their own country, it would rank as the seventh largest emitter in the world.

The Guardian reported that SUVs raced to a new milestone in 2019, surpassing 40 per cent of all car sales worldwide for the first time. The world's roads, parking lots and garages now contain more than 200 million SUVs, eight times the number a decade ago.

The rise of the SUV as the world's pre-eminent car has been so rapid that the consequences of this new status – the altered patterns of urban life, air quality, pedestrian safety, where to park the things – are still coming into focus. "So much space is required for the 95 per cent of the time our cars sit idle that Los Angeles, for example, devotes an area larger than the land mass of Manhattan just for parking," *The Guardian* report said.

Combining the weight of an adult rhinoceros and the aerodynamics of a refrigerator, SUVs require more energy to move around than smaller cars and therefore emit more CO2, overshadowing the car industry's climate gains from fuel efficiency improvements and the nascent electric vehicle market, *The Guardian* said.

But, when we can go back to church post-pandemic, just check out the carparks and see how



The late motoring writer Chris de Fraga told me that the popularity of big SUVs – apart from towing or going off-road – was that "dad feels powerful behind the wheel and mum feels safe."

much church-goers love them. And not the modest versions.

The late motoring writer Chris de Fraga told me that the popularity of big SUVs – apart from towing or going off-road – was that "dad feels powerful behind the wheel and mum feels safe." They'd be much better off driving a Bentley, like me.* *The Guardian* quoted Professor Harvey Miller,

The Guardian quoted Professor Harvey Miller, director of the Centre for Urban and Regional Analysis at the University of Ohio, as saying SUVs not only bring a stew of pollution and an element of fear to those attempting to traverse roads on foot or bike, they are fundamentally inefficient. "You are taking a 200-pound package, a human, and wrapping it in a 6000-pound shipping container," he said.

"For some reason we think that is a good way to move through a city. If Amazon used that rationale, it would be out of business in a week."

Of course when these behemoths hit a pedestrian or cyclist, they tend to hit them higher on the body, causing much more severe injuries and often knocking the victim under the wheels. Also, when parked beside one of these in an ordinary car, it is difficult to edge out because you can't see until you are well into the lane. You will find it harder to get into your car because they are more likely to have crossed the parking line, just as when turning they like to claim a lane and a half.

Christians may tell themselves they are quite justified in driving these road-hog vehicles, though I think they have to go through a couple of theological contortions. But more worrying are those who never even give the issue a thought. Most of the time, when we let our witness slip, it is unconscious rather than deliberate.

And I know that as I point out the mote in your eye I may be unaware of the beam in mine. But, as a married man, there's a good chance I have been told. •

Barney Zwartz is a Senior Fellow with the Centre for Public Christianity.

* About the Bentley, just kidding.

OPINION

How do I know if I am called to the ministry?

Working out the right questions for our work

Michael Jensen

n thinking about the tapering off of numbers in theological education, I've been wondering if our view of the call to ministry is partly to blame. I've spoken to a number of people in their twenties who've said that they've considered whether some kind of full-time or ordained ministry is for them, but then decided they didn't feel called. They were waiting for an inner sense of the rightness of the path – a subjective confirmation that this was what they ought to be doing. When that inner conviction did not arrive, they understood this to mean they shouldn't pursue ministry training.

ministry training. Interestingly, this is the way we like to present the idea of career choices to young people more generally in our culture. We imply there is a career-path – a "vocation" – out there which is an almost pre-destined fit. Whatever it is, it combines deep satisfaction with a sense of personal mission, and hopefully some financial rewards, too.

And we have a powerful belief in our culture in the rightness of our feelings. Subjective experience has more authority than objective considerations.

There's an interesting PhD to be written about the way in which Christian, and in particular Protestant, ideas about vocation have become secularised in the last century or so – and that that's what we are seeing with this priority of the inward sense. To put it simply: one of the central moves of the Reformation of the 1500s was a move away from the idea that there were two levels of Christian: the monks, nuns and priests, on the one hand, and the laity, on the other. It was the first group who had a particular calling, not the second.

