

A U S T R A L I A N

Presbyterian

THE MAGAZINE OF THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH OF AUSTRALIA

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THE
FUTURE
LIFE

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AUSTRALIAN Presbyterian

THE MAGAZINE OF THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH OF AUSTRALIA

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editorial

Over the last 30 years or so futurology – the art of studying the patterns and causes of change and stability in the world with a view to mapping possible futures – has become a major global enterprise. Back in the late 1970s when Alvin Toffler published his popular, ground-breaking book *Future Shock*, many people regarded futurology as a new discipline that held out great promise for the development of human society.

Actually, the popularity of futurology and its promise of mapping the future is nothing new. People have been thinking about the future for millennia. Fuelled by a sense of frustration with the imperfection of our present world, people have yearned for a sense of stability and certainty about the future. The ancient Greeks longed for a golden age, probably best expressed in Plato's plan for the ideal republic. Sir Thomas More also yearned for such a world in his famous work, *Utopia*. And in more modern times, Marxists have hoped to identify the future in their vision of a classless society.

It is not surprising that Christians are also supremely interested in the future. From the earliest announcement that God would undo the effects of the curse through the "seed of a woman" to the final promise that God will renew human society through a city of his own making, the Bible generates a longing for a new creation.

It became clear in later Judaism that hope for the future was rooted ultimately in the twin ideas of individual life beyond death and the transformation of human society and the environment by some form of overwhelming divine intervention.

It is in the writings of the apostle Paul that we really understand how our hopes for the future are realised. Writing to the Thessalonian Christians, he explains that the Christian hope is grounded in the knowledge that Christ's substitutionary death for sinners eliminates any fear that we will be condemned and destroyed. Further, he claims that Christ's resurrection is the guarantee that one day our dust will be raised in an imperishable and recognisable form. Our resurrection will enable us to participate fully and joyfully in God's new society. This explains why the subject of the future life should be of supreme interest to every Christian.

Peter Hastie 

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Our certain hope

God hates death. He has made sure His people do not finally suffer it.



Some people say that to be preoccupied with the future, especially the heavenly life and eternity, renders us unfit for any earthly use. But is this so? Is there some imperative for us to concentrate our attention on the future? There is no doubt that this earthly life is a short one. If the Bible is right when it claims that the universe is awaiting redemption and renewal and that our destiny lies in a resurrection of the body, then it makes good sense to discover the shape of this future.

Ian Smith is a former pastor and missionary who teaches New Testament at the Presbyterian Theological Centre in Sydney. He serves as the vice principal and academic dean. Ian has specialised in Pauline studies and completed a PhD at Sydney University on the Colossian error. He has also completed a master's degree in New Testament studies where he looked at the doctrine of the so-called "intermediate state" in Paul's second letter to the Corinthians.

Ian, in what sense is the Bible a book



**Ian Smith
talks to
Peter Hastie**

that is dominated by the future?

The future plays a very significant role in Scripture. In a very real sense, the Bible is a book about hope in the promises of God. And these promises, for the most part, look forward to the renewal of God's creation in His coming kingdom.

Now it is hope in these promises that motivates us in the present. Hope for the future is always a powerful motivating force. We all live by hope; whether you are a university student looking forward to life beyond graduation, whether you are engaged and looking forward to the day of marriage, you are living in anticipation of the future.

The reason the Bible is a story of hope is that it is a story about the renewal and transformation of God's world. It tells the story of how the world begins with a garden and ends with a city. There is a

very strong theme in the Bible of creation, fall, and new creation – the new creation that God has prepared that provides inspiration for us in the present. This hope runs right throughout the Bible. In many places God speaks about His plans for the future in powerful images – whether in terms of new heavens and new earth in Isaiah 65, or in terms of deserts blooming with flowers in Isaiah 35, or with lions and yearlings lying down together in Isaiah 11, or the whole earth being filled with the knowledge of God as we read in Habakkuk. The Bible has a strong orientation towards the future. It looks forward to a new creation which God will accomplish as part of His redemptive plan. This explains why Christians must be intensely interested in the future and organise their hopes and dreams around God's plans for the world. We need to be driven, among other things, by God's vision for the future.

The book of Ecclesiastes says that God has put the idea of eternity in

our hearts. Why would God have done that?

Yes, the writer says in 3:11 God “has set eternity in their hearts”. To understand this, we need to remember that we are made in the “image of God”. God is an eternal being, and although we do not share His Godhead, He created us in such a way that it was possible for us to share in His immortality. Adam and Eve were not created so that they should die; they were created as immortal beings. This has huge implications for our own self-understanding. It means, for instance, that the truly significant things are eternal. Transient things are of less importance and actually frustrate us.

Nothing transient or incomplete can ever really satisfy us. This helps explain why our desires for money, food, sex or fame, as ends in themselves, never leave us fulfilled – they always leave us longing for more. As ends in themselves they do not satisfy as they are transient. Deep down inside we know this. The call of eternity arises in our hearts and re-echoes throughout our lives. It’s all to do with the fact that we are made in God’s likeness for an everlasting relationship with Him. It also means that if I invest my life in something that will endure forever, then I can enjoy great peace. If I know that I am engaged in something approved by God and I am doing it in obedience to His will, then it has eternal significance. As a Christian I can know that my life now can count forever. This gives me great peace, a sense of purpose and a reason to live.

The idea that God has set eternity in our hearts also helps to explain the constant restlessness that people experience when they live solely for this world. Augustine was right when he said: “Our hearts are restless until they find their rest in You.”

Is it possible to make sense of life if we believe that this present world is all that there is?

No, it’s not. God is our beginning and our end. The world, by itself, cannot provide the answers. This means that it’s a futile and frustrating exercise to try and find meaning, purpose and fulfillment in anything less than God. The big mistake people make is that they attempt to separate the Creator from His creation, then attempt to discover meaning in the latter alone. But as I’ve already said, it is pointless trying to find significance in transient things. The only way to recover meaning in life is to bring the Creator and His creation back together again and understand

that this world belongs to God.

Trying to figure out life by excluding God is a useless exercise because it’s like attempting to interpret a play when you know neither its beginning nor its end. It’s as though you have only one part of the play and you don’t know the plans or purposes of the characters. You can only make sense of life in this world from God’s perspective because He is both at the beginning and the end. He knows the future. He tells us that the groaning and travail of this present world will end and we will receive a new heaven and a new earth. So there is no reason for despair and hopelessness in this life. We have something to look forward to.

The prospect of creation renewed and restored should fill our present life with tremendous meaning. We are looking forward to a wonderful new reality that transforms the spiritual and physical dimensions of life. As we struggle in this life with pain, suffering and disappointment, we are filled with hope. However, only Christians can face life in this way. Once you separate the creation from its Creator and try to find meaning in earthly things, you are left without any answers for suffering and the purpose of life. In addition, you have no idea what the future holds. It’s a recipe for frustration and cynicism. Incidentally, I think this is the message of the book of Ecclesiastes. The writer is saying that it’s absolutely futile trying to find meaning in a creation which is divorced from its Creator.

The big mistake people make is that they attempt to separate the Creator from His creation, then attempt to discover meaning in the latter alone.

Are there any indications in human nature that a future beyond this present fallen world awaits us?

I think there are. When we look at this fallen world what do we think about? We long for justice, healing and a perfect world. We know the difference between good and evil and we desire a world where evil and suffering will be banished forever. We have these longings as a result of our creation in God’s image. This explains why we hope for better things in the future and look beyond this world to God’s eternal regime.

Is there such a thing as immortality of the soul?

We need to be careful in discussing this subject. The first thing to say is that the Bible looks at people holistically. This means that whether we are body and soul, or body, soul and spirit, the Bible is always clear about the fact that we are one.

However, this doesn’t mean that different parts of our nature can’t be viewed separately. For example, the Gospels tell us that at the point of death Jesus committed His spirit to God, and His body went to the tomb before it was raised. In Revelation 6, prior to the resurrection, John speaks about the souls of the martyrs under the altar crying out for the Lord to avenge their deaths. Perhaps the classic case is in Matthew 10 where Jesus speaks of the body and soul separately: “Do not fear those who can kill the body but cannot kill the soul”. This certainly implies that the soul is not destroyed by death, although it does not teach that the immortality of the soul is the ultimate hope of the Christian. We look forward to the resurrection of the body. However, God has invested the soul with a special quality which means that it continues beyond the point of physical death.

So we don’t cease to exist when we die?

No, we continue to exist. The Bible doesn’t have a great deal to say about what happens to non-Christians after they die and before they are raised, although it does say that our souls are not destroyed in death.

However, for Christians, I think the Bible is pretty clear. Places like Philippians 1 and 2 Corinthians 5 talk about the fact that we are “absent from the body but present with the Lord”. In fact, in 2 Corinthians 5 Paul says that we are present with the Lord in a way that is actually superior in relationship to the way we are now. At the point of death, the Christian passes into the presence of the Lord. The Shorter Catechism puts it really well (Q&A 37). It says, “The souls of believers are at their death made perfect in holiness, and do immediately pass into glory; and their bodies, being still united to Christ, do rest in their graves until the resurrection.”

Was death part of God’s plan for the world?

No, not originally. Death is the result of the fall. However, the amazing thing is that God, through His providence, is able to turn evil things which were not part of

His original plan into something good that magnifies His grace and glory. Of course, this doesn't mean that God was caught off-guard by the fall. He knew it would happen. But that's a different thing from saying that it was part of His plan for humanity. God's purpose for Adam was that he would live in obedience before Him without sin. God hates death. We see that when Jesus weeps at the tomb of his friend, Lazarus. But He uses sin, disease and suffering – all effects of the fall – to demonstrate His glory. It's amazing what God can do in the midst of a seemingly hopeless situation.

Do you have any idea what Adam might have been like in comparison with us in terms of his powers and abilities?

We can only speculate about that. I guess that Adam in his original state, unencumbered by sin, would have also enjoyed a far richer relationship with his wife and the animal world. But here's a paradox: God is also able to bring good out of the tragedy of the fall. For instance, Adam would not have known anything about forgiveness apart from the fall. He would not have known anything about bravery in the face of danger. There are other strengths of character too that arise out of Adam's struggle against the results of the fall. Yet, I am equally sure that Adam would have had strengths of character before the fall that exceed our own experience. I can only speculate.

How should we understand death? Is it just a physical dissolution?

No, there is more to death than simply turning to dust. There is also a profound loss of relationship, which is why we grieve so deeply in the face of it. I think the intensity of our grief springs from the fact that we lose all hope of communicating with our loved ones.

However, Christians understand that death brings us closer to Christ. It brings us into the Lord's presence. Even though Christians still await the resurrection, we still have the enormous consolation that we are with Christ. This means that if someone we love dies, and he or she is a believer, then we can experience both grief and joy. Further, the grief which we feel is not a grief of hopelessness.

What about unbelievers? What happens to them?

For the non-Christian death is more tragic. It is not merely the destruction of the body. There is also a spiritual death

involved. Unbelievers are dead to God, according to the apostle Paul. This spiritual separation becomes final and irreversible at death. This is why Paul says that death for unbelievers leaves them without hope (1 Thess. 4:13). While Christians know that they have been made alive in Christ (Eph. 2:5), for unbelievers death brings about a final separation from God forever. This is why death is such a terrible reality for unbelievers. They are cast off forever into a Christ-less eternity. Since they are without the righteousness of Christ, on judgment day they face the terror of eternal damnation.

God hates death. We see that when Jesus weeps at the tomb of his friend, Lazarus. But He uses sin, disease and suffering to demonstrate His glory.



In what sense is a Christian's death different from that of the non-believer?

One verse which I have found very helpful, especially as I have been ministering to dying Christians, is the text in Psalm 116:15, "Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of His saints". In my experience, the death of a Christian is very different, or should be very different, from an unbeliever's. If you are a Christian, you can say, "For me to live is Christ and to die is gain." If you really believe that, it will help you to die well. I have always been impressed by Christians who have died well. Believers have a really powerful testimony when they go through the final lap of their lives looking forward to seeing God and experiencing the resurrection. Instead of being embittered and resentful, they are full of grace and confidence.

On the other hand, I have certainly sat beside the beds of people who are full of bitterness and resentment as they face death. Naturally, Christians can be tempted to feel like this too, but if we pray for God's help and strength and a growing trust in His promises, we can find a measure of real peace.

Is death unpredictable and unfair, or does God have some sort of plan or timetable for us?

From our perspective it is often unpredictable. After all, we have no guarantee that I will actually make it to the end of this interview! But from God's point of view there is a plan. Paul tells us that God has prepared certain good works in advance for us to do. When Jesus gets to the end of His life He exclaims, "It is finished!" The Psalmist says, "All the days ordained for me were written in Your book before one of them came to be."

As Christians we believe that God has not only given us life, but that He is in control of it. He actually knows the number of hairs on our heads. He knows everything about us, so from His perspective there are no surprises. While our lives may seem to us to be pretty chaotic, they are not for God. Of course, there are always times when such truths really jar us. For instance, we always have a hard time coming to terms with the death of a child or a young parent. However, if we believe that God is infinitely wise, good and sovereign, then we can leave these situations in His care. After we get over our initial anger and grief, we can actually find great consolation in knowing that God had a perfect plan for a person's life, even though it ended in a way that seemed unfair to us.

Does the Bible have anything to say about taking our lives or hastening the death of anyone else?

Yes, the Bible has a lot to say about it. We shouldn't do it. It's not our prerogative. For instance, I think of 1 Samuel 31 where Saul tries to get someone else to take his life. When his armour bearer won't do it, Saul falls on his own sword. It's certainly not seen as a positive act. It is actually disobedient to God since He has commanded us, "You shall not murder". This commandment reminds us that the prerogative to take life belongs to God alone. He is the Creator.

Naturally, there are always grey areas. Doctors face them in dealing with patients who are terminally ill. In normal circumstances, I think it is improper for them to actually hasten the death of anyone, but sometimes withholding treatment can be appropriate. It is a difficult area. I think it comes down to intent. If the intent is to hasten death then I think that is unlawful killing. If the intent is to allow someone to die naturally because their life is unsustainable, then that's rather different. Each situation is difficult,

but there is always an overriding duty to protect life where possible.

Of course, there are other areas where the Bible legitimises life-taking. For instance, the Bible says in Romans 13 that the state has the power to take life in certain circumstances. This could include capital punishment or entering into a war. We find this affirmed in the Mosaic Law as well. Obviously, there are circumstances where it's appropriate for governments ordained under God to do that.

The issue of suicide is a difficult one. If a person takes her or his own life or if someone hastens the death of another then that is clearly disobedient to God. Christians, however, also need to be very careful that they don't go the next step and actually become the judge of that person's eternal state. That's not our job. That's God's call. He is our judge. No one else can assume His role.

Is it possible to turn to God in the last minutes of one's life?

Well, it's possible, but it's not likely. The problem is that many people who are dying have severely reduced capacity. They are often under heavy medication or unconscious. I wouldn't recommend waiting to that stage to make your peace with God. It's almost physically and psychologically impossible. Again, many people die quite suddenly without any forewarning. You can be walking across the road and in a split second be hit by an out-of-control car. Or you can drop dead with an aneurysm. So it shows very poor judgment to postpone repentance towards God. The other thing I should mention is that we are creatures of habit. It's often the case that the older we get the more stubborn we become. So it shows rather poor judgment to hold off to the end. However, having said all that, the thief who was crucified with Jesus turned to Christ in his dying moments. I guess we have his example to remind us that all things are possible with God. However, he's the only instance that I can think of in the Bible, so I wouldn't recommend it.

Do you have any suggestions on how a Christian can die well?

Yes, I do. I once sat across a desk from a doctor who told me I had six months to live. He got it wrong because that was about seven years ago. Nevertheless, from the moment that he spoke to me I had to face the prospect that I was going to die. I did some hard thinking and I realised that the best preparation for dying well is to spend your life appropriating the means

of grace. In my case that had meant going to church each week, reading consistently through the Scriptures, studying them, praying, listening to the preaching, receiving the Lord's Supper – all those sorts of things. My whole life of Christian practice was the best preparation for the moment when the doctor told me that I was going to die. So Christians should treat the means of grace seriously. This is the best way to die well.

I noticed in one leading evangelical magazine for ministers that there was not one issue in the last 30 years that dealt comprehensively with death and dying. What does that reveal?

I think that as a society we have become insulated from death. For example, we often don't include children in funeral services. Frequently the coffin is missing as well. We do all that we possibly can to sanitise death because it is the ultimate taboo of modern society. We actually think that with our medical advances we can live a long and healthy life. We forget that at the time of the Reformation people would have had 10 children and prayed that seven would make it to adulthood. Death was all around them. I know from my experience of living in the Pacific Islands that their communities are far more in touch with death than we are. In Australia we try to hide from death and we think it won't happen to us.

What emotion should a Christian experience in the death of a loved one?

When Jesus went to Lazarus' tomb He wept. While a lot of emotions that are displayed at funerals are culturally conditioned, what I do know is that there is nothing wrong with grieving. There is, at death, a very real separation from someone we love. There is nothing wrong or unnatural about grief in such a situation. Some people can get very emotional – that's OK.

At the same time, in the midst of grief, we mustn't lose sight of the joy that our loved one has passed into the nearer pres-

ence of God. While we might be sad about losing their presence, they have actually gained something that is a great blessing. Certainly, people I have spoken to at funerals have expressed feelings of mixed emotions. That is good and fine. The only emotions we need to express are real ones and they will be mixed.

Do you have any idea where the dead go and what they are doing? Are they asleep? Can they see us? What is going on?

The Bible talks about death as sleep, but certainly not in the sense of unconsciousness. The sleep refers rather to the repose of the body. When we die we go to be with Christ. Paul says that being with the Lord is better by far. Do those who have gone before us see what we are doing on earth? I am not aware that the Bible says anything definite about that. I don't see any evidence of a peephole in heaven where the saints above look down and see all that we do. I think that's more myth than anything else.

What about the parable of Lazarus?

I think the parable of Lazarus is really more focused on how we should use our

There is more to death than simply turning to dust. There is also a profound loss of relationship, which is why we grieve so deeply in the face of it.

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wealth with regard to the poor and the helpless than on what happens beyond the grave. I am not convinced that people who have died can actually see what is happening on earth. I think the Bible is relatively silent on that issue.

Should Christians ever pray for the dead?

That's an interesting question. The short answer is "No." Yet it is sometimes very hard not to do this at times. For instance, if someone you love dies, especially someone you have prayed for daily, for years or decades, particularly a family member, then it might seem strange to stop praying for them all of a sudden.

Does it depend on the sort of prayers we pray? For example, presumably we can give thanks for their lives and praise God for their witness?

Yes, we can certainly give thanks for their lives and testimony but a problem arises if our prayers turn to supplication. If we believe that they are in the presence of Christ, what more can they need? If they are with Christ, then they are in need of nothing. And so, we don't need to pray for them anymore. However, this should not stop us from telling God how thankful we are to Him for the gift of their lives

and for the legacy that they have left behind.

Here's a provocative statement; we don't pray for the dead, but there is a sense in which we pray with the dead – "the spirits of just men made perfect".

If there was no teaching of the resurrection in the Old Testament, then how do we explain the belief of the Pharisees about it?

The church militant and the church triumphant are around the throne of God and we are all looking forward to the coming of Jesus. We join with the Christians of all ages in pleading with God to hasten the day of Christ's coming.

Have we got any hints in Scripture about what happens to the children of believers, especially babies who may die?

