

InterSections

An Australian journal for Christian encounter and encouragement

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Welcome to the February 2021 issue of *InterSections*. In the past year, Covid-19 has reminded us of death and its inevitability. Some have lost an individual they love and have experienced grief. So what hope does the Christian have in the face of death? This issue gives thought to some theological and personal perspectives as they relate to death, resurrection, and final judgment.

In our *Feature*, Graham Wall examines how Christians can face the prospect of judgment day and provides clarification regarding various viewpoints concerning the millennium. In our *Food for Thought*, Benny Tabalujan focuses on resurrection and its continuities and discontinuities with our present life. In our *International Letter*, Dale Hartman reflects on the ministry of caring for the dying and the families who remain. In our *Interview* section, three Christians take time to reflect on their faith and how it influences their perceptions of death.

In our *ChurchScene*, Ron Bainbridge shares the history regarding *Discovering a Better Life Ministries* – a Christian internet and media ministry he's been involved in for several decades. Bryce Christensen reviews a well-known classic: *The Screwtape Letters* by C.S. Lewis. Finally in *News*, we hear about an exciting new initiative, *Young Christians Network*, and details of the recent Camp Drewe held at Lennox Head, NSW.

We hope this issue is both encouraging and a reminder of the eternal reward awaiting those who love the Lord (1 Corinthians 2:9). ◇

InterSections Editorial Team

ChurchScene

Discovering a Better Life Ministries, Western Australia



Discovering A Better Life internet and media ministries is a Gospel outreach of the Kendenup Church of Christ in Western Australia. We're here to help people find a committed relationship with Jesus Christ in order that they might live courageous lives in an insecure and discouraging world (John 10:10). Commencing in 1985, from Albany (Western Australia) this ministry has been sharing regular weekly messages of hope and encouragement which have been published in many different newspapers throughout Australia. The messages we share through various newspaper columns are centred in providing emotional and spiritual support on an entirely non-denominational basis and have been well received.

Hundreds of men and women have enrolled in our Bible correspondence courses which encourage a balanced, systematic study of the Bible. These courses have helped many men and women throughout Australia, as well as other places in the world, to experience a committed, personal relationship with God through Jesus Christ (John 10:10; John 14:6).



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Past Issues

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Early in 1996, the *Discovering a Better Life Ministries* team was invited by the local Albany community radio station, 100.9 FM, to present a weekly Bible message. With the help and generosity of our audio technician, Tom Reed, we established a recording studio at his home and pre-recorded our first radio message which went to air on Sunday morning, 18 August 1996. These 15-minute weekly messages, *Discovering a Better Life*, continue to be broadcast in 2021.

In 1997 our 30-minute program known as *A Cappella Songs of Inspiration* commenced broadcasting on Sunday evenings, also on Albany Community Radio. We give God the praise for providing us with an exciting opportunity to introduce *a cappella* praise and worship songs into our community. Some weeks after our program had commenced we received a letter from Ian Hall, a presenter on Central Victorian Gospel Radio. Ian wrote:

'Last week our friends . . . passed on some of your tape ministry programs. I found on listening a refreshing difference and a quality not matched by some of our broadcast material, including the *a cappella* singing. I am writing to ask permission to play the tapes on our radio station on an occasional basis to gauge listener response and to assist our program material. I thank you for your professional quality production and messages to the listening and learning audience. God bless your continued service.'

Naturally, we were happy to oblige this request and received back some very positive responses to our messages.

In 2001, the team was invited by Albany Community Radio to present a 5-minute daily devotional program, *Heartbeat*, which was broadcast from Monday through Friday each week. These messages are aimed at helping listeners overcome personal or social problems. Our 15-minute, 30-minute, and 5-minute programs, presented by Ron Bainbridge, are in a contemporary, easy listening style in an effort to reach the unchurched listener (as well as those who have faith in Jesus). We do this by offering words of Gospel-centred encouragement. We hope to help people cope with life's difficulties by entering into a genuine relationship with Jesus.

