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*Desire, Romance and the
Mind of God*

by Patricia Weerakoon

Live Free and Change the World

by Shane Willard

Reputation is Built on Behaviour not Image

by Karl Faase

SPECIAL EDITION: Lifewell Conference Feature

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Cover: Patricia Weerakoon talks about Desire, Romance and the Mind of God on page one.

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Desire, Romance and the Mind of God

By medical doctor and sexologist, Patricia Weerkoon.

It is hard to think of two topics that are further apart than sex and God. Sex is about hot passion and mind-blowing orgasms. Surely all God has to say about it is “don’t do it”?

We will explore sexological research, on sexual desire; romantic love or limerance; and attachment of couple bonding. Second, we will take a critical look the role sex plays in today’s society. Finally, we will peek into the mind of God, the creator of sex.

The brain in love

Recent neuroscience research gives us a framework to explore the power and beauty of desire and love. It helps us understand why sex is so powerful, why it’s so core to our being.

Based on functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRIs) studies, Professor Helen Fisher has described the neurobiology of sexual emotions and motivations¹ as a three-stage model of neurological responses. In this model, *sex drive* motivates general sexual desire; *romantic love*, also known as *limerance*, is associated with preference for a specific partner; and partner *attachment* enables a long-term bond to be formed between man and woman.

The first stage is sexual *desire*. It’s a testosterone-powered urge that happens deep in the limbic system of the brain, and it’s driven by a powerful cocktail of neurochemicals². It’s a non-specific hunger for sexual gratification. We could satisfy it through a variety of ways: sex, fantasy, masturbation... take your pick. Sexual desire motivates us to have sex.

Why are people turned on by different stimuli? We now know that external stimuli strongly influence the overall process. This is particularly important in childhood and adolescence. Our brains retain neuroplasticity into adult life. What we feed our senses continues to affect the control and expression of our desires.

However, as humans, we have choice in how we respond to desire. We can’t deny our personal responsibility and say “my hormones made me do it”. We choose what we put into our brains and choose how we act to sexual impulses. And that means we can, and must, conduct our sexuality in a responsible manner.

The second stage of Fisher’s three-stage model is called *romantic love* or *limerance*³.

It’s characterised by an increased focus on one preferred mating partner. We feel motivated to pursue one particular person, for the reward of intimacy – that is to say, we ‘fall in love’ with them.

This affective state is primarily associated with the neurotransmitter dopamine, a powerful pleasure chemical. Other chemical changes include an increase in norepinephrine and decreased levels of central serotonin. Dopamine gets us hooked on our beloved – we think about them all the time, we want to be with them, close to them. The decrease in serotonin caused us to concentrate on that person in exclusion of all others – a bit like obsessive compulsive disorder. Norepinephrine makes us feel fearless, and inhibits our pain centres, when we’re around our beloved. This is why love is so powerful. Being ‘in love’ is an addiction, an obsession and like it, loss is felt at a neural and neurochemical level.

Fortunately, this romantic state of lovesickness lasts between eighteen to twenty-four months.

What happens to a relationship after that time? One of two things: either the couple break up, or they move into the third phase of *attachment or bonding*.

This phase of a couple’s relationship is characterized by feelings of trust, calm, security, social comfort, and emotional union. This stage is associated with the neuropeptides, oxytocin and vasopressin⁴. These are called ‘cuddle hormones’ for the simple reason that they increase with any form of intimacy between the couple. An orgasm sends oxytocin levels through the roof. This shared intimacy of a long term union brings lovers closer together, potentially triggering a “virtuous” cycle: the more you make love, the closer you feel, and the closer you feel, the more you make love.

Sex and society

How are we as a society dealing with the power and fragility of sex? Has feeding our desires become the goal in life? What about love? And long term couple attachment?

The desire for more and more sex, better sex, and longer-lasting sex has spawned an industry of medicalised sexuality: props, pills and surgery to enhance our bodily sexual functioning. As the large gold and red roadside billboards advise those of us who want to ‘bonk longer’ all we need is to make that phone call, and it will be ours.

