

T^{GCI} Today

GRACE COMMUNION INTERNATIONAL AUSTRALIA

MARCH - MAY 2012



Approaching the Light

The Empty tomb

What's in it
for you?

SEP
JANUARY
2012



THE MINISTRY OF
LISTENING





- 01 Welcome** – a wonder-ful world
- 02 Approaching the light** – particle science and the wonders of our universe
- 06 The empty tomb** – what's in it for you?
- 05 The joy of communion** – celebrating what we share
- 09 SEP 2012** – friendships, fun and faith
- 12 Listening** – it's a ministry
- 13 Exploring the Word** – a text without a context ...

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

THE TEAM

Pastor General
Joseph Tkach
Mission and National Director, Australia
John McLean
Editor **Aub Warren**
Editorial Assistant
Val Leech
Design **Sheryl Rowse**

HOW TO CONTACT GCI TODAY

Phone **07 5553 6000**
Fax **07 5562 2872**
Email **info@gci.org.au**
website **www.gci.org.au**
Mail **PO Box 402, Varsity Lakes, Queensland 4227, Australia**

Articles on pages 2, 4, 5, 6, and 12 are reproduced courtesy of *Christian Odyssey*.

GCI Today cannot be responsible for the return of unsolicited articles or photographs.

GCI Today is published quarterly by Grace Communion International ABN 53096 517 190. Level 1, Building 2, 175 Varsity Parade, Varsity Lakes, Queensland 4227, Australia.

© 2012 Grace Communion International. All rights reserved.

Printed by Beaudesert Times.

A Wonder-ful World

Skies of blue, trees of green, red roses too. Babies' smiles, watching them learn, watching them grow. In the words of that delightful old song made famous by Louis Armstrong, "I think to myself, what a wonderful world." The colours of the rainbow, the faces of people going by, friends shaking hands, really saying "I love you". What a wonderful world.

For all its clamour, drudgery, problems, pollution and pain, the world we live in is still a place full of astounding wonders. You probably have some favourites: a magnificent sunset, light through a canopy of trees, an ocean wave, a soap bubble. What strikes you with wonder? The list is endless. In the words of poet Gerard Manley Hopkins, "the world is charged with the grandeur of God."

In this issue, we look at some of the wonders that fill the world. Indeed, we look at some of the wonders that go to make up our world. "Approaching the Light" looks into the exciting world of particle physics. The more that has been discovered, the more it seems there is to discover. The levels of intricacy, complexity and balance in the universe are truly amazing – things of wonder. We don't even have the language to adequately describe it. And over 90% of the universe is made up of dark energy and dark matter, at this point beyond our experiments and our understanding.

An interview with a Christian scientist working at the CERN Collider

further explores these scientific frontiers. As John Halford writes, "There's no threat to God in scientific discovery; he's the one who made whatever is discovered." In Christ, it all holds together (Colossians 1:15-17).

The novelist D.H. Lawrence wrote that "When the wonder has gone out of a man he is dead. When all comes to all, the most precious element in life is wonder." This sense of wonder he described as our sixth sense. "And it is the natural religious sense", he said.

Here's something to fire that sense of wonder: into this wonderful world, the Creator himself steps. He takes on our flesh and bone; he takes on our life, with all that it entails. He does it that he might share his life of love and fellowship with the Father through the Spirit with us.

As the writers of "The Empty Tomb – What's in it for You?" conclude: "Easter demonstrates God's willingness to irreversibly bind himself to all of us in an eternal relationship of love, lifting us up into the very life and communion of our Triune God."

This is the wonderful hope, the wonderful purpose of God – the good news of the gospel.

It's a wonder-ful world.

John McLean
Mission and National Director,
Australia



For all its clamour, drudgery and problems, the world we live in is still a place full of astounding wonders ...



Approaching the Light

by John Halford

God, the blessed and only Ruler, the King of kings and Lord of lords, who alone is immortal and who lives in unapproachable light, whom no one has seen or can see. 1 Timothy 6:15-16

THIS IS AN exciting time to be a particle physicist. Especially if you are a particle physicist who believes in God, because we appear to be on the verge of exciting new discoveries that could force us to rethink how we look at the natural world.

Recently I visited the CERN Super Collider in Geneva, Switzerland, as the guest of Dr. Keith Baker—a particle physicist

who is also a committed Christian. Keith is a Yale Professor who has also been involved with the cutting-edge experiments now being conducted using this amazing technological marvel carved into the rock beneath France and Switzerland.

We watched the operators in the control room, which reminded me of Mission Control for a space mission. Which,

of course it is. Except that these men and women are supervising a journey into inner space. The actual experiment is going on deep in the ground under our feet in a circular tunnel 17 miles in circumference. Down there, protons (one of the smallest particles of matter) are accelerated to nearly the speed of light, and then redirected to smash into each other.

I have a vague understanding of what happens when these particles collide, but I think it would be better to leave the explanation to someone who really knows what he is talking about. So we have included an interview with Keith Baker in this issue (see page 4). By the way, don't feel bad if you don't fully un-

Main picture: A cross section of an LHC dipole in the tunnel. **Right:** Installation of the CMS silicon tracking detector was successfully completed on 18 December 2007. The CMS Silicon Strip Tracking Detector began its journey from the main CERN site to the CMS experimental facility in Cessy on 13 December. Later that day it was lowered 90 metres into the CMS cavern. Installation began on 15 December and was concluded three days later.



derstand it. It seems that no one does. I take comfort from the words of the Nobel Prize-winning pioneer of quantum mechanics, Niels Bohr, who admitted, "If you are not completely confused by quantum mechanics, you do not understand it."

