

InterSections



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InterSections is available free in PDF format or at AUD\$22 (incl GST) per year for 4 print issues.

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Top right photo: Kate Jennings and her son Eli.

Top left photos: MSOBS Lectureship.

Editorial

Welcome to the August 2015 issue of *InterSections*.

This issue has a loose theme which focuses on suffering. Our *Feature* article by Dale Hartman explores the paradox that Christians can be joyful in the midst of suffering. In the *Food for Thought* section, John Wiegand, editor of a well-known hymnal, reviews the hymn, 'In The Hour of Trial'. The lyrics of this hymn offer hope when circumstances seem harsh. For our *Interview*, Joan Thomas has a conversation with Carol Offer, a Christian sister who has experienced more than her fair share of health challenges – and yet praises God for the good he has done in her life.

We also publish an *International Letter* from Chris Miller in New Zealand. Chris reflects on the importance of Christians being a source of refreshment for fellow Christians. For our *ChurchScope*, Keith Thomson tells us about the Armadale Church of Christ in Western Australia. In our *Book Review* section, Christian Bargholz describes one of his favourite books, *Mere Christianity* by C.S. Lewis. First published six decades ago, this short classic continues to be read by many. Finally, our *News* section offers updates of a mission trip to Papua New Guinea, the MSOBS annual lectureship in Sydney and a new church worker in Melbourne.

We hope you're encouraged by this issue – especially if you're undergoing a season of suffering. May you be strengthened to continue your walk with the Lord.

The *InterSections* editorial team.

ChurchScope

Armadale Church of Christ, Western Australia



The Armadale Church of Christ was established in 1984 by brother Jerry Cutter. Jerry was sent here by the N.W. 21st Street Church of Christ in Oklahoma City, USA, a congregation which uses one cup for the Sunday communion. Jerry had originally been working in Kalgoorlie and had moved down to the Perth area to start a new work. Jerry and his wife Pat met in their home for worship for a few weeks whilst meeting with various people and trying to make contacts. They met the Hosking family from Armadale and after studying with them for awhile they asked Jerry to baptise them both into Christ. Jerry then looked for a location to hold services in Armadale.

The city of Armadale is about 20 km southeast of Perth. It was originally a farming community with many orchards around. Since then it has grown to one of the larger regional centres of Perth with a population of about 76,000. There is a lot of development around and new localities are springing up and bringing a large number of new people.

The brethren started meeting in various buildings, sometimes having to move each week to make way for different sporting activities. They then began to meet in the Armadale Town Lesser Hall which gave us a more fixed location. We worshipped there for several years before moving on to other council buildings.

While having our own building would certainly be very convenient, we comfort ourselves with the realisation that the first century church met in members' homes and other venues.

In 1992 we moved to our current location, the Armadale Community Family Centre. Since that time we have rented a room for our morning and evening worship services on each Sunday. We have looked into the possibility of purchasing our own building several times, but each time the decision was made to use our available funds for evangelistic endeavours. While having our own building would certainly be very convenient, we comfort ourselves with the realisation that the first century church met in members' homes and other venues.

The brethren at the 21st Street congregation continued to assist us, sending a number of evangelists to help. These included Bruce Word, Glen Osburn and David Stands. Each of these men moved to Australia to live with their families, staying between two and three years and helping the church to grow spiritually and numerically. In 1988 the Armadale church appointed me, Keith Thomson, as an evangelist and I have had the privilege of working here on and off since.

The Armadale church has been involved in evangelistic activity in the Mandurah and Rockingham areas south of Perth. We have also helped send finances and preachers overseas. The locations have included Malaysia, Russia, as well as Malawi and Tanzania. We are currently focusing on the wheatbelt town of Narrogin, about 200 km southeast of Perth, working to establish a faithful congregation there.

We are also seeking to reach out to the church Australia wide. The brethren in Armadale continue to use one unbroken loaf and one cup in the communion. We typically have around 30 in attendance on Sundays. There remains a lot of work to do and we are dedicated to continuing on the Lord's work – locally, nationally and internationally.

'Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.'
(Matthew 28:19–20 NAS95) ■



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Art & Design: Gekko Graphics / H.M.Cox igekko.com.au
Publisher: Klesis Institute www.klesis.com.au
Email: info@klesis.com.au **Fax:** +61 3 8677 9575

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International Letter

Ministry of Refreshment – Chris Miller, New Zealand



I believe we have all experienced the phone call, email, SMS, Facebook message, or visit that comes at just the right time to cheer us. They're even more special when they come when we're undergoing 'the dark night of the soul' – times in our lives when we experience a deep sense of loneliness or discouragement, or periods of depression and isolation. Such periods can be a result of illness, family issues, marriage struggles, financial burdens or ministry setbacks.

On those dark times, how we value and cherish the call that comes, the email that arrives, the heartfelt card that's delivered, or the knock at the door when a brother or sister arrives with a listening ear and wise counsel, to share principles from the Bible or pray with us. Though they may not take away the problem, their words refresh us.

The older I get the more I enjoy 2 Timothy. It's a dungeon letter, and as theologian Handley Moule (1841-1920) once stated, 'It's hard to read 2 Timothy and not have a little mist gathering around the eyes.' Paul was on death row, 'suffering hardship even to imprisonment as a criminal' (2 Timothy 2:9). He had been arrested and was placed in a dark, damp, filthy, cold dungeon in Rome. He was experiencing a dark night of the soul.

Paul had expected brethren to turn up to encourage and strengthen him. But that was not to be. He writes, 'all who are in Asia turned away from me' (1:15). And, 'at my first defense no one supported me, but all deserted me' (4:6). The great apostle Paul, who had served the church tirelessly, was experiencing some great disappointments in his last days.

But when the whole world seemed to have gone awry, that's when God often has that one individual who comes in with the ministry of refreshment. The Scriptures speak of a brother or sister who is 'born for adversity' (Proverbs 17:17). This was the case in Paul's life. That brother was Onesiphorus: 'The Lord grant mercy to the house of Onesiphorus for he often refreshed me' (2 Timothy 1:16). When Christians were fleeing Rome to escape Nero's hand, Onesiphorus was called by God to stay in Rome because an ageing apostle on death row needed some refreshment and encouragement. The word 'refreshed' is *anapsucho*, which means 'to breathe on', 'to cool off' or 'to treat with fresh air'. In other words, Onesiphorus was like a breath of fresh air to an ageing apostle about to die.

Being in ministry for over 30 years, I've experienced some dark nights of the soul. Sometimes, it appeared that everyone was getting out but me. Other times family problems seemed insurmountable. Or times when my Lymes

disease was particularly unbearable. There were other times when loneliness hovered and I despaired over what the future had in store for my wife, Melinda, and me. But it's also been at those times that I've found God's presence in ways I had never experienced before. It was often the encouraging and strengthening words of a brother or sister that refreshed me beyond measure.

These moments, and learning that other church leaders and members have had similar experiences, have made me cherish this ministry of refreshment. It's especially needed among our churches in New Zealand, Australia and the Pacific Islands because often we're isolated and removed from each other. So now I have as a goal and focus the development of this ministry of refreshment. It has many facets to it. It includes being a listening ear, mentoring, preaching and teaching, resourcing, encouraging church plants, and strengthening and encouraging existing churches – as Paul did in Acts 15:21-22.



Let me recount one instance. Some time ago, I visited the church in Tonga with David Austin. Alani and Mele None, who were 2001 graduates from the South Pacific Bible College in Tauranga, New Zealand, work with a small congregation of about 35 people in the Tongan capital, Nuku Alofa. They're on a remote island, with no other congregations for hundreds of kilometres. When we arrived, we had the joy of bringing gifts from New Zealand brethren to this family. It was a thrill to see the joy on the faces of this couple and their five children.

While we were there we got to see their new church building that brethren had contributed to help build. Unfortunately they did not have water or electricity connected as such

services were too expensive for them. So we went to the local electricity and water company and paid to have these services connected. That evening, Alani and Mele stated that this was a miracle in Tonga – it normally takes months to get utility services to be connected. So God was using us in his work. To be there as ministers of refreshment and witness Alani and Mele's joy was so very humbling.

I recently had the pleasure of baptising Alani and Mele's daughter, Ofa, into Christ. Please pray for her and another Tongan girl, Lovely, who are both attending South Pacific Bible College. We still need to raise money for their support for 2015 and 2016.

