

T^{GCI}oday

GRACE COMMUNION INTERNATIONAL AUSTRALIA
WINTER 2015

DEEP CHURCH

Postcard
From Africa

HOW
Inspiring

WELCOME



John McLean

JUST BREATHE

BREATHE IN. FEELS good? You've just been inspired, in the most basic sense of the word. Linguistically and biologically, to be "inspired" means to breathe in.

It's no accident that after his resurrection John says, "Jesus breathed on them and said receive the Holy Spirit" (John 20:22). In a deliberate play on words, the Holy Spirit is the Holy Breath. God breathed life into the first Adam, and so Jesus the Second Adam breathes the Spirit on his disciples. This Spirit unites us with Christ, and takes us into the life of the Triune God. Just as breath is essential to life, so the Spirit is essential to the new life of the new creation. It is from the source of life itself, the guarantee of life eternal.

Consistent with this, in the Old Testament the Hebrew word *ruach* which we translate as Spirit basically means "breath" or "wind". It is the creative power of God by which God continually animates all things. The Holy Spirit breathes life and creativity into humanity. Through Jesus, the Holy Spirit draws us into nothing less than genuine participation in fellowship, the communion that is Father, Son and Spirit. That's inspiring!

Another linguistic definition of inspire is to infuse with feeling and thought, to infuse creatively. This too is a good description of the Spirit – who infuses the Ordinary with the Extraordinary. Rather than chasing after extraordinary experience, the Spirit gives us, among other things, new eyes to see the new creation anew – to see the grace and love of God at work in the common, ordinary every-day matters of life. We find inspiration in the world around us, in one another, in simply living in grace every day. We hope you find encouragement and inspiration in the articles in this issue of our magazine, in your church community, and in your everyday life. In doing so, you just may find yourself inspiring others.

The Spirit and Christ share the same character, the same love, the same self-emptying power, the same purpose, the same personal reality of God's divine love.

As you breathe in, remember that others around you are breathing the same air, and have the same need to do so to animate their existence. God's love is for all humanity, desiring that all share in the fellowship of Father, Son and Spirit.

In this season of Pentecost, we celebrate the person and work of the Spirit. We celebrate the creation of the church through the Spirit. We celebrate our shared fellowship together in Christ in the Spirit. The Holy Spirit is nothing less than the personal presence of God in our lives and in our midst. We celebrate the Holy Spirit, who brings us into communion with the Father and Son, and with one another. And that's inspiring.

Breathe in, deeply.

John McLean is Mission and National Director, Australia

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HOW

Inspiring!

"The meaning of life is to find your gift. The purpose of life is to give it away."

SOMETIMES A SIMPLE quote like this can inspire us to change the way we look at things, behave, and live. Sometimes a few well chosen words from someone we respect can inspire us to great change or courage. Sometimes a piece of music, a landscape or a building will inspire our thoughts above the mundane and everyday so we contemplate things like love, beauty, hope and wisdom.

Inspiration is an important part of life, because inspiration challenges us to

do more, to accept challenges, to hang tough. But it also stimulates us to learn and grow. It can provide new insights, open up new possibilities and create new ways of thinking and being.

What is inspiration?

The dictionary describes inspiration as the process of being mentally stimulated to do or feel something, especially to do something creative. It also means, and has its origins in the idea of, divine influence.

Writers, musicians and artists talk about inspiration – about seeking it, finding it and responding to it in their work. Work that in turn can inspire many others. Designers, architects and chefs seek inspiration for their creations. But

inspiration is not reserved solely for "creative" types; after all, to be human is to be creative. All of us seek inspiration for the work we do and the lives we lead.

So where do we find inspiration? How do we experience it? And how can we share it? Consider these sources and how each influences your mindset, spirit and energy – and how our own lives can, in turn, inspire others.

Nature

Perhaps the most common, familiar and shared experience of inspiration in our human experience is our response to the beauty, the power, the gentleness of the natural environment. Whether it's the ocean or a river, mountains or the desert, a forest or a park, many people



FOR REFLECTION

What Inspires You?

Are there places, experiences, words, music, images that inspire you? How do they inspire you? Why? What responses do those things evoke in you?

Who Inspires You?

Are there people – personally known to you or perhaps just by reputation – who inspire you? How to these people inspire you? What responses do these people inspire from you?

What Inspires Your Faith?

Are there words, experiences, places, people or thoughts that inspire your faith? What is it about those things that inspires you and how do you find yourself responding?

find natural environments provide space for reflection, meditation and regaining a sense of appreciation, peace and wonder.