Nevertheless, what we are on the verge of learning from the collider is likely to turn our understanding of the universe on its head. As physicist Lisa Randall wrote, "We are poised on the edge of discovery. The biggest and most exciting experiments in particle physics and cosmology are under way and many of the world's most talented physicists and astronomers are focused on their implications. What scientists find within the next decade could provide clues that will ultimately change our view of the fundamental makeup of matter or even of space itself—and just might provide a more comprehensive picture of the nature of reality" (Lisa Randall, *Knocking on Heaven's Door: How Physics and Scientific Thinking Illuminate the Universe and the Modern World*).

At CERN that excitement is contagious. It can be an exciting time for the rest of us too, as we look over their shoulders. Because surely the more we understand about the creation, the more we will appreciate its Creator.

Could it be that discoveries that revolutionize our ideas about creation could also revolutionize our understanding of its Creator? Sadly, many people will see a threat in the very idea. We like to think we have God figured out, and when science comes up with something that challenges established ideas, the first reaction is to resist. Copernicus, Galileo, Newton and Einstein proposed ideas that blew the conservative doors off their hinges and opened up startling new levels of understanding. That might be about to happen again.

Like theologians, scientists like to think they have got things figured out. But as they probe ever deeper into outer and inner space, they discover new levels of intricacy. There is still so much we do not know about our cosmos, even the small part that is available to experiments. Most of it is not. What scientists have la-

beled dark energy and dark matter make up 94 percent of the universe. They are beyond the reach of our senses and our instruments, but they have a massive impact on the small sliver of the cosmos we can investigate. What we do experience seems to be just a part of a greater reality. Are we just one of millions of other universes? Are there extra dimensions beyond those we experience? Is time linear, or do the past, present and future all "happen" at the same time? Could there be life—even intelligent life—elsewhere in the universe? Einstein based his theories on the apparent fact that the ultimate possible speed is the speed of light, but recent experiments suggest this might not be so.

These are hard ideas to contemplate, let alone understand.

"Any human being will have difficulty," writes Lisa Randall, "creating an accurate visual image of what's going on at the minuscule scales that particle physicists study today. The elementary components that combine to form the stuff we recognize as matter are very different from what we access immediately through our senses. Those components operate according to unfamiliar physical laws. As scales decrease, matter seems to be governed by properties so different that they appear to be part of entirely different universes" (ibid.).

New discoveries are always hard to explain, and just to talk about them takes us, as theologian/physicist John Polkinghorne observed, "to the frontiers of language." In other words, we don't have the words to express what we think we might be trying to say. The easy way out is to dismiss new understanding as nonsense, and that, sadly, is the road that religion has often chosen. When scientific advances are seen as threats, the natural reaction is to attack and ridicule them. It need not be so. New discoveries simply give us deeper insight into the reality of the creation as God actually made it, not as we have assumed that it should be. There is no threat to God in scientific discovery; he's the one who made whatever is discovered. So why should believers feel threatened?

There's no threat to God in scientific discovery; he's the one who made whatever is discovered. So why should believers feel threatened?

When scientific language becomes inadequate to describe new frontiers in understanding, scientists sometimes find themselves resorting to language that sounds vaguely theological. Lisa Randall based the title of her book, *Knocking on Heaven's Door*, on the idea that as we now have instruments that can accelerate particles to approach the speed of light, we are metaphorically "knocking on heaven's door."

In metaphorical language of its own, the New Testament tells us, "God dwells in unapproachable light." Whatever we discover about the intricacies and mysteries of the universe, we will never "discover" God in it. However long and hard we knock on heaven's door.

That's why God came knocking at our door, meeting us on our territory. God, in the person of Jesus, became one of us. For about thirty years he lived among us, showing us things and telling us things we could never discover for ourselves. He showed us that behind the curtain of "unapproachable light" there is indeed an awesome power, one that is not forever beyond reach. He showed us a Creator who knows us, loves us and, in Jesus, shares all that he is with us.

The people who believed this before the scientific age found it exciting. We, who have the blessing of knowing so much more about the creation, should find it even more so.

This is indeed an exciting time to be a scientist—and a Christian. ☉

So Why Collide Hadrons?

(AND WHAT ARE THEY, ANYWAY?)

The Large Hadron Collider is the world's largest particle accelerator. The Collider lies in a tunnel 17 miles in circumference and over 500 feet below the ground, near Geneva on the border of France and Switzerland.

Christian Odyssey: Would it be true to say that you are on the leading edge when it comes to experiments in this field?

Keith Baker: Yes. The most likely venue for new discoveries in all of science is at the Large Hadron Collider (LHC) at CERN. And that's where I am. I've been working at the LHC for just over 15 years.

CO: What does the Hadron Collider do?

KB: The Large Hadron Collider is a proton-proton collider, that is, it collides hadrons. Briefly, hadrons are particles that have internal structure whereas the other class of particles—leptons—are structureless. For example, protons, neutrons, mesons are all examples of hadrons; they are made of quarks and gluons. Quarks and gluons are subject to the strong force and come together to form these hadrons. On the other hand, electrons, positrons, taus, and muons are examples of leptons. As far as we know, these have no structure and their interactions are not governed by the strong force, only the weak and electromagnetic forces. With circulating proton beams, higher energies can more easily be achieved than if leptons are collided. And the higher the collision energy, the deeper is our probe of space and time. That is, the greater our chance of discovery.

Using a stream of magnets, we send one beam of these protons one way and you send another beam of these protons the other way. Then, as they approach the speed of light, you make them collide at different points around the approximately 17-mile in circumference ring. We want to get to the highest energies we can, and make enough of these collisions so that these rare events that you're looking for can take place in a reasonable amount of time. The magnets can focus these charged particles and we can make the collisions happen wherever we want. And of course, we can

have millions of collisions every second. We then analyze the results. That's the collider in a nutshell.

CO: Popular journalism has suggested you are looking for the "god particle." However, scientists don't like that term, do they? Why not?