And if that isn’t enough and you want the mega penis you see in porn videos – get a penis enhancement. Or maybe as a woman, you want that hairless prepubescent pubis of the porn star? Labioplasty and vaginal reconstructions are available. Age, illness, disability – nothing need stand in the way of having the body we want, and the sex we want.

And then there’s pornography, a multi-billion dollar global industry. The average age of first exposure to porn is eleven. Repeated exposure to porn rewires the brain. Men are particularly vulnerable to porn because they are, on average, more visual – although there has been a recent increase in written, literary porn, directed at women⁵.

Is this really what we want sex to be? A desperate, porn-directed, pill-powered, surgically enabled pleasure explosion?

What about the relational aspects of sexuality – love and romance? Have we lost the ability to distinguish between “I love you” and “I want your body”? Nowhere is this game of lust played out more than in our teenagers. A recent study with >3000 grade 10 to 12 students⁶ reports that 78% of students have experienced some form of sexual activity, over one quarter of all year 10 students and just over half of year 12 students having experienced sexual intercourse. For young women, among those who reported having sexual intercourse, over a third reported unwanted sex.

When it comes to sexually transmitted diseases, the picture for our young people is ominous. A 2011 Kirby Institute report⁷ asserted that Australia’s young people are facing a sexual health crisis of epidemic scale. The recorded number of Chlamydia (a disease that can remain symptomless and cause infertility) has risen exponentially.

What about long-term intimacy and attachment? Is commitment an out-dated concept? Are we a nation of cheaters?

One particular on-line dating site, focused on married people who want to have an affair, attracted almost half a million members across Australia⁸. Articles abound that discuss extramarital affairs as harmless, and possibly even healthy to a relationship⁹. Marriage rates are down and divorce rates are increasing as couples choose to shack up, have casual sex, friends with privileges and one night stands.

Again, part of this is neurochemical. We fall in love with falling in love. We seek the dopamine-fuelled emotional high of being 'in love', and when it fades – as it always does after a maximum two years – we move on. We don't have the patience to stay for the cuddle hormones to kick in.

So our sexual behaviour is all messed up. What can we do about this?

The mind of God

In Genesis, the first book of the Bible, God lays down a plan for good sex:

The man said, "This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called 'woman,' for she was taken out of man." That is why a man leaves his father and mother and is united to his wife, and they become one flesh. Adam and his wife were both naked, and they felt no shame.¹⁰

The God of the Bible is pro-sex. He's so pro-sex; he invented marriage as the framework for it.

My years as a sexologist and Christian have taught me two things. First: there is a wonderful *congruence* between sexological research and God's view of healthy and wholesome sexuality. Secondly: our sexual biology and neurochemistry is God's way of giving us the software and programming for the best sex ever.

Sexual *desire* is powerful because it is *purposeful* – it's meant to point us to our sex partner. The "I want" of sexual desire is good – when *coordinated* with the other aspects of our sexual function, as God meant it to be, and as recent sexological research has discovered. Sexual desire is meant to operate in harmony with falling in love with a *particular person*, and *bonding* with them for life.

The first recorded words from God to humans in the Bible are the command: "be fruitful and increase in number"¹¹ – that is, have babies. God's command to have children implies a command to have sex.

Why did God make sex so much fun? God gave us sexual desire – including all the neurobiology of desire – because sex is good. And sexual pleasure is good. Both are good because he – the one true God, the source and definition of ultimate goodness – thought them up.

Romantic love focuses the powerful energy of sexual desire onto one particular person. All that heart-wrenching, heart-pounding limerance is meant to drive a particular man and a particular woman towards the mutual union of their bodies.

Not enough people read the Song of Songs these days. It's divinely inspired erotic romance. The man and the woman – the lover and the beloved – long for each other, search for each other, get married – a wedding lies at the middle of the book (Solomon 3:6-11) – and delight in each other's bodies.

