

DEATH RELATIONSHIPS  
MONEY WORRIES  
NEGATIVE EMOTIONS  
SICKNESS FAMILY  
**THERE**

❖ — ❖ **IS** ❖ — ❖

DEATH RELATIONSHIPS  
MONEY WORRIES  
NEGATIVE EMOTIONS  
SICKNESS FAMILY  
**HOPE**

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**Rob Tervet**

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## Introduction

Everybody hurts but not everybody has hope.

The content of this book began in the lives of real people in my local community of Attleborough, UK. In the summer of 2011, Christ Community Church asked hundreds of local people one question: what hurts the most? The response was overwhelming; in one week alone we received more than 300 responses.

This book is based on a series of talks I gave responding to the 6 most popular answers to our one question survey. As a Christian I believe that Jesus Christ offers the ultimate hope for all our needs. These talks are unashamedly centred on the hope and healing that he alone brings to our very deepest hurts.

As we explore these six issues you may get more than you bargained for. The Bible says that we have an even deeper need than healing from our pain. Whether we realise it or not, there is a need to be rescued: not from current circumstances but from a future fate even worse than our darkest day on earth. The wonderful message of Christianity is that Jesus has provided that rescue. There is hope beyond our wildest dreams. I pray it finds you.

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# 1 Negative emotions

I was overcome with emotion. In just one day more than a hundred local people had taken the time to let our church know their very deepest hurts. I was clutching dozens of these handwritten cards, detailing terrible pain and sorrow. We initially wondered whether anyone would respond. Would people share their deepest hurts even if anonymously with strangers? The verdict was clear: they were hurting and indeed ready to share.

Many people would consider the Church and Jesus to be irrelevant to everyday life. However, there are two facts which should cause us to question whether this is so. Firstly everybody hurts and secondly Jesus has some utterly unique things to say about deep sorrow and pain that are worthy of careful consideration. Over the past hundred years there have been immense improvements in health care, government, technology and science. Many things have changed for the better but it is worth asking the question: are we any better at being happy? After many billions of pounds spent on new discoveries have we learnt anymore about the secret of happiness? It is time to consider the ancient wisdom of the most famous person who has ever lived: Jesus Christ.

It is true that many people are simply very, very sad. In our survey people wrote things like fear, lacking confidence, loneliness, a sense of failure, depression and anxiety. One person wrote of how they were 'struggling with feeling good enough' while another found it incredibly hard to feel 'truly beautiful and loved'. Many mentioned suffering immense cruelty at the hands of others.

There is an old saying which contains a very profound truth. The saying goes: *Two men looked out from prison bars, one saw mud the other stars.*

It was the same prison and the same barred window but there was something different about the men. One appeared to possess a deep happiness that was not based on circumstance and could even look beyond the continuing ordeal to see beauty and perhaps to smile.

Many people are very cynical about the prospect of finding this kind of contentment, but one writer of the Bible says boldly 'I have learned the secret of being content in every circumstance'.<sup>1</sup> How is it possible to have a fundamental kind of happiness not based on circumstances?

Firstly, feelings need to be put in their place. The Bible says something which is both shocking but also immensely helpful: 'The heart is deceitful above all things.'<sup>2</sup> In other words our deepest emotions cannot be trusted. I think we all know this to be true. On a trivial level, I may 'feel in my heart' a real need to eat another packet of Doritos but that doesn't make the feeling correct. Equally I cannot trust my heart to be consistent because the very next day I know I may feel completely different about a situation. Being driven by our emotions can also lead us to break our moral principles, such as the wife who leaves her husband and family and says 'I just wanted to be happy'. Our deepest emotions cannot be relied upon as a trustworthy guide for making important or even trivial decisions. Tragically many people are ruled by their emotions, slaves to how they feel. If feelings are allowed to dominate then negative emotions will never be overcome and the fundamental happiness or contentment that the Bible talks about will not be found.

### **Heal yourself with the truth**

Feelings cannot be trusted to tell us the truth about ourselves. One person may feel very strongly that nobody loves them. Another feels that they are ugly and fat. Still another feels deeply anxious about what people will or do think about them. How do you overcome these sorts of feelings? You

<sup>1</sup> Phillipians 4:12 <sup>2</sup> Jeremiah 17:9



overcome them with the truth. Jesus once famously said “you will know the truth and the truth will set you free”.<sup>3</sup>

Truth doesn't automatically eliminate all negative emotions or eradicate clinical depression but it does help us put feelings in their place and sets us free from any way that they may have an unhelpful hold over us. Truth also gives us reasons to be thankful, it opens our eyes to what we have to appreciate. I want you to consider three truths which once taken in deeply have the power to set us free.

### ***Truth 1: There is a meaning and a purpose to the universe***

The Bible grips its readers and tells them the amazing story of the universe. One of the things I love about the Bible is that it puts us in our place. We so easily slip into being simply self-focused, thinking about ourselves, making plans and perhaps only thinking about the small collection of people around us. The Bible shatters that view: it wakes us up out of our day-dream and tells us that we are in a great and epic story within which our lives are just one of many scenes. We are a walk-on part in something far greater, far grander than our imaginings can fathom.

Many people long to be a part of something bigger than themselves, like those who spend hours waiting around on film sets just to have a cameo role. The Bible says you are not the main character in the story of the universe: Jesus is. It's ultimately his story but you can have a walk-on part. It's liberating to be lost in the drama of a true story much bigger than you.

If on the other hand there is no meaning to the universe and your life doesn't have any ultimate purpose then your pain and suffering and your tragedy are senseless and pointless. The Bible says there is hope because we all have a part to play in the unfolding story of the universe.

<sup>3</sup> John 8:32

***Truth 2: We are broken***

Jesus taught a very radical view of human beings which may shock you. His message was that we are more evil than we ever feared but more loved than we ever dreamed. He consistently taught that all people are deeply flawed, broken and evil, yet also deeply loved and of immense value and worth. In my experience of talking with people about these issues I find that most people think they are 'not that bad' and 'not that loved' but instead 'a fairly good person who is moderately loved'. The Bible says we are truly broken, helpless and rebellious but loved and valued beyond our wildest dreams. It's an intoxicating mixture and believing both statements is the only way to be whole.

It is more than likely that you have never killed anybody but how would you feel if everything you ever thought was posted on a social networking website such as Facebook? The truth is we all think terrible selfish things. We do not see our brokenness when we compare ourselves to each other and if it is true that we are all sinful and broken then there is very little to be gained from making a comparison. The Bible says instead 'all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God'.<sup>4</sup> When we see God's perfection and look upon him, when we explore the person of Jesus, it is then we start to see how far we fall short.

Understanding our own brokenness is liberating. When we realise how deeply flawed and broken we have become, we are deeply humbled. And that is a great thing because it makes us thankful and grateful for everything. If you believe that you are a fundamentally good person, the danger is that you will forever feel the victim. The Bible says that we are all part of the problem and so rather than complain about every woe we should be thankful for every breath!

<sup>4</sup> Romans 3:23

Our hurts often speak to us of the evil that is 'inside', not just the evil 'out there'. As we progress through the topics in this book and look at other painful areas of our lives, in each one a further indicator of our own brokenness is revealed. Our pain is telling us that something is wrong – will you listen?