Since commencing our first radio broadcast in 1996, we have pre-recorded and distributed hundreds of our Gospel radio messages, audio tapes, CDs and USBs. We've also distributed hundreds of booklets on various biblical subjects to listeners who have requested them. Our radio media outreach is being used by God as an effective means of reaching out to hurting men and women throughout Australia and other countries. It's indeed an exciting, challenging, and rewarding ministry!

On 23 May 2018, Esperance Community Radio, 103.9 FM, commenced broadcasting *Discovering a Better Life*. These messages have been presented each Sunday at 11 a.m. and 11 p.m. In September 2020, Radio Great Southern Easy Listening, 1611 AM, commenced broadcasting *Discovering a Better Life* from Wagin on Sundays at 8:45 a.m.

Since relocating to Kendenup our ministry has received many requests to encourage and mentor young preachers in countries including Africa, India, Pakistan, and the Philippines. Providing sound biblical website resource links and literature has enabled them to grow in their knowledge of Christ and his purpose for his church. We're indeed thankful to God for this opportunity to share messages that are dedicated to helping men and women find hope, meaning, and purpose for a better life with Jesus our saviour (Ephesians 3:14–21). ♦

Ron Bainbridge coordinates Discovering a Better Life Ministries from his base in the rural town of Kendenup, about 350 km southeast of Perth, Western Australia. abl-alb@omninet.net.au



InterSections is a quarterly journal designed to inform, inspire and unite Christians in Australia seeking to restore New Testament faith and practice. The editors are responsible for selecting material for publication, but each article reflects the views of its author(s). Advertisements in *InterSections* are broadly consistent with the ethos and goals of the journal; however, they do not necessarily constitute endorsement by the journal. *InterSections* is published by Klesis Institute (© Klesis Institute, 2021). Copyright permission is given to anyone wishing to reproduce an individual article for non-commercial purposes, as long as due attribution is given to the author and *InterSections*. Klesis Institute is a division of CommAsia Australia Pty Ltd (ACN 097136171 ABN 53702023602).

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Feature

What about Judgment Day and the 1,000-year Reign? *Graham Wall*

The term 'judgment day' has an ominous ring to many people. For Christians, it refers to a time when humanity will stand before the Creator and everyone will give an account of their lives (Matthew 25:31-46). Those who rejected the Gospel will be confronted with their foolishness in spurning God's Word. However, for faithful Christians it'll be different. Although there's accountability (2 Corinthians 5:10), Christians also have expectations of receiving a glorious inheritance and dwelling with our heavenly Father forever – as noted in 1 Peter 1:3-13.

Most people who claim to follow Christ generally agree with the words of 1 Peter. Where there's often disagreement concerns the interpretation of Revelation 20:1-10 which speaks of a 1,000-year reign of Christ with martyred believers (20:4-5). One reading of Revelation suggests that this 1,000-year reign will take place before the universal last judgement (20:11-15) which is then followed by the coming of the 'new heaven and new earth' (21:1-8). But we should be careful of holding rigidly to such a chronological order of events. In the visionary passages in Revelation, John often refers to the same event in different places. Here, the 1,000-year reign (20:1-10) occurs in the middle of a set of seven visions marked off by the term 'I saw' (19:14-21:1-2). In this section all sorts of eschatological events (many echoing the order of Ezekiel 38-39) take place.

Despite the difficulties surrounding this visionary text and its chronology, many wild speculations have arisen about the 1,000-year reign. Regarding this millennial period, three main interpretations are discussed here: premillennialism, postmillennialism, and amillennialism. The arguments for each interpretation are complex; below is a brief sketch and a short evaluation of the strengths and weaknesses of each interpretation.