And finally, attachment is God's mechanism for seeing us through the long haul.

Separation, divorce, and infidelity were never in God's plan for sex and relationships. That's why they're so painful and traumatic.

So let me put before you God's good plan for great sex. Sex and God are topics that are not far apart, but very close together. Because the good God made us as sexual beings, and gave us a pattern for how to enjoy that sexuality in a healthy way, that's good for ourselves, our sexual partner, our families, society, and the next generation. Try it for yourself.

Patricia Weerakoon will speak on sexuality and sexual health at the 2013 LifeWell Conference, 29-31 August in Adelaide. Read more about Patricia at www.patriciaweerakoon.com

¹ Helen Fisher, Arthur Aron, Debra Mashek, Haifang Li and Lucy L. Brown, 'Defining the Brain Systems of Lust, Romantic Attraction, and Attachment', *Archives of Sexual Behavior*, 31, 5, (2002): 413-419.

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⁵ 'Loved Fifty Shades? Try these...' Sydney Morning Herald July 13, 2012 Downloaded from <http://www.smh.com.au/lifestyle/life/loved-fifty-shades-try-these-20120713-220f1.html> on 6th December 2012.

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⁷ The Kirby Institute, 'HIV, viral hepatitis and sexually transmissible infections in Australia Annual Surveillance Report 2011', The Kirby Institute, the University of New South Wales, Sydney, NSW.

⁸ Sydney Morning Herald, 'Natural born cheaters?' <http://www.smh.com.au/lifestyle/life/natural-born-cheaters-20120807-23rmn.html>, 7th August 2012, accessed 4th Dec 2012.

⁹ 'Natural born cheaters' Sydney Morning Herald 7th August 2012. Downloaded from <http://www.smh.com.au/lifestyle/life/natural-born-cheaters-20120807-23rmn.html> on 2nd December 2012

¹⁰ Genesis 2:23-25.

¹¹ Genesis 1:28.

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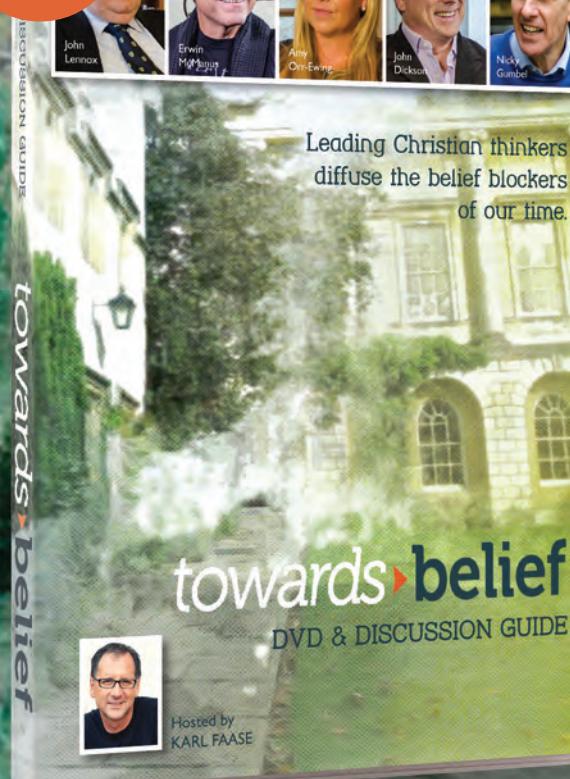
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Reputation is Built on Behaviour not Image

Shauna Nequist, writing in the online magazine, "Revenant" has written an article about the less than accurate way we represent ourselves in online social media forums like Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. Nequist writes...

"The danger of the internet is that it's very very easy to tell partial truths—to show the fabulous meal but not the mess to clean up afterward. To display the smiling couple-shot, but not the fight you had three days ago. To offer up the sparkly milestones but not the spiraling meltdowns.....My life looks better on the Internet than it does in real life. Everyone's life looks better on the internet than it does in real life. The Internet is partial truths—we get to decide what people see and what they don't."

