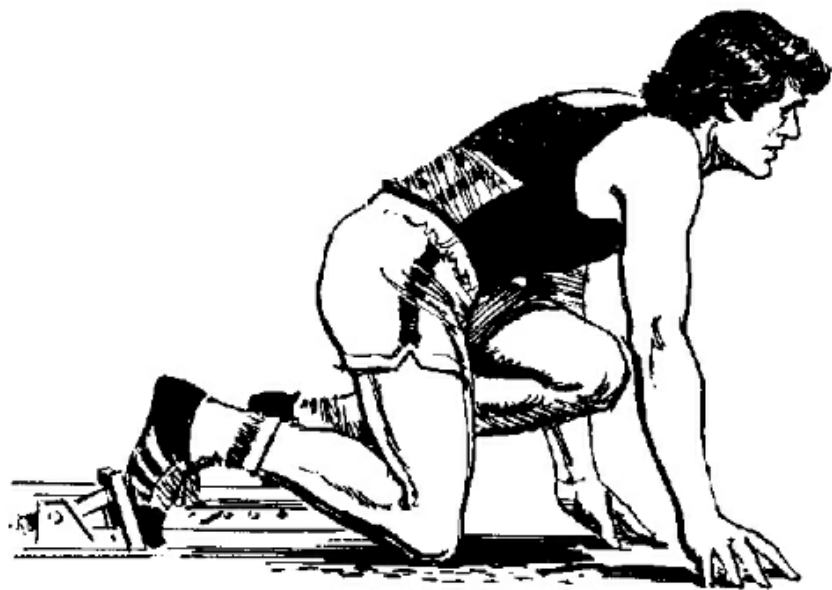
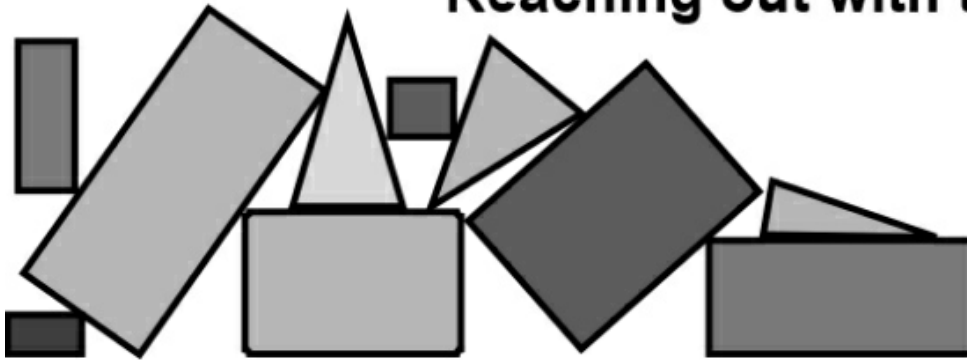


Getting off the Blocks

Reaching out with the Gospel



Peter J Blackburn

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Foreword

No, I am not an expert in evangelism. Yet, if Jesus could take a little boy's lunch – five loaves (bun loaves) and two small fish – and bless it to feed a multitude (John 6.5-13), we shouldn't be surprised that there will be times he evidently uses us!

I heard a speaker years ago saying, "It's not our ability that counts, but our availability!"

That means that, where there are positive responses, it is to the glory of God, not of any human agency. It also means that, where there is no response or even a negative response, God is still at work. Some people are only keen on seeing the harvest – to get credit? If there is to be a harvest, there needs to be a lot of sowing and watering!

The initial concept for this book came to me over thirty-five years ago. We were living in Stanthorpe and I was appointed the "evangelism co-ordinator" for the Uniting Church Presbytery of the Downs.

It seemed to me then – and still does now – that all of us, whether individuals or congregations have "blocks" to evangelism. What we need is a set of "starting-blocks" to reach out with the Gospel.

The final "prod" to develop this book into its present form came when the Edmonton Uniting Church in North Queensland asked me to lead their Family Camp in May 2013 with a theme of "reaching out with the Gospel".

Here is no final or definitive word. In sharing my particular set of experiences and reflections, I haven't come up with a whole set of specifics. My hope and fervent prayer in all that I have written here is that we will allow the Lord to stir us into action.

I have always found it fascinating to read in Acts 8 following the stoning of Stephen –

On that day a great persecution broke out against the church at Jerusalem, and all except the apostles were scattered throughout Judea and Samaria. Godly men buried Stephen and mourned deeply for him. But Saul began to destroy the church. Going from house to house, he dragged off men and women and put them in prison.

Those who had been scattered preached the word wherever they went. (Acts 8.1-4)

Did you notice? "All except the apostles were scattered..." The apostles stayed in Jerusalem, while "those who had been scattered preached the word wherever they went"!

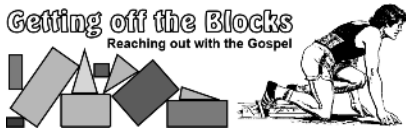
James Kennedy, author of *Evangelism Explosion*, said, "The greatest heresy has been, 'Let ecclesiastical George do it!'"

Perhaps the greatest discovery we all need to make right now – after the Gospel itself – is that Christ regards us all as his witnesses. Then truly we will glorify the Lord!

Peter J Blackburn, Allingham, April 2013

Those Blocks!

Getting off the Blocks
Reaching out with the Gospel



In my high school years in Warwick, I was very much into athletics. The 440 yards was my distance and I ran it well.

The manual arts staff kindly produced for the athletics team a few sets of starting blocks. We may well have been the first school in the district to use blocks.

In a race it's vital how you start. The shorter the race the more critical that will be! These days the timing is measured in hundredths of a second. Spiked shoes have a big advantage over sandshoes – especially in a grassed sports oval – and the blocks give the runner an edge in a powerful start.

“On your mark! Get set!...” BANG! The race is on! The start doesn't guarantee where you will finish in the pack. It is still your fitness, strength and ability – in competition with the other runners. Of course, no matter how much you have trained, you have to get off those blocks! They are there to help you, but they're no substitute for actually running – and no substitute for the “hard yards” of running in preparation for the race!

The 440 (a fraction over 400 metres in metric) was a challenging race. For advanced runners it was really a long sprint, but a bit too long a young high-school student to do that way. My tactic was to do a 110 sprint, stretching out to maintain momentum for 220 with enough puff left for a good 110 sprint home. It worked and I won the race in the third-fastest time recorded up till then in that age-group in the Warwick inter-school sports.

Of course, there are other kinds of blocks that may be a hindrance rather than a help – fear, inadequate preparation, lack of discipline, wrong diet, poor body tone, health issues... Some people are just not cut out to be athletes. But when it came to the school cross-country, everyone, unless there were medical reasons, was expected to try. I seem to recall that sporting-houses got points for every participant – not just for the winners!

In many ways school sports are both good and bad. Good, because they call the athletes to strive for their very best. But bad, because only three athletes can be placed first, second and third – unfortunately, there were some others who didn't really try. That can be a real mental block, preventing the best performance – abbreviated these days to PB (“personal best”).

Athletics is a long way back for me. I have had to face other kinds of “blocks” throughout life. I was hospitalised around eight years old and not expected to live. I was a P.K. (a parson's kid) with all the assumptions and expectations that laid on me – not necessarily an advantage! I worked hard at studies – grindingly hard at times, facing very much what they call “writer's block”.

During the Billy Graham Crusades, sharing faith was easy – many people were open and ready to listen. Where I was staying, we had a prayer group every morning and a lot of support. But later in training for ministry, there seemed little support. A few first-year “theologs” would come to my room for prayer – and a theological students' meeting passed a motion aimed at trying to stop that!

This all brings me to the real issue we are considering here – getting off the blocks and reaching out with the Gospel.

I was at the Uniting Church's second evangelism conference held in Narrabeen, New South Wales. Some ministers of many years' standing from another state were almost embarrassed to be there. It was the first time they had been involved in anything to do with “evangelism”!

We are hearing a lot these days about different ways to “be Church”. This seems a very long way from the last commission the Lord Jesus gave his disciples – “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age” (Matthew 28.16-20).

Jesus didn't tell them to “be church”, but to “make disciples”. He did tell them that “repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in [Christ's] name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem” (Luke 24.47). He did say that “you are witness of these things” (v. 48) and that “you will be my witnesses” (Acts 1.6). Earlier he had said that “I will build my church” (Matthew 16.18), but didn't give many clues about the

“being church” issue at all. The central focus was on “making disciples” and on mission – reaching out with the Gospel. In a real sense, the “church” was to exist for mission.

Is that the central focus of today’s Church? If it is, well and good. If not, then what are the “blocks” that divert today’s Church from fulfilling its central mission?

But where do we as individual Christians fit into all this? We let ourselves off the hook because – so we say – we may not have a specific “gift of evangelism”. Yet Jesus calls all of us his “witnesses”.

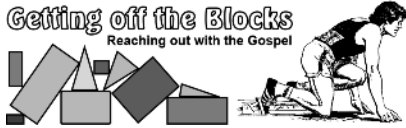
One church was having a special offering for missions. As the stewards came up the aisle, the man at the end of one seat whispered, “Pass. I don’t believe in missions!” The steward said, “Then you had better take some out. It’s for the heathen!”

Sharp comment! Why did Jesus say, “I will build my church?” A power structure in an alien world? A safe haven? A fortress? A place of camaraderie and comfort? Why did he say, “I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it” (Matthew 16.18)? Is the Church meant to be on the defensive, or on the offensive? Are the gates of Hades confronting the Church? or is the Church confronting the gates of Hades? Is Jesus saying that the message and mission of the Church will be unstoppable?

Somehow we have to get away from this deadly preoccupation with “being church”. We need to grasp that our only life is “**in Christ**”, that – for better or worse – **we are his witnesses** in this world and that we are here to **make disciples to Christ** – not, we should note, disciples to ourselves, or to our congregation or denomination.

Mission Forgotten?

Getting off the Blocks
Reaching out with the Gospel



Let's have another look at the commission Jesus has given us.

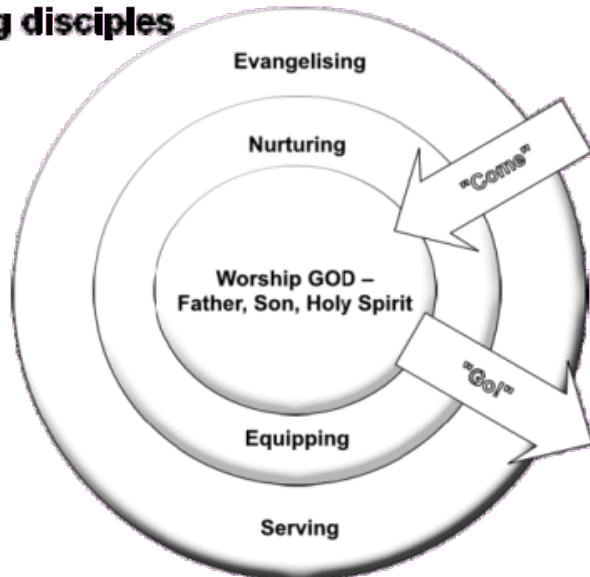
Very often there have been activities in the Church that were begun by people of faith and vision. Much later they are carried on because they have become “the done thing” – what must keep going because we have “always done it”. Originally, it may have been very much part of fulfilling the Great Commission, but across the years that vital link has been lost. As I said in the previous chapter, Jesus “didn't give many clues about the ‘being church’ issue at all.” It is important, from time to time, to look again at the faith, vision and mission-centredness of past members, and our own reasons for maintaining our programme.

We may well find a similar principle with spiritual disciplines that are vitally helpful to our growth in Christian faith and character. Here too what began as joyful stimulation to a life lived with the Lord have too often become laid down as a series of prescriptive rules. Those rules have often included “witnessing”. But please note – Jesus didn't say, “You shall do witnessing”, but “you will be my witnesses”. There is a major difference!

Years ago in one Parish we took a careful look at our youth and children's ministry. Yes, we did have a leadership shortage. But the time seemed ripe to ask, “What's the Church here for? What's our mission as a whole Body? and What form should our youth and children's ministry take within the total mission of the Body?” Big frightening questions! And about fifty people came along to consider them together!

That was the context in which the graphic representation of our mission first appeared. We were trying to think of the whole range of activities that rightly fit into our call from Christ. The question, then as now, was not for each person or organisation to describe and justify some present activity, but for us all to say, “Lord, what is your task for us? and how should we be doing it today?”

Making disciples



The **life** of the Body centres on God himself – Father, Son and Holy Spirit. So – **worship** is our central activity.

The **task** of the Body is to **make disciples** – the “fishers of men” bit! The Head still wants “to seek and to save what was lost”. But it's not just a matter of gathering them in. They are to become new characters in Christ, gifted by the Holy Spirit to take their place within the Body, part of the means of fulfilling the mission! People outside the Church need to hear our loving Lord calling to them, “Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest” (Matthew 11.28). They experience this in the caring **service** of God's people. And they hear it when the good news – of Christ, forgiveness, salvation, new life – is shared with them (**evangelising**) and they have the opportunity to respond to Christ by faith. They have begun to “come” and now continue to need love and **nurture** so that faith will grow, so that spiritual gifts will be discovered, so that Christian character will be unfolded.

They will be gathered into the worship of God. But nurturing doesn't end there, for being part of the Body commits us to the mission. Jesus didn't say, "Come and be comfortable!" In fact, after inviting the people to come to him, he said, "Take my yoke upon you and learn from me..." (Matthew 11.29). A yoke is a means of carrying a burden. It suggests that the Lord has work for us to do! The same Lord who said "**Come!**" also says "**Go!**" (28.19).

Sometimes we have assumed that the minister (plus a few helpers) is meant to do all the evangelising, nurturing and serving for us! But Paul, writing to the Ephesians, emphasised that the purpose of special ministries within the Body is "to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up" (Ephesians 4.12).

So our evangelising needs to include **equipping** – getting ready to do something, discovering and developing gifts that will minister to others in the Body and reach out beyond the Body.

All of us – every one of us – is meant to be involved in some way in building up the Body, in making disciples. All of us, by the grace of God and according to the gifts he has given us, are on active **service**, prayerfully and lovingly ministering to others within the Body and reaching out to others beyond the Body. Our service is evangelism-in-practice – so vital before the right time comes to express the good news (the evangel) in words.

Now I am not suggesting that this diagram and explanation express the totality of the Lord's will for his people. It is rather a very human attempt – mine, in fact – to consider what the Lord said to the apostles and what he is saying to us today.

