

InterSections

An Australian journal for Christian encounter and encouragement

Editorial

Welcome to the February 2013 issue of *InterSections*.

With the new year, we're pleased to announce some new developments at *InterSections*. Nathan Holyoak joins our team as associate editor. Nathan is an architectural draughtsman by profession and is part of The Point Church in Brisbane. For some time, he's been assisting us as an intern and we're delighted to welcome Nathan formally onto the editorial team. At the same time, Jenny Ancell has agreed to take on the role of managing editor, with greater responsibility for the smooth running of the magazine. Meanwhile, Trevor Baker has retired from our advisory board - with our gratitude for his guidance since 2009.

From new developments, we turn to old messages – especially the message of the Old Testament minor prophets. Who of us can name all of the minor prophets? How often do we read them? Too often we assume their minor length means minor significance. In this issue we shine some light on some of these neglected books. In our *Feature* article, Brett Christensen finds that there is more to the book of Jonah than the big fish. Stuart Penhall also offers some *Food for Thought* from the prophet Amos about the dangers of compartmentalising our lives.

In keeping with the Old Testament theme, Norainie Bargholz reviews Paul Copan's book, *Is God a Moral Monster? Making Sense of the Old Testament God*. The book aims to help clear up misconceptions held about God by so many in the secular world.

Our *ChurchScope* article looks at the comings and goings of the Townsville church in northern Queensland. We also interview Jason and Sheryl Moriarty, former missionaries in Papua New Guinea who recently started ministry work with the Cairns Church of Christ. In *News*, Jenny Ancell reports about the recent North Coast Enrichment Seminar held in Coffs Harbour and John Gibbins updates us on recent developments with STAMP.

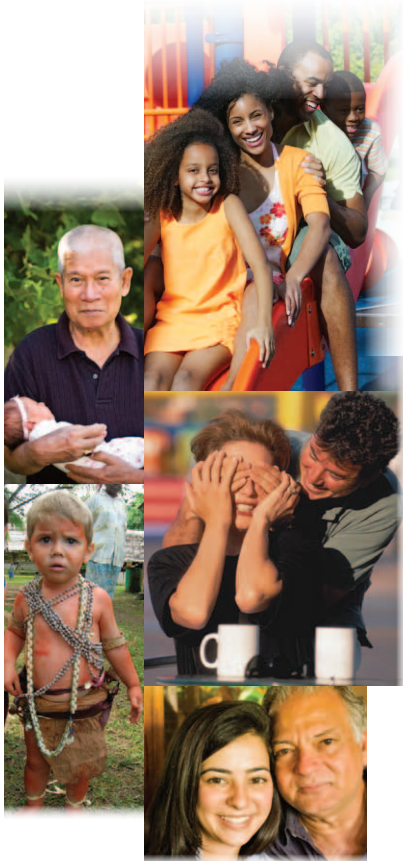
We hope that *InterSections* continues to encourage and challenge you in your walk with God. As always, we look forward to hearing your feedback.

The editorial team

ChurchScope: Townsville Church of Christ, QLD.

The Townsville church first started meeting in December 1972. Thurman and Faye Self, an American couple who had previously worked at the Wynnum and Gympie congregations, decided to start a work in Townsville. They were joined by John and Daphne Gibbins who worked with them for a period of 1-2 years. The team doorknocked households in the whole of the Townsville region and held home Bible studies. Merle and Ray Walker were some of the first Christians converted through these studies. At that time the church met at the CWA hall in the city.

Bob and Lynne Marks moved to Townsville in 1975 to work with the church. After a period of time the church moved to the Weir State School for worship assemblies as land had been purchased nearby in Kirwan and it was felt that this area would be a favourable location to establish the church. During this time many children from the



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InterSections is available in PDF and printed formats. Subscription for the PDF format is free. Subscription for the printed format is AUD\$22.00 per annum for 4 issues (inc. GST).

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The members come from a broad range of occupational backgrounds including: medical, university, research, legal, education and healthcare.

school were contacted, resulting in the development of an active Sunday school. Several Bible studies were held with the children's parents, resulting in some conversions.

In December 1981, a church building was constructed on the corner of Thuringowa Drive and Paluma Street, Kirwan. Several of the men assisted with the completion of the building including the verandas and constructing blackboards. Bob and Lynne worked in Townsville until December 1986 when they moved back to Sydney.

