

WAYWARD GIRL TO INSPIRING ARTIST

Viral values

BY JODY BENNETT

WITH the world melting down over Covid-19 and multiple countries in lockdown, people losing their jobs and memes about social isolation abounding, there is one aspect of this whole situation that I find both encouraging and very interesting, and which has not been pointed out in all the many stories, graphs and vlogs I've seen.

The reaction by almost every nation to the conundrum of: "Do we save our economy or do we save our vulnerable?" has been "We save the people". Millions are out of work in order to save (at this stage) only tens of thousands from death, and less than two million from infection. People are losing their livelihoods, postponing major events and totally restricting their movements and lifestyles, all in the name of the common good.

Left to run amok, the virus would not kill most of us, although it might infect most. But, with isolation, it has already affected and inconvenienced almost everybody. Some people are significantly affected by the closure of their work places or their inability to travel for work.

Isolation is likely to cripple economies, yet when California lawyer Scott McMillan suggested that "the fundamental question is whether we are going to tank the economy to save 2.5% of the population which is (1) generally expensive to maintain, and (2) not productive", he got nine deaths threats within 48 hours and was called a 'ghoul' and a 'Nazi'.

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BY JANICE TEO

THIRTY years ago, if you had told Dena Gower she would one day be a well-regarded Aboriginal artist, activist and community hero in Australia, she would probably have taken a big swig of beer and laughed in your face.

A single mother by the time she was 18, she served three months in prison when she was in her early 20s and was in a relationship with an abusive man who would one day break her jaw.

By the time she was 24, Dena was popping pills and indulging in risky behaviour. She was heading straight down the track to addiction and alcoholism. She had only basic education; a university degree seemed so far out of the question it may as well have been in outer space.

Moving forward 30 years, let's just say Dena has boldly gone where she never thought she would. She did go to university and she graduated with a Bachelor of Applied Science and Management. She is also currently Deputy Chair of the Aboriginal Reference Group in the City of South Perth local council. In 2013 she was bestowed the Premier's Australia Day Active Citizenship Award and the City of South Perth's Citizen of the Year Award.

An accomplished artist, she was one of the featured talents in an exhibition held in March at Mount Pleasant Baptist Church in Western Australia. A joint project with Ngaama Ministries, which Dena co-founded with her husband Gary, the exhibition was organised by the church's missions pastor Jonathan Anthony, who saw it as a means of connecting with the larger community and shining a spotlight on indigenous culture.

The exhibition was a resounding success, with 21 of the 32 paintings sold. Dena had four paintings in the exhibition and sold two.

Soft-spoken and gentle, Dena is honest when she speaks about her journey from delinquent to community role model and respected artist. So what took her from sinkhole to rainbow's end? She has no doubt it was a decision she made when she



Dena Gower's painting *Treasured Families*.

BELOW: Dena Gower (right) with good friend and fellow Ngaama artist Nola Bolton.

was 4 and revisited at crucial times of her life. That decision was to follow Jesus Christ.

Dena grew up in the country town of Narrogin in Western Australia and attended church with her family. "I always loved going to church," she says. "I always felt there was a brightness and warmth in the room.

"Today I know that's the presence

of God but as a child, all I knew was that I always felt extra safe and very happy there."

Her father died when Dena was 13, leaving her heartbroken. Seeking better education and job opportunities, she moved to Perth in her late teens and it was then that she began her downward spiral.

"Perth was so different from

sleepy Narrogin," she says. "It was exciting and different and unfortunately I got involved in the wrong things and wrong relationships."

Those 'wrong things' ultimately led Dena to a three-month prison sentence. While in prison she attended some church services and rededicated her life to God but fell away again when she was released.

This on-again, off-again relationship with God created more turmoil than tranquillity in her life. In desperation, she went back to Narrogin and visited her ancestors' graves.

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Fun for Kids Pages 5,6 & 7

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IS GOD TELLING US SOMETHING?

BY RICK LEWERS

I HEARD an old guy praying for our community recently. It went something like this: "Dear God we have seen drought and fire across our land in recent times and now we are confronted by this Covid-19 virus. Are you trying to tell us something?"

What a question! "God, are you trying to tell us something?"

When viruses so microscopic we can't see them and can't control them can disrupt the world, is there a reminder to a proud humanity that thinks it has no need of God ... that we do? How small we are and how great our need!

When a virus makes us act like enemies toward one another in shopping centres, in business, schools and homes, is God offering us a diagnostic proof that we are sicker than we thought we were or could be?

And when there is no pill, no medicine, or vaccination are we meant to learn we need God?

When a virus with no cure can affect the financial markets around the world so significantly is God telling us that it's not in money that we should trust.

If a virus has the capacity to strip the world of its wealth, then our idolatrous worship of wealth looks ridiculous.

When something you can't see gives rise to a pro-life response, closing schools, churches not meeting, gatherings becoming illegal and nations closing their borders and quarantining the contagious because death is a real option, is it worth asking if God is trying to tell us something?

Are we being made to realise that life is of such value that we should protect it while recognising that we can't?

As God gave humanity dominion over the created world and responsibility to be good stewards of it, I expect that we will exercise that dominion and probably find a cure to Covid 19 and to any future "covids" that will inevitably appear.

But in our panic to protect life from death is the threat of an unseen virus reminding us that we have no cure for death and we cannot live without God?

Can a virus like Covid-19 offer world health? I am not sure that this is such a stupid question. It is certainly rattling our insecure foundations.

"Can a dead king offer hope to a dying world?" That is not a stupid question, it's a crucial one as we deal with killer viruses.

From the cross where King Jesus died for a sin-infected world, He rose from the dead making the promise of life a certainty in an age of uncertainty.

Is God trying to tell us something? I think He is and the world crisis is whether we will listen to Him.

WAYWARD GIRL TO INSPIRING ARTIST

• From page 1

"Noongar people have a strong belief in ancestors and how they continue to guide you even when they're dead," Dena explains. "I had come back to the Lord but was not strong in my faith yet and I still had ties to this way of believing."

She stared at the family tombstones imploring them for help. She waited. She prayed to them. Nothing. Then finally, a voice. But not from the stones.

The voice came from somewhere deep inside her, so loud and clear she said she started shaking. "Dena," she heard. "They are dead. They are all dead. They can't help you. I am alive and I am the only one who can give you your life back."



A Ngaama collaborative painting called God's creation..

She sees her art as an extension of her faith. "I feel my art carries a message," she says.

"People who see my work tell me it really affects them; that it's very powerful. I think my art is a vehicle, a mechanism for God to touch people because I try to paint pictures of His creation and themes of love and of embracing one another."

Pastor Jonathan agrees. "Dena is such a strong advocate for her community," he says. "Her aim is to empower the next generation."

The name Ngaama Ministries comes from a Noongar word meaning

waterhole and is taken from the Bible verse John 4:14. "Whoever drinks the water I give them will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give them will become in them a spring of water welling up to eternal life."

That is indeed what Dena strives to do with her paintings – impart life and blessing. She gives the example of a painting she named 'Sisters', which showed two women in a loving hug. A woman who saw the painting was moved to tears because she said it captured perfectly her relationship with her sister, who was ill at the time.

"That really just affirmed what I am trying to do with this ministry and my art," Dena says. "I want the healing power of God to be at the centre of it because that is what He did for me."

Dena burst into tears. She recognised that voice at once. She had heard it from the time she was 4 years old in church. She knew God was speaking to her.

"That day I finally surrendered to God," she says. "I packed my bags and went home that very day and I've never been back. And instead of grieving this separation from the old ways, I felt liberated."



Under the Sea by Dena Gower.