KB: It implies that what we're looking for will satisfy some deep religious question. But there's no connection there. We are looking for evidence that will explain some important gaps in our scientific understanding—not theological.

We have a theory that's called the Standard Model of Particle Physics and it describes everything we know about all the particles we've discovered up until now. Some people describe this Standard Model of Particle Physics as the greatest theory ever developed.

But there are problems with this Standard Model. It doesn't explain the dark matter and dark energy, which are the most dominant constituents of our universe. We'll come back to that later.

In the Standard Model all the particles are mass-less. That's the only way the theorists who developed this Standard Model could make it work. But we know that particles do have mass. For example, a proton is heavier than an electron. A lambda hyperon is heavier than a proton. So we know that these things have mass, so what is it that gives them mass?

There could be any number of explanations, but the most likely one is what's called Higgs field. It was named after Peter Higgs, a Scotsman. He theorized that there's a field that interacts with particles that gives them mass. And so if there is a Higgs field, then there should be a particle—the Higgs boson. They called it the "god particle" because it's the only missing piece of this Standard Model. We have to discover it to explain how it is that

Dr. Keith Baker is a professor at Yale University and an experimental particle and nuclear physicist. He is a member of the experimental team working at the CERN Collider in Geneva, Switzerland.

particles have mass. It is a scientific question—not a religious one.

There are other ideas. For example, some have suggested there are extra dimensions. Our experience tells us that we live in a world that has three space dimensions plus time. But there could be other dimensions that exist. If they do, they're probably small, and we just pass through them.

CO: You mentioned dark matter and dark energy. Can we talk about the implications of that?

KB: As I said, the Standard Model is a wonderful theory, but it is incomplete. There are lots of things that it doesn't explain. About three quarters of the universe is made of what we call dark energy, but we have no idea what it is. We see the effect of it on stars and galaxies, but we haven't been able to create it in the laboratory.

Dark energy is somehow making the universe accelerate as it expands. In what some call the "Big Bang," 13.7 billion years ago there was a rapid expansion of space. Until recently we assumed that this expansion would eventually stop and then come back in on itself. But the data now indicates that the universe is not only expanding, but it's speeding up. It's accelerating as it expands. We don't know what gives rise to this accelerated expansion, so we just give it a name—dark energy. But this theory we have, the Standard Model, completely fails to explain it. We're not even close.

And then there is dark matter. Cosmological and astrophysical data and data from astronomy indicate that nearly 30 percent of the universe is made of dark matter. We don't know what it is. The Standard Model completely fails to explain that too. So all the stuff that you see—the stars, the galaxies, the clusters of galaxies and if there are black

holes—all that is only a tiny sliver of the universe. The Standard Model explains roughly just four percent of the universe. It has to be incomplete because it doesn't explain dark energy or dark matter, at least not as it is formulated right now.

CO: Do you have a problem reconciling this extraordinary experimental field that you work in with your belief in God?

KB: That has never been an issue. I see no incompatibility with being a scientist and being a Christian. I will say that there are times when I'll look at the universe and just say "wow!" It is so delicately balanced. Some people have compared it to balancing a pencil on its tip on the table and having it remain balanced for 13.7 billion years. It could not have been a chaotic process. Something made this universe be as delicately balanced as it is and allow us to exist. This is pretty amazing, even at our level of understanding, and our understanding will increase over time, obviously.

CO: There have been some reports recently that you are on the verge of a breakthrough. What does this mean?

KB: Some people say this is the most exciting period in the history of our field or in many generations. All our experiments up until now indicate that there has to be some new phenomenon that happens when we collide protons together as we're doing now. But we don't know if that new phenomenon is going to be this Higgs mechanism, or extra dimensions, or super symmetric particles that pop out of the vacuum. And that's what makes it exciting.

The recent news from CERN should be clarified. What is seen is tantalizing evidence that there might be a Standard Model Higgs boson in the vicinity of 125 GeV or so, but it is certainly not a discovery. We particle physicists refer to searches for new phenomena (such as the Higgs) in terms of the probability that what we observe is truly physics phenomena (five-sigma or greater) versus whether it could be a statistical fluctuation or some instrumental anomaly (less than five-sigma). Our experience guides us to make a five-sigma observation the threshold for calling what we see a real discovery. We have seen three-sigma effects come and go in our analysis. So while my advice to you at this point is don't "bet the farm" on these latest results signaling a new discovery, they are in my opinion tantalizing evidence of something new—a breakthrough. That is the reason for the media hype about a Higgs discovery. With more data and more analysis, we can make a

All the stuff that you can see—the planets, stars, the galaxies, the clusters of galaxies—everything you can see is only a tiny percent of what makes up the actual universe.

strong statement one way or another. In any case, 2012 will be an exciting year if the LHC runs as well as it has in 2011!

What we understand now just may be

a small piece of something that's much bigger. And for me, being a part of this adventure is why I went into physics in the first place! 🌍



THE LIGHTS DIMMED and somber music filled the hall as the ushers solemnly carried the bread and wine forward for communion. The pastor emphasized the broken body and spilled blood of Christ as he talked about Jesus' command to remember him. We sat in silence and prayed as the bread and wine were distributed. It was a time of quiet reflection. And on this occasion it stood in stark contrast to an inspiring sermon the pastor had just given about the joy of being in union with Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