But nature inspires in other ways, too. For example, nature has provided inspiration for inventions and design. Velcro was invented based on observing how burrs would cling to dog hair. Green buildings have been inspired by termite mounds. And wind turbine design has been informed by the detail of whales' fins and tails. It's known as "biomimicry". Inspiration is not simply an emotional or psychological experience but a practical one too.

"Those who look for the laws of Nature as a support for their new works collaborate with the creator," said Antoni Gaudi, the 19th century Spanish architect.

The Arts

Human history is told through story. From oral histories and traditions, to

pictures, music and dramatic renderings of events, we learn and share through stories, song, performance and imagery.

Many of us have had the experience of watching a performance like *Les Miserables*, and coming away exhilarated by the passion and courage of characters in a story. Or perhaps we've gazed at a painting and been inspired by the beauty or conviction of the subject. Sometimes a piece of music will inspire us to run faster, be bolder, or simply to be resilient.

Built Environment

Just as the natural environment can inspire, so too can structures from bridges to cathedrals, skyscrapers to monuments, landscaped gardens to railway stations.

In part this is because our built environment is inspired by nature, culture and experience. The builder becomes a translator and an artist. "Every great

architect is – necessarily – a great poet," said Frank Lloyd Wright. "He [sic] must be a great original interpreter of his time, his day, his age."

We know that the environments in which we live, work and play can have a significant influence on our thinking, our creativity, our productivity and our relationships. Creating pleasant and inspiring spaces for people to live, work and connect in is important to bringing out the best in each other.

Faith

However we experience it – through the written Word, meditation, prayer, music and song, fellowship, or service – our faith is an interactive experience throughout our lives. At times individual, at times shared and at times collective, our faith is inspired in many ways. Not everyone's journey and experience of faith is the same; not everyone's faith is inspired by the same words, the same

songs or the same experiences. But our faith is inspired by our experiences and it can also be an inspiration to others.

Stories of faith, journeys of faith and expressions of faith are varied by experience, personality, culture and time. But just as faith can be challenged, so too can it be inspired. And of course, faith in itself can be an inspiration.

People (including us)

All of us have experienced the inspiration that comes from another person. Parent and grandparents, teachers and coaches, pastors and mentors are typical sources of encouragement and inspiration through their presence and personal expressions of belief in us. So too, famous figures can be sources of inspiration, from those who have faced adversity to those who challenged things that were wrong in the face of opposition.

And that reminds us that each one of us has the potential to inspire others.

Each one of us has the potential to inspire others ... through our words, our behaviour and our presence

This is true whether we are parents or children, managers or team members, teachers or students, coaches or players. Each of us can, through our words, our behaviour and our presence in the lives of others, be sources of inspiration to others. Never underestimate the potential you have to inspire someone else to take up a challenge, to be strong, to be compassionate, to try something new, or to simply do what is right. ☺

VALE VAL LEECH

1941–2015



LONG-TIME CHURCH OFFICE employee Val Leech died on Monday March 30. She passed away peacefully after a short stay in hospital. Her death was very sudden, and quite a shock to all those who knew her. Her funeral was conducted on April 8, with John McLean, Rod Matthews and Kerry Gubb delivering messages.

"She was such a part of the history of our denomination, as well as the history-keeper, here in Australia," said National Director John McLean. "She has been an outstanding employee of the church for over 40 years, serving in various roles, even working for a time in the office in the US. She was a member of the national office team in Australia, fulfilling a variety of duties and responsibilities, including that of Editorial Assistant for the magazine. Val was widely known across Australia and nations beyond, and respected and appreciated as a true servant, always diligent, cooperative and happily willing to help."

Val first attended church in Melbourne, Vic., many years ago, and was baptised in 1964. Lynne Vickers from Melbourne wrote the following: "I have known Val since we took her to church in 1964. I am so glad that she died still working – she loved being useful. I know you will miss her positive, smiling face. I know I will. I have many lovely memories we shared together."

Val had an extensive range of interests, from books to airplanes. And a quick sense of humour. She was an invaluable part of the life of our church family. She made a great contribution to all our lives and our whole denomination. "She was a gem," as a friend of hers said, and will be much missed by us all.

MERE-CHURCH, ME-CHURCH, OR Deep Church

by John McLean



IT WAS A sunny day. In the outside lane on the busy freeway, an expensive sports car, top down, raced along the road, passing everything in sight. The driver was busy. In his extended arm, he held a “selfie” stick out in front of him, taking photos of himself and his car, apparently oblivious to the rest of the road users and the potential danger he might cause to himself and others.

Hyper-individualism

“Hyper-individualism.” It’s the word used by researcher, author and well known social commentator Hugh Mackay to describe the state of Australian society and the loss of community. Not just a focus on the self, but an active promotion of, even obsession with, “me” – my wants, thoughts, desires. My world. My life. What I had for breakfast, what I think of the coffee I am currently drinking.