Premillennialists generally take the 1,000-year reference to be a literal millennium. At some point, Jesus is believed to return to earth and will thereafter reign in righteousness on earth for 1,000 years over his opponents.¹ But several questions arise about this view. First, the New Testament teaches that Jesus inaugurated his kingdom in the first century (Matthew 4:17, 13:44; Acts 14:22; Colossians 4:11), not at his second coming. Second, a literal 1,000-year reign before judgment appears inconsistent with other New Testament passages which suggest that judgment comes immediately upon Christ's second coming (Matthew 25:31-46; 2 Thessalonians 1:5-10). Third, many figures and images in Revelation are symbolic (e.g. the woman clothed with the sun in Revelation 12:1). If so, why does it make sense to demand that the 1,000 years be taken literally?

Postmillennialists typically believe that Jesus' second coming comes after a period when Christianity has flourished.² As such, postmillennialism sounds optimistic and attractive. These interpreters take the millennium to be a climactic period of success demonstrated by the Gospel advancing. But precisely for this reason it's difficult to reconcile postmillennialism with certain New Testament teachings. For example, it suggests that Christianity is a relatively easy road – which appears contrary

to Acts 14:22. It foresees a time when there isn't a narrow way to eternal life – which appears to contradict Matthew 7:13-14. It also appears inconsistent with texts such as 2 Timothy 3:1-13 that warn about growing opposition to Christianity in the last days (cf. 2 Thessalonians 2:1-12).

Amillennialists tend to interpret the 1,000-year not as a literal millennium but as a symbolic period for the vindication of God's people from persecution. This is the age of the kingdom; hence, the millennium is the current time: 'the present age of the Church between the first and second comings of Christ...'³ Many also believe that the binding of Satan for 1,000 years refers to the limitations placed on Satan by the work of Jesus on Calvary (cf. Matthew 12:25-29). That is, through Jesus' work, the Spirit helps God's people to limit Satan from fully deceiving the world. It thus acknowledges that Christ's present reign is expressed symbolically as the 1,000 years in Revelation 20. Amillennialism is probably the view held by many in non-denominational Churches of Christ.

Another perspective associated with amillennialism views Revelation 20 in light of Satan using the Roman Empire to persecute and kill Christians. According to this view, Babylon, the beasts, and the prostitute all refer to Rome and her emperors. Despite the church looking like it would be destroyed, the visions in Revelation revealed that the church would ultimately prove victorious over Rome as God eventually brought judgment and destruction upon the Roman Empire. The 1,000-year reign of the saints with Christ then symbolically emphasises the victory of those who died for their faith under Rome (20:4-5).

So, what can we conclude if it's not likely that Revelation 20 refers to Christ reigning for a literal 1,000 years on earth? I believe the millennium is more likely a reference to the current church age or it may refer to the persecution of Christians by the Roman Empire (or both). If so, this means God's kingdom is already established and that when Jesus returns humanity will immediately face judgment.

Scripture tells us that Jesus will appear suddenly, like a thief in the night. When he appears, every eye will see him and every knee will bow at his name (1 Thessalonians 4:13-18; Philippians 2:10-11). Those who rejected the Gospel will go to eternal punishment (2 Thessalonians 1:5-10). The faithful will enjoy eternal life in a new world where they'll be in the presence of God forever (Philippians 3:20-21). ◇

¹ Sam Storms, *Kingdom Come: The Amillennial Alternative* (Christian Publications, 2019) 135.

² Kenneth Gentry, "Postmillennialism," quoted in Storms, *Kingdom Come*, 363.

³ Storms, *Kingdom Come*, 424.



What does Scripture teach about our resurrection after death?

Interestingly, apart from passages like Daniel 12:2-3 and Isaiah 26:19, the Old Testament makes few explicit references to resurrection. In contrast, many English versions of the New Testament uses 'resurrection' dozens of times. Indeed, Paul claims that if Christ wasn't resurrected, then the Christian faith is in vain (1 Corinthians 15:13-19).