### ***Truth 3: We are loved***

The God of the universe made human beings not simply because he was feeling creative but because he desires our company. He wants you and has paid the highest cost to make it possible for you to have a restored relationship with him. He wants you to be his forever.

When we realise we are more loved than we ever dreamed, our deepest longing is satisfied. The person who knows the most about you, the person with the most love to give... loves you. One writer put it well when he said 'God's love for me is utterly realistic; and because he already knows the worst about me, no discovery can make him disillusioned about me, in the way I can become disillusioned about myself and others'.<sup>5</sup>

Many people struggle to receive God's love and believe that anybody could treasure them so highly. For some, love has become a word that they struggle to even comprehend. I once heard someone say that the Bible is like a love letter to humanity. I think it's more like a great story that draws you in and in reading it you discover to your surprise that you are a part of it. Imagine watching a great movie that tells the story of the costly sacrifice of a great hero on behalf of a mystery character. In the final scene the hero walks out of the screen and into your life; you discover he was saving you.

The message of Christianity humbles us and satisfies us. It has the power to overcome negative emotions. If we are not humbled we will always be disappointed with our lot and never be at peace. If we are not satisfied by God's love we

<sup>5</sup> J I Packer, *Knowing God*

will never feel secure or significant. However, this liberating message can be misunderstood and so I want to briefly address three common misconceptions.

***Misunderstanding number 1:***

*Jesus is a happiness slot machine*

Let us be clear Jesus is not a 'happiness slot machine'. If you come to Jesus simply to make you happy then you are making happiness your God not Jesus. Come to him because you love him, come because you believe in him, come because you realise you owe him everything. And you will find peace and joy beyond your wildest dreams but only as a by-product. What matters most is not 'Will Jesus make me happy?' but 'Is Jesus the truth?' because only the truth can heal me and set me free.

***Misunderstanding number 2:***

*You can't be happy and sad at the same time*

Jesus was a fundamentally happy person but he was also called a 'man of sorrows'.<sup>6</sup> His way always leads in the end to the greatest possible joy but sometimes it is a joy deferred. That's why we read in the Bible that 'for the joy set before him [Jesus] endured the cross'. He endured sorrow in the present for a joy and a happiness in the future. The path to joy often involves suffering and sorrow, but they can occur at the same time: 'Happy are those who mourn for they will be comforted' says Jesus in Matthew's gospel 5:4. It's possible to be happy and sad at the same time. It's possible to be sad and yet still be fundamentally happy because you are healed by the truth.

***Misunderstanding number 3:***

*Christians are automatically more joyful than non Christians*

Being a Christian doesn't automatically make you joyful - unhappy Christians are a proof of that! Healing yourself

<sup>6</sup> Isaiah 53:3

with the truth makes you joyful but that doesn't mean all Christians do it. The Bible talks of someone who 'learned the secret of being content'. Everything needed for our contentment has been provided, but we still need to learn to use it. Even the man who learned the secret also said of one time in his life that 'he despaired even of life itself'.<sup>7</sup>

The ultimate question we all have to ask is not 'will this make me happy' but 'is this the truth?' That is the question that confronts all of us. That is the question that we will continue to explore.

<sup>7</sup> 2 Cor 1:8



## 2 Money worries

Money has the ability to make people do very stupid things. In Kentucky two men tried to pull off the front of a cash machine by running a chain from the machine to the bumper of their pickup truck. Instead of pulling the front panel off the machine, though, they pulled the bumper off their truck. Scared, they left the scene and drove home...

...with the chain still attached to the machine.

...with their bumper still attached to the chain.

...with their vehicle's license plate still attached to the bumper.

Californian Bill Helko was thrilled when he had the winning numbers in the local lottery: the first prize being \$412,000. Straight away he went and ordered a Porsche, booked a family holiday in Hawaii and had a champagne dinner with his wife and friends at an expensive Hollywood restaurant. When he went to pick up the winnings he found that 9,097 others had also won first prize and his share of the jackpot was \$45.<sup>8</sup>

It may shock you to hear that Jesus spent a great deal of time talking money. In fact, about 10% of his recorded teachings concern the subject. However, there was only one occasion when Jesus clearly linked money and worry together. He said this:

"Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

"The eye is the lamp of the body. If your eyes are good, your whole body will be full of light. But if your eyes are bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light within you is darkness, how great is that darkness!

<sup>8</sup> These two illustrations are widely available on the internet, no author is stated

“No one can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and Money.

“Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more important than food, and the body more important than clothes? Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they? Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life?

...“But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own. (Matthew 6:19-34)

### **Money has the power to make us worry and ultimately despair**

In this Bible passage Jesus makes a clear link between money and anxiety. He says ‘you cannot serve both God and money therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life’. Many people feel deeply anxious and ashamed about their financial problems.

The financial crisis of 2008 showed that a wrong attitude to money also has the power to cause utter despair. A series of tragic suicides followed afterwards: a money manager in California who was out of work and had lost a fortune killed his family and committed suicide; a Danish executive of the HSBC Bank hanged himself in the wardrobe of his £500-a-night suite in Knightsbridge, London. The chief executive of Sheldon Good, a leading US real estate firm shot himself in the head behind the wheel of his red jaguar; a 90 year old widow from Ohio shot herself in the chest as authorities arrived to evict her from her home of 38 years.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>9</sup> Examples taken from counterfeit God by Tim Keller and a ‘Huffpost business’ article



Tim Keller is the pastor of one of the largest churches in the city of New York. He says 'There is a difference between sorrow and despair. Sorrow is pain for which there are sources of consolation. Sorrow comes from losing one good thing among others, so that, if you experience a career reversal, you can find comfort in your family to get you through it. Despair, however, is inconsolable, because it comes from losing an ultimate thing. When you lose the ultimate source of your meaning or hope, there are no alternative sources to turn to. It breaks your spirit.'<sup>10</sup>

Money controls us when it becomes something we think we can't live without. We are drawn to money as it appears to provide us with significance and security. Significance because it makes us feel better, more important and more successful; security because it provides a level of control in an uncontrollable world.

Jesus tells us that money cannot really deliver either. For a start it does not help with the really important things. Jesus said 'Is not life more important than food, and the body more important than clothes?' People are more precious than things and money doesn't guarantee a great relationship with them. John Paul Getty was the richest man in the world, worth over 4 billion dollars, and he knew this to be true. He said: 'I have never been given to envy except the envy I feel towards those folk who have the ability to make a marriage work and be happy in that marriage. It's an art I have never been able to master. My record – five marriages, five divorces, in short, five failures, I have never been happy.'<sup>11</sup>

Money is also a poor form of security and control; through having it we cannot avoid tragedy, pain or brokenness. Money cannot provide insulation from the things that hurt us the most and is not a reliable protection. Jesus tells us not to 'store up treasure on earth where moth and rust destroy and thieves break in and steal'. Money is prone to instability because of the natural corrosion that can affect anything material and also

<sup>10</sup> Counterfeit Gods <sup>11</sup> Sir John Paul Getty, KBE (September 7, 1932 – April 17, 2003)

the unpredictable nature of human beings who can steal and make serious mistakes. The recent financial crisis highlights how vulnerable wealth can be to simple human error.