And a growing assumption that everyone else must be as interested in me as I am.

Yet deep down, we know there is something seriously flawed with this. Deep in the human psyche, we know we need meaningful friendships, lasting relationships and deep connections. We know we need human contact, to love and be loved. At the abiding core of what it means to be human, we know we need one another.

This is why philosopher and author Alain de Botton writes that “one of the losses modern society feels most keenly is the loss of community”. As our society becomes increasingly technocratic, mobile, secularised, densely populated but increasingly fractured, “social isolation” – loneliness – is one of the biggest social problems in our nation. What an irony. An increasing focus on the self, and an accompanying

increase in isolation and loneliness.

Theologian James Torrance is fond of reminding us that our view of God determines our view of ourselves, and indeed, of everything else. God dwells, in his very Being, in fellowship, communion. He has never been a lonely, isolated, solitary, aloof and separate being. God’s very existence is relational.

There is nothing mechanical, abstract, or impersonal about God. God, John tells us, is love. We were created for communion by the God whose very being is communion.

This is so fundamental we can’t afford to miss it, gloss over it, forget it, or move on to something else. Good theology starts with God, not with ourselves. When we start with ourselves, we get a skewed view of the gospel, and of life. Such an approach can leave us with a distorted theology that actually feeds hyper-individualism, rather than answering

it. You may have come across the line that runs like this: I know God loves me. I am his beloved. I have the Holy Spirit! So I don’t really need you, or anybody else. I certainly don’t need church. All those difficult people! It’s all about me, and I’m okay in God.

This is partly true – you are beloved by God. But when we start with God, we see the obvious, unavoidable, ineluctable truth is that this means we share in the life and love of God – a love that is inclusive, that reaches out to others in grace and kindness. A love that indeed is self-emptying, service focused and other-centred. Nothing could run more against hyper-individualism than the other-centredness of God revealed in the Incarnation, in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus, and brought to communal life in the creation of the church.

Easter and Pentecost

At Pentecost, God breathes life into the new creation of the church through the Spirit. The good news of Easter is followed by the good news of Pentecost. Pentecost is in fact the culmination of a season of celebration that begins with Easter. The two go together. The Spirit of the Risen Christ brings the church to life. This Holy Spirit creates the church, a communion of people in fellowship with God – and one another.

Jesus came from the inner life of God to show us who God is, and to save us – not just from sin, but for fellowship. God’s purpose is sharing his life and love with humanity – with creating communion. And the church is part of this plan – “a long range plan, in which everything would be brought together and summed up in him, everything in deepest heaven, everything on planet earth” (Ephesians 1:6-10 *The Message*).

Mere-Church, Me-Church, or Deep Church

It’s easy – fashionable, even – to dismiss church. After all, church is made up of other very imperfect people. And people are messy, have their faults and idiosyncrasies, and, let’s be honest, are often difficult, complicated and hard to love. Why put up with that? In any given congregation there’s usually a lot of diversity. People are different, think differently, have different opinions, are not necessarily “my” crowd.

So it’s easy to condescend to church – **Mere-Church** – as a dysfunctional group of people who are sometimes judgmental, frequently boring and often apparently hypocritical. The church clearly has lots of weaknesses, faults and problems. It often fails



to live up to its high calling. So, why bother?

Much easier to do **Me-Church**. Just me and God. With no one else to spoil it. No one else to put up with, be patient with, serve, be gracious to, or just plain tolerate. Just me and God, who loves me in spite of everything I do (or don’t do). I can just sing the hymns I want to. Or not sing at all, if that is my prejudice. Sorry, preference.

Clearly, the Pentecost notion of church flies in the face of individualism, let alone hyper-individualism. C.S. Lewis coined the phrase **Deep Church**, which gets at understanding church from the inside, at the often hidden spiritual structures beneath the surface of things. There is always more going on than we see. We never see the church whole and complete. Deep church captures the concept of the Trinitarian realities at work from which the church is formed, from which your congregation draws life.

The Holy Spirit brings us into fellowship. Pentecost draws us out of isolation, separation, and into communion with the Father, Son and Spirit – and with one another. The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of adoption, whereby we call God Father, Jesus Brother, and one another sisters and brothers. The Holy Spirit is always in relationship, creatively animating life and fellowship. So our life is life together, not life in isolation.

The church is not an accident of history, to be confined to an unenlightened past, but part of the divine plan of God. The church is not a wish-dream, a utopian society, or the

Kingdom of God. Nor is it God’s “Policeman” on earth to judge and punish sinners.