Well, the ultimate answer is that of Genesis 18:25 which says, "Will not the God of all the earth do right?" Our God is a God of justice. He always does the right thing. When it comes to believers,

the Scriptures tell us that God deals with whole families as well as individuals. We see this in 1 Corinthians 7 where Paul says that the children of believers are "holy" even if only one parent is a Christian. The church is not just a collection of individuals; it is also a collection of families. God looks with favour upon His covenant family. I think there is a really strong hint there that believers should cherish a strong hope that their children are saved, especially if they die as little ones. King David seems to have thought that God would be merciful to the child that was born from his adultery with Bathsheba. I think it's a hint that believers can entertain hope for their children who die in infancy. Again, we come back to the question that Abraham asked, "Will not the Judge of the earth do what is right?"

The apostle Paul said that the great Jewish hope was the resurrection from the dead. What did he mean?

This is where we as modern Christians really need to understand what he meant. I reckon the problem that Paul faced when he went to Athens is the problem that we face in modern Christianity. By and large, Christians believe in immortality. But, I don't think we have thought through the doctrine of resurrection.



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When Paul goes to Athens in Acts 17 they scoff at him because of his belief in the resurrection. They are not scoffing at him because he believes in life after death; most Greeks believed that. No, they ridicule him because he believed in a physical resurrection. Paul believed that the whole creation was going to be renewed. There would be a new heaven and a new earth. Paul was not talking about some sort of immortality of the soul after we die. Resurrection is more than that. It was something that the people of Athens found hard to swallow. They believed that matter, especially the body, was evil. So they couldn't see the point in raising it back to life. As Christians we need to ask ourselves: "Are we more like the Greeks who believed in immortality of the soul, or are we more like the Jews who believed in the resurrection of the body?"

Is the doctrine of resurrection actually taught in the Old Testament?

Absolutely. The doctrine of the resurrection in the Old Testament is often talked about in corporate resurrection in Israel. Probably the classic example of that is in Ezekiel 37 where the prophet talks about the valley of dry bones coming to life, or in pictures of life in the new world in Isaiah 65 which assume some form of continued bodily existence.

However, in addition to the idea of a corporate resurrection, there is also the idea of an individual resurrection that is mentioned. The clearest instances are in Daniel 12:1-3, but there are other passages such as Isaiah 26:19 and Psalm 49:15. These references help to make sense of the doctrine during the time of the New Testament. If there was no teaching of the resurrection in the Old Testament, then how do we explain the belief of the Pharisees about it? There was a division between the Sadducees and the Pharisees over the resurrection in the time of Jesus, so some people in the first century clearly believed that it was taught in the Old Testament.

Do you think the disappearance of Enoch and the reappearance of Moses and Elijah at Jesus' transfiguration had any influence in the development of the doctrine?

I am sure they did. In the case of Enoch and Elijah we have two translations directly into heaven. Their contemporaries thought that in some mysterious way they had managed to escape death by God's intervention. The re-appearance of Moses in a recognisable form at the transfiguration must also have confirmed people's hopes that believers would survive death in a bodily and visible form.

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How crucial is a bodily resurrection to Christian faith? Is immortality of the soul enough?

No, immortality is not enough. The Bible demands a physical resurrection at Christ's return. Why is this important? If you believe only in the immortality of the soul, then you will believe that only the spiritual aspect of reality is really important. After all, if there is no resurrection, all that survives is the soul. If this is so, then the proclamation of the gospel is confined only to spiritual realities and nothing more. But if we are looking for-



The teaching about judgment is inescapable. Annihilationism is just an attempt to run away from it.

ward to a resurrection, that means that the future has a physical and a spiritual aspect to it. There will be a new heaven and a new earth. God is going to renew our bodies as well as the physical universe. Everything will be transformed. This is the future and it gives purpose to everything that we do in the present. As Paul says, if the resurrection is true, nothing that we do in the body is in vain. This gives purpose to doctors who heal the body, lawyers who fight for justice, scientists who protect the environment, to give just a few examples. These activities actually anticipate what will happen when God renews the world. A correct understanding of the resurrection of the body, especially Jesus' body, and the resurrection of the universe, has a profound effect on our understanding of culture. The coming renewal gives us a mandate to express that renewal – albeit in a faltering way – in our earthly labours now.

So you can see how the resurrection has a profound impact on the Christian's view of the world, life and culture in a way that belief in immortality of the soul does not. Unfortunately, quite often the gospel that we are teaching is very much a truncated gospel. We only get half the

picture when we focus exclusively on the spiritual changes that the gospel brings. The doctrine of the resurrection tells us that the gospel looks forward to the complete renovation of the universe. We are going to be raised physically and so is the world.

Is it essential to believe in a coming judgment and endless punishment as part of the Gospel?

Judgment lies at the centre of the gospel. It reminds us that the earth is in terrible trouble. What's wrong? Why do we need to restore the earth? Well, the problem is sin. What is the answer to sin? The answer to sin is justice. How is justice seen? Justice is seen in judgment. In judgment justice must be seen to be done. How will that work its way through? It will work its way through in punishment. Where is that punishment seen? Well, that punishment is seen when Christ dies upon the cross as a sacrifice of atonement for us as He bears our judgment in His own body and soul.

If we eliminate the idea of judgment, nothing in the gospel makes sense. If there is no judgment, then sin is not really a big deal. Further, if there is no judgment, how can we possibly explain the death of Christ? It just doesn't make sense. So we can't drop the idea of judgment from the gospel message without profoundly altering it.

What is your reaction to evangelicals today who don't believe in the doctrine of hell or endless punishment?

It raises a couple of issues for me. First, it raises the issue of the soul and immortality. I think the Bible is very clear when it talks about "gnashing of teeth" and such imagery. Some of these people believe in "annihilationism" – the doctrine that unbelievers will simply cease to exist. I don't believe this is a fair or accurate reading of the biblical evidence. The evidence is pretty clear in the way those things are depicted, so I certainly would believe in the traditional doctrine of hell. It is not something that sits comfortably with me, but I am not the one who has the right to arbitrate on the Bible's teaching. Of course, it would be nice not to have to believe such truths; but the teaching about judgment is inescapable. Annihilationism is just an attempt to run away from it. However, I don't get to choose what goes in the Bible, God does. And He warns us that judgment and endless punishment await those who spurn His name. I believe that's what the Bible says. ap

Asleep in Jesus

Death for the believer is not a place of darkness but repose and rest.

The Bible teaches that God has for us in the gospel of Jesus Christ not only blessings here in this life, but also blessings in the life to come. Paul says, "If in this life only we have hope, we are of all people most to be pitied" (1 Cor. 15:19). "If the dead are not raised, 'Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die.'" (v. 32b).

Paul is not simply trusting in Christ so that this life might be more full or more prosperous; he is trusting in Christ for this life and forevermore. Christian hope not only controls our present living; it dictates our anticipation of what will come to be beyond this life.

The Westminster Shorter Catechism 37 is instructive here. "What benefits do believers receive from Christ at death? The souls of believers are at their death made perfect in holiness, and do immediately pass into glory; and their bodies, being still united to Christ, do rest in their graves till the resurrection."

What happens to believers the second we shuffle off this mortal coil? What happens to believers the nanosecond our final breath has left our bodies and our brains and hearts fail us? What happens instantaneously for the believer at death?

Before we look more intently at the blessings that belong to all believers in death, we must realise that these blessings – as comforting as they may be – do not mean that death is easy for the believer. Although the Lord through the apostle Paul explicitly says to believers, "But we do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about those who are asleep, that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope" (1 Thess. 4:13), the Lord does *not* say to believers, "Do not grieve." Instead, he says, "You do not grieve as those without hope."

Christian grief has mingled with it an



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inextinguishable, inexhaustible, irrepressible hope, the type of hope that enabled Job to say, "Though he slay me, I will hope in him..." (Job 13:15). In the face of death, a Christian does not approach death with stoic indifference or emotionless detachment because of the hope that is theirs in God. Do not think

I have no idea what it is like to live with a heart wholly given over to God. I have not lived one second with that kind of heart. But one day every Christian will.

for a second that we are commending a stoic approach to death. We are, however, commending an approach that is filled with the comfort of God because of the certainty of His promises, even in the midst of the difficulty of it all. In the catechism passage we mentioned earlier, we learn four blessings that belong to believers even in the valley of the shadow of death. These blessings are why the death of a believer is not only a day of mourning, but also one of triumph. As we contemplate the death of believers, whoever they may be, we can rest assured that they have received these four things immediately upon dying.

1. When believers die, they are immediately with Christ, whom they prize more than all things.

This is the greatest blessing of the believer at death. In 2 Corinthians 5:8, the Apostle Paul is speaking of himself and by extension to all believers saying: "Yes, we are of good courage, and we would rather be away from the body and at home with the Lord." For the Christian to be absent from this body – this is Paul's way of speaking of death – is to be at home with the Lord. The apostle Paul anticipates immediately being with the Lord when he

dies. Since the believer prizes Christ more than anything else, this is his most cherished blessing.

The apostle Paul is assuring us that for the believer to be absent from the body is to be immediately with the Lord. You ask me, "Where is that going to be?" I do not know. It does not matter. All I need to know is this: to be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord. Where is the Lord? He is at the right hand of God. Where is the right hand of God? I do not know, but my Lord is there, and that is all that matters. I will be with Him.

For the believer, Christ is more precious than husband or wife, than parents or children, than riches, than fame, than power, than ambition, than influence, than success, than pleasure. He is more valuable than anything. Job could say, "Though he slay me, I will hope in him" because he himself would later say, "And after my skin has been thus destroyed, yet in my flesh I shall see God, whom I shall see for myself, and my eyes shall behold, and not another" (Job 19:26-27). Job's longing was to be present with the Lord, which is the first and greatest blessing that believers receive.

2. When believers die, they are immediately perfected in holiness.

The author of Hebrews speaks of "the spirits of the righteous made perfect", and he is emphasising that those of us who have come to Christ are part of this perfected company of believers (Hebrews 12:22-24). Immediately upon our death, we enter into the presence of God and are perfected: perfected in holiness, made perfect in godliness, freed from sin, and made in the likeness of Christ.

The book of Revelation frequently describes the saints who have gone before us – that is, believers who have died in Jesus Christ, and are waiting for the day of resurrection – as perfected; no longer committing sin, no longer struggling with the temptations that result because of indwelling sin, and freed completely from the very possibility of sin. If you are like me, this thought is extremely comforting, because a thousand times a day my heart is tempted to be disloyal to God. My heart is tempted to love things that I ought not to

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love and so betray my Lord and God. But, oh, to be in a place where I never again have the slightest tinge of temptation to defect from loving loyalty and blessed service to my Savior. The thought of such bliss and rest is overwhelming.

The transition of death can be daunting, even to a believer. But even as daunting as death may be for the believer, it also means a final cessation of that internal warfare against sin, which is a reality that is beyond our imagining. I have no idea what it is like to live with a heart that is wholly given over to my God. I have not lived one second with that kind of heart. But one day every Christian will.

If you believe in the Lord Jesus Christ as He is offered in the gospel, then at death the warfare is over. The battle is done. Your heart becomes wholly and solely His. Instantaneously in the moment of death, Satan can never again get his hook in your heart and use something in you to pull you away from your Lord, because you will be perfected in holiness.

3. *When believers die, they pass immediately into glory.*

In Philippians 1:23, the apostle Paul says that he desires to depart and be with Christ, for that is much better. Why is it much better? Death is better because we pass into glory with Jesus Christ and are welcomed into the Father's house (John 14:2). As Paul said in 2 Corinthians 5:8, when we are absent from the body, we are at home with the Lord. That concept should certainly change the way you look at death.

I love the way Isaac Watts paraphrases the end of Psalm 23: "Here would we find a settled rest, while others go and come; Not like a stranger or a guest, But like a child at home."

The minute death comes; you are safe at home; safe in the Father's arms; safe with your older brother, Jesus Christ, who shed His blood so that you could come home. Immediately!

One of the thieves on the cross who had been mocking Jesus earlier in the day – as one of the gospel writers tells us – was convicted by what he saw and heard from Jesus Christ. He began to rebuke the other thief, saying, "Do you not fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation?" At one point the thief says to Jesus, "Remember me when you come into your kingdom." And then Jesus replies, "Today you will be with me in paradise" (Luke 23). Like a child going home, the thief passed into glory to the Father's house. Believers immediately

enter glory, a truth we must never forget.

4. *When believers die, their bodies remain united to Christ, resting in the grave, awaiting the resurrection.*

The Thessalonians had been upset by someone who had been teaching that there is uncertainty about what happens to believers who die before Jesus returns. The Thessalonians knew that Jesus would come again, and they were certain that if they



What a beautiful way to describe a believer's death, "Fallen asleep in Jesus." This concept is so comforting Lutherans often put it on grave stones.

were alive when he came, they would be with the Lord, but they were not certain about their relatives who had died in Christ before them. So, Paul assures them, "But we do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about those who are asleep, that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope" (1 Thess. 4:13).

Paul did not even say this in terms of the imperative. He does not even say to

Thessalonians, "Do not grieve as those who have no hope!" Instead he says, in effect, "It is my pastoral concern for you that you do not grieve as those who have no hope."

God comforts his people by saying: "If we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who have fallen asleep in Jesus." What a beautiful way to describe a believer's death, "Fallen asleep in Jesus." This concept is so comforting that our Lutheran friends often put that on the gravestones of departed saints: "Asleep in Jesus." This metaphor of sleep that Paul employs takes the entire sting out of death. Death is not a place of darkness and uncertainty; it is a place of repose and rest where Jesus Himself in the hour of death cradles and cares for the believer.

Your loved ones, who have died resting and trusting in Jesus Christ alone for salvation as He is offered in the gospel, are more alive now than they have ever been because they are united to Christ. The metaphor of "asleep in Jesus" is not a metaphor of inactivity; it is a metaphor of rest that reminds us that at the end of this long struggle comes rest.

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Losing a child

The pangs pierce but – thank God – the story does not end there.

All deaths are terrible, but the death of a child is especially terrible, and the death of one's own child possesses a peculiar kind of horror. The great men of faith were not protected from it – Thomas Boston outlived six of his 10 children while John Owen outlived all 11 of his. When C. S. Lewis' wife, Joy Davidman, died, he graphically described his new life: "Her absence is like the sky, spread over everything."

The absence of a child can be even more unbearable – the house has a new and terrible quietness about it, meal-times are an ordeal, and special occasions are especially poignant. Everything is different; everything is awful.

When Jacob was told that Joseph had been killed – although he really had been sold into slavery by his brothers – so great was Jacob's grief that he refused to be comforted, and declared that he would go down to his grave mourning (Gen. 37:35). His life seemed now to him to consist of nothing but misery. Such a response is by no means uncommon. When G. K. Chesterton's sister, Beatrice, died at eight, Chesterton's father responded by turning Beatrice's picture to the wall, getting rid of all her possessions, and forbidding anyone to mention her name.

The great Russian novelist Feodor Dostoevsky lost an infant daughter at three months, and his response is sad indeed: "This little three-month-old creature, so poor, so tiny was already a person and a character for me. She was beginning to know me, to love, and smile when I came near. When



Peter Barnes

with my comical voice I used to sing songs to her, she liked to listen to them ... But where is Sonya? Where is this little personality for whom, I say boldly, I would accept the cross's agony if only she might be alive."

We can well understand why the "blood and iron" Chancellor of Germany in the late 19th century, Otto

The first response of those who seek to help the grieving parent must be, as Paul says, to weep with those who weep (Rom. 12:15).



von Bismarck, when asked what gave him most satisfaction in life, replied: "That God did not take away any of my children." It is not a profoundly spiritual answer, but it is one with which we can empathise.

At such a time a parent is vulnerable, and prone to break down emotionally. Others can easily say something that is less than helpful, or even downright hurtful. When Boswell's son, David, died, the usually erudite and insightful Dr Samuel Johnson wrote: "You must remember, that to keep three out of four is more than your share. Mrs Thrall has but four out of eleven." Job's three friends came to see him in his grief, which included the loss of his 10 children. They did well – or at least did no harm – while they said nothing and simply sat with Job. They blotted their copybook, and added to Job's anguish, when they tried

to analyse his suffering and suggest reasons for it.

We always want to know why something happens. It somehow brings some kind of consolation to us even if the reality remains as dreadful as ever. We feel a strange kind of relief when the doctor gives our disease a name, even if the disease is still life-threatening. Job was never specifically told why his 10 children were taken from him (Job 1). We readers know that Job was being tested but he did not know that at the time, and was never told even at the end of the whole story. When Abijah, the son of the wicked king Jeroboam, died, that occurred precisely because the child was the only one in Jeroboam's household to find favour in God's sight (1 Kings 14:1, 12-13). What looked like a curse was actually a blessing. The deaths of Jairus' daughter (Luke 8:40-56), the son of the widow at Zarephath in the days of Elijah (1 Kings 17:17-24), and the son of the Shunammite woman in the days of Elisha (2 Kings 4:18-37) all seem designed to enhance faith and assurance in God's revelation of Himself through His prophets and finally the Messiah. When the little son of David and Bathsheba died, of course, God was chastening His wayward people (2 Sam. 12).

The grieving parent's first response must be the natural one – to weep. Jesus wept at the tomb of His disciple and friend, Lazarus (John 11:35). The pain caused by the effects of the Fall so moved the eternal Son of God, the Lord of glory, the one who is the resurrection and the life, that He shed tears of sorrow that the world, which He Himself had created very good, was now the home to such misery.

And the first response of those who seek to help the grieving parent must be, as Paul says, to weep with those who weep (Rom. 12:15). Possessing faith does not require us to be unnatural. Paul himself says that he would have experienced sorrow upon sorrow had his friend, Epaphroditus, who was sick, actually died (Phil. 2:27). The cita-

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tion of Romans 8:28, that God works all things together for good for His people, is not our first port of call. It belongs a little further along in the journey. The truth delivered at the wrong time or in the wrong proportion, can do harm.

Secondly, the grieving parent has to face reality. Terrible temptations can afflict the grieving parent. One may want to try to abolish the grief by pretending the child never existed, another might carry on life as though the child were still present, another might become so absorbed in the sadness that he or she ceases to function properly in home or society, and yet another may take to parties, drink or drugs to forget the pain.

When David's son, born of his adulterous union with Bathsheba, died, David faced facts. He had prayed and fasted that he would be spared, but when that was not to be, he responded: "Can I bring him back again? I shall go to him, but he shall not return to me" (2 Sam. 12:23). David could not undo his sin, nor could he undo the child's death. No amount of wishful thinking or prayer or weeping would bring the child back to life.

Lastly, the grieving parent needs to grasp afresh the biblical perspective that all believers are here for a short time. Life is but a passing mist, but Christ is king of the new heaven and new earth. A renewed awareness of this truth will not work like a magic potion but it does give an undergirding of joy to the experience of sorrow. "Our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body, according to the working by which He is able even to subdue all things to Himself" (Phil. 3:20-21).

Suffering is not to be minimised, but in God's scheme of things for His people, it is but for a short time (John 16:21; 2 Cor. 4:17) and cannot be compared to the glory which is to come (Rom. 8:18). How does this work out in the tragedies of life for those who are savingly joined to Christ? From 1858 to 1862, Rev. John William Matheson and his wife Mary laboured to bring the gospel of salvation to the island of Tanna in the New Hebrides (now called Vanuatu). They both suf-

fered poor health, their infant daughter died, and they themselves had not long to live. Yet the strong Christian affirmation remained, and Mary Matheson wrote: "One moment in heaven will amply compensate for all we have suffered here."

What about if death has come about directly by sin, where God is chastening His people, as in the case of David and his young son? Here too grace triumphs over sin and death. David was assured regarding his son: "I shall go to him" (2 Sam. 12:23).