My encouragement for all of us is to be available to be used by God as ministers of refreshment. Let's be available to come into the lives of those who are struggling in order to encourage and strengthen. Let's be that breath of fresh air for them. ■

Chris Miller is an evangelist. He and his wife, Melinda, are based at the Otumoetai Church of Christ in Tauranga, New Zealand. millbo5@xtra.co.nz



Feature

Joy in the Midst of Suffering



One of the greatest paradoxes of New Testament teaching is that Christians can be joyful in the midst of suffering. From a purely physical perspective, this seems to be totally out of touch with reality. Or impossible.

Several Bible passages speak of joy and trials in the same context. James admonishes his readers to 'consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds' (James 1:2). Paul speaks of the suffering which he encountered in his ministry and asserts that, even when he is sorrowful, he is rejoicing (2 Corinthians 6:10). Christ approached his upcoming death knowing the joy set before him and was thus able to scorn the shame associated with death on a cross (Hebrews 12:2).

Like me, you may think that the idea of being joyful in suffering is easier to read about rather than live out. You're exactly right! There are principles and truths in Scripture that on their first examination seem difficult, if not unnatural. That's part of the reason that many people will never 'get it'; they can't completely understand who we are in Christ.

Here are some observations about this challenging concept. Firstly, being joyful in our trials is a learned spiritual response to our times of suffering. Paul spoke of his journey towards contentment by saying, 'I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation...' (Philippians 4:13). Paul was not content because that was his natural temperament; contentment was developed by learning to trust God, leaning on God's power and choosing to follow God's will in each circumstance. In the same way, being joyful in our trials is also a learned response. Many people go through life merely reacting rather than responding. Christians can learn to rejoice in their trials – instead of moaning, whining or blaming others for their state in life.

Secondly, joyful Christians learn to focus on spiritual realities rather than the physical pain created by suffering. The apostles were beaten for preaching the Gospel. They rejoiced that they were counted worthy to suffer for Christ (Acts 5:41). Paul and Silas were also imprisoned. Luke tells us that at midnight they were praying and singing hymns to God (Acts 16:25). I'm not saying that we'll be oblivious to the physical pain that is causing our suffering. I'm saying that in the midst of that pain we can also focus on a higher spiritual reality. This is a joy that emanates from a strongly held conviction rather than an emotional reaction to circumstances.

Thirdly, suffering is one way God uses to develop character. Paul said to the Christians in Rome, 'we rejoice in our suffering knowing that suffering produces perseverance, perseverance produces character and character produces hope...and hope does not disappoint us' (Romans 5:3-4). It's normally easier to identify this process of character development in hindsight rather than when we're in it. However, as time goes by, we may look back and reflect on how God used a time of suffering to refine a greater purity or a greater consistency in our character.

Fourthly, all Christians should comprehend a sobering reality about the role of suffering in the life of our Lord. 'Although he was a Son, he learned obedience through the things he suffered and once made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him' (Hebrews 5:8). Even though he was sinless all his life, Jesus learned an increased obedience to and dependence upon his Father through the process of suffering. He didn't go through life feeling he was self-sufficient and all powerful. As God's Son, he learned through the things he suffered. We should all remember that our eternal salvation was secured through the agonising travail of his soul (Isaiah 53:11). If there were no suffering on Jesus' part, there would have been no salvation.

If you're thinking that I'm suggesting we should be turning cartwheels of joy in the midst of suffering, I have left the wrong impression. In the midst of suffering we often don't know and are not able to see where this suffering is leading to or what God is doing. However, neither should we live in gloomy despair as we suffer. Instead, we should trust God to walk with us through the suffering.

In the midst of a catalogue of extreme physical suffering, Paul could state that he rejoiced (2 Corinthians 6:4-10). This rejoicing was possible because of the spiritual reality that overcame the discomfort of Paul's physical pain. He realised, as Peter did, that 'Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example that you should walk in his steps' (1 Peter 2:20-24). The potential for suffering saints to identify with their crucified Christ during times of personal pain will remain for each of us until Jesus returns to earth to call us home. ■

Dale Hartman and his wife, Sheila, and their family spent a decade as missionaries in Sydney. He currently works as an evangelist and elder with the Eastside Church of Christ, Oklahoma City, USA. dale.hartman@gmail.com



Our team left Brisbane on 20 June for the Waria Valley in Papua New Guinea.