Nequist's thoughts are an accurate reflection of what we see around us especially in online digital media. There is an explosion of activity in social media across the globe and it seems to suggest there is greater connection and relationship across communities, countries and even the globe. What we need to ask is, is there greater relationship on social media or just greater communication?

Author Shirley Turkle, in her book "Alone Together", also writes about the phenomena of digital communication and, after years of research into how we use this method of communicating, Turkle points out what she believes is happening. She writes that...

"... [if we are] insecure in our relationships and anxious about intimacy, we look to technology for ways to be in relationships and to protect ourselves from them at the same time"

Turkle goes on to write that we usually prefer to text and email than communicate in person because it gives us control of the process. We can edit, re-write, and

carefully construct the image we are looking to project. What Nequist and Turkle are both saying is that we are constantly telling partial truths about ourselves by projecting the image of what we want to be true rather than being fully truthful about who we actually are.

It may seem from these two writers that this is a thoroughly contemporary problem created by the technology that allows us to hide behind the veil of digital media and project false images and messages. Yet any student of history or human nature will tell you that being false is as old as humanity. In fact two thousand years ago, before any type of communication technology was available, Jesus had some very harsh things to say about people who lacked honesty. In a section of the Bible that tells the story of His life and teaching (Matthew 23:16-22), Jesus is direct and strong against leaders in his community who lacked honesty. He especially attacked the fact that they would make vows and oaths that sounded like they were binding commitments and yet they were just doing exactly the opposite. In the same section of the Bible in dealing with the same issues, He says simply "..let your yes be yes and your no no.." (Matthew 5:37). In other words, mean what you say and say what you mean.

It seems all these years later we need to hear those words with new clarity. We have fallen for exactly the same problem but in a different medium and culture. We have fallen for the idea that our reputation is built on our image and not our behaviour. This is exactly what Nequist and Turkle are suggesting - we have bought the concept that "spin" will create an image that will impress our community and build our profile. But it's not what we post that matters, it's how we behave. Our reputation is built on whether we can be believed, trusted and relied upon.



Many people fail to recognize that what they believe is just a "little white lie" is in fact a character flaw that undermines whether people can believe you. We are often so keen to be liked and viewed as acceptable by the right people that we massage our image to create what we think is the right persona. Yet when people find that what we say fails the test of truthfulness then everything we say is called into question. There is an old joke, "how can you tell if a politician is lying.. their lips are moving!". This is possibility harsh on good people with civic commitment who are serving the community in public life and yet for all of us the joke rings true. Too often water tight commitments have become noncore promises and expendable ideals. Before we are too harsh on politicians let's remember we may suffer exactly the same reputation with our friends and associates.



They have stopped believing what you say.

We also live in a time when our commitments seem to be disposable. Getting someone to RSVP to an event or commit to a social engagement is almost an impossibility. There are a range of reasons for this one being the desperate need not to miss out. If I commit to this event what if something better comes up, what if I miss out on a gathering where all the right people are attending, what if someone I want to connect with or start a relationship with asks me out? All the time we are scanning the social horizon for the right place to be seen and all the while constantly letting people down.

Consider the simple task of arriving to a date, event or meeting on time. There seems no

end of people with little ability to keep to a commitment of arriving at a particular place on time. There is an attitude of arrogance in this approach to meeting in that my time is much more important than yours. You can turn up on time and wait for me but I feel very free to leave you waiting because I value your time less than I value my needs. If we can't keep to our commitments, if we can't commit to an invitation and if we fail to honor commitments of time we are proving ourselves to be someone who can't be trusted.