Some scholars have tried to argue that David was only saying that he too would die and join his infant son in the grave. In other words, life is a tragedy, and that is all it is, so get used to it. If that is what David meant, he could hardly have got out of bed the next morning. The Bible tells us of the tragic side of this life, but also, even in


We live in the penultimate chapter of the book. It is the last chapter where the King reigns in all His righteousness and mercy, and every wrong is put right.

the Old Testament context "My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever" (Psalm 73:26).

We live in the penultimate chapter of the book. It is the last chapter where the King reigns in all His righteousness and mercy, and every wrong is put right.

*Be still my soul: thy Jesus can repay
From His own fullness all He takes
away.*

In 1860 Andrew Bonar's little son, also called Andrew, died. It was a Sunday, and somehow the grieving father managed to preach that day. His lament was real, and he wrote in his diary: "O to see him come with Christ, to recognise that sweet, sweet voice amid the company of the redeemed!" Four years later, Bonar's wife, Isabella, died, and this time Bonar wrote: "I have been thinking of her in glory, perhaps with little Andrew beside her, and how they will meet me!" In the gospel, all now mysterious becomes clear, and all now that is grievous becomes joyous. "Weeping may tarry for the night, but joy comes in the morning" (Psalm 30:5).

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Sad? That's life

How unhappiness became a medical condition.

No one is unhappy these days but everyone is depressed. Jerome Wakefield, a professor at New York University, has sounded a warning against the tendency of medical science to apply drugs to block natural human emotions.

In the last few years of my practice as a doctor, I must have heard hundreds or even thousands of people say that they were depressed but only two or three admit that they were unhappy (and one of those was in prison).

When I started out in practice 35 years ago there were depressed people but they were relatively few in number. Their illness was truly incapacitating. They were often very subdued and slowed down, lacking in interest, neglecting themselves, not eating or drinking properly and feeling profoundly guilty for no good reason. Rich people with this kind of depression sometimes believed that they were destitute. They wanted to die, or at least not to live. Some even believed that they were already dead.

In the days before there was effective treatment such people would be admitted to an asylum and would spend their days sitting on a chair at a table set against a wall to prevent them from going anywhere. They would be watched, day in, day out, by an attendant until – two, three or four years later – the fit of melancholia passed. It was a dreadful business. Effective treatment means that such extreme cases are now very few and far between. That, of course, is all to the good.

Unfortunately the replacement of the word “unhappiness” by “depression” is not all to the good. It turns a normal human experience – that of unhappiness – into a medical condition, to be treated and cured by doctors. Most human unhappiness is understandable. If a recently widowed person appears too happy too soon after the death of his or her spouse we suspect that the marriage could not have been a very happy one. It is one thing to make an effort not to cry in public, but another not even to be sad.

Unhappiness usually arises from the situation in which people find themselves,

Theodore Dalrymple

either through circumstances beyond their control or as a result of their own choices. It is like pain: undesirable but necessary for us to learn from experience and to avoid whatever causes it. We think that a person who could feel no pain would be fortunate but in fact those few people who are born without a capacity to feel pain suffer many serious injuries and lead short lives.

Since pills are only handed out for illnesses, the patient now has confirmation from the doctor that he is indeed ill.

The world, said Dr Johnson's biographer James Boswell, is not to be turned into a great hospital; but that is precisely what the replacement of the word unhappiness by the word depression does. For if unhappiness is an illness, why not every other human experience as well? When a person tells a doctor that he is depressed he is in effect asking for a cure, in the same way as he expects the doctor to cure a cough. The doctor has very little time at his disposal so he colludes with the patient. Instead of trying to find out what it is that is making the patient unhappy and suggesting that he change it, he hands the patient a pill.

Since pills are only handed out for illnesses, the patient now has confirmation from the doctor that he is indeed ill. He does not have to change the circumstances that are making him unhappy, which is a great relief because no one likes to change. That is because change is difficult and painful and can be impossible. Sometimes the pills actually work: the patient feels better. But as often as not he feels better because of the placebo effect. A sugar pill would have

done just as well. At other times the pills do not work and the patient returns to the doctor, who tells him to double the dose. When the double dose fails to work the doctor switches him to another pill and, when this does not work either, to yet another.

Each time, of course, the patient has to take the pills for a certain number of weeks before they can be said not to have worked and since there are a large number of pills for a doctor to choose from, this slightly ludicrous foxtrot in the surgery between doctor and patient can go on for years. In the meantime, the cause of the patient's unhappiness goes unexamined and unchanged.

The effectiveness of anti-depressants against most forms of unhappiness is very slight, if it exists at all. This is not altogether surprising because at first they were tested in the '50s on seriously depressed people, in whom they appeared to work miracles. To call everyday unhappiness depression and then to treat it with anti-depressants is like calling every swelling cancer and then treat it with anti-cancer drugs.

The drug companies feared at first that there would not be enough seriously depressed people to make the manufacture of anti-depressants profitable. But the abandonment of the word unhappy for depressed came to their rescue: they became among the most profitable drugs ever developed.

The American psychiatrist Thomas Szasz once published a very funny article in *The Lancet*. Dr Szasz suggested that henceforth happiness should be considered an illness. After all, it is quite rare and often leads people to do foolish things. As a result, it is potentially dangerous. Therefore, those few people who suffer from it need treatment. Luckily, there are plenty of medicines available to doctors that can make their patients feel worse and thereby control their happiness.

This makes no more (or less) sense than treating unhappiness as a disease.

This article first appeared in the Daily Express, London.



Under the sun

**20 daily Bible studies in
*Ecclesiastes***

God created us in His own image. This makes us essentially different from the rest of Creation – including the animals. We were designed to live in communion with the everlasting God forever, to enjoy His perfect fellowship. As the Shorter Catechism puts it: Man’s chief end is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever. Or, as Solomon tells us in Ecclesiastes, God has “set eternity in the hearts of men” (3:11). We were intended to be “heaven” people, and therefore heaven should be a natural and delightful topic to occupy our hearts and minds.

However, sin has also intruded into this idyllic scene, and our fellowship with God has been broken; we have died spiritually. The similarities we share with the animals, simply because we live in, interact with, and are required to survive in, the same environment as they do, are now more obvious to us because we have lost our contact with God. The stark contrast is no longer between us and the animals, but between us and God!

In Ecclesiastes, Solomon takes us through what all this means for daily living, and our attitude to everything under the sun. And the conclusion to which his own experience has driven him, in spite of his outstanding “success” in the eyes of the world, is that everything is empty and futile. This realisation should give us all a greater longing for heaven, and a greater commitment to make only heaven count in the things that enthuse us “under the sun”.

Bruce Christian ▶

DAY 1

Setting the scene

THE PASSAGE

ECCLESIASTES 1:1-11

THE POINT The sum of Solomon’s life in 1 Kings 10 spares no superlatives in measuring his success in terms of all this world has to offer. He is everything today’s media would hold up as the celebrity of celebrities. But as this great, wise king reflects on all his past achievements, he arrives at a completely different conclusion, calling us to realise that we should be storing up our treasures in some place other than just “under the sun” (see below).

THE PARTICULARS

• “Teacher” is from the word for “gathered assembly”; he is one set apart by God to address His “gathered people”, His Church (1).

- The writer of Ecclesiastes identifies himself as Solomon, the one anointed as King after the death of his father David (1, 12).
- “Meaningless” means lacking in substance/durability, ie empty, transitory. Its repetition in English tries to translate “emptiness of all emptinesses” (2, where it occurs six times in Hebrew!).
- The term “under the sun” refers to the world without a God, one in which our lives have no relevance beyond the grave (3, 11).
- If there is no God, the cycle of nature and human existence really reduces to nothing but repetitive, boring monotony (4-10).

TO PONDER ... AND TO PRAY

- What is important to you? Will it last? (cf Matt. 6: 19-21, 33)

DAY 2

Foolish “wisdom”

THE PASSAGE

ECCLESIASTES 1:12-18

THE POINT Sadly, post-Darwinian Man has set himself up as the fount of all wisdom with no space in his world view for the spiritual dimension in which ultimate meaning lies, and of which the physical cosmos is only a part. Scientists who insist that any reference to God is unscientific are actually denying the basis of their own discipline which is to investigate all possibilities!

THE PARTICULARS

• Solomon took very seriously the pursuit of wisdom (cf 1 Kings 3:5-12); but he discovered that with it came great responsibility, which he found quite a burden, not only because of the utter foolishness that dominates the thinking and

lifestyle of Man in his natural, sinful state, but because of the ease with which his own sinful heart succumbed to the ways of the world (13, 18).

- Human wisdom can neither find ultimate meaning in existence, nor make any material impact on where the world is heading (14-15); we are still at the mercy of God’s “natural” disasters.
- Human wisdom has no answer to life’s “big” questions (16-17).

TO PONDER ... AND TO PRAY

- In what way is denying the existence of God unscientific?
- What difference does God make to our understanding of maths? ... geography? ... history? ... art? ... physics? ... biology? ...etc.

DAY 3

This world’s empty glory...

THE PASSAGE

ECCLESIASTES 2:1-11

THE POINT Why is the economy in such a mess at present? Why are we so obsessed by lustful images yet unable to maintain meaningful, lasting relationships? Why are societies and political systems becoming more unstable and less able to fulfil our expectations? From his own bitter experience, Solomon gives us clues to help get a better perspective on where we are and how we got there.

THE PARTICULARS

• Man’s sinful heart is basically hedonistic – it thinks the pursuit of pleasure, in various ways, will bring happiness and fulfilment. Solomon found that if God is left out, happiness is hollow (1).

• The use of humour as an escape mechanism to cope with trouble has no lasting value (2); nor is there any future in drowning our sorrows (3a), or in trying to lose ourselves in amusements or distractions (3b), or in living for our career or having our name on community plaques (4-6), or in the amassing of wealth and material possessions (7-8a), or in the pursuit of sexual pleasure and gratification (8b). Sadly, Solomon realised all this, even while everyone around him was praising his great wisdom (9)!

- Undisciplined self-gratification never really satisfies (10-11).

TO PONDER ... AND TO PRAY

- What nerves does Solomon strike in your life in this passage?

DAY 4

Eternity matters

THE PASSAGE

ECCLESIASTES 2:12-26

THE POINT Death is the great leveller – it is the destiny of both the wise and the foolish, even though the wise man might appear to have more going for him in terms of insight and usefulness during his life. It is this that causes Solomon to question the value of trying to achieve anything here when it seems to make no difference, and even what he might achieve only falls into the hands of others who will probably make a mess of it because they don’t really “own” it for themselves. His 24/7 blood-sweat-and-tears is to no avail in the long run. But Solomon then realises there is one factor that does change the whole picture: God. Ultimately, all that matters is what we do for God and for eternity. Jesus says this in Matthew 6:19-21,

33 – as does Peter in 1 Peter 4:11, and Paul in Colossians 3:17 and 1 Corinthians 3:10-15; 10:31. Sadly, the average career-pursuing, pleasure-seeking atheist is too preoccupied to absorb the thrust of Solomon’s logic here.

THE PARTICULARS

- “Under the sun” it is better to be wise than foolish, to have light rather than stumble in the dark; but all this is nothing and life becomes futile if God and eternity are left out of the reckoning.
- It is only God who gives meaning to, and wisdom for, life (25f).

TO PONDER ... AND TO PRAY

- Where are you storing up treasures? ... on earth or in heaven?



Come worship with us!

*If you are passing through or moving nearby, feel free to ring the Minister, Clerk or Elder.
Find us on the Web at: <http://www.presbyterian.org.au/states.htm>*

northern territory

DARWIN

Casuarina Shopping Centre 9.30am.
Rev. Rob Duncanson (08) 8945 7878.

australian capital territory

CANBERRA, BELCONNEN

Cnr Gatty St. & Ross Smith Cres, Scullin.
Sunday Service 10:00 am
Elder: Mrs J. Cram (02) 6278 7379

CANBERRA, FORREST (St Andrew's)

1 State Circle (opp Parliament House).
Service Times: 9.30am. & 7.00pm.

Church Office: (02) 6295 3457

CANBERRA, TUGGERANONG

Isabella Plains Primary School, cnr Ellerstone Ave & Noorooma St, Isabella Plains.

Worship Service & Sunday School 10.00am.

Evening service 6.15pm (light meal @5:45pm).

Mike Pittman (02) 6292 6772.

new south wales

ANNANDALE-LEICHHARDT

Hunter Baillie, Johnston & Collins Sts.
10.00am (6.30pm 1st Sunday only.)

Rev. Peter Dunstan (02) 9810 7869

ARMIDALE (St. Paul's)

Faulkner St, 9.30am. & 7.00pm.

Rev. David M. Seaman (02) 6772 3093

ASHFIELD

Liverpool Rd. & Knox St. 10.15am & 6.00pm

Rev Peter Hastie (02) 9798 6572.

BEACON HILL (St Andrew's)

244 Warringah Rd. 9.00am. & 7.00pm.

Rev. Trevor Cheetham (02) 9451 5076.

BEECROFT

Mary St., 8.45am. 10.30am. & 5.30pm.

Rev. Paul Cooper (02) 9876 2478.

BEGA — EDEN

Bega — 25 Upper St. 9.30am.

Contact: Mrs M. Cochrane (02) 6492 2949

BONDI

Cnr. Castlefield & Miller Sts.

10.00am & 7.00pm.

Rev John Graham: (02) 9130 6607.

BONNYRIGG

Western Regions Chinese Church

14-16 Bibbys Place. 9.30 am. (English) &

11.00 am. (Mandarin)

S.Clerk: Stanley Chen (02) 9753 2073

BOWRAL

Cr Bendooley & Wingecarribee St. 9.30am.

Kids' Church: 9.30 am. 1st & 3rd Sunday
Sess. Clrk: Mr Peter Boggs, (02) 4861 3079.

BURWOOD (St. James)

46-48 Belmore St. 9.15am

Rev. David Maher (02) 9744 6542

BURWOOD CHINESE

46-48 Belmore St. 9.15am & 11.15am

(Cantonese) 10.30am & 5.00pm (English).

Church Office: (02) 9715 3889.

Rev. Dennis Law 0414 812 776.

Rev. Eugene Hor 0414 992 106.

Mr Joe Lin 0405 203 064. Miss Amy Leong

0415 777 829 (Pastoral worker)

CAMPBELLTOWN

34 Lithgow St. 8.30 am. 10.00 am. 6.30 pm.

Rev. Jim Elliot (02) 4625 1037.

CARINGBAH

393 Port Hacking Rd. South. 9.30am & 6.30pm.

Rev. Darren Middleton (02) 9540 4469.

CASTLE HILL

247 Old Northern Rd. 9.30am & 6.00pm.

Rev. Moses Hahn (02) 9634 2911.

CHATSWOOD

St Andrew's, Anderson St. 9.00am, 10.30am

& 6.30pm. Rev. Jeff Read (02) 9419 5932 (W),

(02) 9419 7349 (H). Ass. Rev. Warren Esdale.

CHERRYBROOK

John Purchase Public School Hall,

Purchase Road. Service: 9.30 am.

Rev. Stephen Fong (02) 9875 4894

CHINESE CHURCH

Cnr Crown & Albion Sts. Surry Hills.

English 9am & 5pm / Cantonese 10.30am /

Mandarin 9am / Bilingual Service 12noon /

Sunday School 9am & 10:30am / Youth 9am.

Church Office (02) 9331 4459. Rev. David

Tsai (02) 9747 4845 or 0408 5516 606.

COFFS HARBOUR (St Andrew's)

187 Harbour Dr. 8.00am, 9.45am & 6.30pm

at Harbourside Evangelical Church.

Rev. Jamie K. Newans (02) 6652 3183

CORNERSTONE

@ Concord: Meets Concord Public School

9.30 am. Cnr Burwood Rd. & Stanley St.

Concord. Rev. Mark Powell (02) 9702 5281

@ North: Meets Eastwood Heights Public

School 9.30am. Lincoln Street, Eastwood.

Rev. C. S. Tang (02) 9688 7880.

COWRA

46 Macquarie St. Also Gooloogong,

Morongla. Ph (02) 6342 1467.

CRONULLA

13 Croydon St. 9.30am.

Rev. Russell Stark (02) 9523 5875.

EAST MAITLAND

George St. 9.30am. Beresfield: Beresford Ave.

7.45am. Raymond Terrace: Irrawang St.

9.45am. Rev. J. Buchanan (02) 4933 7443.

EPPING

Bridge & Rawson Sts. 9.00am, 10.30am &

6.30pm. Rev. Matthew Oates (02) 9876 1188.

FORSTER/TUNCURRY

Bruce St. Forster, 9.30am, 6.00pm.

Rev. Jason Summers (02) 6557 5047

GLEN INNES

Heron St. 11.00am & 7.00pm.

All ages study groups 9.30am.

Pastor Lance Jackson (02) 6732 5707

GOULBURN (St Andrews)

Clifford St. 9.00am. 7.00pm (2nd & 4th

Sundays). Also Taralga, Crookwell and

Tuena. Rev. Chris Balzer (02) 4822 2344

GOSFORD

14-16 Young St. West Gosford. 8.00am.

9.45am. 6.30 pm. Rev. M. Cropper

Office: Ph (02) 4323 2490.

GRANVILLE/MERRYLANDS

Granville: 14 Hutchinson St. 9.30am. Rev. P.

Tamsett 9760 0900. Merrylands & Monitor's

Rd. P. Magee 9760 2362. Canley Heights: 3

Derria St. 9609 7384. East Parramatta:

Inquiries B. Frost 0433 908 130.

GRIFFITH

Opp. Collina Oval, Blumer Ave. 9.30 am.

Rev. Peter Gobbo (02) 6962 4827.

Dr L. Thorpe (02) 6962 1934

GUNNEDAH

Marquis & Barber Sts. Boggabri: Court

House (02) 6742 0551

HURSTVILLE

Cnr. Park Rd. & McMahon St. 9.30am &

6.30pm. Rev Kevin Murray (02) 9153 8176.

KOGARAH

Meets Carlton School of Arts — 9.30am.

2 Short Street.

Mr Steve Chong (02) 8012 6837 (H).

KOREAN, SYDNEY (Young Nak)

7-9 Manson St, Telopea. 9.30am. 11.00am.

3.00pm. S.Clerk (02) 9816 3807

LEETON

Cnr. Sycamore & Cypress Sts. 10.00 am.

Rev. Richard Keith (02) 4272 9407

MANLY (St Andrew's)

Raglan St. & Augusta Lane. 9.00am.

Rev. Derek Bullen (02) 9976 2801

MAROUBRA

8 Robey St, 10.00am. 7.15pm.

Chinese Service, 4pm.

Rev Johnnie Li (02) 9349 1312

MITTAGONG

Cr Alice & Edwards Sts. 9.00am. Sess Clrk

Mr David Hocking, (02) 4869 3118.

MOREE (St Andrew's)

Cnr Albert & Auburn Sts, 10.00am.

Tel. (02) 6752 1083

MORUYA

31 Evans St. 9.00am.

Home Missionary John Wells (02) 4474 2186.

MOSMAN (Scots Kirk)

Belmont Rd. (nr Military Rd), 9.00am.

Rev. Adrian de Graaf (02) 9969 6101.

MOSS VALE

7 Browley St 9.30am & 6.00pm
Rev. Steve North (02) 4869 4795.

NAROOMA

1 Farncombe Ave. 11.00am.
Home Missionary John Wells (02) 4474 2186.

NEWCASTLE (St Andrews)

Cnr. Laman & Auckland Sts 9.30am & 6.00pm.
Office: (02) 4929 2857

NEWCASTLE EAST (St. Philip's)

48 Watt St., 10.00am. **Surfside:** 7.00pm.
Stockton: 10.30am Wednesday.

Rev. John Macintyre (02) 4929 2379.

Asst: Rev. Jon Nuttall (02) 4928 3410.

NORTH SYDNEY-GREENWICH

(St Peter's) 234 Blues Point Rd. 10.00am.
& 6.45pm. Wednesday 1.15pm.