A bodily resurrection

One key element of the New Testament teaching about resurrection is that it's a bodily resurrection. That's why Jesus' tomb was empty of his physical body (Matthew 28:6; Luke 24:2-3). Similarly, Paul's description of our future resurrection also emphasises the presence of an 'imperishable body' (1 Corinthians 15:42-44). Elsewhere, Paul identifies the Holy Spirit as the one who will resurrect our mortal body (Romans 8:11).

What's this imperishable body like? Can we take Jesus' resurrected body as an example? After all, Paul describes Jesus' resurrection as the 'first fruits' – suggesting that our resurrection will follow along the lines of Jesus' resurrection (1 Corinthians 15:23). Moreover, in 1 John 3:2 it's suggested that, when Jesus returns, we'll be 'like him'.

Discontinuity and continuity

If we assume that our resurrected body will be like Jesus' resurrected body, then our resurrected body will not be entirely the same as our present body. Jesus' body after his resurrection could appear and disappear (Luke 24:31, 36) – a feat impossible for our body in the present world (except in science fiction movies). Jesus' resurrected body could dwell on a physical earth and yet also ascend to the sky (Acts 1:9) – again, quite unlike our present body. Overall, such differences appear consistent with Paul's description that the resurrected body has to be transformed from a perishable or corruptible state to become imperishable (1 Corinthians 15:42, 50). This is why many believe that the resurrected body, in contrast to our present body, will be immune to disease and death; it'll be immortal.

But even as our resurrected body can be contrasted with our present body, there are some lines of continuity. For example, Jesus' resurrected body was physically recognisable by several disciples (John 20:26-28) – albeit not easily (Luke 24:16-31). That body bore scars which were inflicted before his death on the cross (John 20:24-29). That body cooked breakfast for his disciples (John 21:7-14) and ate food (Luke 24:43), mimicking similar times of fellowship prior to Jesus' death. That body had flesh and bones (Luke 24:39-40). Together with the post-death references to individuals like Moses and Elijah (Matthew 17:1-8) and Abraham (Luke 16:19-31), all this suggests that a resurrected body maintains certain aspects of continuity – in terms of identity, memory, and physicality – with the corresponding body before death.

But what about Paul's remark that 'flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God' (1 Corinthians 15:50)? Doesn't this seem to conflict with Jesus' words in Luke 24:39 concerning 'flesh and bones'? One way to reconcile the two passages is to take Paul's 'flesh and blood' as a figure of speech referring to mere humans (cf. Matthew 16:17). If so, Paul is asserting that mere humans (in our perishable or corruptible form) can't inherit God's heavenly kingdom. Such an understanding fits Paul's overall argument in 1 Corinthians 15:35-49.

Conclusion

In summary, Scripture doesn't describe comprehensively what our resurrected body will be like. I don't know whether I'll be as short, rotund, and grey-haired as I'm now. I don't know whether a resurrected body continues to grow and age; or does it remain ageless? These details aren't revealed and it's prudent not to speculate unduly.

However, certain snapshots in Scripture do offer glimpses of what our resurrected body may be like. They suggest several preliminary conclusions. First, our present corruptible body isn't suitable for eternal life after death. So, God's people will be raised and changed into something imperishable, allowing us to enjoy immortality (1 Corinthians 15:52-53). Second, resurrection doesn't mean a total loss of identity, memory, and physicality. Post-resurrection, we'll have a body, it'll be our own and, like Jesus, we'll be recognisable as who we are. Third, all this suggests it's unlikely that heaven will be entirely devoid of physicality. If (as in Jesus' case) our resurrected body has flesh and bones, we won't become disembodied spirits. Instead, heaven will accommodate some form of embodied, physical life.¹ Fourth, post-resurrection, we'll dwell in God's presence forever in a glorious world without death, tears, or pain (Revelation 21:4).