### **Money has the power to keep us in the dark from our greed**

*The eye is the lamp of the body. If your eyes are good, your whole body will be full of light. But if your eyes are bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light within you is darkness, how great is that darkness!*

This verse right in the middle of our text seems hard to understand but its message is simple: greed and materialism control us by keeping us in the dark. If your eye is not working, even being in a light room you will still be in the dark. *If your eyes are bad, your whole body will be full of darkness.* Greed and materialism have the strange effect of keeping us in the dark. Greed is the one sin that nobody thinks they have. Consider how very few people consider themselves to be rich even when they are. I am told some 70% of the world's wealth is shared between top 5%. Most people in the UK are in that 5% and yet when was the last time we admitted we were rich?

Greed keeps us from asking searching questions. Tim Keller suggests there are three ways we can see this power in action. Firstly, greed has the power to make us chose a job that we don't enjoy or find fulfilling and not really question why. Secondly, to make us do nothing about the unethical practices of the companies we work for. Finally, it has the power to make us avoid asking 'do I really need to be spending this much?' We hate asking that question, we just want to make a decision and not think about it. The question 'is there a way I could be more generous?' is not asked.

### **How can we be free?**

Jesus gives the answer right at the beginning and the end of our text. He says: *'Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break*

*in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also... But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness.'*

### **1 Jesus gives us a greater cause to live for**

Jesus doesn't say money or earning money is evil but he suggests that we need to be captivated by something more important. Jesus frees us by helping us see differently; it's like he lifts the curtain of our reality and shows us something even deeper at work. He tells us that we live in a world where not everything that matters is visible. There is another reality already breaking in which will last forever ...*where moth and rust do not destroy and where thieves do not break in and steal*. He calls it the Kingdom of God. C S Lewis once said 'Christianity is the story of how the rightful king has landed; you might say landed in disguise, and is calling us all to take part in a great campaign of sabotage. When you go to church you're really listening to the secret wireless from our friends'.<sup>12</sup>

Jesus invites us to join this secret rebellion and fight for his kingdom. In his kingdom things work differently. Secret good deeds are rewarded and social status is not recognised as important. The prostitute who offers heartfelt worship to Jesus is remembered, the poor beggar who played his part faithfully is a hero. A man sold out for his cause once said 'you haven't lived until you've found something worth dying for'.<sup>13</sup> We're all longing for something bigger than ourselves, more important than our individual lives. Jesus offers us a greater cause to live for, one which eclipses the seductive lure of wealth.

### **2 Jesus offer us another treasure**

If money has become our ultimate desire then it needs to be replaced with something else. Deep down many of us recognise that people are more important than things but if

<sup>12</sup> 'Mere Christianity' by CS Lewis

<sup>13</sup> Paul Watson, Sea Shepherd Founder and President

so, what person should be our number one? According to the Bible, Jesus himself is the greatest treasure. Jesus here talks about 'treasures in heaven' and the Bible is clear that what makes heaven ultimately amazing is that we get to be with him. All Christians have tasted something of the indescribable joy that Jesus brings. If you know a Christian why not ask them to tell you about their own experience of Jesus?

One Christian pastor puts it well: 'The really wonderful moments of joy in this world are not the moments of self-satisfaction, but self-forgetfulness ...we are made for a magnificent joy that comes from outside ourselves'.<sup>14</sup> This is why Christians place such an emphasis on worship. Joy comes as we forget ourselves and remember the one who created the universe.

### **Money and debt**

Debt affects every single one of us because Britain's total debt, comprising private, public and financial sector debt, is the highest in the world. Much of our tax is not spent on services but paying interest on debts.

For many people debt is a very personal and painful subject. One person described what it is like to be in debt: *'When I woke up in the mornings, I'd feel instantly unwell and wonder how I'd have the strength to get through the day. It wasn't just the monotony of our lives, but the daily struggle that really ground me down ... When you're in debt; the most crippling feelings are shame and fear. It was the shame of our financial situation that made me want to hide away and cry.'*

There is hope for people in debt because Jesus helps us be better stewards of our money; he wants us to be wise. Sometimes we struggle financially because we are not good stewards. This means sometimes we should not be praying 'Jesus gives me more money' but 'Jesus help me be a better steward and live within my means'. If Jesus gives us more

<sup>14</sup> John Piper, 'Don't Waste Your Life'

money but we don't become better stewards we'll probably just end up in the same difficulty again. The kindest thing for Jesus to do is not to simply give us more money as this doesn't address the root problem.

On the other hand some people are in debt not because they have been unwise but because of genuine misfortune and difficulty. Regardless of what got us into debt, the way out always involves learning to be a better steward. Just to be really practical I want to flag up some wise principles that organisations such as Christians Against Poverty recommend.

- 1 You have to find out the amount of money you need to live on to pay back your debts and then you need stick to it. We call this living on a budget. Once you have a budget you can also learn wise ways to increase your income and reduce costs.
- 2 There are some clever ways to help you manage your money. Many recommend splitting your accounts into a regular payments account, a cash account and a savings account.
- 3 Live on cash rather than cards. Living on cash and getting away from cards means you know exactly where you are and help you to spend less money. It's statistically proven that you spend 33% less money when paying by cash rather than cards. It's God's desire that we should live within our means.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>15</sup> Rephrased guidelines from CAP online



### 3 Sickness

For many years before I was a Christian I struggled with the idea that there was too much pain in the world for there to be a loving God, but slowly over time that objection started to melt away. I began to accept two key things that challenged my thinking and persuaded me the other way, let me share them with you.

#### ***1 Our brokenness suggests we are broken not that life is meaningless***

As soon as you say that there is something deeply wrong in the world, you are implying there is a way things should be, not that the world has no meaning. C S Lewis put it this way: "My argument against God was that the universe seemed so cruel and unjust. But how had I got this idea of just and unjust? A man does not call a line crooked unless he has some idea of a straight line. What was I comparing this universe with when I called it unjust?"<sup>16</sup>

Our brokenness suggests we are broken not that we are meaningless. If I break something I might in a moment of despair and frustration exclaim that "everything is pointless" but the reality is not that things are pointless, it's that things haven't gone the right way. And there is a big difference. The Bible teaches that the world has a purpose but that the world and its people have become broken because of our selfish hearts.

#### ***2 Our brokenness breaks God's heart it does not reveal he is heartless***

If God were unmoved and did nothing about our plight then I think that would disprove the idea of a loving God.

<sup>16</sup> 'Mere Christianity' by CS Lewis

The message of Christianity is altogether different to what many people think.

“There cannot be a God of love, men say;

Because if there was and he looked on the world  
his heart would break.

The Church points to the Cross and says it did break.

If God made the world, men say,  
it’s him who should bear the load.

The Church points to the Cross and says he did bear it.”<sup>17</sup>

The Bible teaches that Jesus was fully man and fully God. The God of the whole universe so loved us that he came and suffered with us. He literally left heaven, a place of perfection, safety and beauty, for us. What did he do when he arrived? What did he do when he met the sick? The Bible describes something remarkable; “Jesus went through all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom and healing every disease and sickness. When he saw the crowds he had compassion on them because they were harassed and helpless like sheep without a shepherd”.<sup>18</sup>

We read in the gospels that Jesus healed the blind, the deaf, lepers, paralytics, a person with a withered hand, a bleeding woman of 12 years and that he even raised the dead. God’s compassion and care for the sick is given huge emphasis. As we think about these passages we must remember that the Bible is telling us that these healing hands are God’s hands. Does God care about the sick? According to the Bible he reached out and touched them and made them well. Our hope in sickness is therefore grounded in the compassion of God himself.