Crossword

- ACROSS**
- 1 A small number
 - 3 A resident of Kampala
 - 7 Oil-drilling equipment
 - 8 Spark plug, e.g.
 - 12 To his own
 - 13 Wax-producing body part
 - 14 ... Of Skye
 - 17 TV show instalment
 - 19 One of four for a square
 - 21 Vein of a leaf
 - 22 A son of Jacob and Leah, O.T.
 - 24 A word formed from initial letters
 - 27 Olive extract
 - 28 Sugar snap (4,3)
 - 29 Naval cry for help
- DOWN**
- 1 Medical pincers
 - 2 Made a bet
 - 3 Acid found in urine
 - 4 Woman's name
 - 5 Full point
 - 6 Neither
 - 9 Extremely unpleasant
 - 10 Short for "ibidem"
 - 11 Snake-like fish
 - 15 Somber disposition
 - 16 Preserves (as a mummy)
 - 18 Currency of Chile
 - 20 Interface Controller Card
 - 23 Female given name
 - 24 Animal that brays
 - 25 Kangaroo, slangily
 - 26 Sleep a little



SOLUTION PAGE 11

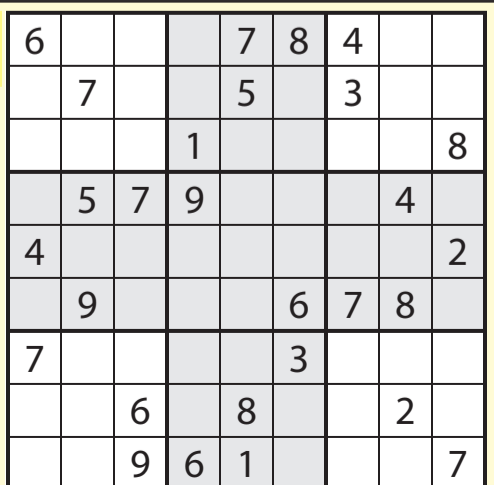
Sudoku

Fill in the grid so that every row, every column, and every 3x3 box contains the digits 1 through 9.

Puzzle Level: Medium

6 3 8
4 2 9
7 5 1

SOLUTION PAGE 11



Chance of a new start in our new normal

BY ALAN BAILEY

MANY people—millions in fact, have entered a new experience. All caused by an unexpected virus coming on the scene. Without much warning, we have been halted in our tracks, so much of our usual routines scrapped and four walls hemming us in. These are necessary measures of course if we are to escape a pandemic out of control. But what is happening to us??

Our pleasant chats at the shops have gone. Our diary dates have had a line drawn through them. The kids are home wandering around as if lost. No more outings to the pictures, to the football or almost to any sport at all. Hey! What are we supposed to do with ourselves?

Lessons are online, so that will soak up some time. The apps on the phone are promising, giving us cause to fiddle. Even some of those ho-hum TV shows are gaining a greater audience.

But here is an important question. When all is quiet and you're all alone, devices switched off, what do you think about?

I have a feeling that many modern people don't think about anything in particular. You see, we live in an age when thinking is done for us. We are fed with information from the media and the government, the computer tells us how to spell, Google will tell us anything we want to know. And now, we are taught like children how to behave in a pandemic.

A SUGGESTION

Maybe at a time like this, when a lot of normal is

A funny church sign in the U.S.



suspended and a new normal prevails, an opportunity has opened up for us to think. Not to concern ourselves for the moment with food and clothes and cars and dogs and washing and buying and all the everyday things that hold our attention, but to stop and ask big questions. Like, "Why am I here?" "What is life all about?" "Is there some purpose to it, or is it all empty?"

I know these are matters strictly avoided by the masses when things are going along normally. But what if God is there, fully aware of each one of us and seeing us in a broken relationship with Himself? This gets serious. Living life day-by-day, ignoring God and His rule, rebelling against divine authority, is not good. It is our greatest sin.

A NEW EXPERIENCE

To be out of touch with God, to be out of favour with Him. It has large ramifications. Note these words: "We have all gone astray like sheep; we have turned all of us to our own way" (The Bible, Isaiah 53:6). We are accountable for this. Another Bible verse, Hebrews 9:27, says: "It is appointed for men to die once, and after this the judgment."

How thankful we should be for the Saviour God has provided for us. What Jesus did on the cross brings pardon and forgiveness within reach.

Perhaps this time of quietness may just be the right time for getting right with God and beginning a new life, a new experience. It is a prayer away. With a sincere heart, seek the Saviour who lives today and saves by His mighty power.

How Oxford drove me away from atheism

BY SARAH IRVING-STONEBRAKER

I grew up in Australia, in a loving, secular home, and arrived at Sydney University as a critic of “religion.” I didn’t need faith to ground my identity or my values. I knew from the age of eight that I wanted to study history at Cambridge and become a historian. My identity lay in academic achievement, and my secular humanism was based on self-evident truths. As an undergrad, I won the University Medal and a Commonwealth Scholarship to undertake my Ph.D. in History at King’s College, Cambridge. King’s is known for its secular ideology and my perception of Christianity fitted well with the views of my fellow students: Christians were anti-intellectual and self-righteous.

After Cambridge, I was elected to a Junior Research Fellowship at Oxford. There, I attended three guest lectures by world-class philosopher and atheist public intellectual, Peter Singer. Singer recognised that philosophy faces a vexing problem in relation to the issue of human worth. The natural world yields no egalitarian picture of human capacities. What about the child whose disabilities or illness compromises her abilities to reason? Yet, without reference to some set of capacities as the basis of human worth, the intrinsic value of all human beings becomes an ungrounded assertion; a premise which needs to be agreed upon before any conversation can take place.

I remember leaving Singer’s lectures with a strange intellectual vertigo; I

was committed to believing that universal human value was more than just a well-meaning conceit of liberalism. But I knew from my own research in the history of European empires and their encounters with indigenous cultures, that societies have always had different conceptions of human worth, or lack thereof. The premise of human equality is not a self-evident truth: it is profoundly historically contingent. I began to realise that the implications of my atheism were incompatible with almost every value I held dear.

One afternoon, I noticed that my usual desk in the college library was in front of the Theology section. With an awkward but humble reluctance, I opened a book of sermons by philosopher and theologian Paul Tillich. As I read, I was struck at how intellectually compelling, complex, and profound the gospel was. I was attracted, but I wasn’t convinced.

A few months later, near the end of my time at Oxford, I was invited to a dinner for the International Society for the Study of Science and Religion. I sat next to Professor Andrew Briggs, a Professor of Nanomaterials, who happened to be a Christian. During dinner, Briggs asked me whether I



Sarah Irving-Stonebraker realised if issues about human value and ethics mattered to her, she needed to make a decision about whether there was a God.

believed in God. I fumbled. Perhaps I was an agnostic? He responded, “Do you really want to sit on the fence forever?” That question made me realise that if issues about human value and ethics

mattered to me, the response that perhaps there was a God, or perhaps there wasn’t, was unsatisfactory.

In the Summer of 2008, I began a new job as Assistant Professor at Florida State University, where I continued my research examining the relationship between the history of science, Christianity, and political thought. With the

freedom of being an outsider to American culture, I was able to see an active Christianity in people who lived their lives guided by the gospel: feeding the homeless every week, running community centres, and housing and advocating for migrant farm laborers.

One Sunday, shortly before my 28th birthday, I walked into a church for the first time as someone earnestly seeking God. Before long I found myself overwhelmed. At last I was fully known and seen and, I realised, unconditionally loved – perhaps I had a sense of relief from no longer running from God. A friend gave me C.S. Lewis’s *Mere Christianity*, and one night, after a couple months of attending church, I knelt in my closet in my apartment and asked Jesus to save me, and to become the Lord of my life.

From there, I started a rigorous diet of theology, reading the Bible and exploring theologians such as Reinhold Niebuhr, Paul Ramsey, and F.D. Maurice. Christianity, it turned out, looked nothing like the caricature I once held. I found the story of Jacob wrestling with God especially compelling: God wants anything but the unthinking faith I had once assumed characterized Christianity. God wants us to wrestle with Him; to struggle through doubt and faith,

sorrow and hope. Moreover, God wants broken people, not self-righteous ones. And salvation is not about us earning our way to some place in the clouds through good works. On the contrary; there is nothing we can do to reconcile ourselves to God. As a historian, this made profound sense to me. I was too aware of the cycles of poverty, violence and injustice in human history to think that some utopian design of our own, scientific or otherwise, might save us.

Christianity was also, to my surprise, radical – far more radical than the leftist ideologies with which I had previously been enamoured. The love of God was unlike anything which I expected, or of which I could make sense. In becoming fully human in Jesus, God behaved decidedly unlike a god. Why deign to walk through death’s dark valley, or hold the weeping limbs of lepers, if you are God? Why submit to humiliation and death on a cross, in order to save those who hate you? God suffered punishment in our place because of a radical love. This sacrificial love is utterly opposed to the individualism, consumerism, exploitation, and objectification, of our culture.