Greenwich: (Taylor Memorial)

86A Greenwich Rd. 10.00am.

Rev. Dr Paul Logan (02) 9955 1662.

Rev. Matthew Oates (02) 9405 2235.

ORANGE (St James)

Cnr Anson St. & Matthews Ave. 10.00am.

Rev. Robert McKean (02) 6362 6304

PARKES/FORBES/PEAK HILL

Parkes: S. School 10.00am; Service 11.00am.

Forbes: 9.00am. Peak Hill: 10.00am.

1st Sunday. Rev. Craig Bland (02) 6862 2730

PENRITH (St Andrew's)

Doonmore St. near High St, 9.00am. &
7.00pm. Rev William Morrow (02) 4721 2440.

PORT MACQUARIE (St Andrew's)

Cnr William/Munster Sts. 9.00am., 10.30am

Rev S Donnellan (02) 6582 2505

RANDWICK

Alison Rd. & Cook St. 10.00am. & 5.00pm.

Rev. Grant Thorpe (02) 9399 3183.

REVESBY

Cnr Tower St & Eastern Avenue,

Service: 9.00am & 6.30pm.

Rev. Dr Peter Barnes (02) 9774 5740.

ROSE BAY (St Andrew's)

Cnr Dover Rd. & Carlisle St.

10.00am & 6.00pm.

Rev Bruce Christian (02) 9388 1206(O).

SOUTHERN CROSS

Park Ave. East Lismore

Rev. Stephen Cree (02) 6621 3655

SPRINGWOOD

160 Macquarie Rd. 10.30am. & 6.00pm.

Winmalee : 481 Hawkesbury Rd. 9.00am.

A. Min. Mark Armstrong (02) 4751 1188 (O).

Rev. Keith Walker (02) 4751 1188 (O).

SUTHERLAND

Cnr Flora & Glencoe Sts. 9.30am & 5.30pm

Rev Andrew Clausen (02) 9521 2361

SYDNEY (Scots Church)

44 Margaret St. Sydney. Sun: 10.30 am.

Wed: 1.15pm. Rev. Adrian Van Ash

(02) 9299 7490 (O) (02) 9817 0587 (H).

TAMWORTH (St Stephen's)

Cnr Matthews & Crown St. 9.00am &

6.30pm. **Moonbi** 9.00am.

Rev Stuart Andrews (02) 6765 8754.

Tamworth Community Presb Church,

St Stephens, Cnr Matthews & Crown St.

10.30am Rev. David Hassan (02) 6765 2865.

TAREE

Albert St. 9.00am.

Rev. Paul Harris (02) 6552 1082(O).

TERRIGAL (Scots Kirk)

2 Willoughby Rd. 9.00am & 6.00pm.

Rev. Glenn Samuel (02) 4385 2240

TUROSS HEAD

277 Hector McWilliam Dr. 9.00am.

Home Missionary John Wells (02) 4474 2186.

WAHROONGA

Wahroonga Presbyterian Church,

Cnr. Illoura Ave. & Stuart St. 9.30am.

Rev. Murray Fraser (02) 9489 3690

WAGGA WAGGA SOUTH

60-62 Coleman St. Turvey Park

9.00am & 10.30am.

Rev. Sandy McMillan (02) 6925 1228.

WEE WAA

Mitchell St. Rev. Mark Powell (02) 6795 4259

WENTWORTH FALLS (St Andrew's)

Falls Rd. 9.00 am.

Rev. Keith King (02) 4784 1255

WENTWORTHVILLE (St Andrew's)

7 McKern St. 9.00am & 5.00pm.

Rev. Luke Tattersall (02) 9863 8366.

WEST WYALONG

Pioneer Memorial, Court St. 10.30am.

Barmedman: 1st & 3rd Sunday. 9.00am.

Mirrool: 3rd Sunday. **Tallimba:** Contact

Minister. **Weethalle:** Last Sunday 7.00pm.

Mr. Graham French (02) 6972 2143.

WOLLONGONG (St Andrew's)

Cnr Kembla & Burelli Sts. 9.45am & 6.00pm.

Rev. Granville Pillar (02) 4226 1725(O).

WOONONA

7 Gray St. Rev Peter Currie (02) 4284 4057.

WOY WOI

118-120 Blackwall Rd. 9.00 & 10.30 am.

Rev. Keith Rathbone (02) 4342 2856.



ARARAT

330 Barkly St (Cnr Albert St). 10.00am.

Rev. Ian Hutton (03) 5352 4054

ASHBURTON

Junction of High St. and High Street Rd.

near Warrigal Rd. 10.15am.

Rev Peter Orchard (03) 9889 6034.

ASPENDALE

Cnr Station St. & Lyle Grv. 9.00am. &

6.00pm. Session Clerk (03) 9580 6161.

AUBURN

Cnr Rathmines & Station Sts Hawthorn East

10.00 am. Rev. Trevor Cox (03) 9882 5256

BAIRNSDALE

159 Nicholson St. 10.00am.

1st of Month 5.00pm. S/school 9.00 am.

Rev. Gary Stephens (03) 5153 1669

BALACLAVA

106 Hotham St. & Denman Ave. 9.30am.

Rev. Tony Johnson (03) 9527 3270.

BENDIGO (St John's)

Forest St. 10.30am.

Rev. Philip Burns (03) 5443 6189.

BLACKBURN

53 Gardenia St. 11.00am.

Rev P Locke (03) 9725 6417

BRIMBANK

Sydenham Community Centre

Cnr, The Community Hub & Overton Lea

Blvd, 10.00am each Sunday.

Rev. Peter Owen (03) 9307 6583.

BUNDOORA

Bundoora Hall, Noorong Ave.

10.00am & 6.00pm.

Admin: Mrs M. Goodson (03) 9457 4962.

BURWOOD

(Chinese Presbyterian Church) 11.00am.

Cnr. Greenwood & Tennyson Sts.

Rev Dr John Elnatan (03) 9801 7645.

CAMBERWELL- Trinity

cnr Riversdale & Waterloo Sts. 10.00am.

Rev. Philip Mercer (03) 9882 8102

CAMPERDOWN-TERANG-GARVOC

9.30 am Aug — Jan. 11am Feb — July

Terang: 1 Warrnambool Rd.

Camperdown: Campbell & Brooke Sts.

Garvoc: 2:30pm. 2nd & 4th Sunday.

Pastor Bernie Thomas (03) 5592 1041

CANTERBURY

146 Canterbury Rd. 10.30am. & 7 pm.

Rev. Grant Lawry (03) 9836 4601.

CANTERBURY JAPANESE

146 Canterbury Rd. 10.30 am

Mr Simon Crittle (03) 9833 6007.

CAULFIELD-ELWOOD

Caulfield: Neerim/Bambra Rds. 11.15am.

Elwood: Scott/Tennyson Sts. 9.15am.

Rev. Phillip Chang (03) 9505 3013.

CHELTENHAM Pioneers' Presbyterian

8 Park Rd. Cnr. Charman Rd. 9.30am.

Rev. Daid Brown (03) 9583 2785.

CLIFTON HILL

Cnr Michael & McKean Sts North Fitzroy.

10.45 am. Rev. Peter Phillips (03) 9346 8044.

COLAC (Scots)

90-94 Armstrong Street. 10.00am.

Rev. Marvin Hagans H: (03) 5250 4360

O: (03) 5231 2398

CRANBOURNE/LYNDHURST

Cranbourne: Cnr Russel & Sladen Sts 10.00am

weekly — **Lyndhurst:** 214 Westernport Hwy

(entry frm Pyramid Pl) 2.00pm 2nd & 4th

Sunday of Mth. Mr Alex van der End

(03) 5996 1024. cranbourne.pcvic.org.au

DANDENONG

51 Potter St. 10.00am.

Rev. John Rickard (03) 9792 4252.

DONVALE

Cnr Springvale Rd & McGowan St Donvale.

8.30am, 10.30am & 6.30pm.

Rev Gerald Vanderwert (03) 9842 9493. (03)

9841 7020 (O)

DROMANA-MORNINGTON

St Andrew's, Gibson St. 9.00am.

Mornington (The Chapel) Cnr Strachans

Rd. & Nepean Hwy. 11.00am.

Rev. Dr Michael Wishart (03) 5975 9514.

DROUIN

Church St. 9am. 10.30am. 7.00pm.

Rev. Mark Smith (03) 5625 4112.

ELTHAM

23 Batman Rd. 10.00 am

Rev. Don Elliott (03) 9439 9720

ESSENDON

Cnr Wilson & McPherson Sts. 9.15am &

7.00pm. Rev. Peter Phillips (03) 9346 8044.

FLEMINGTON

Norwood St. 9.30am.

S. Clerk Miss R. Anstee (03) 9650 9903.

FRANKSTON

30 Radiata St. 10.30am & 6.00pm.

Rev. Bill Medley (03) 9786 2976.

Session Clerk: Mr John Disney 8707 0462.

Elder: Mr Andrew Bilyj

GEELONG (St. George's)

Cnr. Latrobe Tce & Ryrie St. 10.00am &

7.00pm. Interim Moderator: The Very Rev.

Dr Allan Harman (03) 5256 2134.
GEELONG NORTH
 60 Victoria St. 10.00am.
 Session Clerk: Bert Stasse (03) 5241 4097.
GEELONG WEST (Scots)
 Cnr. Pakington & Waratah Sts. 10.00am.
 Rev. David Assender (03) 5249 5508.
 Clerk: Mr J. R. Diffen (03) 5264 8080.
GISBORNE (St Andrew's)
 Fisher Street 10.30am & Evening service last
 Sunday of month 5.30pm (7.00pm Summer
 daylight savings)
HAMILTON
 St Andrew's, Gray & McIntyre Sts. 10.00am.
 & 5.00pm. (last Sunday of month)
 Phone: (03) 5572 1009
HAWTHORN
 580 Glenferrie Rd. 11.00 am. & 7.00 pm.
 Rev. Graham Nicholson (03) 9819 5347.
HEATHMONT
 Cnr. Waterloo St. & Canterbury Rd.
 Heathmont 10.00am.
 Rev. Andrew Venn (03) 9870 5182.
HORSHAM
 16 Kalkee Road 10.00am & 7.00pm.
 Rev. Willem Vandenberg (03) 5382 3735.
KANGAROO GROUND
 265 Eltham-Yarra Glen Rd. 9.30am.
 Rev. Rod Scott (03) 9763 4248.
KOREAN MELBOURNE
 16 Walnut Rd. North Balwyn. 11.00am &
 2.00pm. Mr Wonil Kim 0412 748 681.
LEONGATHA
 Cnr. Bent & Turner Sts. 10.00am.
 Session Clerk: (03) 5662 2107
MALVERN
 161 Wattletree Rd. 10.30am. & 5.00 pm.
 Rev. Philip Daffy (03) 9509 7373.
MELBOURNE
 The Scots' Church, Cnr. Russell & Collins
 Sts. 11am & 5.30pm. Wed. 1.00pm.
 5.15pm (Indonesian Service)
 Rev. Douglas Robertson (03) 9650 9903.
MELTON
 Mowbray College, Centenary Ave. 10.00am.
 (03) 9747 8195.
MOE — YARRAM
Moe: 34 Fowler St. 10.00am.
Yarram: Cnr. Dougherty & Montgomery Sts.
 2.00pm. Rev Jared Hood (03) 5127 1296.
NOORAT
 Cnr Mc Kinnons Bridge & Glenormiston Rds.
 10.30am. Rev. Miles Fagan (03) 5592 5220
NUMURKAH
 58 Saxton St. 11.15am.
Tallygaroopna: Victoria St. 9.30am.
Cobram: Cnr High and Pine Sts. (Anglican
 Church) 2.30pm.
RESERVOIR
 81 Edwardes St. 10.00 am. & 7.00 pm.
 Rev. Ross Tucker (03) 9460 9523
ROCHESTER
 Cnr Victoria St. & Echuca Rd. 10.30am &
 7.30pm (1st Sunday of the month).
 H. Missionary – Pastor Steven Arbuckle.
 S. Clerk – Mr Jeff Broad (03) 5484 6284.
ST KILDA
 Cnr Alma Rd. & Barkly St. 11.00am &
 7.00pm. Rev. Bob Thomas 0417 592 646.
SHEPPARTON
 Cnr. Hayes & Leithen Sts. 9.00am. &
 7.00pm. Also Stanhope, Kyabram.
 Rev Kyung Ee (03) 5831 6494.

SOMERVILLE
 Cnr Jones Rd. & Park Lane.
 Rev. Ian Brown (03) 5977 5469.
SORRENTO-RYE
Sorrento: St Andrew's, Kerferd Avenue
 11.00am. **Rye:** Cnr Collingwood & Lyons
 Sts. 9.15am. 6.00pm.
 Rev. John Brennan (03) 5985 6492
SOUTH YARRA
 621 Punt Rd. 10.30 am. & 5.30 pm.
 S.Clerk: Mr J. Adlawan (03) 9808 7391.
SUNSHINE
 McKay Memorial, Anderson Rd. 10.00am. &
 6.00pm. Rev. John Cho (03) 9311 1661.
SURREY HILLS (St Stephen's)
 Canterbury & Warrigal Rds. 10.15am &
 6.00pm. Family Services 6.00pm (2nd & 4th
 Sunday). Rev. Chris Siriweera (03) 9833 3306.
SURREY HILLS (St Stephen's)
Deaf Presbyterian Church
 Canterbury & Warrigal Rds. 2.00pm.
 Rev. Tony Salisbury (03) 9551 3634
 (Mod. Rev. Chris Siriweera (03) 9833 3306)
WANGARATTA – REGIONAL PARISH
Wangaratta, 158 Rowan St. 11.00am &
 5.00pm (9.00am 1st Sunday)
Yarrowonga, 47 Orr St. 8.45am (11.00am 1st
 Sunday). **Myrtleford,** 78 Standish St. 7.00pm
 (5.00pm June, July, August).
 Rev. Neil Harvey (03) 5721 6444
WARBURTON
 3471 Warburton H'way. 10.00am.
 Brian Harvey (03) 5966 2309.
WARRNAMBOOL (St John's)
Warrnambool: Spence Street. 10.00am
 (Includes Children's program) & 5.00pm
 (in the church hall Princess St).
Office: (03) 5562 2029.
South Warrnambool: MacDonald St. 9.15am.
Woodford: Mill St. 11.00 am.
 Rev. Ben Johnson (03) 5562 2029.
WEST FOOTSCRAY
 141 Essex St. (Scots) 10.00 am.
 Session Clerk: Ms J Swift (03) 9687 5701
WILLIAMSTOWN (St Andrew's)
 87 Cecil St. 10.00am.
 Rev. Bruce Riding (03) 9397 5338
WOORI YALLOCK
 1363 Healesville-Koo Wee Rup Rd. 9.30am.
 Rev. Dean Carroll (03) 5964 7563.
WYNDHAM
 116-120 Blackforest Rd. 10.00am.
 Pastor Shane Cassidy (03) 9974 2024



ACACIA RIDGE
 Cnr. Mortimer & Beaudesert Rds.
 9.00am. & 6.00pm.,
 (07) 3277 0010, (07) 3711 3022 (H).
ASCOT
 68 Charlton St. (Near Airport).
Nundah: 14 Rode Rd
 Rev Guido Kettmiss (07) 3216 4151.
ATHERTON (Tablelands)
 Cnr. Alice & Jack Sts. 10.00am & 6.00pm.
 Rev. Cameron Wills (07) 4091 7203.
BALD HILLS
 58 Strathpine Rd. 8.30am. & 7.00pm.
 Rev Peter Bloomfield (07) 3261 4305.

BRISBANE KOREAN
 145 Ann St. 8.00am. 12.00 noon, 7.30pm.
 Rev. Dr M. M. Y. Kim (07) 3300 3132
BRISBANE (St Paul's)
 53 St Pauls Tce. Spring Hill.
 Rev. A. Gardiner (07) 3831 7458(O).
BUNDABERG
 Cnr Water & Alice Sts. 9.00am & 7.00pm.
 Rev. Wallace Brown (07) 4151 4766.
CABOOLTURE
 24 Cottrill Road. 9.00am & 6.00pm.
 Rev. Don Kennedy (07) 5498 6253
CAIRNS
 85 Sheridan St. 9.30am. & 6.30pm.
 Korean 11.00am. Cook Island 12 noon.
 Rev. Harry Oh (07) 4051 2238
CALLIDE VALLEY
Biloela: Cnr. Kariboe & Melton Sts.
 10.00am. **Jambin:** Three Ways 8.30am.
 Rev. Gaius Goh (07) 4992 1441.
CHARLEVILLE/BLACKALL
 78 Galatea St. 9.00am.
CLAYFIELD (Scots Memorial)
 29 Bellevue Terrace, 9.30am & 6.30pm.
 Rev. Andrew Richardson 0423 160 412
COORPAROO
 Emlyn St. 10.00am.
 H. M. Phil Case (07) 3397 8793.
CREEK ROAD
 Presbyterian Ministry Centre. 1541 Creek Rd
 (cnr Fursden Rd). **Carina** 9.00am & 6.30pm.
 Centre: (07) 3398 4333. Ass. Rev. Jens Norved
 (07) 3396 1185. Japanese Service 11.30am.
 Jack & Keiko Marshall (07) 5501 9220.
DECEPTION BAY—BURPENGARY
 Peace Presbyterian Church. 9.30am.
 155-157 Maine Terrace, Deception Bay.
 Rev. John Gilmour (07) 3203 2526.
GLADSTONE (St Andrew's)
 Goondoon & Bramston Sts. 10.00am.
Benaraby: O'Connor Rd. 8.00am. **Calliope:**
 Dawson H'way (Stirrat St.) 2nd Sunday
 9.30am; 4th Sunday 8.00am. Rev. D. Secomb
 (07) 4972 1058 (O); 4972 1057 (H).
GOLD COAST (I)
Arundel: 132 Allied Drive 9.00am &
 10.45am. (07) 5571 5676. www.arundel.org.au
Robina: Cnr University & Cottesloe Drives
 10.00am & 6.30pm.
 Rev. Kevin Ridley (07) 5571 1416
GOLD COAST (II)
Mudgeeraba: Cnr Mudgeeraba Rd &
 Regency Pde. 9.00am & 6.30 pm.
 Rev. Ray Evans (07) 5573 1458.
GOLD COAST (III)
Christ Church: Currumbin Primary School,
 Phillip Street, Currumbin – 9.30am.
 Rev. Alan Radloff (07) 5530 5758.
HELENSVALE (Northlinks)
 1 Shepparton Road – 9.30am.
 Rev. John Evans (07) 5580 1367.
HERVEY BAY
 5 Denman's Camp Road, Scarness. 9.30am
 & 7.00pm. Rev. John Roth (07) 4124 7018.
ITHACA
 100 Enogerra Tce, Paddington.
 Service: 9.30 am. 6.30pm.
 Rev. Robert Herrgott (07) 3300 6158.
IPSWICH
 Cnr Limestone & Gordon Sts. 9.30am,
 10.00am & 6.30pm.
Forest Hill: Church St, 9.00am.
 Office: (07) 3281 7201, Fax: (07) 3202 2571.

MACGREGOR

268 Padstow Rd. Eight Mile Plains 9.00am.
Pastor Ross Wilson (07) 3272 6265

MACKAY

Cnr Harvey St. & Evans Ave. Nth Mackay.
8.30am & 7pm. **Sarina:** Sarina Beach Rd.
9.30am each Sunday; Ph. (07) 4957 2835.

MARANO

Roma: Queen Street 9.00am.
Rev. Walter Jones (07) 4622 1158

MAROOCHYDORE

45 Okinja Road Alexandra Headland 9.00am
& 7.00pm. Rev. Peter Barber & Church
Office (07) 5443 7073.

Rev. Keith Mayers (07) 5445 9209.