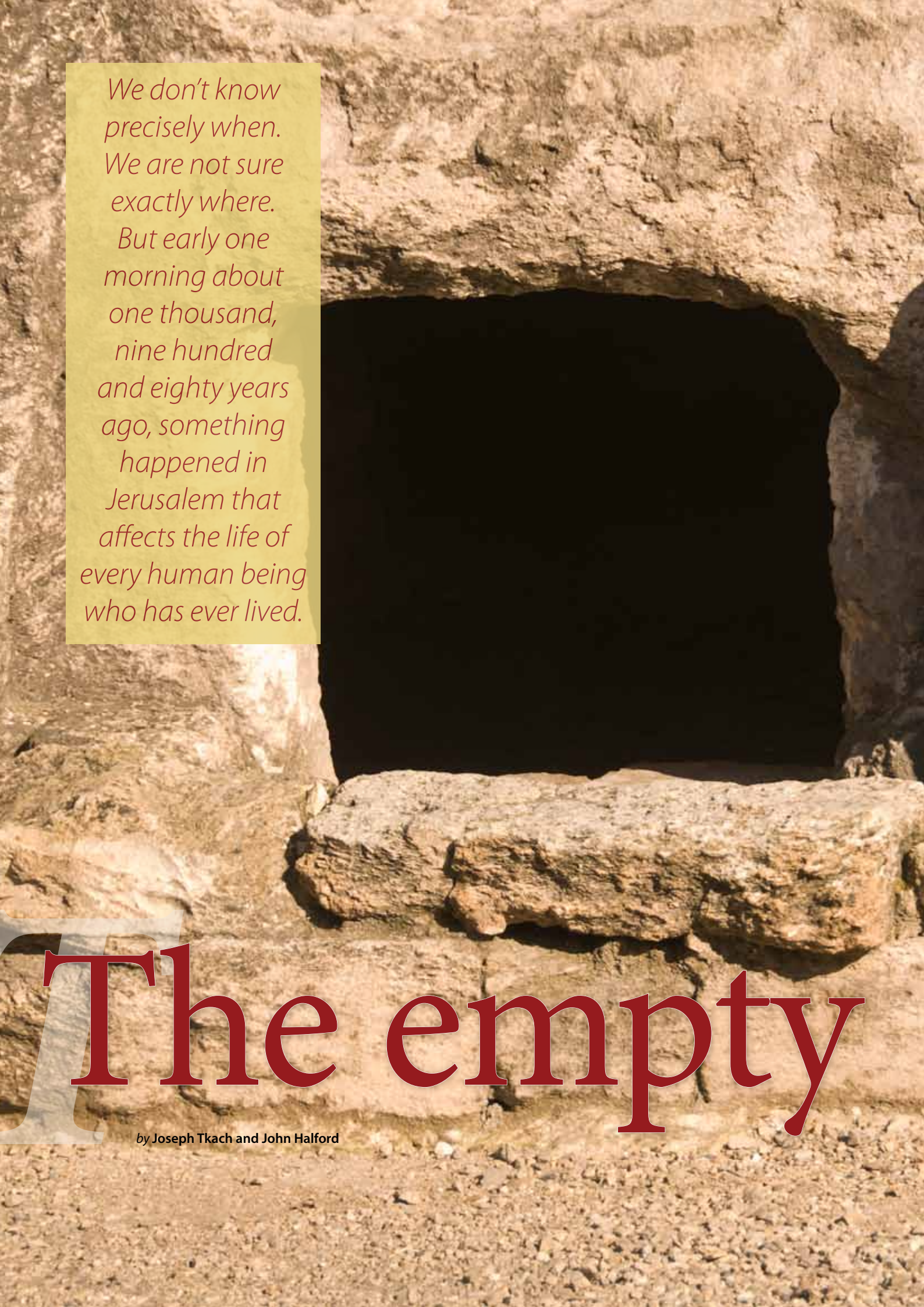
I wanted to stand up and shout Hallelujah at the end of the sermon, not sit in quiet reflection over the broken body. I wanted to celebrate our union with Christ by sharing the joy with others. It was at that point I determined to examine the way I offer communion to my congregation.

I shared with my congregation that communion is not about the crucifixion—it is about our unity with God. The word means "sharing in common." Jesus, the bread of life, shared his life with us. Breaking bread is a symbol of that shared life. Jesus, our redeemer, shared his love for us by laying down his life—this is called the greatest love. The cup represents Jesus sharing his love.

When we take communion, we are actually sharing in Jesus' life and his love. This love and life didn't begin at the Lord's Supper. Communion actually started before the foundation of the earth when you and I were chosen to be in him (Ephesians 1). We were chosen to share in the love and the life shared by the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Communion is about God's desire to share himself with us by determining to adopt us as his sons and daughters. It's about being one with each other and with the Father as Jesus was one with the Father and is one with us (John 17).

It is certainly appropriate at times to remember the sacrifice Jesus made for us when we participate in communion. But it's also appropriate and right to remember that communion is a reminder that God has invited us to participate in what he is doing in the world. I believe one of the reasons Paul called communion a blessing is because it is about our participation with Christ's sharing his life and his love with all.

When Jesus told us to remember him, he wasn't asking us to focus on his suffering, but to focus on his love for us and for the world. I look forward to the time when all of us share in the joy of communion while shouting praises to the One who brought us together.



*We don't know
precisely when.
We are not sure
exactly where.
But early one
morning about
one thousand,
nine hundred
and eighty years
ago, something
happened in
Jerusalem that
affects the life of
every human being
who has ever lived.*

The empty

by Joseph Tkach and John Halford

JESUS, A CARPENTER from Nazareth, had been arrested, condemned and crucified. As he died he entrusted himself to his eternal heavenly Father and his Holy Spirit. Then, for three days his battered corpse had lain in a tomb carved out of solid rock, sealed by a heavy stone rolled across the entrance.