Townsville has a very mobile population and there are people who work there for short periods of time or study at James Cook University. The congregation has been active in assisting Christians who have been students and army personnel or hospital staff whilst they have resided in Townsville. Over the years the congregation has had several American missionaries who have worked with the congregation including Brad Crider and Ashley Crill.

The congregation is currently made up of approximately 15 adults and 3 children. The members come from a broad range of occupational backgrounds including: medical, university, research, legal, education and healthcare.

Current members of the congregation who have been here since the early days are Philip and Robyn Potts, Derek and Judy Winstanley and Les Whicher. Due to health issues, Les has moved to Brisbane to be closer to his family but still retains contact with the Townsville brethren. Louise Wason,

originally a member of the Innisfail church, has now lived in Townsville for many years after coming here to study law.

In more recent years, Jared Potts (youngest son of Phil and Robyn Potts) completed three years study in Youth and Family Ministry at Harding University and now works at the Boulder Church of Christ, Colorado as a Youth Minister.



In 2009 Ian and Diane Coker moved up to Townsville from Toowoomba and are active members of the work here. The men of the church share the preaching, teaching and leading of church activities on Sunday morning and Wednesday nights.

Over the years, the congregation has financially supported men training at the Macquarie School

of Biblical Studies in Sydney. The congregation currently supports brother Abraham who works with an orphanage in India and also assists financially in other areas where help is requested.

Over the past 12 months the church has been letterboxing - offering Bible correspondence courses and a few people have shown an interest and participated in these.

The Townsville church meets on Sundays at 10am for worship and fellowship. For further details, contact Phil Potts on 07 47886646. ■

Phil and Robyn Potts are longtime members of the Townsville Church of Christ. robynpotts54@hotmail.com

InterSections

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, the ministry division of CommAsia Australia Pty Ltd (ACN 097136171 ABN 53702023602).

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Art & Design: Gekko Graphics / H.M.Cox

Publisher: Klesis Institute www.klesisinstitute.com

Email: intersections@klesisinstitute.com **Fax:** +61 3 8677 9575

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Food for Thought

Compartmentalised Christianity

Many years ago I heard an interview on a local radio station with Dr David Suzuki, a leading naturalist in his day. During the interview Suzuki was asked what he thought was the single worst characteristic of human beings. His answer was both surprising and incisive. He said that the worst thing about human beings was our tendency to compartmentalise.

Suzuki went on to explain that compartmentalising is bad because it tended to cause people to do things without any consideration of the consequences of their actions to other areas. He maintained that this was the cause of the majority of the environmental problems facing our planet.

The truthfulness of this observation can be seen all around us: the failure to connect packaging with landfill or the effects of phosphates used in fertiliser on river systems. Or the failure to see the effects of alcohol abuse on our hospital system. It's not just indifference, selfishness or greed. It's more than these. It's seeing things in isolation, thus producing a failure to appreciate consequences – in other words, compartmentalising.

Interestingly, the Old Testament prophet Amos also appears to deal with the evils of compartmentalising. Amos was reflecting not on the natural environment but rather on the spiritual and social impact of this unfortunate human tendency. Amos, whose name means 'burden bearer', lived around 750 BC and was called to shock God's people of the northern kingdom of Israel into an awareness of where they were headed. The judgment language employed by Amos was harsh, critical and filled with warnings. Only in the last few verses of the last chapter do we see any real hope offered and then only for a remnant.

The judgment language used by Amos is vivid to say the least. It's clearly seen in Amos 5:21-24.

'I hate, I despise your religious feasts; I cannot stand your assemblies. Even though you bring me burnt offerings and grain offerings, I will not accept them. Though you bring choice fellowship offerings, I will have no regard for them. Away with the noise of your songs! I will not listen to the music of your harps. But let justice roll on like a river, righteousness like a never-failing stream!'

On the one hand, we see a people who clearly had a careful focus on worship with a preoccupation for precision. They engaged in the prescribed feasts and assemblies. This was no easy task given that Jerusalem, their normal place for worship, was in the southern kingdom of Judah. They offered the prescribed offerings and conducted their worship with evident devotion and care. Nowhere in the book is this worship itself criticised or corrected.