The Holy Spirit opens us up to be other-centred, as God is. That is, the Holy Spirit doesn’t create a closed community of the church, but opens the church up to the whole world, in love and genuine care for all others. In the Spirit, the church’s mission functions so that all may have access to the Father through Jesus (Ephesians 2:18).

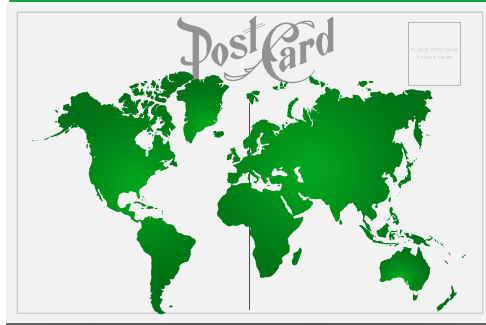
Church is made up of congregations of ordinary people, with all their human faults and flaws, in and through whom Christ chooses to be present to the world. Church takes place in worship, baptism, Eucharist, but also in the ordinary stuff of everyday life – love, service, kindness, compassion. A smile to those who need it. Food for the needy. Help for the marginalised. Being a comfort, encouragement and edification to others.

Church gives expression to the nature of God. It is participating in his mission, his ministry, his work on earth. It is the place we learn to love one another, and all mankind, the way the Father, Son and Spirit love one another. It is the very antidote to hyper-individualism, loneliness and isolation.

At Pentecost we celebrate the Holy Spirit, and the Spirit’s creation of Deep Church – of other-centred communion, participating in the life of the Triune God. So celebrate the life of your congregation, and the other congregations that make up the Body of Christ. And share the Spirit of communion, grace and love when and wherever you can. ☺

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PHOTO: © GETTY IMAGES/NUSTOCK



GCI CHURCHES AND WORK IN Africa

Once in a lifetime conference

Elders and congregational leaders representing GCI from countries around Africa met with Pastor General Joseph Tkach, our Mission Developers and members of the US home office team for a Pan African Conference in May.

THE CONFERENCE WAS held in a Youth Camp facility at Bela Bela, a little over two hours north of Johannesburg. Co-host and Mission Developer Kalengule Kaoma said it was a "once in a lifetime" conference for many participants.

The participants travelled there from Angola, Botswana, Ghana, Kenya, Madagascar, Malawi, Mozambique, South Africa, Zimbabwe and Zambia. A number of leaders from other countries were unable to attend because of health issues or prevented from travelling for political reasons. It was truly inspiring to see many people from different nations, backgrounds and languages meeting in accord, joy and harmony. Their love of the gospel, embrace of their calling, and communion together was a delight to share. An attitude of appreciation and thankfulness, not taking anything for granted, permeated the event.

Joseph Tkach said, "I'm humbled by their enthusiasm for the gospel and their love for our GCI church family."

As a microcosm of the work of the gospel, the international communion of the church and our life together in Christ,

the conference was a very special privilege to share. It was memorable for the wonderful worship, teaching, interaction and fellowship shared together. Given the front page news in the papers and lead items on the television bulletins at the time focused on the riots, assaults and deaths associated with "xenophobia" running through the country, the contrast could not have been more vivid.

Australian Mission Developer John McLean was asked to talk about the ministry training available through ACCM, and to take two sessions on Christian Leadership during the conference. These sessions were an introduction to the ACCM class. The sessions were interactive, and the participation of the group was wonderful, in the midst of a busy conference schedule. ACCM is able to offer ongoing equipping to our African ministry leaders through our Christian Ministry program. We can offer a quality, theologically sound and unifying program, as well as continue to support and build the relationships of our international church family.

Several leaders, most of them younger people, want to pursue training with ACCM. Most of them come from situations where the tuition, although modest, is out of their reach, so ACCM will look for ways to scholarship them through their ministry qualification. This would be a wonderful opportunity for Australian churches to provide the help and support these leaders and young people who are part of our family in Africa need. ☺



Kalengule Kaoma with John McLean



Pastor General, Joseph Tkach, addresses the Pan African Conference



John McLean's session on Christian Leadership

During the conference, John McLean caught up with Kalengule Kaoma, who has twenty nations under his care, for an interview.

JMc: You are Mission Director (MD) for a large and varied region. What are some of the biggest challenges you face?

KK: Yes, there is a lot of travel involved. Africa has challenges with distance, poverty, languages – and of course varying political circumstances across different borders.

Pan Africa Conference report



Delegates with Joe and Tammy Tkach from Malawi (far-left) and Kenya (left)

by Kalengule Kaoma

PAN AFRICAN CONFERENCE (PAC) was born out of many requests from our African general leadership who wanted to come together. Coupled with this request, an appeal for connectivity also arose. Loneliness and isolation affect many leaders in Africa. Others hear of this GCI global work but wonder whether there are other congregations near them.