Meanwhile, given the enigmas associated with eternity, perhaps the key point about resurrection and the afterlife isn't how or when all this will happen or what immortality is like – but that God will be there with us throughout (Revelation 21:3). In this way, eternal life is defined ultimately not by an event, a place, or a circumstance, but by a relationship. After all, eternal life is knowing God (John 17:3). ◇

¹ Some wonder whether the heaven to come (i.e. the 'new heaven and new earth' of Isaiah 65:17; 2 Peter 3:13; Revelation 21:1) incorporates a renewed or restored physical earth. *InterSections* is open to exploring this topic in a future issue if there's sufficient interest expressed among readers.





International Letter

The Ministry of Caring for the Dying Dale Hartman

For our *International Letter*, we ask Dale Hartman, a former missionary in Sydney, Australia, and an experienced minister, about his insights in caring for the dying.

How does a minister care for his own spirit when dealing with the grief of others?

Doing a family funeral for a faithful Christian is a sacred privilege. It's a time to celebrate a person's efforts to fight the good fight, to finish the race, and to keep the faith (2 Timothy 4:7). It's a time to reflect on the blessing that this person has been to many other lives. It's a time to celebrate the coming resurrection for the faithful who die in the Lord. It's also a spiritual service to the family and those attending the funeral. At times, a well-planned, personal service can be quite moving. When we know someone well, it's important to select comments that we can say without being emotionally overwhelmed. I've had to rewrite funerals so that I can serve the family well by mentioning things that I can express without becoming smothered by feelings at the moment.

Funerals can drain enormous amounts of spiritual energy from a minister. We have to develop some measure of detachment from all the emotion involved in order to conduct the service. Beyond the funeral, we also have to plan for additional time for healing and renewal of our own personal spiritual health. Three times during my ministry, I've conducted three funerals in a week in addition to my usual Wednesday class, a Sunday morning class, and two sermons. At the end of a week like that, one's spiritual reserves are depleted. At times we can feel as spiritually flat as a car battery the morning after the lights have been left on all night!

Self-care must become a priority in our schedule. It's crucial to plan for some 'down time.' We all need a period to rest, reflect, and pray in order allow our spirit to heal and to renew our own soul. In the midst of a hectic ministry schedule, Jesus frequently withdrew from the crowds. He went to a solitary place to pray and be alone with his Father. His disciples should do the same!

From your experience, how have people coped with death?

A Christian's hope in the resurrection and the life to come makes a tremendous difference in how the family approaches a funeral service. The visits with family and friends before a funeral are a deeply personal and spiritual occasion. I often say at the funeral of a faithful Christian, 'Brother Jones has left the land of the dying to enter the land of the living.' '...Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on!' "Yes," says the Spirit "that they may rest from their labours, for their deeds follow with them." (Revelation 14:13).

Many non-believers never think about death in a serious and meaningful way until a family member or close friend dies. I've done probably ten funerals for families who aren't part of a local church and who have lived a secular lifestyle. So far, without exception, I've heard at least one family member say, 'We're so glad that our father is in a better place.' This suggests that even non-Christians want to believe in the hope of a better life in the future.

What can Christians do to comfort others during this period of grief?

Immediately: When I visit a family who has just suffered the death of a loved one, I pray about a positive and a negative example. 'Lord, please help me today to be swift to hear and slow to speak. Lord, please help me to *not* be like Job's friends who were good comforters until they felt compelled to speak on your behalf.'

Each time I visit a family in grief or crisis, I remind myself of the acronym B.L.D. **Be** there. Your presence says more than words can say. **Listen**. Let them say whatever they need to say without judging. Don't criticise or provide commentary. Just listen.

Do something to serve them. Often something will come up that you can quietly do to help the family.

I don't have to have all the answers for the questions that arise surrounding the death of the loved one. I don't have to explain why God allowed this to happen. I don't have to speak falsely for God (cf. Job 13:7). I just have to be there and express my sorrow for their loss.