When Jesus said to "let your yes be yes and your no no" he wasn't just giving a pious commandment for religious types to follow. He was speaking the truth about life and giving us clarity on the only true way to build your reputation. How you are viewed,

whether you will be trusted and whether people believe what you say will not be created via a hip and cool Facebook page, it won't come through endless Instagram shots in all the right places and it won't come from clever tweets. It will be built on the simple truth of whether you keep your word and your commitments, whether you are honest and if people find that the image you portray and the person you are are congruent. Any failing in those areas can't be changed by a new image only via new behavior.

Karl Faase will be a keynote speaker at LifeWell Conference to be held in Adelaide on 29-31 August 2013. Find out more about Karl and his teaching at www.karlfraase.com.

Live Free and Change the World

RISE managing editor Wendy Rush talks to Shane Willard about how we can live a life of freedom by taking possession of, and using, what we already have. And how embracing the cross as a symbol of forgiveness and confrontation can help us change the world. Shane is an international preacher and theologian with a master's degree in clinical psychology.

When we think of freedom, most of us think of being free from debt, or the burden of having to turn up to a job we don't particularly like, or letting go of relationships or situations that make us unhappy. The freedom to do what we like and to live the way we want to.

Shane Willard talks about a different kind of freedom. "There is a freedom found in possessing what you already own" he says.

What is the difference between 'possessing' something and 'owning' it? Isn't that the same thing? Shane explains that it is possible to possess something and not actually own it. "If you are in possession of, say, a motor vehicle that you don't own, it means you either borrowed it or you stole it. It's also possible to own something that is not in your possession. Many people have the legal rights to something and they may not even know it."

What should we be looking to possess and where do we start?

"Salvation is one thing we all have in common" says Shane, and he relates the

story the Apostle Paul told in the book of Galatians. "This is how Paul frames Christianity. There is a land owner who owns a big piece of land and he is particularly cruel to his slaves. Then another man comes along and he buys the land. He pays a big price for it, because he not only bought the land but he paid the redemptive price for the slaves. He tells them 'I no longer call you slaves, I now call you sons. You are heirs of all this land. I give you the whole thing. Now I want you to work the land as if you are an heir, an owner, not as if you are a slave.'

"So my question to believers is, are you working for God to try and own more or to avoid punishment? All you need to do is reach out and possess what you already have."

To further illustrate his message, Shane uses the example of someone having a ridiculously large amount of money buried in their backyard. They own the money but until they find it, they are not in possession of it. "You can own something rightfully, but not possess it, and you can search for what you hope for but you haven't seen yet. That's faith. To be saved is not looking to create a new reality, but to reach out by faith to possess what God already has for us."

"2 Timothy 1:9 expresses it this way: All your names were written in the book before time began. God loved you and called you before the foundation of the world. Salvation is when you reach out and receive what has always been yours."

Living a life of freedom also involves 'unburying' what we have been given. Shane points to the parable of the talents in Matthew 25. The story involves a landowner who entrusted his wealth to people, and the expectation was that they would put it to good use and account for it when the landowner returned. The ones who used what they were given for the common good were celebrated and their wealth multiplied. The one who buried the single talent he was given found that even that was taken away from him.

"This story challenges those of us who believe in Jesus by essentially saying, don't sit around and wait to go to heaven but allow heaven to be established in you now.

"I looked back at everything Jesus ever said about heaven and I asked myself would I enjoy it? Would I like it? When Jesus talked about heaven, most of his teachings were confrontational. Some were meant to give hope, so we knew that death doesn't win. There is this 'next day, tomorrow, some day' reference, but Jesus also focused on the confrontation of heaven. If heaven invaded your life tomorrow would you like it? For example, in heaven all the secret conversations in your heart will be revealed. If your pattern of living is secretive, dodgy or questionable then watch out, because your motives will always be revealed. Are you ready for that?"

“Salvation is when you reach out and receive what has always been yours.”

“The Bible says that heaven is like eating at a table with every tribe, nation and race so if you are racist on earth how will you cope with that? While you are living on earth, go ahead and get heaven in your heart now so that you don’t get whiplash!”