The team consisted of Stephen Collins – group leader (Warwick, Queensland), David Payne (Melbourne), Damien Bissett (Burnie, Tasmania), Jannah Hoopmann and me (Brisbane). We were joined in Lae, PNG, by Wesley Wosse, his wife Tupolin, and Joe Dobadoba. Steve and David have been to PNG several times before. It was wonderful to see the reception they received wherever we went. Our PNG hosts took us newbies straight into their hearts too. There's a genuine love and fellowship with the people we visited.



After a few days in Lae we flew to Kira. Our reception was overwhelming. Many Christian brothers and sisters had come to carry our cargo. They were lined up along the airstrip. From Kira we walked several hours to Orouba village. The way was muddy, steep and rocky but the villagers helped us every step of the way. They even went ahead and cut steps into the hillside to help us. It was a great lesson for me as I learnt that I had to truly submit to God and throw pride out the window – I definitely could not have trekked it alone. The welcome was again heartwarming, with singing that could be felt, not just heard.

Both David and Stephen taught lessons while I taught a ladies' class. David and Stephen spoke with the evangelists and villagers and delivered lessons on what was needed most. Tupolin, Wes and Joe translated for us. Jannah ran a clinic for wound dressings (the worst was an axe injury). For a young lady, Jannah was calm and reassuring. She was a real favourite with the young folks and children.

A few days later we walked to Aroba. Again people had gone ahead to prepare the track. At the mountain top we were greeted with roasted corn, a log seat and trees cut for shade. The villagers' care for us was humbling. They taught me much about having a servant heart. In Aroba we made a special delivery: Stephen had brought the ashes of Tom and Rens Bunt – longtime PNG missionaries – to be buried in Aroba where they had lived many years before. Tom never lost his love of PNG and this was his final request. After four nights in Aroba we walked to Asama village where a house had been built for us. Again, their preparations for us was mind-blowing.

During this mission trip 23 people were baptised. The work that local evangelists did with few resources was amazing. We were pleased to bring songbooks, Bibles and other resources. None of this would have been possible without financial support from Christians in Australia. The PNG Christians asked us to convey their thanks. So thanks for your prayers for our mission! Please continue to pray for the 23 new Christians, the evangelists and the churches there. ■

Gillian Johnson, The Point Church, Brisbane, Queensland. gilliansbears@yahoo.com.au

MSOBS Lectureship (photos also - front page)

The annual Macquarie School of Biblical Studies lectureship was held from 8–12 July 2015. The theme was 'Aiming for Perfection'. Highlights for me included the children's depiction of David fighting Goliath and the singing led by Jules Cseszko. Other highlights included: Ben Bray's graduation ceremony, the attendance of teenagers from the Canberra church and the wonderful work of many women who ensured that no-one went hungry! We had a strong attendance throughout with 60 to 100+ people.



Dale Hartman was the key speaker delivering four lessons. He used the example of the church at Ephesus to show us the dangers of wolves in the flock. He urged us to be wise as serpents and innocent as doves. Dale spoke about the importance of growing in Christ and not giving up – especially as we near home. In another lesson Dale discussed the concept of the Godhead using the example of three blind men describing an elephant by what part of the animal they felt. He also encouraged us to be like Christ and to wash dishes as Jesus washed feet. In his final lesson, Dale shared how we were chosen in Christ and equipped to do Jesus' work. In this work, part of our strengthening comes by enduring suffering. Finally, he said that we can serve God increasingly as we mature, though often in different ways compared to our youth.

There were other speakers including: Bob Marks, Frank Cunningham, David Carr, Les Totman, Marvin Ancell, Brett Christensen, Stephen Males, Kim Frank, Sharon Kelly, Monica Grant and Pam Paull. The lectureship was a tremendous time of encouragement and opportunity for growth. Thanks to Ted Paull and Peter Tickner for their work behind the scenes to make it happen. ■

Stuart Bassett, Macquarie Church of Christ, Sydney, NSW. Stuart.W.Bassett@marsh.com

New church worker in Melbourne

The Heidelberg West Church of Christ in Melbourne is excited at having an additional worker, Roberto Quintanilla, to serve the kingdom community throughout Victoria. After serving the Kurrajong Church of Christ, NSW, for the past four years, Roberto made the move to Melbourne in mid-July. Supported mainly by sister Victorian churches, he will be spending substantial time each month visiting congregations in Melbourne and regional Victoria. Roberto also hopes to bring the youth and young adults from sister congregations together to foster better relationships and strengthen their faith. Having lived in Chile for 10 years, Roberto is using his fluent Spanish to reach out to other Spanish speakers (there are already two Spanish-speaking Christians from Colombia attending the Belmore Road church). In coming months we also hope to see him helping Christians establish a new congregation in the Gippsland area. The Heidelberg West church asks you to keep Roberto in your prayers so that he can be sustained in his ministry as he seeks to bring glory to God. ■