Just as radical, I realized, was the new creation which Christ began to initiate. This turned on its head the sentimental caricature of ‘heaven’ I’d once held as an atheist. I learned that Jesus’ resurrection initiated the kingdom of God, which will “bring good news to the poor, release the captives, restore sight to the blind, free the oppressed.” (Luke 4:18) To live as a Christian is a call to be part of this new, radical, creation. I am not passively awaiting a place in the clouds. I am redeemed by Christ, so now I have work to do. With God’s grace, I’ve been elected to serve – in whatever way God sees fit – to build for His Kingdom. We have a sure hope that God is transforming this broken, unjust world, into Christ’s Kingdom, the New Creation. •

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Teaching my heart to beat again

When singer Danny Gokey rose to fame in the US in the eighth season of American Idol in August 2008, not many people knew that he was grieving.

Danny’s wife of four years, Sophia, whom he had been with since he was 16, had died during surgery for congenital heart failure a month before his audition. She had been a big fan of Idol and had encouraged Danny to try out, so later he credited her with his success.

The 31-year-old was eliminated in third place on Idol but his career has not looked back since. He has been on tour, started a charity in his late wife’s honour, launched an eyewear brand, been nominated for a Grammy, and won a Dove Award for his Christmas album in 2016, which is one among seven albums he has produced so far.

Last year, the former church music director, whose musical style is country pop, won the K-Love Fan Awards’ title of Male Artist of the Year.

Danny has also found love again, remarrying model Leyicet Peralta in 2012. The couple now have four children together: Daniel (7), Victoria (5), Gabriel (2) and Emmanuel, born last year on August 16, the birthday of Danny’s first wife.

Eleven years after losing Sophia, he shared in a Youtube interview, “There are so many ways the Lord has redeemed the situation. I want to remind people that if you open up and give your cares and burdens to God, He wants to help you and turn the situation for good.

“God was with me this entire time – there were times when I felt He wasn’t,” Danny says frankly, “That He was angry with me. Like ‘why would you let me go through this?’ But if you just keep putting one foot in front of the other. You don’t have to understand.”

That faith had been with Danny from the time he was a little boy. His grandfather was a pastor and Danny says, “I was raised in church. The stories in the Bible are so close to me.”

So he knew about people like Joseph and Job, who got to a very low place where everything looked lost, but who saw God turn their situations around for good.

The artist’s most famous song is Haven’t Seen It Yet, an anthem of hope for those who feel they have been praying and praying for God to intervene in their situation but they “just haven’t seen it yet”.

The lyrics include: Don’t ever lose hope, hold on and believe/ Maybe you just haven’t seen it, just haven’t seen it yet/ You’re closer than you think you are/ Only moments from the break of dawn/ All His promises are just up ahead/ Maybe you just haven’t seen it, just haven’t seen it yet

And: He had the solution before you had the problem/ He sees the best in you when you feel at your worst/ So in the questioning, don’t ever doubt His love for you/ ‘Cause it’s only in His love that you’ll find a breakthrough.

“I am grateful that the grace of God carried me through,” he told Prazor last year at the Dove Awards, where he won an award for the “Haven’t Seen It Yet” music video.

He told Godupdates: “A lot of people are defined by their situations. They are defined by being a crack addict, or they are defined by their parents having abused them. But instead of letting my situation define me, I let it become a defining moment in my life, and something good has come out of it. I hope that people get that side of me that’s saying, listen, don’t let that tragedy or that failure define you, but let it be a defining moment where you step up and become greater.”

This sentiment is captured well in his lyrics to Tell Your Heart to Beat Again, which include:

Let the shadows fall away/ Step into the light of grace/ Yesterday’s a closing door/ You don’t live there anymore/ Say goodbye to where you’ve been/ And tell your heart to beat again

“My music is part of the Great Commission [where Jesus told His followers]: ‘Go into all the world and proclaim the gospel to the whole creation,’” he told The Christian Post. “It’s a goal I continually work toward. With each new record, I’ve tried to reach out to the church and unchurched. I really try to do that with my music and get the Gospel message out in a way that’s fresh.

“My goal is to show God and His glory through my music.” •



Danny Gokey has come back from grief, stronger.

Gymnast forgives her abuser

FROM GOOD NEWS UK

Former gymnast Rachael Denhollander was the first woman to publicly accuse former USA gymnastics doctor Larry Nassar of abusing the girls in his care. She also publicly confronted the paedophile in court during Nassar's sentencing last year.

It was Rachael's report about him abusing her when she was 15 that sparked the case against Nassar, and led to over 200 other victims coming forward. Her 36-minute statement in court earned an ovation from the gallery and became a key episode in the #MeToo movement, particularly in sport.

Yet when she was face to face with Nassar, Rachael's statement also offered forgiveness. She didn't shirk from calling for the maximum sentence for him, but as justice, not retribution.

Nassar was eventually sentenced to between 40 and 175 years, but not before Judge Aquilina opened the courtroom to any



Rachael Denhollander gives her victim impact statement in court, describing her pain but also her forgiveness.

of Nassar's victims who wanted to address him. Over 150 victims took the opportunity, during the almost week-long hearing.

Nassar objected and accused Judge Aquilina of overseeing a "media circus", but the judge replied: "Spending four or five days listening to them is significantly minor, considering the hours of pleasure you had at their expense and ruining their lives."

Rachael, now an attorney and mother of three, told the court of the delight Nassar took in grooming his victims and how he showed no remorse.

But addressing Nassar, she said: "Larry, if you have read the Bible, you know forgiveness does not come from doing good things, as if good deeds can erase what you have done. It comes from repentance, which requires facing and acknowledging the truth about what you have done in all of its utter depravity and horror without mitigation, without excuse."

She encouraged him to understand the seriousness of his crimes, but also to find forgiveness from God: "Should you ever reach the point of truly facing what you have done, the guilt will be crushing. And that is what makes the gospel of Christ so sweet. Because it extends grace and hope and mercy where none should be found. And it will be there for you.

"I pray you experience the soul crushing weight of guilt so you may someday experience a true turning away from sin and true forgiveness from God, which you need far more than forgiveness from me -- though I extend that to you as well."

She explained that knowing that she has been forgiven for her own wrongdoing means "I can be forgiving, move forward and begin to heal."

Rachael also found solace in reading the Bible, particularly the parts that describe Jesus returning as a judge against evil.

"We have a God who says, 'This is evil, and it matters, and I will come back and deal with it,'" she said. "That was the greatest comfort to me as an abuse victim."

Forgiveness and justice are not mutually exclusive with God. He holds the threat of punishment but also the way to escape that – if we are willing to admit our own wrongs, as Rachael explained, and ask his forgiveness.

COKE, CRISPS AND HOPE

STICK of the stream of depressing and disheartening chatter that is the daily Covid-19 news cycle? Here's a coronavirus story that will lift some of that gloom.

It's a story about a cleaner, a can of Coke and a packet of crisps and how they helped pull a man back from the end of his rope.

Lee McClelland is the pastor of The Ark Church in Belfast. He had tested positive for the virus and was in isolation in hospital. Despondent, fearful and alone, he was going through a deep dark night of the soul.

His YouTube account of what happened to him in hospital has seen his church inundated with responses and messages of cheer.

Speaking about two nights he says were his "nights from hell", he says in the video. "I remember those two nights particularly in the hospital when I didn't know if I would make it or not.

"I was under incredible pressure and thought I was moments away from ending up on a ventilator."

Lee said he cried out to God for help. "I asked Him to help me, to somehow encourage my heart, even supernaturally to bring me through this."

And that's when things began to happen for Lee. "You have to understand that being in isolation...nobody can come in," he says in the video. "No friend, no family member, nobody. But when



Many churches have been rising to the occasion and using their notice boards to encourage passers by. This one was found by a Twitter user from the States recently.

nobody was allowed in, God sent a cleaner."

And not just any cleaner. This cleaner had been a missionary to Nigeria for 14 years. He spoke to Lee, encouraging him and, as he left his room, said a prayer for him.

"He asked the Holy Spirit (the unseen presence of God) to touch me, to heal me, to touch my lungs," Lee said. "He pleaded with God Almighty to save my life."

Lee said his condition improved that very night. It improved in the time-honoured way of a sudden uptick in his appetite. Lee went from having no appetite at all to a sudden craving for prawn cocktail potato crisps and Coke.

Unfortunately, crisps and Coke are as a general rule not easily found in isolation wards. Enter

Lee's new friend to clean the room the next day. This time, he came with a bag of goodies. In the bag were two oranges. A can of Coke. And a bag of prawn cocktail-flavoured potato crisps. Exactly what Lee had been craving - and something the cleaner could not have known without some divine prompting.