MARYBOROUGH

523 Alice Street. 9.00am (& 5.00pm first
Sunday). Rev. David Newman (07) 4123
1212

MONTO

Bell St. 10.00am. **Abercorn** 11.45am. (1st
Sunday). **Kalpovar:** 5.30pm.
Pastor Elton Wiltshire (07) 4166 1441.

NORTH PINE

57 Old Dayboro Rd. Petrie. 9.00am &
6.30pm. Rev P. Cornford (07) 3285 2104.

REDCLIFFE PENINSULA

WoodyPoint, Cnr. Ellen & Hawthorne Sts.
9.30am. & 6.00pm. **Scarborough:** Jeays St.
8.00am. Rev. Peter Whitney (07) 3284 2578.

ROBINA

Cnr Cottesloe & University Drs.
Rev. Kevin Ridley (07) 5571 1416.

ROCKHAMPTON (St Andrew's)

51 Denham St. (cnr Alma Lne) 9.00am. &
6.00pm. Rev C. Kennedy (07) 4922 8241.

ROCKHAMPTON (John Knox)

Rundle St. 10.00 am. & 7.30 pm.
Rev. Jon Chandler (07) 4922 1825 (O)
(07) 4922 1540 (A/H).

ROCKHAMPTON (St Stephen's)

Burnett St. Nth Rockhampton, 8.30am.
Rev. Jon Chandler (07) 4922 1825 (O)
(07) 4922 1540 (A/H).

Mt Morgan: St Enoch's, East St. 4.00pm.

Rev. Jon Chandler (07) 4922 1825 (O)
(07) 4922 1540 (A/H).

SANDGATE

Loudon St. 9.00am & 6.00pm.
Rev. D.K. Ashman (07) 3269 1231

SHAILER PARK/CORNUBIA

99 Bromley St. **Cornubia.** 10.00am &
6.00pm. Rev. Don Geddes (07) 5522 8982.

SPRINGSURE

Charles St. 9.00am.
Emerald: Cnr Ruby & Egerton Sts.,
11.00am.

Rev. B. J. Harrison (07) 4984 1550.

THE GAP

1195 Waterworks Rd, 9.00am.
Rev. Chris Perona (07) 3300 2987

TOOWOOMBA NORTH (St David's)

Mary St. Also at **Geham.**

TOOWOOMBA SOUTH (St John's)

Cnr Cranley & Geddes Sts. 9:30am, 6pm.
Rev Graeme McKay (07) 4635 4560

Murphy's Creek, Thor St 9:30am.

Westbrook, Westbrook Hall, Main St. 9am.

TOWNSVILLE (Willows)

26 Carthew St. Kirwan 9.30am & 6.30pm
Rev. David McDougall (07) 4723 1232

TOWNSVILLE (St Andrew's)

113 Wills St. City. 9.00am & 6.30pm.

Ass. Rev. Kwang-Ho Song (07) 4778 3823

WEST TOOWOOMBA

Cnr Greenwattle & South Sts. 7.45am,
9.30am & 5.45pm. Rev. R. Sondergeld
(07) 4633 4000 (H), (07) 4633 4188 (O).

WINDSOR

Maygar St. 8.30am. **Wilston:** Macgregor St.
10.15am. **Newmarket:** Wilmington St.
6.00pm. Rev. Stuart Atkinson (07) 3356 4124

western australia

BASSENDEAN

14-16 Broadway. 9.30am.
Rev. Ross Fraser (08) 9248 3252.

BICTON

Harris St. & View Tce. 9.30am & 7.00pm.
Rev. Andrew Robinson (08) 9339 3542

FREMANTLE (Scots)

90 South Tce. Worship & Sunday School
10.00am. Rev. Stuart Bonnington
(08) 9398 1304 Off. (08) 9336 6542

MANDURAH

Cnr Sutton and Gibson St 10:00am
Rev. Paul Bloomfield (08) 9319 0706.

WEST LEEDERVILLE (Henderson Memorial)

Cnr Kimberly & Ruislip Sts. 10.30am.
English & Japanese Service 1.00pm.
Rev. Steve Young (08) 9448 8755.

south australia

ADELAIDE (St Andrew's)

92-98 Archer St. North Adelaide. 10.30 am.
Rev. Chris ten Broeke.
Session Clerk Mr D. Niven (08) 8381 4615.

ELIZABETH

106 Goodman Rd, Elizabeth South. 9.30am.
Rev. KKevin Stow (08) 8284 1719. Session
Clerk: Mr Bob Arstall (08) 8825 5226.

LARGS NORTH

Brenda Terrace. 11.00am.
Rev. Raymond Brewer (08) 8263 9692.

MILLICENT

Cnr Fifth & Sixth Sts. 10.30 am.
Rev. Alan Clarkson (08) 9739 6490.

Also **Rendelsham**

MT BARKER

Hutchison St. 10.30 am.
Pastor Rupert Hanna (08) 8391 3151.

Mod. Rev. S. Slucki (08) 8296 1581.

MT GAMBIER

Allison St. 10.00 am. 5.30 pm. Also **Allendale,**
Nelson (Vic). Rev Gary Ware (08) 8723 9028.

NARACORTE

Church St. 10.00am.
Rev. Andrew Gall (08) 8762 1035.

NORWOOD (St Giles)

79 The Parade. 9.15am & 7.00pm.
Rev. Dr Reg Mathews (08) 8395 7841

PARA HILLS

174 Maxwell Rd. 10.45 am.
Rev Dr Reg Mathews (08) 8395 7841

PENOLA

Portland St. 9.30am. Rev. Alan Clarkson (08)
9739 6490. Also **Dergholm, Kalangadoo**

PORT AUGUSTA

Jervois St. 10.00 am.
Barry Rossiter (08) 8642 2059.

SEACLIFF

Kauri Pde. **Seacliff.** 9.30am.
Rev. S. Slucki (08) 8296 1581.

WHYALLA

28 Ramsay St. 10.00 am.
S/Clerk H. Mashford (08) 8645 0818.
I.Mod. Rev. Dr Reg Mathews (08) 8395 7841.

tasmania

CORNERSTONE (Hobart) 9.30am.

"The Philip Smith Centre", 2 Edward St,
The Glebe. Rev. David Jones (03) 6223 4701.

CROSSROADS 5.30pm.

"The Philip Smith Centre", 2 Edward St, The
Glebe. H.M. Michael Lynch 0414 669 554.

DEVONPORT (St Columba's)

13 Edward St. 10.00am. **Don:** Waverley Rd.
2.00pm (1st & 3rd Sundays).

Rev. Steve Warwick (03) 6424 6066

HOBART (St John's)

10.00am & 6.30pm. 188 Macquarie St.
(03) 6223 7213.

Rev. Robert White (03) 6229 7657

Rev. Rod Waterhouse 0438 555 983.

LAUNCESTON (St Andrew's)

Civic Square. 10.00 am & 5.00 pm.

Church Office: (03) 6331 5412

Rev. Peter Thorneycroft 0438 315 412

MONTROSE

Cnr. Islington Rd. & Walker St. 10.00 am.

Mod. Rev. Rod Waterhouse 0438 555 983.

RIVERSIDE

Eden St. 10.45am. **Glengarry:** 9.15am.

Frankford H'way. **Winkleigh:** 9.15am, 2nd
Sunday. Rev. Norman Shellard (03) 6327 2967

ROKEBY

Presby. Community Church, Tollard 9.30am
& 6.00pm. Clerk David Turner (03) 6247 7971.

SCOTTSDALE

George St. 11.00am. **Bridport:** Westwood St.
9.00am. Pastor Greg Munro (03) 6352 2527.

STANLEY (St James)

Fletcher St. 10.30am.

I.M. Rev. Steve Warwick (03) 6424 6066.

ULVERSTONE (St Andrew's)

65 Main Rd. 10.00am.

Rev. Charlie Kennedy 0400 228 241.

WEST TAMAR (Auld Kirk)

Sidmouth 10.00am and Mole Creek 2.00pm.

Clerk: Steve Buckland (03) 6396 3213.

*To register your church in this section of AP
is an easy, low cost exercise.*

*Facsimile the AP office on: (03) 9723 9685
or E-mail us at: aus-pres@bigpond.net.au*

The Annual Fees are:

Congregations under 50 \$45.00 plus GST

Congregations 51 -99 \$55.00 plus GST

Congregations 100 or more \$65.00 plus GST

DAY 5

*Everything in its time***THE PASSAGE****ECCLESIASTES 3:1-8**

THE POINT One of the struggles those of us who are committed to the truth and infallibility of the Bible have is to hold in tension verses that seem to be saying opposite things. We are told that no-one can know God unless Jesus chooses them (Matthew 11:27, John 10:25-30), and that the invitation is open for everyone to come (Matthew 11:28, John 3:16); sometimes we're told both truths in the same verse (John 6:37)! Here Solomon tells us that in God's providence we must be prepared for a wide range of different possibilities, that we must let God be God, trusting Him to do whatever is best for us "in its season", always realising that His providence in one person's life might be quite different from His providence in another's.

And, of course, it is much easier to rest content in His providence if we sustain a heavenly perspective.

THE PARTICULARS

- Solomon here talks about "under heaven" instead of "under the sun": what a difference it makes when God is acknowledged (1).
- God is in full control of every aspect and moment of our lives.

TO PONDER ... AND TO PRAY

- Spend time on each statement. Look back over your own life to see how God has been with you in each of the contrasting circumstances. Note especially the "seasons" when it was hard to recognise God's loving hand until some time later. Thank Him.

DAY 6

*Eternity set in men's hearts***THE PASSAGE****ECCLESIASTES 3:9-22**

THE POINT I am writing these notes 2 days after Charles Darwin's 200th birthday. As a natural scientist, Darwin noticed the very thing Solomon had also observed concerning Man's similarity to the animals. This is not surprising: we were designed by the same Creator to live in exactly the same environment. But what the King of Israel saw, that the father of evolutionary theory chose to overlook, is that there is a fundamental difference between Man and the animals: God has set eternity in our hearts. What we also know from God's revealed Word is that our sin has introduced spiritual death into our camp, so that without God's intervention we are back with the animals (cf Ephesians 2:1,5). This passage serves as an

excellent backdrop for the Gospel!

THE PARTICULARS

- The burden God has laid on us is the direct result of our own disobedience (9-10; cf Genesis 3:17-19); if we continue to reject Him the whole framework falls apart, life becomes futile, and it only remains for us all to face Him in final judgement (15-17).
- Because we are made in God's image (Genesis 1:26-27), we have eternity in our hearts (11); because we have sinned against God (Romans 3:23), we also have "madness" in our hearts (9:3). Only in Christ can the first be restored (2 Corinthians 5:17); without Him we remain spiritually dead, cut off from God for eternity.

DAY 7

*The third strand***THE PASSAGE****ECCLESIASTES 4:1-12**

THE POINT Technology allows us to see the world from our lounge rooms. Sadly, Solomon's account of life "under the sun" is alarmingly accurate: the oppression, and absolutely hopeless plight, of the poor; the greed, and unfettered covetousness, of us in the West; the utter loneliness of the man with plenty of toys (Facebook, a mobile phone, a car) but desperate for one meaningful, intimate relationship. But this is exactly what happens when we live as if this world is all there is. In Romans 1:18-32 Paul provides us with another description of what happens if God withdraws His influence, His restraining hand of mercy, from us. These are not pretty pictures, but their accuracy is borne out before our very eyes today. How much bet-

ter it is if we do things God's way, if we help one another instead of always competing with each other (locally and globally), if we warm each other up, and if God is intertwined into our lives as the third strand (12)!

THE PARTICULARS

- Many parts of the world today are described in verses 1-3.
- Wars are fought, and lives ruined and lost, through greed (4-8).
- God designed us for friendship/community; marriage and the Church are good examples – as long as He is woven in (9-12)!

TO PONDER ... AND TO PRAY

- Can there be any hope for our world apart from Christ?

DAY 8

*What kind of king are you?***THE PASSAGE****ECCLESIASTES 4:13-5:7**

THE POINT It was the role of the king in Israel to represent God among the people (cf the prophet who brought God to the people, and the priest who brought the people to God). Solomon knew that true wisdom is found in God alone (cf Proverbs 9:10), and so God's true representative among His people is the man who continues to listen to what God says, walking humbly in His ways, and refraining from waxing eloquent with his own wisdom so that he no longer hears God's voice. Even a poor young man, with a less than impressive background, who seeks God's wisdom, is more use than an old blue-blood who thinks he no longer needs to have a regular daily quiet time meditating on God's Word!

THE PARTICULARS

- It is not our background that counts, but where we stand in relation to God's Word – the source of His wisdom (4:13-14; the "his" in "within his kingdom" probably refers to the old king).
- Fickleness is another indicator of the futility of a humanity that ignores God (4:15-16; cf the crowd's cry, "Crucify!" at Jesus).
- The important thing is to recognise God as God in heaven (not "under the sun"!); to listen to Him rather than speak, especially to make rash, man-centred claims (5:1-7; cf Matt. 7:21-23).

TO PONDER ... AND TO PRAY

- Are you too busy serving the Lord to have time to listen to Him?

DAY 9

Living wisely

THE PASSAGE

ECCLESIASTES 5:8-20

THE POINT Is the Bible relevant today? Solomon could have written these words after watching last night's News – but we never learn!

THE PARTICULARS

- The world's present financial crisis is due in part to a failure to have in place satisfactory accountability mechanisms: sinful greed easily takes control of the economy when those whose job it is to "check the checkers" are motivated by self-interest. In the end, everyone suffers and everything becomes futile (8-10).
- Once we have lost a heavenly perspective, and centre our lives on material things that neither last nor even satisfy our

deepest longings, we are left feeling not only empty but cheated (11). The honest worker, on the other hand, who keeps everything in the right perspective, realising he is serving the Lord in all he does, and remembering to thank Him for all he has, rests soundly at night, and is content with God's present providence (12, 18-20).

- We come into this world with nothing but what we are; we go from it with only what we have become by the grace of God in us. Material possessions are for this fleeting world alone, and even wealthy Solomon found they brought only trouble (13-17).

TO PONDER ... AND TO PRAY

- Does your lifestyle take Luke 12:13-21 into account?

DAY 10

...dying well

THE PASSAGE

ECCLESIASTES 6:1-12

THE POINT If our brief appearance on the stage of history is all there is to our existence we could be excused for thinking "Is anything we do worth all the striving and worry, especially when nothing seems to last?" There must be many past high achievers "turning in their graves" at what others have done with their legacy. We can't even accuse the author of the sentiments of this chapter of "sour grapes" – Solomon had everything going for him in terms of what this world has to offer. But, in the end, the wise king saw that all that truly matters is a "proper burial" (3): only what we can take with us beyond the grave has any real and lasting value.

THE PARTICULARS

- "Having" doesn't guarantee "enjoying", as many can testify

(1-2)!

- It is quite disarming to realise that living for two millennia and raising 100 offspring is as nothing in the light of eternity (3-6)!
- There is an interesting parallel between vv 7-9 and Genesis 3:6 where Adam and Eve were deceived in 3 areas: the stomach (cf 7), the eyes (cf 9), and worldly wisdom (cf 8); by disregarding the heavenly perspective they, too, forfeited life's real blessings.
- In a God-less world, nothing changes, nothing satisfies (10-12).

TO PONDER ... AND TO PRAY

- What epitaph would you like inscribed on your headstone?

DAY 11

Nostalgia isn't what it used to be

THE PASSAGE

ECCLESIASTES 7:1-12

THE POINT Solomon introduces a series of "better than" proverbs pointing to the choices we make in life. Again, they show the importance of a heavenly perspective that totally overshadows anything this world can offer. It is only as we recognise ourselves as primarily citizens of heaven that our life on earth has meaning.

THE PARTICULARS

- The reality of death ought to keep us focussed on what counts: inner rather than outer fragrance; a solemn funeral celebrating a godly life rather than a wild, frivolous "birth" day party (1-4).
- Our society trivialises sinful behaviour, almost as a cover for

embarrassment; we should confront it and deal with it (5-6).

- "The love of money is the root of all evil" (7; cf 1 Tim. 6:10); money might promise protection, and so lull us into a false sense of security (as the world is now discovering to its chagrin) but truly godly wisdom is the only reliable refuge for life (11-12).
- It is dangerous to make too hasty an assessment of our current circumstances; patience with God's providence brings peace of mind, humble surrender, calmness of spirit in relationships, and a quiet acceptance that doesn't dwell on "better days" (8-10).

TO PONDER ... AND TO PRAY

- Can you identify with Paul's sentiments in Philippians 3:18-21?

DAY 12

Consider what God has done

THE PASSAGE

ECCLESIASTES 7:13-22

THE POINT Like Job, we can wrestle with, and wrangle over, the seeming injustices of life, but in the final analysis God is sovereign in His world, and we must allow Him to decide what is best. David comes to the same conclusion in Psalms 37 and 73, as does Paul in Romans 8:18-32. The real secret of life, hard as it might seem, is to walk in the steps of Job/David/Paul; only then will we find meaning and purpose in an otherwise confusing "under the sun".

THE PARTICULARS

- We have very little control over our circumstances, but God knows what He is doing. Since it is He who organises the bad as well as the good in our lives, seldom letting us see the future,

the best policy is to trust Him without complaining or questioning (13-15). This is the essence of authentic faith (cf Hebrews 11:1).

- Part of letting God be God is realising that there aren't neat theological explanations for everything that happens. This is where Job's 4 "overrighteous", "otherwise" friends went wrong. Satan loves to push us to opposite extremes; the hypocritical "know-all" is just as useful to him as a hardened sinner. Being aware of the sinfulness of every human heart should deter us from making hasty judgements or listening to rumours (16-22).

TO PONDER ... AND TO PRAY

- Does growing in maturity make you less critical of others?

DAY 13

Wise with the eyes

THE PASSAGE

ECCLESIASTES 7:23-8:1

THE POINT An interesting characteristic of our society is the use of the word “adult” (meaning “mature”) to describe books, movies, etc, preoccupied with sexual immorality. Solomon searched hard for genuine, mature wisdom and, sadly, found out the hard way the stupidity of wickedness. Our world today mocks those who, like Job (Job 31:1), would seek to live disciplined, God-honouring lives by being very selective when it comes to TV or movie watching, or browsing in magazines or on the internet.

THE PARTICULARS

• There is a vast difference between worldly wisdom and God’s wisdom as Solomon discovered (23-24). True wisdom can

only be found in Christ (cf Colossians 2:2-3; 1 Corinthians 1:18-31), and so only in the OT as it foreshadows and anticipates Him.

- It is sad that we are so slow to see sin’s utter stupidity (25); if God made us in His image, it is no surprise that our whole being will function much better when we walk in His wisdom (8 :1).
- When a society declines by rejecting God’s way, man’s sinful lust and woman’s flirtation seem to be at the heart of it (26-29).

TO PONDER ... AND TO PRAY

• Do you think professing Christians today are generally wise in the use of their eyes? How much self-censorship do you apply?

DAY 14

“I have installed my King on Zion”

THE PASSAGE

ECCLESIASTES 8:2-17

THE POINT Most of Man’s problems stem from our making exactly the same mistake our first parents made in the Garden of Eden (which is why there is no point in blaming them for our sorry state!). It is natural for us to want to run the world (it is what He designed us to do!), but we want to do it by our rules/wisdom, not His. It is an authority issue, and our sinful hearts prefer anarchy. If only we would realise that God is King, that He runs His world His way anyway without being answerable to us, and that He appoints rulers to act on His behalf. All this points to Jesus as the only true King, and so to how we are to relate to Him as our King. This is how we should interpret Solomon’s words here.

