

# T<sup>GCI</sup>oday

GRACE COMMUNION INTERNATIONAL AUSTRALIA

DECEMBER 2010–FEBRUARY 2011



**Shed night**  
the sharpest tool in  
the shed

**Nepal**  
caring for the neglected  
at the top of the world

The humanity of  
**Christmas**

**RAISING  
SUCCESSFUL  
KIDS**

FROM **strength** TO  
**strength**



- 01 Welcome** GCI Today begins with a rich history
- 02 From strength to strength** Appreciating and valuing strengths is good for you
- 04 The humanity of Christmas** Finding meaning in the "ordinary" and "physical"
- 06 Exploring the Word** How can you understand the Bible?
- 07 Raising successful kids** Explore the dimensions of success with your children
- 09 Spirit matters** What we believe makes a difference
- 10 The sharpest tool in the shed** Iron sharpens iron
- 12 Grace at work** Caring for Nepal's neglected people

## About GCI Today

### MISSION STATEMENT

*GCI Today is published by Grace Communion International to celebrate and share the good news of God's love in ways that express practical help, hope and encouragement*

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# Welcome to GCI Today!

## *GCI Today begins its life with a rich history*

That might sound odd for a new publication, but it's true. Because the heritage of Grace Communion International (GCI) is one firmly established in media production – from magazines and newspapers to radio, television and the internet.

This magazine's immediate predecessor (which continues as a sister publication) is *Christian Odyssey*, produced by our church in the United States. Since 2007 *Odyssey* has provided readers around the world with quality articles on Christian life, experience and learning. With some recent changes to incorporate more US-based church life into *Odyssey*, we've taken the opportunity to build on that legacy and produce our own regional magazine.



We certainly respect and appreciate the high standards that *Odyssey* has set and look forward to continuing to share content from and with that magazine (which can still be accessed online at [www.christianodyssey.com](http://www.christianodyssey.com)).

We are also grateful for the financial support made available by members and supporters of Grace Communion International which enables us to continue to produce quality media. Magazines remain a valuable and vital way of communicating in contemporary society. In tandem with online resources (such as those available at [www.gci.org](http://www.gci.org) and [www.ambascol.org](http://www.ambascol.org)), *GCI Today* is one more way GCI continues its commitment to "providing sound biblical teaching through congregations, media, and personal outreach in relevant, meaningful forms for people of diverse backgrounds and ages" (from the GCI mission statement).

*GCI Today* is designed to express and celebrate GCI's mission of "living and sharing the gospel". Our pages will reflect and celebrate Christian life and faith in action. Our mission expresses a desire to provide hope, help and encouragement – all of which are real expressions of the grace of God.

There will be regular articles on family life and personal wellbeing, along with informative messages about faith, scripture and life in communion. We hope that GCI will become a valued part of your reading, reflection and learning. And that it will become a resource to be shared.

**So, welcome to *GCI Today*!**

**John McLean**

**GCI National Director, Australia**

***Our mission expresses a desire to provide hope, help and encouragement –  
all of which are real expressions of the grace of God***





*When you are using your strengths,  
you are at your most productive, and  
at your happiest*

# From strength to *strength*

by John McLean

**T**HE NEW PASTORAL intern had mixed feelings about his approaching feedback session with his senior pastor. He loved the job, felt called to it, and was encouraged by his experience of the last few months in ministry. He found he enjoyed serving people, and felt privileged to be invited into their lives in the various ways that had transpired. While he felt a heavy responsibility preaching, he also loved sharing the Word of God with the congregation.

Quickly, his senior pastor ticked off all the things that he was good at: the congregation loved him, he was well respected, he got on very well with the young people, feedback from his preaching and teaching was very positive. But, said the senior pastor, there was one major problem. This problem was so big that unless he fixed it to the senior pastor's satisfaction, he was told he had no future in ministry and would have to look for another job.

That problem was his office work. "I want you to focus on your office work for the next six months," the senior pastor told him. "Unless you can fix the problem, I can't recommend you for future employment," he said.

Should someone with such obvious strengths in ministry be rejected because of a weakness with office work?

## Focus on problems is normal

Before we are too hard on the senior pastor, research by the Gallup organisation would confirm his actions were quite normal. That is, most individuals, families, schools, churches, organisations and institutions function according to this unwritten but fundamentally accepted rule: identify the problem, fix what is wrong, and let the strengths take care of themselves.

And this seems to work – at least up to a point. In fact, it's a classic approach to problem-solving. But is there a better way?

When we start with and focus on the problems and weaknesses, our beginning point and our language tend to be fundamentally negative. This influences everything that happens from that point. Our orientation can become so problem-focused that we find it hard to see the positives and the possibilities. And our solutions can be in reaction to our weaknesses,

rather than from a position of optimising our strengths. **The process can be problem-driven instead of strength-driven.** And this perspective is dramatically different.

Here's a simple test: when do you do your best work in the shortest time and with the least stress? When you are working in your areas of greatest weakness, or when you are working with your strengths?

When do you feel most relaxed, efficient, productive? When you are "fixing" your weaknesses, or when you are exercising your strengths?

What's intuitively true is also backed up by the research: when you are using your strengths, you are at your most productive, and at your happiest.

## What about humility?

Often the business and corporate world picks up on this quicker than the overtly "Christian". Christians sometimes worry: but aren't we supposed to be humble? Doesn't focusing on strengths smack of pride and self-congratulation? Isn't it righteous to be overtly aware of our failings, sins, and shortcomings?

Well, yes to the first, and no to the second and third questions. It's humble to acknowledge that God has given us certain strengths (the New Testament calls them gifts, a play on the word for grace). God is the source. It's not humble, and even less helpful, to deny those gifts. And of course we recognise that spiritually we rely on even our best efforts to be redeemed and transformed in Christ.