Later: Each of us walks through the grieving process in different ways and on different schedules. My father and mother both died in 2009, on the Lord's day but seven weeks apart. The cloud of loss and even depression can sometimes be almost overwhelming. Since then, I recommend that Christians write down their five favourite memories with their loved one. Mine is always taped to the back of my office door, so I see it regularly. These items are not carved in stone; they can change over time. I found it helpful to focus on specific positive memories that I shared with my parents, rather than be paralysed by a cloud of grief that seems to hover over us with no end in place.

What lessons can we learn from death?

Death is as much a part of God's divine design as birth. We truly are sojourners and strangers in this world. Moses reminds us, 'Teach us to number our days so that we may get a heart of wisdom' (Psalm 90:12). That's important to remember. ◇

Dale Hartman is an associate minister at North MacArthur Church of Christ, Oklahoma City, USA. dale.hartman@gmail.com

Book Review

The Screwtape Letters by C.S. Lewis

(multiple editions; first published by Geoffrey Bles, London, 1942)

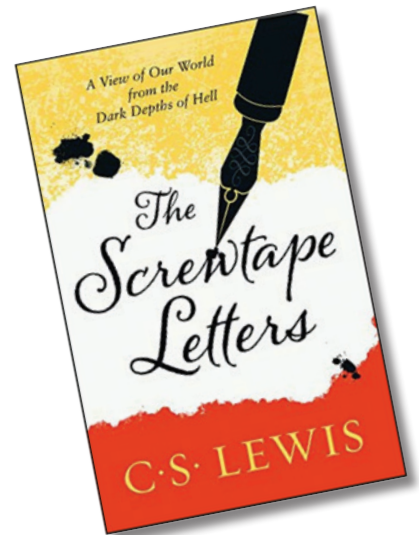
Reviewed by Bryce Christensen



In his well-known work, *The Screwtape Letters*, C.S. Lewis imagines a junior devil, Wormwood, who's assigned to lure an unnamed young Christian away from God. The book is written as a series of letters from Wormwood's more experienced uncle, Screwtape, who provides advice on methods of temptation. The story follows the young Christian's life beginning at his conversion. Screwtape provides suggestions on how best to draw him away from God in the different situations he faces. Lewis puts this Christian in various situations – including a difficult family relationship, an association with a new group of friends, and a courtship with a young woman – in order to discuss the manifold spiritual attacks that he may face.

We know, of course, that temptation isn't a perfunctory topic. Yet the setting introduces an element of farce. The names of key characters (Screwtape, Wormwood, Toadpipe, etc.) invite ridicule; so too their actions (in one letter, Screwtape spontaneously transforms into a giant millipede during a fit of rage). We scoff at them because the devils are made to appear silly. In this way, the serious but mocking letters serve as a reminder of the futility of Satan's efforts. Throughout, it remains clear who's in control of all things: our God.

Within this amusing setting, Lewis reminds us of the stark reality of our situation. Scripture tells us that our adversary, Satan, 'prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour' (1 Peter 5:8). We know that we're in a spiritual war. We know that we're in constant danger from Satan's flaming darts. The Bible tells us to put on the armour of God in order to stand firm against Satan's schemes (Ephesians 6:11). Through Screwtape's letters, Lewis analyses and mocks those schemes.



Released in 1942, *The Screwtape Letters* is set against the backdrop of the Second World War. Wartime is a reminder that, regardless the suffering and temptation we face on this earth, what's truly important is to strive for the prize that God has prepared for us. 'The world and its desires pass away, but whoever does the will of God lives forever' (1 John 2:17).

Lewis' book is a powerful reminder that what we face today is just a shadow of what's to come. Screwtape's letters show that humans tend to view the things that we directly experience as 'real' and the things beyond our physical experience as less than real. The spiritual realm, however, truly holds the fullness of everything we know here on earth and more. Anything good we experience here is simply a reflection of the great things that God has in store for us. Any evil we face is a shadow of the darkness faced by those who are eternally separated from God. While we're in this life for only a few years, the place where we'll spend eternity is truly where our focus and our devotion should lie.