I have challenged elders, church councils, adult fellowships, youth and children's leaders, Sunday School teachers... with the same question – where do the things we are doing fit into the mission our Lord has given us? It is not my position to say that this or that activity is not a true part of church life. Mostly these activities were started by people of faith and vision. The problem is that over the years we have ceased to think and act missionally. It may be that some activities have served their purpose, are no longer relevant and need to be given a decent burial, that others are misfits – good activities that don't really belong – and that most activities need rejuvenation with a new understanding of the call of Christ.

But the Church is people. If there is malaise in the Church, that malaise is in us, the members, not just in the whole organisational "structure" that we call "Church".

As mentioned in the previous chapter, "Somehow we have to get away from this deadly preoccupation with 'being church'. We need to grasp that our only life is '**in Christ**', that – for better or worse – **we are his witnesses** in this world and that we are here to **make disciples to Christ** – not, we should note, disciples to ourselves, or to our congregation or denomination."

Part of the Mission

Look again at the diagram. That is an attempt to see the mission of the Church. It isn't a set of boxes for you personally to tick. The mission is far bigger than the individual Christian can fulfil, yet we all fit in there somewhere. In a sense, as we grasp the mission in these terms, we will see that all of us individually, in a variety of ways, do fit into the various elements of the church's mission. And I am not meaning this in the sense of tasks and functions.

For instance, week by week all of us are "coming" and "going". That's a physical fact of our lives if we are a regular part of a congregation. Is our coming together for worship a response to the gracious invitation of Christ? What about when we leave the congregation for life within our homes and the community? Do we go as those who are Christ's witnesses wherever we go?

Our lives may be the only Bible some people ever read, the only clue about the Gospel they will ever see. Churches may put up a notice-board with a thought-provoking Christian message. They may go further and do a letter-box drop in their area. That's fine and commendable. But just think about our congregation for a moment. How many people would there be with whom each member of this congregation has a significant level of contact? Multiply that out and you will be staggered just how many people are within our circle of witness. That puts us all in the area of "evangelising" – reaching out with the Gospel – the theme we will be pursuing at greater depth.

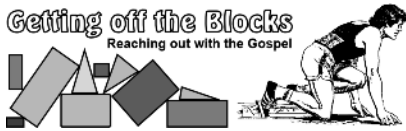
We are also all involved in "nurturing". The Uniting Church's *Basis of Union* states that the congregation's "members meet regularly to hear God's Word, to celebrate the sacraments, to build one another up in love, to share in the wider responsibilities of the Church, and to serve the world" (15a). It also describes the Elders' or Leaders' Meeting which is "responsible for building up the congregation in faith

and love, sustaining its members in hope, and leading them into a fuller participation in Christ's mission in the world" (15b).

Those described here as "elders" or "leaders" have a functional responsibility, but all of us are involved in "building one another up" and "serving the world".

What is the Good News?

Getting off the Blocks
Reaching out with the Gospel



We have already noted that one huge “block” in today’s Church is that we have forgotten our mission. Evangelism becomes an intrusion into our ordered programme. In a sense, we interrupt our programme so we can “do evangelism”.

In a real sense, we satisfy our churchly “conscience” by having a special “outreach” drive from time to time – before getting back to the “real business” of our regular programme.

Take your pick. There are, in fact, some very good tools for such outreach which we will look at later – tools like Lay Institute for Evangelism (“Have you heard of the Four Spiritual Laws?”), Christianity Explained, Evangelism Explosion, Alpha...

Please don’t misunderstand me. I am not dismissing the use of such tools. I have found them a great help in “getting us going”, in providing a framework understanding of the message, in “breaking the ice”... But they are not a substitute for the evangelism/outreach that needs to be in the heart of who we are and what we do as a Church – and in the heart of who we are and what we do as individual Christian people.

Sometimes we think back nostalgically to the era of the early Billy Graham Crusades. I was in Brisbane and it was as if the whole city was moved. As I mentioned earlier, “sharing faith was easy – many people were open and ready to listen”. There was an Operation Andrew programme, encouraging people to bring along a friend. There was counsellor training, and, where people had made a response, they were referred back to the local churches.

Some congregations grew significantly after the Crusades. Others expressed disappointment that the new life hadn’t come their way. Why such a difference? I am sure there were many reasons, but believe that one was that some congregations already had a heart for mission, whereas others didn’t. The latter thought, “Billy Graham is the evangelist – he is here to do evangelism for us.” Sorry! It doesn’t work that way! Evangelist Billy Graham was the catalyst. His positive, clear preaching of the Gospel and his invitation for people to respond gave an effective occasion for what was already beginning to happen in congregations.

What Paul wrote is still true, “since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not know him, God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe” (1 Corinthians 1.21). The King James had “the foolishness of preaching”. As the context makes clear, it is the content – “the message of the cross” – that is foolishness.

God still uses the preached word – foolish though it seems – to bring salvation to people. The message is confronting. It isn’t a matter for “buzz-group” sharing. It is a message about what God has already done – what are you going to do about it? But in the pervasive unbelief of modern times the older styles of “crusades” and “missions” may be less effective now than they used to be. As it was in their heyday, the issue is still what is happening in congregations.

What is the Gospel?

We need to get right back to the basics – what is the Gospel? **What is the good news in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus?**

For many centuries, we have numbered our years on the basis that years were either BC (before Christ) or AD (*anno Domini* = in the year of the Lord). There is now a widespread trend to keep the numbering but change the designation to CE (common era) and BCE (before common era). Quite clearly, however, in spite of this humanistic intrusion, there is still a silent recognition that the coming of Jesus is the centre-piece of human history.

A short piece called “One Solitary Life” originates from James Allan Francis in 1926 –

He was born in an obscure village, the child of a peasant woman. He grew up in another obscure village where he worked in a carpenter shop until he was thirty.

He never wrote a book. He never held an office. He never went to college. He never visited a big city. He never travelled more than two hundred miles from the place where he was born. He did none of the things usually associated with greatness. He had no credentials but himself.

He was only thirty-three. His friends ran away. One of them denied him. He was turned over to his enemies and went through the mockery of a trial. He was nailed to a cross between two thieves. While dying, his executioners

gambled for his clothing, the only property he had on earth. When he was dead he was laid in a borrowed grave through the pity of a friend.

Nineteen centuries have come and gone, and today Jesus is the central figure of the human race and the leader of mankind's progress. All the armies that have ever marched, all the navies that have ever sailed, all the parliaments that have ever sat, all the kings that ever reigned, put together have not affected the life of mankind on earth as powerfully as that one solitary life.

That is a fine statement. Most would agree that the personality and teaching of Jesus has impacted the history of many nations. Mahatma Gandhi, though a Hindu, is said to have carried a copy of the New Testament with him in his pocket. Years ago the *Courier-Mail* carried a short report from a Soviet historian stating that they had reconsidered all the evidence about Jesus Christ and had come to the conclusion that he had said and done all the things recorded of him in the gospels – with a final comment, “I am not sure where we go from here.”

So we come back to the question – what is the good news in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus? It is a good thing to be convinced of the historicity of Jesus, but – so what? Why celebrate Christmas, Good Friday, Easter...? Why not just stick to Santa and the Easter Bunny to keep the kids happy and let that be all? Of course, we do need some good order in society, so we might pick out some teaching slogans like “Love your neighbour” and “Do unto others as you want them to do to you”. Jesus was a great teacher, a good man, a man for others... Sad what happened to him – dead and buried like the rest of them – but he has left us a legacy... Have you come across those attitudes?

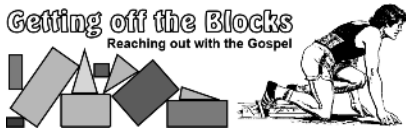
Here is a comment by CS Lewis in *Mere Christianity*.

I am trying here to prevent anyone saying the really foolish thing that people often say about Him: I'm ready to accept Jesus as a great moral teacher, but I don't accept his claim to be God. That is the one thing we must not say. A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic — on the level with the man who says he is a poached egg — or else he would be the Devil of Hell. You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God, or else a madman or something worse. You can shut him up for a fool, you can spit at him and kill him as a demon or you can fall at his feet and call him Lord and God, but let us not come with any patronizing nonsense about his being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to.

In grasping “the good news in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus”, there are three important areas for us to consider – his incarnation, his crucifixion and his resurrection.

Incarnation

Getting off the Blocks
Reaching out with the Gospel



The life of Jesus was an **incarnation**. The prophecy from Isaiah 7.14 was fulfilled in his birth – “The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel” —which means, “God with us” (Matthew 1.23). Mary received the stunning word, “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God” (Luke 1.35).

Those were not just nice statements about any cute baby due to be born. We hear Jesus at age twelve responding to Mary’s rebuke that he had stayed behind in the Temple in Jerusalem – “Why were you searching for me? Didn’t you know I had to be in my Father’s house?” (2.49). Already he was aware that he was not just another boy growing up with Joseph and Mary. They didn’t understand, but he did.

In John’s gospel we hear Jesus making a number of claims about himself beginning with the words, “I am...” – “the Bread of Life” (John 6.35-58), “the Light of the World” (John 8.12-19; 9.4-5), “the Good Shepherd” (John 10.1-18), “the Resurrection and the Life” (John 11.17-27), “the Way, the Truth and the Life” (John 14.1-14), and “the True Vine” (John 15.1-17). All of these are major claims, but there is another staggering claim that throws them all into a new light – the specific claim to be “I Am” (John 8.48-59).

Remember the story of Moses before the burning bush at Horeb. God promised to be with him, but Moses says, “Suppose I go to the Israelites and say to them, ‘The God of your fathers has sent me to you,’ and they ask me, ‘What is his name?’ Then what shall I tell them?” God replies, “I AM WHO I AM. This is what you are to say to the Israelites: ‘I AM has sent me to you.’... Say to the Israelites, ‘The LORD, the God of our fathers the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob has sent me to you.’ This is my name forever the name by which I am to be remembered from generation to generation” (Exodus 3.13-15).

The Jews found it very difficult to decide just who Jesus was. They had already decided who he wasn’t! Right now Jesus has said something quite extraordinary – “If I glorify myself, my glory means nothing. My Father, whom you claim as your God, is the one who glorifies me. Though you do not know him, I know him. If I said I did not, I would be a liar like you, but I do know him and keep his word. Your father Abraham rejoiced at the thought of seeing my day; he saw it and was glad” (John 8.54-56).

So who does he think he is? Not yet fifty years old, and he seems to claim to have seen Abraham. “I tell you the truth,” Jesus answered, “before Abraham was born, I am!” (v. 58)

The claim was unmistakable – and “they picked up stones to stone him” (v. 59). Why? because he was claiming equality with God, the great “I Am”. To claim equality with God was blasphemy – unless, of course, it was true! And we don’t hear Jesus saying, “You’ve misunderstood what I mean – I wasn’t claiming equality with God at all!” He did nothing to soften the clear meaning of what he had just said. They had got it right!

Notice the way Paul writes about the incarnation in Philippians 2.5-10.

⁵ Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus:

⁶ Who, being in very nature God,
did not consider equality with God something to be grasped,

⁷ but made himself nothing,
taking the very nature of a servant,
being made in human likeness.

⁸ And being found in appearance as a man,
he humbled himself
and became obedient to death—
even death on a cross!

⁹ Therefore God exalted him to the highest place
and gave him the name that is above every name,

¹⁰ that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow,
in heaven and on earth and under the earth,

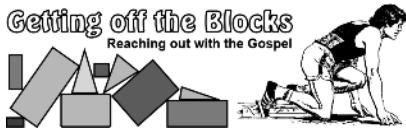
¹¹ and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord,
to the glory of God the Father.

The incarnation is inescapably central to the Christian message. We aren't talking about a good man, a holy man, a wonderful teacher, a remarkable healer... Yes, he was all of these. But we are talking about the Son of God from all eternity, described by John as the Word who "was with God, and... was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made" (John 1.1-3). The Word who "became flesh and made his dwelling among us" (v. 14). We are talking about Immanuel, God with us, and about what God has done in human history – "For 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" (3.16).

The incarnation is an integral and important part of the Gospel. It speaks of "God with us" in a sense that also implies "God for us". It revolutionises how we think about God. Incredibly, Jesus could say, "Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father" (14.9b). God isn't some far away terrifying superBeing – to be ignored for the moment and maybe feared in the end. We see Jesus – God incarnate – who could be quite stern in the face of hypocrisy, but was full of compassionate love – Jesus, who could pray for his enemies, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing" (Luke 23.34).

Crucifixion

Getting off the Blocks
Reaching out with the Gospel



The crucifixion was central to the life of Jesus. The angel had said to Joseph, “[Mary] will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus (which means ‘The LORD saves’), because he will save his people from their sins” (Matthew 1.21). Jesus taught his sometimes-ambitious disciples that “the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many” (Mark 10.45).

When we read the Gospels, we are confronted by the amount of space devoted to the last week in Jerusalem from the triumphal entry to the crucifixion – seven chapters out of twenty-eight in Matthew (21-27), five out of sixteen chapters in Mark (11-15), four-and-a-half out of twenty-four in Luke (18.28-23.56) and eight out of twenty-one in John (12.12-19.42). Obviously, while the Gospels truly record what Jesus said and did, they are not simply biographies in the modern sense.

Matthew records that, following Peter’s confession of him as “the Christ, the Son of the living God” (16.16), “From that time on Jesus began to explain to his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things at the hands of the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life” (v. 21). The disciples didn’t grasp this at all, and Jesus repeated it on several occasions (as in 17.22-23; 20.18-19).

In Luke 9 we read, “As the time approached for him to be taken up to heaven, Jesus resolutely set out for Jerusalem. And he sent messengers on ahead, who went into a Samaritan village to get things ready for him; but the people there did not welcome him, because he was heading for Jerusalem” (vv. 51-53).

There was one occasion when Jesus took Peter, James and John up a high mountain (Matthew 17.1-8; Mark 9.2-8; Luke 9.28-36). There he was transfigured before them. They saw Moses and Elijah talking with him. Luke writes, “They spoke about his departure, which he was about to bring to fulfilment at Jerusalem” (9.31). Curiously, the Greek word for “departure” here is *exodos* – the time of his leaving this world. The three would have liked to remain on the mountain – rather than face Jesus’ “departure”. But just as the Lord had brought deliverance to Israel in its “departure” from Egypt (the Exodus), so Jesus’ “departure” was an essential part of God’s saving plan. The voice from heaven confirmed Peter’s earlier confession – “This is my Son, whom I have chosen; listen to him” (v. 35).