There's a lot more here – it's not just about us. Acknowledging strengths also means we acknowledge that we don't have all the strengths. Other people have different strengths. No one has nothing; everyone has something. In other words, a strengths focus also reminds us that we need each other. And that we work together much better – families, churches, schools, organisations – when we focus on each other's strengths, instead of pointing out each other's faults, shortcomings and weaknesses, which typically leads to being judgmental, critical and negative.

Churches are not machines that need to be fixed. They are families, a "communion"

that needs to be loved, encouraged and strengthened. In fact, Dr David Cooperrider, who developed the Appreciative Inquiry approach, suggests that all organisations contain an element of mystery, and are much better approached as "centres of infinite strengths" rather than problems to be solved.

Office work needs to be done. And sometimes we will need to work in the areas of weakness because there's no choice. (If we do so consistently over a long period of time, however, we often become stressed, inefficient and sick.) Some people love office work – and, no surprise, they are usually good at it. Better to work as a team, using and integrating the strengths of the various members working together.

Yes, a healthy self-awareness involves knowing our weaknesses so we don't inflict them on others. But don't spend your life-time trying to fix or back-fill your weaknesses. Rather, put your energy into using your strengths, the gifts God has given you, to serve him and one another in love. Look for, appreciate, value and celebrate the strengths of those around you, and work together to use those strengths harmoniously, participating in the work Christ has for us to do.

By focusing on strengths we strengthen one another – our families, churches and organisations – and we can all enjoy the process.

**You can learn more about this subject in ACCM's Leadership class – visit [www.ambascol.org](http://www.ambascol.org)**

*John McLean is a co-author of Lead With Your Strengths: Making a difference wherever you are (2009, NCLS Research). You can purchase a copy at [www.gci.org/store](http://www.gci.org/store).*





# The humanity of *Christmas*

*God's presence among us has "made us alive". We are invited to embrace life just as we have been embraced by his life.*

**T**HE CHRISTMAS SEASON often presents a challenge: keeping up with all the fun, the food, the family and friends – okay, and the stress of some of those things – and trying to retain a focus on the “reason for season”, the meaning, the “spiritual aspect” of all that celebration.


Truth be told, the “fun” usually wins out and we can sometimes feel a bit guilty about not having spent enough time being thankful for, talking about or just reflecting on what Jesus Christ’s birth really means for us. It’s easy to feel torn between the commercial appeals and physical attractions of the season and the spiritual meaning and Christian duties we sense are being pushed into second place.

For most of us, our experience of Christmas is typically a pretty “human” one. Yes, there might be some carols reminding us of the silent night and the heralding angels in Jerusalem. And yes there might be an Advent week, Christmas eve or morning church service reminding us of the miracle of the virgin birth and the coming of God “in the flesh”. But in sheer quantity of time, effort and expense the physical experience trumps the spiritual one for most of us.

So, no presents this year? No big lunch? No cards? Or maybe just jettison the whole thing and focus on celebrating God’s presence all year round?

Or perhaps the humanity of Christmas has





some important and valuable spiritual lessons for us.

Theologians tell us that chapter one and verse 14 of the apostle John's gospel account is one of the highest points of theology: "The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us" it says.

"The first chapter of the Fourth Gospel is one of the greatest adventures of religious thought ever achieved by the mind of man," says William Barclay. This "Word" (Gk: *logos*) we are told in verse one of the chapter is the one who was "in the beginning ... with God, and the Word was God". This "Word" was the "reason" in Greek – the "rational principle that governs all things" (NIV Reference Bible). But the Word was also deeply personal, being in Jewish thought the creating power of God, the Mind of God.

So John is telling Jew and Greek alike that God deliberately chose to become one of us and to live among us. It could have happened in 2010, it could have happened in 1610, but it did happen in a real place at a real time among real people.

Which is the link to this thing called "humanity".

Much human thought, argument, experience and effort has gone into understanding the difference between the human and the divine – the physical and the spiritual. And the simplistic notion that lots of well-intentioned people of various faiths have come to is that there's "this" (our physical experience now) and there's "that" (another non-physical, spiritual reality that we seek for, hope for and might one day enter into). In between "this" and "that" we try to throw off the shackles of the physical and find ways to focus on and pursue the spiritual.

This leads some to radical rejections of the frustrations and distractions of "the flesh" in attempts to become "more spiritual". Often this means separation from "physical distractions" like possessions, work, and even other people.

No doubt these efforts are well intentioned. But are they the ways "the divine" expects us to look for and seek him/her/it?

Back to the Christmas story. "The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth."

The glory, the grace and the truth of God came among us. But not only that, became flesh like us. The divine embraced our physical experience. And did what? Renounced it? Condemned it? Set an example of denial, asceticism and isolation in order to set an example of "spirituality"?

Not so much as it turns out.

The life of this Word who became flesh – the person we know as Jesus of Nazareth – is recorded as that of a real person in real history in real locations living among and alongside real people having real experiences. He ate with sinners and saints. He celebrated weddings and mourned deaths. He healed the sick and had arguments with "spiritual" leaders (some of whom led apparently godly movements deliberately committed to being separate from other people – "Pharisee" means "separate"). He suffered public humiliation. He was falsely accused. He was killed. And he rose from the dead.

(Okay, the last bit's not such an everyday experience – but that's part of the point: he embraced humanity to the point of death so that he could reconcile humanity to himself for eternity. Death does not separate us from his love and his presence.)