Lewis also shows that we're not fighting our battles alone. Although devils are attacking the young Christian directly, trying to steer his thoughts and affections away from God, the pivotal moments in his story reveal God's handiwork. God protects the Christian despite Satan's actions. As we fight spiritual battles, the power of our God shields us from harm.

For those familiar with Lewis' other writings, some of the book's content will sound familiar. Lewis writes about the importance of maintaining 'mere Christianity'. He also discusses the ambiguity of the word 'love'. These are two topics which Lewis wrote about elsewhere. Incidentally, parts of *The Screwtape Letters* suggest that Lewis accepts certain man-made religious ideas. As is the case when reading any author, it's important for us to examine what we read and compare it with what's taught in Scripture. Nonetheless, as with much of Lewis' other writings, the vast majority of this book contains valuable thoughts for Christians to dwell on.

The Screwtape Letters is a valuable book for Christians because each of us battles with temptations that can so easily draw us away from God. Lewis discusses in specific detail several approaches which devils use to influence their victim. These can be useful food for thought for those of us who are facing similar scenarios. Moreover, there's much encouragement that can be drawn from the picture that Lewis paints. These remind us of the spiritual war that we're in. Until we go home to be with God, let's fight the good fight of the faith and keep holding on to the eternal life to which we're called. ◇

Bryce Christensen is a member of the Southeast Church of Christ in Melbourne, Victoria. the.bryce01@gmail.com

Camp Drewe in Lennox Head, NSW, opened their beautiful facility to the Coffs Coast Church for a family camp on 18–21 January 2021. The theme, 'Way To Go', was based on Psalm 119:105. Based on the book of Psalms and Ephesians 5:15–16, Peter Tickner (from the Macquarie Church of Christ in Sydney) taught lessons on making wise choices. He challenged the audience to consider this question in every situation: *'In light of my past experiences, current circumstances, future hopes and dreams, what is the wise thing for me to do?'*

Altogether, 35 people attended. They included several families from Nana Glen (about 25km northwest of Coffs Harbour) and some Burmese teenage girls who have been attending regular online Bible studies with the church in Coffs. Activities included: painting, soap and jewellery making, tie-dyeing, team games, swimming, and coastal walking. We also enjoyed singing together under the stars. During these times, friendships were strengthened and fellowship was enjoyed.

It was encouraging to hear only positive feedback from the attendees. The camp was valuable not only for the spiritual uplift it generated. Everyone left with a renewed appreciation of the value of sound doctrine for our lives; applying it well is truly a mark of wisdom. All glory to God. ◇

Hannah Satish is part of the Camp Drewe Committee and a member of Coffs Coast Church of Christ, Coffs Harbour, NSW. hannahsatish@gmail.com



Young Christians Network, Australia. Joy Tabalujan

Recently, with encouragement from Klesis Institute, a group of young Christians developed a new initiative called 'Young Christians Network'. YCN is intended for young men and women between the ages of 20–35 years who are part of non-denominational Churches of Christ in Australia. The hope is that this informal network will help make and strengthen personal connections and motivate one another to love and good works.

After a year when many of us mastered Zoom (and suffered Zoom fatigue), we organised an online gathering through Zoom in December 2020. The YCN pilot event, 'The Heart of a Servant', brought together 33 young Christians. They came from 18 different congregations all over Australia, representing every State and Territory. How incredible is that?

Those who tuned in were given the opportunity to meet new people, share ideas on how we can better serve one another in the church, and ultimately encourage each other to continue growing closer to God. It certainly was heartening to see so many young, enthusiastic Christians share their experiences.

Given the interest and positive feedback from this pilot event, we're hoping to take the YCN initiative further. What this may look like is yet to be determined, but we pray that it'll be something pleasing to God.

If you're reading this and are interested in joining YCN, feel free to contact Joy Tabalujan for more information. joy.tabalujan98@gmail.com ◇

Ray Thia, Joy Tabalujan, Jack Hughes, Dale Christensen, and Nathan Wilson.