On the other hand, despite all its evident precision and diligence, God rejects the worship outright. The words used are harsh and dismissive: 'Hate', 'despise', 'cannot

stand', 'no regard', 'will not listen'. These words express God's displeasure and anger at the situation. His rejection is total. God's stated reason for his stance is an absence or neglect of justice and righteousness. Just what this neglect looked like can be clearly seen in Amos 8: 4-7.

'Hear this, you who trample the needy and do away with the poor of the land, saying, 'When will the new moon be over that we may sell grain, and the sabbath be ended that we may market wheat'— skimping the measure, boosting the price and cheating with dishonest scales, buying the poor with silver and the needy for a pair of sandals, selling even the sweepings with the wheat. The Lord has sworn by the pride of Jacob: 'I will never forget anything they have done.'

Their worship might have been excellent but the rest of their lives were anything but that. Amos 8:5 showed that they wanted to complete quickly their religious duties so that they could trade and make money by cheating their victims. How could people who were so keen to obey God in one area be so far away from him in another? This is all the more perplexing as the same God from whom they got instructions regarding worship also gave instructions regarding harvesting, fairness and social responsibility.

While the answer could be expressed in a variety of ways, it seems they had fallen into the trap of compartmentalising. They failed to see any connection between their worship and their lifestyles. Worse, they didn't realise that God would find fault with such a situation. As far as they're concerned, their religious duty was satisfied by their worship and sacrifices; how they lived the rest of their lives had nothing to do with this. It must have come as something of a shock to find that God thought the opposite!

Whether we care to admit it or not, we can also fall into the compartmentalising trap. Consider the growing focus which worship assemblies receive today. Increasingly, contemporary religion, as was the case in ancient Israel, is defined by worship. Contemporary Christianity is often defined by what we do for a few hours on Sunday morning. In some churches, people's gifts and talents are determined almost exclusively by what they can contribute to that Sunday gathering.

Of course, there's nothing wrong with doing the best we can when we assemble to worship. But, as in Amos' day, there's a very real danger with seeing our faith *only* in terms of such gatherings. It's all too easy for us to compartmentalise our Christianity, equating faith solely with worship. If we fall into this trap, we can easily do what

the people in Amos' time did: we feel justified to live our lives outside of Sunday assemblies however we please.

Now, some would say that we're different because we're trying to restore the New Testament church. We're not like the rest of Christendom; we're marching to the beat of a different drum. We can even stress our conviction that we're guided by the Bible alone.

But the fact remains that we can be influenced by those around us. It takes discernment and courage to follow God's Word fully and not be swayed by the ebbs and flows of popular Christianity. After all, the people of Israel didn't wake up one morning and plunge headlong into the evils Amos described. The change would have been gradual. The process would have been almost imperceptible. Doubtless it started with the unspoken idea that worship defined everything and progressed from there.

This being the case, we need to pay special attention to the words of Amos. They aren't pleasant. They don't make for comfortable reading. Yet the intended purpose of

shocking God's people into repentance remains valid today. Amos' words should make us feel uneasy. They should make us examine ourselves. They should make us keenly aware that the unfortunate characteristic of compartmentalising does not simply threaten our physical environment – it threatens our relationship with God.

Perhaps the most chilling passage in the book of Amos is found in Amos 5:18.

'Woe to you who long for the day of the Lord! Why do you long for the day of the Lord? That day will be darkness, not light.'

The people of Israel thought they were doing well. They thought they could point to things they did which pleased God. But, in failing to see the connection between their worship and their lives, they were condemned. We may not see compartmentalising worship and life as evil or even dangerous, but Amos would beg to differ. ■

Stuart Penhall is a longtime evangelist with the Gosford Church of Christ in Gosford, NSW. stupen@optusnet.com.au



Feature Insights from Jonah

Jonah is easily the best known of the minor prophets. Why? Is it because it's such a handy-sized book that it fits across a page spread in most Bibles? I think not. Is it because it's a story, more narrative than poetry? Or is it 'the whale'?

It amazes me how people find that great sea creature so hard to swallow. God did a lot of things in this series of events and when God does things, he isn't bound by anyone else's limitations. Arranging for a great sea creature - whether specially created or enabled or whatever - to swallow Jonah is hardly worth a twitch of God's eyebrow.

But it's what Jonah himself did that is particularly remarkable. He flatly disobeyed God, going in nearly the opposite direction to where God commanded him to go. Can you believe that? What was he thinking? You and I would never flatly disobey a clear command of God, would we? Um, OK, let's move on...