In planning the conference, the following objectives were aimed at:

- bring African leaders up to date on GCI's core theology
- introduction to ACCM theological training
- help GCI African leaders create connectivity among themselves
- share ideas on African Missions, church administration and church finances.

All these objectives were achieved. We thank and praise God for this achievement. Our teams which worked very hard on accommodation, meals, logistics, presentations, praise and worship, set up and take down, communications, media, PA system, translations, intercessors, grounds and all unnoticed but essential departments deserve a huge hug of appreciation.

Emmanuel Okai, GCI Ghana National Director, recently wrote: "The learning, fellowship and reunions were fantastic. It was a real blessing to be part of the ... conferences. My family truly appreciate our sharing in the ... conference." These sentiments are echoed by many other delegates.

For our brother from Madagascar, Dr. Rigobert Rafiringason, he has started using what he learned during the conference. "We are sharing many messages from the Pan African Conference [with] our congregation. The last sermon was about the Triune God."

Even though some leaders endured long trips to and from South Africa, they felt the conference provided worthwhile opportunities of learning, fellowship and connectivity. Pastor Silvester Nkosi lives in Lilongwe, Malawi. In his update he declared the conference "wonderful" in spite of a long long and tiring journey. "I just arrived on Thursday 6 p.m after three days of travelling. I used three buses, four minibuses [vans], one car, one motor cycle and one bicycle. Thankfully, I am now safe at home."

All in all, the conference brought many brothers and sisters together to learn at the feet of our denominational leaders.

JMc: Is there a strong "Health-Wealth" movement in the countries you supervise?

KK: Very strong. The health-wealth gospel is very attractive, especially to people who have very little, and little informed knowledge of the gospel. We teach people the value of education and work – that you need to work to achieve your goals. But some people have been drawn away by the promises of the quick fix that the health/wealth teaching offers.

JMc: You have had a lot of experience with groups wanting to join GCI. How do you handle that?

KK: We get a constant stream of requests – some direct, some via the web

sites in the US, Australia, and elsewhere. We take time to get to know one another. We try to build a relationship, and see where God leads. The challenge of distance and language often means this is not easy. However, in God's grace many groups have joined us through this process, and continue to do so.

JMc: Tell us about the Pastor's Basket Project you have implemented?

KK: We have started the Pastor's Basket Project to help our volunteer pastors. Some are very poor, and their church is unable to pay them anything. So we give them a small amount of money to invest – some have invested it in growing vegetables,

for example. As they draw an income from their investment projects, they then repay the money they were given and it is passed on to others who need it.

JMc: So it's a form of micro-finance for volunteer pastors in Africa?

KK: Yes, that's exactly what it is.

JMc: Delightful to chat with you, as always.

KK: Please ask the Australian brethren to continue to pray for us, for the Pastor's Basket Project, and for the development of our young leaders. And thank the Australian churches for their generous support of projects and needs in our part of the world.

WANT TO HELP?

You can scholarship an African ministry leader through ACCM by contacting the National Office on **07 5553 6000**. If you would like to contribute to the Pastor's Basket Project in Africa please visit **www.gci.org.au/pastorsbasket**.

Sydney, Wollongong, Bathurst and Canberra in Africa



Top: Two school blocks which need roofing. These two buildings will house six classrooms out of a projected nine classrooms, staff room and computer room. Above-left: Toilet buildings for staff and students. Above-right: Church Community School Migori Area. Enrolment is 320 and consists mostly of orphans and vulnerable children.

by Rod Dean

EMMANUEL OKAI, THE national ministry leader in Ghana, asked to pass on his thanks and gratitude to the Australian churches who have financially supported various projects in Ghana including the refugee church at Buduburum, and other parts of Africa.

For many years Sydney, Wollongong, Bathurst and Canberra congregations have been involved in Ghana, Kenya/Tanzania, Malawi and Burundi. All projects and budgets are submitted annually to GCI Australia and monies sent coordinated through the National Office. Project development also requires ongoing communication with Kalengule Kaoma, a native of Zambia, who is National Director for Zambia and GCI Missions Director for much of Africa, and Emmanuel Okai, GCI Ghana National Leader, and also Theo Okai, pastor of the Buduburum refugee church. We seek their advice about the priorities of the region.