When the theologians tell us that John 1:1 and 14 are among the loftiest and most central passages of Scripture they also tell us that the message of John's record of Jesus's life and presence among us is, in significant part, that to know God is to be "fully human". That is, when we acknowledge his presence and respond to his acceptance – his embrace – in our lives every day and in the everyday, then we know what it is to be "human". We experience who we were created by him to be.

It's a long way from taking yourself off to a mountaintop to find "truth", "meaning" or "yourself". Truth, meaning and a true sense of self have come to each one

of us in Jesus Christ.

"Because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions – it is by grace you have been saved", wrote the apostle Paul in a letter to the New Testament church (Ephesians 2). God's presence among us has "made us alive". We are invited to embrace life just as we have been embraced by his life.

And so back to Christmas once more. When we gather with family and friends, when we seek out gifts to share, when we gather to sing carols and to hear the Advent story again, when we spend hours choosing and preparing (too much) food we are embracing life. To do that in the context of celebrating our Saviour's birth – his embrace of physical life with us – can be just as valid an experience of the "spiritual" as an hour of devotion to reading the Scriptures about him.

"Experiencing God's presence" sounds like a pretty daunting, supernatural and "remote" thing for most of us. And yet God chose, two thousand years ago, to make it very real, very ordinary and very human. Being born as a baby to a marginalised couple from a little town in Palestine is pretty ordinary. Being born in a stable because there was no room at the inn is even more ordinary.

And yet for two thousand years people have told the story and celebrated these events. And we celebrate the story with other people, around the table in the midst of our everyday work and homes and time pressures. And in so doing we experience the presence of God as he intended – in communion with the everyday, the mundane, the "physical", the challenging. And so we experience a little more of what it is to be "fully human" as we experience those things within his embrace.

So, celebrate the humanity of Christmas. Don't be ruled by commercialism or food and drink or giving gifts and sending cards. But don't let those things discourage you from experiencing the loving presence of our loving and living God – the Word who chose to "become flesh and dwell among us".

***When we acknowledge his presence and respond to his acceptance – his embrace – in our lives every day and in the everyday, then we know what it is to be "human".***

# How can you understand the Bible?

**T**HE BIBLE IS the world's best-selling book. Many people read it and find hope, encouragement, inspiration and peace. Yet it is also often used as the source of argument, debate and, let's face it, hatred and violence. And this from people who see the Bible as the Word of God for us.

The Bible is a big book written by many different authors, in different languages, living in different cultures, spanning a long period of time. A cursory glance at history would quickly indicate that the Bible has been read and interpreted in many very different ways by different readers – whether they be individuals, organisations or even nations. These different interpretations have resulted in everything from interesting differences of opinion and new insights to furious arguments and loss of friendships. Differing interpretations have not only given rise to accusations about people's faith but to executions and warfare.

Take a random group of Christians today and you will quickly uncover widely different interpretations of what the Bible "really says" on any number of topics. It's enough to make you pause – *what is going on here?*

Over the years some have offered various explanations of their own interpretations – such as "special inspiration" (that nobody else has), or special "keys" to understanding what it says (everything

from numerology to the identity of nations, from prophecies to, well, you can pretty much name it and someone has come up with it). These "keys" are often supposedly hidden from everyone else (but you can usually get them for just \$32.95 in a book!).

Yet equally many people will maintain that it's easy – all you have to do is just read it and take it for what it says. "The Bible says, I believe, that settles it." This sounds good and really appealing. However, those same people will quickly find themselves in disagreement with others who also say it is easy, and that anyone can read it and understand it – just as long as they agree with them. (And the history and levels of disagreement alluded to must surely make us question this apparent simplicity.)

It's no wonder the critics say you can make the Bible mean anything you want it to, because it certainly seems that's what many have done.

## So where do we start?

So where then do we start? Well, it's helpful, in light of the Bible's claim to be the Word of God, its long and rich history and the influence it has had in millions of lives across thousands of years, to start with a healthy dose of humility, and an openness to discovery.

Rather than "using" the Bible to prove our point of view,

## For reflection and discussion

- "We bring ourselves to the text": What different sorts of "glasses" might we be wearing when we read the text?
- Have you seen or experienced the Bible being "used" as a weapon in argument? In what ways?
- What is "humility"? What might it mean for the way we read the Bible?

confirm our prejudices, or hit someone over the head with it, we must come to it in humility, recognising there is much to learn – about it, about God, about other people and about ourselves. And acknowledging that even after a lifetime of learning, we will not know it all. And so, maintaining a gracious spirit to others on the same quest is also a significant part of this openness to learning.

Another principle is to recognise and acknowledge that we do approach the Bible a certain way. Everyone interprets what the Bible says – just as we interpret any text. Our interpretation – our approach – arises naturally from our background, education, family of origin, church experience, belief system, even our temperament.

In other words, one of the reasons we read the same text differently is that *we bring ourselves to the text*. We cannot do otherwise.

If we all bring ourselves to the text – if we all see the text through our own glasses, if you like – is there anything we can do about that in our question to discover what the Bible is really saying? Yes, indeed we can. In this and future columns

we will bring you some important principles of study that can help and enrich your reading of the Bible. You don't need to be a scholar or an expert (although we should be grateful for the contribution the scholars continue to make to our understanding), or invest years of tedious technical study. Because Bible reading is a part of life, and about life in all its realities.

The more we love the word of God, the more we are likely to make the effort to understand what it is saying. (As the theological writer Richard Foster puts it, we will want to know what the Bible means, before we want to tell others what it means to *us*.) We read it first to see what it tells us about God.

The best way to do this is to take off our own personal "glasses", and replace them with the "glasses" of Jesus Christ. He is after all the Eternal Word (John 1:1-4, 14), who became flesh to show us who God is and what he is like. That is why we say we read the Scriptures "through the lens of Jesus". And that's what we will explore in our next column – reading the Bible through the lens of Jesus.

