

Luke's Journal

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CHRISTIAN MEDICAL
& DENTAL FELLOWSHIP
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**Marriage practice,
biblical interpretation,
and the church's
discernment**

There is a time for
everything... Work
and family life: does
resilience matter?

The Trinity:
A Divine Model
for the Human
Family

**Parenting in
an Age of
Anxiety**

Family Violence

Some thoughts from a
Christian in the field of
Sexual Health

Family Matters

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Vol 19 No 2	Sept 2014	Integral Mission or Holistic Transformation
Vol 20 No 1	Feb 2015	"You are What You Eat"
Vol 20 No 2	Nov 2015	Standing Together in the Public Square

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editorial

Family Matters

In this edition of *Luke's Journal*, writers take up various aspects of the umbrella theme "Family Matters." The "Institution of family" is as ancient as civilisation itself. Old issues regularly resurface. New challenges surprise us.

The Genesis creation account culminates in the formation of the first family. God declares "it is not good for man to be alone." David in the 68th Psalm sings that "God... is a father of the fatherless, and a judge of the widows, and he sets the solitary in families," or as the ESV has it: "in a home." Yet the introduction of sin into this first society comes through the family itself. Husband and wife conspire to rebel against God, and the children are the first dysfunctional family. While God's first intention for society is a happy family life, the devil's first intention is to use the family for sinful rebellion.

Yet the Scripture goes beyond this. The Lord Jesus himself said: "A person's enemies will be those of his own household. Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me, and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me." This indeed is a hard saying – not in its clarity so much as in its implications. Paul does not make it any easier when he writes to the Corinthians: "To the unmarried and the widows I say that it is good for them to remain single as I am... I say this to secure your undivided devotion to the Lord." It can be argued that he writes to a specific context, but the principle remains that service of God is the highest calling, (though we may have trouble endorsing Whitfield's reported comment about John Wesley: God blessed him with a shrew of a wife!)



For many of us a happy family life is God's greatest earthly good, but as in this issue we consider family matters we must ever remain sensitive to those to whom it has been denied, and honour those who in Jesus' words "have made themselves eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven."

Finally we can note George Harpur's comment on Paul's phrase in Ephesians about the "Father from whom every family in heaven and earth is named," that the church is a family of God sharing his very life and nature.

John Foley

Co-Editor

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In the previous edition of *Luke's Journal*, Denise Cooper Clarke's article "Hot buttons and cool reason" was inadvertently attributed to Catherine Hollier.

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– copy by mid-June 2016

A 20th Anniversary Luke's Journal – Health & Hope
– copy by September 2016

The Trinity

A Divine Model for the Human Family

by Dave Andrews

Dave is an author and community worker for TEAR Australia.

The Holy Trinity is a picture of the ultimate reality of God – as three persons in one community – devoted to love and justice – living in harmony for all eternity.

The ultimate reality in the universe is not impersonal – but personal. God is not chance 'playing dice with the universe'. But a family of three persons living compassionately in communion with each other and the world they have made.'

The Trinity As Persons

A person is 'a distinct identity'.¹ The great Scottish personalist philosopher, John Macmurray, says a person is a distinct identity as an 'agent' – who acts and interacts, and as a 'subject' – who reflects upon their actions.² In their actions, a person does what is important to them; and in their reflections, a person thinks about what they feel is significant; thus – Macmurray says – a person is an identity who possesses the capacity to think, to feel and to act.³

Trinitarian theologian, Baxter Kruger, says God is 'not a divine abstraction, a faceless, nameless, infinite, austere omni-being with no real personality'.⁴

In the trinity there are three distinct identities. They are not the same as one another, but they are very similar to one another. Though each of the identities are distinct, as persons

they each have the capacity to think, to feel and to act – and to reflect on their actions and their interactions.

'Reason' – or the capacity to think – is the capacity to behave consciously in terms of the 'nature' of reality – in terms of the nature of what is really there.⁵ 'Emotion' – or the capacity to feel – is the capacity to behave consciously in terms of the 'value' of reality – in terms of the value of what is really there.⁶ Both reason and emotion are inextricably interconnected. There can be no 'objectivity about truth' unless there is 'subjectivity that is open to the truth'.⁷

According to the prophet Isaiah, God loves nothing better than a good debate. 'Come now, let us reason together'. Come on 'present your case. Set forth your arguments.'

"If the ultimate reality of the universe is a community of persons depicted in the Trinity, then we can trust the context in which we live is located in a community who think reasonably, feel emotionally and act morally with real sensibility!"

God says.⁸ On occasion, the prophet Zephaniah says, God loves to get down and boogie - 'to sing and dance as on a day of festival'.⁹

'Morality' – or the expectation to act appropriately in terms of the nature and the value of things as they really are – is a product of reason and emotion.¹⁰ 'Duty' tends to emphasise 'principle' (based on reason) over

'passion' (based on emotion). 'Sincerity' tends to emphasise 'passion' (based on emotion) over 'principle' (based on reason). A person with 'sensibility' combines both.¹¹ John says God personifies passionate and principled sensibility to such an extent that the best thing you can say about God is – that 'God is love!'

If the ultimate reality of the universe is a community of persons depicted in the Trinity, then we can trust the context in which we live is located in a community who think reasonably, feel emotionally and act morally with real sensibility!

I know it sounds too good to be true. But that's why it's called the 'Good News'

The Trinity As Persons In Relations

A person is always a 'distinct identity' in 'relation to another'. John Macmurray says a person is 'at once subject and object'. As a 'subject' he or she is an 'I'; as an 'object' he or she is 'You' – since the 'You' is always 'the Other'. The 'unity of the person', he says is found 'in the community of the You and I'.¹²

Macmurray say that in 'science' other persons tend to be treated as 'means' – or as 'objects' of 'efficiency'; in 'art' other persons tend to be treated as 'ends' – or as 'objects of beauty'; but in the Trinity others are treated as 'friends' – not just as 'objects', but as other 'subjects' – other 'selves' (in our image) – with whom one can create 'community' that is well and truly 'reciprocal'.¹³



Looking at Rublev's painting *Icon of the Trinity*, each one in the Trinity is not only aware of the other, but also attentive to the other. The figure on the left has a hand raised – in blessing? – to the figure in the middle. The figure in the middle has a hand extended – in greeting? – to the figure on the right. And the figure on the right has a hand lowered – in deferring? – to the figure on the left.¹⁴

The Jewish mystic philosopher, Martin Buber, said in his seminal

book *I and Thou*, that the spirituality of community simply consists of always treating 'the Other' as a 'Thou' (or a 'You') rather than an 'It'. An economy may function on 'I-It' relationships – but a community can only function on 'I-You' relationships.¹⁵

The feisty communitarian, Amitai Etzioni, says that all 'communities are based on two foundations, both of which reinforce 'I-Thou' (or 'I-You') relationships. First, communities provide affective bonds that resemble extended families. Second, they transmit a moral framework for developing 'extended families'.¹⁶

So it is not surprising that the Trinity resembles an 'extended family' to such an extent that one person in the Trinity is said to love like a 'father'¹⁷ and another person in the Trinity is said to love like a 'mother'.¹⁸ The 'moral framework' that they use to develop their 'extended family' as a community is the simple rule of 'general reciprocity' – to love others as you love yourself.¹⁹

Contrary to what much of our theology would lead us to believe – 'God is not an isolated sovereign, a self-centred king who demands that everything revolve around him. God is a circle of passion and life and fellowship'.²⁰

If the ultimate reality of the universe is a community of persons in relation to one another, as it is depicted in the Trinity, then we know that being 'family' is fundamental to who we are – and we cannot become the 'family' we are meant to be without keeping the 'family' rule and 'loving others as we love ourselves'.

The Trinity As Three In One

It takes one person to make an 'individual'. It takes two persons to make a 'couple'. And it takes at least three persons to make a 'community'. Well-known and well-loved community theorists and practitioners, Tony Kelly and Sandra Sewell, say that where there is an individual, there is an 'I' with zero (0) relationship. Where there is a couple, there is an 'I-You' with one (1) relationship between two persons. And where there is a community there is an 'I-You-We' with at least three (3) relationships between at least three persons.²¹

A 'trety' or a 'threesome' creates an exponential explosion in potential – not only in the quantity – but also the quality – of relationships. According to Kelly and Sewell "I-You-We" creates the possibility for persons to 'go beyond personal interest'. It is, they say, 'the beginning

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THE TRINITY – A DIVINE MODEL FOR THE HUMAN FAMILY

of a sense of common cause' – a 'collective purpose' – beyond what is 'coterminous with individual interests'.²²

A 'trey' creates the 'stability' and 'security' that is essential for 'community'. If the relationship between two persons is strained, in a threesome the relationship that the two persons have with the *third* can hold the community together. As the ancient sage says: 'A cord made of three strands is not easily broken.'²³

A 'trey' creates the 'subjectivity' and 'objectivity' essential for 'community'. If there is a problem in a relationship between two persons, in a threesome the problem can be understood 'subjectively' by each of the two persons involved and understood 'objectively' by the third person – who can act as a 'witness'. And its common sense to 'decide on the testimony of two or three witnesses'.²⁴

"...the ultimate reality of the universe is a community, as depicted in the Trinity, that involves 'masculinity' and 'femininity' equally..."

Finally – yet importantly – a 'trey' creates the 'possibility' for God to 'be love'. Love is a relationship between persons that requires the 'individuality' of one, the 'reciprocity' of two, and the 'stability', 'subjectivity' and 'objectivity' of three. If God was just an individual, s/he could 'act with love', but could not 'be love'. If God was a couple, they could 'be in love' – but could not actually 'be love'. It is only because God is a community – of Three-In-One – God can 'be love'.

God has always been a *Three-In-One Community*. There has never been a thought of God that was not a loving 'trey' thought. There has never been a feeling of God that was not a loving 'trey' feeling. 'Camaraderie, togetherness and communion have always been at the centre of the very being of God'.²⁵

If the ultimate reality of the universe is a community of persons in relation to one another, as depicted in the Trinity, it is because the 'trey' is the only 'way' it is possible for persons to relate to one another with the 'individuality' of one, the 'reciprocity' of two, and the 'stability', 'subjectivity' and 'objectivity' of three.

Gender Equity In The Trinity

Some people argue that, as the Trinity is dominated by a 'Father' figure, the community of God is a 'patriarchy' in which the 'male' dominates the 'female'.

There is no doubt that, in the scriptures, each person in the Trinity has been given a 'patriarchal' name rather than a 'matriarchal' name; but each person in the Trinity demonstrates both 'masculine' and 'feminine' qualities that, in practice, engender 'gender equity' in their community.

Theologian Robert Jenson writes, that Jesus called the first person in the Trinity 'Father', rather than 'Mother', is 'a fact that we can no more change than we can decree he was not Jewish, or a wandering rabbi, or unpopular with the Sanhedrin'.²⁶ So the 'patriarchal' name is 'central' to the Christian tradition.

But as theological researcher, Paul Fiddes, says 'the reason the word "Father" is indispensable is not because there is any gender (bias) in God, but simply the givenness of the fact that Jesus used it in prayer' – most famously in 'The Lord's Prayer'. Fiddes writes that, while the name "Father" is an important metaphor for God, it doesn't exclude other important metaphors like 'Mother.'

Indeed, even in Deuteronomy, the fifth book of the Pentateuch,



(that some critics might say is an archetypal patriarchal text), the writer uses both masculine and feminine metaphors for God, when he says to the people of Israel, that God 'sired you (like a father), and God gave you birth (like a mother)'.²⁸

According to Genesis, the Spirit brooded over the cosmos in creation, like a mother hen, sitting carefully on her clutch of eggs, waiting for them to hatch.²⁹ And according to the Gospels, when Christ comes, he picks up the same *matriarchal* rather than *patriarchal* theme, when he says, 'Oh, how I longed to gather you together, as a mother hen gathers her chicks under her wings'.³⁰

Lest you think I'm just reversing the gender stereotype we have about God, let me say that I agree with Latin American theologian Leonardo Boff. Boff says that, when we talk about God, we are talking about 'a maternal God-Father' and 'a paternal God-Mother'; so we need to feel free to use the pronoun 'He' when the metaphor used to refer to a figure is *masculine*-like 'Father', and 'She' when the metaphor used to refer to a figure is *feminine*-like 'Mother'.³¹

If the ultimate reality of the universe is a community, as depicted in the Trinity, that involves 'masculinity' and 'femininity' equally, then even though we may be confused about the meaning of these categories, there must be something of *fundamental significance about 'gender' and 'gender equity' in our families.*

Genuine Equality In The Trinity

Some people argue that the relationship that defines the Trinity is a 'Father-Son' relationship, so the community is really a 'hierarchy' that is 'top-down'.

There is no doubt that, in the scriptures, from time to time the Trinity takes on a 'top-down' approach to serve a specific 'bottom-up' purpose; but it is 'mutuality', not 'hierarchy', that is at the heart of the Trinity, and each person in the Trinity encourages 'genuine equality' in the community.

It is important to note that the first person in the Trinity whom we refer to as the 'Father' was *not* always the 'Father' in an *eternal super-ordinate position*; and the second person in the Trinity whom we refer to as the 'Son' was *not* always the 'Son' in an *eternal sub-ordinate position*. On the occasion of the incarnation, when the first person helped the second person take on flesh and blood and be born as a finite human being, the writer to the Hebrews records that the first person said to the second person, 'You are my Son, today I have begotten you' – today I have become your 'Father'.³² As Leonardo Boff says, the 'Father receives his fatherhood through this act of sending forth the Son'.³³

This sending of one of the persons of the Trinity from the heavenly community into an earthly community as a finite being (who would naturally be 'poorer' or less powerful than any infinite being) was *not* a decision imposed by the first person as a 'superior' on the second person as a 'subordinate'. To the contrary, the scripture suggests that the second person voluntarily chose to give up his *infinite 'equality'* with the first person, in order to demonstrate his commitment to *finite equality* among the human beings to whose community he came! As the apostle Paul says, Christ, 'being in very nature God, did not consider (his) equality with God something to be hung up on, but he emptied

himself to take on the very nature of a human being'.³⁴ Paul argues that 'though (Christ) was rich (in power), yet for your sakes, he became poor, so that through his poverty you might become rich (in power). So that there might be equality!'³⁵

This dynamic interaction prevents us from conceiving of the Trinity revolving round 'an eternally superordinate Father' and 'an eternally subordinate Son'.

The steps that each person takes seems to be more in keeping with the drum beat playing for a circle dance than orders coming from a chain of command.



As Paul Fiddes says, the origin of the movement 'is not in one person'. 'Using the image of the dance, each person moves out in the direction of the other'. 'This picture of an ever-circling movement has been traditionally capped by the idea that the Spirit is the bond of love between the other two persons'.³⁶ It is all about 'mutuality' not 'hierarchy' – 'interdependence not domination'.³⁷

Any 'top-down' approach in the direction of the dance is to serve the purpose of *arranging human families on the basis of equality from the 'bottom-up'*.

If the ultimate reality of the universe is a community, as depicted in the Trinity, that is defined by 'mutuality' – rather than by 'hierarchy' – and by its commitment to 'equality' for others as well as themselves, then maybe we should consider rearranging our

priorities, take some lessons, and learn the steps ourselves.

Gracious Inclusivity In The Trinity

Some people argue that the Trinity is an *exclusive* club 'for members only – a coterie' that *includes* 'Father', 'Son' and 'Spirit', and nobody – nobody – else.

There is no doubt that, in the scriptures, at times the Trinity seems like its an 'exclusive' club. But it isn't. In fact, as Rublev's Icon illustrates, the Trinity is so '*inclusive*' that you might be forgiven for thinking the only thing 'excluded' from the Trinity is 'exclusivity' itself. Each person in the Trinity *embraces* the other, and *expects* the other to extend the same 'gracious inclusivity' towards others.