Lee's testimony has touched many lives and sparked scores of comments such as these:

"Amazing the way the Lord works and how that cleaner went in in a time of need and how God got Lee what he asked for through the cleaner. Nothing is impossible with God."

"Amazing testimony of God's power! Your testimony has reached all the way to the Cornells household in California, USA and has been shared many times. Thank you pastor Lee McClelland !!!"

"I watched your video last night and cried. Lovely story of faith and hope amidst such fear and sadness."

The video has not surprisingly sparked many questions to Lee about his faith.

In an interview with the *Belfast Telegraph*, he says this virus has led to a growing awareness that we are frail, along with fear and anxiety.

"There are people who have been encouraged but others are still sceptical. As a Christian and a pastor, my greatest focus isn't this earth, my focus is eternity," Lee says.

"People have been contacting me saying 'I'm hurting, does your God have any hope for people like me?'"

To people everywhere, Lee's message is simple: "Folks, God is a personal God. I want to encourage you that He knows what you have need of. He knows your hearts' desire and He is an incredible Saviour - right down to when one of his sons desired a packet of prawn cocktail crisps He found a way to get them to me.

"So don't tell me that God doesn't know...He knows our every need, our every desire. My new cleaner friend passed the bag through the door and said 'this is a gift from the Lord.'"

And to Christians he says: "Never underestimate how God can use your life or what He can do through you. He can use anybody."

Lee is home with his family and has months of recovery ahead. He hopes to one day meet the cleaner who in simple obedience and faith pulled him back from brink of the abyss.

"One day I would like to give this man a huge hug because his gesture meant so much. What he did that morning was incredible. I don't know if he knows how much it encouraged me."

Viral values

• From page 1

Suggesting that money or most people's ability to carry on as usual comes first is met with outrage, but shouldn't that be the proper Darwinian, pragmatic approach?

This idea of protecting the weak and vulnerable at all costs to the economy is a decidedly unevolutionary instinct. This is not survival of the fittest. This is not people are all just sophisticated apes who have no more value than any other animal. This is not even socialism, where the good of the few is sacrificed for the good of the many – this is the good of the many being sacrificed for the good of the few(er).

In fact, it is a very Christian response. It is about loving our neighbour as we love ourselves and laying down our lives for our friends. It is an attitude that sees every life as worth saving. As an article by Lyman Stone on the website foreignpolicy.com¹ points out, right from the beginning of Christianity, the followers of Jesus have stood out in times of plague and famine for the way they sacrificed their own health and safety in order to minister to the sick and provide for the needy. This was an outworking of their belief that every person was a precious soul made in the image of God.

Such an attitude went against the Roman hedonistic idea of pursuing pleasure and avoiding hardship, or the Greek Stoic fatalism. And it also flies in the face of secular Darwinian evolution. I think it proves how deeply our cultures have been affected by Christian teaching and philosophy. And it is interesting that this is true globally regardless of whether governments are socialist, communist or democratic.²

Because we all know that even if we ourselves are not among the weak and vulnerable, our parents, or our grandparents are, or our friend or colleague is.

Covid-19 has reminded us as we self-isolate, that we are all connected to one another by a thousand threads of relationship, and that our

common enemy is death.

And while I thoroughly agree with this altruistic approach, I do wonder if while we are doing our level best to protect the old and those in ill-health, we might at some point be sacrificing our poor and mentally ill in order to do so. Extended isolation and business shut downs will have their own unintended consequences, as would economic collapse.

As David Mills from NewsCorp Australia has pointed out: "The lockdown itself will be a massive problem for public health, if not a disaster in its own right. A recent American study showed social isolation was linked to a 50% increased risk of dementia, a 29% increased risk of heart disease and a 32% increased risk of stroke.

"The time spent inside will likely have detrimental health effects, the breadth and depth of which we cannot even fully countenance yet.

"Mental health will suffer. Alcohol abuse will go through the roof. Domestic violence and sexual abuse will no doubt increase. Some of what happens now will affect people for the rest of their lives."

It remains to be seen how deep this selfless care for others goes in our societies or whether it is just a thin veneer left over from some former Christian influence. Perhaps the fearful stockpiling and racist accusations are more indicative of what really drives us.

As more people die and quarantining drags on, I hope this crisis will make people question what they do indeed believe about the value of human life. I pray that millions, as they contemplate their own deaths and the uncertainty of the future, will realize that their need for meaning, security and eternal happiness can only be fulfilled by turning to the God of the Bible, for whom none of this has come as a surprise and who can use even this pandemic for good.

¹ "Christianity has been handling epidemics for 2000 years" by Lyman Stone

² It may also be evidence of how well our schools have indoctrinated the younger generations with evolutionary thinking that Gen Z is the generation most flouting the isolation and quarantine rules, with an "it doesn't effect me" attitude.

I came out ... as a Christian

BY DAVID ROBERTSON

I always knew I was different. There was that feeling inside; that 12 year old's angst as I considered who I was; that indefinable something as others went their way with wild parties and girls. I tried to be like them. But I just couldn't. In today's parlance I was just not being true to myself.

I tried to divert and get what I wanted in different ways. There was even a phase when as a 14-year-old I tried communism. I became politically active, even leading a school strike against the raising of the school leaving age.

I tried mocking those who frightened me because I thought I might end up like them. I was very good at arguing against such unfortunates. I really did not want to be different. I knew that it would be social suicide, intellectual damnation and almost certainly harm my future prospects. The society I lived in wasn't ready for people like me.

There came a point where I admitted to myself who I was and what I believed. But even then I was determined to keep it secret.

And then one incredible New Year, I came out ... or perhaps I should say I was outed.

As a Christian.

We were sitting in the sixth year common room (a rather

grand title for a portacabin in the school playground). Four of my classmates got up and headed to their usual Thursday lunchtime prayer meeting. Some sneered. Some shook their heads in mock amusement. Others ignored. It was the 'Bible bashers, the Holy Joes, the Religious Weirdos' up to their usual tricks.

And then in a moment that changed my life, one of the group turned to me and asked: "Do you want to come with us?"

How my pals laughed. Was I not the one who was expert at arguing against Christians? Was I not the one who led the mocking crowd? For some reason, utterly inexplicable to me, I got up and walked out the door with the Christians to a prayer meeting. And never looked back.

We sat in that meeting and, apparently unusually for them, they prayed round in a circle. When it came to me I thought I had better pray something. And so I did. There was silence. No hallelujahs. Not even a mumbled 'Amen'. Just silence. And then a tap on the shoulder.

"Are you a Christian?"

"I guess so."

"What happened?"

So I explained about my prayer on New Year's Eve, as I wrestled with my desire to



be an atheist and my knowledge that it would be a denial of reality and a denial of who I was.

"God, if you exist, show me."

It was midnight and I walked out into the beautiful, cold, starry night in the Scottish Highland town of Dingwall, and looked to the heavens. There was no answer. Not a bolt of lightning. Not an angelic choir. Not even a still small

voice. If God was there, he was keeping pretty quiet about it.

For two weeks I tried to put it out of my mind. I told myself "there was no answer, therefore there is no God", whilst at the same time knowing what a dumb argument that was. Until one Sunday morning I got out of my bed and turned to my youngest brother.

"Come on ... we're going to church."

After various questionings of my sanity, my brother came with me. I was, after all, bigger than him. Shall we say that he was compelled to come in – it was my first successful attempt at evangelism! Much to my mother's surprise and delight, (she had long given up on trying to get us to go to church) – we headed out the door and cycled to a little church in the fishing village of Balintore.

I don't know what it was, the singing of a psalm, the reading of the Bible, the splashing of the sea waves on the nearby beach, but suddenly it became crystal clear. Of course God existed. Nothing made sense without Him. How could you have a creation without the Creator? It wasn't God that was silent. It was me that wasn't listening. He who has ears let him hear. The heavens declare the glory of God, the skies proclaim his handiwork. She who has eyes let her see.

And then there was the Bible, and Jesus, and the Holy Spirit, and the Church, and history, and science, and morality, and love, and justice, and hope, and humanity. All of the pieces fell into place.

I still didn't like Christians and I did not want to be

associated with them, so I reasoned that I could be a secret follower of Jesus – like Nicodemus – until that day I was outed.

At the prayer meeting the teacher who led it, asked me if I would be willing to take on the leadership of the group – because, good old Brethren lady that she was, she thought that a man (even though a boy) should lead.