In Gethsemane we hear Jesus – the Son of God who “emptied himself” and was very much living fully as a human being – wrestling in revulsion with what was soon to happen to him. “My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will” (Matthew 26.39). Louis A. Barbieri Jr. in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary* notes on this verse –

The “cup” probably referred to His imminent death. He also may have had in mind His coming separation from the Father (27.46) and His coming contact with sin as He became sin for mankind (2 Corinthians 5.21). A cup, figuratively in the Old Testament, refers to wrath. The significant thing about this prayer, however, was that the Lord submitted His **will** to the **will** of His Father (Matthew 26.39).

It was as if the earlier temptations were surfacing again. At the end of Luke’s account of the temptations in the desert, we read, “When the devil had finished all this tempting, he left him until an opportune time” (Luke 4.13).

“If you are the Son of God, tell this stone to become bread” – in the Gethsemane context, the temptation to look after yourself, don’t go ahead with this insanity.

“If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down from here,” God’s angels will look after you and lift you up – in the Gethsemane context, we hear Jesus, “Do you think I cannot call on my Father, and he will at once put at my disposal more than twelve legions of angels?” (Matthew 26. 53), and later at the cross, those who passed by, “You who are going to destroy the temple and build it in three days, save yourself! Come down from the cross, if you are the Son of God!” (27.40).

“All this I will give you, if you will bow down and worship me” – and Jesus’ response in Gethsemane, “Father... may your will be done.”

The trial and crucifixion of Jesus was a truly shocking business. Perhaps watching the Mel Gibson film, *The Passion of the Christ*, we may have felt that the scourging and crucifixion of Jesus was unnecessarily over-exaggerated. Yet all the written evidence from the time fully supports the gruesomeness of what is

portrayed in the film. Personally, I think the extended footage of the scourging was not necessary to highlight the horror of what was done.

The scourging has been called “the intermediate death” – which many didn’t survive. Roman crucifixion was one of the most cruel means of capital punishment ever devised. It aimed to maximise suffering over an extended period of time in full view of the public. It was reserved for members of subject races. A Roman citizen judged worthy of the death penalty was simply beheaded.

Why this emphasis on the crucifixion? Why has the cross become the symbol of Christian faith – an emblem found on churches, headstones, jewellery...? And why is Holy Communion one of the central acts of Christian worship?

Listen to the apostle Paul, “May I never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ” (Galatians 6.14). And again, “Jews demand miraculous signs and Greeks look for wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God” (1 Corinthians 1.22-23).

I have heard people try to soften this with “we preach Christ crucified and risen again”. It is true that Paul preached the resurrection of Christ – it was the very point that upset the philosophers in Athens (Acts 17.32). But right here in 1 Corinthians 1 his focus is on the crucifixion.

John records the last words of Jesus, “It is finished!” (John 19.30) – not “I am finished!” Archaeologists have discovered papyrus receipts for taxes bearing the Greek word *tetelestai* written across them, meaning “paid in full.” The redemptive work for which Jesus had come was complete.

From 1.18 Paul writes about the sin of humanity and the wrath of God – the expression of God’s holy love. And so by chapter 3 he concludes –

For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,²⁴ and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement, through faith in his blood. He did this to demonstrate his justice, because in his forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished—he did it to demonstrate his justice at the present time, so as to be just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus. (3.23-26)

For “sacrifice of atonement”, there is a footnote, “Or *as the one who would turn aside his wrath, taking away sin*”. The King James has the word “propitiation”. The Greek word, *hilastērion*, was used in the Septuagint (the early Greek translation of the Old Testament) for the “mercy seat”. John A. Witmer in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*, comments –

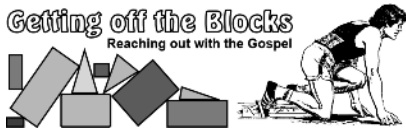
This [Greek] noun is used elsewhere in the New Testament only in Hebrews 9.5 for the mercy seat (NIV, “the place of atonement”) of the tabernacle’s ark of the covenant. There a goat’s blood was sprinkled on the Day of Atonement to cover (atone) Israel’s sins (Leviticus 16.15), and satisfy God for another year. Jesus’ death is the final sacrifice which completely satisfied God’s demands against sinful people, thus averting His wrath from those who believe.

These days we seem inclined to think God shouldn’t express “wrath” or “anger” concerning sin. Our emotions when something is wrong never really equates to “righteous anger”. Yet again and again on television we are confronted by situations where there has been rape, grievous bodily harm or murder. It is never satisfactory for the perpetrator to get off scot-free. Something in us knows that there has to be some redress for crime.

Paul writes in 6.23 that “the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in (or, through) Christ Jesus our Lord”. There are a number of ways in which New Testament writers have expressed it, but the essence is the same. Christ Jesus in his death – yes, that horrible crucifixion death – bore the penalty of our sin. Through him the gift of eternal life – God’s free gift – is made available to sinners. “God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us” (5.8).

Resurrection

Getting off the Blocks
Reaching out with the Gospel



In 1930 a book was published under the title, *Who Moved the Stone?* It was written by Frank Morison, an investigative journalist. Morison, a skeptic, admired the teaching of Jesus but rejected miracles of any kind. He decided to write a book about the last week of Jesus' life – a period that he reckoned to be without any miracles. It was to be titled *Jesus – the Last Phase*. But that project became what he called “the book that refused to be written” – and never proceeded – because he was confronted by the fact of an inescapable miracle at the end of the week – the resurrection!

But not all skeptics have become believers. Roland Gregor Smith, then a professor of divinity in Glasgow University, wrote, “So far as historicity is concerned... we may freely say that the bones of Jesus lie somewhere in Palestine” (*Secular Christianity*, 1968). This thinking is part of an outlook promoted today as “progressive Christianity”. But it is a backward step – a regression – and ends up rejecting so much of core Christian belief that it ceases in any true sense to be “Christian”.

It is of critical importance that Jesus literally rose from the dead. It makes a huge difference to our understanding of who Jesus is and of the positive good that the crucifixion achieved.

Paul begins Romans by speaking of “the gospel of God... promised beforehand through his prophets in the Holy Scriptures regarding his Son, who as to his human nature was a descendant of David, and who through the Spirit of holiness was declared with power to be the Son of God by his resurrection from the dead: Jesus Christ our Lord” (1.1-4).

The resurrection didn't make Jesus the Son of God, but rather was a public declaration of his deity and fulfilled his prediction that he would rise from the dead. We may have thought the day of crucifixion should be Black Friday followed by the resurrection on Good Sunday. But the resurrection confirms that the horrible events of the Friday were, by God's plan, “good”. So we hear Peter addressing the crowd on the day of Pentecost –

²³ This man was handed over to you by God's set purpose and foreknowledge; and you, with the help of wicked men, put him to death by nailing him to the cross. ²⁴ But God raised him from the dead, freeing him from the agony of death, because it was impossible for death to keep its hold on him... ³² God has raised this Jesus to life, and we are all witnesses of the fact. (Acts 2.23-24, 32)

In 1 Corinthians Paul gives this account of the resurrection–

³ For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, ⁴ that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, ⁵ and that he appeared to Peter, and then to the Twelve. ⁶ After that, he appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers at the same time, most of whom are still living, though some have fallen asleep. ⁷ Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles, ⁸ and last of all he appeared to me also, as to one abnormally born. (1 Corinthians 15.3-8)

In the Corinthian church there were those who denied resurrection in general – “some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead” (v. 12b). But, Paul reasons, if there is no resurrection of the dead, Christ has not been raised; and, if Christ has not been raised, three conclusions of devastating consequence for the Christian life must follow.

He says, “if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith. More than that, we are then found to be false witnesses about God, for we have testified about God that he raised Christ from the dead. But he did not raise him if in fact the dead are not raised” (vv. 14,15).

If Christ has not been raised, every preacher, teacher, missionary... in the world is – wilfully or ignorantly – perpetrating a hoax, and misleading people to trust in a delusion, not simply with respect to the resurrection as a fact of history, but with regard to the gospel that depends on it.

Without the resurrection of Christ as an historical fact, the Christian gospel is merely “the opiate of the people”, a sort of “pie in the sky when you die” that keeps you contented but has no substance.

No resurrection – no gospel!

Paul goes on, “if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins” (v. 17).

This spells out the implication of what I have already said. If Christ has not been raised, then every person who has trusted in Christ for the forgiveness of sins and, on the basis of faith in Christ, has been assured that his sins are forgiven, is in fact miserably deluded – “you are still in your sins”. You have not

received forgiveness, your guilt remains. You thought you had found the way of peace and reconciliation – how wrong you were!

If Christ has not been raised, we certainly don't know what way there might be for salvation and forgiveness of sins – we are still in our sins!

No resurrection – no salvation!

Paul continues, “Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ are lost. If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are to be pitied more than all men” (vv. 18,19).

Christianity isn't “pie in the sky when you die.” But it is true that Christians believe that this present life must be lived in the perspective of eternity. For example, the Christian is to set first God's Kingdom and his righteousness over such things as food, drink and clothing (Matthew 6.33). The Christian is to take the narrow gate and hard way, because these lead to life (7.13,14). The Christian is to have a mind which is set on heavenly, rather than earthly, things, putting to death earthly desires and appetites (Colossians 3.1ff).

If Christ has not been raised, there is nothing beyond the grave. The rigours and denials of this life have been for nothing. The greatest hopes and aspirations of this life have been for nothing. If we have had hope for this life only, with no reason to expect anything after this life (as would be the case if Christ has not risen from the dead), what a pitiable state we are in!

No resurrection – no hope!

“But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep” (v. 20).

What a tremendous significance the resurrection has for the Christian! We have good news – for ourselves, for our fellows, for the whole world! All who believe in Christ can be certain of forgiveness of sins! The hope of an even fuller life beyond the grave is strong and solid!

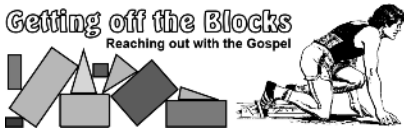
What an awful state we would be in if Christ has not been raised!

“But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead!”

Hallelujah! With confidence, we can believe it, live it – and share it!

Thinking Again about the Good News

Getting off the Blocks
Reaching out with the Gospel



We have been thinking about the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. We now come back to our earlier question – **What is the good news in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus?**

We have looked at the implications of the incarnation, the crucifixion and the resurrection in some detail. That is for the purpose of making quite clear our own foundational understanding. We need to know that our faith isn't based on some laughable fairy-story, but on the solid grounds of what actually happened. I am not suggesting that we try to say all this when we are "reaching out with the Gospel". There may, of course, be particular people for whom that is appropriate!

Let's try for a more succinct and memorable statement. What are the key points in what we have shared so far?

Incarnation

Jesus was – and is – the Son of God from all eternity. He came to earth, emptied of his heavenly glory, to become a human being. Jesus was God-in-the-flesh on a mission to redeem and rescue sinful, fallen humanity. God hates our sinful rebellion – that can't go unnoticed and unpunished – but he loves us. Jesus was Immanuel – God-with-us in redemptive love, God-for-us.

Crucifixion

Jesus' crucifixion was central to his life and ministry. He was crucified because of the enormity of human rejection of God (sin). This was evident in the jealous anger of the religious leaders of the time and in the weakness of Pilate who established Jesus' innocence yet ordered his death. But also – and especially – Jesus was crucified because of God's love for sinners and his desire and plan for our redemption. The penalty for sin is death. Jesus, in his death, took that penalty for the whole human race. "It is finished!"

Resurrection

Jesus literally rose from the dead – it's historical fact! It makes a huge difference to our understanding of who Jesus is – the Son of God, the God-Man – and of the positive good that the crucifixion achieved – redemption and salvation for sinners.

Communicating the Message

Look again at the Great Commission as recorded in Luke 24.46-49.

This is what is written: The Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, ⁴⁷ and repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. ⁴⁸ You are witnesses of these things. ⁴⁹ I am going to send you what my Father has promised; but stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high.

So there is a message that must be "preached to all nations". The big question is, "What is that message?" So there is "good news" and it focuses on the life and ministry of Jesus. What is that good news? How do we understand it? And how can we begin to communicate it "out there" – where people haven't been brought up on the Bible and don't understand the "jargon"?

Think for a moment about what I have said about incarnation, crucifixion and resurrection in the more succinct statements above. To start with, "incarnation" is a foreign concept – if used at all, with a different meaning. "Crucifixion"... well, that's to do with the horrible history of what happened on Good Friday. But "resurrection"? These days some folk are familiar with "reincarnation" – from contact with Hinduism or Buddhism – but that's a different concept altogether.

Then there are other words I have used. What do we mean when we say that Jesus "came to earth"? We know we aren't talking about an alien invasion, but do others realise that? And what about "sin" and "sinful"? The one use for many years was for people "living in sin" outside marriage – which was never the Bible meaning at all. In any case, "sin" doesn't even mean that now! Then what about "redemptive love", "redemption"? We may talk about "redeeming" a loan – but to "redeem" a person? and why does anybody (apart, perhaps, for outright criminals) need "redeeming" anyway? Then we have said that humanity is "fallen". What do we mean by that? "Fallen" from what? "Fallen" into what? Someone radical suggested

that the human race has “fallen” upward, inferring that what we call the Fall was in fact a good thing that has benefited us all. In Christians we have a pretty good idea what we mean when we talk about “the Fall”, but it is a foreign concept to most of our fellow-countrymen. What about “Immanuel”? That’s a special Hebrew phrase from Isaiah 7.14 – “with-us God”. To confuse us further, the Latin and Greek translations of the Old Testament (and the Greek of Matthew 1.23) begin the word with an “E” – “Emmanuel”. Folk “out there” may have come across a church building, a university college or a school, even a famous philosopher... by this name. But the significance of the name is probably lost on people outside church circles.

Anybody who knows something of what was happening in Jesus’ crucifixion (and we may not be able to assume that) will readily see “the jealous anger of the religious leaders of the time and... the weakness of Pilate”. Whatever people may think of Jesus and his teaching, here was a terrible injustice – in fact, a miscarriage of justice. Remember that the religious leaders were regarded as the most “righteous” in the land. These are the ones who conspired to have Jesus arrested, tried, convicted and crucified. But he wasn’t convicted – they couldn’t make their charges “stick”. Pilate could see through their scheming. However, complaints about his rule had already been lodged in Rome and, perhaps for this reason, he weakly concurred with the shouts for the death sentence.