In order to make clear the extent of the inclusivity that there is in the Trinity, Christ as the 'Son' spells it out for his disciples, by telling them: 'If you have seen *me*, you have seen the *Father*'.³⁸ 'I am *in* the Father and the Father is *in* me'.³⁹ 'I and the Father are *one*'.⁴⁰ They are that *tight*; are that together. According to the great Trinitarian theologian, Jurgen Moltmann, 'the divine persons exist so intimately with, for, and in one another that they themselves constitute themselves in their unique, incomparable and complete union'.⁴¹

However, in praying for his disciples, Christ says 'my prayer is not for them (the disciples) alone. I also pray for those (like us) who will believe in me through their message, *that all of them* (including us) *may be one, Father, just as you are in me, and I am in you – may they also be in us*'.⁴² Did you get that? He is not only praying that *all of us might have a sense of community the same as the Trinity*; but also that *all of us might become part of the Trinity and participate in that 'unique, incomparable and complete union' ourselves.*

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Then Christ turns to his disciples and says, 'A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another as I have loved you.'⁴³ He continues 'You have heard it said, "Love your neighbour and hate your enemy." But I tell you, "Love everybody. Love those who hate you; bless those who curse you; do good to those who do evil... unto the very least."⁴⁴ In order that 'you may be "sons" (and "daughters") of your "Father" in heaven who causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on sinners and saints alike'.⁴⁵

As Paul Fiddes puts it: God is *not* 'content to find dancing partners within the divine communion alone'. God's circle dance is not a closed circle, 'but open to others'. The Creator 'invites the created to join the eternal festivities'.⁴⁶

Baxter Kruger picks up this theme in his book on *The Great Dance*. He says, 'The shared life of God is not about isolation. It is all about fellowship. And fellowship means that God is not a sad, lonely, depressed being. God is essentially very happy. The (Trinity) live in a fellowship of free-flowing togetherness and delight – a great dance of shared life that is rich and full, passionate and creative, good

and beautiful.' He says, that 'as an act of mind-boggling philanthropy, God chose to open the circle and share the great dance with us.' And so, he says, 'the very life of the Triune God,

"The (Trinity) live in a fellowship of free-flowing togetherness and delight – a great dance of shared life that is rich and full, passionate and creative, good and beautiful"

the fellowship and communion, the eternal joy and glory of the Father, Son and Spirit have been given to us. The great dance is now ours, as much as God's'.⁴⁷

The Trinity shows there should always be room at the family table for more. And heaven will come on earth when 'people come from east and west and north and south, and take their places at the feast in the community of God'.⁴⁸ ●

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Same-sex 'marriage' untrue and unjust

by Dr David van Gend

David is President of the Australian Marriage Forum and a GP in Toowoomba, Queensland.

Redefining marriage is a dangerous idea. It redefines everything from parenting and kinship bonds to sexual morality and acceptable religious doctrine.

And according to G.K. Chesterton, it is a terminally dangerous idea, because, "This triangle of truisms, father, mother and child, cannot be destroyed; it can only destroy those civilisations which disregard it."

The destroyers are at the gates, and to resist them we must do two things: first, reassert the truth of marriage, and second, convince our fellow Australians of the harms of homosexual 'marriage' – specifically:

- That it will force future children to miss out on either a mother or a father;

- That it will impose radical homosexual education on all of our children;
- That it will intimidate conscientious objectors with the big stick of anti-discrimination law;
- That it will mess with much more than marriage: it will

marriage as "a social institution built on a biological foundation". All of our marriage laws and customs exist to reinforce this biological foundation, helping bind a man to his mate for the sake of social stability, and above all for the sake of any child they might create.

"Marriage is not a social or religious invention; it is a social and religious recognition of pre-existing biological reality: male, female and offspring."

radically deconstruct the bonds of parenting and kinship and the very notion of male and female.

The Truth of Marriage

Marriage is not a social or religious invention; it is a social and religious recognition of pre-existing biological reality: male, female and offspring.

The father of modern anthropology, Claude Levi-Strauss, defined

Not all marriages do create children – but typically they do, and the institution exists for the typical case.

Married couples who cannot have children are still fully married because they fulfil the twin criteria of marriage: they bring together the two great halves of nature, male and female, in a 'one-flesh' union;

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– CHC Research Symposium featuring James K A Smith



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SAME-SEX 'MARRIAGE': UNTRUE AND UNJUST

and they are still able to give a child, albeit an adopted child, the mother and father relationship a child needs.

A homosexual couple does not bring together the two halves of nature together in a one-flesh union, and they cannot give a child, even an adopted child, the mother and father relationship a child needs. They do not meet nature's job description for marriage.

This is not a religious argument. The atheist philosopher Bertrand Russell understood the child-centred basis for marriage. He wrote in his 1929 book *Marriage & Morals*:

It is through children alone that sexual relations become of importance to society, and worthy to be taken cognizance of by a legal institution.¹

Homosexual relationships obviously cannot create children, so society has no *institutional* interest in regulating such friendships. They are of importance to the individuals involved, and demand neighbourly civility, but such relationships are not marriage.

Surveying all of human history and culture, Levi-Strauss concluded that the family is "based on a union, more or less durable, but socially approved, of two individuals of opposite sexes who establish a household and bear and raise children."

In the same way, the Chief Justice of the US Supreme Court, John Roberts, recognised the timeless structure and purpose of marriage in his dissenting judgement in the 2015 *Obergefeld* case:

"Marriage... arose in the nature of things to meet a vital need: ensuring that children are conceived by a mother and father committed to raising them in the stable conditions of a lifelong relationship."

Go as far back in written history as it is possible to go and you will find marriage between male and female as the natural and necessary basis of family and society. Ancient legal codes of Hammurabi and King Dadusha in Babylon four thousand years ago specify social conditions for valid marriage similar to our own, including the need for a formal contract, a public ceremony and even obtaining consent from the in-laws.

"The heart of opposition to same-sex 'marriage' is that it means same-sex parenting, and same-sex parenting means children have to miss out on either their mother or their father."

If King Dadusha had been a guest at the Royal Wedding of Kate and Will he would have understood the Bishop of London's exposition, from the 1662 *Book of Common Prayer*, of why we have the institution of marriage:

First, (marriage) was ordained for the increase of mankind... Secondly, it was ordained in order that the natural instincts and affections should be hallowed and directed aright... Thirdly, it was ordained for the mutual society, help, and comfort that the one ought to have of the other.

Note that the Bishop's basic rationale is anthropological, not theological: marriage exists to nurture a new generation, to discipline the feral instincts of males to constructive ends, and to be what John Locke called "the First Society" of husband and wife; of mother, father and child.

What King Dadusha would not have understood, nor any other King or philosopher in the last four thousand years, is that two gentlemen sitting in the pews at the Royal Wedding, Sir Elton John and his partner David Furnish, would soon thereafter have their homosexual relationship elevated by English law to "the honourable estate of marriage".

Homosexual and bisexual relationships are recorded in history, but there has never been an institution of homosexual marriage – since it would serve no vital social purpose.

The ancient Greeks indulged homosexual relations but never confused that with the necessary life-task of marriage and family. As early as Homer we find the word

'gamos' to describe the honoured relationship between man and woman that we recognise as monogamous marriage, centred on the 'oikos' or family home. The Romans gave us the word 'matrimony', made up of 'mater', meaning mother, and 'monium' meaning state or condition – matrimony is the institution built around motherhood.

As a rare aberration that proves the rule, the ancient Romans did record one case of 'homosexual marriage' in the year 64 AD, but that was the Emperor Nero – whom the historian Tacitus described as "corrupted by every lust, natural and unnatural". The marriage was publicly consummated on a barge on the Tiber for the titillation of his guests. I have not seen that historic gay wedding celebrated in any TV ads for Marriage Equality.

So the truth about marriage is that it is given by nature and affirmed by every culture, because man and woman are uniquely empowered to nurture new life.

So-called same-sex 'marriage' has no foundation in nature: it cannot create a child; it cannot give a child both a mother and a father. In

fact same-sex 'marriage' makes it impossible for a child to have both a mother and a father, and that is an injustice against the child.

Same-sex couples, who make up 1% of all couples,² are free to live as they choose, but they are not free to redefine marriage for all of us. They need to find a different word for their relationship, because it is not marriage.

Injustice to the child

The heart of opposition to same-sex 'marriage' is that it means same-sex parenting, and same-sex parenting means children have to miss out on either their mother or their father.

Marriage is a compound right under Article 16 of the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*: "the right to marry and to found a family". Therefore homosexual marriage involves both the legal recognition of an exclusive relationship and the right to form a family by adoption or artificial reproduction – but any child created within that 'marriage' would necessarily be deprived of either her mum or her dad.

Of course, there are already tragic situations where a child misses out on her mum or her dad, such as the death or desertion of a parent, but that is not something we would ever wish upon a child, and it is not something a government should ever impose upon a child. Legalising same-sex marriage would impose that deprivation on any child created within such an institution.

There are already situations where broken families reform as a homosexual household and nothing can or should be done about that. What we must not allow, however, is the situation where government facilitates the deliberate creation of motherless or fatherless families. A law establishing the institution of same-sex 'marriage' would be an act of premeditated injustice against future children.



Some people also raise the scenario of an abusive mother and father and argue that it is better for a child to have two loving same-sex carers than a dysfunctional pair of biological parents – yet neither option gives a child what she needs. We must reject both, restraining parents who would inflict abuse while also restraining governments who would inflict laws that institutionalise the motherless or fatherless child.

"...same-sex marriage forces us to choose between giving priority to children's rights or to homosexual adults' claims."

Senator Penny Wong and others insist that because some same-sex couples already obtain children by adoption or surrogacy, nothing is going to change with same-sex 'marriage'. That is not correct. A number of states rightly prohibit same-sex couples from adopting or creating a child by surrogacy, but a federal law for same-sex 'marriage' would overrule the remaining state prohibitions on same-sex parenting. Such a law would become the nationwide, permanent violation of a child's right, where possible, to be raised by both mother and father.

Society is faced with an inescapable choice. As Australian ethicist Professor Margaret Somerville

observes, the question of same-sex marriage "forces us to choose between giving priority to children's rights or to homosexual adults' claims."³

Importantly, when we asked 1200 Australians in our Galaxy poll to choose between these conflicting priorities, they chose by a margin of three to one to give priority to the rights of the child to have both a mother and a father over the rights of two men to marry and start a family.⁴

In the media, however, the rights of homosexual adults always take priority. Our aim in the Australian Marriage Forum has been to counter that bias and create a more child-centred public debate.

We say that a child has the right to look up and see the only two faces on earth that reflect her own: the woman and the man who together gave her existence. A little girl should not have to look up and see two "married men" as her parents. Neither man can be a mother to her; they cannot guide her as a mother would when she is growing from girl to woman nor model for her the complex relationship of husband and wife. Likewise, any boy needs his father's companionship and example to help him become a man; no matter how competent and caring a lesbian partner may be, she cannot be a dad to a little boy.

We must keep marriage man and woman, to give every child their chance of a mum and dad. ●

[Subsequent sections on the consequences of same-sex parenting; on the question of gay mental health; on the 'born that way' fallacy; on implications for homosexual education of schoolchildren and for conscientious freedom, and on the question of just discrimination, can be heard at <https://soundcloud.com/archdiocese-of-hobart/dr-david-van-gend>]

www.AustralianMarriage.org, contact@AustralianMarriage.org

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Marriage practice, biblical interpretation, and the church's discernment

by Darrin Belousek

Darrin W. Snyder Belousek is a member of Salem Mennonite Church (Elida, OH).

In a time when Western society is rapidly altering its image of marriage and government institutions have legally recognised same-sex marriage, the church is pressed to decide: Shall we follow suit?

The church is to discern between the fading form of this passing age and what is “good” and “acceptable” according to God’s will (Rom 12:2). Historically, the church has relied upon scriptural revelation, doctrinal tradition, rational wisdom, and communal experience to guide discernment. Our *Confession of Faith* (1995) acknowledges Scripture as “authoritative source” for the church’s discernment, the “standard” against which all other claims must be “tested and corrected” (Art. 4).

Here, I venture to sketch the path that my thinking has taken thus far on the question of interpreting Scripture concerning marriage practice, in the hope that this might contribute constructively to the church’s discernment.

I do so cautiously, aware that this may elicit passionate reactions or touch pained places. I do so honestly, not pretending neutrality. I do so modestly, cognizant of necessary brevity and limited scope. I do so humbly, not presuming

to understand perfectly or settle everything. I do so fraternally, as a fellow labourer in the Lord’s vineyard, inviting thoughtful consideration and faithful correction.

Marriage and Scripture: Analogies to slaves and women Just as the church yesterday was wrong on slavery and women, some argue, so the church today is wrong on marriage. The church today denying blessing to same-sex union for biblical reasons is akin to the church yesterday giving sanction to slavery and patriarchy for biblical reasons.

This argument requires careful scrutiny. Are the cases actually parallel? How should we evaluate the comparisons?

Concerning slaves and women, there are texts in the Old Testament (OT) that legalise and legitimate slavery or patriarchy and even some texts in the New Testament (NT) that might be interpreted to reinforce oppressive or patriarchal practices. At the same time, there are textual strands running through the biblical canon that counter, and thus point the church toward overturning, previous practices of oppression and patriarchy.

Regarding slaves: We can trace an arc of liberation from the Exodus narrative to Sabbath and Jubilee law (Lev 25; Deut 15) to prophetic critique (Isaiah 58; Jer 34:8-22) to gospel proclamation (Luke 4:16-21) to apostolic teaching (1 Cor 7:21; 12:13; Gal 3:28; Eph 6:9; Col 3:11;

4:1; 1 Tim 1:8-11; Philemon 15-17). Cumulatively, this canonical arc points toward abolition of slavery.

Regarding women: We can trace an arc of OT texts that teach “male and female” as made in God’s image and sharing “dominion” over creation (Gen 1:26-28), that honour women leaders in Israel (Miriam, Deborah, Huldah, and Judith), and that portray women as exemplars of covenant righteousness (Ruth and Naomi). This arc continues through NT texts that highlight women’s roles in Israel’s history (Matt 1:1-16), that honour women’s participation in Jesus’ ministry and leadership in the early church (Mary, Martha, Joanna, Tabitha, Lydia, Prisca, Junia, Phoebe, etc.), that affirm unity of “male and female” in Christ (Gal 3:28), and that call for mutuality between husbands and wives (1 Cor 7:3-5; 11:11-12; Eph 5:21-33). Cumulatively, this canonical arc points toward egalitarian practices.

In each case, there are voices (for slavery and patriarchy) and counter-voices (for liberation and equality) in the biblical canon. Comparing the counter-voices to their canonical contexts and cultural backgrounds, and connecting them into a canonical arc, reveals a Spirit-guided redemptive movement that can guide the church’s discernment. We ask: How does that redemptive movement bear upon our situation? How can we act faithfully along that arc’s direction?

Taking the same approach in the case of marriage, we find that marriage

practice throughout the biblical canon is neither simple nor static. Here, too, there are voices and counter-voices (mono/poly-gamy, for/against intermarriage, hierarchy/mutuality, etc.).

Yet, the intra-canonical dynamic is constrained within the boundary of male-female union. The implicit norm across the biblical canon – evident in origins narrative (Gen 1:26-28; 2:18-24); presumed in legal code (Lev 18), wisdom instruction (Prov 5-7), and pastoral counsel (1 Cor 7); apparent in poetic expression of erotic love (Song of Songs) and symbolic depiction of divine covenant (Isaiah 62:4-5; Hosea; Eph 5:22-32; Rev 21-22) – is that marital union is predicated on the created difference and sexed correspondence of male-and-female.

Now, some today argue that the canonical pattern of male-female union is *normal* but not *normative* – and thus not restrictive of marriage practice in the church. Such arguments reinterpret key texts in Genesis.

“Jesus and Paul dispensed teachings that are as restrictive as – or even more restrictive than – the OT.”

Some argue that the Genesis story only describes what *is*, not prescribes what *should be*: “male and female” becoming “one flesh” reflects common cultural custom but does not present a normative model for marital union. Jesus, however, read the Genesis story as having prescriptive import with respect to marriage practice. That “from the beginning of creation” God “made them male and female” and joined them in “one flesh” (Gen 1:27; 2:24), Jesus interpreted, indicates God’s intention for marriage, according to which Jesus judged the human practice of marriage (Mark 10:6-9; cf. Matt 19:4-6).

Others argue that the biblical emphasis in marital union is on

similarity not difference: the man’s becoming “one flesh” with the woman (Gen 2:24) signifies the man’s union with a creature like in kind to himself (a human) not a human different in sex from himself (a woman). The Genesis text, however, equally emphasises similarity and difference. The paired lines of poetic lyric highlight both human kinship (“This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh”) and sexed correspondence (“this one shall be called Woman, for out of Man this one was taken”) in becoming “one flesh” (Gen 2:23).

Concerning marriage and sex, moreover, Jesus and Paul dispensed teachings that are as restrictive as – or even more restrictive than – the OT.

The OT prohibited adultery (Exod 20:14) but permitted divorce-and-remarriage (Deut 24:1-4). Jesus intensified the commandment, judging that coveting a neighbour’s wife (Exod 20:17) is adultery

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(Matt 5:27-28). Similarly, Jesus subordinated the human accommodation reflected in the divorce law to the divine intention revealed in the creation story, ruling that God meant marriage to be permanent such that divorce-and-remarriage is adultery (Mark 10:2-12; cf. Mal 2:13-16). Adhering to Jesus' teaching, Paul prohibited divorce by believers and required divorcees to reconcile or not remarry (1 Cor 7:10-16).

Now, Jesus allowed divorce-and-remarriage in cases of unchastity (Matt 5:31-32; 19:3-9). Also, Paul permitted remarriage in the church in cases of abandonment by an unbelieving spouse (1 Cor 7:15; cf. v. 39). Yet, exceptions for divorce were not exceptions to the male-female pattern of marital union.