Martin Luther and John Calvin insisted that the lives of ordinary Christians could be just as sacred as the life of the full-time minister. All of these roles were "vocations" in which God could be glorified. God is at work in and through your shop or in your work in the factory. This new theology of work gave dignity to work that had once been despised and overlooked. For most people in the 16th century, there was little choice about what career to pursue. Work, for most human beings for all of history – and even today – is simply what they need to do to survive as best they can. With the growth of the educated, urban, middle classes from about 1700 on, there was, for some people, a new opportunity to choose a "career." Add

With the growth of the educated, urban, middle classes from about 1700 on, there was, for some people, a new opportunity to choose a "career." Add to that the way in which evangelicals started to speak, and still do today, about the active guidance of God in their lives as a subjective experience, and the choice of one's profession became a matter of vocation, or divine, inward calling. Also, secular middle-class people love the idea of

Also, secular middle-class people love the idea of an inner confirmation that a career is right for you. And so, the idea of calling to a profession is in our culture, even where people have no Christian faith.

What this tangled story tells us is that, when we approach the issue of a calling to ministry, we are somewhat prone to overemphasise a supposed subjective experience of calling. So what does the Bible actually say about calling?

The Bible never speaks about calling in the inward sense that we often use the word. And it almost never speaks about specific callings to particular jobs – even to the ministry. It is true that Saul (Paul) and Barnabas were spoken of as "called" by the Holy Spirit in Acts 13:2. Paul does speak of his call to be an apostle. But his call was, I would suggest, unique, just as his mission was.

would suggest, unique, just as his mission was. The language of calling in the New Testament almost always refers to the call of the gospel. It's the call of Jesus to his disciples to follow him. In Ephesians 4, Paul urges his readers to "live

a life worthy of the calling you have received" –

OPINION

When speaking truth is a crime

Peter Downie

ot long ago, Tasmanian Senator Claire Chandler was in trouble with the law. Her state's Anti-Discrimination Commissioner found she had potentially breached the Tasmanian Anti-Discrimination Act, where section 17 criminalises what is often called "hate speech."

It says a "person must not engage in any conduct which offends, humiliates, intimidates, insults or ridicules another person on the basis of an attribute ..." including sexual orientation, religious or political belief and gender identity. Intention is irrelevant.

Intention is irrelevant. Senator Chandler was required to attend a "conciliation conference" with a man who complained about a newspaper column she wrote in July.

If the Commissioner upheld the man's complaint, the senator could be forced to make a public apology and pay damages. If she did not agree with the ruling, she could appeal to a tribunal and the courts. But she would have to pay her own legal costs throughout. If all appeals failed and she did not comply with the ruling, she risked jail for contempt of court.

So what were the allegedly illegal words that Senator Chandler said? In effect, she said that women who play contact sports face significant danger from "transwomen." The latter, being born male, are generally bigger and stronger than those born female. A recent study showed that biological women are up to 30 per cent more at risk of harm when competing against transwomen. The senator also said: "Women's sport, women's

The senator also said: "Women's sport, women's toilets and women's changing rooms are designed for the female sex and should remain that way." Most Australians would agree.

Tasmania's Catholic Archbishop Julian Porteous faced a similar situation in 2015. A transwoman lodged a complaint against him, merely because he had distributed a respectful booklet about his church's teaching on marriage. He incurred significant legal costs before the transwoman dropped the complaint for political reasons.

Years earlier, following the 9/11 Twin Towers attack in New York, two Christian pastors organised a Melbourne church seminar on the Qur'an – including its teaching on jihad. One pastor – Daniel Scot – had studied Islam in detail under Muslim scholars in Pakistan.

Three Australian Muslim converts attended the seminar under cover and later lodged complaints with the Victorian Equal Opportunity Commission. They said they had been offended, insulted and intimidated when Pastor Scot cited



passages such as 9:5 – where Allah commands Muslims to "fight and kill the disbelievers wherever you find them."

In 2004 following a long hearing, the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal found Scot guilty. In 2006 the Supreme Court of Appeal set aside that finding. In 2007 the parties ultimately settled out of court. Total legal costs were more than \$1 million.

Most Australian states now have antidiscrimination laws like those in Tasmania and Victoria. The process is the penalty, even if a complaint is dismissed.

So what happened to Senator Chandler? She refused to sign a confidentiality agreement that would have prevented her telling the Parliament about the complaints process.