<sup>17</sup> William Temple, quoted by J John in ‘Dead sure?’ <sup>18</sup> Matthew 9: 35-36



### **There is hope for today because Jesus heals**

Jesus still heals. His healing hands have not left us because Jesus still has a body on earth. One day after he had gone back to heaven Jesus appeared to a man called Saul who was persecuting Christians and said "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting".<sup>19</sup> Jesus so identified with his people that to persecute the church was to persecute him. The Bible goes on to say explicitly that the church is the body of Jesus.<sup>20</sup>

If so, Jesus' healing hands are still available on planet earth today. Jesus said "he who believes in me will do what I have been doing"<sup>21</sup> – a clear reference to his miracles. Not everybody gets healed, even Jesus didn't heal everybody. Sometimes, unlike the situation we saw described in Matthews gospel, he just healed one person such as at the Pool of Bethesda<sup>22</sup>. John Wimber who in his life prayed and saw countless people healed said "When we prayed for no one, no one was healed. Now we pray for lots of people, not everyone's healed, but some are".<sup>23</sup>

### **There is hope for today because Jesus helps**

There hope too for those who never get healed. The famous 19th Century preacher, Charles Spurgeon once said "He will either make the burden lighter, or the back stronger; He will diminish the need, or increase the supply". Countless Christians can share of how Jesus has helped them through sickness. Peace, joy and hope are possible even when enduring the deepest possible pain. They are even possible when those we love are enduring the deepest possible pain. We rely on God in our pain and in their pain.

That's not to say there will never be days when God seems distant and close friends let you down. Jesus was once found in a situation where his friends deserted him and he wept alone, asking his father to change his circumstances. For the

<sup>19</sup> Acts 9: 5   <sup>20</sup> See 1 Cor 12: 27   <sup>21</sup> John 14:12   <sup>22</sup> See John 5: 1-15

<sup>23</sup> Quoted on Alpha, 'Does God heal?'

Christian even those darkest moments contain glimmers of hope because we realise we are living out the life of Jesus and becoming more like him.

### **There is hope for eternity because Jesus saves**

The preacher C J Mahaney tells the powerful and moving story about his sister Sharon and the untimely death of her husband Dave:

*During those last few weeks, Dave's bed was set up in the center of their living room, where a parade of caring people visited him. Sharon would often sit beside him and stroke his hair and, whether he was conscious or not, speak into his ear, telling her 'bud' what a wonderful, godly husband and father he was.*

*On one occasion, a relative of Dave visited, a man who was not a Christian. As he watched Sharon caring for Dave and thought about Dave's relative youth and the children he would leave behind, anger seemed to well up from within him – anger directed at God whom Dave and Sharon were professing to believe in.*

*He asked Sharon, "Why aren't you angry?"*

*She turned to him and answered with the truth of the gospel: "Dave deserved hell for his sins, just like you and me, and yet God, in His mercy, forgave him because of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Dave is going to heaven," she said. "How can I be angry at God for taking him to Heaven?"<sup>24</sup>*

The Bible gives us a new perspective; in this story the friend was angry but the wife was able to be thankful because she had hope. Heaven is a real hope because Jesus died and rose again. It was the greatest victory. The world is not simply a cold dark place where you live, get sick and die. There is hope for resurrection for all of us. Death is not the end. Death has been defeated and if we love and trust Jesus this life is the worst things will ever get. The best is yet to come.

<sup>24</sup> Taken from 'Humility' by C J Mahaney

## **Jesus is our only hope**

There's a choice we all face. Sickness and suffering can cause us to run to Jesus the healer or to become bitter and even seek help in unhelpful and sometimes dangerous places. Desperate people will turn to anything and there is a whole host of non Christian spiritual forms of healing. A great deal of alternative therapies have non Christian spiritual origins – I implore you please do not try something without checking it out. If it has even a hint of something spiritual that's not Jesus centred, the Bible says that we should run from it. It's not worth the risk.

We also have the choice as to whether we will suffer with or without purpose. One author says "When you suffer – because the question is not if but when you suffer – will you suffer in a way that is purposeful or purposeless? Will you suffer in a way that God could do a good thing in you? Will you suffer well? Will you waste your sickness, and your poverty, and your hardship, and your loneliness, and your tears, and your grief, and your sadness, and your sorrow, and your suffering?"

Suffering for the Christian is an opportunity to share your faith and encourage other Christians. I have a friend with Parkinson's disease who does just this. When people say 'I feel so sorry for you' he replies "Don't pity me I have the peace of God, who can heal me. And if not he'll get me through it". I want to be like him. His life reminds me of something a missionary once said: "Don't bear trouble. Use it. Take whatever happens, justice and injustice, pleasure and pain, compliment and criticism, take it up into the purpose of your life and make something out of it. Turn it into a testimony".

## 4 Family

Marylyn Poole who writes about family life and works as a sociologist says: *'Within the family context lies a paradox... although most of us hope for love and support within the family – a haven in a heartless world, so to speak – the family can also be a place of violence and abuse.'*<sup>25</sup> It is indeed paradoxical that one of the things that most people consider to be the precious and most important to them, turns out to be one of the most painful things in life. Local people told us of a number of ways that family life had become painful:

- Arguing in families
- Bringing up children correctly
- Having patience with young family
- Falling out with my children
- Screaming Grandchildren
- Broken marriages – one wrote 'My second husband was alcoholic and violent, had a horrible divorce'
- People wrote about the pain of their parents splitting up
- One person put 'failing my parents'

Something that was meant to be beautiful has become broken. Something which made such bold promises has become a disappointment.

- Nearly one child in three is living without their father or mother
- Nearly half of all marriages are likely to end in divorce
- The number of children contacting ChildLine<sup>26</sup> about child abuse has increased by over 50% between 2007 and 2009 across the UK. That's partly because of awareness and access to the service on mobiles but it's not only because of that.

<sup>25</sup> Marilyn Poole, *Family: Changing Families, Changing Times*

<sup>26</sup> A service provided by The National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children

Many people have rejected the traditional pattern of marriage before living together. They either go on to marry later on or never at all, but the impact of this trend is not good as the following statistics<sup>27</sup> reveal:

- Living together before marriage is associated with a higher divorce risk, with estimates ranging from 33 percent to 151 percent increased risk of divorce.
- Annual rates of depression among cohabitantes are more than three times higher than married couples.
- Women in cohabitating relationships are twice as likely as married women to suffer physical abuse.

Something that was meant to be beautiful has become broken. Perhaps we have even forgotten what family is meant to be. So let me paint the beautiful picture again and look at how this beauty can be regained.

If God exists and God is a good creator, then his intention and design for how things should work would surely be the best and most beautiful. What does he say? One of the basic principles is that *marriage, kids and sex all belong together*. Sadly many people now separate out just two or even just one. I want sex but I don't want marriage or kids. I want kids but I don't want sex or marriage. I want marriage but I don't want kids or sex. It's interesting because for thousands of years we were without very reliable and widely available contraception. Becoming pregnant without sex was impossible and so it was perhaps harder to separate out one from the other. It was a bit easier to see that these things naturally belonged together. Things have changed so much in the last hundred years but just because we can do something doesn't mean that we should.