Even so, Pontius Pilate, the Roman governor, had placed a guard at the tomb. Jesus had prophesied that the grave would not hold him, and Pilate was afraid the followers of the dead man would try to steal the body. However, that seemed unlikely. Those followers were demoralized and in hiding. They had seen the brutal end of their leader—flogged nearly to death, nailed to a cross and after six hours of agony, and stabbed in the side with a spear. They had taken the battered body down from the cross and hastily wrapped it in linen. It was only intended to be a temporary burial, as a Sabbath was approaching. Some planned to come back after the Sabbath to prepare Jesus' mortal remains for a proper burial. They had no illusions about what they would find in the tomb. Their beloved leader was dead—he was going nowhere.

The body of Jesus lay in the cold, dark tomb for three days. Then, sometime early in the morning of the third day, the shroud that held the mangled flesh stirred, and out of it stepped something that had never existed before—a resurrected and glorified human being. Jesus had been resurrected by his heavenly Father and in the power of the Holy Spirit. Not just in a way that restored his human existence, as he had done for those he brought back from the dead, but who would later die again—Jesus had become a new kind of creation,

never to die again. He folded the burial shroud, and walked out of the tomb to continue his work. And nothing would ever be the same again.

Don't fully understand

When he was with us on earth, Jesus was one of us, a flesh-and-blood human being, subject to hunger, thirst, weariness and the limited dimensions of a mortal existence. He also lived in communion with God's Holy Spirit, as one of us. Theologians call this "the incarnation." But he was also one with God as the eternal Word or Son of God. This is a concept that is difficult, and perhaps impossible to completely grasp, given the limitations of our human minds. How could Jesus be both God and human? The contemporary theologian J.I. Packer put it well: "Here are two mysteries for the price of one—the plurality of persons within the unity of God, and the union of Godhead and manhood in the person of Jesus... Nothing in fiction is so fantastic as is this truth of the Incarnation." It is a concept that is contrary to everything we know about ordinary reality.

Well, perhaps not everything. Scientists working on the leading edge of physics have had to come to terms with phenomena that turn conventional logic on its head. At the quantum level, the rules that govern our everyday life break down, and rules that are so counterintuitive to logic as to seem preposterous take over. Light can act as both a wave and a particle. A particle can be in two places at the same time. Some subatomic quarks must spin twice before they have 'gone around' once, while others need to make only half a revolution. And so on. The more we learn about the quantum world, the more unlikely it seems.

But experiment after experiment demonstrate that quantum theory is right. But our ordinary experience gives us no clues that this would, or even could, be the case.

What science is uncovering shows that just because something seems to defy explanation, that does not mean it is not true. Likewise, we accept that even though we may not fully grasp how Jesus was God in the flesh, that was the way it was. We have the tools to investigate the physical world, and are often surprised at its inner details. So why should it be a surprise that the spiritual world is also sometimes counterintuitive? We do not have tools to investigate divine and uncreated realities—we have to accept it the way God reveals it to us. In fact we were told about these things by Jesus himself and by those he commissioned to preach and write. The evidence we do have, from Scripture, from history and our own experience supports the belief that Jesus was both one in being with God and one with humanity.

So while it is intriguing, it is not essential for us to understand every detail about how this can be. Insisting on it may actually get in the way of fully appreciating what happened on that first Easter morning. When Jesus the man was resurrected, the two natures reached a new dimension of being together that resulted in a new kind of creation—a glorified human being, no longer subject to death and decay.

Many years—perhaps as many as 60—after this event, Jesus appeared to John, the last of his original disciples, who had seen him die. John was now a very old man. Jesus told him, "I am the Living One; I was dead, and now look, I am alive for ever and ever! And I hold the keys of death and Hades" (Revelation 1:18).

tomb

what's in it for you?

*Through his
life, death and
resurrection, Jesus
has shown us what
it means to be a
human being*



Hold it! Read that again. Let the impact of it percolate. Once we become familiar with a scripture, there is a danger when we read it quickly, thinking we know what it is saying, but end up glossing over important details. Most of us have grown up knowing that “Jesus died for us.” It has become a cliché, and once that happens, it dilutes any power to shock. Once a verse or an idea becomes too familiar it is tempting to hurry through it, thinking, “Yes, I know that.”

Revelation 1:18 is a verse that needs to be unpacked carefully. So look again at what Jesus is saying. He *was dead*. He *is now alive*. As if that were not enough, he says he will *stay alive forever*. And he also has a key that opens up the way for *others to also escape the grave*. Even death isn’t what it used to be after Jesus’ resurrection.

Wow! At least, we should respond with a “wow.” What this verse is saying is that Jesus has revolutionized what it means to be a human being. Not just for himself, but for everyone. That is the astonishing promise of another verse that has become a cliché: “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that *whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life*” (John 3:16). Jesus, resurrected to eternal life, has opened up the way for us to also live forever.

But wait—there’s more.

Look again at what Jesus prayed before he died: “Father, I want those you have given me to be with me where I am, and to see my glory, the glory you have given me because you loved me before the creation of the world” (John 17:24). Jesus, having shared our mortal existence for about 30

years says he wants us to be with him in his immortal environment forever.

Paul, writing to the Romans, believed it: “Now if we are children, then we are heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that *we may also share in his glory*” (Romans 8:17-18).

Jesus was the first human to transcend mortal existence, but God never intended that he be the only one. We were, as Willie Nelson sings, “always on his mind.” “Those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among *many brothers and sisters*” (Romans 8:29).

Although we cannot yet understand the full impact of this, our eternal future is in safe hands. “Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has *not yet been made known*. [So don’t worry about it.] But we know that when Christ appears, *we shall be like him*, for we shall see him as he is” (1 John 3:2). What is his can become ours, his kind of life. God’s kind of life.

Through his life, death and resurrection, Jesus has shown us what it means to be a human being. He is the first to reach the full perfection that God had in mind for human beings from the beginning. But by no means is he the last. We can’t get there by ourselves. “I am the way and the truth and the life,” Jesus explained. “No one comes to the Father except through me” (John 14:6). But he “by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body” (Philippians 3:21).