**FOR MORE INFORMATION** on how to make the most of your Bible reading, you can sign up for the Grace Communion International online class "Jesus and the Gospels". Or you can arrange for the class, seminars or training sessions to come to your congregation. Please contact [info@accm.org](mailto:info@accm.org) or telephone 07 5553 6000.



*Defining and modelling success may be two of the most valuable things you can do for your children*

# Raising successful

**W**E ALL WANT our children to be successful.

But what do we really mean by success? And how can we effectively teach our children how to live successfully throughout the inevitable challenges, disappointments and distractions of life?

"Success" isn't a template. It isn't a destination or an event. It's more than achievement. It's not simply winning. Certainly being successful can include all of these things, but none of them adequately defines success.

## The many shapes of success

So if success isn't a standard or measure that we try to shape our children into, what is it?

One of the great joys of success is that it is something we are each free to design and discover. Success can be as varied as our experience of what it is to be human. It will inevitably be framed and influenced by our culture, our values and our circumstances. As parents, our own experience of success is inevitably challenged, shaped and expanded by our children.

Defining success with our children should include thinking about their individual personalities, talents and abilities – how they learn, their aptitudes and gifts, and how best to develop and refine their talents and strengths.

One caution – especially for achievement-oriented parents – is to be careful about overlaying our own expectations of achievement on our children. It's natural to want them to do as well or better than we have. It's natural to want to see them performing at an "above average" level. But it can be limiting, discouraging and counter-productive to insist that our own experience or our own preferences set the standard for expectations. It's equally discouraging and unproductive to focus on apparent underperformance while ignoring or taking for granted strengths, gifts, talents, skills and interests that may not be measured in the same ways as

mathematics, writing, running or playing music.

While this makes sense, it's easy for us to become frustrated about – and fixated on – our children's apparent limitations. And often those limitations are simply how we perceive their performance in relation to our own or "the average". (You can read more about this in John McLean's cover story on strengths.)

Howard Gardiner's work with "multiple intelligences" (see accompanying box) is a powerful reminder of the fact that people are different – even our own children – and that there are a range of ways in which we've each been "wired" to learn, achieve and find satisfaction. Discovering and reinforcing these strengths and interests can be a vital step towards supporting our children's success.

## More than money and marks

In contemporary society, success is too often mistakenly measured by a person's ability to make money or the amount of stuff they have acquired. Marketing images of this sort of "success" bombard us every day: designer clothes, electronic toys, new cars, bigger houses, overseas holidays, and endless sources of entertainment.

And while we know these are not the real markers of success we also know that they appeal to us. So they can easily become standards of success against which to measure ourselves and others. But success

cannot be measured simply in financial terms. Neither can it be assessed purely by academic qualifications or achievements, career progress or titles, or even by the number of friends you have on Facebook.

Success may or may not include some of these things, but it is undeniably more relational. Which brings us back to parenting.

For parents, success includes teaching our children to think for themselves, to set their own goals, and pursue their hopes and dreams. Success is enabling our kids to establish a strong personal value system, to develop strong and healthy relationships, to contribute to their communities, and to be able to work through the difficult times they will inevitably face.

That means that our example as parents is crucial. What we value will frame our approach to success – in our own lives and in the lives of our children. What we celebrate, invest in and spend time on all communicate our priorities and our values. Because they express our sense of purpose.

Success is about living with a positive purpose – whether that purpose is to raise a healthy family or a healthy investment portfolio, to create a stronger community or a stronger body. But it's even more important to evaluate our purpose to make sure it's worthwhile.

As a short-term purpose achieving a grade, scoring a win, taking out a prize or earning a dollar can be a good thing. But across a lifetime – and even the all-too-brief span of childhood – success requires a big-





“ IN THE FINAL ANALYSIS IT IS NOT WHAT YOU DO FOR YOUR CHILDREN BUT WHAT YOU HAVE TAUGHT THEM TO DO FOR THEMSELVES THAT WILL MAKE THEM SUCCESSFUL HUMAN BEINGS - ANN LANDERS ”

ger purpose, a broader scope. It calls on us to use abilities and other resources to make a difference and a contribution. It's more about our spiritual, relational and emotional lives than is about the physical things we do and acquire.

True success is about who we are and what we are becoming. And it's about the positive influence and effect we can have in the lives of other people. A key parental task is to teach our children that success includes the effect and influence we have on others; that making a positive difference in our families, communities, and beyond is a dream we can work towards.

## Passing it on

Success is an important topic to talk about with your children. So here are some suggestions for passing on to them ways to live successfully, reach their goals, hopes, and dreams, and make a positive difference:

- **Talk** about success. Celebrate genuine effort, achievements and contributions. Reinforce a "success culture".
- Model and reinforce a consistent moral, ethical and spiritual **value system** in the pursuit of goals and achievements.
- Help your children **define** what kind of people they want to become, how they'd like to live, and what they'd like to accomplish in life.
- Take care to celebrate **personal qualities** such as compassion, integrity and determination, not just grades and victories.
- Find out your children's **learning styles** and the best ways to teach and challenge them.
- Use failures and setbacks as **learning experiences** and opportunities to learn resilience.

## Intelligent success



**NO ONE IS GOOD AT EVERYTHING. EVERYONE IS GOOD AT SOMETHING.**

Finding out what we're good at and how we learn best is an important resource in living a successful life.