The resurrection is a “block” for some people. It is, however, consistent with the incarnation. In emptying himself and becoming a man, Christ was born of a virgin – his humanity not fully explainable by human genetics. As a man he suffered and died. On the third day God raised him to life again. In form he was recognisable as the same Jesus. He ate fish with them, invited Thomas to touch his wounds... Yet he passed through doors, appearing unexpectedly.

Paul wrote –

God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name,¹⁰ that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth,¹¹ and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. (Philippians 2.9-11)

If Jesus was the one he claimed to be – the one the Gospels proclaim him to be – his resurrection was quite consistent. As noted earlier, “The resurrection didn’t make Jesus the Son of God, but rather was a public declaration of his deity and fulfilled his prediction that he would rise from the dead..”

Finding Timely Words for the Timeless Message

Fifty years ago, a group of us conducted two open-air evangelistic meetings – one in Toowong, the other in Spring Hill. I am sure it was good experience for us, singing and preaching, publicly declaring ourselves to be Christians... but, all these years later, I wonder how well the message connected with the people on the other side of the road. I recall that one Sunday night, having preached at Spring Hill, I was approached by a man who had been sitting in his car not far down the road. He wanted to know who we were, what our message was, what we were hoping to achieve... It turned out he was the local Catholic priest. From that night on, windows opened around that street corner every Sunday night! Only God knows the results of such preaching by a young and confident but very inexperienced group from an eternal perspective.

I believe such preaching is not without fruit – though it was quite unseen to us. And we hardly knew a thing about picking it! I like those words from Isaiah 55 –

¹⁰ As the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return to it without watering the earth and making it bud and flourish, so that it yields seed for the sower and bread for the eater,¹¹ so is my word that goes out from my mouth: It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it. (Isaiah 55.10-11)

Much later in a country town, we were running a Bible study which included folk from four different churches. One day one of the women spoke of an open-air her church had held in the main street across the road from where crowds of people were walking on a Friday night. She said, “In eternity, none of them will be able to say they didn’t hear the message.”

Again, I am sure their preaching would have borne fruit – even though they were on the other side of the road to the people! But it raised an issue for me – it is possible to “hear” but not “hear”. That sounds like what Jesus was saying about his parables in Matthew 13.11-17 – an issue for another time! The Holy Spirit is at work. As Jesus reassured his disciples,

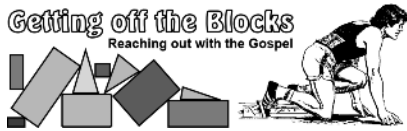
⁸ When [the Counsellor] comes, he will convict the world of guilt in regard to sin and righteousness and judgment:

⁹ in regard to sin, because men do not believe in me; ¹⁰ in regard to righteousness, because I am going to the

Father, where you can see me no longer; ¹¹ and in regard to judgment, because the prince of this world now stands condemned. (John 16.8-11)

There is a work of translating into people's conscience that only the Holy Spirit can do. But there is a work of translating the good news into people's consciousness that is given to us to do – prayerfully guided by the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit has used the *King James Version* for many many years in the conversion of many people. Realistically, it's in a foreign language now! And many of our rich Christian words – like justification, repentance, salvation, faith, grace – which we rightly continue to use (nothing else quite says what needs to be said!)... we need to do the difficult, important task of translating.

Timely Words for the Timeless Message



So there's another important question that we have to keep before us – **How would you explain the Christian good news to an average non-church-going Australian?** I am serious about this question. Try writing down in your own words what is good news about the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, having in mind “an average non-church-going Australian”. Hopefully, that may be someone you know.

In some of the congregations where I have served we have had a “guest service” every couple of months. Folk were encouraged to pray regularly for a family belonging to no church. I would dress casually, would prepare a message which was as de-jargonised as possible and with a catchy title. We would print and distribute to congregational members an invitation card to hand to someone else. The day of the guest service, a printed copy of the message was available for the congregation – and to pass on to folk we had invited who couldn't come.

As I stood at the church door with my handful of cards one Sunday morning, one of our regulars said to me, “It's no use giving me any invitations. I don't have any non-Christian friends!”

In Appendix 1 and Appendix 2, I have included two messages which originated in guest services – *Fair Dinkum!* and *Straight from the Horse's Mouth*. They are not quite in their original form, having been rewritten for use in ecumenical Australia Day services in the local Anglican Church. The church was packed on both occasions and comments afterwards indicated that the messages had struck a chord with ordinary community members.

Of course, anyone who attempts this needs to be open to criticism – myself included. Have I succeeded – on the one hand true to the Gospel and on the other relevant and understandable to the ordinary Aussie non-churchgoer? You be the judge.

Appendix 3 – *Life after Birth* – is a message given at guest services in several places and, in its final form, in a combined service of Townsville Uniting Churches at Mount Louisa House of Praise. This was a different situation again. John 3.1-16 was read as part of the service. The message was very warmly received. An older minister commented, “Peter, it was good to hear preaching tonight!” I'm not quite sure what that says about the usual Sunday fare! All I was endeavouring to do was speak clearly and relevantly on a well-known passage with the challenge from the Word that should always come through.

Again I request you to study it, reflect on it. Are these timely words for the timeless message?

Being a Witness Day by Day

I'm retired now. I take a little service weekly in BlueHaven, an aged-care facility in Ingham, and visit a number of the folk there. I only preach in church occasionally. But I meet people. I walk on the beach. I have the opportunity to converse with others in a community choir. I am now part of a community in a way that I wasn't before retiring – but that you are!

Of course, a number of folk know I'm a minister – I have conducted several funerals and have spoken at Anzac Day – but I am no longer paid to talk about God. Mind you, I've never viewed it that way. I've always understood that the “stipend” wasn't a wage for services rendered. Rather it was a payment that freed me for the work of the Gospel.

Coming back from the beach one morning, I met a man whom I'd never seen before. He has lived here long enough to have complaints about the boat-ramps and the professional prawners who are ruining all the best fishing spots – like they're doing in Moreton Bay. I don't know his name yet – that will come another time. We just didn't get beyond boat-ramps and prawners today. Our church has a Men's Breakfast coming up – I wonder if that's a bit soon in the relationship.

Quite often folk walking their dog will want to talk about issues like climate change, same-sex marriage... It is amazing how easy it can be to say, “Well, it's God's world. I wonder what we're doing with it sometimes.” Or “It's just not the way the Lord has made us!” Provided we aren't heavy-handed, “preachy”, “witnessing”..., people will accept what we say – perhaps even reveal where they stand in relation to faith! We have been bought with a price. We are the Lord's people – all the time! That's who we

are, and bringing God into the conversation isn't always difficult, provided we don't see ourselves being "on assignment" to "do witnessing" and hopefully "bring in a few scalps"!

Another morning recently, I was pleased to note that the beach – which lost about eight metres in cyclone Yasi – was building up again. "A sign of how the good Lord has made things", I commented to another walker. To which I received the response, "Mother Nature is gradually putting it all back again." I knew that, for the present, the door wasn't open. It was a "cold" contact where no relationship had been established.

It reminded me of a situation in my first appointment. A man had been painting his daughter's house during his holidays. He fell of a ladder and badly broke his leg. Whenever I tried to guide the conversation towards spiritual things, he steered it away again. It felt like trying to steer a car when somebody else has their hands on the wheel as well!

Right at the end of the first chapter, I said, "Somehow we have to get away from this deadly preoccupation with 'being church'. We need to grasp that our only life is **'in Christ'**, that – for better or worse – **we are his witnesses** in this world and that we are here to **make disciples to Christ** – not, we should note, disciples to ourselves, or to our congregation or denomination."

That's it! What I am saying is that we are to be his witnesses right here where we live day by day! That surely has to begin with a deepening relationship with the Lord, and then translated into loving people, building relationships with them, praying for them... long before there will be the possibility of speaking intentionally about matters of faith.

Many times I find myself walking alone on the beach. My mind moves in prayer for people I have met and conversations I have had with them. Sometimes they have gone on and on about the tangles of their life. My heart goes out to them. The Lord loves them, but they're not ready to hear the Gospel yet. We need to do a lot of listening, a lot of loving – and a lot of praying!

The lady who said, "I don't have any non-Christian friends!", may have thought herself protected from bad influences and surrounded by good, but... if that is widespread in the congregation, there is no opportunity to reach out with the Gospel!

We must never forget that our relationship with the Lord is a top priority. We will never be positive witnesses if we skimp on the Word and prayer.

In our last two settlements we drew up a "Covenant of Prayer" in which members were encouraged to commit themselves in the following terms –

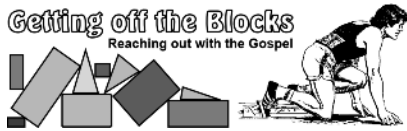
1. I reaffirm my faith in Jesus Christ as my Saviour and Lord.
2. I commit myself to a regular practice of prayer and the study of God's Word, the Bible.
3. I commit myself to the worship, life and witness of this congregation of God's people.
4. I covenant to pray each day for the following regular members of our congregation and to encourage them in their faith and life _____
5. I covenant to pray each day for the following person or family not presently a believing and active part of our church life and to seek opportunity to offer friendship _____.

Signed _____ Date _____

(This covenant is truly between you and the Lord. It is a private document. Keep it, read it and live out your commitment. The Lord will be with you and will reveal his presence in our midst. If you desire, you may discuss any part of this covenant with our minister or one of the elders. You may choose to make this covenant jointly with a prayer partner.)

This "covenant" can be a significant step forward for a congregation and its members in reaching out with the Gospel.

Reaching out with the Gospel



Often we assume that some outreach programme will be for us the “timely words for the timeless message”. That, we feel sure, will enable us to “get off the blocks” that hinder and onto “the starting-blocks” of reaching out with the Gospel.

Let me be quite clear – such programmes can indeed be a starting-point and stimulus to “getting off the blocks”. I am reminded, however, of a conversation I had years ago with the late Bob Hillman. At the time, our parish back in Brisbane was heavily involved in Evangelism Explosion. Bob commented that Jesus didn’t use any one “formula” in bringing a person to faith.

Reading the Gospels, I knew it was true! To Andrew and another of John’s disciples, Jesus had simply said, “Come and you will see” (John 1.39). Later, when they were back at their boats, he calls them, “Come, follow me, and I will make you fishers of men” (Matthew 4.19). We hear him telling Nicodemus, “You must be born again!” (John 3.1ff). He rebukes his disciples and says, “Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these” (Luke 18.16)...

Sometimes we have taken a whole series of elements from the Gospels and Epistles and put them together into a kind of formula – a series of “hoops” that people have to go through to become a “true” Christian. Another minister who had done Evangelism Explosion training the same time as I did said later that there was one element missing – from this already-comprehensive Gospel presentation – and he had added it for his students! Theologically, he had a point, but, practically, he had missed the point.

Let’s take a quick look at four outreach programmes in which I have had involvement over the years. I am not suggesting any of these is “the ultimate”. Indeed, I was concerned in watching a training video for one of them to hear it claimed that it was now practically perfect! These are examples from which we may learn. They have helped many to have more confidence in putting their own faith into words and in leading others towards a genuine faith. Many such “programmes” seem to be most effective for about ten years. Then the church begins looking for something else. But the core issue is never the “programme”, but whether “reaching out with the Gospel” is at the heart of the Church and its members.

“Have you heard of the Four Spiritual Laws?”

The little booklet, *Have You Heard of the Four Spiritual Laws?*, was created in 1952 by Bill Bright (1921-2003), the founder of Campus Crusade for Christ. It is freely available on the Campus Crusade website (<http://campuscrusade.com/fourlawseng.htm>) and has been reproduced here as Appendix 4. A completely rewritten version is also available under the title, *Knowing God Personally* (<http://www.ccca.org.au/about-us/knowing-god-personally>).

My experience of the Four Spiritual Laws booklet comes from a week-long “Lay Institute for Evangelism” conducted in our Childers church in the early 1970s. L.I.F.E. was not then, as it seems to be now, an arm of the Seventh-Day Adventist Church. Rather, it was the Australian outreach of Campus Crusade which, at that stage, had no ministry on Australian university campuses.

The week of teaching included topics such as “How to be sure you are a Christian”, “How to experience God’s love and forgiveness”, “How to be filled with the Spirit”, “How to introduce others to Christ”, “How to help fulfil the Great Commission”... The Four Spiritual Laws booklet was introduced from the first session. For the Saturday, participants received community survey questionnaires on attitudes to religion. We took these questionnaires into the community. The questionnaire was quite general, but sought opportunity to introduce the question, “Have you heard of the four spiritual laws?”

The week and the booklet helped clarify a number of faith issues. Further, several people had begun sharing their faith outside the church context – the booklet proved to be a useful tool. Interestingly, we heard that in USA, where it was written, over 20% of those approached in the community made a positive response to the presentation, whereas the figure in Australia was less than 10%. That probably says something about the more “irreligious” attitude of our fellows.

However, I still recall one church lady arriving for the first time on Friday night. She had missed the teaching in the earlier part of the week and was somewhat confused by it all. She took home the Four

Spiritual Laws booklet in her handbag. Next morning she woke early and thought, “I think I’ll read that little book.” She followed it through, page by page. She looked at the diagrams of the life centred on self and the life with Christ on the throne. “That one on the left is me,” she thought to herself. “I wish my life was like the one on the right. I’ll pray that prayer...” A week or two later she came along to our mid-week women’s Bible study for the first time. It happened to be a day when the numbers were well down, but it didn’t matter. She spent most of the time telling us what the Lord had done for her! It was real!

Evangelism Explosion

Evangelism Explosion started in 1962 by Dr. D. James Kennedy at the Fort Lauderdale Presbyterian Church, Florida. The church began to grow, and grow. In a 12-year period, church membership increased from 17 to 2,000. Kennedy realised he couldn’t do this alone and made witness-training a bedrock of his ministry. The principle is set out well on the EE website (<http://evangelismexplosion.org/about-us/what-is-ee/>) –

Evangelism Explosion is a ministry that trains people how to share their faith in Christ and how to bring people from unbelief to belief. It utilizes a variety of components including prayer, actual on-the-job training where the experienced lead the inexperienced, and the principle of spiritual multiplication.