So when we read the scriptures care-

fully, an exciting preview of the future of the human race begins to unfold.

“What is mankind that you are mindful of them, a son of man that you care for him?” asks the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews. “You made them a little lower than the angels; you crowned them with glory and honor and put everything under their feet” (2:6-8).

This much he knew. He was quoting a Psalm that had been written a thousand years before. But, he continued “at present we do not see everything subject to them. *But we do see Jesus*, who was made lower than the angels for a little while, now crowned with glory and honor because he suffered death, so that by the grace of God *he might taste death for everyone*” (verses 8-9).

When the women came back to finish preparing Jesus’ body for burial, they found the stone rolled back and the tomb empty except for the neatly folded body shroud and head covering. But that empty space was filled with promise—for them and the other disciples. And for every human being.

Jesus’ destiny is our destiny. His future is our future. Easter demonstrates God’s willingness to irreversibly bind himself to all of us in an eternal relationship of love, lifting us up into the very life and communion of our Triune God.

Jesus came to save us for that. And he has. 🌐

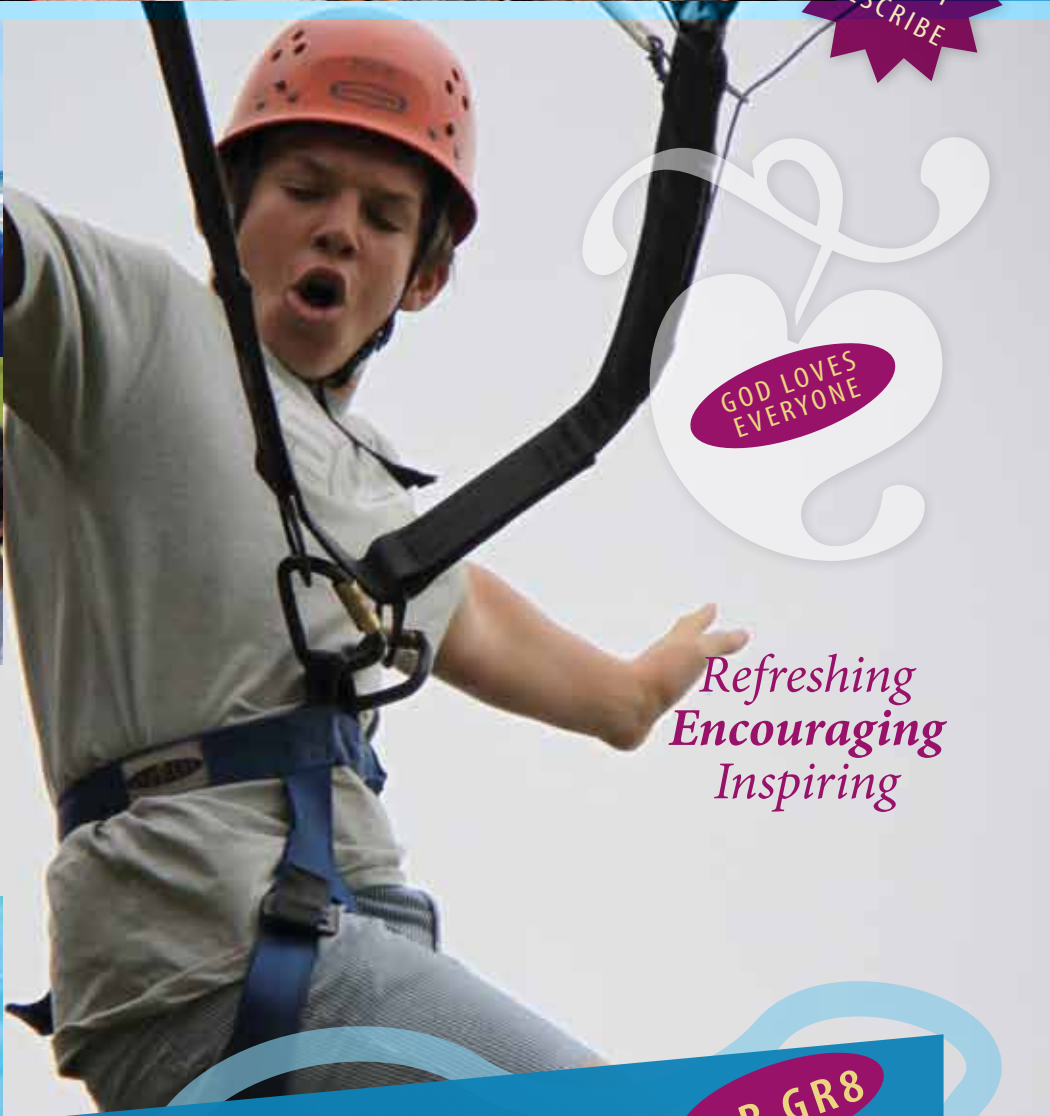
Endnote

1 J.I. Packer, *Knowing God* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993), 53.



(WHERE) FRIENDS
BECOME FAMILY

WORDS
CANNOT
DESCRIBE



GOD LOVES
EVERYONE

Refreshing
Encouraging
Inspiring



U R GR8

THE YEAR KICKED off to an exciting start for the 147 campers and staff at our national youth camp – SEP. Twelve days of fun, friends and faith was an inspiring way to begin 2012!

Camp was held at the beautiful Yarabah Conference Centre in Morisset, NSW – the campsite that has been our SEP “home” for the past six years. Campers gathered from Queensland, New South Wales, Victoria, South Australia, Western Australia, New Zealand, Fiji and even the USA to share in the experience. Together they tried out High Ropes and the Giant Swing, basketball, touch football, and volleyball, shared meals, built spirit within their dorms, and made new friends. Campers even mastered dance classes and put their skills on display at the three camp dances. Daily worship and discussion sessions were also a big part of the SEP experience.