Graham Wall, Heidelberg West Church of Christ, Melbourne, Victoria. gjwall@hotmail.com



Food for Thought

Hymn Review – Singing Through Suffering



'In the Hour of Trial'
Praise for the Lord 328
Hymns of Faith & Praise 767

In the hour of trial,
Jesus, plead for me,
Lest by base denial
I depart from Thee.
When Thou seest me waver,
With a look recall,
Nor for fear or favor
Suffer me to fall.

With forbidden pleasures
Would this vain world charm,
Or its sordid treasures
Spread to work me harm,
Bring to my remembrance
Sad Gethsemane,
Or, in darker semblance,
Cross-crowned Calvary.

Should Thy mercy send me
Sorrow, toil and woe,
Or should pain attend me
On my path below,
Grant that I may never
Fail Thy hand to see;
Grant that I may ever
Cast my care on Thee.

When my last hour cometh,
Fraught with strife and pain,
When my dust returneth
To the dust again,
On Thy truth relying,
Through that mortal strife,
Jesus, take me, dying,
To eternal life.

Lyrics: James Montgomery

'In the Hour of Trial' is a beloved hymn among Christians throughout the world. Its haunting melody is especially effective for *acappella* singing. James Montgomery (1771-1854) wrote the lyrics. He was born in Scotland to Moravian parents, but spent his adult life in England as a member of the Anglican Church. He was chief editor of a daily newspaper and wrote about 400 hymns, of which fewer than 20 are in use today. Interestingly, his other hymns in current use do not reflect an intense interest in the problem of Christian suffering or an absence of joy in this age. In fact, some of his hymns, like 'Hail to the Lord's Anointed', anticipate joy in earthly life.

Spencer Lane (1843-1903), an American, wrote the tune PENITENCE specifically for this hymn. The circumstances of its composition are well known. In 1875, he was serving as the music director of an Episcopal Church in Rhode Island. At the conclusion of Sunday morning worship, the minister gave Lane his hymn requests for that day's evening service. One of the requested hymns was 'In the Hour of Trial'. Lane looked at the tune for this hymn in his hymnbook and concluded that he could write a better tune – which he did that very afternoon while his wife prepared dinner!

Our hymns reflect the message of Scripture that Christians both can and should rejoice, even in the face of the most severe difficulties. Most of our hymns that address suffering urge us to find joy by focusing on both the blessings of this life as well as eternity. For example in 'My Jesus, As Thou Wilt', the believer's experience in this world includes both sorrow and joy, scarcity and plenty. Yet, some hymns call us to endure trials by focusing exclusively on the eternal promise rather than the present hardships.

'In the Hour of Trial' is an example of a hymn that looks exclusively to eternity as a source for joy in the experience of suffering. The experience reflected in this hymn text is particularly intense. Although the first line of the hymn suggests that the period of trial will be limited, the remainder of the hymn text presents the difficulties of life as pervasive and almost overwhelming. In the first stanza, the hymn addresses the circumstance of a trial that brings with it the risk of apostasy. In the second stanza, he moves beyond a concern with this specific situation to consider the temptations of 'forbidden pleasures' and 'sordid treasures'. Rather than applying to a specific situation, these temptations, probably to sexual impurity and materialism, appear to be a continual and permanent presence in life. The third stanza delves deeper into the potential bleakness of this world. From sorrow, toil, woe and pain, this stanza does not extend as far as joy, but does offer the promise that we can cast our cares on Christ (1 Peter 5:7).

Sadly, many hymnbooks truncate the hymn after stanza 3. This is quite unfortunate because stanza 4 ultimately reveals a joyous conclusion. Yet, before the hymn concludes with joy, we must consider not only the struggles of life, but also the pain of death. The hymn writer does not contemplate dying peacefully in his sleep. Having experienced trial, temptation, sorrow, toil, woe and pain in life, Montgomery's expectation of death is a picture of struggle characterised by strife and pain. Only after death is joy realised.