“Multiplication” is the key component, not just winning people to the Lord one-by-one (addition). But training those won to the Lord to win, and then train, others. In the Book of Acts we read that the disciples “multiplied” and “multiplied exceedingly.” This shift from addition to spiritual multiplication offers the one real hope of sharing the Gospel with a world population that is, itself, continually multiplying.

On-the-job training is another vital ingredient. By actually going out with experienced trainers in real life witnessing situations, people learn how to share their faith. Much like learning to fly an airplane would be impossible without actually getting in the cockpit, evangelism is difficult without leaving the confines of a classroom.

By learning small parts of the Gospel each week, including Bible verses and illustrations, people incrementally grasp a Gospel tool that becomes a lifelong mission.

The training is normally over a seventeen-week period. There is a whole structure has to be memorised. This is not as difficult as it sounds, working from four basic points (Introduction, Gospel explanation, Commitment, Immediate follow-up) to five sub-headings for each point, then with detailed study of each sub-heading. The time includes going out with a trainer. Initially, the trainer leads the presentation, with the trainee giving a short testimony. Progressively, the trainee takes over more and more of the presentation.

St Andrew’s Anglican Church, Coorparoo, was the Australian centre for this ministry for a number of years – that’s where I did my training. Later, it moved to Sydney. It was obvious that it had a major impact on the St Andrew’s congregation. Newcomers, visitors and folk coming for baptism of a child would all be visited by a training team.

A summary of points 2 and 3 (Gospel presentation and Commitment) can be found in Appendix 5. This has been modified from a web version at <http://www.scribd.com/doc/115361661/Do-You-Know-for-Sure>.

The transition from Introduction to Gospel explanation is marked by two “diagnostic” questions.

Do you know for certain that, if you were to die tonight, you would go to heaven?

If God were to ask you, “Why should I let you into my heaven?”, what would you say?

When presented sensitively, I have never known these questions to cause anxiety or offence. I often prefaced them with, “I know you look fit and healthy, but wonder how you would respond to this question...” The questions assume some sort of belief in God and an after-life. They may not be the questions or approach for a committed atheist! The response to the first question may reveal uncertainty about the concept of “heaven”. However, it is still possible to proceed sensitively, “Just supposing there is a heaven...”

Often the response to the first question is a plain “No”. The response to the second generally assumes that you have to be good enough, do lots of selfless acts, give money to charity/church... In other words, entry into heaven is thought to depend on what we manage to do – in contrast to the Gospel.

I haven’t had the opportunity to train EE teams or to be involved in EE-style visitation evangelism for many years now. However, I have found the five-point Gospel presentation and five-point Commitment points very useful in counselling and follow-up. They are evident in my Confirmation course (<http://www.peterjblackburn.net/confirm/confirm1.htm>) and in my follow-up booklet, *It’s a Great Life!* (<http://www.peterjblackburn.net/confirm/gtlife.pdf>).

Christianity Explained

The Christianity Explained course was written by Michael Bennett. He converted to faith in Jesus Christ at the age of 24 mainly through reading the Scriptures. During 20 years of pastoral work in Anglican churches he developed the Christianity Explained course, which he further developed and promoted when he was working for Scripture Union from 1985-1996.

Four principles of CE are explained on the website –
<http://www.christianityexplained.com/shop/principles.htm>.

ASSUME NOTHING

CE starts from the assumption that the enquirer knows little or nothing about the Bible or the basic Gospel. This is increasingly the case in traditionally Christian countries.

PROCEED SLOWLY

CE seeks to teach the Gospel slowly, one point each lesson, over a six-unit course. It is based on the Gospel of Mark, as this is the shortest and easiest gospel for someone starting out.

LIMITED TIME COMMITMENT

“Would you be willing to give me just six hours of your life?” Enquirers are asked to meet on just six occasions, a limited commitment.

THE THREE FEARS

Enquirers are assured from the beginning they will not be asked to read aloud, pray, sing or answer Bible questions that may embarrass them. Discussion however is encouraged.

A summary of the course content is set out in Appendix 6, as found on the website
<http://www.christianityexplained.com/shop/course.htm>).

Alpha Course

Originating in Holy Trinity, Brompton, and after years of development by former barrister Nicky Gumbel, the Alpha course has been used in churches around the world and has modifications for specific groups – Student Alpha, Youth Alpha, Business Alpha, Alpha for Forces, Alpha for Prisons, Alpha for Seniors, Alpha in a Catholic Context... (<http://www.alpha.org.au/>)

Alpha is “an opportunity for anyone to explore the Christian faith in a relaxed setting over seven or ten thought-provoking weekly sessions, with a day or weekend away.”

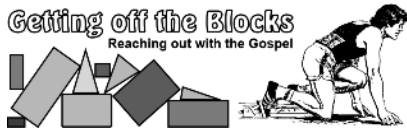
The booklet, *Why Jesus?*, is available in an on-line version (<http://www.alpha.org.au/why-jesus>).

Alpha typically includes food, a short talk about the Christian faith (usually from a Nicky Gumbel DVD) and a small group discussion.

An outline of the course can be found Appendix 7.

The Alpha course runs for about as long as Evangelism Explosion. Here, however, apart from team training, the sessions are all with the invited guests. While the presentation leans heavily on the Nicky Gumbel videos (I don't think that was Nicky's original intention!), the role of the small group leaders is vital.

Pointers for Witnesses



It would be possible to spend a great deal of time studying these and other such “programmes”. There is much benefit to the outreach focus of the congregation and its members in actually doing an evangelism programme such as one of these. They also help get individual members beginning to open our mouths about issues of faith – we find this easier than we had thought! It is still, however, in the “protected” environment of church activity.

This is especially true of Christianity Explained and Alpha. In both of these, the Gospel content is all shared in a “safe” group context – safely steered by printed course material. The Four Spiritual Laws have the challenge of a “cold” contact – at least in the form in which we were taught it – though the booklet is also a very useful tool to introduce the Gospel to someone where a friendly relationship already exists. Evangelism Explosion visits people who have already some sort of contact with the church. However, it does expect memorisation and appropriate application of Gospel content. I have already mentioned the ways in which I have found the framework of EE to be very helpful in other contexts.

More important than the differences between the four programmes are the elements they have in common. In one way or another, they all see the God of love acting against the backdrop of human rejection and sin. They all have a key focus on the identity of Jesus Christ and the fact and results flowing from his death and resurrection. They all include God’s call to repentance and faith.

There are two key elements in our “reaching out” – relationship and prayer. All of these “programmes” assume a strong prayer back-up. I commend again the concept of a “covenant of prayer” as a strongly positive means towards building up relationships within and beyond our church fellowship.

Earlier I asked the question which we can rephrase slightly in these words, “What is the good news **to me** in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus?” I hope that, in taking a deeper look at the content of the good news, we can still write down a succinct summary – and that we know that it is true for us!

But now we come to an important but different question – **How is the message about Jesus Christ good news to a non-Christian?** Can we write down words that will help make the basics clear to someone else?

In an article “You are My Witnesses” (<http://wscal.edu/resource-center/resource/you-are-my-witnesses>), Julius J. Kim, of Westminster Seminary, California, describes a visit to his non-Christian barber. There is much in this article worth reading, and he makes reference to some resources, including Christianity Explained. Here are excerpts from the beginning and the end.

During one visit several months ago, we struck up a conversation on an intriguing movie he had watched: Mel Gibson’s *The Passion of the Christ*. He began to share how mesmerized he was with the movie, especially the remarkably vivid portrayal of Jesus’ torture and execution. As he began to describe what he watched, he plaintively asked me, “Why did Jesus have to suffer like that?”

While this may no longer be a common scenario, it does nevertheless illustrate the fact that as Christians we will undoubtedly encounter people within our families, neighborhoods, and workplaces who need to hear a clear presentation of the gospel. As followers of Christ, we are reminded by the apostle Peter: “Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have” (1 Peter 3:15)...

“So, why did Jesus have to suffer?” asked my barber. Where should I begin? “Well, Jesus suffered because he was willing to pay the penalty for my disobedience to God. Now, you’re probably wondering what my disobedience has to do with Jesus, right? How about we start at the beginning...”

While Jesus is central to the gospel message, my barber (and most 21st century people living in North America) do not have the background or worldview to understand the basic story line of the Bible in which the death and resurrection of Jesus makes sense. If we are to present the gospel to those who are biblically illiterate and have adopted worldviews that are contrary to the Bible, there are certain assumptions about God the creator and man’s original dignity and subsequent guilt that must be shared so that the rest of the gospel story line makes sense. The resources mentioned above will help fill in that biblical story line so that the gospel can be presented with clarity and power.

One thing these resources cannot do, however, is persuade my barber of the truth. That is something only the Holy Spirit can do. And that’s comforting, isn’t it? We need to remind ourselves that God is the only one who can change a heart of stone into a heart of flesh. He is the one who draws his people to himself and grants his

mercies in Christ. Nevertheless, what I do, out of love for God and for the lost, is simply offer the gospel freely and fully so I can say along with the apostle Paul, “When I preach the gospel, I cannot boast, for I am compelled to preach. Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel!” (1 Corinthians 9:16).

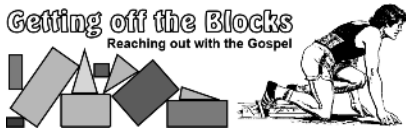
In many places worldwide, Christians face the possibility of loss of property, imprisonment, torture, death... It is in the context of real suffering that Peter wrote the words quoted by Julius Kim above – “Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have” (1 Peter 3.15). In our country, we don’t face harsh persecution for our faith. We have freedom, yet have been tongue-tied about the Gospel.

Christianity tends to be marginalised in the media. Mention is always made of any professing Christian involved in wrongdoing. Indeed, misdemeanours – proven or otherwise – by priest or pastor, church official or worker... is soon reported. We agree that there should be no cover-ups, but sometimes feel that the media makes judgement before the courts do.

A few years ago, I saw a sad car in a parking lot. The front passenger’s door was badly buckled. The owner had attached to the door a neat sign which read, “Christians aren’t perfect, just forgiven sinners.” Now, that’s true – though I hope we realise that, when we have received the grace of forgiveness, the Lord is going to keep working on us! Seeing it had been a left-side collision, I hoped that the owner was also a “forgiving sinner”. The silent “witness” of a sign is no substitute for the face-to-face reality of a life.

Sharing the News

Getting off the Blocks
Reaching out with the Gospel



Am I the perfect witness? No! Do people always come to faith when I have opportunity to share the Gospel with them? Again no!

I was struck by these words of Julius Kim – “One thing these resources cannot do, however, is persuade my barber of the truth. That is something only the Holy Spirit can do. And that’s comforting, isn’t it? We need to remind ourselves that God is the only one who can change a heart of stone into a heart of flesh. He is the one who draws his people to himself and grants his mercies in Christ.”

Many years ago I visited a man who had been helping paint his daughter’s house. He fell off a ladder and seriously fractured a leg. After we had talked for quite a while, I tried to steer the conversation towards spiritual matters. But his hands were also on the “steering wheel” keeping our talk away from spiritual things! He wasn’t ready.

Sometimes we can’t even “sow a seed or two”. Always we have to remember that it is God’s work. We just don’t know how many “witnesses” down the line God will use to bring someone home.

About that time I received a phone call from someone in Helidon. Could I visit a man from Kyogle who had cancer and had been admitted to St Vincent’s, the big Catholic hospital in Toowoomba. He only had one month to live. In the words of the caller, “He knows he will die soon, but doesn’t know where he is going.”

I slipped a John’s gospel into my pocket and headed up to the hospital. I spent a couple of hours with George that day, basically going through John, underlining verses that seemed especially significant. At the end of that time I wrote in the front, “For God so loved George, that he gave his only-begotten Son Jesus, that as George believes in Jesus, George will not perish but will have everlasting life.”

That was the new reality for George. In fact, he lived on for another six months. I saw him often and could see him growing in grace. During periods when his pain levels weren’t too high, he was writing to his wife and members of his family. He didn’t know whether any of them were believers. But it wasn’t just his words – his life had become a witness to the love and grace of God. One day the Mother Superior of that hospital came to him with a request, “George, you are a godly man. Will you pray for me?” To which he replied, “I am already praying for you!” That had become his life – praying for people! His funeral was a celebration and an opportunity to retell John three sixteen and George.

Many years later, one of our members – faithful but silent about faith – had a stroke. He had been chatty and cheerful, but was now unable to speak. The EE question ran through my head, “Joe, have you come to the point where you know for certain that, if you were to die tonight, you would go to heaven?” Not the time for that question – definitely not the time for that presentation! Yet I knew that, if he were to die tonight, I would conduct his funeral within the week... Would I have certainty that he would go to heaven?

So I told Joe the story of George. He listened carefully. Then I said, “For God so loved Joe, that he gave his only-begotten Son Jesus... But what about the next bit, Joe? Can I say, that as Joe believes in Jesus?” He managed a sort of smile and a very definite nod. “...that as Joe believes in Jesus, Joe will not perish but will have eternal life.”

Some might say that is an inadequate presentation of the Gospel – not enough said, for instance, about the death and resurrection of Jesus. I would reply – How many “hoops” does a person dying from cancer or a stroke have to go through to enter the Kingdom of God? Entry is only possible through the completed redemptive work of Christ, the eternal God-Man who died for our sins and rose again. Jesus had said that “no one comes to the Father except through me” (John 14.6). Peter later declared to the Jewish Sanhedrin, “Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved” (Acts 4.12).

Remember Jesus’ words with the criminal crucified alongside him –

One of the criminals who hung there hurled insults at him: “Aren’t you the Christ? Save yourself and us!”⁴⁰ But the other criminal rebuked him. “Don’t you fear God,” he said, “since you are under the same sentence? ⁴¹ We are punished justly, for we are getting what our deeds deserve. But this man has done nothing wrong.”⁴² Then he said, “Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.”⁴³ Jesus answered him, “I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in paradise.” (Luke 23.39-43)

It wasn't the time to rehearse all the doctrinal necessities. Both of them were dying. The criminal had expressed acknowledgement of sin. He claimed no worthiness and just asked to be remembered. What a simple word of promise and comfort – "I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in paradise."

Then there was a lady who started coming to our church. She always came a bit late and left before the benediction – not easy to build a relationship. We were involved in Evangelism Explosion training and prayed for an opportunity to visit her.

She had a lot of pain in her life and had fled to Brisbane hopefully to start a new life. We did a lot of listening and reached a point when we were able to share the Gospel presentation. She listened intently and when we asked, "Would you like to receive the gift of eternal life?", she said, "Yes, would you like a tea or a coffee?"