In Ghana over five years ago we joined a partnership with the Buduburum congregation made up of a group of refugees from several neighbouring troubled nations – their fifth

anniversary was celebrated recently. We have just completed a shared project in the construction of a toilet for the Buduburum congregation's hall which we purchased five years ago. We continue to help educate all the children from the congregation and provide vocational scholarships for the young adults, medical insurance for the congregation, and help provide grain. The next shared project will be a children's church hall for the 60 children who belong to our Buduburum congregation. They will hold their children's church there.

Money was sent during the drought in Malawi. Over the years we have helped pastors to have bicycles and Bibles in Tanzania and helped in construction of a church building. In consultation with Kalengule Kaoma, we are continuing to support the orphans and widows of Tanzania/Kenya as well as support the reconstruction of a school in Kenya. This last project has had a number of delays and setbacks but the school is functioning and the building of new classrooms has restarted.

We have donated to the church affected by floods in Burundi and with Kalengule's advice are looking at buying land so the Burundi church has a place to meet.



One of the most effective ways we join Jesus, is by investing in the lives of others through one-on-one relationships.

The power of one-on-one

by Rick Shallenberger

A short time ago, a woman who was very special to me died. In my teen years, I thought of Betty as my "church mom." I remember many hours of conversation when she would encourage me, push me, motivate me, correct and love me. Like most teens, I needed someone to show a personal interest in me and Betty was a person who did just that. Another was my pastor.

BOTH UNDERSTOOD THE value of one-on-one relationships as well as the power of speaking life and love into another person's life. Both were true evangelists without trying to do anything religious.

I spent a lot of time at Betty's home—admittedly not just because of her counsel, but also because she was the mother of three attractive teen girls. She always made me feel important because she showed interest in me as a person. What I found fascinating while attending her visitation, was how many others also considered Betty their church mom. She had a gift of speaking life and love into others' lives.

Pastor George had the same gift, though he demonstrated it in a different way. My family had gone through quite a bit of trauma and Pastor George didn't just give answers to my questions that I wasn't interested in anyway. He listened to what was on my heart and shared my pain. He showed interest in me, asking tough questions, then waiting patiently for my answers.

Pastor George also spoke to me about my beliefs and how they would impact my life, teaching me that prayer is simply talking with God. He then encouraged me to be honest and open in my prayers, assuring me that God

would not get angry or disappointed.

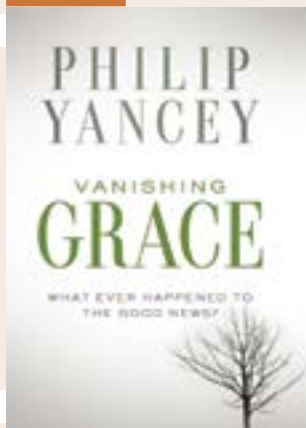
Both Betty and George understood the value of one-on-one relationships and as a result, both had a big impact on my life and helped mould me into who I am today. Both met me where I was, and simply listened. Because I knew they had my best interests at heart, I was able to listen when they offered advice and respond positively when they corrected me.

In our talk about evangelism, ministry, mission and making disciples, we can fail to note that all of these are about sharing God's love and life with people—often one person at a time.

Jesus has not asked us to do his job. What he has done is invite us to participate in what he is doing. And what he is doing is bringing good news (Luke 4:18), drawing all to himself (John 12:32), bringing many sons and daughters to glory (Hebrews 2:10), and living for, with and in God's beloved.

One of the most effective ways we join Jesus, is by investing in the lives of others through one-on-one relationship. By meeting others right where they are, loving them as they are, and sharing life with them, we may just be making a powerful difference. Living and sharing the gospel, one-on-one. ☺

PHOTO © 123RF/107070



Vanishing Grace

Reviewed by Janiece Harper

Many will have read another book by Philip Yancey on grace (*Amazing Grace*, 1997, Zondervan), that grace which, “like a sudden thaw in the middle of winter happens at unexpected moments”. That grace which “stops us short, catches the breath, disarms”, and which, “if we manipulate it, try to control it, somehow earn it” would not be grace. The grace that, in the book of Hebrews, we’re given the admonition, “See to it that no one misses the grace of God” (Hebrews 12:15).

In this book, *Vanishing Grace*, (2014, Hodder & Stoughton), Yancey describes how he began researching and writing out of “concern that the church is failing in its mission to dispense grace to a world thirsty for it”. His writings evolved from four short books into this compilation which he divides into four sections:

- Part 1:** A World Athirst;
- Part 2:** Grace Dispensers;
- Part 3:** Is It Really Good News;
- Part 4:** Faith and Culture.

Yancey records a wide range of views, interviews and writings focussed on grace or the lack of it, in the church or out of it, the way it was exhibited in the past, and the way it is being exhibited in the Post-Christian era.