<sup>27</sup> Statistics taken from a BBC News article entitled 'Sex abuse calls to ChildLine soar' and Mark Driscoll in an article for the Washington Post

## Marriage

God's purpose is that marriage should tell a story. God is a storyteller and he wants to tell the most important story in the universe: the story of his Son and his love for his people. "Husbands love your wives as Christ loves the church and gave himself up for her".<sup>28</sup> Marriage is meant to speak about the love of Jesus.

The focus is not on what you get but on what you give. Marriage works beautifully when you have two humble servants who are living to please each other. The Bible is both realistic and hopeful about this vision for marriage. It's realistic because it recognises that everybody marries, in one sense, the wrong person. Everybody is flawed and broken, so there will be conflict and challenge and seasons when you give a great deal but receive very little in return. Far too many people expect things from marriage that can never be delivered. However, there is also great hope. No season lasts forever and with God the cycle of destructive habits can be broken.

Most people desire in theory to be more loving but the problem is that many people aren't very easy to love, at least some of the time. We must learn that if you love a person when you don't like them you will feel more and more loving. If you only love the person when you like them you will feel less and less loving. Jesus gave his life for us even though we are rebellious and selfish and it's this kind of sacrificial love which marriage runs on. It must be made clear that selfless love does not mean enduring abuse. Sometimes the most loving thing to do is to confront the one that you love. It's possible to love your spouse and be walking in forgiveness but still move out and call the police because you or your family are in danger.

In the past, marriage was viewed as an undertaking for status and security. The Bible was revolutionary it said 'marry for

<sup>28</sup> Ephesians 5:25

love and come together for an incredible combination of passionate romance and intimate friendship'. Husbands and wives are called to best friends as well as lovers. Friends want something else beside the friendship. The saying goes that 'those who are going nowhere can have no fellow travellers' and in marriage the Bible says we together should share a passion for the purposes of God and all that we could be in him. When we look at one another we see not only what they are but what they are going to be in God.

### Parenting

It is important to remind ourselves that a married couple are a family. Some people think they will never be truly happy unless they are able to be parents but the reality is that millions of people are unable to have children and those people can still live satisfying, fulfilling and incredible lives.

The Bible says that children are a gift. We should be thankful for our children and enjoy their company and raising them. So often we focus on the responsibility which can lead to guilt and a lack of joy. 'Children are one big guilt trip' is what our midwife told us. No, they are a gift; if they are challenging then there is a lesson that God thinks we need to learn.

Here are two proverbs from the Bible which speak about parenting:

Folly is bound up in the heart of a child,  
but the rod of discipline will drive it far away.<sup>29</sup>

My son, do not despise the LORD's discipline,  
and do not resent his rebuke,  
because the LORD disciplines those he loves,  
as a father the son he delights in.<sup>30</sup>

There are broadly speaking two commonly held views of parenting. One is the traditional view that parenting is about

<sup>29</sup> Proverbs 22: 15 <sup>30</sup> Proverbs 3: 11

control and obedience, the other more modern view is that parenting is about love and affection. The biblical view in Proverbs is neither of those. The Bible says that the main purpose of parenting is to make children wise. The first proverb talks about driving away folly, that there is a selfishness in children we need to coach them out of. And the way to get there is a mixture of discipline *and* delight.

### Handling parents

The Bible says that above all other commands we should treat those who are older with respect and honour. That's the beautiful picture of how things should be no matter however old we are. It's a positive way of telling us to honour our parents and not despise them. The instruction is one of the Ten Commandments and it's so interesting what it doesn't say – such as love, admire, obey, trust or show affection. Why? Actually sometimes it's not right to do those things as some parents are evil. But there is one thing you must always fulfil, you must always honour them. It's not a sentimental thing a feeling as such – it's about how we treat them. What does it look like?

- For start make appropriate cultural acts of honour, for instance we shouldn't need signs on buses telling us to give up seats for older people.
- Anyway in which you can say I got that from you and its good, say it!
- Don't ever stereotype them, they can change. You can change too.
- Forgive them – being resentful will distort you – “I never let my children go there because my dad made me go every week” If you are still mad at them you are still a child. We should neither live to please them or resent them. We honour them.<sup>31</sup>

<sup>31</sup> Many of the ideas in this paragraph come from a talk by Tim Keller called 'Family', June 12, 2005, [www.redeemer.com](http://www.redeemer.com)



### **Why is there hope?**

***Because Jesus offers us the truly satisfying relationships we all need.***

If your children, your spouse, your parents or your future spouse are the one thing you can't live without then they have become your God. Your relationship with them will be distorted, because you expect something from them that they can never give. There is roughly a 50/50 possibility your spouse will die before you. What will you live for when they are gone? Your God is not very reliable. Your children will probably fall in love and start a family of their own, and would you even want anything less for them? Can you really live for them, when they have their own lives to live?

There is a statement here which isn't a bible verse but it is true: Jesus + nothing = everything. Why?

### **Jesus is our ultimate spouse**

Supposing you are single and prone to wondering on wedding days, "will it ever be my turn?" Remember the happiest person in the universe was a single virgin called Jesus. Tim Keller says the way to deal with being single is to say this: "There is only one person in the universe who can give my soul what it longs for the most. And he awaits me. My wedding day is coming no matter what. I can read about it in Revelation 21 and 22. And it's the only wedding day I really need". He goes on to say "And on that day your first embrace from your ultimate lover could heal a thousand lives worse and more unhappy than yours. That awaits you, heal yourself with that. Tell yourself about that. If you don't it's your fault".<sup>32</sup>

Jesus made a promise with the Father that he wouldn't give up on us even if it cost him his life. He got into the marriage from hell with us and stayed in it. He showed us that dying to self is the only way to win. He confronted the most broken

<sup>32</sup> Tim Keller, quote from talk on 'Family'

thing about us and defeated it on the cross. The darkest day, was the day when light broke through like never before, as Jesus showed us that losing your life is the only way to find true life. He's alive today, he's present here and he is a permanent reminder that costly love that puts others first, wins in the end.

### **Jesus offers us the ultimate parent and the ultimate family**

*While Jesus was still talking to the crowd, his mother and brothers stood outside, wanting to speak to him. Someone told him, "Your mother and brothers are standing outside, wanting to speak to you." He replied to him, "Who is my mother, and who are my brothers?" Pointing to his disciples, he said, "Here are my mother and my brothers. For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother."*<sup>33</sup>

Jesus welcomes us not only to a Father who delights in us but to a people who he calls his own. I met someone on a plane who said she couldn't be associated with Christianity because of what Christians say and do. What I later realised is that what repelled her was actually beautiful. Tim Keller, again, says this: 'Christianity... leads its members to [expect that many] people of other faiths ...will live lives morally superior to their own. Most people in our culture believe that, if there is a God, we can relate to him and go to heaven through leading a good life... Christianity teaches the very opposite. In the Christian understanding, Jesus does not tell us how to live so we can merit salvation. Rather, he comes to forgive and save us through his life and death in our place. God's grace does not come to people who morally outperform others, but to those who admit their failure to perform and who acknowledge their need for a Saviour.'<sup>34</sup>

Church is messy but there is also something wonderful as God takes these broken people just as they are and makes

<sup>33</sup> Matthew 12: 46–50 <sup>34</sup> Tim Keller, 'The Reason for God'

them right again. You cannot say to Christians, 'your God will be my God', without saying to God, 'your people will be my people'. This is an act of grace, you might want to say 'they don't deserve to be here, they are too judgmental, too sinful, too annoying' but when we see the cross we realise none of us deserve to be here: it is only because of his mercy and grace that we are. Jesus invites you to join this family of people. Accept them as they are, knowing that inside us is a power that will change us now, and change us for all eternity: a family that lasts forever.