The promise of eternal life is what sustains us when suffering is so pervasive that no suggestion of joy in this world has credibility. For some Christians, the burdens of life (perhaps consequences of sin committed before life in Christ was begun) are, or appear to be, permanent. This hymn speaks assertively that, even the most difficult circumstances – when all hope for deliverance in this life has evaporated – faith speaks with joy from the promise of eternal life. ■

John Wiegand is editor of the hymnal, Praise for the Lord. John frequently runs singing workshops for churches around the world and has been to Australia several times. He is a member of the Pleasant View Church of Christ in suburban San Francisco, California.
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Book Review

Purely, Simply, Christianity

Mere Christianity by C.S. Lewis



First US edition 1952.

We are all told, and rightfully so, never to judge a book by its cover. But if you were to judge this book by its title, you would be rightly vindicated. Because that is its wonderful beauty: as its title perfectly suggests, it is purely, simply (and merely) Christianity. C.S. Lewis writes about a Christianity that is rarely seen and beginning to be lost in a heavily denominated faith and an increasingly agnostic society. He writes of a Christianity stripped of human embellishments and traditions – one that has its roots in logic, rationality, morality, history and (most importantly) the Bible. And that is why, despite the age of his words, C.S. Lewis, through this book, stretches out and speaks to us today just as pertinently as he did to people huddled around wireless sets in Great Britain in the early 1940s.

Mere Christianity is a collection of radio broadcasts given by C.S. Lewis in England for the BBC during the height of the Second World War. The broadcasts were designed to remind people about the fundamental teachings of Christianity. They were made all the more important given the daily traumatic experiences Britons were living through during the war. How poignant must it have been, then, for people suffering through one of humanity's darkest hours to turn on their wireless sets to hear the voice of a man talk about hope; in a time of war to hear about peace; in a time of bloodshed to hear about mercy; in a time of hatred to hear about love.

Mere Christianity is broken up into four sections: Right and Wrong; What Christians Believe; Christian Behaviour; and Beyond Personality. The first section seeks to explain the meaning of the universe and the existence of a 'Higher Being'. Lewis highlights our unique ability to discern what is right from what is wrong, or what he calls the 'Law of Human Nature.' Unlike laws of nature – such as gravity and genetics, which we have no choice but to obey – humans can choose to obey or disobey the Law of Human Nature. Our knowledge of what is right and wrong comes from our knowledge of a greater good, something beyond right and wrong, that deep down each of us has and cannot deny. This greater good is that higher being called God.

The second section expands from the first, explaining our position relative to this higher being and our response to him. If this higher being exists, and if he is God, why should you care? What has he done for you? And what should you do about it?

The third section describes the Christian life. Taking its roots from the first section, it explains the Christian virtues in light of our morality. Lewis writes of each virtue with beautiful simplicity, focusing on what God says regarding the virtues of faith, hope and love.

The final section deals with what Lewis calls 'the science of God', or what we may call theology. This section deals with issues that lie behind the Christian faith that can often be difficult to understand. They include issues such as the Trinity and how we become sons of God. Far from being unimportant, Lewis calls this science of God the road map to greater spiritual understanding and a block in the foundation of Christian faith.

C.S. Lewis, not only through this book but through many of his other writings, has had a profound impact on my faith. He has shown me the way to love God with all of my mind. He has shown me (contrary to what the world tells me) that the Christian is a thinking person, that my faith is not blind but evidence-based, and that instead of being a fairy story that keeps me ignorant, God is the source of clarity, illumination and understanding in every aspect of my life.

For me, the greatest aspect of both this book and its writer is their prescience. What is written speaks equally – if not more powerfully – today than it did at the time of the original broadcasts. And it is for that reason this book and its author are so important. In a world full of skeptics agnostic about all things spiritual, at a time when Christian morals are being questioned and challenged more intensely than ever before, and amongst people whose questions are often insufficiently answered, Lewis' voice speaks with a wonderful gentleness and empathy. His words give clarity, logic and reason at a time of confusion, tension and misunderstanding.

This is a must-read book for any Christian seeking to secure the foundations of their faith amidst an uncertain society. It's ideal for those feeling honestly lost and confused about what they believe and why. It's really is a book written for everyone. Christian and non-Christian. Theist or atheist. Or the just-not-sure. Ultimately, it's a book which – much in the way of the faith after which it is named – does not discriminate. ■

Lewis' voice speaks with a wonderful gentleness and empathy. His words give clarity, logic and reason at a time of confusion, tension and misunderstanding.