A remark by a friend pro-

vided Yancey with the framework for much of his discussion of the topic in *Vanishing Grace*. His friend noted that “There are three kinds of Christians that outsiders to the faith still respect: pilgrims, activists and artists. The uncommitted will listen to them far sooner than to an evangelist or apologist”. The book addresses some of the pitfalls encountered by Christians as they are led to dispense grace. He reminds Christians how lack of grace has proved so damaging that society no longer looks to the church for the guidance it needs.

I have found this book to be both chastening and illuminating and encourage you to take the time to read right through to its “Holy Subversives” end.

Vanishing Grace, by Philip Yancey, Hodder & Stoughton, 2014

Quiet: The power of introverts in a world that can't stop talking

“Our lives are shaped as profoundly by personality as by gender or race,” writes Susan Cain, a lawyer, researcher and writer whose work on the (distinct) subjects of shyness and introversion has appeared in the *New York Times*, *Time* and *Psychology Today*. “And the single most important aspect of personality – the ‘north and south’ of temperament, as one scientist puts it – is where we

fall on the introvert-extrovert spectrum. Our place on this continuum influences our choice of friends and mates, and how we make conversation, resolve differences, and show love ... Yet today we make room for a remarkably narrow range of personality styles. We’re told that to be great is to be bold, to be happy is to be sociable ... Depending on which study you consult, one-third to one half of Americans are introverts ... (Given that the United States is among the most extroverted of nations, the number must be at least as high in other parts of the world.) If you’re not an introvert yourself, you are surely raising, managing, married to, or couple with one.”

The different preferences people have for these two ways of orienting themselves to their outer and inner worlds can be described briefly like this: Where the extrovert is more drawn towards the outer world of people and things, the introvert is more drawn to the inner world of concepts and ideas. (It’s important to note that we all experience both worlds, but have a preference more towards one than the other.)

Susan Cain has written a comprehensive and helpful book that shows how our contemporary western world dramatically undervalues introversion. She describes “the rise of the Extrovert Ideal

in the twentieth century”. Her book is not, however, a condemnation of extroversion, nor is it an attempt to suggestion introversion is a superior way of being. Rather, she shows how easily we miss the contributions of those with an introverted preference, how those who prefer introversion can manage the stress of extraverted environments, and how we can all better manage introvert-extrovert relationships.

The book is divided into four parts:

- 1. The Extrovert Ideal**, which explores how the culture of extroversion came to be accepted as “appropriate” and the way to success, and also looks at the limitations of group work versus the power of working alone.
- 2. Your Biology, Your Self?**, which looks at nature and nurture and the role of experience in shaping us and the “rubber band theory of personality” ... “We are like rubber bands at rest. We are elastic and can stretch ourselves, but only so much.”
- 3. Do All Cultures Have An Extrovert Ideal?**, which looks at East-West differences, individual versus group identity, and “soft power”.
- 4. How To Love, How to Work**, which explores “When should you act more extroverted than you really are?”; the importance of “restorative niches” in daily life (for both extroverts and intro-



Stéphane Audran stars as Babette in *Babette's Feast*



verts); and how to understand different communication styles.

Quiet: The power of introverts in a world that can't stop talking, by Susan Cain, Crown Publishers, 2012.

Babette's Feast

Twelve people sit around a table about to begin a sumptuous meal – a feast cooked by a lady named Babette. Eleven of those at the table have already decided that they will not enjoy it. They have even decided they will not speak while they eat, but reluctantly consume the food set before them in silence.

The group are the remainders of an austere, strict, Lutheran sect in a small village. Their domineering pastor has died, and the congregation has splintered into several tiny remnants. Even among this small gathering, there are people who will no longer speak to one another, and who harbour hurts and offences long past.

Their religious experience has been exceedingly narrow, legalistic and judgmental. They have been busy rejecting the joys and worldly pleasures of life so they can be closer to God. This life on earth is seen

as something to be merely endured as a way to qualify for the next. Their regime has been well intentioned, but exclusive, hard, harsh, dogmatic and exceedingly rigid. Although they have heard grace preached every Sunday, they have little experience of it.

The movie *Babette's Feast* captures this claustrophobic atmosphere and experience well. The pace and style of the movie itself reflect the tedious nature of their religious life in their small, bleak community. The congregation wear only black; the streets are muddy and the houses are little better than hovels with thatched roofs. The subplot of the disappointments and missed opportunities of the pastor’s two daughters who try to hold their small religious community together sadly contribute to the layers within the story.

Unknown by the group, Babette was formerly a famous chef in Paris. She had to flee for her life amid the political turmoil in France, and landed in this harsh isolated environment. For twelve years she has diligently worked without pay to humbly serve their little community, even making their food – boiled cod and boiled

The movie is, of course, a rich parable of grace ...