## 5 Relationships

People sometimes say 'I can't live with them but I can't live without them'. According to this survey that seems tragically true. In the final chapter we consider the pain of living without those we love; in this one we look at the pain of living with them. For many people the most painful thing in life is what other people have done to them. Here are some more responses to the question 'what hurts you most?'

- When people don't understand the way I feel
- Criticism from others
- Arguing
- Lying
- Selfishness
- Somebody lets you down
- Broken promises
- Ending of a marriage
- Anger
- Hate
- Rejection
- Deceit
- Abuse

But there was one answer which stood out from all of them, because I realised in a way it summed them all up:

- Not being loved

At the very root of all this painful stuff was a lack of love. One of the most watched videos in the world is the artist Adele singing the song 'Someone like you'. It ends with the haunting line ... 'Sometimes it lasts in love but sometimes it hurts instead'.

Many people are longing for a relationship that will fulfil them. Jesus once met someone who had been hurt by relationships. This lady was what we might call a serial monogamist – someone who had gone from one serious relationship to another, had married four times, but now was with someone else and not married to them. She had clearly given up on marriage and had become very cynical towards it. I think there are many people like her today. Here are some quotes and popular statements about marriage:

- Married life is very frustrating. In the first year of marriage, the man speaks and the wife listens. In the second year, the woman speaks and the husband listens. In the third year, they both speak and the neighbours listen.
- I never knew what real happiness was until I got married and by then it was too late.
- Cher says: 'The trouble with some women is they get all excited about nothing – and then they marry him.' Ouch.
- Marriage is very much like a violin; after the sweet music is over the strings are attached.
- I think, therefore I am single.<sup>35</sup>

So Jesus meets this lady, who has become wary of marriage, and enters into a conversation with her at a well. Being thirsty, he asks her for some water but instead receives a rebuff because he's a Jew and she's a Samaritan and the two communities don't associate with each other. Undeterred, he uses the water to make a point: 'If you knew ... who I am, you would be asking me for a drink, and I would give you fresh, living water'. 'What are you talking about?' she replies, perhaps a bit mockingly, 'are you greater than the man who gave us this well?' Jesus answers her, 'Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks the water I give them will never thirst, indeed the water I give them will become a spring of water welling up into life'<sup>36</sup>.

<sup>35</sup> All from J John and Mark Stibbe 'A Box of Delights' <sup>36</sup> John 4:13-14

A person can survive for weeks without food but only days without water. And Jesus saw that this woman's heart and soul had become like a desert. All the past relationships had left her dry and lifeless. That's true isn't it? Painful relationships can kill the life in you. People say things like '*A little piece of me died the day you said you didn't love me anymore*'. But Jesus says there is hope, he can restore you to life again and give something even better than what you have known; something far more satisfying. He can turn your desert into an oasis.

He says the answer to the pain of broken relationships is something he can give you, he calls it life. I want to share with you three things that Jesus does which give us life again.

### **Jesus shows us the love we really need**

One writer says this: "If God had a fridge, your picture would be on it. If he had a wallet, your photo would be in it. He sends you flowers every spring, and a sunrise every morning."<sup>37</sup>

If I was to sum up the life of Jesus in one sentence, I would say "Jesus was a man who showed people how loved they were". Jesus told lots of stories to get this across. One of the most famous is the story of the prodigal son. In the story a son ask his father for his inheritance early – which was a really rude thing to do; it was like saying "I wish you were dead". He goes off and lives a lifestyle of sex, drugs and rock and roll and blows the whole lot. In one scene Jesus describes him so hungry he contemplates eating pig food. At that moment he has an idea, 'if I go back to my father, I can be a hired hand and eat better than this, I will tell him how sorry I am'. The son comes back to his father, but to his amazement the father runs out to him and hugs him before he even reaches home. The son apologises and they have a party to celebrate. Jesus says, God is just like that; waiting to run out to us if we only come back to him.<sup>38</sup>

<sup>37</sup> Ibid <sup>38</sup> Luke 15: 11–32

Jesus also showed us how loved we are when he died for us. People might say no-one really loves me. I say Jesus does. People might say no-one would die for me. I say Jesus did. And this love liberates us. Jesus was once asked “what’s the most important thing we do in our lives?” He said “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and soul and mind and love your neighbour as much as yourself”.<sup>39</sup> Once we receive the love of God we are liberated to pass it on. It’s quite hard to love when you’ve not been shown how to love but Jesus shows us how, he liberates us to love others too.

### **Jesus bore the shame for their lack of love**

A young woman named Margaret had spent decades battling depression and anxiety that were traced back to a horrible day in school when a teacher, frustrated with her tardiness, made her stand in front of the room and then invited all the students to come up to the chalkboard and write something bad about her. The kids were ruthless. They wrote things like, “Margaret is ugly!”, “Margaret smells”, “Margaret is stupid”. All twenty-five students went up to the board and wrote these hurtful things. This event inflicted wounds that Margaret found difficult to heal. She battled depression, discouragement, and was angry all the time. Finally she went to a psychologist for help. She spent two years meeting weekly but finally they had reached the end of their sessions.

The counselor said, “Margaret, I know this will be difficult, but just to make sure you’re ready to move on, I am going to ask you to do something. I want to go back to your schoolroom and detail the events of that day. Take your time. Describe each of the children as they approach the blackboard, remember what they wrote and how you felt – do this for all twenty five students.”

In a way, this would be easy for Margaret. For forty years she had remembered every detail. And yet, to go through the

<sup>39</sup> Luke 10: 27

nightmare one more time would take every bit of strength she had. After a long silence, she began the painful description. One by one, she described each of the students vividly, as though she had just seen them, stopping periodically to regain her composure, forcing herself to face each of those students one more time.

Finally she was done, and the tears would not stop, could not stop. Margaret cried a long time before she realised someone was whispering her name. "Margaret, Margaret, Margaret." She looked up to see her counselor staring into her eyes, saying her name over and over again. Margaret stopped crying for moment.

"Margaret. You ... you left out one person"

"I certainly did not! I have lived with this story for forty years. I know every student by heart."

"No, Margaret, you did forget someone. See, he's sitting in the back of the classroom. He's standing up, walking toward your teacher, Ms. Garner. She is handing him a piece of chalk and he's taking it. Margaret, he's taking it! Now he's walking over to the blackboard and picking up a board rubber. He is erasing every one of the sentences the students wrote. They are gone! Margaret, they are gone! Do you recognise him yet? Yes, his name is Jesus. Look, he's writing new sentences on the board. 'Margaret is loved. Margaret is beautiful. Margaret is gentle and kind. Margaret is strong. Margaret has great courage.'"