We couldn't go any further at that point – beyond the tea or coffee! – but arranged to come back the following week. Apparently, she told us later, this put her in a bit of a panic. She went to Vinnies – "Can you sell me a Bible? I need a Bible!" "Sorry, lady! We don't have any Bibles here." Then, as she walked down the street... "Wait a minute, lady! We've found one!"

It was one of those King James Bibles we used to give to Sunday School children – with print so small you needed 20-20 eyesight! But it was a Bible and she was ready for us next week. I had written and printed out a follow-up booklet, *It's a Great Life!* (<http://www.peterjblackburn.net/confirm/gtlife.pdf>). We went over the Gospel again, clarifying her response and praying the prayer of faith.

We arranged to come back yet again. She had written on every line, up the margins, down the other side and across the bottom! What she had written expressed so clearly what the Word was saying. It was just so insightful. I have commentaries on the Greek text that I don't think could have expressed biblical truth more clearly than she had done! That love of the Word was the sign to me that the Holy Spirit was really at work in her life, that she was truly "born again"!

Which brings me to an important question – Do we really believe in the Holy Spirit? It seems to me that – from widely differing points of view! – our major focus is on forcing people's thinking or experience into our pre-conceived "right shape".

Perhaps you have heard of L'Abri (<http://labri.org/>), a ministry which

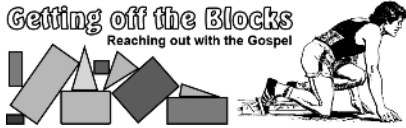
began in Switzerland in 1955 when Francis and Edith Schaeffer decided in faith to open their home to be a place where people might find satisfying answers to their questions and practical demonstration of Christian care. It was called L'Abri, the French word for "shelter," because they sought to provide a shelter from the pressures of a relentlessly secular 20th century. As time went by, so many people came that others were called to join the Schaeffers in their work, and more branches were established.

For some time we have been on their mailing list. One prayer letter told of the particular challenges and blessings they had been facing in the recent term with the particular set of students who had come. It ended with the comment, "If the Holy Spirit hadn't turned up, we'd have been toast!"

We should never try to "engineer" the presence and work of the Holy Spirit – nor to "pump ourselves up" with the Spirit! That's to invite something that may well not be genuine. But as we truly live and share Christ, the true Holy Spirit does turn up!

Going, therefore...

Getting off the Blocks
Reaching out with the Gospel



The Lord Jesus – our Saviour and Lord, the Lord of the Church – gave his disciples a mission. We often call it the Great Commission. “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age” (Matthew 28.16-20).

Is that our passion as members saved by grace, alive in Christ? Does the life of the present-day Church – including our congregation – intentionally reach out with the Gospel to rescue the lost?

Theodore Wedel, an Episcopal priest, wrote the following parable of the lifesaving station in 1953. Most of us have heard it in some form. It speaks a powerful challenge – has the mission been forgotten?

On a dangerous seacoast where shipwrecks often occur there was once a crude lifesaving station. The building was just a hut, and there was only one boat, but the few devoted members kept a constant watch over the sea, and with no thought for themselves went out day and night tirelessly searching for the lost. Many lives were saved by this wonderful little station, so that it became famous. Some of those who were saved, and various others in the surrounding area, wanted to become associated with the station and give of their time and their money and their effort for the support of its work. New boats were bought and new crews were trained. The little lifesaving station grew.

Now some of the members of the lifesaving station became unhappy, in time, however, because the building was so crude and so poorly equipped. They felt that a more comfortable, suitable place should be provided as the first refuge of those saved from the sea. And so they replaced the emergency cots with beds, and they put better furniture in the now enlarged building, so that now the lifesaving station actually became a popular gathering place for its members. They took great care in decorating it beautifully and furnishing it exquisitely, for they found new uses for it in the context of a sort of club. But fewer members were now interested in going to sea on lifesaving missions, and so they hired lifesaving crews to do this work on their behalf, and in their stead. Now, don't misunderstand, the lifesaving motif still prevailed in the club's decoration and symbols – there was a liturgical lifeboat (symbolic rather than fully functional) in the room where the club initiations were held, for example –

so the changes did not necessarily mean that the original purposes were totally lost.

About this time a large ship was wrecked off the coast, and the hired crews brought in boatloads of cold and wet, half-drowned people. They were dirty people and they were sick people, some of them with black skin, some with yellow skin. The beautiful new club, as you might imagine, was thrown into chaos, so that the property committee immediately had a shower house built outside the club where these recent victims of shipwreck could be cleaned up before coming inside the main clubhouse.

At the very next meeting, there was a split in the club membership. Most of the members wanted to stop the club's lifesaving activities for being so unpleasant, as well as for being a hindrance to the normal social life of the club. Some members insisted upon lifesaving as their primary purpose, pointing out that, indeed, they were still called a lifesaving station. But these few were finally voted down and told that if they wanted to save the lives of all the various kinds of people who were shipwrecked in those waters, they could begin their own lifesaving station down the coast. And so, they did just that.

Now as the years passed, the new station down the coast came to experience the very same changes that had occurred in the older, initial station. It evolved into a club, and yet another lifesaving station had to be founded to restore the original purpose.

Well, history continued to repeat itself, so that if you visit that seacoast today, you will find a great number of exclusive clubs along that shore. Shipwrecks are frequent in those waters, but most of the people drown!

Throughout the course of this book, I have asked a number of questions.

Where do the things we are doing fit into the mission our Lord has given us? This question is to help us assess where we are as a congregation. We may view ourselves as very open, warm, welcoming... but is that really reflected in our life together? Are we so “warm” to one another that we leave visitors and newcomers on the outer? Is there something in how we view ourselves as a church that is a “block” to sharing the Gospel in the community?

What is the good news in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus? Here's where we can discover another “block”. There is so much negativity out there, and we find it in the Church too. The very foundations of our faith are called into question. We won't reach out with the Gospel if, personally and as a

congregation, we aren't certain of the core of the Gospel. I'm not talking here about believing the facts – they are true! – but living the facts – translating them into life and action.

How would you explain the Christian good news to an average non-church-going Australian? This is probably the “block” where we struggle the most. When we have good non-Christian friends, we hesitate to say or do anything that might disturb our friendship. I certainly trust that we won't give up our friends if they seem to reject Christ's invitation! Remember that, in God's plan, we are just one “witness” in a whole series of “witnesses” and events God may use in bringing someone home.

Above all, don't forget to **pray!** Pray for your non-Christian friends, Pray for one another. Pray for the life of your congregation. Pray for elders, leaders, ministers. But, above all, come yourself to the Lord – reading the Word, seeking the mind that was in Christ Jesus, and knowing your personal emptiness that has only been filled by the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit.

Appendix 1 – Fair Dinkum!

How long do you have to live on Buderim before you are classed a local? What qualifies a person to be regarded as a “local”, anyway? I have been living here for three years now. But my family has longer associations. Both my mother’s and my father’s families farmed in the Woombye area and knew Buderim well. Dad used to tell a story, from courting days, of how he had borrowed Grandpa Schulz’s sulky to bring Elsie and two of his sisters up Mons Road to Buderim. The wheel hit a root in the road and the shaft was broken, tipping the three ladies out. Grandpa still agreed to the marriage! That’s a true story, but does that make me a “local”?

How long does “Western-style” civilisation have to exist in Australia before it can really be classed as Australian? This question is being asked afresh as aboriginal groups consider whether they have land claims over Brisbane’s central business district. It raises a number of important issues which are not to be taken lightly.

Throughout Expo 88, a small group of protesters maintained a presence and an aboriginal flag outside one of the main entrances. In both church and community there were those who questioned whether Australia should be celebrating at all. You are just the late-comers to this land. What have you done with those who have been here *ab origine* – “from the beginning”?

From the Christian and Biblical perspective, of course, we want to affirm that God is the only one who has been here *ab origine*. All of us are latecomers. “The earth is the Lord’s and the fulness thereof; the world and they that dwell therein” (Psalm 24.1), as the Authorised Version put it. Ultimately, God has prior ownership and expects of all of us a far greater measure of respect and care for one another. This generation cannot carry the guilt of the early settlers in their treatment of the aborigines, and it is quite impossible to revert to old boundaries and to ship us back to the countries of our forebears! But all of us – aboriginal or otherwise – must learn to deal with one another with true respect and mutual care. At the end of 1987, our family was having some of Dad’s Long Service Leave. On 22nd December, the Tall Ships were coming to Adelaide. We took our breakfast to Outer Harbour so we could see the Polish ship, *Dar Mlodziezy*, come into port. A fine ship, she had all the signs of modern construction – steel hull, masts, arms, spars, sophisticated electronic navigational equipment and twin 750 bhp engines. We saw it, with sails neatly furled, under diesel power, but with its motors drowned out by helicopters and other planes overhead and the engines of the tugs and other small craft that had gone out to accompany it into port.

I guess most of us saw some of the Tall Ships at that time – on television, if we couldn’t get to a suitable place. Great stuff, didn’t you think? It helped us to recreate the past, to give a sense of history to our Bicentennial celebrations.

I don’t know how the timing of things went in other places, but the *Dar Mlodziezy* arrived in St. Vincent’s Gulf two days early. Why? Because of light winds! On the voyage from Perth it had to make greater use of its diesel engines than anticipated!

So there was something phoney about our re-creation of the past! We wanted the feeling of the past, but not the disabilities and dangers, the charm without the inconvenience!

Back in the real days of sail, when navigation was a tricky business and shipwreck a real danger, when the colony and the possibility of a new life and of gold were the attraction and not the bicentenary of a nation – back in those days things were different.

One famous (perhaps we should call him “notorious”) captain was “Bully” Forbes. In 1854 he set a record of 63 days for the trip from Liverpool to Melbourne in the *Lightning*, a boat that carried 13,000 square yards of sail. “The captain says we must set every yard of canvas, and if that does not make her go, we must put up our shirts.” One of the passengers thought “we ought to petition the Captain to keep up less sail, for he sees very little difference between frightening a man out of his wits and killing him outright.” Two days later, a diary entry recorded, “More sail set and we tear away as if we are to be strained to pieces... Now and then a batch of passengers pitched over to leeward – some thrown out of their berths.”

Sailing then wasn’t a sport – it was for real, it was fair dinkum! For many of the poorer passengers the experience was so terrifying that they would never venture into a boat again. So they came – and stayed – and a colony grew to be a nation.

Fair Dinkum?

Now, who, would you say, is a “dinkum Aussie”? Is it Norm – the over-drinking, under-active character? Is it the “ocker” – proud to be irreverent and a bit irresponsible? Can you be first-, second-, third- generation and be dinkum? Should you preferably be of English, Welsh, Scottish, Irish descent – or will it do to have come from an aboriginal, Italian or Chinese line?

It depends on your definition of a “dinkum Aussie”. Is it OK not to be absolutely truthful all the time? to play around with the truth for the benefit of number one? Is it OK for you, but not for the tall poppies in the police force, the government and elsewhere?

That’s where we’ve blown it! Dinkum has tended to mean “She’s OK by me”. But does that make us really OK? Are we OK by God?

There are things about each one of us that aren’t fair dinkum. For one thing, our double standard – one for us and another for people in leadership – shows us up! That can’t be right. If there’s a God, he must know that we’ve all gone wrong somewhere, that not one of us really matches up to what we ought to be!

He's Fair Dinkum!

The Bible is an uncomfortable book – it tells it like it really is. It gets at me – as well as at all the political leaders! It doesn’t try to make out that any of us is perfect, except one – that’s Jesus!

Our immediate Aussie reaction, of course, is to pull him down a rung or two. We don’t like tall poppies. Except – with this one it doesn’t seem to work. He really **is** fair dinkum – strong, wise, unselfish. The people of his time thought they’d put him to the test, get rid of him as a fake – but he wasn’t! His death was public and well-publicised, and the evidence that he came alive again was quite overwhelming!

It’s no use going through what they did all over again! We’ll only get the egg on our face like they did! Or worse – because if it’s all true, then we’re more stupid than usual if we don’t do something about it! Unfortunately some of us never learn!

The incredible thing is that God is still prepared to welcome us – stupid and all as we’ve been! didn’t just accept the rough treatment we gave him – he accepted the rough treatment we deserve from God because we haven’t been fair dinkum.

Let's Get Fair Dinkum!

I wonder if you can trace back to a First Fleeter. Good for you – these days that seems to have become a matter of pride! But most of us can’t! We came even later than you did!

So much for our forebears. Now what about us? Are we fair dinkum? Are we the genuine article God meant us to be? We do well to think long and hard about Jesus. He’s been the only really fair dinkum one in the whole history of the human race. And we tried to get rid of him – in fact, in many ways we keep on trying to trying to get rid of him! But it backfired all those centuries ago and it will backfire for us too – because he’s real and really did come from God.

God is saying to us that if we admit we’re not fair dinkum and put our trust in Jesus he’ll forgive and forget all we’ve ever done wrong and give us a whole new start!

Now, that’s fantastic! How about it? There are many big issues facing our Australian nation at this present time, but the biggest is still whether we are prepared to come to God and accept his new beginning. The tragedy is that we have imagined our fake responses to God to be “dinkum Aussie”. But they have never really been that at all. They may be “typical”, but they are never “fair dinkum”.

We need an Australia that is more caring towards both people and the environment. But we are not going to make it alone. We are not going to make it without the God who sent his own Son to live the truly “fair dinkum” life. He was tried by a kangaroo court and put to death on a cross because “Aussie” attitudes were about in those days.

Now God is saying, You took it out on Jesus. The rough treatment you gave him should have come to you. Now come! Because he died, I’m prepared to forgive you and to accept you into my family!

That’s a fair dinkum offer! How about it?

Appendix 2 – Straight from the Horse’s Mouth

The man was driving out west when his car broke down. Fortunately he was not too far from the next town. But he put up the bonnet – it might be something simple he could fix himself or, at the very least, he should find out where the problem might be before he went for help.

As he leaned over the engine checking the electrics – battery terminals tight, high tension cables properly home... – he heard a voice behind him, “It’s the carburettor!”

That gave him a bit of a start. He hadn’t seen a soul when the engine died. He looked all around – a horse on the other side of the fence, but nobody in sight. “It’s been a long hot drive,” he thought. “I must be imagining things.”

He put his head down again to continue his search when he heard the voice a second time – “It’s the carburettor!”