“While canonical arcs reveal redemptive movements pointing toward liberation of slaves and equality for women, no parallel arc points toward sanctioning same-sex union.”

While the OT prohibited incest (Lev 18:6-16), a prohibition reinforced by Paul (1 Cor 5:1-2), it accommodated but regulated polygamy (Lev 18:17-18; Deut 21:15-17). Jesus' teaching pictures marriage as an inseparable “two-become-one” (Mark 10:2-12; cf. 1 Cor 6:16; Eph 5:31); and Paul's instructions restrict marriage to “one wife” or “one husband” (1 Cor 7:2; 1 Tim 3:2, 12; 5:9; Titus 1:5-6). These together arguably prohibit polygamy.

The major NT innovation concerns whether marrying and begetting are duties or even priorities. Apart from nazirite vows or prophetic vocations, celibacy was not a general option: marrying-and-begetting was considered both duty and blessing (cf. Gen 1:28; 9:1; Pss 127; 128). Jesus and Paul, celibate themselves, neither mandated marrying nor prioritised begetting. Jesus offered celibacy for the kingdom as an alternative to fidelity in marriage

(Matt 19:10-12) and deemed celibates worthy of the marriage-less coming age (Luke 20:34-36; cf. Rev 14:1-5). Paul, anticipating the coming age and prioritising the Lord's service, commended celibacy over marrying (1 Cor 7:7-8, 25-40). Yet, the celibacy option did not alter the male-female pattern of marital union.

The NT thus presents four counter-voices concerning marriage practice: permanency, monogamy, mutuality, and celibacy. Concerning same-sex practices, however, the biblical canon speaks with a single voice.

The biblical attitude concerning same-sex practices is sustained consistently: across both OT (Lev 18:2-30; 20:13) and NT (Rom 1:18-32; 1 Cor 6:9-11; 1 Tim 1:8-11) canonical contexts; against both ancient Near-

Eastern and Greco-Roman cultural backgrounds, each of which tolerated same-sex practices; regarding both male-male (Leviticus; Romans) and female-female (Romans) relations; and regarding both possibly exploitive (Corinthians; Timothy) and likely mutual (Leviticus; Romans) relations. The canonical assessment is univocally negative.

The redemptive movement throughout the biblical canon is thus always away from same-sex practices. Even were disputed texts concerning same-sex practices discounted, there would be no positive voice in the biblical canon that counters the male-female pattern of marital union. No law permits or counsel commends or story favours same-sex union – unless one twists the text to turn David and Jonathan or Ruth and Naomi into erotic lovers. Still, some appeal to God's working the divine

purpose through marriages in non-normal ways – Abraham and Sarah or Mary and Joseph – as evidence that God would bless non-normative unions. Yet, despite this special pleading, these instances themselves exhibit the normative pattern of male-female union.

Amidst diverse voices across the biblical canon, the marriage arc consistently evidences that marital union in the present age is predicated on the created order of male-and-female. Insofar as the church anticipates the coming age of renewed creation, the NT points beyond marrying-and-begetting toward celibacy, not same-sex union.

The case of same-sex union, therefore, is not analogous to the cases of slaves and women. While canonical arcs reveal redemptive movements pointing toward liberation of slaves and equality for women, no parallel arc points toward sanctioning same-sex union.

Marriage and membership: Analogy to Gentiles

If the church is to discern an affirmation of same-sex union, then we must derive from the biblical canon a clear reason that compellingly warrants diverging from the canonical marriage arc. That reason must answer this question: Why should the church follow the *counter* directions of the liberationist and egalitarian arcs but then diverge from the *consistent* direction of the marriage arc? We next consider a prominent argument for divergence.

There are various texts throughout the biblical canon that augur for reception of Gentiles, Samaritans, eunuchs, and others who were formerly considered “outsiders” to Israel as members-by-faith of God's people. We can trace this canonical arc from exodus narrative (Exod 12:38) to covenant code (Exod 22:21; 23:9) to holiness code (Lev 19:33-34) to festival law (Deut 16) to prophetic witness (Isa 56:3-8) to

Jesus' genealogy (Matt 1:1-16) to Jesus' ministry (Matt 19:12; Luke 5:27-39; 14:12-24; John 4:1-42) to early church (Matt 28:18-20; Acts 1:8; 8:4-40) to apostolic teaching (Gal 3:27-28; Eph 2:11-22; Col 3:11; 1 Pet 2:9-10) to apocalyptic vision (Rev 5:9-10). This inclusionary arc reveals a Spirit-guided redemptive movement that should shape a receptive posture in the church today toward various “outsiders,” including sexual minorities.

Some today invoke the inclusionary arc concerning marriage practice. Might “outsider” inclusion in membership be a precedent for same-sex inclusion in marriage? Might the church thus judge that the inclusionary arc supersedes the marriage arc? Some argue that the church today should redefine marriage as sex-undifferentiated to sanction same-sex union in analogy to how the early church redefined membership as ethnicity-neutral to receive Gentiles. This argument requires careful scrutiny.

“Outsider” inclusion did have an immediate implication for marriage practice: Gentile membership shifted the intermarriage boundary from Jew/Gentile (never addressed in the NT) to believer/non-believer (1 Cor 7:12-16; 2 Cor 6:14-7:1). Yet, Jew-Gentile union was no exception to the male-female pattern.

To redefine marriage in analogy to membership, moreover, would blur the distinction between belonging (who is “in” and on what terms) and behaving (acting as befits belonging). That distinction in the church's discernment is evidenced in a key text along the inclusionary arc: Acts 15.

At the Jerusalem council, the apostles and elders discerned that the church should receive Gentiles on the same terms as Jews. Peter testified: “in giving [Gentiles] the Holy Spirit...and in cleansing their hearts by faith [God] has made no distinction between [Gentiles]

and [Jews]” (15:8-9; cf. 10:34-35, 44-47). Nonetheless, the council made a distinction between Gentile members, who were received on faith by grace (15:11), and certain practices, from which believers were required to abstain (15:19-21).

Still, some argue that waiving the OT requirement of circumcision for Gentile believers is precedent for waiving OT restrictions on sexual practice for today's church.

Let's hear the apostolic decree: “It seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us not to burden you with anything beyond the following requirements: You are to abstain from food sacrificed to idols, from blood, from the meat of strangled animals and from sexual immorality” (15:28-29). The generic term “sexual immorality” (*porneia*) covered various forms of illicit sex (e.g., prostitution, fornication, incest, adultery).

Intended to facilitate Gentile-Jew fellowship, these “requirements” were, likely, derived from holiness laws pertaining to aliens residing within Israel. Those laws forbade idolatry, eating blood or carrion, and various forms of illicit sex, including same-sex acts (Lev 17:8-18:30). Or, possibly, these “requirements” were a version of Noahide laws derived from Genesis 9, which delineated God's will for “the nations” and defined “righteous Gentiles” (e.g., Cornelius, Acts 10:1-2). Rabbinic tradition codified seven laws, which forbade idolatry, eating meat torn from living animals, and various forms of illicit sex, including same-sex acts. Either way, rather than simply abrogating OT law, the council discerned by the Holy Spirit how to appropriate OT law for the church.

The Jerusalem council reinforced canonical norms concerning sexual practice at the same time that it received Gentiles as members. The NT continued teaching consistently against “sexual immorality” across various contexts (Rom 13:11-14; 1

Cor 5:1-2, 9-13; 6:9-20; 7:2; 2 Cor 12:19-21; Gal 5:16-24; Eph 5:3-5; Col 3:1-11; 1 Thes 4:1-8; Rev 19:2; 22:15). The early church taught likewise (*Didache* 2:2; 3:3; 5:1; *Hermas* Mand. 4; Ep. Barnabas 19:4).

Marriage, therefore, is not analogous to membership. The Jerusalem council, in redrawing membership boundaries to include Gentiles, did not redraw moral boundaries in any way that deviated from the canonical arc concerning marital union and sexual practice.

Marriage practice and church discernment

The apostolic decision at the Jerusalem council, which “seemed good to the Holy Spirit,” set an enduring precedent for the church's discernment of what is “acceptable” to God. The council's discernment worked along the inclusionary arc but without letting membership inclusion override moral norms or redefine marital union. Therefore, for the church today to honour the canonical precedent of the Jerusalem council, we must hold *both* arcs *together* in our discernment.

Two important implications follow. The inclusionary arc is not optional for church practice, contrary to the inclinations of some traditionalists. At the same time, the inclusionary arc cannot be pitted against or privileged over the marriage arc, contrary to the claims of some innovationists.

This canonical-arc approach to biblical interpretation thus yields these questions to guide the church's discernment: How do the marriage and inclusionary arcs *together* bear on our situation with respect to membership inclusion, marriage practice, and sexual minorities? How might the church act faithfully along *both* arcs?

Let us prayerfully seek the instruction and guidance of the Holy Spirit (John 14:26; 16:13) as we forbear patiently with one another in love and “the unity of the Spirit” (Eph 4:2-3). ●

"Love is in the Air"

by Paul Mercer

Paul is co-editor of *Luke's Journal*. This article was originally a speech at the wedding of his youngest daughter, Esther.

Love is in the air. Love is in the air. On 'our' behalf I want to thank Rodger and Esther for responding to the prompts of love that have brought them to this public marriage ceremony and celebration. What are we here for today, if it is not for love? Rodger and Esther, in this meditation at the start of your married life together, I want to reflect on love. It just may be, love is all we need!

The apostle Paul often writes on the subject of marriage. In his letter to Christians at Ephesus, Paul proposes marriage as an allegory for the love of God. For Paul it is an allegory of the personal relationship of love Christians encounter with Christ. He also suggests marriage as a way we can visualise what it means to be the Church, the Body of Christ, a 'community of love.' (Eph 5:32 CEB). Marriage as an allegory for love is a practical field test of what the love of God looks like. By exploring this proposal with you, I hope we all will sense the welcome love is to all of us.

During a recent ABC radio programme, the presenter interviewed a successful Queensland romance novelist. This writer clearly enjoyed her craft and in her bubbling enthusiasm, speculated that there is a "love story in all of us". You are writing one of the early chapters of your story today. You can do this, indeed we could all write love stories because life itself is conceived and sustained in the love of God. Today, we all have a certain permission to consider the meaning and experience of love for our own life journeys.

Something that stirs me, that gets me going when it comes to love is what Paul in his letter to Roman Christians describes that happens, when we trust Jesus to set us free from the power of sin. He suggests this image, "that the love of God is poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit". (Rom 5:5) I like the word 'poured,' thirst-satisfying, gushing and flowing for our renewal.

While the literature, poetry, music, art and drama produced in the name of love often provide(s) overlapping glimpses of the great love of God, it is the Christian record I want us to check out here. I invite all of us as witnesses to this marriage to explore three facets of the love that seeks to fill our hearts. They are:

- Our life itself depends on love
- Playfulness is an important quality of love, and
- Love maintains a patient presence when confronted by offence

I want to show that love can come to life in the witness of marriage and particularly for you.

Our life itself depends on love

How can we understand that our life itself depends on love? In 1 Corinthians 14

Paul writes, "Go after a life of love as if your life depended on it – because it does." (1 Cor 14:1) These words say it all, they put love front and centre of Christian spirituality.

Phone apps are all the rage these days. Imagine if someone developed an app that would download the presence of God.

Wouldn't that be amazing? The Bible is like an app. The picture of God we are given is that at the core of God's



being is the Trinitarian communion of self-giving love. The one who we call God is presented to us in the harmony of three persons; Father, Son and Spirit. Out of this communion God has made the world in its unity and diversity. One human race but 7 billion stories and counting. God-willing, as a married couple, you will add to the world population statistics! The account of scripture is that we are made; we are designed in the image of God. The communion of self-giving love is imprinted on our being. Marriage is a good allegory.

"The account of scripture is that we are made; we are designed in the image of God.

The communion of self-giving love is imprinted on our being. Marriage is a good allegory."

However, if brought under scrutiny, our own personal histories would bear witness to a problem; the amazing variety of life's sins. What we call the seven deadly sins and more. Greed, gluttony, pride and so on. Life is in tension between sin and the love of God and we all experience a strange restlessness.

Last June, Katrina and I visited Israel and we were able to go to Nazareth. It was great to find a church there with a sign in both English and Arabic, "Jesus is Alive."

The 'Christ-event' – the life, death and resurrection of Jesus, who grew up in this same Nazareth, is the basis on which God deals with sin and welcomes us home, embraced by self-giving love. The Christian project

is a 'game plan' of new creation, of growth, in response to the costly sacrifice of Christ, the great love of God.

Such growth says Gregory Jones, "Occurs through the guidance of the Holy Spirit as Christians unlearn habits and patterns of domination and diminution of others and learn to embody habits and practices of Christian communion." It is growth, as the poured love of God seeps deeply to our lives. Your marriage will be a way of seeing this growth unfold.

Marriage is a genuine allegory for love because it will call a couple like you, to allow love to sustain you through the thick and thin of what C.S. Lewis calls "the incessant provocations of daily life."

At your engagement party (in all the mud – no rain since) I quoted French sociologist Jacques Ellul who observes, "An inseparable couple, a united couple, is an extraordinary force on behalf of the lonely, the suffering, the deprived and those who need comprehensive and attentive love and who can draw strength from the venture made by this couple, finding in it support and confidence and secret riches. Marriage is an allegory where other people join the dots of love.

On Boxing Day 2004, Esther's older sister Rebecca and I travelled together in India. Our first entry point was Kolkata. On our arrival, the air was smoky, acrid and warm. I wondered how I could keep breathing. In this city of 20 million or so people, the daily battle to survive is infamous and caught up in the phrase, "the black hole of Calcutta." But this is also the place of Mother Theresa. We visited her tomb. Premilla Pavamani is another person who has followed the call to

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“LOVE IS IN THE AIR”

live out the love of God in this city. With her husband Vijan, this couple had established an organisation called Kolcutta Samaritans. They worked tirelessly with homeless families, street children and drug-dependent people. Converted to Christ in their early twenties, the couple followed the prompting of the love of God to move from Bombay, one of the richest cities in the world, to the “black hole.” Like Mother Theresa, God blessed their faithfulness. Rebecca and I were impacted by the gracious integrity of Premilla. Over and over we heard her say, “If you can’t do it in love, it’s not worth doing.” Rodger and Esther, “If you can’t do it in love, it’s not worth doing.”

There may be some emerging science to support my argument here. Academic Paul Zac has been studying the molecule oxytocin. Right at the beginning of life, it is oxytocin which stimulates labour contractions. With great effort we are expelled from the womb into life. Oxytocin’s work is not left at the birthing suite. Zac and his colleagues have discovered that oxytocin is behind all human virtue, trust, affection and love. Living a life of love is, as it were ‘turbocharged’ by this God breathed molecule.

Now, Professor Zac managed to convince all the guests at a wedding to have their serum oxytocin levels monitored. He wasn’t surprised to find they all had an oxytocin spike! Even more interesting the bride topped the scoring (yes Esther you’re dux again today). Close family members were next and then friends. Now the groom was the only one out of sync in this study. Not unexpectedly his testosterone level was surging, and this hormone blocks oxytocin release!

It would seem love has a neurobiological advantage.

Love as play

This takes us to my second point, love as play. Our married couple today, are people who know how to play. Music,

sports, hanging out with friends and sharing in the fellowship of the Spirit at their local church; these have all been ways you have played and lived out the love of God. The scriptures regularly speak of the delight, the sheer delight of God for the world He has created and loves.

In one sense we don’t need a photographer today. We are privileged to see a snapshot of this love of God by participating in this wedding.

“...oxytocin is behind all human virtue, trust, affection and love. Living a life of love is, as it were ‘turbocharged’ by this God breathed molecule.”

In play, the subject is taken out of itself and plays a game ‘larger’ than itself. At times success generates a great “Oh yes”! At one stage, Esther, you and I would go to the Gabba and watch the Lions play ‘Aussie Rules’ football (Sorry New Zealanders!) During one memorable game we sat directly behind the goal posts. The Lions scored 10 goals in one quarter. We were ducking for cover as the ball landed around us. The crowd was ecstatic. Good play can draw spectators out of their seats to celebrate the delight of playful love. Marriage is good play so join with me to make the applause resounding for Rodger and Esther!

In Matthew’s Gospel we find these words, “To what will I compare this generation? It is like a child sitting in the markets calling out to others. ‘We played the flute for you and you didn’t dance. We sang a funeral song and you didn’t mourn.’” (Matt 11:16) Can you imagine the scene? My imagination goes to something like an OT session at the Royal Children’s Hospital.

Love as play is like child’s play - the giggles, the rhymes, the disinhibited observation of adult seriousness. Love as play is the dance of God’s love in the marketplace and the home. It takes place where the oil of joy and mourning mix.

Jesus the Lord of the Dance as He is sometimes called is the game breaker in life for guilt, shame, suffering and sorrow. The Lord of the Dance becomes the power of love on the cross. We need to sit in the marketplace with childlike eyes to see this. Above all the other noises of life, the sales, the politics, the conversations over coffee, even a wedding, do we hear “the funeral song?” It contains the words, “Father forgive them for they don’t know what they are doing.”