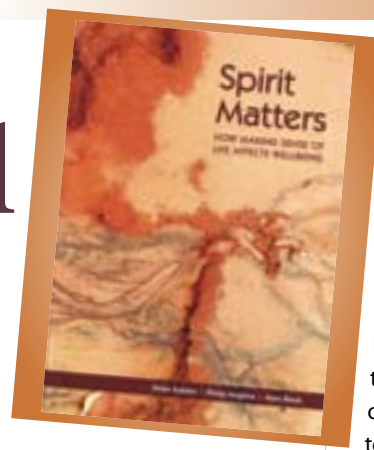
Educator Howard Gardner was dissatisfied with typical IQ (intelligent quotient) tests that tied intelligence to the ability to provide fast concise answers to problems involving mainly linguistic and logical skills.<sup>(1)</sup> Under Gardner's theory of Multiple Intelligences a person is intelligent if they can solve problems that confront them in life and can (or will, in the case of children) produce goods or services that are of value to the people around them (their society). Gardner found that there were a range of ways by which the human mind approached problem solving or producing goods or services:

- Linguistic (language and words)
- Logical-mathematical (numbers, reason, logic)
- Spatial (artistic, visualisation)
- Musical/rhythmic
- Bodily-kinesthetic (physically skillful)
- Interpersonal (sensitive to and understanding others, leadership)
- Intrapersonal (self-awareness)

What types of intelligence does your child demonstrate? Are they similar or different to your own? How are you celebrating and supporting their particular intelligences?

<sup>1</sup> Gardner, Howard. (1993) Multiple Intelligences: The Theory In Practice. New York: Basic Books.

# Surveys reveal spirit matters



**T**HE AUTHORS OF a new book about Australian spirituality say there are significant links between how we make sense of life and our personal and societal wellbeing.

*Spirit Matters*, by Peter Kaldor, Philip Hughes and Alan Black, presents an in-depth analysis of national surveys undertaken in Australia on wellbeing, religion, spirituality and how we make sense of life.

Despite what some commentators may say, religious ways of making sense of life are far from dead in contemporary Australia. Approximately one quarter of Australians (26%) approach life from an actively religious perspective. Others (17%) are influenced by alternative spiritualities. Somewhat more than half (57%) are not influenced much by either religion or spirituality. Most of this last group are not atheists, but are not sure what to believe, taking a secular approach to life by default.

The authors analysed research from people describing themselves across seven spiritual orientations with three broad groupings:

- Christian – Reflectively Christian; Uncritically Christian
- Alternative Spirituality – New Age/Buddhist; Land/Nature Spirituality.
- Mainly Secular: “Something Beyond”; “Uncertain About the Beyond”; “Nothing Beyond”.

*Spirit Matters* looks at the ways in which these different approaches can affect personal wellbeing and the common good. The book identifies several “key channels” whereby how people make sense of life can affect personal or community wellbeing. These channels are: Purposefulness; Openness to

personal growth; Optimism; Other-oriented values; Lived concern for others; Financial wellbeing and attitudes to it. Among the findings:

- The two Christian groupings averaged higher purposefulness scores.
- The New Age/Buddhist and the Reflectively Christian groupings recorded the highest average scores on openness to personal growth (with the Uncritically Christian group lowest).
- “Overall, a carefully developed religious or spiritual way of making sense of life is more likely to generate optimism than are more secular perspectives.”
- “Those in the Christian groups most valued helping others. The alternative spirituality groups most valued broadmindedness (tolerance of different ideas and beliefs). Those with a secular approach to life are more likely to have a stronger emphasis on individual rights and self-actualisation, and less on helping others, social justice or concern for the environment. By contrast those influenced by religion or other spiritualities tend to place higher value on these other-centred values.”
- “The religious and those exploring some form of alternative spirituality are more likely to be involved in voluntary work ... more likely to help others informally and more likely to make charitable donations than are people with a predominantly secular orientation.”
- “People with a predominantly secular orientation are more likely than others to emphasise material success. Although, on average, the reflectively or uncritically Christian have lower incomes than the most secularly inclined, people in one or other

of the two Christian groupings tend to place less importance on wealth and they are more likely to be happy with their standard of living.”

In summary the authors say that the research suggests that “A reflective, thoughtful approach appears far more helpful than an unquestioning or dogmatic one, as is evidenced by the wellbeing differences often seen between the reflectively Christian and the uncritically Christian groups. We need to engage questions of meaning and explore them

with integrity, recognising our human limitations in the process. This journey needs to be undertaken in an open reflective manner, exploring possibilities and piecing together our understandings over a lifetime. It is all too easy to accept something uncritically, or to see to reduce reality to a simplistic formula of one sort or another. The research here suggests that there can be dangers in doing so” (pp146-147).

“Trends in recent times have left us with a wealth of life choices,” says Philip Hughes. “People sometimes assume that it doesn’t matter very much what they choose. The data in this book shows that it does matter. The ways we choose to live influence our personal wellbeing and the wellbeing of the whole society.”

## Who believes in what?

AMONG THE SURVEY FINDINGS:

- When asked if **“there is something beyond this life that made sense of it all”**, twice as many Australians agree (44.6%) as disagree (21.8%). Close to a third of Australians are non-committal; they neither agree nor disagree (33.5%).
- More women than men believe in something beyond this life (53% of women as compared with 35% of men).
- Young people aged 15-29 are least likely to agree there is something beyond that makes sense of it all (38% vs ~47% for those aged 30 plus).
- A person’s levels of education makes no difference to their view on whether or not there is something beyond.
- When comparing people born in Australia and overseas, the patterns are relatively consistent with the whole population. For both groups, more people accept there is something beyond than do not.
- As part of the Australian Survey of Social Attitudes in 2009, some 1718 people across Australian communities were asked which philosophy of life had the most influence on how they lived today. The results show the largest group of people (39%) nominate the Christian religion as being the most influential in how they live today. However another significant group of people, almost as large (32%), are unable to name an underlying life philosophy, either not knowing or having nothing come to mind. Those citing influence by non-Christian religions, including Buddhist, Hindu, Jewish and Muslim religions total 5%. Some 8% cite a secular/humanistic philosophy, while 16% of people subscribe to an “other philosophy” as influential (including new age, nature/land philosophy and “some other” philosophy).



by Geoff McLean

*“As iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens another”  
– Proverbs 27:17*

# The sharpest *tool* in the **SHED**

**T**HERE IS A Shed Night almost every week across Australia, a place for men to get real with each other, to get real with themselves and to get real with God.