Of course, I said no, but she assured me, in that wonderful way that women who believe in 'submission' sometimes have, it would be OK because she would tell me what to do! She was a good teacher.

The small group also asked if I would be willing to speak on their behalf at a debate being held by the school debating society the following week. The subject was the existence of God and the

participants were to be an atheist, an agnostic, a 'liberal' Christian and an evangelical. I spoke on behalf of the biblical Christians (even then I did not like the label, evangelical).

Afterwards I was approached by one of my favourite teachers, the head of the English department. I liked him because he never gave me or anyone the belt – he didn't need to, he had that kind of authority.

"Robertson," he exclaimed, "... that was brilliant. Your best performance yet. You almost had me convinced you really were a Christian!"

"Sir ... I am! And no-one will ever say that to me again!"

I knew I was well and truly outed. I knew I couldn't be a halfway Christian, or a secret Christian, or a nominal Christian. Whatever was to happen in my future I now belonged to Christ and would follow him ... whatever. Where he leads me I will follow, what he feeds me I will swallow. Life was to be full of Christian clichés ... some of them were even true!

It's been 41 years since the day I came out. Everything I

feared would happen did. The social ostracism, the sneering mockery (this was in the days before social media – now that is only multiplied), the knowing glances from those who thought that I had thrown away a prospective glowing career, the spiritual warfare, the dysfunctional churches and, above all, my own weakness and sin. Life as a Christian has been hard. But it is life!

And I do not regret a minute of it. With Christ comes not only trouble and persecution, but also the "solid joys and lasting treasures that none but Zion's children know".

My hope and prayer for those of you who read this is that some will come to know the Christ who gives more than we can ask or think; that some of you will yourselves be encouraged to 'come out' and make your stance for and with Christ; and that those

of you who are feeling weary and worn would be encouraged in the Lord.

Fight the good fight, lay hold of the eternal life to which you were called. The battle belongs to the Lord. The victory we get to share with Him. Happy New Year. •

David Robertson is director of Third Space in Sydney and blogs at The Wee Flea.



See David's blog at theWeeFlea.com

LIFE AS A CHRISTIAN HAS BEEN HARD. BUT IT IS LIFE!



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Trapped in the black hole of addiction

"Addictions are a black hole," warns Tyson*, a young man in his twenties. "They suck the life out of you. They leave you feeling guilty and shameful. They can even cost you a lot of money. The worst thing they do is make you feel trapped in a cycle that you can't escape."

Tyson knows those feelings well from his own battles with phone and pornography addictions. "I have wasted so much time and effort pursuing worthless addictions," he confesses. "It took me so long to realise that those addictions always left me wanting more and could never actually satisfy the desires in my heart."

Born in Thailand and growing up in a Christian home, with "the best parents", Tyson was taught about God from a young age and believed what he was told.

At some stage in his young childhood his parents led him through what is known as the sinner's prayer – a prayer of dedication to God, confessing your sin, wrong actions and thoughts-faults and asking God to forgive you and to live His life through you from now on.

In his teens, though, Tyson didn't ask Jesus for power to combat his temptations, but gave into them and soon became trapped.

"It took a long time for the head-knowledge I had about God to become a heart-to-heart relationship with Jesus," he admits.

It finally did become an intimate walk with God when Tyson's guilty conscience got the better of him.

"I knew better than to be living like I was. One day I decided enough was enough and I made a decision to pursue God and live life for Him rather than living for my sins and addictions.

"I confessed my sins to God and to someone I trusted. I became accountable to them, letting them mentor me, and drew close to God by reading the Bible and praying regularly.

"God has shown me that He can fill the hole in my heart and I don't need those addictions. He is enough. His forgiveness has taken away the guilt I was under.

"If you are trapped in addictions, you CAN escape from the cycle of sin and self-loathing, but you can't do it alone," Tyson counsels. "Pray to God about it. Tell Him where you are at and ask for help. Then be proactive and ask someone you trust to help you practically with accountability and support to keep away from situations that tempt you." •

*Full name withheld for privacy reasons.

Anxiety

BY CLINICAL PSYCHOLOGIST
SUE BARTHO

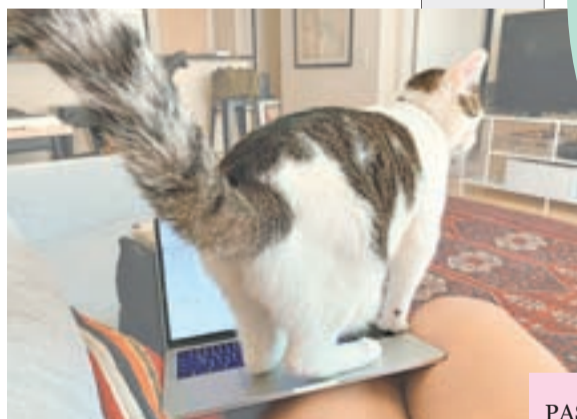
TO help you combat fearful feelings – even during the coronavirus crisis – here are some of my principles for coping with anxiety:

- 1. Don't feed fear.** Check the news headlines once a day but don't gorge on them! Coach yourself to not play in this zone of fear – you just don't help yourself or your family.
- 2. Do what you can.** Be clear about hand-washing, social distance and sneeze etiquette, and be satisfied with actively doing that.
- 3. Feed positivity and thankfulness.** They are the antidote to fear). See the OPPORTUNITIES we have in these days at home and embrace them creatively. Prioritise time reading the Bible to keep an eternal perspective. Practise relaxation and Christian meditation. Take time for deep stillness in God's presence. Take up chances to express care for friends and neighbours.
- 4. Develop routines and structures** in your day and week, to balance work, chores, exercise, relaxation, worship and family fun.
- 5. Focus, focus, focus.** As C.S.Lewis reminds us in *The Screwtape Letters*, we should focus on today and eternity, rather than fearful possibilities for tomorrow. Relax and enjoy this day.

Sue Bartho is a clinical psychologist and cognitive behavioural therapist with extensive experience helping people with anxiety. (Eternity news)



"My coworker at home isn't adhering to social distancing techniques. Please advise."



I have finally finished my panic room! 😂



Grief

THE world's foremost expert on grief, David Kessler, explained to Harvard Business Review how our grief evolves during the turmoil that Covid-19 has brought to our lives.

Kessler applied the well-known stages of grief: "There's denial, which we say a lot of early on: 'This virus won't affect us.' There's anger: 'You're making me stay home and taking away my activities.' There's bargaining: 'Okay, if I social distance for two weeks everything will be better, right?' There's sadness: 'I don't know when this will end.' And finally there's acceptance: 'This is happening; I have to figure out how to proceed.'"

Kessler adds a sixth stage: meaning. He explains: "After acceptance, we need meaning in those darkest hours. And I do believe we can find light in these times."

For the Christian that meaning might be summed up as: 'I am small and helpless but God is great and sovereign. My life is fleeting but God has promised me eternal life through Jesus. This life is hard but doing good and being kind still bring joy.'

From that day on I have known that "I am His and He is mine, forever and forever." I've been through "many dangers, toils and snares" since then, but He's been "with me, with me all the way."

Well, in God's mercy, my life's been comparatively long and I've been privileged to serve Him in undreamt-of ways. I'm glad to be able to sing: "My times are in thy hand; my God, I wish them there; my life, my friends, my soul I leave entirely to thy care." ●

This is abbreviated from a piece in *Eternity News*.
Bob Thomas is editor of *New Life*, an evangelical newspaper in Melbourne. He is a former Moderator-General (national leader) of the Presbyterian Church of Australia

PASTOR Mark Spence gave his Facebook viewers a quick lesson on hope:

I want to talk for just a moment about hope. What is hope? For most people it is crossing your fingers and hoping you get to the other side of this pandemic. I hope I won't get sick or lose my job. I hope I will have enough money to put food on the table. It is a hope in hope, which is no hope at all."

He says that is not what the Bible means by hope. "Thomas Brookes said of true hope that it can see heaven through the thickest clouds. When your eyes are on the Lord it doesn't matter how tumultuous the storm is.

"God is not worried in the midst of this situation. God is the potter and we are the clay. God can do whatever He wants to do. Even this virus must bow before a sovereign God who is not pacing back and forth, who has no sweat on His brow. He is not worried. He is not wondering. He does whatever He wants, whenever He wants, to whomever He

HOPE

wants. He answers to no one. This is the God of the Universe. He is ruling. He is reigning. He is not hopeless.