It rises to a crescendo, “He is risen! He is risen!”

In the children’s song, the gospel writer Matthew recognises that the ‘father’ sometimes will join in. He uses words like those of the prophet Isaiah,

“Look my Servant whom I chose, the one I love, in whom my soul finds great pleasure. I’ll put my Spirit upon him and he’ll announce judgement to the Gentiles. He won’t argue and shout, and nobody will hear his voice in the streets. He won’t break a bent stalk, and he won’t snuff out a smouldering wick; until he makes justice win. And the Gentiles will put their hope in his name.” (Matt 12:18-24) God is lover who joins us in play.

Many treat love as simply an emotional state, but love, like marriage it is a life calling. Love is a verb. The poet Gerard Manley Hopkins penned these words “... for Christ plays in ten thousand places, Lovely in limbs, and lovely in eyes not his. To the Father through the features of men’s faces.” Love is a verb that needs to be played out in our lives. Rodger and Esther you are dressed in splendour today. You look fantastic. Your calling is to love in all the, “For

better or for worse” moments ahead. To stay dressed up in love when your clothes might be worn or dirty. To embody Christ at play.

Developing his thinking to Roman Christians, Paul says things like: “Love should be shown without pretending; love each other like members of your family; nothing can separate us from the love of God; don’t be in debt to anyone except the obligation to love each other.” He goes on to suggest that to “play in the game of love” we need to get dressed up. Listen. “Instead dress yourself with the Lord Jesus Christ and don’t plan to indulge your selfish desires.” (Romans 13:14) And again in Colossians we read, “Love, it’s your basic all-purpose garment. Never be without it.”

The game of love you are invited to consider today, bears all things. It hopes all things; it overcomes bitterness; it outlasts fear. At times, the apostle Peter is so caught up in ‘love as play’ that he encourages Christians to greet each other with a holy kiss. The bride and groom have shown the way. It would be fitting if at a wedding at least we follow Peter’s advice and pucker up for a holy kiss. If never before, now is your chance to kiss at church.

The Patient Presence of Love

The third thing that has impressed me is that ‘love’, in Paul’s words again, ‘doesn’t take offence’. It doesn’t fly off the handle or react to real or perceived provocation. This profound peace-centred-ness of love comes as we imitate Christ. As the fruit of the Spirit of Christ disseminates in our being. Marriage is a litmus test of whether as a couple you are one in sentiment only.

If marriage is an allegory of life lived in the wholeness of love, it starts with Christ being formed in you and is discovered in the push-back you experience against resentment, anger, frustration and bitterness. We recognise aggravation, but allow love to flood over a tendency to be offended.

In my work, there are times I am deeply saddened by the distress of people impacted by ‘offence’. Rash or impulsive behaviour, aggressive violence, drug-fuelled waste, a

“The union has become such that the two are no longer strangers. After so many years, then the saying is really true, “This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh.”

failure to meet expectation. As the song goes, ‘Jesus and bartender have heard them all.’ So in life we encounter offence, hardening of heart and social withdrawal. Love appears banished to outer darkness. If a third party is genuinely present to such people, tears of deep longing for communion, and love restored are not far away.

It may be marriage is an allegory for love others hunger for, but is ‘offence’ a reasonable excuse? Can ‘offence’ be a flow in the power of love? Can offence blow the cover of love? Your marriage will seriously test this question.

In driving our thoughts towards a conclusion and answering this question, I return to Jacques Ellul. He says this, “Love as union presupposes intimate acquaintance with the whole life of the other. There is no need to ask or to ask oneself. We know what the other suffers and fears. We know what gives the other pleasure or satisfaction. We know what causes the other to bloom or wilt. We know all this because we have lived in the same way at the same time as the other. The union has become such that the two are no longer strangers. After so many years, then the saying is really true, “This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh.” Marriage as an allegory for love. This is a blessing we all wish for you both.

Appropriately my final words come from the apostle Paul. The ‘apostle of love’ reminds all that, “God doesn’t give us a spirit that is timid, but one that is powerful, loving and self-controlled.” (1 Tim 1:7) It is a gift of the Spirit that we are invited to participate in the self-giving, other receiving and sacrificial love of God. Paul’s words in Philemon then can become our blessing. “This is my prayer; that your love may become even more and more rich with knowledge and all kinds of insight.” (Phil 1:9) Join with me and share the blessing as we speak it together. ●



Seeing the influence of the generations of our families

by Jenny Brown

Jenny is a family counsellor in Sydney. See www.thefsi.com.au/jenny-brown/

All families are part of a long generational history. The bible has much to say about the transmission of wisdom or folly from generation to generation.

Psalms 100:5 – For the LORD is good; his mercy is everlasting; and his truth endures to all generations.

Luke 1:50 – And his mercy is on them that fear him from generation to generation.

The following is a description of the ways that the previous generations of our family, and their patterns for managing the stressors of this broken world, shape how we relate to others. This knowledge of the intergenerational family is drawn from research by psychiatrist Dr Murray Bowen 1913-1990. Dr Bowen developed family systems theory as a way to appreciate the relationship influences that shape each human being.

Family ties that bind: Understanding our family of origin

(This is an excerpt from Chapter 3 of this author's book Growing Yourself Up: How to bring your best to all of life's relationships. Exisle Publishing. P: 37-64)

How do you think your original family has influenced how grown

up you are? The way our parents responded to our childhood expressions of protest and neediness can shed plenty of light on how much space we had to begin to develop our inner adult.

At the risk of simplifying the many factors that go into family dynamics, let's consider a few examples of the influence of various patterns that develop between parents and children. If we were the child whom a parent worried most about, we get accustomed to the emotional pattern of having them jump in to smooth out our difficulties. As a result we instinctively expect and invite others

an exaggerated way, we'll struggle as adults to tolerate not being important.

It isn't that our parents cause our limitations but rather that we respond to them in ways that keep these circular patterns going. Our parents' responses to us are as patterned as our instinctual responses to their anxious reactions. The energy we pick up from what our parents convey to each other in their marriage is also a big part of this influential circuitry. We all grow up in families with the backdrop of many generations of patterns that enabled the survival of the group.

"It isn't that our parents cause our limitations but rather that we respond to them in ways that keep these circular patterns going."

to solve our problems. If one or both of our parents' anxieties were detoured onto perceiving negative attributes in us, it's likely that we got used to exaggerated criticism and correction and could be prone to similar negative overreactions. If a parent reduced their tensions by giving in to our demands from our childhood tantrums we may find it harder to let go of always feeling entitled. If a parent confided or leant on us when things were tough or distant in their marriage, we're likely to be at ease with giving advice, but less comfortable accepting it from others. If we were given centre stage by a parent who secured themselves by applauding our achievements in

The parent-child relationship is one of these circuits that sit within a bigger multigenerational tapestry – one that includes dealing with the previous generation of parents, trying to stabilise a marriage and relating to support systems in the outside world.

One person's story of making sense of his family of origin influences

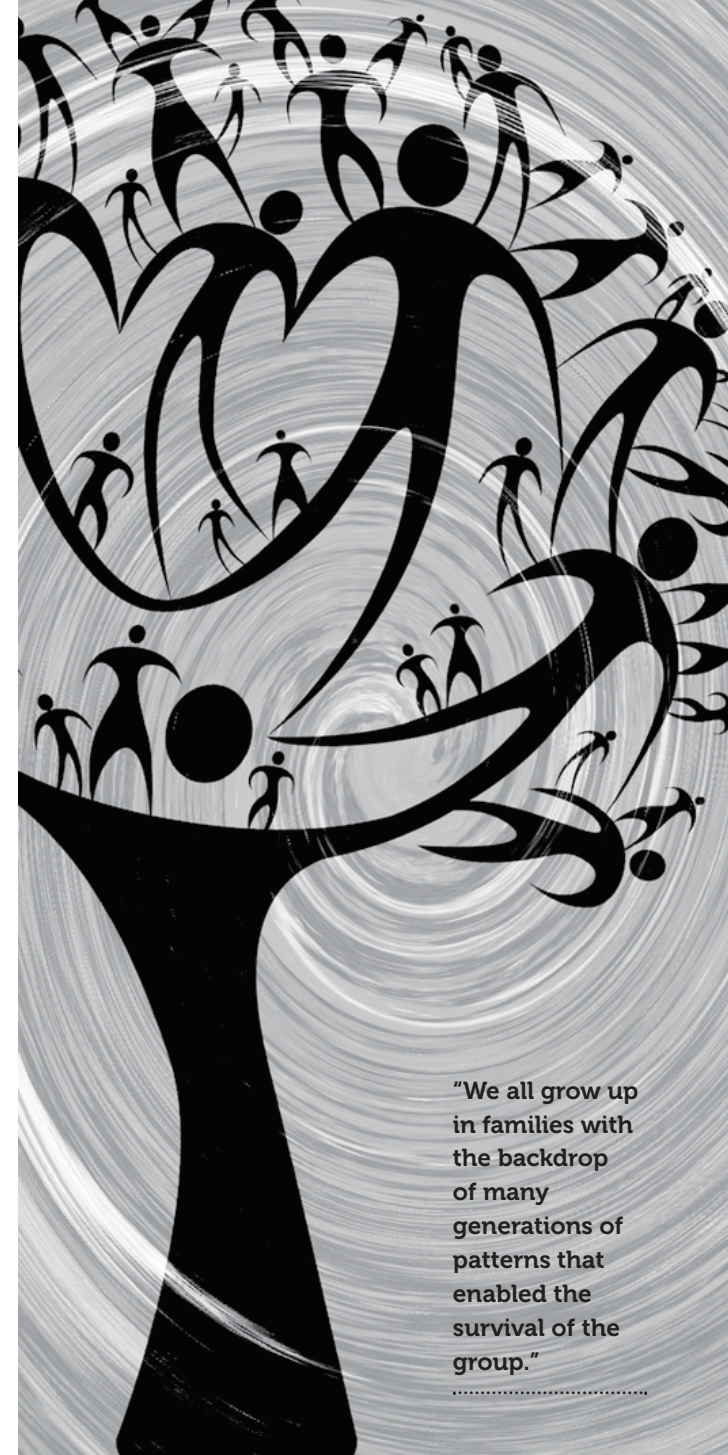
Greg came to counselling to get help with what he termed his 'commitment phobia'. He walked into my office somewhat awkwardly not having sought any counselling before. His height and smart business attire belied his nervousness as

he began to explain that at age 44, his long-term girlfriend Kerry was getting frustrated about his avoidance of the subject of marriage. This was not the first time a girlfriend had lost patience with Greg's avoidance of making plans for the future of the relationship: there had been two earlier long-term relationships that had ended painfully over the same issue. Greg wondered if he could ever grow up when it came to relationships. He said he wanted to be married and have kids and was getting anxious about losing his chance with Kerry. 'I start the relationship with such passion,' he explained, 'but before too long I look for every fault imaginable with these really decent women. What's wrong with me?'

I asked him how he understood what was getting in the way of him taking the step of marriage. He replied, 'I just don't know how to have watertight assurance that I could be happily married forever to Kerry.'

Greg sensed that his anxieties about committing were not all about Kerry. A friend had suggested to him that his relationship fears were caused by an experience of early abandonment by his mother. He had recounted a story he'd heard of how his mother had left him for two weeks with an aunt in his first year of life. At his friend's suggestion Greg had spoken to his mother about the damage this might have caused him. Her response was saturated with enormous guilt as she recounted the

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"We all grow up in families with the backdrop of many generations of patterns that enabled the survival of the group."

SEEING THE INFLUENCE OF THE GENERATIONS OF OUR FAMILIES

story of her difficulty coping with her colicky first baby and the lack of support she received from her husband. Defensively she recounted how a baby health centre nurse had suggested that a couple of weeks' respite would be a good idea. As Greg reflected on this short period of separation when he was well cared for, he was sceptical that this episode could account for the growing-up roadblock he was now trying to negotiate. 'I just can't make sense of how a two-week separation from my mother, that I've no memory of, really cuts it as an explanation for my anxiety about getting married. I don't really buy the idea of this being all about a childhood wound.'

It would be easy to hold Greg's parents responsible for this disruption. His fears of commitment could be blamed on his anxiety about being abandoned again. But this simplified cause-and-effect explanation doesn't leave much room for Greg to grow himself up and to see what he can work on doing differently in his relationships with both his parents. In our efforts to bring out our inner adult by not focusing on others but addressing what we can change in ourselves, it's unproductive to blame one event from the distant past as the single cause of a current relationship impasse.

The problem isn't abandonment but intensity

Greg did get past the potential of blaming this childhood event. He began to examine more broadly his growing-up experiences, which yielded some practical insights.

I asked Greg, 'What do you recall about your parents' relationship?'

He answered: 'My parents had a pretty bad marriage. I have no idea how they are still together after 45 years. My mother has never stopped complaining about how Dad lets her down; but you know what's really weird, I can never remember them having a fight!'

'Can you explain more about how each parent and you related during your growing up?' I asked.

Greg recalled, 'For as long as I can remember, Mum was always talking to me. I don't think Dad was ever there for her and she must have been lonely. I liked being special to her for most of the time but it all got a bit much for me as I got older. I'm still close to Mum but I also get resentful about how much she leans on me.'

'And what about your dad?'

Greg continued to reflect. 'Oh Dad and I were always awkward and distant. I resented how much time he spent at work. My sister Veronica got on better with Dad. She had

"The ability to be both a distinct self and part of a close relationship is at the core of being able to grow our genuine adult maturity."

problems with Mum, though. They were fighting all the time when she was at high school about her dodgy friends and breaking curfew; funny that I never gave Mum or Dad any trouble. Veronica on the other hand was quite a rebel. And she couldn't get out of home fast enough. She still lives as far away as she can; but it's the opposite for me. I have never moved out of the same suburb as Mum and Dad.' Can you identify some of the patterns of relating Greg developed in his family that form part of his current dilemmas? When asked this very question, after thinking through the facts of his family relationship story, Greg began to piece together some useful insights.

'I've only known how to do relationships one way, where I do all the listening but never say anything

about what's going on for me. It's always one-sided with Mum and empty with Dad. I get so intense quickly in my relationships, trying to make the other happy. No wonder I get overwhelmed with Kerry and then distance myself. I guess this is just what my father used to do?'

Putting the relationship puzzle together

Over a period of some months, Greg put effort into getting to know his parents' story of their early adult lives. He also worked at being more open with each of them about what was happening in his life. Greg discovered that his parents, like many other young adults, felt insecure with each other as they embarked on the challenging journey of parenting. In listening to their descriptions of how they adjusted to new responsibilities, Greg could appreciate how his mother coped by putting her focus onto her son to fill the distance that was growing in the marriage. Meanwhile, his father relieved his uncertainty through his distance and avoidance of upsetting his wife.

Greg could see that his mother's focus on him contributed to both a sense of suffocation and a strong dependence. For many years he had fostered this closeness by seeking his mother out and soliciting her attention with his humour. Greg's clash of feeling both dependent and needing space had primed him to be ambivalent in intimate relationships, where he had not grown his ability to develop a separate sense of self. Maintaining balance

There are patterns and tensions in Greg's family that all of us encounter. Greg, and each member of his family, struggled to get the balance right between their desire for closeness and intimacy and the need for separateness, for some space to be an individual. The ability to be both a distinct self and part of a close relationship is at the core of being able to grow our genuine adult maturity. The maturity blocks come when some family members put all their



effort into getting close, and others put their energy into individuality. This common 'pursue and withdraw' division of labour in a relationship can be seen in Greg's parents' marriage and the pattern that he was caught in with Kerry. Being mature means that a person learns to be comfortable and take initiative to be warmly connected as well as being able to operate independently.

When family members struggle to deal with the tension of feeling alone versus feeling smothered they often detour from growing up by getting their needs met in a third-party relationship. This is clearly what occurred when Greg's mother stopped pursuing her husband for closeness and replaced it with an emotional connection with her son. Greg's dad was part of creating this triangle by getting comfortable in his distancing position. He would likely have felt relief and less insecurity about meeting his wife's expectations when she refocused onto their son.

Figuring out your triangle detour

Identifying how we might have been involved in such triangles is useful for awareness about how we're prone to taking sides or getting in the middle of other people's issues and avoiding addressing our own. Our triangle positions can be identified by considering who we sided with about another person, or which two people aligned together to focus on us. The triangle that shapes us most is usually the one we occupied with each parent. Other influential triangles can be with one of our parents and a grandparent or a parent and one of our siblings. We may have played the part of an ally with a parent, whom we viewed as being treated badly by the other

party; we may have responded as a rescuer or mediator, compelled to look after the needs of both parties; or we may have absorbed the worry focus as the scapegoat or sick one, who provided a kind of glue for another relationship by providing a common cause to unite around. If you were reacted to as the troublemaker or sick one in a triangle with your parents, the growing-up challenge is to learn to express your responsible side. If you were an ally or rescuer for another in your family, a gap you may need to address is learning how to experience and express your vulnerable side.