THE PARTICULARS

- Paul could apply this passage, even when the ruler at the time was a godless despot persecuting Christians (cf Rom. 13:1-7).
- Paul also notes our complete slavery to sin (8; cf Romans 6:16).
- Justice delayed is justice denied; but this also means there is a serious lack of deterrent to further crime, as we see today (11).
- The best thing to do is to realise it is God’s world not ours, that He will run it as He wills, and to enjoy all His blessings (12-17).

TO PONDER ... AND TO PRAY

• Is this how you see, and apply, Jesus’ rightful rule in your life?

DAY 15

A call for sober thinking

THE PASSAGE

ECCLESIASTES 9:1-12

THE POINT What Solomon is giving us here is a picture of the natural state of affairs if God had not graciously intervened following Adam and Eve’s rebellion in the Garden. The default consequence of their sin was death, separation from the God in whose image and likeness they were created, and with whom they were to have enjoyed fulfilling fellowship for all eternity. To have died spiritually, in effect, made them exactly the same as the animals for whom life “under the sun” was all there was. It put “madness in their hearts while they live” because their “living” became a different scenario from what God had intended. All who fail to respond to the trace of “eternity in their hearts” of 3:11, rejecting God’s saving grace in

Christ, continue in this “madness” and are part of the very bleak picture of life painted by Solomon here.

THE PARTICULARS

- It is a sobering thought that, apart from God’s saving grace, all our efforts at being good count for nothing in the end (1-3).
- Solomon outlines the logical philosophy of life of the unbeliever if he is honest and consistent in his approach to daily life (4-10).

TO PONDER ... AND TO PRAY

• Who we are, and what happens to us in our earthly existence, is entirely in the hands of our sovereign Creator (11-12). What impact should knowing this have on our thinking and behaviour?

DAY 16

Upside-down Kingdom

THE PASSAGE

ECCLESIASTES 9:13-10:7

THE POINT The apostle Paul, trained as a Pharisee, was well acquainted with the OT Scriptures. These verses could well have been in his mind when he wrote 1 Corinthians 1:18-31. God carries out His purposes using poor, humble people who are often quickly forgotten by the world and leave few lasting monuments of their achievements; His Kingdom is an upside-down kingdom where the “foolish”, “weak” and “despised” shame the wise and strong.

THE PARTICULARS

• The weapons and ways of the world can cause much harm, but in the end the quiet, unheralded, and often unrecognised work of God is accomplished; sadly, powerful movements of

the Spirit in Church history have been short-lived because of man’s evil scheming, but even this is in the providence of God (9:13-18).

- We are directed by our inner being, our heart (cf Luke 6:45); it inclines either to the “right” or “left” (10:2; cf Matt. 25:33).
- Even a little bit of foolishness can cause much damage (10:1,3).
- Ruling authorities can make terribly bad decisions in delegating authority, as they discover too late, to their shame; we should never waver if we are in a position to influence them (10:4-7).

TO PONDER ... AND TO PRAY

• Do you persist in exerting godly wisdom wherever you can?

DAY 17

Look sharp; stay sharp

THE PASSAGE **ECCLESIASTES 10:8-20**

THE POINT Here is a set of proverbs comparing wisdom with foolishness; they would sit as easily in the book of Proverbs, as they do here.

THE PARTICULARS

- It is foolish to act without taking necessary precautions (8-9).
- Our efforts will be more effective, and safer, if we spend time in careful preparation before embarking on a project (10-11, 15). On the other hand, indecision and incompetence sap our strength (15), laziness leads to the depreciation of our assets (18), and our whole life becomes centred on empty worldly pursuits (19).
- The same principles apply at a national level where leaders are

to be self-disciplined if there is to be prosperity for all (16-17) .

- A wise man will be careful to keep disciplined control over his tongue. (It is better to remain silent and appear stupid than to open one’s mouth and remove the doubt!) In the end, a man’s wisdom is limited by his inability to see into the future (12-14).
- There is little to be gained from insubordination or anarchy because those who have positions of authority have it in their power to make things worse; far better to follow the wisdom of Paul’s perspective about authorities in Romans 13:1-7! (20).

TO PONDER ... AND TO PRAY

- What aspects of your life is God challenging in this passage?

DAY 18

From futility to faith

THE PASSAGE **ECCLESIASTES 11:1-6**

THE POINT Solomon has demonstrated most clearly in chapters 1-10 just how futile life becomes if we leave God out, if we live out our lives on the assumption that the physical world, with all its pursuits and pleasures, is all there is. (Sadly, most Australians are wanting to discover this for themselves!) Now, in these last 2 chapters, he challenges us, on the strength of his observations, to acknowledge God as the sovereign Creator and so to commit every part of our lives wholeheartedly and trustingly to Him.

THE PARTICULARS

- If we truly trust God for our daily bread (ie everything we need for life), we will be open-handed and generous in sharing

what we have with others. What is the use of storing it up while others suffer deprivation if some disaster takes it from us (1-2)?

- There is a certain inevitability about God’s providence; we are most content when we accept everything that happens to us as a loving gift from His gracious hand (3; cf 1 Thessalonians 5:18).
- The secret of life is to work hard, to take “faith risks” for God, but not be anxious about the results (4-6; cf Matt. 6:25-34).

TO PONDER ... AND TO PRAY

- Are we generous enough in sharing the resources God has given us with the needy? Do we save up too much “for a rainy day”?

DAY 19

Enjoy life... with God

THE PASSAGE **ECCLESIASTES 11:7-12:8**

THE POINT Life is a struggle – and this becomes more obvious to us the older we get! It is wise and good, therefore, to get the most out of our youthful years, enjoying the earthly life our gracious and loving God has given us (cf Jesus’ wonderful promise in John 10:10), but remembering that sin has done two things: it has brought a sorrow into our world which we cannot escape; and it has so infected our own hearts and minds that we need the voice of conscience to remind us that God will one day require us to give Him an account of all our decisions, thoughts and actions.

THE PARTICULARS

- Our earthly life is a complex mixture of joy and sorrow. God

wants us to enjoy the good times to the full, while not forgetting that even these times, in the earthly realm, are fleeting (11:7-8).

- The greatest joys of youth can only be found within the limits of obedience to God’s commandments; sin leads to judgement, and causes anxiety and trouble which make the joy futile (11:9-10).
- Although in Christ we have God’s guarantee of resurrection to eternal life, our earthly life usually ends badly (cf Ps. 90:10); the earlier we involve God in this journey the better (12:1-8).

TO PONDER ... AND TO PRAY

- What would you say to someone who is putting off becoming a Christian until after they have “tasted a bit of the world”?

DAY 20

A Word from God

THE PASSAGE **ECCLESIASTES 12:9-14**

THE POINT Solomon here gives us an insight into the doctrine of inspiration of Scripture. He is conscious of his own input as he wrestles with the hard issues of life using the measure of wisdom God has given him (9-10) – who Solomon is in what he writes! But he is also conscious of the fact that these same words are also divinely inspired, that they are “upright and true” (a description that implies God’s imprimatur), and that they are “given by one Shepherd” (11; the NIV is justified from the context in spelling this with a capital “S” as Solomon probably has in mind his father’s statement, “The LORD is my Shepherd ...” in Psalm 23). So, for this wise King of Israel, whose own life too often had been influenced by

a worldly perspective rather than a heavenly one, the “conclusion of the matter” (13), the only workable wisdom, was to live life committed to the way prescribed by the God who created us, and to whom we must finally give account.

THE PARTICULARS

- The wisdom of the Gospel ought to be shared with others (9a).
- God’s Word is both a goad to urge us on in spiritual growth (cf Heb. 4:12), and nails to anchor us firmly in His truth (11); it and not human wisdom should be our guidebook for life (12).

TO PONDER ... AND TO PRAY

- Are God, and the joy of His heaven, central to your earthly life?



Across Australia

Appeal to PM on Gaza

Moderator-General Robert Benn has written to Prime Minister Kevin Rudd pleading for significant Australian aid to help rebuild Gaza after the incursion by Israel in January. He said he understood the background to the Israeli action – the constant barrage of rockets into Israeli territory – but said aid agencies and impartial observers called Israel’s actions indiscriminate and disproportionate.

“I am aware there are Anglicans, Lutherans, Baptists and probably Christians of other denominations living in Gaza alongside Muslims and that the Israeli military has targeted many non-military people and buildings, including a Christian medical clinic,” Mr Benn wrote.

“There was a recent estimate that Israel has caused US\$3 billion of damage in Gaza. I would ask that Australia make a significant contribution towards the repair and re-building of basic medical and other services for both Christians and Muslims – after all, they live, work and suffer together as a community. I hope to hear that you have protested to Israel and communicated Australia’s aid-donation plan to the Palestinian authorities.”

Freedom fear

The Federal Church and Nation committee has been greatly concerned by the proposals of the Australian Human Rights Commission’s *Freedom of Religion and Belief in the 21st Century Project*. As have many state committees, it has prepared and forwarded a submission, which can be read at <http://www.canfederal.presbyterian.org.au>.

Oldest church turns 200

This year marks the 200th anniversary of Australia’s oldest existing church, Ebenezer Church in the Hawkesbury, and the first Presbyterian Church in Australia. To mark the occasion, the Ferguson Memorial Library (Archives of the Presbyterian Church) will mount an historical display of photos and memorabilia in the pavilion in the church grounds in June.

For its first 15 years the congregation was not aligned to any one denomination. Ebenezer became the first Presbyterian Church in 1824, and a **Uniting Church** in 1978. Representatives of both churches are involved in planning the bicentenary service. Celebrations are planned for 19 to 21 June, and are expected to attract a vast number of people including descendants of pioneering families.

PresCare grows

The Rev. Philip Strong, the PCQ Chaplaincy Coordinator, has presented to the PresCare Board the vision of how the chaplaincy might roll out throughout PresCare (Queensland). On 26 February, applications closed for up to four new positions within PresCare.

A service jubilee

At Lockhart (NSW), on 18 March 1959, Bruce Napper was ordained by the Presbytery of Wagga Wagga. This followed six years as a student for the ministry and five years conjointly as a Home Missionary at Dorrigo and Kingsgrove.

Since his ordination he has served at Lockhart, Port Macquarie-Wauchope, Ballina-Alstonville, St Andrew’s Townsville, West Toowoomba, and Annerley. He retired in 1995, but served as “supply” at several churches. He also served on several assembly standing committees in NSW and Qld, and as convener of Home Mission Qld, Presbytery clerk for the Presbyteries of Townsville and North Queensland, as moderator of the Presbyteries of Northern Rivers, Townsville, Darling Downs and Mowbray, and moderator of the Queensland Assembly.

New minister

The Rev. Robert Finster was appointed minister of St Andrew’s Mt Barker (SA) on 6 February by the Presbytery of Torrens. Robert, his wife Julie and son Matthew have come over from Tatura in Northern Victoria to serve in the Adelaide Hills. Pastor Barry Rossiter from Port Augusta led the service and the Rev. Stefan Slucki preached.

Tasmania plans to grow

Last year the Presbytery of Bass (Tas.), formed the Bass Church Extension Committee. The new committee has three priorities. The first is for a rural regional ministry in the Tasmanian midlands, which is suffering prolonged drought. This has quickly taken shape with the assistance of PIM, Vision 100, and the Presbytery of Derwent (Tas.).

The second is for an expanding area of the city of Launceston called Prospect. Greater Launceston has a population of over 100,000. The third is to develop the small church in Burnie so that it may become a mother church for the area. Burnie region has a population of over 30,000 including the West Coast, but has not had a Presbyterian Church since Union. Services started there four years ago to support a local family and now continue weekly. The presbytery has begun to advertise for a church planter for this region.

Battling AIDS

PresAID’s 2009 Good Friday Mercy Appeal is towards a number of worthy causes, including HIV-AIDS ministry with the Evangelical Bible Church in



WE, LAURIE & GWEN PEAKE, ARE PLANNING IN MAY 2009, TO REVISIT MANY PLACES THAT WERE IN OUR PATROLS WHEN WE WORKED WITH PIM. THESE ARE PLACES OF HISTORICAL INTEREST TO THE INLAND MISSION SUCH AS CHARLEVILLE, INNAMINCKA, BELTANA, OODNADATTA AND TERMINATING AT ALICE SPRINGS ON SUNDAY THE 17TH OF MAY. WE WILL ALSO BE MAKING CONTACT WITH AS MANY PATROL PADRES AS POSSIBLE. WE ARE HAPPY FOR A FEW FOLK, AT THEIR OWN EXPENSE AND RISK, TO JOIN US ON THIS TRIP AND DISCOVER FIRST HAND THE MIGHTY WORK THAT PIM UNDERTAKES. THOSE WANTING TO COME WOULD NEED ACCESS TO A HIGH CLEARANCE 4WD VEHICLE AND HAVE 2 WEEKS AVAILABLE FOR THIS VENTURE.

IF ANYONE IS INTERESTED THEY MAY CONTACT US BY PHONE – 07 4627 4157.

Namibia. **Julie Mbaisa**, daughter of the **Rev. Guido and Virginia Kettniss** of **Ascot (Qld)** coordinates this program, which covers training and educating church and community members about HIV-AIDS from a Biblical perspective.

The appeal will also support the **Evangelical Presbyterian Church of East Timor**, which was formed last year under the leadership of the **Rev. Arlindo Marcal** and sent a "Macedonian call" to PCA **Moderator General, Robert Benn**: "Come over and help us!"

Links with South Africa

The **Presbyterian Church of Australia** is building close links with the **Reformed Churches in South Africa**, cemented when **WA moderator and Theological Education convener Bill Macrae** attends the Africans' 150th Synod.

Presbyterians joined cult

Apostles of Fear – A church cult by **Morag Zwartz** was recently launched in Melbourne and Brisbane. This book will be of interest to Presbyterians because it was the well-regarded **Alex Wylie and Ian Barlow** who resigned in the late 1970s and, together with a large number of their congregation at **Wavell Heights Presbyterian Church**, joined forces with **Vic Hall's Immanuel Church** at Alderley, to form what would later become known as **Brisbane Christian Fellowship**.

The book follows the growth of the group from its early beginnings by **Ray Jackson** in New Zealand to its present fellowships around Australia today.



Around the World

Charges for raping nun

Orissa police have filed preliminary charges against 10 men in the rape of a nun during anti-Christian violence in Orissa last August. A native of **Dhama** area in Sambalpur district of Orissa, the nun said she was raped in **K. Nuagaon** village on 25 August, during large-scale violence against Christians that broke out in Kandhamal and surrounding districts of Orissa. The 29-year-old nun, who was working at **Divyajyoti Pastoral Centre** was allegedly dragged and raped by the accused as police looked on.

Compass Direct

Christian nurse vindicated

Caroline Petrie, an English nurse who was suspended without pay for asking a patient whether she would like to be prayed for, has been reinstated by **North Somerset Primary Care Trust**. The dramatic turn around comes days after extensive media coverage and news reports which revealed that Mrs Petrie, a born-

again Christian and mother of two, was suspended after her employers discovered that she had asked a patient whether she would like to be prayed for. Although the patient in question was not offended, the incident was reported and Mrs Petrie was told that she could face disciplinary action.

Last week Mrs Petrie attended a disciplinary hearing on the basis that she had failed to demonstrate a "personal and professional commitment to equality and diversity" by offering to pray for the patient. **North Somerset Primary Care Trust** said in a statement that they recognised that Mrs Petrie had been acting in the "best interests of her patients" and that nurses did not have to "set aside their faith" in the workplace, and could "continue to offer high quality care for patients while remaining committed to their beliefs". The Trust also said that for some people, prayer is recognized as an "integral part of health care and the healing process".

Assist

Faith funding decision delayed

The **Obama** administration will delay a decision on whether religious groups who hire based on the religious background of job applicant can receive federal funding. The decision will impact whether evangelical groups like **World Vision** can receive money from the new **White House Office of Faith-based and Neighborhood Partnerships**.

President Obama will order a legal review of hiring practices for faith-based groups participating in White House faith-based initiatives, *Associated Press* reports.

Hope for Pakistani

After months of legal deadlock, lawyers in Pakistan said they have new hope they can restore to her family a 13-year-old Christian girl who was kidnapped and forced to marry a Muslim. **Saba Masih** might be returned to her family, the lawyers said, if they can legally manoeuvre around Pakistani policemen who have stonewalled their attempts to pursue a kidnapping case against the captors. In February a Pakistani judge charged the suspects with kidnapping for the first time in the seven-month legal ordeal, though **Chawk Munda** village police have not followed through by arresting the three Muslims.

The judge contacted the local police station and ordered officers to register the

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kidnapping case against the three men, lawyer **Arfan Goshe** told *Compass*. The decision to file kidnapping charges marks a major shift of momentum in the case. In previous hearings judges have nearly always sided with the kidnapers – based on either dubious evidence or threats from local Islamists – in the Muslims’ legal battle to retain custody of **Saba** and her 10-year-old sister **Aneela**, who was allowed to return to her family last September.

More Turks charged

A Turkish court has charged two more men for instigating the murder of three Christians in **Malatya** in 2007 – a former employee of the Christian publishing house where they were killed, and an ex-journalist suspected of ties to a group that tried to engineer a political coup. A judge ordered the arrest of former journalist **Varol Bulent Aral**, 32, on suspicion of instigating the murder. Aral has been connected to **Ergenekon**, an ultra-nationalist cabal of retired generals, politicians, journalists and mafia members under investigation for conspiracy in various murders. **Huseyin Yelki**, 34, a Turk who has worked for Christian organisations, was arrested after suspected ringleader **Emre Gunaydin** implicated him for instigation of murder. Yelki is a former employee of **Zirve Publishing Co.** in Malatya, site of the brutal torture and murder of two Turkish Christians, **Necati Aydin** and **Ugur Yuksel**, and a German, **Tilmann Geske**, on April 18, 2007.

Compass Direct

Hamis torture critics

Amnesty International says it has evidence that Hamas forces and militias have been involved in a ruthless crackdown on opponents after the Israeli military action in Gaza. The leading human rights organisation talks of a “campaign of abductions, deliberate and unlawful killings, torture and death threats against those [Hamas] accuses of ‘collaborating’ with Israel, as well as opponents and critics”.

It says that at least two dozen men had been shot by Hamas since the end of December and “scores of others” shot in the legs, kneecapped or beaten. Meanwhile the United Nations stopped delivering emergency relief because Hamas fighters were plundering the trucks and stealing the supplies before they got to the intended recipients.

Amnesty has been given detailed

accounts of some of the cases and said there was “incontrovertible evidence” that Hamas security forces and militia were “responsible for grave human rights abuses”.

Lawyers advocate death

In the latest hearing of a Muslim-born Egyptian’s effort to officially convert to Christianity, opposing lawyers advocated he be convicted of “apostasy” or leaving Islam, and sentenced to death. More than 20 Islamic lawyers attended the hearing in late February in **Maher Ahmad El-Mo’otahsem Bellah El-Gohary’s** case to obtain identification papers with Christianity designated as his religious affiliation. El-Gohary was not present at the hearing, as attendance would put him at extreme personal risk. He had planned to obtain papers authorising attorney **Nabil Ghobreyal** to act as his proxy representation in court, but staff members at the registry office swore at and beat him, lawyers said. **Judge Hamdy Yasin** was forced to adjourn the case until March 28 because El-Gohary did not obtain the necessary proxy representation documents.

Compass Direct

Nigerian Christian freed

Sani Kibili, 55, a Nigerian Christian who was sentenced to three years imprisonment for blasphemy in October 2007 by a Shariah court in the northern town of **Kano**, has been freed. According to a statement by **Open Doors UK**, Kibili’s released was secured after a series of legal

battles by their lawyers.