Babette spends everything she has as a gift to the group who barely understand what she is giving them

bread – the way they have traditionally eaten it. Still, she has been treated as an outsider. When she wins a lottery (a friend back in Paris has continued to put her numbers in) she decides to use the money to cook a sumptuous feast for those who have taken her in.

As she serves each course, those around the table begin to visibly thaw. Only the twelfth person at the table – a widely travelled military man, a nephew of one of the older group members – has any idea what the courses are. Nevertheless, the others simply can't help enjoying the tastes and flavours of the food, in spite of their determination not to. Conversation begins, smiles appear. Even those who had refused to speak to one another begin to talk again, and one person admits a wrong he has done to another in the group.

The movie is, of course, a

rich parable of grace. Babette spends everything she has as a gift to the group who barely understand what she is giving them. She receives very little thanks for her labours and sacrifice. But something happens to the people involved. Light begins to dawn, joy breaks in to their harsh existence, a whole new dimension of appreciation of life and God begins to take shape through her generous and gracious gift. Grace flutters in among them. The penultimate scene sees the group join hands and join in singing the hymns of their faith – a communion scene.

The movie captures both the prisons of legalism, and the amazing nature of grace. It's what Christianity has to offer to the world, but so often doesn't. As a parable of grace, the movie is well worth watching.

Babette's Feast, 1987. Directed by Gabriel Axel

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Echuca-Moama, Vic.....19-25 September
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Mandurah, WA.....28 September - 5 October
Ulladulla, NSW.....28 September - 5 October
Ulverstone, Tas.....19-25 October

New Zealand.....29 September - 3 October
Ngongotaha, Rotorua
North India.....23 October - 26 October
Hyderabad
South India.....dates to be confirmed
Srirangapatna, Mysore
Malaysia.....1 October - 4 October
Port Dickson



For the latest details see
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GCI News Items

Featured News



'A Flourishing Life' National Conference is to be held at Broadbeach on the Gold Coast from 2-5 July. All welcome. [Read More](#)



Join us for our annual youth and young adults camp! This will be spending time together from 2-5 July in Belgrave, Victoria. This weekend is a great chance to reconnect with friends and spend time in worship, discussion and study together. [Read More](#)

Latest News

ACCM Learning weekend for Young Adults

28/09/2015:
 All young adults are warmly invited to participate in an interactive ACCM Learning weekend with ACCM Director John McLean, Al Kurzawa and Matt Gudze - talking and learning more about the nature of God and the nature and function of Christian Leaders. [Read More](#)

Perseverance 10

08/09/2015:
 Perseverance is a time of great rejoicing, celebration and joy. Time to celebrate our international communion of grace, part of the Body of Christ, open to living and sharing the gospel, the love of God, with the world. [Read More](#)

National Conference - June 13-14, 2015

21/09/2015:
 Our National Conference is almost open to all. Cut off dates for registration is May 20. So, please don't miss out if you are able to attend. We would love to see you there! [Read More](#)

Headings 0015

10/09/2015



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ACCM

NEXT GENERATION Young adults

Christian Leadership Class
August 1-2, Melbourne, Vic

Instructors: John McLean, Al Kurzawa and Matt Gudze

Melbourne is hosting a very special weekend for our Young Adults from around Australia

All young adults are warmly invited to participate in an interactive ACCM Learning weekend with ACCM Director John McLean, Al Kurzawa and Matt Gudze - talking and learning more about the nature of God and the nature and function of 'Christian Leadership'. This is a wonderful opportunity to deepen your understanding and relationship with God, while developing your knowledge and skills for leadership in the Christian community, your career, and in all of life. It's a special occasion to share learning together, as well as fun, friendship and connecting with others from all around the country. You'll be glad you came. **The course is part of the ACCM Diploma in Christian Ministry.**

Course: ACCM Christian Leadership

Food: Lunch, snacks and tea and coffee provided for the two days

Accommodation: Billeting is available locally for this weekend.

Social: Time to engage with all throughout the weekend. Saturday evening there will be opportunity to have a meal/go out as a group or meet up with others as you prefer.

Details

When: August 1-2, 9am to 4pm each day


Where: Pembroke Primary School, Lawson Road, Mooroolbark

Cost: \$50 is the very special discounted youth offer for this weekend

We'd love to see you there!

Sign up at <http://www.gci.org.au/ACCMLeadership/> or contact Al Kurzawa at al.kurzawa@gci.org.au or contact the National Office on 07 5553 6000





"May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope."

– Romans 15:13 (ESV)

PHOTO: GETTY IMAGES/MYCOLAE