It may be difficult to see the triangles in your family, as they may only be evident at times of heightened stress. Think back to times when family harmony was put to the test or when a stressful event intensified a mother's or father's need for togetherness or separateness. Often triangles come to the surface when relationships are required to make adjustments, with new additions to the family or family members leaving home. Who did you move towards or away from at these times? Did you move into a position of increased compliance, rebellion or neediness?

The more you're able to see the patterns of triangles that impacted you, the more you will be able to understand your own part in being a conduit to helping problems escape from the relationships they belong in.

Seeing the system helps to get past futile blaming

To see things from a systems perspective requires getting out of a 'cause and effect' way of thinking to seeing how every person's impulses are part of a circuit of reactions that flow like electric currents around

relationships. It's as if relationships are a kind of dance, with each person responding intuitively to the dance steps of another. These circuits of emotional and behavioural responses in relationships shape how each individual develops. Hence getting real about ourselves in our original families requires us to get honest about how our emotional responses and behaviours flow onto others and influence how they appear to us. The good news, from a systems way of thinking, is that changing our emotional reactions and behaviours eventually flows onto changing the entire circuit of the system. That is if we can hold onto the principles that drive our change efforts in the face of others' anxiety. This is how we can make a positive difference over time, not just for ourselves but for everyone we're connected to.

It's all too easy to blame others for our current struggles but when we're finding fault with others we stop working on ourselves. Our growing gets stuck in the blame rut. **The more we can understand the generational patterns that our parents inherited, the less likely we are to falling into narrow blaming of a parent.** It's not necessary to achieve universal admiration of each parent if their behaviour hasn't earned this, but we can learn to appreciate more of the context that gave rise to their particular way of managing. When our view of family members broadens beyond ascribed labels of villain, victim, saint or hero, our maturity is enhanced as we stop taking another family member's behaviour so personally. The more we can find out about the generations of our family, the more our family can be a rich resource, instead of a liability, in our growing up. ●

Parenting in an Age of Anxiety

(Taken from a workshop for parents and carers:
Brisbane Qld August/September 2015)

by Carolyn Russell

As I prepared for this article, my mind went via a number of loops through some questions on which to explore the topic, and as it did so, it brought up from memory the words from a very early medical teacher in Royal Brisbane Hospital, when faced with a person in our care.... *What is important to this patient presenting? And why have they come now?*

These have been extremely valuable words over the years to filter the presentations of various persons in my practice, helping me to understand both the internal motivations and the contextual /temporal factors influencing consultations.

So, having been asked to speak and write about this topic – something which parallels a consultation, (albeit with variations in numbers of persons in the room speaking and listening!) – these words seem to provide a framework on which to build our conversation.

What is important to this group of people asking for a workshop on this topic? and Why is this important now?

The first of these questions seemed to be clear. In the workshop, participants spoke of tension in homes, and awareness of behaviours which they described as worrying, and frustrating; they told of children getting very sad and anxious when

they could not do a particular task, or keep up with someone in the class; they spoke of life being very different from what they expected in raising kids; they shared experiences of their own as they battled with racing thoughts, difficulty making decisions, worry over 'everything', and of feeling like the future is ever darker now than earlier in their lives.

This last expressed thought spoke to the answer to the second question from my past teacher... Why now? The participants attested to an ever-increasing pressure in their lives and contexts about behaviour, expectations, speed of life, and future capacity and hope which left them and their young people sometimes overwhelmed.

If you are reading this article, perhaps you are in a similar situation, with thoughts along the same lines, or sleepless nights, thinking the thoughts of worry about future challenges, or parenting within these, and perhaps you are experiencing some level of hopelessness and despair as experienced by those at the workshop days.

Maybe you are not, and the words of the apostle Paul in Philippians 4 ring in your ears. Be anxious about nothing... Or perhaps you are resting in the words of Jesus in Matthew 6:25-34 knowing that your heavenly Father has the provisions for now, and tomorrow.

34 *"Therefore do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble."*

If so, stay there, and enjoy the certainty of your position in Christ, and the reality of His provision in uncertainty, His presence at hand in all things.

Concurrently, as you continue to read, consider how you might help those who are not in that state currently, to explore their thoughts and feelings and attempt to get some perspective on anxiety and our current world. They may be patients, or family and friends. Christians in all circumstances must face it at some time and have some possible ways of helping.

Before we start to explore and consider though, let's recognise that anxiety changes the way we think and weigh up, in content and perception, and in speed and processing. It is hard to do these reflective tasks well when our bodies and thoughts are racing. So, a small exercise in **being still** may help this process: go on to your verandah or patio, sit in a comfortable chair. As you sit, notice the texture of the chair on your skin, the movement of the breeze on your face, and listen – listen with the left ear for some time noticing what you hear, with the right ear just noticing and appreciating. Listen far away, listen near, listen again with the left ear, and then the right. After about 2 minutes, bring your attention back to the chair, and the breeze. And thank God who gives all things for the experience of NOW, when the future worry fades a little, and we are present with Him who cares.

Did you notice, I did not suggest that you make coffee and take it with

you? Perhaps if you are thinking in an anxious manner, then reducing the caffeine in your drinks may help with your feelings of tension also, and your capacity to *be still*!

Now, let's speak together about anxiety, this 'symptom' that brought you to this article, or workshop today.

What is anxiety and why is it important to those in the audience?

A mental health clinician currently describes Anxiety Disorders a little differently from what others may describe and even differently from the context that Paul and Jesus may be referring to. What definitions are currently used around the word anxiety?

A mental Health clinician will use definitions related to functionality and to severity of symptoms with which a person presents. There are many examples online rather than taking up space with them here (<https://www.beyondblue.org.au/the-facts/anxiety/types-of-anxiety>¹ or good old Wiki https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Generalized_anxiety_disorder)² and these examples given are described using DSM V or ICD 10 criteria³ which provide categories of disorders which create significant morbidity.

Anxiety in the Scripture seems to refer to a particular experience both mentally and spiritually, where we experience *existential* anxiety. The question set to us all, by Jesus and by Paul and the other epistle writers, and also by the Old Testament prophets eg. Do you know that God is big enough and in control enough to entrust yourself to Him in this world?

When we speak of Anxiety Disorders in a clinical setting, this existential anxiety may or may not be present, however, when someone presents with Panic Attacks, Agoraphobia, Social Anxiety Disorder, or Obsessive Compulsive Disorders, to name a few, they present with SIGNIFICANT constellations of symptoms which interfere with functioning. These symptoms affect either of them alone, or those whom they love

as well. These are the symptoms then such as avoidance, physical symptoms and excessive fear in thoughts, and behaviours, which isolate them and shut down their lives from productivity.

Beyond Blue states that currently 1 in 7 Australians will present with some form of Anxiety Disorder every year. That is why it is such an important issue and one to understand in our current climate.

This brings us to that second question asked in consultations and by friends.

Why now?

Looking around us especially at our young persons and families in this current generation, a number of factors seem to stand out as part of the reason for the increasing sense of anxiety and pressure experienced.

As I researched for this workshop, I came across many comments from parents wishing the day would 'have less to do', or that 'the world would slow down' so that they can take a breath. I found articles by psychologists and psychiatrists describing the amount of relational time in families reducing dramatically year by year. I discovered people who live on the buzz of heightened adrenalin for their work, and go into a slump if they slow down, and people who worry constantly about their boss, or their friends, or their performance, or their university entrance scores.

Most of us know that tension of some degree is important for our bodies to function well and to develop resilience and robustness – just sitting and enjoying the breeze all day will not feed our children, or clean the bath, or get us through exams!

Three main themes appeared in articles around anxiety and the parenting of children in our generation:

- an environment where the pressure to excel starts very early, with expectations constantly high, where life is increasingly complex

and fast paced, where instant answers are expected, and where reflectivity is apparently valued, however the time required for it is not provided in many domains. Our world is moving to a situation where we are **expected to be ALL present, ALL knowing, ALL powerful, and growing to self sufficiency daily...** where these attributes, *which are only present in God*, are expected of human beings! And this is happening everywhere.... Somehow our finiteness, our creatureliness, given by God, is not being seen as wonderful, but rather the idea that we can do superhuman things is pervading.

I have recently travelled in Nepal, and recall a moment there... a man standing in a field, hand to his wooden plough controlling it as it was pulled by a horse, and under his Nepali hat his other hand carried a mobile phone, on which he was speaking ferociously, and me, watching him, in one of the most beautiful bucolic places on the planet, with my phone suddenly pinging with a message from Australia! Omnipresence? I am thankful for my phone and connection with family while travelling, however are we allowing technology to push us to points where we cannot allow ourselves to catch a breath, where we are not reflective of the need to slow our lives sometimes, and to NOT be available at all times?

- Secondly, our environments contain **increasing amounts of information to process**. Either news or internet, or television gives us 24 hour coverage of every occurrence on our globe at our fingertips. Many people are not able to contain the overwhelming experience of this amount of knowledge, and those primed for anxiety, will find themselves constantly asking the anxious questions... what if... this happens here? What if... we cannot stop this? What if...

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my child grows up in a world like this? What if...???

These are the two main varieties of anxiety thoughts that you will notice in your family or friends: Fear of a future outcome that seems somehow threatening, or fear that I will not be capable of managing myself into any future.

- Finally, the opportunity for play, and for freedom to explore for children (especially in cities) seems to be eroding. Many writers spoke of parents who worry, managing timetables and play, watching all outdoor activity in case of injury or accident, providing agendas for their childrens' out of school activities. Our communities are increasingly **Risk Averse**. They spoke of testing and of tutoring for preschoolers to 'get a good start in education'.

Paula Barrett, child and adolescent researcher and psychologist in Brisbane, advocates for children to learn more through play and exploring their environment, rather than having it provided for them, as a means to resilience / reduction in anxiety about the future and capacity.

So, to summarise so far,

- We have genetic and system potential for developing anxiety disorders,
- We live in a climate which increasingly encourages us to be faster and cleverer, (however with less risk!), and
- We possess attitudes which suggest reliance on self, rather than on our Creator God and in interdependence with others.

If you recognise this state personally, or feel the effects of it, join with me in attempting to understand how we can help and move forward.

1. Understand Anxiety:

Acknowledge your child's fear – don't dismiss or ignore it. The resources listed at the end of the paper are a starting point in understanding how anxiety presents, and its prevalence. Recognise it early, and call it what it is – even if *you* experience it. Commit to reducing its effects in isolating people or eroding function and thought, with its' result of reducing their experience in life.

2. Recognise Accommodation:

One of the primary understandings for our profession, for the local and wider Christian community and for families is to understand how we accommodate to anxiety in persons in our midst. (Leibowitz et al)⁴

The Yale Study Centre has produced some very good Internet and You Tube resources by Dr Eli Leibowitz, explaining how this occurs. The figure below contains a very useful device for assessing whether we are being engaged in increasing the physiological and mental effects of anxiety, rather than challenging their power in a child's life.

The 4 domains of effect in this work are:
Time, Space, Actions, Emotions.

If these are present in your situation, then seeking help to manage the family and children with anxiety is essential.

How common it is for us to say: 'well, he **LIKES** us home, so we do that. It saves a lot of anguish for us all.' 'We don't go to those places any more because Allie doesn't like them.'

Or for a mum to report in your surgery... 'She will get distressed if I do not have a particular food, so I always have them in the cupboard.' Or for dad to get annoyed at the presence of Tom (9) in the bedroom yet again, and for his wife to respond... 'He will get over it in time'

The accommodation of an anxious child feels (*initially*) so much better than the distress noted and experienced by the family, it is not unusual that the avoidance of the experience occurs.

3. Review Context: realistically assess your context and family beliefs

Children vary in capacity and rate of growth and maturity. This is for adults too! We are not all Einstein (some would say... thankfully).

If children do have particular gifts, and talents, it is important to help nurture, however not at

the expense of their mental or spiritual health. And maybe we are making the competition about us and what we would like them to achieve. The pressure to perform may be tapping in to some of our own expectations, and the rate of achievement at the school may be for the schools' kudos not the best for the child. Be curious about the context in which your child is growing and the attitudes of family and leaders.

4. Respond appropriately:

Not all contextual factors can be changed. So, fighting them all will just exhaust you, along with the ones you love. However, being swept along with something that seems to be accommodating anxious stressed behaviour, or '*just going with the flow as it's too hard to resist*', is not the only solution.

- Work with others: keeping anxious thoughts and behaviours in the family is *accommodating* anxiety. Becoming open about its existence in your life helps to reduce the tensions of managing. You will be surprised how many other parents and families are facing the same issues.... Remember how many people in Australia have anxiety symptoms?
- Care for your own mental health... Do you need to learn something about your own anxiety and how you have accommodated it in your life? Perhaps avoiding some activities or ideas.
- Engage your children in managing the situation. Apart from 'being anxious' your children are many other things... they have great creative ideas about life. Some of these may be helpful, rather than 'fixing' everything for them.

The Raising Children Network⁵ has a good set of guidelines for speaking with children who are anxious... Check them out as you work with your patients, or family members



who are experiencing the signs and symptoms we have considered.

Here are some examples:

- Wait until your child *actually gets anxious* before you step in to help.
- Gently encourage your child to do things she's anxious about, but don't push her to face situations she doesn't want to face. Build up slowly in capacity as confidence increases.
- Praise your child for doing something he/she is anxious about*, rather than criticising him/her for being afraid.
- Avoid labelling your child as 'shy' or 'anxious': he or she is **MORE** than that, he or she is a child... with many other parts!

Consider yourself for a moment changing one or all of these four in your life:

- Understand the symptoms
- Review your accommodation of the symptoms
- Review your context
- Respond appropriately

Mindful noticing, becoming still, slowing life to be able to think and reflect more clearly, listening to each other, and connecting in families and communities who are on the lookout for each other, encouraging growth – What a difference we will see as we thoughtfully consider our responses to persons with anxiety and change them.

Why this discussion, and this aim of managing anxiety well,

and early? And why now?

As those who choose to follow Jesus, we want to point the way to Him, who is able to do 'far more abundantly than we can ask or even imagine'.⁶ When we are in clear mind, engaging with each other, and supporting each other in the body of Christ, it is much easier to see and to experience that 'indeed, the Lord is good'. For those who are suffering, His presence brings life and sustenance.

For those suffering with anxiety symptoms, especially in our increasingly complex world, the opportunity to know Him well, and to trust Him with the *Whattif?* questions, can become limited. As a result of accommodating the symptoms, avoiding the feelings of anxiety, people can become cut off from much relationship and growth, as information about others and context, is considered in this panicky way.

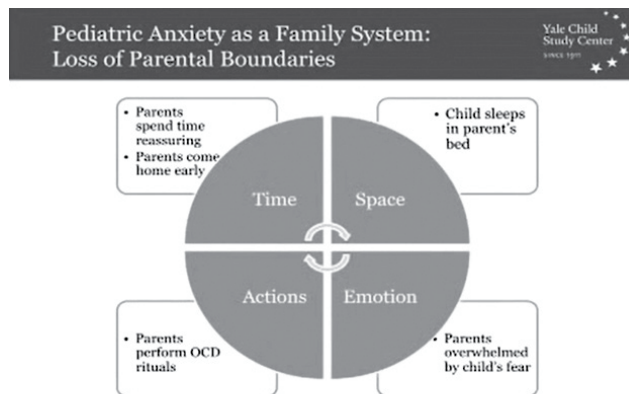
Be part of the change!: As parents, as workers, and those who serve medically.

Anxiety symptoms affect us all at some time or other. Anxious thinking begets more anxious thinking and physical symptoms. As a clinician, I believe it is increasing and especially in those whose understanding of God is clouded, or whose desire for certainty and safety is heightened.

Our improved response, in support, in management and connection, enables those with anxiety to learn the deep lesson that we all must learn: That our finiteness and weakness is no problem with God. Even with our anxious capacities, we can be sure of God's presence and saving grace, and therefore can live without despair because of this. ●

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Family Relationships Matter

by Dr Johanna Lynch

Johanna is a Christian GP in Brisbane.

Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. 1 John 4:11

As a general practitioner who works with adults who have survived childhood trauma and neglect, I have spent a lot of time thinking and caring about the quality of family relationships – often looking back at chaos, destruction and absence, but also looking forward to how survivors face the task of connecting and caring for their children. And of course, contemplating my own family of origin and my family relationships.

Reflecting on family makes me look at church family in its own broken ways of loving and reconciling, and the wonder of the way that God consistently connects, includes and is wise and kind without being invasive or manipulative. What a peace we can find in belonging to His family – in the ways He repairs relationships and frees us to love.