Two big highlights of SEP 2012 were the Adventure Race and waterskiing sessions. The Adventure Race was a four(ish!) hour obstacle course and orientation challenge involving mental and physical games.

Teams of three worked together to complete the race, which took place on foot and by canoe across the whole campsite and surrounding areas. It was a true challenge for the campers and there was a real sense of achievement as each team crossed the finish line!

Another camp favourite was the waterskiing activity where campers had hours of fun on the water learning a brand new skill. Special thanks must go to the Adventure Race and waterskiing crews for the extra effort they put into organising and running these fantastic activities.



INDESCRIBABLE UNCONTAINABLE

(THERE'S TWO!)



IN THE MIDST of the exciting activities and new friendships, SEP was also a time of deep encouragement and growth for many campers and staff. It is a unique environment of community and a place where campers can come to know their God and their faith in a new light. One camper shares her personal SEP story below.

"I came to SEP 2012 with very little interest in God and faith. I had a million and one questions and really wasn't looking forward to immersing myself in a Jesus-centered environment for two whole weeks...however God had other plans! By day two, Sandra Gudze and I had engaged in a deep conversation about the real version of Christianity, and how the basis of God was simply love. That's exactly who He is! No hidden agendas, no list of rules, no bargaining or brownie points. Just pure, beautiful love. I was so inspired to hear this that I spent the next few days at camp just really watching how God might possibly love every single person at camp – with all their completely different attitudes and personalities.

I learnt that not everyone was at the same point in their walk with God. Yet it was so incredibly clear that God so dearly loved each of them to the highest possible degree. It was a discovery

that brought me to tears. Joyful tears of realizing the extent of God's love and mercy – realizing the price Jesus paid on that cross – just so I could live a life of peace and happiness. I so desperately wanted to be a part of this everlasting love. So desperately wanted to be filled with that joy that I saw in the lives of so many of the staff members on camp who were so happy to answer my questions, and whose actions spoke wonders of the love they found in themselves from Christ.

During those two weeks I had a massive change of heart and God filled me with the knowledge and desire to accept others for exactly who they are, and to love them despite anything I might previously have judged them for. I felt a compassion I'd never experienced previously, and knew that there was no turning back from here... What an inspiring and beautiful focus for my life! SEP gave me a new-found hope in Jesus. I found the true source and meaning of love – and this is a discovery that I will never forget."

Thank you so much to all who supported SEP 2012. It was a wonderful way to start the year, and a very special time for all who attended. Visit youth.gci.org.au to see more great photos from camp, and for information on our upcoming youth events.



BEST THING EVER



WORSHIP? Giving God MORE THAN A SONG ...

This year SEP brought a new light to worship. We as campers and staff decided to really think about what the concept of worship actually is and what it may mean in our daily lives.

Through many discussions we have come to realise worship can be more than just a song. There is no doubt that music has an incredible, universal way of bringing people together and honouring God selflessly and soulfully. Worship, though, does not need to have limitations. It's not even just single acts, but rather encompasses an entire lifestyle. It is choosing to worship God with your life.

Worship has the ability to transcend worldly boundaries. In its purest form worship is what our souls were designed to do; it is the innermost part of our being. It is about what we put our time and energy into and where our heart is pointed as we perform actions in our lives.

One of the main focuses of worship class at SEP this year was to help campers understand that our lives are a blessing and that we can bring glory to God day by day. When asked what

worship was to them, campers said it can be anything from the way we listen, serve and talk to others, to the way we work, encourage one another, and place a focus on God each day.

God is intimately involved in every moment of our lives and the more opportunities we take, and time we devote to opening our hearts to his love, the more we realise he is always there – loving us, guiding us, accepting us and holding us close.

Many campers expressed feeling closest to God when out in nature, away from the busyness of it all and surrounded by his majestic works. It is in moments like those where we can truly bask in his creation, in awe of the wonders so beyond our own power.

Others expressed that it is when performing service that they feel closest to God, when doing selfless acts of kindness and love for others.

There are many ways in which we can worship. We are each unique individuals and as God's children we can share our love for him and with him in many, many ways. Whether in big groups or on our own, out in nature or inside our homes, day or night – there is no reason to feel limited or to hold back from the endless opportunities through which we can honour and glorify God.

Worship is an attitude of deep respect, of adoration and love for our creator, our father, our provider, our friend.



Listening

IT'S A MINISTRY

by Barbara Dahlgren

Years ago I helped escort a group of teens on an educational tour of Washington, D.C. Our hotel was on the outskirts of the city, so we rode a bus into a central location and walked to the various sites. This required a lot of walking. Some of the chaperones seemed to have more stamina than the kids.

ONE DAY I overheard a teen behind me complaining to one of the adults. He was enjoying the trip but the weather was hot, the days were long, he was tired, and his feet hurt. Mrs. Williams was at a loss on how to help the boy. Finally she said, "Well, Marty, what can I do about these things?"

The astute youngster replied, "I know you can't do anything, but could you please listen?"

Mrs. Williams smiled and said, "Yes, Marty. I can listen." Marty grinned and then gave her a hug.

James 1:19 tells us everyone should be quick to listen and slow to speak. On the surface, it appears the wisdom of this passage is protecting us from a faux pas like putting one's foot in one's mouth.

But if we dig deeper we know that simply holding one's tongue is not listening. Listening requires not only restraint from speaking but also active, mental participation in what someone is saying. Listening connects us with others.

People have an innate need to be listened to. Swiss psychiatrist Paul Tournier wrote, "It is impossible to over-emphasize the immense need humans have to be really listened to, to be taken seriously, to be understood..."