He is not helpless.

"My God is in heaven. He is on His throne and is not thrown for a loop about what is going to happen. He is not worried. He does not even blink His eye to this."

Christian hope, according to Hebrews 6:19 in the Bible, is called 'an anchor of the soul, firm and secure'. It is unshifting in the storms of life. Nothing happens except what God allows and the Christian is the person who knows and trusts God's character such that they realise that God only allows what is perfectly placed and strategically timed for our good and His glory. God knows what He is doing. Christians do not look to hope itself, they look to Christ Jesus who is their hope.

"I do not need to worry about tomorrow because He is already there," Mark reminds us. ●

I am old but I am not afraid

BY BOB THOMAS

I'm not afraid to die: I say this as someone who's in a precarious situation as the coronavirus closes in, being 75 years old, having type two diabetes, being obese, having high blood pressure (thankfully controlled by medication), having arrhythmia, the Leyden factor in my blood, but controlled with warfarin – and probably a few other things as well.

And I could say this ever since the last day of the 1959 Billy Graham Crusade, when I was 15 years old. That was the "Happy day that fixed my choice on Christ, my Saviour and my God."

It seemed as though Graham was speaking directly to me, only to me, pointing to me, putting his finger on my sin and telling me that there was one, and only one, remedy for sin: "You must repent of your sin; you must put your faith in Christ as your Saviour and Lord; you must trust in His blood shed on Calvary's Cross to atone for your sin! The Bible says: 'The wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life!' Come now. Say 'God I am a sinner. I don't deserve your mercy. But you've shown your mercy in the Lord Jesus Christ, and I put my faith and my trust in Him.'"

Graham intoned. And the rest is history.

Well, in God's mercy, my life's been comparatively long and I've been privileged to serve Him in undreamt-of ways. I'm glad to be able to sing: "My times are in thy hand; my God, I wish them there; my life, my friends, my soul I leave entirely to thy care." ●

This is abbreviated from a piece in *Eternity News*.
Bob Thomas is editor of *New Life*, an evangelical newspaper in Melbourne. He is a former Moderator-General (national leader) of the Presbyterian Church of Australia

We're all exposed

BY SARAH BURNS
(ORIGINALLY POSTED ON FAITHIT.COM)

We've all been exposed. Not necessarily to the virus (maybe...who even knows). We've all been exposed BY the virus.

Corona is exposing us. Exposing our weak sides. Exposing our dark sides. Exposing what normally lays far beneath the surface of our souls, hidden by the invisible masks we wear. Now exposed by the paper masks we can't hide far enough behind.

exposed

Corona is exposing our addiction to comfort. Our obsession with control. Our compulsion to hoard. Our protection of self.

Corona is peeling back our layers. Tearing down our walls. Revealing our illusions. Leveling our best-laid plans.

Corona is exposing the gods we worship: Our health Our hurry Our sense of security. Our favorite lies Our secret lusts Our misplaced trust.

Corona is calling everything into question: What is the church without a building? What is my worth without an income? How do we plan without certainty? How do we love despite risk?

Corona is exposing me. My mindless numbing My endless scrolling My careless words My fragile nerves.

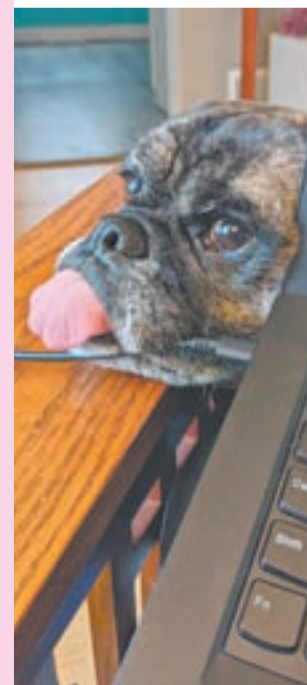
We've all been exposed. Our junk laid bare. Our fears made known. The band-aid torn. The masquerade done.

So what now? What's left? Clean hands Clear eyes Tender hearts.

What Corona reveals, God can heal.

Come, Lord Jesus. Have mercy on us.

Can I help?



Coronaviruses in creation

Does the Covid-19 outbreak support evolution?

BY DR ROBERT CARTER

Coronavirus Covid-19. What are we supposed to think about it? Do viruses support evolution? Can we explain them in a creation context? Can this be part of the 'very good' creation? Hold onto your hats, for I am about to turn what you think about viruses on its head.

Most viruses are beneficial

It comes as a shock to many people when they hear it, but most viruses are good for you and good for the environment. Have you heard that there are as many bacteria in and on your body as there are cells in your body? That is true. But it is also true that you have more viruses in your gut than you have bacteria! In fact, the viral population (called the 'virome') plays an important role in regulating the number and types of bacteria in your body.² Without them, we might be rapidly consumed by the hungry little bacteria that live in our intestines.

Ocean water is another example: it is a highly concentrated bacterial soup that is maintained and balanced by a huge number of viruses.

It also might be a surprise to many to learn that viruses are not, in fact, living things. They are not cells. They are just little machines, and are more like a computer virus than anything else. They contain a little piece of RNA or DNA that hijacks a living cell's mechanisms, much like a malicious piece of code can hijack a computer. This causes the cell to make many copies of the virus, burst the cell, and go on to infect other cells. So viruses cannot be said to 'learn' or 'grow' or 'die', they just disintegrate under certain conditions.

Some viruses are harmful

Although creation scientists believe that everything was created "very good" (Genesis 1), clearly something like Covid-19, which is killing humans, is not good. From a big picture point of view, Christians see all evil and sickness in the world as related to the Fall of mankind, caused by the disobedience of Adam.

You might think viruses killing humans is an argument for evolution. How could that be related to Creation? The answer is really simple: This is a virus that was designed to do something different and it escaped its initial design constraints, either by accidentally jumping to a new species in which it could also live or through a mutation that allowed it to survive in a new species it was not originally designed for.

All species on earth exhibit copying mistakes in their DNA, and they are increasing with every generation. Indeed, each species is slowly devolving, not getting stronger and fitter. Mutations are therefore not an argument for evolution, as they don't improve the instructions for making the 'machinery' of an organism.

Usually, there are checks and balances in how a virus is designed to work. If one of those checks fails, the virus might be able to, for instance, reproduce much faster than it was originally designed to do. This would



Robert Carter

result in disease. Thus, a 'beneficial' virus would turn into a dangerous one. It would just take a few small mutations, like maybe a change in a cellular recognition factor that prevents the host cells from detecting, and therefore regulating, the virus.

Viruses, like Covid-19, that jump species are especially dangerous. Viruses that jump between species are called zoonotics. We have lots of evidence for zoonotic viruses, including influenza,³ the coronavirus family (Covid-19, SARS, and MERS⁴), and HIV (the virus that causes AIDS). All of these cause disease in humans. Some of them have persisted in the human population for a very long time.

Happily, however, many new viruses burn themselves out. As they multiply, they pick up mutations, and sometimes those mutations will weaken them to the point where they are no longer transmitted. This is not always the case, though, and some viruses, like HIV or the human cold virus (yet another coronavirus), can continue to propagate despite picking up mutations. It depends on many different factors and no two viruses are alike.

By God's good design humans are often able to build up an immunity to diseases caused by viruses and that is why vaccines work. A mother also passes antibodies to her children through the placenta and breastmilk. The problem with Covid-19 is that it is a 'novel' coronavirus that nobody has been exposed to before and therefore no one has any antibodies to it. That is why, until a vaccine is developed, the only way to 'fight' it is to avoid spreading it.

The initial creation had no disease, yet diseases have arisen over the past 6,000 years. There is no reason not to expect another viral contagion to not appear in the future. This is not a reason to fear, but it should help us to soberly assess our sometimes tenuous position on this earth.

We have created all sorts of safety nets to prevent the spread of infection and the world is beginning to react

more swiftly to emerging threats. Quarantines, hand washing, and vaccinations are all part of that strategy. And the scientific community has responded very quickly to the latest crisis. In a short time, multiple gene sequences for the virus were completed and posted to public databases and electron microscopes produced pictures of what we were dealing with. The speed of this was unprecedented.