And Margaret began to weep. But very quickly, the weeping turned into a smile, and then into laughter, and then into tears of joy.<sup>40</sup>

When Jesus died he became like a sponge and absorbed all the pain and shame of sin, a bit like that board rubber. The Bible says "He who had no sin became sin, so that we might be the righteousness of God".<sup>41</sup> A sponge doesn't work if it's dirty, it can't absorb dirt if it's full of dirt already. Jesus was perfect;

<sup>40</sup> From 'Your scars are beautiful to God' by Sharon Jaynes <sup>41</sup> 2 Corinthians 5: 21



he was a clean sponge that could take all the dirt away not just our wrongs but the dirt of what other people have done to us.

### **Jesus took the blame for our lack of love**

There is a famous passage about love in the Bible which people often read at weddings, so whether you are a regular churchgoer or not this passage might be a bit familiar to you. But look at what happens when you replace the word 'love' with your name.

- \_\_\_\_\_ is patient
- \_\_\_\_\_ is kind
- \_\_\_\_\_ does not envy
- \_\_\_\_\_ does not boast
- \_\_\_\_\_ is not rude
- \_\_\_\_\_ is not self-seeking
- \_\_\_\_\_ is not easily angered
- \_\_\_\_\_ keeps no record of wrongs
- \_\_\_\_\_ does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth
- \_\_\_\_\_ always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.<sup>42</sup>

The hard truth is that we too fail to love other people. Imagine there was a room and it in you could put all the people who you consider to have really hurt you at one time, because of their lack of love. How many people would you put in: 5, 10, 20, 100? Now imagine another room but in this room are all the people who you have hurt because of your lack of love for them. How many people would there be in it? I have a theory – that there would be about the same number of people.

The Bible says: "You... have no excuse, you who pass judgment on someone else, for at whatever point you judge the other, you are condemning yourself, because you who pass judgment do the same things."<sup>43</sup> We really hurt because of

<sup>42</sup> 1 Corinthians 13: 4–7 <sup>43</sup> Romans 2: 1

what others have done but deep down we also hurt because we do the same things. We're not just a victim, we're the problem. What's the answer? We can't hide from how much we've hurt people because we know how much it hurts. Do we just stop caring? Or is there another way? Jesus offers to take the blame for us.

It's quite a profound thing when someone takes the blame for you. When I first started dating my wife Christine we went on a youth group trip to a church variety show. Thinking I was being really funny I secretly entered Christine for a quiz that was due to take place in the interval. I informed her of my 'funny joke' just before they started pulling people's names out of the hat and her face suddenly fell. She looked utterly devastated. The problem was I didn't know her very well and hadn't realised that she really hated standing up in front of lots of people and that she particularly disliked quizzes. I desperately hoped her name wouldn't be picked out fearing it might spell the end of our relationship but my worst fears were realised when her name was the *very first to be read out*. To my great relief a close friend took her place, she even stood at the front and said her name was 'Christine' when it wasn't. It was a strangely beautiful moment – she had lovingly taken Christine's place and wonderfully taken the blame for my stupid mistake.

Imagine now one of the most shameful mistakes of your life. Imagine if just at the moment when your mistake was to be revealed that someone else piped up and said "I did that. I take the responsibility for this, it was my fault". One day we will be held responsible for the things we have done wrong but if we ask him, Jesus takes the blame for us, that's what he did on the cross. It was the day when he said "I did it, I take responsibility for the wrongs things in this world".

## 6 Death

Death is the one of the few things that unites all human beings. It's the great leveller regardless of wealth, status and ethnicity. We all die. One out of every seven people who responded to our survey told us that death, bereavement or loss was the thing in life that hurts the most. Many were specific: some people had lost both parents while others had lost wives or husbands, young children or grandchildren. Some people had even lost all their family members. Others had lost brothers and sisters in their early twenties and one told of the people they loved being murdered.

Who is qualified to speak to these people? I'm certainly not but I know someone who can speak from experience about the deepest possible pain. And I want to introduce him by quoting a powerful modern day parable:

### The Long Silence

*At the end of time, billions of people were seated on a great plain before God's throne. Most shrank back from the brilliant light before them. But some groups near the front talked heatedly, not cringing with cringing shame – but with belligerence.*

*"Can God judge us? How can He know about suffering?", snapped a pert young brunette. She ripped open a sleeve to reveal a tattooed number from a Nazi concentration camp. "We endured terror ... beatings ... torture ... death!" In another group a Negro boy lowered his collar. "What about this?" he demanded, showing an ugly rope burn. "Lynched, for no crime but being black!" In another crowd there was a pregnant schoolgirl with sullen eyes: "Why should I suffer?" she murmured. "It wasn't my fault." Far out across the plain were hundreds of such groups. Each had a complaint against God for the evil and suffering He had permitted in His world. How lucky God was to live in*

*Heaven, where all was sweetness and light. Where there was no weeping or fear, no hunger or hatred. What did God know of all that man had been forced to endure in this world? For God leads a pretty sheltered life, they said. So each of these groups sent forth their leader, chosen because he had suffered the most. A Jew, a negro, a person from Hiroshima, a horribly deformed arthritic, a thalidomide child. In the centre of the vast plain, they consulted with each other. At last they were ready to present their case. It was rather clever.*

*Before God could be qualified to be their judge, He must endure what they had endured. Their decision was that God should be sentenced to live on earth as a man. Let him be born a Jew. Let the legitimacy of his birth be doubted. Give him a work so difficult that even his family will think him out of his mind. Let him be betrayed by his closest friends. Let him face false charges, be tried by a prejudiced jury and convicted by a cowardly judge. Let him be tortured. At the last, let him see what it means to be terribly alone. Then let him die so there can be no doubt he died. Let there be a great host of witnesses to verify it.*

*As each leader announced his portion of the sentence, loud murmurs of approval went up from the throng of people assembled. When the last had finished pronouncing sentence, there was a long silence. No one uttered a word. No one moved.*

*For suddenly, all knew that God had already served His sentence.<sup>44</sup>*

Jesus is qualified to speak to us about the deepest possible pain because that is what he endured. And so it is to Jesus that we turn today... what would he say to us? What would he do? What has he done?

### **Jesus weeps with us**

The first answer comes from one of the shortest sentences in the English language and it is found in the Bible: Jesus wept. Why was Jesus weeping? We discover that he was weeping

<sup>44</sup> Anon but quoted in John Stott, 'The Cross of Christ'

because of a recent bereavement. He has just seen two things: the tomb of a dead friend and the grief of those around the tomb who he knew and loved (you can read the whole story in John 18).

There is something very affecting about seeing and hearing others grieve. I was once with an 18 year old friend sat on a mountain who had just been told that her mother had tragically died in an accident on that same mountain. She let out a cry of utter despair that was like nothing I've ever heard before. It deeply affected me.

Jesus also wept and his tears speak to us. Does God really care about us? Jesus wept. Does our pain matter to Him? Jesus wept. Does God ever shed a tear? *Jesus wept*. His tears speak a thousand words, they tell us of a God who cares, a God who knows and a God who weeps.

If you are grieving very profoundly at this moment in time – perhaps your loss has been recent – then I would suggest that this verse is of great importance to you - Jesus wept. Sometimes actions speak louder than words. And sometimes we are not ready for words. Were Jesus physically present with you right now, I am sure that one thing he would do is cry with you.