I must admit my listening skills are weak at best. Too often what people say drifts into a drone of "blah, blah, blah, blah, blah..." I look into their eyes, nod my head in compliance and whisper "uh-huh" a few times while I think about what I want for dinner. But that really isn't

listening, is it? There is a difference in faking interest and taking interest. Listening is a conscious choice. It's a courtesy, yea verily, even an act of love we extend to others.

In its purest form, listening is a ministry. We minister to others by listening to them. We are giving them our time and our attention. We don't have to offer solutions. We don't have to fix people or their frustrations. In fact, many times people will come to conclusions about problems on their own, just by talking it through.

Listening is a way of saying, "You are important to me. I value your opinion. I empathize with what you are going through." Or in simpler terms, listening to others says, "I care about you!" 🌐

Text without context

IMAGINE, FOR A moment, that you are travelling abroad on holidays. You write a letter home to your family. Yes, a letter, not an email, a text, or an update on your Facebook page – we're imagining, remember.

You begin by saying, "I hope and pray that you are really fit and well, and that everything is going well for you", and you finish by signing off with "I wish you every health and happiness".

You say in your letter: "this trip is one of the best things I have ever done. I love it. Although I must confess there have been some days that were harder and more tiring than I had planned. On those days I have sometimes felt that I hate travel (particularly trains!), but after a meal and a good night's sleep, I am refreshed and eagerly anticipate the adventures of the next day."

Oh, and with the football season starting, you can't help but throw in, "Here's hoping the Broncos trample the Cowboys, and the Saints kill off the Demons."

How would you feel if someone who read your letter claimed that you had said everyone should be healthy and wealthy, or it is their fault? And further quoted you as saying that you "hate travel", and think no one should use a train. What would you say?

Well, you would probably say, hang on a minute, I've been misquoted, and my comments have been taken out of context. Because that is precisely what has happened.

And it happens all the time. Everyday someone (a politician, for example?) complains that

some part of the media have taken a comment they made out of context. (Shock, horror, not the media, surely?) (Text alert: here's a little hyperbole and irony thrown in for effect.)

It happens when a person takes what someone else has said or written and, without regard to the specific purpose and intent of the author, fits a carefully selected and limited portion of it within his or her own framework, thus sometimes changing – a little or a lot – what the original author had to say.

And it can happen too when reading the Bible.

If we just take a word, a phrase, or a verse, and quote it to fit our beliefs, we can often, even with the best of intentions, misquote the text, and misrepresent what the original author has to say. No serious student of the Bible wants to do this. It's called "proof-texting" – taking a selected section of the biblical text to "prove" something you already

want to say or believe, without taking the context of the verse or the intent of the author into consideration. That is, without seeking to understand what the original author meant with that word, phrase, verse or section of text.

How can we avoid doing this? If God chose to communicate his truth through the conventions of human language, it behoves us to pay attention to these conventions. There are a few simple principles to keep in mind. The first one is to read and think in terms of context.

In previous articles, we have looked at the reality that a word only has meaning in the context of a sentence. The sentence is best understood in the context of the paragraph. And the paragraph is best understood within the context of the chapter, and indeed the whole book we are reading.

Remember, the authors of the Bible didn't write chapters and verses – these were later

additions, for ease of access. And for that, they work well. But by far the best way to read the Bible is as the authors wrote it – as complete books. As a Gospel, or a letter, for example. Not just a series of disconnected statements that can be fitted within your own framework. Just as you wouldn't pull bits and phrases out of a letter without regard for the context, so too we need to avoid pulling words or phrases out of the letters found in the Bible, and building doctrines or belief systems on such narrow foundations.

We can summarise this by saying: *a text without a context is a pretext for a proof-text*. And proof texts are often the cause of serious misunderstanding and misreading of the text that God has given to us.

PS Now imagine someone has discovered your letter in a thousand year's time. Imagine what they could, if uninformed, do with your football references! 🌐

FOR MORE INFORMATION on how to make the most of your Bible reading, you can sign up for the Ambassador College of Christian Ministry 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@ambascol.org or telephone 07 5553 6000.

For reflection and discussion

- Read the whole book (e.g., start Ephesians at chapter 1, verse 1, and read through to the end)
- Read the book in more than one translation
- Listen to someone read the book aloud (such as a CD recording of the Scriptures) – many letters, for example, were designed to be read aloud to the congregation
- Read the chapter
- Make a habit of reading paragraphs, not just a phrase or verse
- Read and think in terms of context, not texts at random

What does this verse mean? 3 John 2 (KJV): "Beloved, I wish above all things that thou mayest prosper and be in health, even as thy soul prospereth."

Can you think of some examples of proof-texting you have heard?



“
For I received from the Lord what I also passed on to you: the Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, ‘This is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of me’. In the same way, after supper he took the cup, saying, ‘This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me’. For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes.”

– 1 Corinthians 11:23-26



Hmmm ... *Don’t ask the Lord to guide your footsteps if you are not willing to move your feet.*
– Anonymous

Beautiful young people are accidents of nature, but beautiful old people are works of art.
– Eleanor Roosevelt

Some people, no matter how old they get, never lose their beauty – they merely move it from their faces into their hearts.
– Martin Buxbaum

I am only one, but still I am one. I cannot do everything, but still I can do something; and because I cannot do everything, I will not refuse to do something that I can do.
– Helen Keller

I wish, brothers and sisters, that we could all imitate “the pearl oyster”. A hurtful particle intrudes itself into its shell, and this vexes and grieves it. It cannot reject the evil, but what does it do but ‘cover’ it with a precious substance extracted out of its own life, by which it turns the intruder into a pearl! Oh, that we could do so with the new provocations we receive from our fellow Christians, so that pearls of patience, gentleness, and forgiveness might be bred within us by that which otherwise would have harmed us.
– Charles Spurgeon