Looking at Jonah, there's a lot we can relate to in him. And let's not ignore the reflection we see in the mirror of God's Word (Romans 2:1-8 comes to mind here). When we're reading the story of Jonah, we're reading our story - with different particulars. Have you ever run away from what God wanted you to do? Have you ever complained to God about your circumstances when, on reflection, you really had nothing to complain about? Jonah learnt from his mistakes and experiences, and so can we.

'Go to Nineveh'

What was it about going to Nineveh that was so repugnant to Jonah that he didn't just refuse to go, but purposely went further away? Perhaps Nahum's later description of Nineveh

(Nahum 3:1-4) will help us appreciate where Jonah was coming from - or at least running from.

'Woe to the bloody city, all full of lies and plunder - no end to the prey! The crack of the whip, and rumble of the wheel, galloping horse and bounding chariot! Horsemen charging, flashing sword and glittering spear, hosts of slain, heaps of corpses, dead bodies without end - they stumble over the bodies! And all for the countless whorings of the prostitute, graceful and of deadly charms, who betrays nations with her whorings, and peoples with her charms.'

That's Nineveh. Go there, Jonah, that great city, and call out against it, for their evil has come up before me.

Jonah's response

Jonah's response was to get as far away from Nineveh as he knew how. God's response was to send such a violent storm that the ship carrying Jonah was about to break up. In the midst of the tempest, Jonah was willing to surrender his own life to save the lives of the others on that ship. But is he remembered for that? He was cast into the depths and both he and those who threw him thought it was the end for Jonah, the son of Amittai. But we know, with the benefit of historical hindsight, that his body was not abandoned to a watery grave. After three days and three nights, God had Jonah walking on dry land.

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We also know that centuries later Jesus drew a parallel between Jonah and himself (Matthew 12:40). Jonah's experience prefigured Christ's death, burial and resurrection. From the other direction, our own conversion looks back to that same victory over death when we too lay down our lives for Christ in the watery grave of baptism. That's when God, by the power of Christ's resurrection, gives us another chance at life - just as he did for Jonah when Jonah surrendered his own life. Jonah's story is linked to our story and we can learn from his experiences.

Lessons for us

One emphatic lesson Jonah learned, which we should also, is that you can't get away from God. In our sane moments we acknowledge this as a no-brainer. But when we're not thinking straight, we can lose sight of this otherwise obvious fact. People keep fooling themselves on this one, whereas those who face up to this fact surrender to Jesus.

We also shouldn't miss the fact that God wants all people everywhere to repent - even people in godless places like Nineveh. We know this from Acts 17:30 and 2 Peter 3:9, but consider also Jeremiah 18:7-10.

'If at any time I declare concerning a nation or a kingdom, that I will pluck up and break down and destroy it, and if that nation, concerning which I have spoken, turns from its evil, I will relent of the disaster that I intended to do to it. And if at any time I declare concerning a nation or a kingdom that I will build and plant it, and if it does evil in my sight, not listening to my voice, then I will relent of the good that I had intended to do to it.'

There's no indication in scripture that God has rescinded this. That means no nation today has a perpetual lease on the land God has allowed them to occupy. If they choose a path of evil, they do so to their own peril. If they turn from their evil ways, God will hold off evicting them. That's what Jonah communicated to the people of Nineveh. Do we communicate that to our own Nineveh?

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Our God is a god of second chances. He gave Jonah a second chance. He gave Nineveh a second chance. He's given each of us a second chance, because he's a 'gracious God and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love, and relenting from disaster' (Jonah 4:2). He will still relent if people repent. But do we really want God to relent, or do we suffer from Jonah's lack of compassion? Do we act like we want our fellow-Australians to repent? God showed Jonah how much he cares for souls stumbling around in darkness.

'Shouldn't I pity Nineveh, that great city, in which there are more than 120,000 persons who don't know their right hand from their left - and also much cattle?' (Jonah 4:11). Shouldn't we? How many people live in your town or district? Do we share God's compassion for them?

Like so many of the prophets, Jonah was commanded to do something which you or I would not like to do. But, given a second chance, he went ahead and did it - not because he loved those Ninevites. He did it in submission to God. It's easy for us to tsk-tsk Jonah as we read the account. But what do we do with the hard things God commands us to do? Shirk them? Water them down? Put them off? Wait for someone else to do it?