This work – of noticing family, of noticing the quality of relationships and the history of encounters with fear, violence, deliberate ignorance and invasion, as well as experiences of safety, fun and freedom in a child's life – is really important work. There is a growing body of research showing the physical, neurobiological and lifelong relational impacts of early childhood lifeworlds.^{1,2} Taking an interest in this part of a patient's story is integral to good quality comprehensive health care and raises suggestions that family therapy should have more of a role in health care.³

Once called 'family doctors' – living within the community, and often aware of many generations of

patients, their relationships and family life – primary care assessment of mental distress has been reduced to symptom identification, case-finding according to criteria-based diagnosis,⁴ prescription and referral.⁵ A once-complex, intuitive, humane way of relating has been dumbed down and reduced to mechanistic behavioural descriptions – devoid of story, context, meaning and hope. This way of practicing has become enshrined as standard practice in Australia as Better Access insists on diagnosis prior to referral. Present-day mental health provision often ignores assessing relationship quality – ignoring how relationships impact on our embodied memories, resources, sense of self, meaning and experience of joy and comfort in day to day life. This has impacts in all areas of medicine.

In reflecting on the topic of this *Luke's Journal* I thought I might speak about the practicalities of trying to understand a patient's family story, what I try to see and notice in those stories, and how our relationship with and understanding of God might inform what we look for.

One deep legacy of the Judaeo-Christian world view is the importance of **relationships**, the high value placed on hospitality and the inclusion of the down-trodden, ostracised and refugee into belonging spaces. So much is written in the Old and New Testament that guides how humans should relate to each other with honour, respect and inclusion. So much is written about 'each other' and 'one another' – loving (1 John 4:7), encouraging (1 Thess 5:11), serving (Gal 5:13), forgiving (Eph 4:32), bearing with (Eph 4:2), offering hospitality to (1 Peter 4:9) and so on. This list is such a call to community – a rich realistic view of the need for humans to be taught how to 'be with' each other – and a reminder of how God values us working together and the 'deeply communal dimensions of

formation'.⁶ Some areas of research and practice have come to recognise that relationship is central to how well we are. They focus on the quality of attachment to each other and its effects on development, neurobiology (both neurochemical and synaptic networks), interpersonal neurobiology, affect regulation, meaning making... and so much more.

God also teaches us about how he looks at our **hearts**. He looks beyond appearances and behaviours to what is going on in our hearts – our needs, our dreams, our attitudes, our fears, our angers, our sadnesses – the realities that drive us. He sees and knows and cares about the deep parts of us, and he can bring healing there in a way no one else can. He looks beyond utility, or function or wantedness to each person's valuable heart. We are more than moving objects to Him. Looking through behaviour to each other's heart is a key element of responsive safe relationships. Mentalising – the capacity to accurately predict what is happening inside ourselves and others can be lost in families that don't learn how to see each other's hearts.

Another word that is used throughout scripture which is helpful to reflect on when we consider family relationships, is a deeply comforting word: **faithfulness**. This is a word used to describe our God. It reveals His nature, it reveals His decisions, it reveals His attitude towards us, and it makes such a difference to

There are many other aspects of God that we could reflect on when we consider relationships – but an important one not to miss is **humility**. Humility helps us to notice that we are not more elevated than another person in God's eyes. It helps us not to cross boundaries into territory that is only God's – like 'knowing' what the

"Present-day mental health provision often ignores assessing relationship quality – ignoring how relationships impact on our embodied memories, resources, sense of self, meaning and experience of joy and comfort in day to day life."

us. Neurobiology is discovering the importance of 'consistency'⁷ for neural network development and a steady sense of self. Others write about the importance of autobiographical coherence – making sense of our stories.⁸ The existence of faithful relationships that do not change based on our moods, our behaviour or our beliefs about ourselves makes such a difference in the life of a child and the adult they become.

other person needs, wants, or 'should' do. It also helps us not to believe that we have become God-like in our omnipotent ability to rescue, heal and restore. It helps us remember our own human need for rest, comfort, lament, restoration and healing. Humility is really important in family relationships. One difference between abusive and safe family relationships is the ability to say sorry. 'Sorry' – the capacity to repair broken ways of relating, the humble admission that I

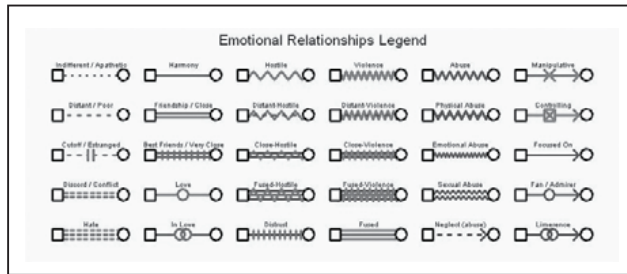
have made a mistake, the honouring of the other person as someone worthy of an apology – these are deeply important to how humans grow and live in community.

The Scriptures have a lot to say about **refuge and safety** – telling us about God's nature and what He offers to us. So many times we are reminded that He is refuge and rock – two concepts that are reflected in attachment literature. Much is written about attachment – but an influential and useful way to understand the impact of safe attachment environments in a family is to look at the development of the Circle of Security concept. If you want to see a helpful animation about this – look at <http://circleofsecurity.net/news/circle-of-security-animation-video/>. Circle of Security highlights the importance in relationships of three elements: the caring *kind hands* of the caregiver who is 'bigger, stronger, wiser and kind' (isn't that a wonderful description of God!), the *secure base* that enables a person to go out from that relationship and explore the world freely and with confidence, and the *safe haven* that invites the person to return assured of welcome, comfort and protection. Experiencing this in families is so important.

So many of these elements are central to a Christian understanding of the much-maligned word 'love', and perhaps they guide us to help us understand what it is like to experience a 'heart's embrace'⁹ or 'deeply authentic welcome'⁶ where we are seen and heard in an attuned way. So many people in our community have never experienced this, including many sitting in churches. If you have not ever received this faithful, humble, heart-focussed, attuned love, it is not possible to offer it to others. And yet this experience of being loved is so vital. Brown asks "What might

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be a solid foundation for identity?... **being God's beloved** might be at that human core. Our identity might best be understood not in light of something inherent in us, but in light of God's covenant relationship and loving commitment to us.⁶

So how are these thoughts useful in ordinary medical practice? For me they change what I look for. They change whether I let current mental health frameworks seduce me away from caring about and trying to understand relationships both in the present and the past. I use genograms to try to understand families, to try and notice patterns, to help me to feel what a patient might have experienced as a child. I cannot imagine practice without that now. I ask different questions - like how often did people say sorry in your home? Do you have any mutually safe relationships? Or any that you find invasive or manipulative? What words would you use to describe your mother/father? Is there anywhere or anyone in your childhood where or

with whom you felt safe? What did that feel like? Can you remember that now by describing all the sensory things you remember about that place/person?

Family therapy training has influenced me to try to record the quality of relationships that I learn about in a consistent way in my notes. There is a standardised code (see table below and this link: <http://multiculturalfamily.org/wp-content/uploads/wp-checkout/downloads/ExplainingGenogramsPlus.pdf>) that I use aspects of in day to day practice.

It is a discipline to remember to look and see and try to understand the complex web of family relationships surrounding a person as they cope with any aspect of medical illness. But not to look is intentionally ignoring of much of what makes us human. Imagine if we looked for faithfulness, connection, humility, hospitality, refuge and safety in the worlds around our patients. Imagine if we stopped looking for symptoms as

our primary tool and started trying to understand relationships and each person's heart.

I am willing to continue the journey to health care that notices our hearts and our communities - will you join me?

This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. John 15:12 ●

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'What happens with states of mind when a sense of terror or grief in response to loss is not met by reasonably attuned comforting?' Peter Fonagy¹¹

Some insightful quotations....

*In a world of flawed communication community is possible through understanding others.
In a world of painful alienation community is created by accepting others.
In a world of broken trust community is sustained by forgiveness.
Augsberger¹⁰*

*Whoever dwells in the shelter of the Most High will rest in the shadow of the Almighty. I will say of the Lord, "He is my refuge and my fortress, my God, in whom I trust."
Psalm 91:1-2*

*What does hospitality as a healing power require? It requires first of all that the host feel at home in his own house, and secondly that he create a free and fearless place for the unexpected visitor.
Henri Nouwen (1979)p89¹²*

*"To welcome the stranger is to challenge the social arrangements that exclude and include. Thus any serious welcome of a stranger is a gesture that 'unsettles' the power arrangements to which we have become accustomed."
Walter Bruggemann¹³*



Communicating with our children in an age of technology

by Leith Harding

Leigh (BSSc (Hons)(Psychology) DipT) is a Lecturer in School of Psychology and Counselling, QUT.

My childhood was one of friends playing together at school; walking home together; meeting to play in the park, at each other's homes and even on the footpath. Television, videos and board games were our foray into the world of technology!

Times have changed and children today have much less of daily interaction with neighbourhood friends. iPods and smartphones are quickly replacing television, and play dates are planned events with 'known' adult supervision as concerns for children's safety and busy lives inhibit the spontaneity of childhood communication.

Much of the literature around this change focuses on the fast, accessible and mobile technology now supplanting face-to-face interaction (Hazelwood & Shakespeare-Finch, 2011). In fact, children prefer mobile devices over television so much so that Gorr (2015) found in her research that parents said they confiscated their children's mobile devices as punishment, making them watch television instead. Furthermore, children would prefer more time on mobile devices than other rewards. According to research, one in every five Australian children uses technology during meal times and a similar number fall asleep with a device. The mobile link to entertainment, friends, even comfort and security is knowing that a familiar voice or image is right there if needed.

This technology is not going away so we need to learn how to communicate with it. Tim Challies (2015) states that we have been called by God to be creative in the world, and to do that in this 'time' means being able to productively use the tools of the time. In this time technology has made it possible for us to communicate around the world, provide assistance and share knowledge immediately. We also need to be stewards in the application of technological communication with the next generation.

This raises a number of questions, the first of which is often 'When do I give my child a mobile phone?' The simple answer is: 'When you need your child to communicate with you or vice versa.' For many parents

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COMMUNICATING WITH OUR CHILDREN IN AN AGE OF TECHNOLOGY

this coincides with the teen or pre-teen steps towards independence. The phone can come with number restrictions, tracking, activity logs and no data options; or the parent-child trust relationship is put to the test, possibly too prematurely to be successful. I have seen pre-schoolers with mobile phones and toddlers competent on iPads – the goal posts are no longer fixed!

With more than 5 billion mobile phones in the world (more phones than people!) communication has changed, and with it has come a new language. This language contains abbreviations for speed, emoticons to replace paralanguage, and often lacks the grammar and 'manners' of written communication of the past. There are also assumptions that the receiver has an understanding of the context and tone of the sender. As a result, miscommunication is a common event and relationship can be strained or damaged. With the ever-present contact of a mobile device there is a sense of urgency in receipt and response that allows the sender to interrupt the receiver and intrude into their current social interaction.

This raises the next important question: How do we manage this change in communication and adjust our communication to stay connected to our children and their world? We need to stay in touch with our children and this doesn't mean tracking their phones! It means communicating with them in the language they are using – abbreviations, emoticons, photographs, 'stickers' etc.. Also we need to use the media they most frequently use - texts, facetime, snapchat, whats app, tweeting, etc. Danah Boyd (2013) researched teenage phone and social media use and found that parents might read but not fully understand teenagers' messages because they used in-jokes, nicknames, code words and subliminal tweeting or "sub-tweeting", so messages become meaningless to those outside their communication group.



the age of technology and prepare our children for their encounter with potentially harmful interactions. Many parents do not realise that today's social media can include real-time video through built-in cameras and apps like snapchat. This translates to their teen's friends and acquaintances (friends' friends) always being with them 24/7 – at the dinner table even in their bedrooms, bathrooms, anywhere, anytime, often with video access.

While Danah Boyd thinks that social media is the social world of the future, we need to be aware that peer influence, deception, harassment and stalking are the hidden and often

“Our responsibility as parents means that we need to consider what the ‘real’ concerns are for our children in the age of technology and prepare our children for their encounter with potentially harmful interactions.”

It may seem strange using teenage language at first, but this sends two important messages to your child and they will 'listen'. You are acknowledging that you are aware of their communication and you are going to be part of it. You are also opening the door for them to communicate important messages that may be hard to address face-to-face. My teenage son was more comfortable asking for help and saying "thank you" by text. Boyd also explained that teens were acutely aware that privacy was non-existent and therefore coding provided teens with a safer way to communicate. You will learn their short-hand and even develop your own secret messages with your teen. "It looks like rain tomorrow," could mean "You are late!" or "I'm shopping, do you want anything?" could mean "I'll pick you up in 10 minutes."

Our responsibility as parents means that we need to consider what the 'real' concerns are for our children in

silent attack on our youth through their online devices. With minimal regulation of online communication the incidence of deception, deceit, false representation and false witness has escalated. Boyd claims that teens are self-protecting and active parents can assist by monitoring and encouraging their children to self-monitor and not accept messages from anyone they do not actually know. Being a 'quiet friend' (lurking with minimal engagement) on your children's social media will allow you to keep astride of their activities but take care not to engage too often or you may find yourself excluded!

Teens generally have a high level of computer skills and with the anonymity cyberspace offers through email, social media, Twitter and texts, cyberbullying has become a real and silent danger. A malicious hate campaign can be mounted in minutes, leaving a victim hurt, demeaned, excluded and isolated. One in ten Australian students has

been cyberbullied (Hazelwood and Shakespeare-Finch). When parents are included in their teens' technological social world they have been more able to identify cues, notice changes in the tone, style and amount of communication and non-verbal signs at home like withdrawing and snappiness. Make sure your teens know they can confide in you and you can respond in any medium.

How can we instil family values into our children's phone and online activity? One of the key elements is modelling the type of phone behaviour you want from your children. Being a good steward in your own life reflects on your children's lives. Telstra surveyed more than 1800 Australians and found most parents did not consider themselves to be good technological role models, and most children mirrored their bad screen habits (Gorr, 2014). A way to avert this outcome can be to set standards that apply to all family members, such as no technology at the table, and technology free-times, and monitoring internet activity. Set standards for phone interruptions, eg. excusing yourself from face-to-face situations to answer the phone or reply to texts and avoid technology use when in the company of others. You can encourage your children and teens to share what they are exploring online by sharing and discussing things you are looking at online. This models transparency and provides the opportunity to discuss the sources, validity of the facts and how to seek other relevant information.

If you are thinking it is too late because your teen is already locked into their own world of social media, phone texting, snapchat, and/or tweeting then find ways to engage them in these worlds. Ask them to help you set up your 'accounts' in social media forums. Take this learning opportunity (or excuse!) to communicate short messages often. Send short tracts and funny sayings intermingled and your



“Telstra surveyed more than 1800 Australians and found most parents did not consider themselves to be good technological role models, and most children mirrored their bad screen habits.”

children will become comfortable with you in their world. When skilled in communicating in this non-verbal medium, you can discern meaning by considering intent and emotion. Look for clues in what is written by observing changes in text or writing patterns, and model good e-communication skills by observing your own communication. In this way you can responsibly teach your children to discern, observe and show caution without being fearful of the future.

Who would have thought 20 years ago that we would be helping to deliver babies halfway around the

world through Google and Skype, or managing emergency surgery from our office computer. Our children will embrace the technology and we can prepare them to communicate effectively and responsibly, to seek the truth, share knowledge and skills, and minister to others anywhere in the world. ●

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There is a time for everything...

Work and family life: does resilience matter?

by Dr Kylie Gates

Kylie, (MBBS(Hons) FRACGP, is
Director of Medical Standards,
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A GP by training, I have spent the last 20 years working in a specialty niche providing chronic disease prevention and occupational stress management to executives, managers and professionals in the corporate sector.

For the last 10 years I have worked at Ford Health, a Brisbane based practice with national coverage in all major capital cities. We take a particular interest in exploring the relationship between work (roles, hours, travel), family life, health behaviours, psychological wellbeing and work performance.

In our experience, a holistic approach such as this in working age individuals is the key to optimising health and changing lives in a positive way.

Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest...

Matthew 11:28 (NIV)

We spend around a third of our week, each week, at work. For those who work part-time, that proportion is slightly less, but for many of you the time spent at work may be much higher. So it is not surprising that our work lives, how we deal with them and how they affect us, have a significant impact upon our family lives.

For you... know how you ought to imitate us... because we were not idle when we were with you... but with toil and labour we worked night and day...
2 Thessalonians 3:7-8 (ESV)

One of the great challenges that I see for Christian health care professionals is balancing the desire (or pressure) to serve God by pouring ourselves out sacrificially for our patients, against the need to have more than just a few crumbs left over for our families.

We are regularly faced with significant pressures – long hours, difficult clinical problems, difficult patient interactions, difficult staff issues, medico-political issues,

“One of the great challenges that I see for Christian health care professionals is balancing the desire to serve God... against the need to have more than just a few crumbs left over for our families.”

practice finance issues, etc. On top of that, we often end up in (or seek out) voluntary roles within our local communities or our specialty groups, or teaching the next generation of health professionals.