The voice was coming from the direction of the horse. Absently, he looked over at the horse and said, “Did you say something?” He saw the horse open its mouth and say, “I tell you, it’s the carburettor!”

This was just too much for the man. He dropped the bonnet and ran all the way to town, as fast as his legs could take him. When he got to the pub, he rushed into the bar and began telling his story.

“...And there I was, hanging over the engine when I heard this horse speaking! He said, ‘It’s the carburettor!’ ”

“Not an old grey stallion?” they asked.

“Yeah, that’s the one!”

“Ah,” they said to him, “you don’t want to take any notice of that horse! He doesn’t know a thing about cars!”

Can I have a Light?

As Aussies, we like to think we can do things ourselves. For some, that streak of independence may well have come over with an ancestor who had fallen foul of the law. Others have had forebears who came to pioneer an existence in an incredibly tough land – it would make or break them!

But with that tough independence there developed mateship – that fellow feeling for others battling the harsh conditions – and the typical Aussie humour – because if you didn’t laugh, you might cry. And we do value our mates. You never tell on a mate. And a mate can help you if you get in a spot.

“Can I have a light, mate?” he says. And what does he mean? He wants to “light up”. The craving for another cigarette has grabbed him, but he has no matches. He needs my help. But non-smokers like me just don’t carry matches, so I tell him, “Sorry, I can’t help you!” and he goes looking for someone else.

“Can I have a light, mate?” he says. His legs are sticking out from under the car. He’s trying to find out what’s wrong. He’s fairly certain where the problem is, but can’t see quite well enough to work on it. He needs me to pass him a torch, or, better still, to climb under with him and shine it on the place where he is working. Then he’ll be able to see properly, understand the problem and fix it up.

Of course, some people are complete loners – they absolutely refuse to admit they need help, even if it’s staring them in the face! None of us like the interfering types, but it’s possible to be quite stupidly stubborn about it. Some fellows would swear black and blue that they’re OK when it’s as clear as day they’re not!

But then, we’ve all had the experience of taking someone’s advice and regretting it. So we end up making our own mistakes. We’re rather good at that – though we don’t like admitting it! Someone said that, if we kicked our worst enemy in the pants every time he did us a bad turn, we’d be so sore we’d never be able to sit down!

Who Needs God?

Curiously, Australians are among the most religious people on earth. The name of God, or of Jesus Christ, or the Holy Ghost (or Holy Smokes or some other holy thing) passes the lips of many Australians at a higher rate per sentence than for most English-speaking peoples! And yet the image we try to project is that we are rather irreligious. We don’t need any of that religious stuff. We don’t need God. If we use his name, we don’t mean anything by that! By our blasphemies we are showing our maturity, asserting our independence – perhaps in a strange way daring this God (if he exists) to strike out against us!

Who needs God? In this land we have faced flood and fire and drought by our own courage and ingenuity. It has often hurt, but we’ve done it. That’s the character that has made us rugged individualists.

That has marked us out for over two hundred years now. We don't want to live under God or anyone else. Many would happily remove from our Constitution, not only all reference to monarchy, but also to God Almighty. We're grown up now! Who needs God?

Our multicultural policies feed this independence of God. School teachers have been told references to Christmas must be free of Christian content. Supposedly this is to avoid offence to students of other faiths, though it is hard to imagine that class references to Yom Kippur or Ramadan could be made without reference to the religious significance of these Jewish and Islamic celebrations. Somehow our cultural diversity is being used as an excuse for opting out of any faith. Who needs God?

The reality is that we aren't making out so well on our own after all. We are finding it more difficult to make long and stable marriages. Violence within marriage has reached frightening proportions. The level of violence in our society as a whole has increased alarmingly. We show commendable concern for the animals and plants in our environment, but tolerate the eradication of unwanted human embryos and are slow to eliminate the sexual exploitation of the young in our country and overseas. We prefer that doctors assist terminally-ill patients to end it all than to accept the commitment of long-term palliative care. We are all too ready to give in to the pressures from homosexual lobby groups that we accept their orientation as normal and their actions as moral. We are in a moral mess! We are already paying for it in our society and will pay heavily for it in the future! God help us! Where do we think we're going?

There's Light All Right!

It's time to blow the whistle – to say, “Enough!” We just can't keep travelling along this road. It's time to find our way again! It's time to turn this whole show around – this nation that we call Australia!

During the Year of Indigenous Peoples we thought we could solve the native title issue. We satisfied our racial conscience but we gave a narrow solution. It hasn't helped many aborigines and has failed to address the bigger question, “Whose land is this?” Right at the moment we face the divisive issues of justice, of what it means to live as one nation together – of black land rights versus white land rights. But – whose land is this?

Some early cartographers pictured *Terra Australis incognita* as part of a large antarctic mass arising from the South Pole. It was the unknown continent – there ought to be such a continent, but western explorers hadn't discovered it.

In December 1605 the Portuguese explorer, Fernandez de Quiros, set out to discover, where others had failed, the elusive south land. After weeks of sailing, his boat came to land at what he believed to be the missing continent. He named it “*Australia del Espiritu Santo*” – the South Land of the Holy Spirit. (The spelling “Australia” was a gesture to the King of Spain who was also archduke of Austria).

De Quiros got it wrong. He had in fact discovered the largest island (now called simply Espiritu Santo) in the group that Cook later named the New Hebrides (now Vanuatu). And yet, he got it right! This land was God's country before ever it became Aboriginal country or Anglo-European country.

The Mabo legislation and the recent Wik decision have the potential to lead to a social and legal nightmare for black and white Australians alike if we fail to turn again and acknowledge our land as *Australia del Espiritu Santo*. This is God's land first and foremost. How should we use this land? And how are we to recognise with care and fairness the needs of all Australians, whenever they have settled here?

We desperately need the true God, his Light and his help! That Light is not just an idea that people have had – you know, hold up the light, pass on the torch... – and the Light is not just God's truth that is somehow over there when we seem to be over here!

Listen to the incredible claims of Jesus – “I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life – no one comes to the Father, except through me!” (John 14.6) “I am the Light of the world; whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life” (John 8.12).

God's Truth has come here to us! God's Light has come into this world! God himself, in the person of his Son, has come here!

The Light has come! And that Light shines on our human life, our values, our life-styles, our institutions... Like so many today, the people of that time didn't like the Light, rejected the Light, tried to get rid of it because it made them uncomfortable... But it's God's Light – you can't do that! The trial was a miserable kangaroo court, but God took that rejection and turned it to redemption! The Light still shines!

We need some light all right! Being irreligious hasn't been so very successful! These days people are seeking spirituality in all sorts of places and by all kinds of means. Do be careful! Don't take it from any old

horse! Not all you get “from the horse’s mouth” is to be trusted! Many modern gurus parade their lavish claims.

The God who revealed himself to this world in the person of Jesus Christ the Son of God is the only true God there is! He is the God of this South Land of the Holy Spirit! He is worthy of our allegiance, and is ready and able to help us! Come to him! Trust him! Worship him! Obey him!

An Australia Day message by Peter J. Blackburn, at St Mark's Anglican Church, Buderim, 1994

Appendix 3 – Life after Birth

Tonight I want to talk about “life after birth”. Do you believe in life after birth?

A funeral director once told me that his most depressing experience was with the funeral of an atheist. A group of friends gathered at the grave-side. One of them spoke about the man’s life – and his death – then said, “Well, that’s it! And that’ll be it for us all one day!” And they just walked off.

Something in the human spirit says, “There must be life after death!” It is expressed in so many ways in the world’s various religions.

But we’re not talking about life after death. Today’s question for young and old is this, “Is there life after birth?”

People engage in high-risk behaviour. They have been educated about the harmful effects of drugs, but take them anyway. They live – and drive – for thrills, risking the spills. An alarming number actively choose to end it all. They are willing to risk death, but aren’t sure they can risk life!

Is there life after birth?

A Better Life

We’ve watched an older generation spend a great deal of time, energy and money looking for a better life. Yet I’ve had folk say to me, “If eternal life is just this life going on and on, I don’t want it!”

We try to cram a lot into this present life, but it can’t hold everything! It does have its limitations. For one thing we are mortal, and the fear of death can hang as a cloud over all that we do.

But the major limitation is personal. Like – “I love life. It’s people I can’t stand!” Or to bring it right home – “If you could kick your worst enemy in the pants every time he did you a bad turn, you’d be so sore you’d never be able to sit down!”

Some seek the better life in shops and industry. Some follow the beat of the latest music. Others are always looking to “get away from it all” in some favourite holiday spot or an alternative lifestyle.

But we can’t escape from ourselves and things can never be just quite right even when we’re away from it all. Perhaps that’s why some people seem unsure that they would like their present life to go on and on! We wouldn’t like our present problems extended into eternity!

Living and Growing

We live in the Burdekin where sugar is the major industry. Have you seen the fertiliser ad claiming that all the farmer has to do is “just add soil”? Actually, it’s a little more complicated than that! The farmer opens the fertiliser bag, puts in a couple of shovelfuls of soil and a 30-centimetre piece of cane, adds a few buckets of water, and shakes it all up. Then he’ll have a big bagful of sugar which can be divided among those little plastic bags of sugar you buy in the shops.

Of course not! Sugar cane has to grow and live before it is harvested and the sugar extracted. In a sense, sugar is the life-after-death of the sugar cane – but you’re not supposed to have too much! To get good results in harvest-time, the farmer has to pay close attention to life-after-planting. His focus has to be keeping up the water and nutrients – we have plenty of sunshine already.

And just as surely, we were designed to live in relation to our Creator, God, and separation from him means death. I don’t mean instant physical death. That obviously hasn’t happened! But, without God, something in us has died and life cannot fully be what it was intended to be.

Paul puts it this way, “In the past you were spiritually dead because of your disobedience and sin” (Ephesians 2.1). Sometimes people say, “But I’m just not interested in religion” – as if it’s merely a matter of personal preferences. But this is a matter of life and death!

Or, as Paul put it in another letter, “What did you gain from doing the things that you are now ashamed of? The result of those things is death!” (Romans 6.21)

Life after Birth?

It’s no use postponing the whole question of God and eternal life until after we die. That’s too late! The better life is meant to begin now! We can know life after birth – in fact, it is the guarantee of life after death!

Nicodemus was a very religious Jewish man who really wanted to find out about Jesus. Something about Jesus must have impressed him.

We aren’t really sure what Nicodemus’ question was, for Jesus cut across it with this stunning statement, “I tell you the truth, no one can see the Kingdom of God unless he is born again (from above)” (John 3.3).

For Nicodemus, this was a new and revolutionary concept, so Jesus stated it again – “No one can enter the Kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit” (v. 5). It’s not enough to be born physically or “born of water” – we need a spiritual birth too!

To suggest that he might need such a thing could well have offended the good-living Nicodemus, but he was a genuine seeker after the truth and asked, “How can this be?” (v. 9)

The answer of Jesus centres on his own life and work. Nicodemus knew how the Israelites had been dying of snake-bite in Moses’ time. The bronze snake on the pole symbolised punishment for their disobedience. When they looked at it, they were admitting the wrong they had done and were healed.

And that, Jesus explained, is like the way this spiritual birth becomes possible for us, for he himself would be lifted up (on a cross) so that everyone who looks to him in faith will have eternal life.

That’s where that key verse fits in – “For 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).

Jesus said, “I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full” (10.10).

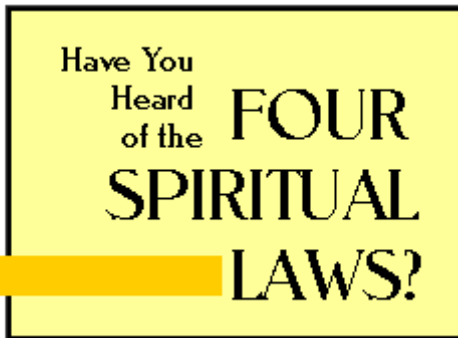
And that’s life now, not just in the future! John put it this way, “God has given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life” (1 John 5.11,12).

You are alive – heart and lungs functioning! But do you know the reality of life after birth? It is God’s free gift in Jesus Christ (Romans 6.23).

A sermon by Peter J. Blackburn, Mount Louisa Uniting Church, Townsville, 30 November 2003

Appendix 4 – Have You Heard of the Four Spiritual Laws?

(from the website of Campus Crusade for Christ: <http://campuscrusade.com/fourlawseng.htm>)



Just as there are physical laws that govern the physical universe, so are there spiritual laws that govern your relationship with God.

Law 1

God loves you and offers a wonderful plan for your life.

God's Love

"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, NIV).

God's Plan

[Christ speaking] "I came that they might have life, and might have it abundantly" [that it might be full and meaningful] (John 10:10).

Why is it that most people are not experiencing that abundant life?

Because...

Law 2

Man is sinful and separated from God. Therefore, he cannot know and experience God's love and plan for his life.

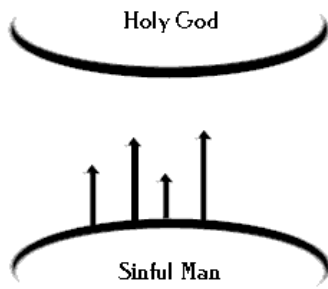
Man is Sinful

"All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23).

Man was created to have fellowship with God; but, because of his own stubborn self-will, he chose to go his own independent way and fellowship with God was broken. This self-will, characterized by an attitude of active rebellion or passive indifference, is an evidence of what the Bible calls sin.

Man is Separated

"The wages of sin is death" [spiritual separation from God] (Romans 6:23).



This diagram illustrates that God is holy and man is sinful. A great gulf separates the two. The arrows illustrate that man is continually trying to reach God and the abundant life through his own efforts, such as a good life, philosophy, or religion - but he inevitably fails.

The third law explains the only way to bridge this gulf...

Law 3

Jesus Christ is God's only provision for man's sin. Through Him you can know and experience God's love and plan for your life.

He Died In Our Place

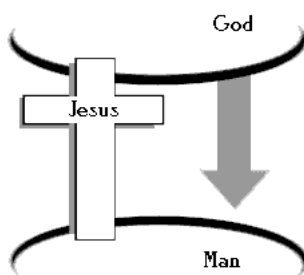
"God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8).

He Rose from the Dead

"Christ died for our sins... He was buried... He was raised on the third day, according to the Scriptures... He appeared to Peter, then to the twelve. After that He appeared to more than five hundred..." (1 Corinthians 15:3-6).