Jesus said that 'Jonah became a sign to the people of Nineveh' (Lk 11:30). What kind of sign are we to this generation, to our own Nineveh? The Book of Jonah leaves us with Jonah still sitting in his shelter, watching to see what will become of the city, having a grump. Is that where we're going to leave it? Are we going to pass that offer of mercy on to the people around us, or will we sit in the shelter we've made for ourselves, and wait for our Nineveh to perish? ■

Brett Christensen works as a municipal prosecutor and together with his wife, Lesley, and family are part of the Southeast Church which meets in suburban Melbourne.

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NCES (North Coast Enrichment Seminar) Coffs Harbour, NSW

'Reach in Reach out' was the theme for the inaugural North Coast Enrichment Seminar hosted by the Coffs Coast Church on 16-20 January 2013. The seminar had an evangelistic focus aiming to encourage brethren throughout Australia to 'reach in' deeply for spiritual encouragement and then to 'reach out' to those in Coffs Harbour who are in spiritual need.

The seminar attracted Christians from over 10 congregations in Australia and 19 visitors from the Coffs Harbour community. Overall, 65 participants attended.

The 4-day seminar hosted activities including a welcome BBQ, spiritual presentations to the community, an evangelistic community booth and an evangelistic craft stall at a local market. There were also thoughtful presentations stimulating fresh thoughts on evangelism and the promotion of church unity and church identity.

Speakers included David Carr, Brad Johnson, Ted Paull, Brett Christensen, David Payne and John Gibbins. A number of Australian ministries were also showcased during NCES including: the Salt Foundation, MSOBS, ACCET, *InterSections* magazine, STAMP and the Coffs Harbour church planting.

When asked about the seminar's highlights, some said it was the delightful fellowship of Christians from all over Australia that came to help during NCES. For others it was



the encouragement received from hearing about vibrant ministries and their contribution to the church's unity and collaboration. Others were inspired by the seminal work done with indigenous Australians in Moree and Brewarrina, NSW.

The theme of NCES was well encapsulated by the remarks of the opening speaker: 'Each believer has been entrusted with the responsibility of being a "faithful witness of the message of salvation" perfectly exemplified by Jesus in Hebrews 2:3. He lived it, breathed it, suffered for it and died for it. Are you a faithful witness?' ■

Jenny Ancell, Coffs Coast Church of Christ, NSW. jenancell@optusnet.com.au

STAMP: exciting developments

Below are some recent developments with STAMP (Short Term Australasian Mission Program, www.mystamp.org.au).

John Gibbins, an elder with the Gosford Church of Christ, NSW, was appointed the new director of STAMP in 2012. In terms of the program itself, STAMP classroom training and practicum now run concurrently throughout the year under the STAMP director's oversight. Long periods of practicum and mentoring have ceased.

In 2012, STAMP signed a Memorandum of Understanding with South Pacific Bible College, New Zealand, to forge a partnership to share resources and work together for future mutual benefit. Commencing September 2013, STAMP participants will undertake a one week session at SPBC followed by two weeks of working with a growing congregation. Travel and accommodation costs are provided by STAMP.

There are also current discussions with the head of missions, Abilene Christian University, USA, for taking interns and individual students from USA into STAMP in 2014. Dialogue has also commenced with Nations University (an online university associated with Churches of Christ offering free learning programs in theology) with a view to partnering with them as a facilitator. STAMP has also contacted the church in Fiji to recruit students for the program.

STAMP plans to participate with Coffs Coast Church of Christ to conduct a workshop in September 2013 on 'How to Plan, set-up and run a VBS'. This will be followed by actually running the VBS at Coffs Harbour for African communities. We anticipate taking volunteers and youths from Gosford.

STAMP's innovations are providing vistas of great scope and hope for the church's future growth. ■

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Book Review



Is God a Moral Monster? Making sense of the Old Testament God

By Paul Copan (Baker, 2011)

The Israelites so often wanted to imitate these nations whereas the Mosaic law represented a call to higher moral standards and ideals.

Recent years have seen the rise of New Atheism. Two of its chief proponents have been Richard Dawkins and Christopher Hitchens. While atheism has been around for millennia, the 'new' atheists stand out with their strident criticism of all things religious.

This is particularly so of God as they see him portrayed in the Old Testament. God is labelled by Dawkins as a 'moral monster' (hence the title of the book).