If we do not manage ourselves well, we run the risk of having nothing left in the tank – mentally, emotionally or physically – for our families. I am not sure that God will be keen to bless us with ‘*well done a good and faithful servant*’ if, despite

all that we have accomplished professionally in His name, we leave behind a legacy of damaged relationships, disappointment and lost opportunities.

Many of us do not have the capacity to determine our working hours or even our patient scheduling or after-hours demands. But there are many other things that are completely within our power to influence, and these can enable us to absorb the pressures of our professional lives without sustaining damage, leaving us with energy to invest in our families. Because, let’s be honest, doing family life well takes energy!

So, what are the factors that help to build energy and resilience?

Strategies

Sleep – 7 hours per night is the recognised optimum for most people. Yet, over 50% of the people I see do not get sufficient sleep. Contrary to what we might assume, the most commonly stated reason for this is not stress, but merely the lack of sufficient personal discipline to go to bed at the right time. Sleep is a critical contributor to stress absorption and the maintenance of a sensible perspective, which are all important elements for resilience.



Sometimes I think that sleep is undervalued amongst our profession. Sleep debt can become a badge of honour, indicating indispensability and importance, instead of being recognised as a problem that needs correcting. Whilst it is sometimes inevitable to have reduced sleep due to after-hours demands, it is important to try to catch up and minimise sleep debt as soon as possible.

Exercise – Regular exercise is well recognised as a stress management tool and contributor to resilience. Yet fewer than 50% of individuals make the time for this. Within our executive population, we find that combining exercise with commuting even on just a few days a week can make exercise seem more feasible in a busy life. I add to my weekly exercise by choosing to use a combination of public transport and brisk walking (up to 5km) two days per week. I enjoy the combination of exercise, blue sky and Vitamin D, all accompanied by music via

“If we do not manage ourselves well, we run the risk of having nothing left in the tank – mentally, emotionally or physically – for our families.”

my earphones. It is a good way to start the day in a positive frame of mind, or to shed the difficulties at the end of the day whilst making the transition home.

Positive uplifts – ‘*Be joyful always*’ (1 Thess 5:16 NIV) is not so easy. But finding a moment of joy in each day is possible. Whilst it might sound like Facebook pop psychology, there is a well-researched and validated correlation between positive emotions and resilience. It could be something as simple as really

looking properly at the beauty in God’s creation on your way to work. It can be little things that fit into the slivers of available time in your day – like listening to music during your commute, laughing with staff, reading a book, time with friends, focussing on what is going well in your life, and enjoying the patient interactions. ‘*Give thanks in all circumstances*’ (1 Thess 5:18 NIV) – developing a habit of gratefulness is also powerful contributor to resilience.

Hobbies/Interests – It is good for us to have a hobby or interest completely unrelated to our profession. These provide distraction, which helps with perspective. It is hard to think about the troubles of the day when you are playing a musical instrument, dancing, painting or doing Tai Kwon Do.

Find an antidote for negative thoughts – Ruminating on negative

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events and emotions is highly erosive of mental and psychological wellbeing. If you find yourself doing this, then it is important to combat this by seeking out someone with whom you can safely discuss these issues. Whilst that might be your spouse, it is important to have at least one other person in your life who you can turn to for discussing the difficult case, the difficult day. This may be a trusted friend or a mentor. And don't be afraid to seek professional help if you recognise that you need extra assistance. As health professionals we are often reluctant to do so, feeling that we have failed if we cannot look after ourselves. Yet, our psychologist colleagues are of great value and can provide us with useful tools to enhance our resilience.

Faith – *‘Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.’* (Philippians 4:6 NIV). There is much documentation in the psychological literature of the value of religious faith in enhancing resilience. Actively praying, reading our bibles, putting the word of God into practice, and interaction with a faith community; these can assist us with perspective, sense making, anxiety reduction and social support, which then have the flow-on effect of boosting resilience.

Recovery time – *‘Then, because so many people were coming and going that they did not even have a chance to eat, he said to them, “come with me by yourselves to a quiet place and get some rest.”’* (Mark 6:31 NIV). Olympic athletes know that their performance is as much influenced by the time they schedule to rest as it is by the time spent in training. The same is true for us. Time away from work allows us to recover and be restored in both energy and enthusiasm. This, in turn, helps us to be better able to absorb the pressures during the hard times which will inevitably crop up in our working days. Days off and

holidays are valuable. Use them for whatever is refreshing. This could be adventuring, relaxing, enjoying hobbies, fun with the family, catching up with friends, exercising, or just sleep! Whatever works for you. But these times should not be regarded as luxuries or guilty pleasures. They are necessities.

Performance

Given the nature of our jobs, and the significant implications of poor performance, doing them well helps to reduce stress. Whilst the quality of our performance as health practitioners will primarily be maintained through continuing professional education, there are additional factors that can affect our day-to-day work. We recently analysed data from 1700 health assessments on executives, managers and professionals, to look for correlations between work performance and health & wellbeing. The top three parameters that showed the most significant correlation with high performance were:

- (a) having 7-8 hours of quality sleep most nights;
- (b) exercising at least 4 days per week at a moderate intensity; and
- (c) not experiencing any clinically significant stress, anxiety or depression.

In addition, we specifically asked this population to nominate the issues that had negatively influenced their work performance in the month prior to the assessment. Whilst workplace communication and direction was the most selected option, family related issues were nominated by 22% as having had a negative impact upon recent work performance. So, family and work are interrelated in more ways than one.

As a courtesy to family –

- Clear your head before you arrive home, to avoid bringing home the grey cloud. Your family sense it and it infects everyone. Pick a spot on the journey home and

consciously use it as a hat stand to leave work problems there.

- Listen to their needs – if they ask you to come home a bit earlier, then try to do so if this in your power. To repeatedly ignore this could have long-term impacts on levels of marital connectedness, as it sends a message that they are not as important, not as valued, as your patients.
- Don't feel the need to be a problem solver at home – family interactions are not a consultation with a problem to be solved in 10 minutes. Sometimes just a sympathetic ear is all they need, and that can be liberating!
- Intentionally involve yourself in family interests and activities. A wise doctor once pointed out that it was all too easy, particularly for men, to become more 'at home' at work than at home. Staying late at the office, escaping to the study at home, attending every educational dinner on the calendar, missing meal time with the family can all potentially lead to disconnect.
- Do fun things with your family. Date your spouse regularly. Have special outings with each child individually. Show them that they are valued and loved, rather than taken for granted.

Conclusion

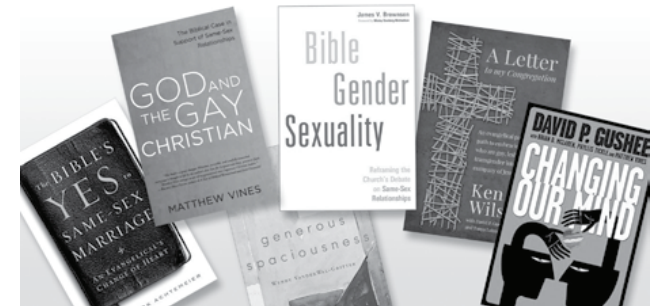
Family and work may, at one level, operate separately in our lives, yet in reality they are intertwined. By engaging in sensible self-care activities, we are better able to absorb the stresses of our professional lives. We can then return to our families at the end of each day with energy to engage and contribute, to build up rather than drag down, to enrich instead of disappoint. Family may be one of the hardest things that we do in our lives, but it can also be the one with the most lasting and significant rewards. ●

Disputable Matters

Six books that are changing the evangelical discussion about LGBT Christians and the church

by Prof. David P. Gushee

David is Distinguished University Professor of Christian Ethics at Mercer University, a *Sojourners* contributing editor, and author of the new book *Changing Our Mind: A call from America's leading evangelical ethics scholar for full acceptance of LGBT Christians in the church* (Read the Spirit, 2014).



Evangelical Christianity has changed significantly over the last forty years on issues of gender, race, and nation. But until now it has not changed on homosexuality. Until the last five years, any self-identified evangelical Christian (in the United States, at least) suggesting that Christians might need to change some aspect of their teaching about same-sex-oriented people and their relationships has been (metaphorically, so far) banished by the evangelical community.

But that reality has begun to shift. Six books, all published in 2013-14, represent the newest wave of US evangelical reflection on LGBT matters. Evangelical New Testament scholar James Brownson published *Bible, Gender, Sexuality* in February 2013. Vineyard pastor Ken Wilson unveiled *A Letter to My Congregation* in February 2014; Matthew Vines posted *God and the Gay Christian* last April; Wendy VanderWal-Gritter's *Generous Spaciousness* came out in May; and evangelical Presbyterian Mark Achtemeier released *The Bible's Yes to Same-Sex Marriage* in June. And my own *Changing Our Mind* came out in October.

Brownson's work reveals that at least some of those who tackle questions about LGBT people and evangelical Christianity are scaling the great mountain of biblical scholarship and related literature on sexuality. In an early chapter he takes on in a broad way "traditionalist" Christian scholarship, notably in the work of Robert Gagnon, a mainline conservative at Pittsburgh Seminary. Gagnon's primary claim is that the Bible's consistent message about sex reveals a God-given design in creation (Genesis 1-2) involving physical/biological sexual complementarity between male and female. Gagnon argues that this creation theme underlies Paul's condemnation in Romans 1:24-27 as well.

Brownson, a professor at the Reformed Church in America's Western Theological Seminary, takes on Gagnon's approach. Through very careful research on both Genesis 1-2 and echoes later in scripture, Brownson shows convincingly that the Genesis texts do not emphasise physical/ biological complementarity between male and female, in any of the forms argued by traditionalists, but instead the similarity and

equal value of male and female. He suggests that Genesis 2:24 ("one-flesh") is really about the forming by two of a binding kinship relationship, and not about anatomical fitting together in the sexual act.

Brownson then examines the relevant biblical passages and underlying "moral logics" shaping the Bible's texts on sexuality. He does this through his own original research and digging in the best of biblical scholarship, as well as sufficient reading in contemporary Christian sexual ethics and the literature related to LGBT matters. It is an extraordinary achievement. Brownson identifies the themes of patriarchy (and an egalitarian strand in scripture), the meaning of "one-flesh," the role of procreation in sexual ethics, and celibacy as central to Christian sexual ethics, carefully reporting on ancient and biblical understandings and then attempting to make a leap across cultures to consider their applicability in our own time.

In the end, Brownson offers a book that graciously reports the

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traditionalist position but very carefully breaks with it and shows the reasons why. This book is the achievement of a lifetime, in my view the most important work any Christian scholar has contributed to the recent conversation.

Mark Achtemeier is another senior leader in US Christianity, this time in the Presbyterian Church (USA). He is a pastor and theologian who taught ethics for 15 years at Duquesne Seminary. Achtemeier notes that in the late 1990s he took the conservative position when his denomination was fighting over whether to permit the ordination of openly gay and lesbian ministers. But his opening line states, "This book is the story of a change of heart." Achtemeier here documents his defection from the position he once held, though he remains an evangelical.

Like many of us, Achtemeier's heart has been changed because he has engaged the suffering of earnest, devoted Christians who also turn out to be ineradicably same-sex in their sexual orientation. Existentially changed, Achtemeier narrates how he then went back to the Bible for a fresh look. Achtemeier classifies the traditionalist texts as "fragments" that do not cohere with the "broader witness of scripture," and says that the New Testament itself offers plenty of evidence of the way Jesus and the early church rejected applications of biblical law that actually directed people away from the will of God rather than toward it.

Like Brownson, Achtemeier calls Christians to read not just the texts on their face but to seek the "coherent, good sense reasons" for what the texts say and therefore what God the Lawgiver intended. Other principles of good biblical interpretation, he says, include being Christ-centered, interpreting scripture by scripture, and interpreting passages in biblical and historical context. Constructively, this yields a sexual ethic that is marital,

holistic, deeply self-giving, and enabling people to grow toward a fuller reflection of God's image. He does not think this rules out marital-covenantal same-sex relations. Ken Wilson writes with the heart of the Vineyard Church pastor he has been for more than forty years. Like Achtemeier, he chronicles his own surprising change of mind and heart toward a posture of "acceptance" and "embrace" of LGBT Christians. The way he does this, though, is unique in the literature — he writes a long letter to his congregation, only later deciding to share it with a wider audience in the form of this published book.

This extraordinary pastoral letter describes what it is like to be a pastor attempting to do gospel ministry, especially in relation to the constantly excluded gay and lesbian ones in, near, and out of the church. He discusses the difficult responsibility of pastoral leadership on such a conflicted matter, the challenge of moral and spiritual discernment, the homework required in theology and exegesis, his disappointment with what passes for biblical scholarship, and the difficulty of "simply" making decisions for and with one congregation when a "clenched" evangelical world starts paying politicised attention as well. The broader back story concerns Vineyard Church politics, as a pastor-teacher-writer formerly recognised as a denominational leader begins to experience his own increasingly severe exclusion due to his decision to follow what he believes is God's leading.

The most innovative proposal Wilson offers is for congregations to treat LGBT concerns under the neglected "disputable matters" rubric offered in Romans 14-15. Wilson's "third way" is found right here: a gospel- and Christ-centered willingness to live together in grateful community not dependent on shared moral convictions on all matters. I think he is right, that Paul was indeed saying this; I also fear that this task

will prove almost impossible in our contemporary churches, with our shallow commitment to particular communities and our cultural context of angry, ruthless, ideological polarisation.

Wendy VanderWal-Gritter's book is experiential in a different way. A Canadian, Gritter comes out of the ex-gay ministry world with massive direct ministry experience with the human beings at the centre of this horrible dispute. Her book tells her own story of turning away from reparative therapy approaches with their associated political baggage toward a posture of "generous spaciousness" as the key response to gay Christians in the church. In her rather lengthy book, she offers reflections on such varied matters as the legitimacy of ex-gay ministries, the nature of sexuality, the spectrum of views on sexuality in the church, the coming-out process, best practices for congregational dialogue, and the biblical and hermeneutical issues. Like Wilson, Gritter also thinks that a "disputable matters" interpretation is very helpful in working through these questions.

The book offers a detailed and narratively rich discussion of the actual experiences of LGBT evangelical Christians, showing that their responses to their sexuality vary dramatically, and calling the rest of us toward a respectful posture. This in itself makes it an excellent pastoral resource, especially in the conservative evangelical world. It should be able to be heard there because Gritter never takes a normative stance embracing same-sex relationships. She wants to encourage a certain set of Christian virtues, such as hospitality and peaceableness, as the pre-conditions for adequate response to gay Christians and to the church's dialogue with and about them.

Matthew Vines has quickly become the most famous advocate for full inclusion of LGBT Christians in the US evangelical world, and

he is only twenty-three years old. Raised in a conservative evangelical congregation in Kansas, the whip-smart young man graduated from high school and started at Harvard University. But there his acknowledgment of his own gay sexual orientation led him on a journey back home to apply his intelligence to the controverted question of same-sex relationships. For several years he read everything he could get his hands on, finally producing first a video that went viral, then *God and the Gay Christian*, and finally an organisation (The Reformation Project) with mushrooming visibility and impact.

Vines' overall project is to revisit the biblical materials and the massive related scholarly literature to show that the Bible does indeed make space for covenanted same-sex relationships. One might quibble with particular judgments, as have

a battalion of credentialed critics, but over-all I would describe the level of scholarship that Vines offers here as better than most of what one finds on the revisionist side and extraordinary in light of his level of training. It deserves a place on the shelf of works one must read when engaging these matters.

But it is the person who matters at least as much as the book. This cheerful, confident young man — a person under constant attack by "Christian" enemies — is an out gay Christian not pledged to lifetime celibacy and utterly clear about his evangelical identity. He is leading a youth movement demanding reconsideration of evangelicalism's exclusion of people like him.

The current situation, then, looks like this: Evangelical revisionists are growing in number and voice. Voices counselling respectful dialogue

are still speaking, but the main normative issues are increasingly being joined. Some young gay evangelicals are staying and fighting rather than running away. Evangelical young people generally find their intransigent elders obnoxious and their silent leaders cowardly. Many are deeply attracted to youth movements for change led by Matthew Vines and others. A few senior scholars such as Brownson and Achtemeier (and now Gushee) are supporting the youth crusade. This is creating ever greater anxiety and anger among increasingly marginalised traditionalists. This fight feels like it is reaching a crescendo. History will record who was on what side, and when. ●

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ONE IN THIRTEEN CHILDREN
DIE BEFORE THE AGE OF FIVE

Tackling Modern Myths



by Assoc Prof Alan Gijbers

Alan, MBBS FRACP FACHAM DTM&H PGDip Epi., is Head of the addiction Medicine service Royal Melbourne Hospital, Medical Director Substance Withdrawal Unit, The Melbourne Clinic, Richmond. President of ISCAST, ICMDA Board Member and former Chairman of CMDFA.