Shane challenges us to get angry enough in those places in the world where heaven is not established. “We should be bringing heaven to earth, not waiting to go to heaven” he says.

“16,900 children are going to die today according to the World Health Organisation. What does our response look like? I’m not talking about irresponsibly giving everything away once, and then having nothing left. I am talking about using our blessings to help others, about focusing on the right things in order to partner with Jesus in making the world a better place.”

Shane reminds us that the cross of Christ is a symbol of confrontation. “The cross is about the forgiveness of sins and should be embraced as such. But adding to that, it is also a public ‘in your face’ confrontation about living. One example is the tendency of the world to escalate situations, so if you slap me I have to slap you harder. But the cross says you can win by humbling yourself.

“In the week leading up to Christ’s crucifixion, Pilate is riding around on a chariot and warhorse to control the crowd on one side of the city, and Jesus is coming in from the other side of the city riding on a donkey. The contrasts of the kingdoms of this world vs the Kingdom of Christ are very apparent.”

Shane points out that all four Gospels only quote part of the Scripture about the coming of the Messiah. Matthew says ‘See, your king comes to you, gentle and riding on a donkey, and on a colt, the foal of a donkey.’

“None of the Gospels complete the Scripture, and don’t mention where it is from because the believers were living in a time when their very lives were threatened so they memorized Scripture in order to be able to communicate in secret. Instead they would say ‘This is to fulfill the words of the prophets’ and people knew the rest. What they are quoting is from Zechariah in the Old Testament which goes on to say ‘I will take away the chariots and the warhorses.’”

Believers know that what the cross stands for is in stark contrast to what the world stands for. But it can be very difficult to live this out.

“The cross is about forgiveness, but it is also about humbling yourself and not escalating violence. About putting God’s stamp on this world because it is worth saving now! It’s about choosing the donkey over the warhorse. A choice to live in this world as if it is worth saving. How you live now matters because this world matters to God. The Apostle Peter calls it a new birth, so we can do over all of our failures and live as if we are worth something.”

“The cross is about hope flowing through suffering. It has everything to do with no longer being a slave to things like anger, bitterness, guilt, fear, and all about being redeemed from these slave drivers. About taking possession of what we already own, unburying what God has given us and living as if we, and the world, matter.”

Shane began working in full-time ministry as a youth pastor of a small church in Charleston, South Carolina, USA. He now ministers full time in America and internationally, particularly in South Africa, Australia, and New Zealand. Shane is keynote speaker at the LifeWell Conference 29-31 August. For more information about Shane and his ministry go to: www.shanewillardministries.org





Why do **bad** things happen to **good** people?

Author: Bob Day

The story is told of two people chatting one day, "You know, if I ever get to meet God I'm going to ask him straight out why he let all those children in Africa starve to death?" The other person responds, "What a coincidence, because he's going to ask you the same question."

It is one of the most profound questions mankind ever asks, "If there's a God, why do bad things happen to good people?"

It was asked by Gideon three thousand years ago.

To recap the Gideon story, the archangel Gabriel met the young Gideon in a forest and greeted him as if he were a 5-star General - "**Hail thou mighty Man of Valour**" said the archangel, "**The Lord is with you.**" Now at this stage, Gideon was a nobody - "**My family is poor and I am the least in my father's house**", Gideon said to the archangel.

As we know, not many mighty, not many noble are called. God uses '*the foolish to confound the wise, the weak to confound the mighty*'. I'm sure if someone had told

Gideon or his family that he would one day lead the army of Israel or that a worldwide organisation would be named after him – Gideons International, they wouldn't have believed it!

"Hail thou mighty Man of Valour. The Lord is with you." Now Gideon doesn't take this statement lying down but responds with that most profound of statements - "**If God is with us, why do the Midianites do these terrible things to us?**" In other words, "**If there's a God, why do these bad things happen?**"

The Midianites were a ferocious race of people. They swarmed around the Middle East like locusts raping and pillaging wherever they went. They were not merchants, they were not farmers, they were not traders, they were warriors. And the archangel answers Gideon the same way we are called to respond to injustice - "**Go and do something about it.**" Gideon did.