The future of Covid-19

If this outbreak follows the course of previous ones, the coronavirus might burn itself out. This is apparently what happened to the human H1N1 influenza virus that swept across the world in 1917, killing millions of people. It lasted for 40 years before disappearing. It was reintroduced from a stored laboratory sample in 1976 and lasted another 33 years before disappearing again during the 2009–2010 swine H1N1 pandemic, which was also not a particularly lethal virus. The later versions did not have the lethal nature of the earlier ones, and the fact that the human H1N1 could not persist in the human population is good evidence that it was undergoing genetic entropy. In fact, the virus was picking up over 14 mutations per year while it was active and more than 10% of its genome had mutated before it went extinct.⁵ This also matched previously published computer simulations.⁶

But the coronavirus is not the flu, we cannot wait decades for genetic entropy to take its toll. Infection models are applied science, and we need to listen to the expert advice we are being given. We also need to do our civic, and Biblical, duty to protect others and ourselves from infection.

Conclusions

Viruses are part of God's created order. We can see that many of them play beneficial roles. Yet, we live in a sin-cursed world with much suffering, death, and disease. God has not promised us long life, nor good health. But He has promised to redeem this sin-cursed world and our disease-wracked bodies. So the hope of Christianity is not ultimately in

vaccines or cures, but in complete healing and wholeness on the other side of death.

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Dr Robert Carter has a BSc in Applied Biology from the Georgia Institute of Technology and a PhD in Marine Biology from the University of Miami. He is currently a senior scientist and speaker for CMI-USA in Atlanta, Georgia, and is researching human genetics and other issues related to biblical creation.

Believe it or Not

Soap is your best weapon

EVEN THOUGH scientists have yet to find a vaccine or cure for Covid-19, to protect yourself from infection, apart from a face mask, a common bar of soap is one of your best weapons.

More effective than hard-to-find hand sanitizer and better for the environment and your body than bleach, lathering up with soap, if done properly, is your best weapon in the fight against the deadly pathogen.



This was confirmed by Pall Thordarson, a professor of chemistry at the University of New South Wales, Sydney, writing for *The Guardian* recently.¹

"So why does soap work so well on the Sars-CoV-2, the coronavirus and indeed most viruses? The short story: because the virus is a self-assembled nanoparticle in which the weakest link is the lipid (fatty) bilayer. Soap dissolves the fat membrane and the virus falls apart like a house of cards and dies – or rather, we should say it becomes inactive as viruses aren't really alive.

"Alcohol-based products, which pretty much includes all 'disinfectant' products, contain a high-percentage alcohol solution (typically 60–80% ethanol) and 'kill' viruses in a similar fashion. But soap is better because you only need a fairly small amount of soapy water, which, with rubbing, covers your entire hand easily. Whereas you need to literally soak the virus in ethanol for a brief moment, and wipes or rubbing a gel on the hands does not guarantee that you soak every corner of the skin on your hands effectively enough.

"So, soap is the best, but do please use alcohol-based sanitiser when soap is not handy or practical."

However, using soap effectively includes washing your hands often and for at least 20 seconds, making sure to wash every part of your hands, and drying them on a clean cloth or paper towel, not your jeans!

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BUILDING BETTER RELATIONSHIPS

Mother's Day in a time of coronavirus

BY ROB FURLONG

Mother's Day, as with many other celebrations in 2020, will be very different to previous years!

With that in mind, and given our current social restrictions, how can you all enjoy the day together, without driving each other crazy?

Here are some suggestions:

Take a walk in the park! Unlike some countries which are in total lock down, we are fortunate to still be able to enjoy our parks and other areas as families. Observe the social distancing rules if others are around, but there is no need to stay completely cooped up in the house all day! A short walk in the park, taking in the beauty of creation revives the soul. (Mums - because it is your day, ask

the family to let you take a walk on your own!)

Make the most of technology. Many of you will have family members in different parts of the country or state. This does not mean you cannot enjoy each other's company! Set up a FaceTime or Messenger chat while you are all around the dinner table, wherever you are. We did this over the recent Easter holiday period with our own family. Despite being in different parts of Australia we were still able to hold our family tradition of telling the Easter story and rolling our Easter eggs off the table! Technology is another blessing - all it requires is that we be a little creative with it.

A word to Dads and kids - **give Mum the whole day off - really!** Everyone is working hard in this interesting time we find ourselves in, but chances are that Mums are carrying a greater than usual load. For example, most of them didn't expect to become school teachers overnight!

I once heard a lady describe Mother's Day quite cynically as being a day "Where they give you a thank you

card and then pack you off back to the kitchen!" Don't let your wife or mum feel like that this Mother's Day.

Give her a real break. Breakfast in bed. Cook lunch. Do the clean-up afterwards. In short, spoil her for the whole day!

And if you really want to make an impact, make this a regular part of your life, not just on Mother's Day!

Live in the present. In other words, don't mope about what might have been - enjoy the day you have been given and mine the blessings from it!

The Apostle Paul found himself in the middle of extremely trying circumstances, chained to a Roman soldier while under house arrest in Rome, yet he was still able to share the Gospel effectively and in ways he never imagined; write letters to a number of churches and above all, know the deep joy of Jesus in spite of it all.

Discover the joy in the day, indeed, in every day, and receive the gifts God has for you. The current state of the world can leave us feeling "chained" to our homes and circumstances, but we need not be!

I am discovering more and more that joyful people are big picture

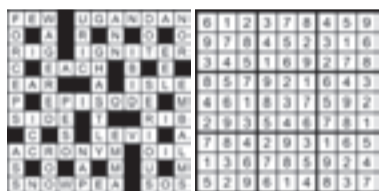


people who can look beyond their circumstances to see what God is doing and who are able to live in the present, enjoying God, His presence and the people He has placed in their lives.

Quite simply, your enjoyment of Mother's Day this year will come down to the choice you make - will you bemoan the fact it is not like other years or will you see the potential in it? One author describes this type of choice for us:

"Happy people do not depend on excitement and 'fun' supplied by externals. They enjoy the... simple things of life...they waste no time...(yearning) for yesterday or tomorrow. They savour the moment, glad to be alive, enjoying...their families, the good things around them. They are adaptable (and) adjust to the changes in their times."

Make Mother's Day 2020 your best one yet!



How can I become a Christian?

Anyone can gain the eternal life offered though Jesus Christ

We read in God's word: "God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16)

OUR PROBLEM: Separation from God
"Everyone has sinned. Nobody is good enough because God's standards are perfect" (Romans 3:23)

ADMIT

GOD'S REMEDY / SOLUTION: Jesus died on the cross
"God demonstrates His own love for us in this; while we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8)

BELIEVE

OUR RESPONSE: Trust Jesus by receiving Him
"To all who received Him, to those who believed in His name, He gave the right to become children of God" (John 1:12)

COMMIT

Here is an example of how you can pray.

Dear Father in Heaven. I come to you now because I want to be saved. Please, forgive me of my sins. I believe that you sent your Son Jesus Christ to die for me and that you have raised him from the dead. I now ask Jesus Christ to come into my life as my Saviour and Lord. Take control of my life. Please make me the person You created me to be. In Jesus Christ's name. Amen

The Lord Jesus says: "I tell you the truth. Everyone who believes in me has eternal life." (John 6:47). He gives life of a wonderful quality that continues forever.

AS A NEXT STEP:

If you prayed the above prayer, tick this box



I have prayed this prayer.

- Please send me:
- Bible
 - Some 'starting off' literature
 - Information on a helpful church

If you have NOT prayed the prayer at this stage, tick this box



I would like to think about this.

- Please send me:
- More information as I am inquiring about being a Christian.
 - I have a problem (see attached letter)

* Please tick and write clearly *

Name

Address

Phone

Age and occupation (it helps)

Challenge Literature Fellowship
PO Box 978, Cloverdale WA 6985

Fax (08) 9453 3006 or email
info@challengenews.org

All overseas enquiries are referred onto someone in their own country

Ask Y: Peter Meadows answers your questions about God

QUESTION: If God is so powerful and loving, why doesn't he just stop all the suffering in the world?

IF you see a child with a sharp object you take it away. If a truck is about to mow them down you snatch them to safety. Why doesn't God do the same? And my answer is that He could - but think what would be the outcome.

God could program people never to make mistakes or behave badly. But do you want to live on a whole planet full of android types like "Data" from *Star Trek*? What bliss! What perfection! "I'm sorry sir, I just can't help being good and serving others all the time. It's all I'm programmed to do!"

This powerful God could also remove all evil from the Earth, if that's the way he wanted to play it. But do you fancy living in a place like Seahaven, the TV-location-city featured in the Jim Carrey film *The Truman Show*? This controlled environment was populated by people pushing baby carriages, riding bicycles, and cleaning their spotless houses. And all presided over by a watchful benevolent 'god'—the producer.