In the first article I tackled the myths of secularity and the immanent frame. In this article I tackle the myths of disengaged reason, of the triumph of science over faith, of a mechanistic view of humans, of human autonomy,

of a-teleology and the myth of nomolatory (the worship of rules and regulations).

The myth of disengaged reason
Charles Taylor in both his *Secular Age* and his *Sources of the Self* describes how people in the seventeenth century saw the world as just a machine, that everything in it were just machines and even humans were just machines with rationality. The ideal of disengaged reason received impetus from Descartes famous strategy of subjecting all he knew to radical doubt. This led him to his famous starting point, *cogito ergo sum* (I think therefore I am). This was the basic axiom for his whole system of knowledge. It was directly analogous to Euclid's geometric

reasoning in his famous textbook *Elements*. Euclid's belief in one single logically coherent framework of understanding geometry was extended by Descartes to the development of a system of rigid logic into a theory of everything. This system was true for all time and all places. Emotions were excluded.

Descartes' approach has been criticised on a number of grounds. First a lot of neuro-scientific research indicates reason and emotion are not opposed but integrated. Further we move away from seeing humans simply as isolated adults (usually male and usually Westerners) to seeing humans as particular males and females who have developed to maturity from within an emotional

and cultural framework which has either truncated or extended their neurodevelopment. In other words humans develop (or are retarded in) their emotional and rational maturity by the relational, emotional and cultural environment in which they grew up. Thus our emotional life is integrated with our rational life – the two are not opposed or even complementary, but fully integrated.

Secondly reason argues from a position. We often take that position emotionally, and then shore it up with reason. David Hume's famous quote, "Reason is a slave to the emotions," suggests that we use reason in much the same way we hire a barrister – to argue our case rather than to seek the truth. If that is the case then reason is very similar to rationalisation.

Thirdly we do not think foundationally. Each one of us plunges into what we know from different starting points and our knowledge spreads in many directions. Further, we recognise our systems are incomplete. There is no one single system which encompasses everything. We are always learning and discovering more.

For clinicians and theologians, we now see passion and compassion are watchwords of a Christian's engagement with the world, and of our clinical interactions. This has not always been so. There has been a tradition of God being an a-passionate God, unmoved by feelings. This view is contradicted both by Scripture and by the compassion Christ showed on earth. Thus theological reflection can never be a simple development of a cold rational systematic theology but must touch our emotions, especially our love. And our clinical reflections, while requiring a degree of detachment must also engage passionately and empathetically with our patients.

Even further motivational research and clinical experience shows that people are not persuaded by logic but they go through a cycle of changes towards a new position.

Clinicians understanding these processes help their patients to live with the ambivalence of the contemplative phase in the cycle of change.

Finally there is the romantic reaction to a rationalistic structure. Rousseau railed against the imposition of cold civilisation on the natural innocence of youth and Wordsworth witness to the emotional delight we feel encountering nature. For all these reasons we see humans as a far greater complex than just rational machines.

The myth of the triumph of science over the Christian faith
Christians are commonly criticised along the lines of, "I have the certainty of the facts of science; you simply have blind faith." This misunderstands science which is a human activity trying to understand the order and chaos in the natural world. Every culture grapples with the natural world from within its own plausibility structure. Such a pursuit is much older than the Enlightenment, or even the

to where wisdom can be found (Job 28, 1 Cor 1: 18-2:16)

Whole books have been written debunking this myth.¹ For instance see my paper on science and faith on the ISCAST website. http://www.iscast.org/journal/discussions/gijbers_a_2011_science_and_faith.pdf

The myth of a mechanistic view of human beings

This myth is closely related to the previous myth and arises out of the mechanistic view of the universe and of humans within that universe. Like all myths there are elements of truth in it. We have hearts that pump, lungs that exchange gases and kidneys that filter waste products, but we are not only machines. Humans are more. Even our brains are more than just a collection of nerve impulses, for these nerve impulses carry meaning. We grow in families and develop stories about ourselves. We are distressed and we need comfort. Sometimes our mental health is not optimal, and sometimes we have clinical depression requiring

"All our activities, whether our sciences or our clinical care, but also our relationships at work, at home and in the community, require us to be wise."

Renaissance or Reformation. Such reflections occur within the First Testament and within other religious traditions. An evaluation of these plausibility structures requires more than just a scientific method. Modern science is a complex interaction of hunches, leads, experiments and explanation. The plausibility structures undergo paradigm shifts. Professor Graeme Clark of bionic ear fame well illustrates how he continued to believe he was right to address sensory-neural deafness even in the face of severe scepticism from his colleagues. I would go further. All our activities, whether our sciences or our clinical care, but also our relationships at work, at home and in the community, require us to be wise and I believe our faith points

appropriate medication. However there are other distresses which would do better with care, listening and nurturing activity, for we need love. Even when we have a mechanical disease like a clot in the coronary artery, we still need the care of those we love to help us in the next step of our journey. When we are in hospital we are not just economic generating units but humans needing hospitality. We are not just numbers for employers to push around in our iron cages of the modern world. As Christians we believe we are made in God's image, giving us an alien dignity, and we are animated stardust – spirit/flesh amphibians.

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The myth of self-referentialism and human autonomy

This is a further myth arising out of Descartes' scheme. Each person is called to subject everything they see and hear to radical doubt. Then only that which fits in with their scheme should be accepted. As university students we were told to question everything. The hermeneutic of suspicion was strong (interpret everything as if they are trying to fool you – especially your teachers!) Such a destructive attitude reduces our understanding of the world to what we can accept for ourselves. It denies the fact that we belong to



“Christians believe humans are more than just the result of the blind forces of nature. We have been made by our creator for God’s purposes.”

a community of knowers and that we can complement each other’s ignorances and learn from each other. Further it gives no respect to experienced thinkers in their area, although it does allow bright young things to come up with new ideas. There is a tension here for we do not want to go back to the authoritarianism of the past but we also want to ground our knowledge wisdom and insight within a wider community. For a Christian this is particularly acute for she has accepted the Lordship of Christ and all decisions come under His direction. How is the mind of Christ known? A full answer would require another article; the short answer is that we hear the Word of God in Scripture, nature, the church and in history with each informing the other.

The myth of a-teleology (that the world is purposeless and directionless)

Darwinian evolution is a valuable explanatory theory of why species vary in different niches, but as an overall philosophy it is found wanting, precisely because it rests on a bedrock of randomness, hence meaninglessness. However Christians believe humans are more than just the result of the blind forces of nature. We have been made by our creator for God’s purposes. These purposes can only be found by hearing from God and following God’s ways.

The myth of nomolatory, the worship of rules, regulation policies and procedures as sufficient for ethics.

Taylor describes the myth that people will conform to the Modern Moral Order simply by clarifying the rules. This resonates with me as I see hospitals and other institutions, extending policies, procedures and regulations into every area of human behaviour. This neglects three big areas. First why should people follow the regulations? Secondly what gives people the strength and ability to follow the rules and thirdly what happens when we do not obey?

Christian ethics has a very different starting point. The Son of Man described himself as physician to the ill, who came not to call the righteous but sinners to repentance (Matt 9:10-13). Paul likewise spends the bulk of his letters in the New Testament addressing his central ethical dilemma. He was an ex-legalist and sought to motivate gentile ex-hedonists to live morally without living legalistically. He does this by reminding his readers of their baptism, by which they were done with (crucified) their old way of living and that they were now to live the resurrection life in the power of the Holy Spirit. This spirit provided the life which created the fruit of the spirit – love, joy, peace and the like (Gal 5:22-23). It is this theme of divine motivation, empowerment and grace which makes Christian ethics so different from the traditional rule, consequentialist or virtue ethics. It is unashamedly transcendent and happy to be so.

The key task in challenging these myths is to do so in a way which is understood by those who hold these myths while at the same time recognising that the wisdom of Christ is foolishness to those who do not see. As we relate winsomely to them we pray that they may gain insight into these myths. ●



Family Violence

by Dr Elizabeth Hindmarsh

Elizabeth is a GP with 30 years of experience. She has been working in Aboriginal Health in Liverpool for the last five years. She has worked in the Northern Territory in a remote community on Elcho Island in a part-time capacity from 2006 to 2012. She was the principal of a GP Practice in Glebe from 1980 to 2006. She has worked with the Royal Australian College of General Practice (RACGP) since 1992 in projects involving domestic and family violence. She is co-editor with Professor Kelsey Hegarty of the RACGP manual 'Abuse and Violence: working with our patients in general practice' now in its 4th edition. She co-chairs the Abuse and Violence network of the RACGP National Faculty of Specific Interests and her work has involved teaching, writing and advocacy around domestic and family violence.

With the death of Luke Batty at the hands of his father and the nomination of Rosie Batty as Australian of the Year 2015, family violence has come to prominence in the Australian society.

We would all like to believe that families care for each other. However this belief no longer stands up to scrutiny when we face the fact that at least one woman dies every week in Australia from family violence. If

“...at least one woman dies every week in Australia from family violence.”

you are an Australian woman in the child bearing age group then your greatest risk of disability or death is from family violence. Living in many of these families are children who are being adversely affected by this violence either by being directly targeted or by seeing one of their

parents, more likely their Mother, being abused.

Family violence is occurring across all socio-economic and cultural groups and involves physical, emotional, sexual, financial and social forms of abuse and neglect. It can be called domestic violence (DV), intimate partner abuse, child abuse and is probably best embraced by the term family violence (FV). Family violence is about all the family members and includes elder abuse and other abuse of family members like teenagers abusing their parents.

Is the Australian community doing anything about this epidemic of death and disability?

The police are being called out to family violence in increasing numbers and in many police areas around Australia it is the largest single crime for police. At a recent meeting in Newcastle hosted by the Royal Australian College of General Practice (RACGP), Ms Ruth Edwards,

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NSW Police Region DV Coordinator presented some police statistics.

NSW police deal with about 370 instances of domestic and family violence a day, or more than 135,000 DV related incidents every year, or 15 every hour. Unfortunately NSW is not unique as a state in terms of family violence, so this is happening in every state and territory of Australian. This is however but the tip of the iceberg

“A very high percentage of men and women in detention have been abused as children or adolescents and end up with the police, courts and eventually our goals. Some of them may also grow up to be the perpetrators of family violence.”

as many cases of family violence go unreported. Women in Australia are most at risk of violence in their own home and it also occurs in same sex relationships and it can also happen to men.

The police then take these cases to the courts to apply for an order to protect the victim and children. These orders have different names in different states.

In NSW they are ADVOs – Apprehended Domestic Violence Orders. In Northern NSW – Gosford to Tweed Heads – the police have applied for more than 10,000 ADVOs in the last 12 months.

Abuse and violence is also impacting on our education system as children involved in family violence will have more problems concentrating and learning at school and some of them will be withdrawing and others acting out. Some of these children break the law. They go on to fill our juvenile delinquent facilities and later our jails. A very high percentage of men and women in detention have been abused as children or adolescents and end up with the police, courts and eventually our jails. Some of them may also grow up to be the perpetrators of family violence.

The victims of family violence arrive at their general practice with symptoms like depression, sleeping disorders, somatic symptoms and pain, eating disorders, drug and alcohol problems, smoking, sexual issues and infection, PTSD and in many other ways. They are often sent on for specialist appointments or arrive at the dentist without anyone thinking about what might underlie these symptoms. They may go to the

specialist or dentist with a ruptured ear drum, abdominal symptoms, pelvic pain, depression, PTSD or with damaged or absent teeth.

When I worked on Elcho Island in NT, one day we did a session with the Aboriginal Health Workers and three patients with diabetes, to try and talk about diabetes, its cause and effect on the body. After the session I asked one of the woman how she had found this session. Oh it was wonderful she said – I now understand the ‘underneath story’. I found this a great way to think about medical things and with family violence we need to think about the ‘underneath story’ of the depression, sleeping problems or however it is presenting to us in general practice, hospital casualties or to specialists and dentists.

Patients rarely present to general practice telling their GP or Practice Nurse that they are involved in family violence. Some patients when asked will share with you that they are or have been victims of family violence. However many of them will not have associated the problems they are having with what is happening at home. They can be called pre-contemplative and may not have

recognised that they are involved in a form of abuse and violence. Also if you have grown up with family violence then you think what is happening occurs in all families. The patient may dismiss the abuse as the perpetrator being stressed or that they are themselves the cause of the abuse. They have failed to have the dinner on the table, keep the house tidy, provided sex whether they personally want it and are raped. The list goes on. The blame goes on and the perpetrator thinks their own behaviour is totally OK.

The World Health Organisation (WHO) has produced ‘Responding to intimate partner violence and sexual violence against women’. WHO Clinical and Policy Guidelines. 2013.

These guidelines say in summary:

A health-care provider is likely to be the first professional contact for survivors of intimate partner violence or sexual assault. Evidence suggests that women who have been subjected to violence seek health care more often than non-abused women, even if they do not disclose the associated violence. They also identify health-care providers as the professionals they would most trust with disclosure of abuse. These guidelines are an unprecedented effort to equip healthcare providers with evidence-based guidance as to how to respond to intimate partner violence and sexual violence against women. They also provide advice for policy makers, encouraging better coordination and funding of services, and greater attention to responding to sexual violence and partner violence within training programmes for health care providers. The guidelines are based on systematic reviews of the evidence, and cover: identification and clinical care for intimate partner violence; clinical care for sexual assault; training relating to intimate partner violence and sexual assault against

women; policy and programmatic approaches to delivering services; mandatory reporting of intimate partner violence. The guidelines aim to raise awareness of violence against women among health-care providers and policy-makers, so that they better understand the need for an appropriate health-sector response. They provide standards that can form the basis for national guidelines, and for integrating these issues into health-care provider education.
Copyright © World Health Organisation 2013.

How then can health-care providers in the Australian community respond to what is happening in our society at present which is damaging so many adults and children?

The WHO would advise us to start by seeing that we have a role to help our patients to identify and acknowledge the problem. This will happen as we are willing to ask questions such as ‘How are things at home?’ and whatever the answer then asking some more specific questions like ‘Are you ever afraid of your partner?’ Sometimes when my patients present with... I ask them about family abuse. Has this ever happened to you?’

They may say no never and you could say ‘If that ever happened to you I would be happy to talk with you about that’. They may say yes at which point you would start to talk about safety and consider doing a safety plan. This can be termed family violence first aide.

At some stage they may be willing to be referred to a specific family violence service, to a Domestic Violence Liaison Officer at the police or to a legal service. There are many services involved with family violence and it is good to know what is available in your area.

If you or your patient wants more support or information then there is the 24 hour National Phone Line – 1800RESPECT. This line is run by trained counsellors who will speak

The RACGP White Book has a mnemonic nine steps to intervention – the 9 Rs. All GPs need to understand the nine steps to intervention:

- Role with patients who are experiencing abuse and violence
- Readiness to be open to
- Recognise symptoms of abuse and violence, ask directly and sensitively and
- Respond to disclosures of violence with empathic listening and explore
- Risk and safety issues
- Review the patient for follow-up and support
- Refer appropriately and also
- Reflect on our own attitudes and management of abuse and violence
- Respect for our patients, our colleagues and ourselves is an overarching principle of this sensitive work.

with patients involved with domestic violence and sexual assault. The counsellors will also speak with health professionals who need information and support around these issues.

Our role...

I hope this has helped you to think about this epidemic in our society. No one person and no one group can solve this issue. It will take us all to do our part and all doctors to consider ‘the underneath story’ and ask kindly and sensitively about whether it might be happening.

Receiving a ‘yes’ answer to this question means going on to explore risk and safety. The ongoing care needs to be supportive of the patient and seeking their preferred options and timing. The options maybe to refer to specific services or offer a range of counselling approaches, including motivational interviewing strategies or to continue to provide support, as we know these are effective in assisting women to discuss safety and reduce depressive symptoms in general practice.

Perpetrators are mainly men and are interested in power and control. They come from all socioeconomic, cultural and social groups. They present to general practice for a range of health concerns but not usually about family violence. The

prevalence rates of perpetration are at 20-25% of the general population. It stems from society’s attitudes to women and the belief of some that women are the inferior gender and can be seen as the perpetrator’s possession and from learnt behaviour in their family of origin. There are groups within society who see men as having the power and being the ‘head of the family’ or having the right to make all decisions as they are the ‘bread winner’.

I am writing this at the time of epiphany when the wise men followed a star to find a king. They found a baby born to an ordinary yet extraordinary family who cared for him. As I thought about this today, I thought every child has the right to be welcomed and cared for and nurtured. Yet in our society many of our children are being abused and neglected and live in families where violence is the order of the day. What can we do to address these issues and play our part in making our society a safer place for victims and children and make perpetrators responsible for their actions? Can we collectively and individually **SAY NO TO FAMILY VIOLENCE?** ●

References

1. World Health Organisation, Responding to intimate partner violence and sexual violence against women: WHO clinical and policy guidelines. Geneva: WHO, 2013. Search PubMed
2. RACGP Manual: Abuse and Violence: working with our patients in general practice. www.racgp.org.au/whitebook