A Shed Night presents quite a sight. Typically an oversized roller-door lets light flood out, revealing a shed full of men. The welcoming smell of a freshly fired up barbecue beckons the new guys closer. There is no one checking if you've paid or holding you back on the double onions.

Inside there's a scattering of chairs facing what might be a makeshift stage – wooden pallets, some crates raised on bricks. Later a couple of the guys that were standing next to you in the queue for seconds will be up there being interviewed. Just blokes like you and me sharing their journey of faith. All this is surrounded by the industry of the host's shed, a setting which is inspiring men to be the person that God created them to be.

There is amazing strength, creativity, kindness and potential in the hearts and minds of men. Children need caring, effective parents, and women want good partners to share the work of bringing up children. We need to find ways to facilitate the process for men to free themselves to be better at who they really are.

This notion led Ian “Watto” Watson to start a men's ministry about seven years ago – something which has evolved over time to its current format. Before Shed Night there was Burger Bash.

“This was just a bunch of blokes and a barbecue in a car park, standing on the footpath getting together and sharing their story,” Ian said. This later moved location to a shed. “We just went to a bloke's shed and he talked about what he did, what his hobbies were, what went on in the shed,” Ian explains. “Whether that was woodwork or home brew, it didn't matter.”

Since then Shed Nights have formed in more than 20 locations in Queensland, New South Wales, ACT and South Australia. The hosts' sheds include a boat building company, a prawn farm, a cane farm, a sign writer, a cheese factory, an electrical switchboard making company and a barramundi farm. Once it was held in an old milking shed complete with 30 old, dirty couches.

The setting is important. Ian insists that it has to make the average bloke feel at ease. The men come from a wide range of backgrounds and represent all ages. Fathers are bringing their sons. Shed helps a person where they're at.

“For a lot of blokes they are more comfortable bringing along a mate to Shed than to church,” he said. This is not to discount church, but it can serve as a more natural introduction to the breadth of church life beyond a church service.

Ian's gift is encouragement, and he is uninhibited in his determination to celebrate the life and story of every bloke. To this end, the interview format was born. Sometimes there are guest speakers that are “entertaining,” but it's more about hearing everyday blokes sharing where they are at, heart to heart and what God is doing right now in their life.

People tell their story when they are ready. “Ask a bloke about his special interest,” Ian said, “and he'll talk for ages. Listen to him, get alongside him.”

Often, after someone has been interviewed they feel relieved. “It's like they've gotten rid of a bag of concrete off their shoulders,” Ian explains. They want to talk about it more and feel more real about themselves for opening up.

Shed Night is all about inspiring men to be the person they were created to be – and women are noticing the results. There have been many women thank Ian for the Shed Night ministry because they are seeing the difference in their men and their desire to be better blokes, better fathers, better husbands, better sons and better people.

### Mission statement

Shed Night provides a place where men can learn from men “As iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens another” (Proverbs 27:17). This mission is carried out through men talking about matters of the heart.

Shed Night is a place that is open, honest, compassionate, challenging, inspiring, respectful, encouraging and accepting – free of judgment and manipulation.

To find a Shed Night near you visit:  
[www.shednight.com.au](http://www.shednight.com.au)



## Shed Men

"Every man needs to be able to rub shoulders with other men. Too often men become segregated, and Shed brings them together. I especially liked the interviews. You hear things that we as men just want to shelve or keep inside. And this affects us emotionally. It's good to get it out. Sharing is the key, and it helps you to think 'I'm not the only one who has this problem.'"

– Bill, 70

"It didn't matter how you turned up. It's just in a shed and this puts everyone at ease. And they showed us around. I really liked the stories, the way they could say that stuff without being afraid. And the food was really good too!" – Josh, 13

"It was good hearing real, down to earth stories of men, not someone preaching up the front. It's great to get a different perspective. Instead of being talked to, it's hearing someone's story; that format works really well. Having it in a shed is I think more helpful to guys who don't usually come to church. It's definitely a more non-threatening or safer environment." – Matt, 29

"It's a good opportunity to invite some non-Christian friends. You can say to a mate, come to Shed Night with me. Church can be daunting if you are coming for the first time, whereas Shed you can come and be yourself. It's great to hear men talking openly about being a Christian. It's getting the message across that being a Christian isn't about being weak. At Shed you can be a bloke and be yourself and not worry about any fanfare."

– Adrian, 40





by Rod Matthews

# Nepal brickworks

## *Caring for beautiful Nepal's neglected people*

**F**LYING INTO KATHMANDU, Nepal, is one of air travel's great experiences. There are no highrise buildings in Kathmandu. The city sits in a lush valley at a height of 1400m with the peaks of the Himalayas only barely visible at a distance through gaps in the hills to the north, and even then only on a very clear day. The plane descends through a gap in the surrounding hills and approaches the landing strip over thousands of flat-roofed red-brick buildings holding more than a million people.