Kibili, a father of six children was arrested after three Muslim men in his home town called him an infidel and accused him of blasphemy against Islam and its prophet. “Following his arrest Sani was taken to the Shariah court, and after a brief trial, the judge sentenced him to three years in prison without the right to appeal,” the statement said.

It noted that Sani’s case was riddled with irregularities and that a Christian cannot be tried in a Shariah court without his agreement. The statement also said that Sani’s lawyer discovered many discrepancies in the transcript copies of the court proceedings, indicating a conspiracy and consequently was freed on the grounds of lack of evidence.

Assist



On the Agenda

Wycliffe joins Aids fight

By Jennifer Riley

The world’s largest Bible translation organisation is joining the fight against AIDS in African communities. **Wycliffe Bible Translators**, a ministry with 75 years of history, is developing an easily translatable booklet in 11 countries and 80 African communities where AIDS education programs have been set up. Booklets are already in use in some places.

Pastoral Opportunities in Rural Victoria



Do you have a sense of **call** to minister in rural communities?

Do you have a passion to **share Christ** with many impacted by drought and hard times?

Do you have the desire to demonstrate “Christ in you” by **helping people** in practical ways?

Are you **Reformed** in your theological understanding?

Are you willing to undertake **ongoing theological education** while you engage in **grassroots ministry**?

Are you ready to **explore your call to ministry** on a part- or full-time basis?

Then contact Rev Dr Robert L Carner at the Presbyterian Church of Victoria; Email ministry@pcvic.org.au or phone (03) 8786 9358

Applications and enquiries from ordained ministers are also welcome!

Wycliffe's staff and African translation teams are translating the booklet, *Kande's Story*, into each community's native language to provide "heart language" AIDS education for the first time in most of these communities.

"After seeing people I cared about dying from this epidemic I wanted to do something," said **Kathie Watters**, developer of Wycliffe's AIDS program and co-author of the *Kande's Story* materials.

Watters was living in Cameroon when she witnessed the death of her friend and housekeeper from AIDS. She realised that with the skills she has as a registered nurse and a linguist, she could help fight against a leading cause of death in Africa.

"Being part of a translation team and having a background in nursing, I believed Wycliffe could have an impact on AIDS in communities where language development was under way," she said.

Watters is part of a three-generation Wycliffe family. Watters and her husband, **John**, worked in Cameroon and Kenya; her daughter and son-in-law serve in Papua New Guinea; and her father-in-law served in Peru and the United States.

Wycliffe Bible Translators was founded in 1942 to make the Bible accessible to all people in the language that is most meaningful to them. The ministry recently launched the **Last Languages campaign** – an aggressive effort to bring first-time access to literacy, life-saving health information, and the Bible to the remaining one-third of the world's language groups,

some 200 million people, over the next 17 years. If this goal is met, Wycliffe would save about 125 years compared to the translating pace of the late 20th century for the same amount of work.

Christian Post

Persecution unacceptable: Pope

By *Ethan Cole*

Religious persecution is not acceptable, **Pope Benedict XVI** pronounced following a historic meeting between top Catholic and Muslim leaders late last year.

While the three days of Christian-Muslim dialogue focused on encouraging better relations between the world's two largest religions, the head of the one billion-member Catholic Church said people should have the right to practise their own faith without persecution.

"The discrimination and violence which even today religious people experience throughout the world and the often violent persecutions to which they are subject, represent unacceptable and unjustifiable acts, all the more grave and deplorable when they are carried out in the name of God," the pontiff said.

Muslim leader **Tariq Ramadan**, a senior research fellow at the **University of Oxford** who took part in the **Vatican** summit, said he thought Benedict's points were "fair". "No Muslim should avoid speaking about this," he said, according to *Religion News Service*.

The historic Catholic-Muslim meeting was the first of its kind and brought together 48 leading scholars and leaders of both religions. The official theme of the meeting was "love of God, love of neighbour". It produced a final declaration that renounces "any oppression, aggressive violence and terrorism, especially that committed in the name of religion", and affirms respect for "choices in matters of conscience and religion".

The document also denounces "any form of mockery or ridicule" of founding

figures and symbols considered sacred by religious minorities.

"Muslims and Christians have different approaches in matters concerning God ... but must consider themselves members of one family," Pope Benedict said during the meeting.

The Pope challenged the leaders and scholars of both faiths "to overcome past prejudices and to correct the often distorted images of the other, which even today can create difficulties in our relations".

Christian Today

Christian words dumped

A mother-of-four from Northern Ireland has expressed her horror over the number of words associated with Christianity that have been removed from the latest edition of the **Oxford Junior Dictionary**.


Such Christian-related words as "bishop", "chapel", "disciple", "minister", "sin" and "devil", have been replaced by words like "blog", "biodegradable", "MP3 player", "democratic", and "celebrity", in the 2007 edition of the popular children's dictionary.

Although the newest version of the dictionary was released last year, the removal of words went largely unnoticed until mother-of-four **Lisa Saunders** pointed them out.

She first realised the omission of words during a homework session with her son when she couldn't find "moss" and "fern," which were in editions up until 2003, but were not included in the 2007 version, *The Telegraph* reported.

The discovery prompted Saunders to compare entries from the older editions, dating from 1978, 1995, 2000, 2002, and 2003 with the latest junior dictionary.

"I was completely horrified by the vast number of words which have been removed," she said. "We know that language moves on and we can't be fuddy-



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duddy about it but you don't cull hundreds of important words in order to get in a different set of ICT words."

Vineeta Gupta, the head of children's dictionaries at **Oxford University Press**, said the changes were made to reflect a "multicultural" society. "People don't go to church as often as before. Our understanding of religion is within multiculturalism, which is why some words such as 'Pentecost' or 'Whitsun' would have been in 20 years ago but not now," he said.

The decision by OUP to discontinue particular words is a form of "verbal engineering", **Erin Manning** recently wrote on **Beliefnet's** conservative **Crunchy Con** blog.

Manning cited Catholic moral theologian **William Smith** as saying, "All social engineering is preceded by verbal engineering."

"Deciding to drop a word that has already fallen out of use, become obsolete, from a dictionary is not a political act," said Manning on Monday, "but removing words still in everyday use just because you've decided they ought not be important in the vocabulary of a modern child most decidedly is."

The Telegraph, London

Nashville's wide menu

A hotel in **Nashville** will be the first known in the US to remove the standard **Bible** from its rooms and replace it with a "spiritual menu" that includes other religious books such as the **Koran** and books on **Scientology**, a Tennessee newspaper reported.

Hotel Preston, a boutique owned by Oregon-based **Provenance Hotels**, will require guests to call room service to order their religious book of choice, according to *The Tennessean*.

The religious book list includes the **Book of Mormon**, the **Koran**, the **Torah**, the **Tao Te Ching**, **The Four Noble Truths** of Buddhism, **Bhagavad Gita** (a Hindu text), books on **Scientology**, as well as the **King James** and **New American Bible** versions.

The hotel says its goal is to accommodate travellers who are not Christian and those interested in other faiths.

Offering a spiritual menu means breaking the long held tradition of a **Gideons Bible** in the nightstand of every American hotel room.

Gideons International, founded in 1899, has distributed millions of Bibles in hotels. Now in the 21st century, Bibles are

increasingly missing from hotel rooms and are replaced by other comforts such as an iPod docking station, a flat-screen TV, a selection of underground music, a complimentary goldfish, or in some an "intimacy" kit.

In the trendy New York City **Soho Grand Hotel**, for example, Bibles have never been offered in guest rooms. According to *Newsweek*, the **Sofitel** hotel brand recently removed Bibles from guest rooms after clients questioned why other religious texts were not available.

"The absence of Gideons Bibles from an increasing number of hotel rooms tells us something about the secularisation, sexualisation, and extreme sensitivities of our age," **Dr R Albert Mohler Jr**, president of the **Southern Baptist Theological Seminary**, commented in his blog.

"The fact is that many persons have come to faith in Jesus Christ by reading a Bible supplied to their hotel room by the Gideons," Mohler said. "Many others have turned to the Bible when in crisis. Some have even decided against suicide when they read from the Gideon's Bible. Are they now to look for salvation and solace from an iPod docking station or a goldfish?"

Christian Today

FROM THE MODERATOR – GENERAL IN REGARD TO CHURCH PLANTING IN PERTH, WESTERN AUSTRALIA



'The vigorous, continual planting of new congregations is the single most crucial strategy for 1) the numerical growth of the Body of Christ in any city, and 2) the continual corporate renewal and revival of the existing churches in a city. Nothing else – not crusades, outreach programmes, para-church ministries, growing mega-churches, congregational consulting, nor church renewal processes – will have the consistent impact of dynamic, extensive church planting.' (T. Keller)

Perth is currently growing at an unprecedented rate. People are moving to the Capital of Western Australia from all over Australia and the world. The West Australian General Assembly has developed a METRO-WIDE STRATEGY which seeks to respond to this growth and has as a key component, the planting and establishment of at least five new congregations. The West Australian General Assembly has declared that under the METRO-WIDE STRATEGY, the next area for church extension work will be in the Rockingham district, half an hour drive south of Fremantle on the coast. The Presbyterian Church in Western Australia is marshalling its own resources to launch a new effort in church planting but it also needs the help of the wider Presbyterian Church in this great task. (More details on the METRO-WIDE STRATEGY can be obtained from the Clerk of WA Assembly, Mr. Glenn Muskett on 08-9339 9400 ceo@braemarhomes.com.au)

I would invite you to pray especially for a suitable church planter to be raised up and for a suitable, committed and supportive core group to come together.

The 2007 General Assembly of Australia authorised the Moderator-General to coordinate an annual appeal during 2008, 2009 and 2010 to raise funds from across the Presbyterian Church of Australia to provide for the opening, staffing and development of a new church planting congregation in metropolitan Perth. The new church (the Lord willing) in the Rockingham district will be the recipient of the funds raised. Gifts can be sent to 'GAA WA Church Planting Appeal' c/- PO Box 2196, Strawberry Hills, NSW, 2012 with cheques made out to 'Presbyterian Church Funds'. A covering letter should state that the gift is for the 'WA Church Planting Appeal'. The GAA WA Church Planting Appeal will be placed before the Lord's people in our Church in a number of different forms.

Thank you for taking time to read this Communication. I would ask that we work together to ensure a very generous response to this call for gospel partnership with the Presbyterian Church in Western Australia.

ROBERT BENN, Moderator-General

The art of dying

Jesus' last seven words can guide the Christian preparing for death.

Jesus' life is an example of the Christian life. His death is no different. Willing to submit to the will of his Father, even unto death, Jesus shows us the true cost of following God. But even in death, Jesus provides an example, not only of extreme obedience, but also of how to die.

Ars Moriendi, the art of dying, was a 15th century book of instructions to assist in dying well. Explaining that the Christian need not fear death, it outlined the five temptations that confront a dying person: lack of faith, despair, impatience, spiritual pride, and avarice. Illustrated with woodcuts, *Ars Moriendi* showed how to overcome these temptations and achieve a good death. The instruction was particularly relevant in an era when the Bubonic plague was a constant threat.

Jesus' last words on the cross provide another model of *ars moriendi*. He reconciles with His persecutors and His neighbors. He takes care of His earthly estate. Jesus acknowledges His spiritual and physical state as a dying man, and he accepts His life's end. Finally, Jesus actively commends His spirit to His Heavenly Father. Though His death was inevitable, Jesus was not passive. He took an active role in His own death.

The *Ars Moriendi* woodcuts were especially relevant in an age where the plague changed the way Europeans viewed death. In a different way, Westerners are undergoing a shift in how they view death. Despite living longer, healthier lives, Westerners also experience longer periods of declining health. A recent study found that most deceased elderly "were already sick with their eventually fatal conditions three years before death". Those three years are filled with sometimes grueling medical treatment, but they also afford the opportunity – never before so regularly available – to prepare for death. With the understanding that many people will have this opportunity, we can look to Jesus' seven words from the Cross to learn what it means to prepare for death.

"Forgive them"

Healthy people often say they want to die suddenly, says Ira Byock, author of *Dying Well* and director of palliative med-

icine at Dartmouth Hitchcock Medical Centre in New Hampshire, yet quick deaths leave much uncompleted. They are the most difficult type of death for families to accept. "In contrast to an abrupt, easy death," writes Byock, "dying of a progressive illness offers precious opportunities to complete the most important of life's relationships."

Westerners are undergoing a shift in how they view death.

Often relationships cannot be completed – which Byock defines as having nothing left unsaid – without forgiveness. From the Cross, Jesus says, "Father, forgive them, for they don't know what they are doing." Jesus forgave the very people who mocked and killed Him. If we hold grudges or harbor anger, those who work with the dying say, peaceful deaths only come after we offer forgiveness. Forgiving is a Christian duty throughout our lives, but it is an essential part of the work of dying. Seeking forgiveness is equally important. Asking for forgiveness helps complete relationships with friends and family. And knowing that we need forgiveness helps us overcome the temptation of spiritual pride.

Have faith

When the crucified criminal says, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your Kingdom!" Jesus offers a remarkable promise. "I assure you, today you will be with Me in paradise." This criminal who admits that he deserves death also confesses his belief in Jesus as Messiah – overcoming the temptation of lack of faith outlined in the *Ars Moriendi* woodcuts.

Jesus' promise to His fellow crucified that they would be reunited in paradise is

an encouragement to all who face death. Having faith in Christ's work on the Cross offers comfort at a time when thoughts of the life to come are especially relevant.

"Here Is Your Mother"

The dying wonder who will care for their loved ones. This is just as true for the 21st century man leaving behind his wife as it would have been for a first century Jewish man caring for his mother. Jesus tells His mother "Dear woman, here is your son," and His disciple, "Here is your mother."

This scene is a metaphor for the expanded family into which Christians are reborn. This family has the responsibility of taking care of its bereaved members. Yet Jesus also shows us His concern for His mother's welfare by discharging a very earthly duty. Wrapping up worldly affairs is so important that Martin Luther lists it as the first task in his "Sermon on Preparing to Die."

Despair

As Jesus neared His death, He was no stranger to spiritual anguish. Jesus' fourth words from the Cross reflect this. "Why have you abandoned Me?" He asks God.

Jesus carried a burden that none of us will: the sins of the world. His spiritual torment, as a man who had fully communed with His God, was also unique. We will never know full communion with God only to have it cut off. But for a patient receiving a diagnosis of a terminal illness, it can seem as if God is absent. Here is the temptation of despair. If God is absent, what hope is there? Jesus acknowledges His spiritual state, but in doing so He shows us how to work through despair. Honestly dealing with God, even when we feel forsaken by Him, is the first step.

Dependence with Dignity

Jesus also experienced physical anguish. "I am thirsty." In a culture that prizes independence, we often confuse autonomy with dignity. We worry about being a burden on others, and we are bothered by the "indignity" of needing help with the most basic tasks: dressing,

bathing, even using the bathroom. The inability to care for oneself is often used as an argument for physician-assisted suicide. Here we see the temptation of impatience.

In an age where death comes after years of decreasing function, we must learn that dignity does not come from being able to button a shirt or use the bathroom independently. Recognising our dependence on others and learning to wait for God's timing – rather than ending our own life or stubbornly refusing help – are important steps in preparing to die.

Not only is dependence a practical necessity, Byock says allowing others to mind our needs can be a gift to caregivers. For Christians, this interdependence is a natural part of being the body of Christ. The healthy need the ill as much as the ill need the healthy. Practising dependence cultivates contentment. This helps us avoid avarice, or the inordinate desire for wealth.

Completion

Those who work with the dying often report being amazed at how long a dying person clings to life. And then, when a birthday, a visit from a family member, or

another important event passes, the dying person quickly lets go. Jesus' first five words have shown us how to prepare to die. At the end, Jesus shows us how to die. Recognising that His life is complete, Jesus says, "It is finished."

In his book, *Mrs Hunter's Happy*



We must learn that dignity does not come from being able to button a shirt or use the bathroom independently.

Death, John Fanestil writes, "When I am asked to name the single greatest difference between the typical death in our day and the deaths represented in the accounts from the 18th and 19th centuries, I reply, 'the vitality and agency of the one who is dying.'" Fanestil, a pastor who has worked with many dying congregants, says they are often very aware that

their body is shutting down. Yet, personally, they are very much alive.

Stories abound of people who have lived through a coma who later relate tales of their experience. Whether they hear sounds around them or simply have some form of consciousness, far from being inert – as they physically appear to be – their minds are alert. They are personally very much alive.

So, Jesus' final words, "I entrust My spirit into Your hands," show Jesus participating in His death. Luke 23:46 says, "And with those words, He breathed his last."

As with all spiritual work, preparing to die is best practised throughout life. Forgiving and taking care of others and acknowledging to God our needs are routine spiritual duties. While our age of gradual dying affords unique opportunities to grow spiritually, how we die is often a reflection of how we live. So while Jesus' words can be read as *ars moriendi*, they are best contemplated as the art of living.

This article originally appeared online at Christianitytoday.com, the website of Christianity Today International, in May 2007.

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Letters

Distorted perspective

May I commend you, and contributors Peter Barnes, Rowland Ward and John McArthur, for the content of the November issue of *AP*. Many readers would be encouraged by your defence of the historic Christian understanding of the biblical Gospel of grace. The cover theme, *Divine Rescue (Law and Grace in Galatians)* puts it succinctly. These issues are central to our Presbyterian doctrine (WCF).

The more one learns about these so-called “new perspectives on Paul’s doctrine” the more one is disturbed – deeply disturbed! Present day Evangelicalism is already troubled by various controversies, scandals, cultural inroads and attempts to make it relevant. True Christianity can never be *relevant* to the pagan world (1 Cor. 2:14). Much that passes for “contemporary worship” sends the wrong message to the world.

Now these learned men (Acts 26:24) are – unwittingly, one would hope – attacking the very heart of Evangelicalism! Why cannot they see

what they are doing (2 Cor. 4:4)? We may fearfully take refuge in another thought from Galatians: “God is not mocked: for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap” (Gal 6:7). May the Lord have mercy on His church, for there appears no other hope.

Neville Taylor,
Elder, Acacia Ridge, Qld

Direct communication

I am sorry about upsetting Neil Cadman (Letters, *AP*, November) but I defend the spiritual validity of the hymn lines “He walks with me and talks with me, Along life’s narrow way”. I also defend my other assertion that this is part of the “fellowship of the Holy Spirit”. If Mr Cadman knows nothing of this, then I am sad for him. What does he think that fellowship means? Much of Scripture tells me loud and clear, that our God of love, grace and truth, wants to be personal with His redeemed people.

Mr Cadman writes: “The apostles sought guidance by lot, not by audible voice.” OK but Acts 10:19 tells that precise guidance came to Peter without his even seeking it – “the Spirit said to him!” This could have been by strong thought rather than by audible voice, but it is hard to see that on this occasion, God spoke to this apostle by creation or Hebrew scripture. Also, Acts 16:6 tells of Paul and company “They were forbidden by the Holy Spirit to preach the word in Asia”. Not creation nor lot nor scripture is mentioned, but there was a clarifying vision – direct communication.

Mr Cadman also thinks that “guidance is sought mainly for marriage and career”. This is a curious limitation! The offered proof texts seem rather strained, and also, it seems at odds with my earlier reference to John 14. Only last year I sought, and was confident of having, Divine guidance (both negative and positive) in a property matter. Have no missionaries ever come to Norman Park with accounts of God’s guidance in details of their work? If not, then I suggest he reads *My Seventh Monsoon* by Naomi Reed, a recent worker in Nepal and writer in *The Pulse*.

I agree that some people go overboard about guidance but nevertheless there is a solid reality to it for anyone who actually lives by faith. Many Christian biographies attest to this.