### **Death is an enemy Jesus came to defeat**

Jesus doesn't simply weep with us. He also fights for us. The Bible says: *Death has been swallowed up in victory. Where, O death is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting...thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.*<sup>45</sup>

Jesus does not view death as a reality that we just have to learn to cope with and accept. He says death is an enemy that he came to defeat. That's how Jesus views death – it is his enemy. However, there are many ways that we can try to fight death on our own.<sup>46</sup>

<sup>45</sup> 1 Corinthians 15: 54–57 <sup>46</sup> Taken from a talk by Matt Hosier, Gateway Church, Poole

## **Pursuing health**

As a nation we spend billions of pounds on health care, keeping fit and beauty products. Arthur Lydiard was an athletics coach and the 'father of jogging'. He produced two Olympic champions and was credited with inspiring the worldwide jogging craze. It is said that at one point he was running 200 miles a week. Arthur was a healthy man who lived until he was 87 when he collapsed from a suspected heart attack in a Texas hotel. Like all of us even he couldn't hide from the inevitability of death.

## **Living in denial**

There are two ways to live in denial; one is to dance with death and the other is to avoid the subject altogether. So on the one hand there are those who enjoy high risk sports and love the thrill of death-defying sky dives but there are also many who live in denial by avoiding the subject. We don't talk about it. We use different words for it. We turn off the news when it gets too depressing. We live in fearful denial. The problem is you can dance with death or shut it out but it still finds you and it will still find the people you love.

## **Ambition**

Some think that perhaps if we are rich and successful enough we will find a way out. Simon Cowell said recently in an interview that when he dies he would like to have his body cryogenically frozen. "It's an insurance policy. If it doesn't work, it doesn't work. If it does work I'll be happy. If it's possible, and I think it will be, why not a second crack? Does that sound crazy? I think it's a good idea. I have a feeling that if I don't do it now, I could regret this in 300 years time."<sup>47</sup>

Even if this was really a possibility it doesn't deal with the inevitable we can only cheat death for so long. And it's hardly a hope for everyone. So none of these ways to fight death are really enough. We need someone stronger than death to fight for us.

<sup>47</sup> Simon Cowell, quoted in GQ magazine

## Enter Jesus

Jesus claimed to be that person. Jesus once said “I lay down my life – only to take it up again. No one takes it from me but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to take it up again.”<sup>48</sup> Some people have chosen when to die, but no one can claim that they chose when they were born or they chose to come to life again. Jesus made that claim. He chose to be born, he chose to die and he chose to rise from the dead.

In films the most powerful villain is usually the last to be destroyed; it would be quite underwhelming if they died in the very first scene. In the Bible the last villain to be defeated is death because in a sense it's the most powerful, it's the reason all the other villains exist. With death defeated injustice, fear, sickness and war all melt away. If you can abolish death, you in turn totally strip all the other enemies of their power.<sup>49</sup> Jesus broke the power of death on the cross and will one day destroy death forever.

## Jesus rescues us from eternal death

So Jesus weeps with us, Jesus fights for us and he also offers us hope. Jesus rescues us from eternal death and offers us eternal life.

*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. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world but to save the world through him.*

*Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God's one and only Son.*<sup>50</sup>

The message of Christianity is that God loves you. And Jesus came to save you not condemn you or tell you off but to save you not simply from death but from eternal death. This is good news but to understand this good news we need

<sup>48</sup> John 10: 17–18 <sup>49</sup> Matt Hosiers illustration <sup>50</sup> John 3: 16–18

to understand something of our plight. If someone was drowning and I threw them a life ring I am sure it would be well appreciated but if this book came with a free life ring I'm not sure it would make a great deal of sense!

C S Lewis once said "God whispers to us in our pleasures, but shouts to us through our pain, it is his megaphone to rouse a deaf world"<sup>51</sup>. Death speaks to us of our plight. Death raises very important questions such as; why is our world broken? Why are we broken? How did this happen? Death tells us that something has gone wrong.

There was a holocaust survivor who was invited to the trial of those responsible for the cruel deaths of his own family members. When he saw the accused he fell to the floor and began to weep. Journalists later asked him if he was weeping because he was so overwhelmed to see these men finally brought to justice. He replied "No, I wept because when I saw those men I realised they were just men. Men like me. And I was capable of everything they did".<sup>52</sup> One philosopher made a similar point when he said "The line separating good and evil passes not through states, nor between classes, nor between political parties, but right through every human heart, and through all human hearts."<sup>53</sup>

The Bible says we are not simply victims of death in need of hope but that we are rebels who brought death into the world and we need to be rescued. Death is here because of us. Long ago, right at the beginning, someone made a choice that had consequences. It was the choice that any one of us would have made and it brought death into the world (you can read about that choice in Genesis 3).

People can make empty statements when someone dies but occasionally they may say something very true. One such statement is "you need to make your peace with God".

<sup>51</sup> The problem of pain by CS Lewis <sup>52</sup> Source unknown

<sup>53</sup> Aleksandr I. Solzhenitsyn, The Gulag Archipelago 1918-1965



And that is a very true word of advice. The Bible says each one of us should “be reconciled to God”. Urgently as a highest priority we must be reconciled to God. The Bible describes God as a Father waiting for his wayward child to come home. We are that child and God is waiting.

For a moment lay aside thoughts of death and grief for those around you and contemplate head on the prospect of your own death. Are you ready to die? Have you made your peace with God? The Bible says there is a fate worse than a painful death. It is eternal death. Jesus came to rescue you from that also. There was a famous London preacher in the 19th Century who gathered crowds of thousands called Charles Spurgeon and he once said this: *If sinners be damned, at least let them leap to Hell over our bodies. If they will perish, let them perish with our arms about their knees. Let no one go there unwarned and unprayed for.*<sup>54</sup>

Let my words be your warning, as they stand between you and that terrible fate. I say to you with all my heart; *you desperately need to be rescued.* The amazing news is that Jesus has provided that rescue. There is hope.

### **Jesus offers us hope of eternal life**

We began by reading one of the shortest sentences in the English language, and on the day that Jesus wept because of his friends he also said something very bold. He said this: *I am the resurrection and the life, he who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me shall never die.*<sup>55</sup>

Jesus offers this amazing hope to every person that if we believe in him we will never truly die but be with him in heaven. That means death isn't the end. In many ways it's only the beginning. C S Lewis put it like this at the end of the book 'The Last Battle': "And so for us this is the end of all stories, and we can most truly say they lived happily ever after.

<sup>54</sup> C H Spurgeon: 'The Wailing of Risca' December 9th, 1860 <sup>55</sup> John 11: 24-26

But for them it was only the beginning of the real story. And all their adventures had only been the cover and the title page: and now they were beginning Chapter One of the Great Story which no one on earth has ever read: which goes on forever: in which every chapter is better than the one before."<sup>56</sup>

Heaven is a real place with real people. It's a lot like earth on a really good day. It's not a place that is impossible to imagine but it is more wonderful that we can fully imagine. What makes heaven truly amazing is that we get to be with Jesus. There is something so amazing about being with the one you love. I remember when Christine and I were first dating we spent so much time together, it didn't matter what we did, it just mattered that we were together.

Jesus is the best person in the universe to be with. He's more interesting, more fun, more kind, more loving than anyone else. He is what makes heaven amazing. We get to be with Him. The way to go there is not by being religious or trying harder.

*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.*<sup>57</sup>

<sup>56</sup> The Last Battle, the last page <sup>57</sup> John 3: 16

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