Here are Dawkins' own words: *'The God of the Old Testament is arguably the most unpleasant character in all fiction: jealous and proud of it; a petty, unjust, unforgiving control-freak; a vindictive, bloodthirsty ethnic cleanser; a misogynistic, homophobic, racist, infanticidal, genocidal, filicidal, pestilential, megalomaniacal, sadomasochistic, capriciously malevolent bully.'*¹

I confess I've struggled with some of the commands found in the pages of the Old Testament. The twentieth century probably stands out as one of the most genocidal in history (think Hitler, Stalin, Pol Pot, Rwanda, the Balkans). Society's consequent sensitivity to such mass killings has often made me prefer to skip over 'offending' chapters in Joshua. And I can't say I've seen the point behind many of the laws contained in Exodus, Leviticus and Deuteronomy. They can seem pernicky and unfair. Am I the only woman who's had difficulty with passages such as Leviticus 12: 1-8? And I'm often glad we're under a new covenant when I read these books.

The author of the book under review, Paul Copan, has been through the writings of the New Atheists and has drawn up a list of specific charges made by them against God and religion. The charges include: Canaanite genocide, God being a jealous and egocentric deity, the binding of Isaac, ethnocentrism/racism, chattel slavery, bride price, women as inferior to men, the harshness of the Mosaic laws and the irrelevance of God for the existence of morality.

Copan's book is divided into four sections. The first describes the New Atheists and details their complaints against God. Sections 2 and 3 are where the second half of the book's subtitle, *'Making Sense of the Old Testament God'*, is addressed. Section 2 deals with the nature of God. God's apparent neediness in terms of praise and worship and his jealousy, and even the command to bind Isaac, are seen from the perspective of the Creator/creature relationship and what God does to nurture and develop this.

The third section places the Old Testament in the context of life in the ancient Near East and deals with a raft of issues including food and cleanliness laws, penal laws, marriage laws, laws relating to slavery and the killing of the Canaanites. I found these chapters particularly enlightening as they gave me the historical, social and cultic background of the nations around Israel. The Israelites so often wanted to imitate these nations whereas the Mosaic Law represented a call to higher moral standards and ideals. So, in that context, God's laws were lenient and consistent through generations (and thus not capricious) and can be viewed as a tutor for the time when the higher call of Jesus would arrive.

The final section (in my opinion, the weakest part of the book) considers whether it is possible for morality to exist without God and whether naturalistic evolution can explain the existence of morality.

A list of further readings is included at the end of each chapter and Copan also includes a section with discussion/study questions, which would be helpful if you are using the book in a group setting.

I found the book to be clear, thoughtful and helpful. I highly recommend it. ■

1. Richard Dawkins, *The God Delusion* (Bantam, 2006) 31

*Norainie Bargholz is a homemaker and, together with husband Michael and two sons, are part of the Eastside Church of Christ in Sydney.
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before. Fifty years ago when society as a whole, whether Christian or not, valued Christian beliefs and values, people would come to faith like this: first, they *behaved* correctly (similar value system), they *believed* and then they *belonged*.

This is not how my generation is typically coming to faith now. They don't have the same values, nor do they uphold Christian values. I believe the statistics are that fifty percent of Australians are antagonistic and skeptical towards Christianity. As such, very rarely will you get my generation into a church building from the very start. You can, however, get them over to your house to share a meal.

This is how my generation is coming to faith: they *belong*, they *believe* and then they *behave*. It's totally opposite from fifty years ago. So it's really about assessing the current world we live in and finding the best way we can engage it.

So where to begin? I think it can start simply by asking your neighbour over for dinner, praying about it and seeing where God leads it. It sounds simple, but it's really hard to do actually because we're not wired to create relationships in western society (they are in PNG!). Jesus said, 'love your neighbour'. I think the more we're able to live out the Christian life through genuine expressions of love, meals and authentic conversations, we'll begin to see God working in those relationships. ■

*Jason and Sheryl Moriarty are now part of the Cairns Church of Christ in Cairns, QLD. They were interviewed by Nathan Holyoak.
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Interview

with Jason and Sheryl Moriarty, Cairns, QLD

Where did both of you grow up and how did you come to Christ?