Another story is told of Mother Teresa attending to a person with leprosy in a Calcutta slum. A visiting westerner saw what she was doing and said, "*I wouldn't do that*

for all the money in the world." "**Neither would I,**" said Mother Teresa. "**Go and do something about it.**"

In the Old Testament book of 1st Chronicles, King David spoke of '*The people of Issachar*', people who "*understood the times and what needed to be done*". In 2013 we need modern day '*people of Issachar*'. People who understand the times and what needs to be done.

Have you ever wondered why some people go into politics? Most people couldn't imagine anything worse. The public are critical, the media intrusive, your opponents try to destroy you and your colleagues betray you. The life of a politician is one of loneliness and constant travel. But as an expression of values, the political process is right up there. It is said, '*Public policy is just personal morality writ large*'. We get the government we deserve.

However when values and ideals are expressed through action, they can shape our community and the world in which we live. The equality of all human beings for example is a profoundly Christian concept



We are called to respond to injustice
- “Go and do something about it.”

Bob Day is a homebuilder and former National President of the Housing Industry Association. In 2003 he was appointed an Officer of the Order of Australia (AO) for service to the housing industry, to social welfare – particularly housing the homeless – and to the community. Later that same

year he was awarded the Centenary of Federation medal for service to housing and charity. In 2008, Bob was elected Federal Chairman of the Family First Party and has been preselected to stand as the Party’s Lead Senate Candidate at the 2013 Federal election.

which led to democracy, international human rights and the abolition of slavery. And wherever Christianity goes in the world, the status of women improves dramatically. The whole notion of ‘*the common good for the common man*’ came from Christianity. The ancient Greeks and Romans and most cultures throughout history believed in higher and lower forms of human beings. US President Thomas Jefferson author of the US Declaration of Independence made his famous declaration that it was ‘self-evident’ that “*all men are created equal*” at

a time (1776) when it appeared that it was actually ‘inequality’ that was self-evident – intelligence, talent, height, weight, strength, it was self evident that all men were not created equal. Jefferson was of course referring to ‘moral equality’. Every life is as valuable as every other.

Jesus taught respect for human life, compassion, care for the disadvantaged and above all love expressed through action. “*I was hungry and you gave me food; I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink;*

I was away from home and you invited me into your house; I was without clothes and you gave me something to wear; I was sick and you cared for me; I was in prison and you visited me”. Note he didn’t say “*I was sick and you healed me; I was in prison and you set me free; I was old and you built me a retirement village*.”

Yes, some are called to heal and to advocate for those in prison and build retirement villages, but that is not the instruction. The instruction is ‘**do what you can**’.

*“I believe Australia
can do better”*

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Petia's MADD World

See more about Petia Wilson at
www.maddmessenger.com.



Rise talks to New Zealand born Samoan Petia Wilson who has been taking his message of hope, acceptance and destiny to churches, youth camps, schools and corporates in New Zealand, Australia and Malaysia since March 2011. By Wendy Rush.

Petia has always had a passion for the arts, music and drama. His ministry as an evangelist began in 2005 when he and his brothers-in-law formed a band called the INLAWS. INLAWS was an acronym for Inspiring New Lives And Winning Souls. Their love for music and drama took them to various youth camps, schools and corporates in New Zealand, the United Kingdom and Florida, USA.

"We got off with a hiss and a roar; people were excited about it and asked us to come to their church. It was great. Then in 2008 we went to the UK and the States to do a bit of a stint over there and when we came back, all of a sudden the guys in the band felt like God was calling them to be pastors or to lead worship and so forth," says Petia.

But Petia's passion for communicating the Gospel through the arts didn't go away. He felt strongly that this was something he wanted to do and in 2010 he received confirmation that this was the direction he should be heading in.