Around the outskirts of the city are many brickyards, their giant chimneys rising from the kilns. There are more than 500 brick kilns in the Kathmandu Valley. While these kilns crunch out much-needed building products, they do so at a huge environmental and human cost. It's estimated that among the people "employed" in the brickworks – they are in fact bonded labourers – are about 60,000 child workers who are often working to help parents pay off debts. Some workers have one day off a week, many work seven days a week and the children do not receive any schooling. Most, if not all, suffer respiratory problems because of the pollution. They naturally also suffer many other health issues.

The workers earn about 90 rupees (\$1.50) per 1,000 bricks. These 1,000 bricks can then be sold by the brickyard owner for approximately 6,000 rupees (\$100).

These desperately poor children and their families work in slave labour conditions. The housing for hundreds of these workers is typically a shack without any modern facilities like piped water. They also lack access to medical care or advice.

In 2007, a young Nepalese Christian pastor named Deben Sam sought assistance from some ministry partners in Australia to establish a medical centre for the families living in the brickworks. Deben cared for a group of about 30 Christians in one of the brickworks. Christians are a minority population in largely Hindu Nepal and, because of their religion, they tend to suffer additional hardships such as being denied the right to a day off

each week. Although technically illegal, there is no real course of appeal for a minority group such as this.

Deben's own experience has given him, as he puts it, "a heart for the poor". Now the pastor of the Gospel for Himalayas church, Deben and his wife, Manju, both come from the far eastern part of Nepal. They have a young son. Deben was the first person in his village to become a Christian and as a result of the persecution from his non-Christian neighbours, his parents asked him to move out. So he moved to Kathmandu and lived with a relative who was a Christian pastor.

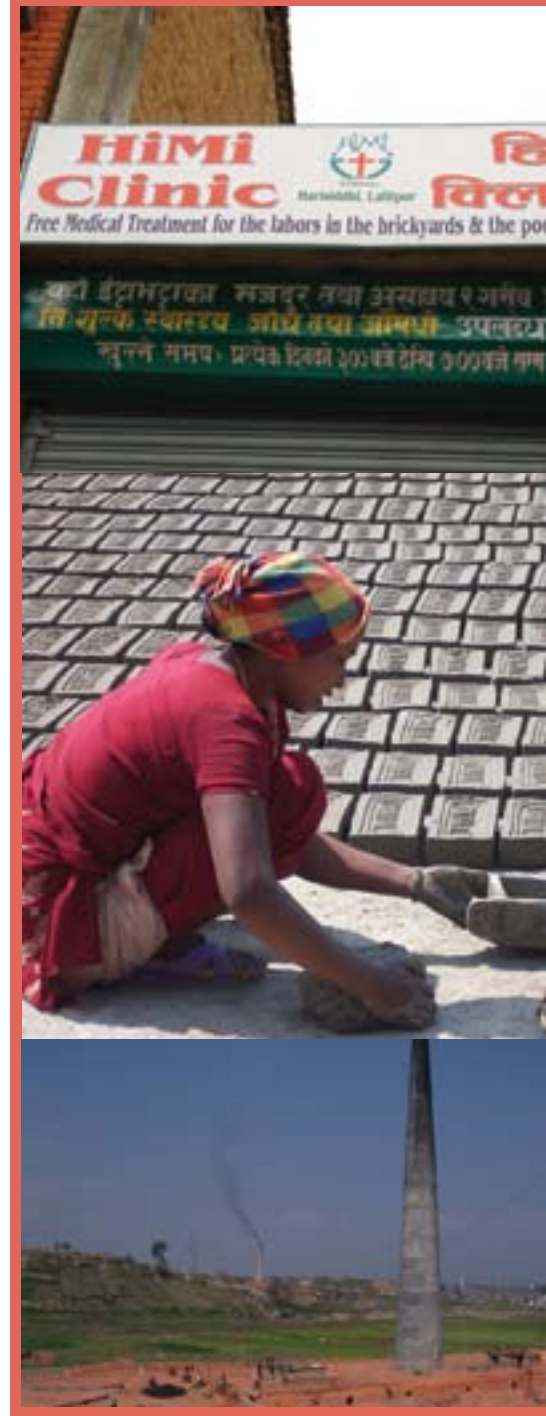
He travels to remote townships to minister to small groups of people, helping them establish meeting places and learn more about the gospel. He typically uses public transport to get around. And he is committed to providing Nepalese translations of Christian education materials – one of the ways in which Grace Communion International (GCI) has been able to support his ministry.

Setting up the medical clinic was not easy. Because most workers have no transportation and many have to work seven days a week, Deben decided he needed to establish the medical centre in close proximity to the brickworks. After battling and finally fulfilling many government regulations, Deben Sam found a couple of rooms to rent in an appropriate location, negotiated for a receptionist, a doctor and a medical assistant to work limited hours per week, and purchased medicines.

The brickworks clinic commenced operation on December 1, 2007. It is located in Harisiddhi Village on the southeastern outskirts of Kathmandu where there are about 15 brickyards within a few kilometres of the clinic.

The clinic treats hundreds of patients each month for problems including typhoid/enteric fever, backache, headache, spinal spondylitis, gastric ulcers, acute respiratory infections, and skin problems such as fungal infections, impetigo and wounds.

Each afternoon six days a week the clinic offers a general check-up and consulta-



tions, as well as family planning and counselling, and general medicines – all free of charge for the workers in the surrounding brickworks.

The clinic is funded by donations from Grace Communion International congregations and members in Australia and the US through a GCI-supported organisation called CarePac.

The basic costs of operation are around \$550 per month to cover the expenses of medicines plus hiring the necessary personnel including a pharmacist/medical assistant for four hours per day and a doctor for one afternoon per week.