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For this interview, three followers of Jesus at different stages in life share their responses to the question: How does your Christian faith help you deal with the reality of death?

Christian Bargholz

'As is the case for so many who are relatively young in life, I can't escape the feeling that death seems like a remote possibility. Generally speaking, with youth comes the blessing of good health and the optimism for a long and bright future. Death, therefore, hardly warrants more than a passing thought for myself (and probably others my age) given that life has only just gotten started.

However, becoming a Christian at a young age has actually brought me closer to the reality of death – especially compared to most of my contemporaries who aren't believers. Being a Christian makes for a spiritual existence replete with reminders of death: we're taught of the 'deadly' consequences of sin; we're called to put our former selves 'to death' each day; and we call death to mind on the first day of each week when we partake the Lord's Supper. These dramatic reminders help to provoke me out of a cloudy apathy towards death.

In this way, my Christian faith has helped me deal with the reality of death by forcing me to confront it early on in life, despite my good health. But beyond such confrontation, my faith has also shaped my thinking about death: from being something that's the hopeless end of all things into something that's the hopeful beginning of all things new. That new thing is eternal life, of which the present reality is but a shadow.

And so, the first day of every week becomes a reminder not only of death, but of life. It's a reminder not only of the death of Jesus, but also of his resurrection. He's the archetype that we all hope to emulate when we die. Ultimately, being a Christian means trusting that death is not the end. It's the hope that empowers me to live a new kind of life. It strengthens me through the knowledge that dying is the way of following Jesus into eternity.' ◇

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Bob Abney

'Death can be faced either with fear or with joy. Paul expressed the latter in Philippians: "For me to live is Christ, and to die is gain" (1:21). Why was Paul so resolute, so confident and unwavering? He tells us in 2 Timothy: "[Jesus] has, indeed, abolished death, and has brought life and immortality to light through the gospel, for which I was appointed a preacher and an apostle and a teacher. On account of this, I am suffering these things, but I am not ashamed, for I know him whom I have believed, and I am confident that he is able to guard that which I have entrusted to him until that day" (1:10–12).

Faith plays a role in facing death, the moment someday when we'll depart this life and face our maker. Jesus himself spoke of knowing this moment just before his own death: "Father, the hour has come. Glorify your Son, that your son may glorify you. And this is eternal life: that they may know you the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent" (John 17:1–3). Consider also the words of the wise man Solomon: "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, And the knowledge of the Holy One is understanding" (Proverbs 9:10).

So, how do we come to know the Holy One and thus face death with the same joy Paul had? By making time to hear his voice from his Word. By speaking to him in prayer. By seeing the wisdom of his will as we keep his wishes. And by seeing his works as we see prayers answered in the lives of other people.' ◇

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Norainie Bargholz

'As I see it, death is fearful for a number of reasons. Especially in the developed world, death is often physically the culmination of a prolonged and painful illness. (It can also be seen as a release in this case.) For those without a belief in God, I guess death is nothingness. But it's precisely the idea of nothingness – the end of potential – that often provokes fear, anger, and grief. For others who rely on their own righteousness, there's also the fear that you mightn't have done enough to "get to heaven".

The truth of Jesus' resurrection gives me something to cling to: it frees me from the fear of nothingness. Meanwhile, the grace of God as revealed in the atoning death of Jesus gives me confidence that my place in him is secure. In this way, I don't have to worry whether I've lived a good enough life. And while a painful terminal illness is a scary thing, I trust God to give me the strength to take each day as it comes.

Being a Christian doesn't exempt me from the emotional distress associated with death. If I'm told tomorrow that I have terminal cancer, I'm certain that I'll experience anger, disappointment, and grief similar to everyone else. But there's a difference. Trust in God is a choice. I hope I won't allow a momentary distress to overwhelm the rock-solid basis of trust in God.' ◇

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