He Is the Only Way to God

"Jesus said to him, 'I am the way, and the truth, and the life, no one comes to the Father but through Me'" (John 14:6).



This diagram illustrates that God has bridged the gulf that separates us from Him by sending His Son, Jesus Christ, to die on the cross in our place to pay the penalty for our sins.

It is not enough just to know these three laws...

Law 4

We must individually receive Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord; then we can know and experience God's love and plan for our lives.

We Must Receive Christ

"As many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name" (John 1:12).

We Receive Christ Through Faith

"By grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as result of works that no one should boast" (Ephesians 2:8,9).

When We Receive Christ, We Experience a New Birth

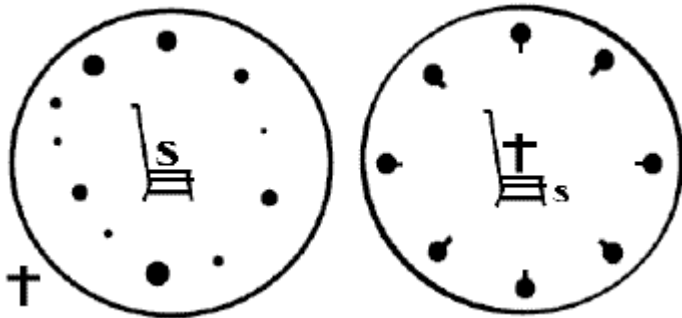
(Read John 3:1-8.)

We Receive Christ Through Personal Invitation

[Christ speaking] "Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if any one hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him" (Revelation 3:20).

Receiving Christ involves turning to God from self (repentance) and trusting Christ to come into our lives to forgive our sins and to make us what He wants us to be. Just to agree intellectually that Jesus Christ is the Son of God and that He died on the cross for our sins is not enough. Nor is it enough to have an emotional experience. We receive Jesus Christ by faith, as an act of the will.

These two circles represent two kinds of lives:



Self-Directed Life (left)

Self is on the throne

Christ is outside the life

Interests are directed by self, often resulting in discord and frustration

Christ-Directed Life (right)

Christ is in the life and on the throne

Self is yielding to Christ, resulting in harmony with God's plan

Interests are directed by Christ, resulting in harmony with God's plan

Which circle best represents your life?

Which circle would you like to have represent your life?

The following explains how you can receive Christ:

You Can Receive Christ Right Now by Faith Through Prayer (Prayer is talking with God)

God knows your heart and is not so concerned with your words as He is with the attitude of your heart. The following is a suggested prayer:

Lord Jesus, I need You. Thank You for dying on the cross for my sins. I open the door of my life and receive You as my Savior and Lord. Thank You for forgiving my sins and giving me eternal life. Take control of the throne of my life. Make me the kind of person You want me to be.

Does this prayer express the desire of your heart? If it does, I invite you to pray this prayer right now, and Christ will come into your life, as He promised.

How to Know That Christ Is in Your Life

Did you receive Christ into your life by sincerely praying the suggested prayer? According to His promise in Revelation 3:20, where is Christ right now in relation to you? Christ said that He would come into your life. Would He mislead you? On what authority do you know that God has answered your prayer? (The trustworthiness of God Himself and His Word.)

The Bible Promises Eternal Life

"The witness is this, that God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. He who has the Son has the life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life. These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, in order that you may know that you have eternal life" (1 John 5:11-13).

Thank God often that Christ is in your life and that He will never leave you (Hebrews 13:5). You can know on the basis of His promise that Christ lives in you and that you have eternal life from the very moment you invite Him in. He will not deceive you.

An important reminder...

Do Not Depend on Feelings

The promise of God's Word, the Bible - not our feelings - is our authority. The Christian lives by faith (trust) in the trustworthiness of God Himself and His Word. This train diagram illustrates the relationship among fact (God and His Word), faith (our trust in God and His Word), and feeling (the result of our faith and obedience) (John 14:21).



The train will run with or without a caboose. However, it would be useless to attempt to pull the train by the caboose. In the same way, as Christians we do not depend on feelings or emotions, but we place our faith (trust) in the trustworthiness of God and the promises of His Word.

Now That You Have Received Christ

The moment that you received Christ by faith, as an act of the will, many things happened, including the following:

1. Christ came into your life (Revelation 3:20 ; Colossians 1:27).
2. Your sins were forgiven (Colossians 1:14).
3. You became a child of God (John 1:12).
4. You received eternal life (John 5:24).
5. You began the great adventure for which God created you (John 10:10; 2 Corinthians 5:17 ; 1 Thessalonians 5:18).

Can you think of anything more wonderful that could happen to you than receiving Christ? Would you like to thank God in prayer right now for what He has done for you? By thanking God, you demonstrate your faith.

To enjoy your new life to the fullest...

Suggestions for Christian Growth

Spiritual growth results from trusting Jesus Christ. "The righteous man shall live by faith" (Galatians 3:11). A life of faith will enable you to trust God increasingly with every detail of your life, and to practice the following:

- G** Go to God in prayer daily (John 15:7).
- R** Read God's Word daily (Acts 17:11); begin with the Gospel of John.
- O** Obey God moment by moment (John 14:21).
- W** Witness for Christ by your life and words (Matthew 4:19; John 15:8).
- T** Trust God for every detail of your life (1 Peter 5:7).
- H** Holy Spirit - allow Him to control and empower your daily life and witness (Galatians 5:16,17; Acts 1:8).

Fellowship in a Good Church

God's Word instructs us not to forsake "the assembling of ourselves together" (Hebrews 10:25). Several logs burn brightly together; but put one aside on the cold hearth and the fire goes out. So it is with your relationship with other Christians.

If you do not belong to a church, do not wait to be invited. Take the initiative; call the pastor of a nearby church where Christ is honoured and His Word is preached. Start this week, and make plans to attend regularly.

Appendix 5 – Evangelism Explosion

Adapted from the Evangelism Explosion presentation found at <http://www.scribd.com/doc/115361661/Do-You-Know-for-Sure>
This covers sections 2 and 3 of the presentation – Gospel explanation, commitment.

Two important (diagnostic) questions:

- **Do you know for certain that, if you were to die tonight, you would go to heaven?**
- **If God were to ask you, “Why should I let you into my heaven?”, what would you say?**

Did you know that the Bible tells how you can know for sure that you have eternal life and will go to be with God in Heaven?

“I write these things to you . . . so that you may know that you have eternal life.” 1 John 5.13

The Bible says there are 5 THINGS you need to know about eternal life:

GRACE

Eternal life is a free gift! The Bible says, “The **gift** of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.” Romans 6.23

And because Heaven is a gift, like any other genuine gift... **it is not earned or deserved**, No amount of personal effort, good works, or religious deeds can earn a place in Heaven for you.

“For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith – and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God – not by works, so that no one can boast.” Ephesians 2:8,9

WHY is it that no one can earn his way to Heaven?

Because...

MAN/WOMAN

Man/woman is a sinner. “For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.” Romans 3.23

Sin includes much more than murder or robbery, in fact, it is anything we think, say, do, or don’t do, that does not please God.

And because of this... **man/woman cannot save him/herself**

If you wanted to save yourself by good deeds, do you know how good you would have to be?

“Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.” Matthew 5.48

With such a high standard, no one can save himself.

However, in spite of our sin...

GOD

God is merciful And doesn’t want to punish us.

The Bible says that “...God is love.” 1 John 4.8

And He says, “...I have loved you with an everlasting love...” Jeremiah 31.3

But the same Bible which tells us that God loves us, also tells us that...

God is just and therefore must punish our sin.

The Bible says...

“...Yet He does not leave the guilty unpunished...” Exodus 34.7

“...The soul who sins is the one who will die.” Ezekiel 18.4

We have a problem

God loves us and doesn’t want to punish us. But He is just and must punish sin.

God solved this problem for us in the Person of...

JESUS CHRIST

Who is He? The Bible tells us clearly that He is the infinite **God-Man**.

“In the beginning was the Word... and the Word was God... And the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us.” (John 1.1,14)

What did He do?

He died on the cross to pay the penalty for our sins and rose from the grave to purchase a place in Heaven for us.

“We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the LORD has laid on Him (Jesus) the iniquity (sin) of us all.” Isaiah 53.6

Jesus Christ took our sin in His body on the cross and offers you eternal life (Heaven) now and forever, as a free gift.

This gift is received by...

FAITH

Faith is the key that opens the door to heaven.

Many people mistake two things for saving faith:

1. Saving faith is not just head knowledge about God.
2. Saving faith is not just turning to God for temporary needs.

Saving faith is...

trusting in Jesus Christ alone for our eternal life both now and forever. This means trusting in what He has done rather than in what we have done.

“...Believe (trust) in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved ...” Acts 16.31

You have just read the **Greatest Story** ever told about the **Greatest Offer** ever made by the **Greatest Person** who ever lived – JESUS CHRIST;

The question that God is asking you now is...

Would you like to receive the gift of eternal life?

Because this is such an important matter, let's clarify just what it involves.

It means that you need to:

TRANSFER YOUR TRUST

from what *you* have been doing to what *Christ* has done for you on the cross.

ACCEPT THE LIVING CHRIST AS SAVIOUR

Open the “door” to your heart and invite Him in. He says: “Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in...” Revelation 3.20

RECEIVE JESUS CHRIST AS LORD

Give Him the “driver’s seat” and “controls” of your life, not the “back seat.”

REPENT OF YOUR SIN

Be willing to turn from anything that is not pleasing to Him. He will reveal His will to you as you grow in your relationship with Him.

Now, if this is what you really want...

YOU CAN GO TO GOD IN PRAYER

HERE'S A SUGGESTED PRAYER:

“Lord Jesus, thank You for Your gift of eternal life. I know I'm a sinner and do not deserve eternal life. But You loved me so You died and rose from the grave to purchase a place in Heaven for me. I now trust in You alone for eternal life and repent of my sin. Please take control as Lord of my life. Thank you so much!”

If this prayer is the sincere desire of your heart, look at what Jesus promises to those who believe in Him:

“...I say unto you, he that believes on Me has everlasting life.” John 6.47

If you have placed your trust in Jesus Christ's sacrificial death, you have received His free gift of eternal life! And now, you are a child of God. Forever!

WELCOME TO THE FAMILY OF GOD!

“Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God.” John 1.12

Today is your Spiritual Birthday! A DAY YOU WILL ALWAYS WANT TO REMEMBER!

The Bible speaks of those who receive eternal life in these words: “Children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God.” John 1.13

When you were physically born, the day of your birth was your physical birthday...

WHAT'S NEXT?

Just as a newborn baby grows physically, in a similar way we grow spiritually, by taking the following steps:

READ THE BIBLE

Starting with the Gospel of John, read a chapter each day. “Like newborn babes, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation.” 1 Peter 2.2

PRAYER

Spend time each day talking with God. “Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.” Philippians 4.6

WORSHIP

Regularly attend a church that honours Jesus Christ and teaches you the Bible. “I rejoiced with those who said to me, ‘Let us go to the house of the LORD’.” Psalm 122.1

“God is Spirit, and his worshippers must worship Him in spirit and in truth.” John 4.24

FELLOWSHIP

With Christians who will help you grow in faith. “We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ.” 1 John 1.3

WITNESS

Tell others what Jesus Christ means to you! “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses...” Acts 1.8

Appendix 6 – Christianity Explained

Part (a) Learning about Jesus:

1. JESUS – SON OF GOD

Mark begins by calling Jesus the 'Son of God' (Mark 1:1) We show Jesus' claim to be equal with God, forgiving sin. See sample lesson (<http://www.christianityexplained.com/shop/Images/Pages42-43.pdf>)

2. JESUS – HIS CRUCIFIXION

Jesus came to give his life a ransom for many. (Mark 10:45)

3. JESUS – HIS RESURRECTION

By his often-predicted resurrection (Mark 8:31), the risen Jesus guarantees both life after death and future judgement.

Part (b) Where do I fit in?

4. GRACE – NOT WORKS

The finished work of Jesus, not our goodness, is the only basis of our acceptance with God.

5. REPENTANCE

'Repent and believe' is Jesus' basic message (Mark 1:15) Repentance is more than sorrow for sin. Jesus must come first in my life, he must be Lord.

6. BELIEVING

The Kingdom of God, God's rule in my life, must be received as a little child. Without undue pressure, the enquirer is encouraged to take this step.

Appendix 7 – The Alpha Course

Alpha Course Outline

Introductory Dinner – “Christianity – Boring, Untrue, Irrelevant?”

Week 1 – “Who is Jesus?”

Jesus’ teaching, indirect and direct claims.
Evidence for the resurrection

Week 2 – “Why did Jesus die?”

People’s greatest need
What has God done?
What the cross achieved

Week 3 – How can I be sure of my faith?

The Word of God
The Work of Jesus
The Witness of the Spirit

Week 4 – Why and how should I read the Bible?

God has spoken - Revelation
God speaks - Relationship
How do we hear God speak through the Bible?

Week 5 – Why and how do I pray?

What is prayer?
Why Pray?
Does God always answer prayer?
How do we pray?
When should we pray?

Weekend Away

Who is the Holy Spirit?

In the Old Testament
In the New testament

What does the Holy Spirit do?

Sons and daughters of God
Developing the relationship
The family likeness
Unity in the family
Gifts for all the children
The growing family

How can I be filled with the Spirit?

What happens when people experience the Holy Spirit?
What did they experience?
What are the common hindrances to being filled with the Spirit?

How can I make the most of the rest of my life?

“Do not confirm”
“Be transformed”

“Present your bodies...”

“...as living sacrifices”

“God's good, pleasing and perfect will”

“In view of God's mercy...”

Week 6 – How can I resist evil?

Why should we believe in the existence of the devil?

What are the devil's tactics?

What is our position?

How do we defend ourselves?

How do we attack?

Week 7 – How does God guide us?

Commanding Scripture

Controlling Spirit

Common Sense

Counsel of Saints

Circumstantial Signs

Week 8 – Why and how should we tell others?

Presence

Persuasion

Proclamation

Power

Prayer

Week 9 – Does God heal today?

Biblical basis

Practice

Week 10 – What about the Church?

The People of God (Ephesians 2.19-22)

The Family of God (Ephesians 2.14-18)

The Body of Christ (1 Corinthians 12.1-26)

A Holy Temple (Ephesians 2.19-22)

The Bride of Christ (Ephesians 5.25-27)

Celebration Dinner – Celebrate the new relationships you've made, the knowledge you've gained, and enjoy another delicious meal.