Amazingly, the complaint was then dropped. Senator Chandler is now free, but these unjust laws remain. She has pledged to keep fighting for truth and justice.

We need more like her.

Peter Downie is the National Director of FamilyVoice Australia.



and then goes on to speak about our unified and godly lives. In Romans 1, we are "called to be his holy people." In Romans 8 we hear that "God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose." In 2 Thessalonians 2:13-14, Paul says: "God chose you as first-fruits to be saved through the sanctifying work of the Spirit and through belief in the truth. He called you to this through our gospel, that you might share in the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ."

There are many more references to Christians

Ridley

being called by God in the proclamation of the gospel of Jesus Christ to live holy, peaceful and godly lives in service of one another. All Christians have been called in the gospel of Jesus Christ to ministry. And that call comes in the public preaching of the gospel. It is words that we've heard with our ears, which match the prompting of the Spirit in our selves. To be called in the gospel will encompass our whole selves, including our feelings. We've all been called to serve Christ wholeheart-

edly. The call of the gospel will be refracted in

different ways through our personality, opportunities and abilities.

There is only one passage which has sometimes been read differently. In 1 Corinthians 7:17, Paul writes: "Each person should live as a believer in whatever situation the Lord has assigned to them, just as God has called them." He then encourages the Corinthians to live out the gospel in service in whatever condition they find themselves.

In fact, Paul isn't making a point about discerning God's calling to a particular career through inward examination, but rather that the situation in which you find yourself – whatever it is – is under the sovereign hand of the Lord. And that means, you need to get busy and active in serving the Lord right now. That is your call, as a Christian.

So what about ministry full-time? How do I know if I should pursue full-time ministry, rather than serve God in some other way? Full-time ministry often means the particular responsibility of being a shepherd of the sheep. It is service like all Christian service, but it has a particular shape to it.

As with all decision-making as a Christian, we need to ask God for guidance and then listen: first to the Bible, second to other mature Christians, third to wisdom, and last, look to our feelings.

We start with the Bible, but it doesn't tell me much about me specifically. However, as I read the Scriptures, I am struck by the power and priority of the gospel message, and the hold that has on our lives. Above all, God is building for himself a people – calling the unsaved and building up the saved, in Jesus Christ. That's his great plan and purpose for the universe.

So my question is going to be: how can I best serve God's plan with my whole life, in my circumstances and with my gifts?

Michael Jensen is the rector of St Mark's Anglican Church in Darling Point, Sydney, and the author of several books.

"The genius of Jesus was that he could flex two muscles at the same time, the muscle of moral and theological conviction, and the muscle of deep compassion for all."

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One of the common barriers I encounter on secular campuses is the misguided notion that to become a Christian requires you to surrender any intellectual curiosity.

Whenever I face this objection, I simply recount my own experience of coming to Christ where, as a new Christian, the youth pastor at my church handed me a reading list some 50 books long.

For me, stepping into the Christian story opened up my eyes to a wide world of literary delights, and in pursuit of loving God with my mind, I've never stopped sampling widely.

As a young Christian and then student of theology, I often found myself perusing the aisles at my nearest Koorong. Silver and gold I did not have, but whatever I could scrounge together I poured into the library of books that now crowds our house.

Here are a few of my favourite investments whose pages are well worn after years of rereading. You might do well to add them to your own.



Dan Paterson is a Christian thinker who speaks regularly to religious and secular audiences on how the Christian story connects to life's biggest questions.

Dan's recommendations



Can Man Live Without God (216588), by Ravi Zacharias, shows how affirming the reality of God's existence matters urgently in our everyday lives.

The Cross of Christ (252641), by John Stott, is as sharp and as pertinent as ever. This modern classic explores the profound significance of Christ's cross and answers the objections commonly brought against the Christian doctrine of atonement. Stott's characteristically thoughtful and sound biblical exposition provides the basis for his searching call to the church to live under the cross.

In Jesus Through Middle Eastern Eyes (258575), Kenneth E. Bailey draws on his scholarly expertise and personal experience of village life in Middle Eastern and Mediterranean culture. Kenneth Bailey assesses Jesus and Paul from the perspective of peasants revealing a wealth of insights about the New Testament world often overlooked by urbanised Westerners.

See

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