*Christian Bargholz is about to complete his university studies and is part of the Eastside Church of Christ in Sydney.
christianbargholz@gmail.com*

Back for the winter in Paradise amongst the Crocodiles!

Carol Offer is a member of the Southeast Church of Christ in Melbourne and the Cairns Church of Christ in Queensland because she and her husband, Graeme, live part of each year in Melbourne and Cairns. Carol and Graeme have been faithful workers for the Lord over many years despite Carol's serious health challenges.

Carol, tell us about where you grew up and your early involvement with the church.

I grew up in Innisfail in far north Queensland. When my sister, Vicky, and I were young, Cam LaSpina taught us the Scriptures. I think we were some of his first contacts when he returned to Innisfail after he was baptised in Sydney by Colin Smith. My mother had grown up in the 'Associated' Church of Christ in Melbourne, and she arranged Bible studies with Cam at our home, and also did a bit of match-making with Cam and Margaret. Cam later baptised me, then my father and my two sisters. The church in Innisfail was small and remote, and I regret that I was not able to have more fellowship with other Christians my age as I grew up. I left home to do nursing training in Townsville, but at that time there was no church meeting there. When I later moved to Brisbane, I was able to meet with the Holland Park church.

You have a very rare medical condition. Can you explain what it is and how long you have been suffering from this condition?

I have chronic intestinal pseudo obstruction (CIPO), which means poor absorption from the small intestine, resulting in diarrhoea and malnutrition. The problems started when I was about 13. For most of my life I was able to manage with diet control, lots of rest and some medication. My condition is so rare that I was once referred to Professor J. E. Lennard-Jones, an eminent gastroenterologist in London and now regarded as the 'Father of Gastroenterology'. Whilst he was very interested in my case, he was unable to help me.

How and where did you and Graeme meet?

After returning from overseas in 1976, I came to Melbourne to study at the Royal Children's Hospital. Graeme and I met at the West Heidelberg church. It's really God's providence at work, because I wanted to study the same course while I was in London, but couldn't get in. So I came home to Australia to do the course in Melbourne. It's a case of 'all things working together for good' and God knows lots of things that we just can't see!

You and Graeme have been instrumental in the Lord's work in several places. Can you share something of your work in the far north and south of Australia?

We went to Traralgon in the Gippsland region of eastern Victoria in the early 1980s. There were two other families meeting as the church there, but they both moved away

soon after. We had to start again, but were able to build the church to around 30 people. Unfortunately, after we moved to Queensland, many in the Traralgon church moved away and some fell away. Our move to Queensland was again God at work. We were able to see the church in Cairns grow from three families to around 35 people. But, more importantly, it provided an opportunity for Graeme to put together a series of Bible studies covering every book of the New Testament (275 studies so far). These Bible studies have gone all over the world. It's really mind blowing to look back and see how God has used us!

In recent years your health issues have become more debilitating. How does this impact on you and Graeme now?

Until about 10 years ago I was able to manage the CIPO with diet and medication. Then things changed and nothing was working. Four years ago, I went through extreme malnutrition and was put on total parenteral nutrition (TPN) – this is an intravenous feed. Now I'm connected to a tube feed for 12 hours every night. It also requires sterile procedures to connect and disconnect. I'm one of about 140 home TPN patients in Australia. I've also been diagnosed with scleroderma which is an auto-immune disease. This has primarily affected my lungs and breathing. I now have very little energy. Graeme is my carer and travelling anywhere requires a lot of planning. But we are able to spend our summers in Victoria (and escape the north Queensland heat) and our winters in Cairns (and escape the cold Victorian winters).

Can you share how the faith which you and Graeme have has helped you both to cope with these challenges in your daily life?

When we look back at our lives we can see the hand of God at work. If I had studied the course in London like I wanted to do, I might not have met Graeme. If it had been up to us, we probably would not have moved to Queensland – but then Graeme wouldn't have written his Bible studies and they wouldn't have gone all over the world. Also, at just the very time that I needed constant care, Graeme was able to retire and provide the care that I needed. We are also able to help the churches in both Victoria and in north Queensland. Praise God for his goodness!



*Carol Offer was interviewed by Joan Thomas, her long-time friend and a member of the Heidelberg West Church of Christ in Melbourne.
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