For everyone in Seahaven, except Truman, this was adequate—because they were actors. But Truman wasn't scripted by the cosmic producer. He was a real, living human with needs and desires and frustrations, which eventually made him yearn to break out of the perfect world.

We can't have it both ways. Either we will be in Seahaven performing to someone else's script, or on a planet where we are allowed the dignity of choice. And once we get to choose, sometimes we will choose harm—to ourselves and to others.

Or God could snuff out anyone who may cause suffering to another. Great idea—and we all have our own list of where He should start. But to eradicate all pain we couldn't stop there. The axe would have to fall on all who had or could—intentionally or accidentally—cause anyone to suffer.

Do you know what that means? We'd all be on the "snuff" list.

Even so, you may still be saying, "I don't understand why God allows suffering." But what if there is no way we could ever understand. What if God wants to provide answers but they are way beyond our ability to understand?

Every normal child reaches the "why?" stage. And time and again the adult has the answer—but the child's vocabulary, intellect and experience deny him/her the capacity to understand the answer.

Could that be how it is on some of the issues of suffering? That God would love to let us in on the answers but we don't have the capacity to deal with them?



Lessons from a sausage dog (Part 1)

BY JODY BENNETT

WHEN we walk our sausage dog Carrie in the nearby park in the afternoon I am struck not only by the wide variety of different types of dogs that people own, but by the different relationships they seem to have with them.

Some dogs are so nervous and untrusting it is clear they have been abused some time in their past - though usually not by the kind person walking them now. They cower and shy away from any attempt at contact and seem afraid of their own shadow.

Some dogs are very well disciplined and heel or sit on command like a police dog, but they are unfriendly to others and seem to have a master-servant relationship with their owners, well aware of who the boss is and of the consequences of not obeying.

Then there are dogs that are pulling on the leash, struggling to get away, that can only be controlled by manipulation or force. Their relationship with their master is a constant power-struggle.

Finally, I see dogs like Carrie who are so devoted to their masters that they don't even need a leash, they follow obediently. They may wander off a bit for a smell here or there but they come as soon as they are called and they are anxious to keep their master in sight.



It struck me that those relationships mirror people's relationships with God.

Some people are so afraid of God striking them down as soon as they put a foot wrong, usually because of some poor example or teaching they've had in the past. The whole concept of God scares them and they are sure He is out to get them.

Others try to obey all the rules and do all the right things but their relationship with God is not one of love but of duty. God is their master, not their Dad or friend.

Some people say they are Christians but will try to get away with as much as they can when they think no one is looking and their desires constantly rail against the restrictions they feel God imposes.

The relationship true Christianity teaches is that God is a loving father who we can trust and wants the best for us. He is someone we can follow with confidence and be so devoted to that we never want to lose sight of Him; in whose lap we can curl up and find peace.

If you doubt that this is really possible, the Bible makes it clear: "For those who are led by the Spirit of God are the children of God. The Spirit you received does not make you slaves, so that you live in fear again; rather, the Spirit you received brought about your adoption to sonship. And by him we cry, 'Abba [Aramaic for Daddy], Father. The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children.'" (Romans 8:14-16).

Ruwan Kalpage says handing his life over to God has made all the difference.



Cricket coach finds contentment

Ruwan Kalpage is former Sri Lankan cricketer who played in the 1992 Cricket World Cup. He coaches Sri Lanka and Bangladesh at the national level.

The experience which I am about to relate occurred a few years ago. When I went to service my car, I met an ex-colleague. Although we had never chatted before, there became an appointed time in my life for this person to talk to me.

My life was centred on two things: cricket and religion. From the age of nine, I was very interested in cricket, as my father was a reputed cricketer. My childhood dreams were fulfilled when I was selected to represent Sri Lanka in the Test team.

I was brought up in a religious background that demanded strict compliance of rituals and discipline. I followed religious observances and lived a life I thought was good and correct. But while playing cricket, I indulged in many vices I thought were normal. I did not feel bad about these things.

My cricket career had many ups and downs. I played in the 1992 World Cup tournament but then was subsequently dropped from the team in 1996. I knew it was not going to be easy to make a comeback to the team in the future with the tough competition among players.

Suddenly this disappointment became an appointment for me. The person I met at the service station had the same background as me. He began to talk about a God who was close to him; he said we are created by this God who loves us. Further, I was told God could rule over my life and change things for me.

At this point of time in my life, my family life was not in the best of shape. I had a lot of misunderstandings and arguments with my wife. All of this, as well as career disappointments, were making me very frustrated. When I heard there was a God who loved me, cared for me and understood what I was going through, it surprised me. This person also told me this God who created the universe had also sent

His Son Jesus to live and die for me.

After hearing about this God and His Son, Jesus Christ, I knew my life was not on the right path. I decided to change my life and hand it over to God so He could lead and rule over me. I was going through a difficult patch in life, but when I opened my heart to God, it turned out to be the best decision ever in my life.

Life hasn't been the same since. I feel I have rediscovered it. God changed every aspect of my life. I was called back to the Sri Lankan team after two years and once again, I represented Sri Lanka at the World Cup, the 1999 tournament in the UK. Furthermore, my family life was also restored.

I now have satisfaction as I live with joy and peace with my wife, and I've been blessed with a daughter and son. I do not feel frustrated when things become tough or go wrong. I know there is God who walks with me. I know it is Jesus

who changed my life and gave me a new direction. If not for Jesus, my life would be a disaster.

I retired from cricket in 2000, and for the last 18 years I've been an international coach, travelling all over the world. Cricket does not control my life anymore. My trust is in the Lord Jesus who made all things new for me. I know He came to this world to give life abundantly.

Today, I urge you to turn your life to Jesus and experience the miracle of a new life – one full of joy, peace and contentment. Jesus says, "Come to Me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest" (Matthew 11:28). Put your trust in the living God; He will never put you to shame. He is the same yesterday, today and forever. We can be victorious in Him.

Ruwan's favourite Bible verse is Proverbs 3:5-6, "Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways submit to Him, and He will make your paths straight."

This story first appeared in the Sport Go Magazine. Used with kind permission.



Jean Paul Duminy playing for Barbados Tridents, looks back to see his bails fly, bowled by Dwayne Smith of Jamaica Tallawahs during match 20 of the Hero Caribbean Premier League at Kensington Oval on September 23, 2019 in Bridgetown, Barbados. (Photo Randy Brooks - CPL T20/CPL T20 via Getty Images)

HELP WHEN LIFE GETS IN A SPIN

South African cricketer Jean Paul Duminy, known as J.P., has made quite a name for himself as a left-handed batsman and right-handed off-spin bowler. Having grown up in the Western Cape of South Africa, he currently plays for both his home team, the Cape Cobras, and the South African national team.

It all started when I was a young boy of eight years old, playing for the Strandfontein Cricket Club – I fell in love with the game of cricket. While I enjoyed the game immensely, it was my dad who believed I had the talent to represent my country one day. At the age of 17, I received my first professional contract with the Western Province.

I have always been incredibly blessed to have such amazing family, friends and coaches as my support structures. But it was in 2012, when I snapped my Achilles, that I truly grew in my reliance on and personal faith in Christ Jesus.

This crucial time in my life was even more significant for my spiritual walk. He put some really good friends around me who guided me through my journey of getting to know who Christ really is and understanding what He did for me on the cross at Calvary.

A verse in the book of Galatians has been a real encouragement to me which says; "I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the

Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me." – Galatians 2:20.

Since that time, my drive is to be the best I can be in my sport in order to honour God with the talent He's given me. I want to glorify Him and His name through every little thing I do.

There are huge expectations that come with being a professional athlete, and because of those expectations we can become desperate at times. This career might look easy, but with the amount of time and energy we as professional cricketers invest in our sport, we face certain challenges every day. Throughout the years, I've learned that there is only so much I can do in my own strength. After that, it's all about leaving it in God's hands.

I am nothing without Christ.

None of my successes would have been possible without Him. We are all fallen creatures and that's why Christ died for us. My identity is not found in how anyone else labels me, it's found in who He says I am.

At the end of my life, I want to be remembered as someone who, like Christ, gave his all at all times, who loved people, who was compassionate to the needs of others, and who always had a servant attitude.

J.P.'s favourite Bible verse comes from Romans 8:28, "And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love Him, who have been called according to His purpose."

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