The clinic is provided as a means of





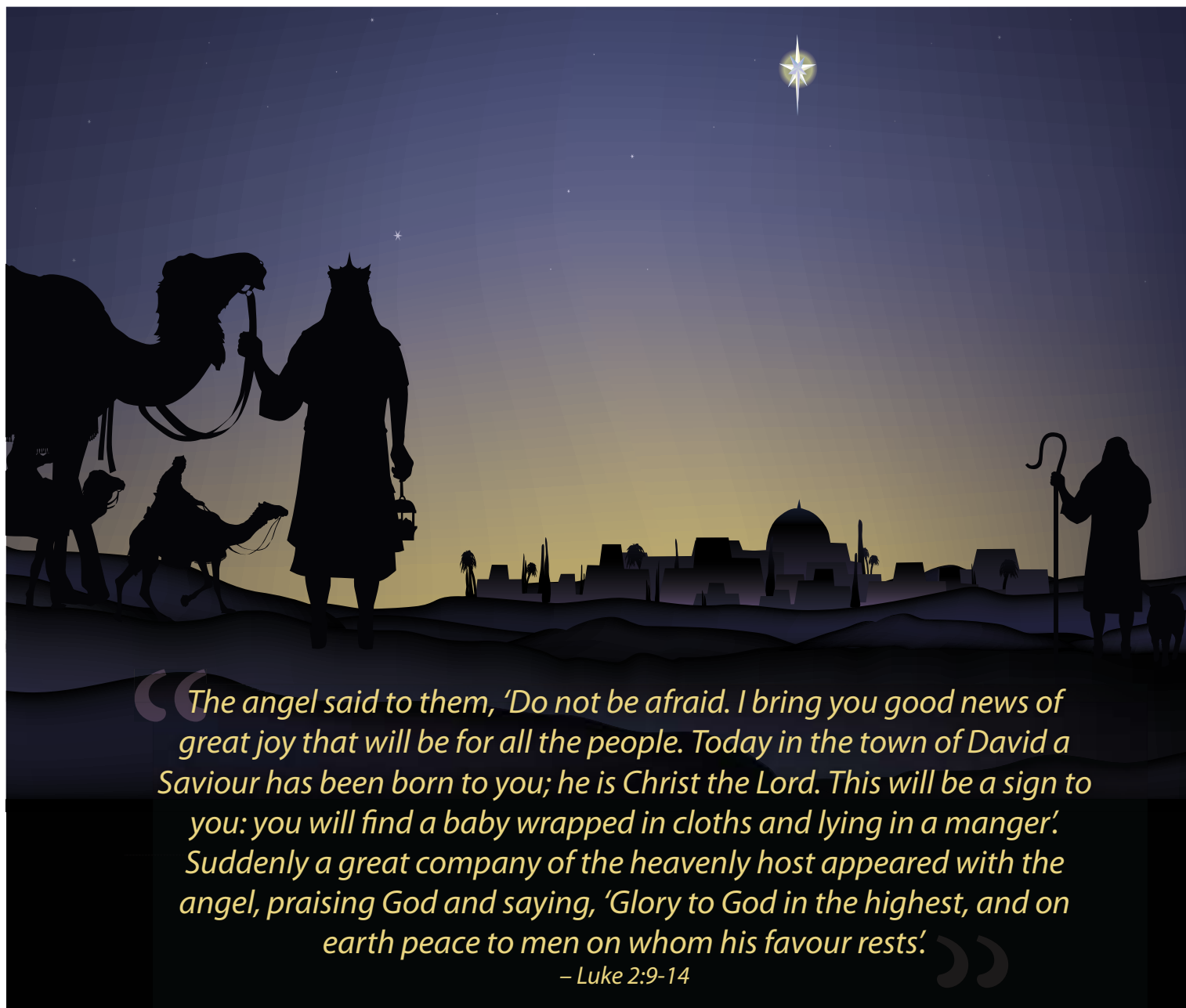
There are more than 500 brickworks kilns in the Kathmandu Valley in Nepal. Desperately poor workers and their children not only lack access to basic facilities but also lack health care and medical services. CarePac helped establish a medical clinic in the Harisiddhi Village in 2007. The clinic operates each afternoon six days a week with a doctor and pharmacist in attendance to provide free consultations and medicines to the families from surrounding brickworks.

expressing the grace, care and love of God to people who must wonder if anyone anywhere cares for them at all. When Deben Sam put this proposal to us it was hard to resist – the need is so profound and it is a wonderfully tangible and practical way to demonstrate the love of God for them.

#### THE BRICKWORDS CLINIC

If you would like to contribute to the support of the Nepalese brickworks medical centre or make a general donation to CarePac, visit [www.gci.org.au](http://www.gci.org.au) or call 07 5553 6000.





*“The angel said to them, ‘Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. Today in the town of David a Saviour has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord. This will be a sign to you: you will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger’. Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying, ‘Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men on whom his favour rests.’”*

*– Luke 2:9-14*

**Hmmm ...**

*We cannot all do great things, but we can do small things with great love.*

*– Mother Teresa of Calcutta*

*The wise man doesn’t give the right answers, he poses the right questions.*

*– Claude Levi-Strauss (1908-2009, French anthropologist)*

*Decisions help us start. Discipline helps us finish.*

*– John Maxwell, Developing the Leader Within You*

*The purpose of life is not to win. The purpose of life is to grow and to share. And when you come to look back on all that you have done in life, you will get more satisfaction from the pleasure you have brought to other people’s lives than you will from times that you outdid and you defeated them.*

*– Harold Kushner (American rabbi)*

*Worrying does not empty tomorrow of its troubles. It empties today of its strength.*

*– Unknown*

*You will become as small as your controlling desire; as great as your dominant aspiration.*

*– James Allen, As a Man Thinketh*