Ian Campbell of Epping NSW questions my railway history but did he really expect his engineering book to give a spiritual detail? On the north/south question

I gladly accept his evidence. The two reference works I checked did not correct my source. He was both a Scotsman and NSW Moderator, but apparently even they are fallible – ah well! However the principle of personal guidance by the Holy Spirit to His trusting people remains. Otherwise faith is not fellowship, but little more than fire insurance.

Bernard Secombe,
Springwood, NSW

Far-reaching

Peter Barnes states that God’s Word can reach where we cannot and gives instances where singing and Scripture reading have an impact upon people whom most would consider unreachable, such as dementia patients (*AP*, October). God taught me this lesson early on when teaching Scripture to the worst students in one of the worst schools in Sydney’s eastern suburbs, I found that the students would quietly listen while I read the Scriptures to them but when I paused to give explanations the class would go back to their rabble. I soon realised that they had more interest in hearing what God had to say to them than what I had to say. So I would concentrate the lesson around Bible reading with cross references providing any necessary explanations. I would also sing hymns and soon they would also sing. The children almost fought to get into the class, unfortunately the devil fought to get me out.

Today I now go into a dementia ward to visit a lady with Alzheimer’s disease. I often sing hymns for her and the others. One old man never said a word to anyone except when I sang, and that was to swear and curse me. But you know, now when I ask them what do they think of a song he is the first to say “Why that is beautiful.” He seems to particularly like, “Low in the grave He lay...”

Peter Barnes is right. The Spirit reaches where we cannot.

Neil Cadman,
Norman Park, Qld

Protecting the abused

In response to Peter Barnes’ review of my book, *Not Under Bondage*, I’m concerned that he suggests interviewing spouses together to evaluate allegations of abuse. Yes; we should test allegations of wrongdoing, but in Matthew 18:16 the initiative for a meeting between the offended, offender and third-party witness comes from *the offended person*, not the witness.

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If a pastor insists on such a meeting, he may put the offended spouse into greater danger. Victims usually feel intimidated by their perpetrators, fearing payback if the truth is told. It's best to privately ask the offended partner for specific details about the abuse, and then take their guidance as to whether and when it is safe to talk with the alleged abuser.

Barnes thinks that if abuse is defined in non-violent terms, "the definition could become very elastic". The US Dept of Justice states: "Domestic violence can be defined as a pattern of abusive behaviour in any relationship that is used by one partner to gain or maintain power and control over another intimate partner. ... [It] can be physical, sexual, emotional, economic, or psychological actions or threats of actions that influence another person. This includes any behaviours that intimidate, manipulate, humiliate, isolate, frighten, terrorise, coerce, threaten, blame, hurt, injure, or wound someone."

My condensed definition is "abuse is a pattern of conduct designed to obtain and maintain ungodly control over another". I believe this definition is sufficient to weed out unfair allegations from valid ones. It's good to see debate about this under-recognised area of pastoral care.

Barbara Roberts,
Ballarat, Vic.

Not just personal

I write in response to Peter Barnes' review of *Not Under Bondage* by Barbara Roberts. In his first paragraph Barnes implies that Roberts wrote this book with the intention of justifying her own decisions with regard to her own marriage breakdown as a result of abuse. Having read the book, I would say that Roberts, rather than starting out with an end point in mind and then using Scripture to justify it, took a large step back from her own experience and determined to investigate, dispassionately, what the entire scriptures have to say about the matter of divorce and its legitimacy.

She has meticulously researched each passage and seeks to provide a cohesive understanding of the scriptures in relation to abuse, adultery and desertion, where seeming contradictions occur. It is my belief that she has achieved this. Not only that, she has related to the reader the deep conflict and pain that victims feel, how they struggle to come to an understanding of what appropriate actions they can take in these circumstances and the shame and condemnation they often

experience. This book stands as a serious theological examination and should not be so easily dismissed.

Kylie Rowlands,
Kurunjang, Vic.

Delight – and despair

AP must be one of the great Christian periodicals of the time. Articles are biblical, relevant, timely and instructive and reflect the theological quality of the men who contribute. Articles do well in addressing theological and church trends. There is the added bonus of news, letters and regular items to stimulate and inform. So why is it that when I read it I feel aggrieved, sad, disappointed? Why do I shake my head in despair yet find encouragement in it?

It seems that there is a great disparity for the most part in the Presbyterian church between doctrinal correctness and biblical practice. Some of the leaders in the denomination who purport to be theologically and biblically correct are unwilling or unable to follow through in practice what the Bible teaches. There is a manifest unwillingness to examine and assess practice, to take rebuke, instruction and admonishment. I could cite numerous examples. Supposed men of God excuse, permit and tolerate open rebellion and sin in their households and congregations and denomination. Ordained ministers preach another gospel or no gospel.

Elders in churches are condemned by the very Bible they read and profess to believe. Men who may be able to dot the "i"s of a doctrine do tolerate, excuse and overlook poor and incorrect preaching, tolerate non-Christian and unqualified elders, imbibe and communicate worldly philosophy and indicate limited or no progress towards a Biblical pattern for life and service.

So I read *AP* and wonder. Its very content stands in contradistinction to what actually occurs in the field. The doctrine has little impact on the ministry. Little impact on the activities that churches and professing Christians undertake. And no one seems to be able or willing to redress the situation. Scripture may well be a sure foundation. The reality is that the Presbyterian church as a whole, in practice, is built on anything but Scripture. It is built on a day to day basis on tolerance, compromise, expedience, diplomacy and ungodly philosophy.

AP is a good work – it keeps the believer informed and challenged. It is corrective. However it will not rescue the Presbyterian Church from heresy and apostasy and decline. It is the Lord God who requires repentance, who must renew and reform. His work does and will continue here and there, while the denomination at large, as such, carries on, ignorant that Ichabod is already writ in letters large over it.

Stan Gliszczynski,
Portland Vic.

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Discendi Studio is an initiative of the College Committee of the Presbyterian Church of Australia and the colleges in Brisbane, Melbourne and Sydney. For details of program, registration and proposals for papers see www.presbyterian.org.au/theoed/index.htm

prayer

MARCH 2009

- 21 The election of able, honest and godly members to the Queensland parliament today.
- 22 The many families who have suffered bereavement and loss of homes and business in the devastating Victorian fires, and the Queensland and NSW floods – and all who are bringing Christian ministry to them.
- 23 Presbytery of Kilnoorat, western Vic. – 6 charges totaling 14 congregations with about 845 c&a (communicants and adherents), and 120 yf (younger folk – Sunday School and youth), 1 school principal; Ian Leach clerk.
- 24 Graceville home mission station, Brisbane – Michael and Miranda Nakla.
- 25 Richard and Ann Wilson *mission partners* (APWM) workers from Annerley, Brisbane with the Indian Reformed Fellowship Australia, which assists Presbyterian and Reformed churches in the subcontinent.
- 26 The student body, staff and council of Scots College, Bellevue Hill, Sydney – Robert Iles principal; Conrad Nixon and John Buchanan chaplains.
- 27 Law, order and justice in Papua New Guinea (6 million people, 98% “Christian”) and the healthy growth of all churches there.
- 28 Belgrave Heights charge Melbourne with about 12 c&a, 25 yf and 2 e (elders); Mark and Alison Tonkin.
- 29 Moderator General Robert Benn ministering in Argyll charge NSW – Goulburn, Taralga and Crookwell.
- 30 Calvin and Ruth Mathys *mission partners* (APWM) workers from Warburton, Vic. in Papua New Guinea with Wycliffe Bible Translators.
- 31 Praise God that nobody was injured when a tornado badly damaged the church during worship in November at the Gap charge, Brisbane, and pray for the repairs.

APRIL 2009

- 1 Presbytery of Moree 3 charges and 4 home mission stations totaling 12 congregations with about 680 c&a and 175 yf, 1 PIM patrol worker. Elizabeth Style clerk.
- 2 City Central Church, Wollongong NSW with about 250 c&a, 20 yf and 13 e; Granville and Denny Pillar, Brett Richardson.
- 3 John and Denise Dickson *mission partners* (APWM) workers from Parramatta City church, Sydney in Thailand with Pioneers involved in outreach through English teaching.
- 4 Praise God for the 150th anniversary of the Presbyterian Church of Victoria, and pray for the celebrations, and Moderator General Robert Benn taking part.
- 5 Andrew and Rosemary Williamson *mission partners* (APWM) workers from Wee Waa, NSW with the Presbyterian Church of Vanuatu involved in teaching at Talua Ministry Training Centre, and preparing a Bislama Study Bible.
- 6 Phil and Glenda Simmonds who have just commenced ministry in Melton charge, western Melbourne with about 75 c&a, 25 yf and 8 e.
- 7 Three day Discendi studio conference starting in Sydney today, sponsored by the Qld, NSW and Vic. theological committees, and commemorating the 500th anniversary of the birth of John Calvin.
- 8 Canaan Korean charge, Petersham, Sydney with about 40 c&a and 13 yf; Won-Hyoung and Young Ran Moon.
- 9 Presbytery of Penola SA – 3 charges totaling 9 congregations with about 400 c&a and 80 yf. Brian Johnson clerk.
- 10 Thank God again for “love so amazing, so divine” and pray that its message will come with new force to very

many today.

- 11 Scots Church, Fremantle charge WA with about 100 c&a, 25 yf and 4 e; Stuart and Sharon Bonnington – and the church plant at Southern River: Clive and Doreen Griffiths.
- 12 Praise God for our new and living hope through the raising of Jesus Chris from the dead, and pray that multitudes will discover this as this message is proclaimed today.
- 13 Pray for Christian leadership in combating the tensions resulting from the growing ethnic diversity of the Australian population.
- 14 Pray for the Interim moderator, preachers and filling of the vacancy in Blackburn charge Melbourne with about 35 c&a, 2 yf and 5 e.
- 15 Rick and Kayleen Manton *mission partners* (APWM) workers from Clarinda, Melbourne in western Sydney involved in koorie ministry.
- 16 Cherrybrook charge northern Sydney with about 60 c&a, 12 yf and 5 e; Stephen Fong.
- 17 Drs Patrick and Jennie Fung *mission partners* (APWM) workers from Sydney Chinese church at Overseas Missionary Fellowship h.q. in Singapore where he is the General Director.
- 18 Moderator General Robert Benn with Rob Duncanson (Darwin) and Gary Ware (SA) on a fact-finding visit to East Timor and strengthening our ties with the Evangelical Presbyterian Church there.
- 19 Pray that your own, neighbouring and all Presbyterian churches will be focused on mission to a dying world, ad not just maintenance of our institutions.
- 20 Sydney Chinese church Surry Hills with about 650 c&a, 150 yf and 18 e; David and Meredith Tsai.

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Books

Fear Not!
Death and the Afterlife from a Christian Perspective

Ligon Duncan with J. Nicholas Reid
 Fearn: Christian Focus, 2008.

Reviewed by Peter Barnes

This short book is the one so many Christians have been looking for. In fewer than 100 pages, it deals with death, life after death, the return of Christ, the final judgment, and heaven. This is warmly and simply done, and can only be recommended with gratitude. Ligon Duncan handles Scripture with a deft touch, and his citations of other authors are equally helpful. So many people want to escape hell and go to heaven. The point of heaven is that it is where Christ reigns. Hence Samuel Rutherford declared: "I am so in love with His love that if He were not in Heaven, I would not want to go there."

The unbeliever struggles with guilt, meaning, and the prospect of death. So too does the believer, but thankfully God has spoken to us. For saints facing death – which in a real sense is all of us – this is a most wonderful work, and I trust Christians make much use of it.

Peter Barnes is books editor of AP.

Mr Moody and the Evangelical Tradition

Ed. by T. George
 T. and T. Clark International, 2004.

Reviewed by Stuart Bonnington

This short book (185 pages long) contains "a mosaic of Moody's life and legacy, reflecting several facets of his work as an evangelist, preacher, social reformer, publisher, founder of schools and international evangelical celebrity". In 10 short chapters (which were presented originally at celebrations marking the centenary of Moody's death in 1999) we are given a great introduction to Moody, the man and the (non-ordained nor formally trained) minister.

The reader is effectively given a biography of the great man, although I thought more might have been said of the Bible Institute he founded and of the influence it became world-wide, first in Glasgow and

even here in Australia with, for example, the founding of the Perth Bible Institute. A key insight to understanding Moody is given in the comment of Gundry: "What he really opposed was the dead letter of doctrine that did not also involve a living faith. He opposed reading Scripture in the light of doctrine rather than reading Scripture in the light of Calvary."

These are helpful and insightful words and, set along side Warren W. Wiersbe's chapter "Mr Moody's Life Text", turn a book on church history into one of practical theology.

Stuart Bonnington is minister of Scot's Kirk, Fremantle.

They Were Pilgrims

Marcus L. Loane
 The Banner of Truth Trust, 2006

Reviewed by Mignon Goswell

The interconnections between four great men of mission history are brought together in this reprint of a book first published in 1970. For those who know little of David Brainerd, Henry Martyn, Robert Murray M'Cheyne and Ion Keith-Falconer this book is a perfect place to start. For those who have read other books about these men it is valuable to note the connections Marcus Loane makes between them. They died between the ages of 29 and 31; they were outstanding as people from their youth onwards; they shared a passionate missionary outlook; they worked themselves without heed to what effect this was having on their bodies.

We are drawn into the depth of Brainerd's seeking after God coupled with the intensity of his journal. We witness the burning zeal of Martyn's translation work. We feel the force of M'Cheyne's preaching and the love for his flock. We learn about the willingness of Falconer to leave what could have been an easy life for the rigours of missionary work. Loane stands in awe of these men and freely expresses his admiration for the depth of their relationship with their Saviour, and yet these men are portrayed as real human beings. The beauty of the relationship of Brainerd with the daughter of Jonathan Edwards, the pathos of Martyn's hopeless love for Lydia Grenfell, the brief details of M'Cheyne's never to be fulfilled marriage plans and the illness that cut short Falconer's life fill out the reader's knowledge of these men.

Connections between the men are constantly drawn. The effect of Brainerd's

diary and Martyn's journals on M'Cheyne, the impact of the death of beloved family members, the shining beauty of Christian character, and the way subsequent generations have been moved and motivated by them. The descriptive words of one of M'Cheyne's converts can be applied to each of these men. "I saw in you a beauty of holiness that I never saw before." Will you allow yourself to be challenged by these lives?

Mignon Goswell is manager of PTC Media at the Presbyterian Theological College, Melbourne.

Habakkuk
A Wrestler with God

Walter Chantry
 Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 2008

Reviewed by Peter Barnes

In the sixth century B.C. Habakkuk wondered how God could use such a vile people as the Babylonians to chasten His own chosen people, the Jews. Two and a half millennia later, Walter Chantry writes: "When moral decay eats away all strength in nations, they will fall prey to violent, evil empires. After that comes judgment at God's throne." The 21st century applications of Habakkuk's message should be obvious to all with eyes to see. It is surely a case of judgment or revival for the Western churches. With good reason, Walter Chantry warns against any "lazy optimism" with regard to revival. Habakkuk is the book for the time, and Chantry's vigorous little treatment of it is timely indeed. So too is the wonderful appendix – Calvin on Lamentations 3:24.

Read this after you listen to the six o'clock news. This should greatly help and encourage Christian thinking in days when we need it desperately.

All books reviewed are available from the Reformers Bookshop – Phone: (02) 9569 9857 or visit www.reformers.com.au



Inflammatory ideas

Behold how great a fire a Pentecostal pastor's tongue set ablaze.

Controversial Christian leader Danny Nalliah says the Victorian bushfires are a punishment for decriminalising abortion. Danny Nalliah is wildly wrong. He is wrong as a theologian, a thinker and a pastor, and has shocked both the mainstream community and the vast majority of his fellow Christians. They feel he has brought the name of Christ into disrepute.

At a time like this, the role of religion is not explanation; it is consolation. It is to seek to offer comfort and hope, a way of going on.

Uniting Church of Australia president Gregor Henderson speaks for most in saying Nalliah's claim is ludicrous, abhorrent and misunderstands the nature of God. Henderson says: "God is not punishing the people of Victoria, so many of whom lost their lives, and so many more of whom are working day and night to fight fires, support the victims and provide food, clothing and shelter. God is, in fact, there with the people, in the middle of their suffering; God is made known through the love that is extended to those most in need."

Nalliah – senior pastor of Catch the Fire Ministries, a man who has enjoyed the support of former prime minister John Howard and treasurer Peter Costello and who stood for Federal Senate representing Family First – is a Pentecostal from the apocalyptic and ecstatic end of Christianity who believes God still speaks in dreams and prophecies.

He had a dream on 21 October in which Victoria was ablaze. He says he awoke, and the Spirit of God told him God had removed His protection, Victoria would be destroyed, and Nalliah should call God's people to repent and pray. He published this on his website in November. (Other prophecies have been less successful, including anointing Peter Costello as the next Prime Minister in 2007.)

Whether God speaks in dreams, I cannot say. Hebrews 1:1,2 strongly suggest otherwise (that in the past God spoke in various ways but now has spoken by his son). I can say the Bible refutes the idea that suffering is God's punishment. In the Gospel of Luke, for example, Jesus is



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asked exactly this question of two groups of people who died, and replies: "Do you think they were worse sinners? I tell you, no."

Another key text is the Old Testament book of Job, probably the oldest in the Bible, which ponders suffering. The answer Job is given is that there is no answer – at least, not one accessible to humans; we can only endure and trust.

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God rebukes Job's comforters for offering false answers.

This might lead pastors who respect the Scripture, as Nalliah says he does, to be wary about offering explanations on behalf of God. His explanation might readily be ignored, except that something like it so often emerges at times of disaster.

It is simply colossal arrogance to presume to speak for God in this way – to understand God fully, one would have to be God – because His thoughts are not our thoughts, nor our ways His ways. Where the Scriptural authors give a theological explanation for events or for suffering, that is one thing; it is quite another to indulge our own interpretations today.

Does Nalliah really believe God punishes the innocent to teach the guilty? Jeremiah contradicted that idea more than 2500 years ago: "In those days they will not say again, 'the fathers have eaten sour grapes and the children's teeth are set on

edge.' But everyone will die for his own iniquity." Meanwhile, there is another lesson from Job that impertinent pastors could ponder: "Man is born to trouble, as surely as the sparks fly upward."

I don't have the temerity to suggest any spiritual explanation for the bushfires, but there are certainly spiritual lessons – not least, what a gift life is and how precious we are to each other. At times like this I turn to perhaps my favourite Bible verse, Romans 8:28: "In all things, God works for the good of those who love him." How and why, I cannot know – it is a matter of faith and I know that for many this will bring no consolation. But I also know that such thoughts have provided comfort through millennia of suffering.

As a young Christian exploring the denominations, I met many Pentecostals who claimed to prophesy ("Thus saith the Lord ...") and was struck by how unfailingly God's word through them precisely mirrored their own obsessions.

I don't doubt Danny Nalliah is sincerely disturbed by the Victorian abortion law. I don't even doubt he means well. I do very much doubt that his vision is from God.

Postscript: I posted this article on my Age blog, The Religious Write, and was appalled at the vicious attacks on Nalliah (many of which I did not publish), even allowing for the fact that feelings were raw and passions high. Some accused him of being an arsonist, and many wished painful and permanent retribution against him.

Others asked why *The Age* gave his comments the oxygen of publicity. It was because his proximity to some of the political greats gave him a public profile. We did not report an American church group claiming it was a judgment on homosexuality in Victoria or a Muslim claiming it was a judgement of Allah in retribution for the execution of the Bali bombers. But those examples highlight how wrong it is to turn a natural catastrophe to political or propaganda ends.

Barney Zwartz is religion editor of The Age. This is an edited version of an article that first appeared there.

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