I (Jason) grew up in Calgary, Alberta, Canada. Sheryl grew up in Spartanburg, South Carolina, USA; Callum grew up for the first two years in Papua New Guinea, 2.5 years in USA, and now, Australia! Zoie was born in Cairns, grew up in USA and, most recently, Cairns. Sheryl and I both grew up in Christian families; my mother had taught the gospel to my father and in Sheryl's case her father had taught the gospel to her mother. Sheryl was baptised at age 13 and myself at 12.

How did you come to be missionaries in PNG?

Good question. Here's the short answer. I met Joe Cannon, whom many people might know, in 1990 at Mission 1000, a missionary training program he ran. I was 20 years old then. For those who may not know Joe, in 1971 he was the first missionary from Churches of Christ to go to PNG. He mentored me and in 1991 I went to PNG as a missionary apprentice. I have been involved in PNG ever since. Through the past 20 years God has allowed us to do mission work not only in PNG but also in China, Africa and India as missionaries and missionary consultants.

Sheryl is a different story; she grew into the role. She traveled to PNG in 1997 and returned saying she would never go back! (Everything that could go wrong went wrong.) Never say never they say – especially to God. We returned to PNG in 2000.

What's the religious landscape in PNG?

PNG claims to be a Christian nation with the majority of people claiming Jesus as Lord. Islam is now in the country and there's a mosque in Port Moresby. Mormons, Roman Catholics, Seventh Day Adventists are all present. In fact, when the country was being explored, Catholic and Lutheran leaders divided the country in half, each claiming an equal section of the country. Those in the northern coastal regions were deemed to be Catholic while those in the lower and southern parts were to be Lutheran.

Animism is widely practised and believed. Animism is a worldview and involves the worship of ancestors and the appeasing of spirits found in or at animate and inanimate objects such as trees, streams and rocks.

What's the condition of Churches of Christ in PNG?

I would say the church is spiritually strong in most regions of PNG. This is due, in part, because of the Melanesian Bible College in Lae. MBC seeks to equip indigenous ministers for ministry. The church continues to grow in new areas due to committed Christians sharing their faith as they go and also because of a committed core of leaders equipping Christians for service at MBC. The Christians also strengthen and encourage each other throughout annual nationwide events including separate ladies and men's gatherings as well as church-wide gatherings.

What did your work in PNG involve?

We established new churches and empowered leadership in existing churches in the Madang Province. Once a church was established we would concentrate on leadership development and discipleship.

Mathew and family with Murray Ververda, minister/missionary from Canada. Mathew is a graduate of Melanesian Bible College and ministers/is from Manum Island in the Madang Province. (white t-shirt on)



Demaris and daughter MaryAnne with Sheryl (my wife). Demaris is about 4 feet tall but her faith is about ten times that. The smile testifies to that.



What were some of the difficulties you faced as a missionary in PNG?

Several come to mind. The biggest difficulty was experiencing people's allegiance to their animistic beliefs. It is a real struggle for some to put the lordship of Christ first over fear of retribution from a dead ancestor. Many conversations were spent on this matter.

Another difficulty was the people's belief in the Cargo Cult (Google that one). If you want to know their impact on the exact region we worked in, then Google this: 'Madang, Black Jesus'. This was happening near the villages where we worked during our time there. The Cargo Cult is fairly localised and is mainly found in coastal regions of PNG.

What are some of the strengths of the church in PNG?

1. The Christians are relational. They want to have real, authentic relationships.
2. The Christians are hospitable. A person, not the task, is most important in PNG.
3. Christians actively share their faith. It's something they just do.
4. They give of themselves.

What caused you to move to Cairns?

We moved to Cairns to help the church here, to establish communities of Christians to do mission, to strategically place ourselves where we can continue our work in PNG and possibly, at some point, be involved in a work in China. Cairns is strategically placed where all this can happen.

What are some of the things you hope to achieve with the church in Cairns?

We hope to empower and equip the leadership of the church here with skills necessary for the continuation of the work of the church. We plan on establishing missional communities: groups of 20-50 people who live life together, help one another, share meals together in homes and serve the community around them. Basically this is trying to put Acts 2:42ff into practice.

What can Christians in Australia do to become more evangelistic?

I'm hoping you can help me with that since I'm learning what it is to be Australian! People are coming to faith differently than



Jason and Sheryl Moriarty with Callum and Zoie.



Picture of Manam Island, where Mathew is from. That is real smoke coming from the volcano ready to blow at any time. 10,000 people live on that island.