"I went to a conference in Nashville Tennessee and I said to God 'If you want me to do this, open up the door.' At the same time my boss had come to me and said that they had lost an upcoming contract and I was going to be made redundant. I knew at this point God was in control, so I said to my wife 'Let's do this'", recalls Petia.

"God's been opening up doors, opportunities that I couldn't have imagined in my wildest dreams. I believe when you step out in faith and you just let God do his thing it will be an amazing journey."

Petia has always had a passion for the word of God. "I grew up in the Church and I had a traditional religious upbringing. Back in the early nineties a friend invited me to go along to a Baptist church and that was the first time I really heard the Gospel. I got saved and began the journey and a relationship with God. It's just been awesome."

Petia uses creative outlets such as Music, Arts, Drama and Dynamic speaking (MADD) to demonstrate the grace and freedom of Christ in fresh and exciting ways. He brings his messages to life through the visual art form called 'speed art', alongside music and drama.

"Our vision is about creatively, innovatively communicating the Bible to the world, to captivate and point the world to Jesus" says Petia.

"I see a lot of young people, and even adults, who are struggling to accept who they are. I come from a large Samoan family and growing up I wondered if I fit in with the Samoan crowd or in the New Zealand culture or Western culture. It was a challenge." He believes it is important for us to know our identity in Christ.

"The Bible says we are made in the image of God and that's a lot for us to take in. I believe when we know who we are it brings a lot of freedom and victory."

In his performances Petia conveys a message of self-worth and discovering your identity in Christ, finding and pursuing God's will in your life, finding hope in times of hardship. "I believe many of our problems in the world today derive from a lack of self-acceptance and a false perception of who we are. Our true identity and purpose can only be found when we know Jesus."

With a background as a drug and alcohol counsellor and NZ Police youth worker, Petia is well aware of the pressure on young people to conform to feel accepted. As father to a daughter with Downs Syndrome it is particularly important to him. However, he says the compulsion to "fit in" can lead to emotional pain and poor life decisions at any age.

"Identity issues are prevalent for adults too. At 34, I still have to be reminded of God's love constantly. Parents, friends, families, need to be mindful of this issue in our young people. As the proverb goes, it takes a village to raise a child."

Petia will be the creative guest at the LifeWell Conference in Adelaide in August. And what does the future hold? "We continually pray that God takes us out of our comfort zone, we continually push ourselves to think out of the box, to ensure the Gospel is communicated in a creative and innovative way to captivate and point the world to Jesus", he says.

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Essentially EBC is ON GOD'S MISSION - for more people to know Jesus, become His life apprentices, live life to the full, and actively participate in God's plan to restore all things under Jesus as Lord.

RISEWISE

by Nick Hawkes

Suffering Sorts It

Nothing sorts out the credibility of different religions than the subject of suffering.

Some religions say that pain and suffering is an illusion ...Christianity says that it is real.

Some religions say that all suffering comes from the passions and desires of humanity, and that your goal should be to deny all desire and to do all that it takes to escape this present reality. Christianity says that we are not to have an escapist mentality. We have an important purpose to live right now ...and godly passions and desires are part of that living.

Some religions say that your suffering is your fault, for it means that you did something wrong in a previous life. Christianity says there is no reincarnation. Christianity says that suffering exists because the world is polluted by the sin of all of humanity. As such, all of us must share the responsibility for it.

Some religions say that if you are living a life of pain, you should not change your situation but faithfully live out the destiny assigned to you. Christianity says that God desires the best for you and wants you to work at being all you can be.

I don't know your situation or the suffering you have experienced, but I do know that if you want to make sense of it and know the truth, you'd better have a look at authentic, faithful, Christianity.

*Nick Hawkes has two degrees in science and two in theology. He is the author of a number of books including *The Country is Different*, and *The Dance Between Science and Faith*. He is also the author of the *Basics discipling series*. Nick is a radio broadcaster and noted speaker who has been invited to preach in America and India.*



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