

October 2013

the **+**Helper



The Magazine for Women
Grace Presbyterian Church of New Zealand

Celebrating God's Gift of
CREATIVITY

Literature

Creative Hobbies

Movies

Contents

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Editorial

Beauty. It can be something we envy, spend money on, worry about or pursue. Yet from the tiny flowers to panoramic vistas it is undeniable that God has made a beautiful world and that he delights in beauty.

Genesis 1 tells us that human beings are made in God's image and our capacity for enjoying beauty is the way he has created us. We not only contemplate the beauty of God's world, but also the eternal beauty of God himself "One thing I have asked of the Lord... to gaze upon the beauty of the Lord and to inquire into his temple" (Psalm 27:4). As creatures made in God's image we find great fulfilment in being "sub-creators" in whatever sphere we are gifted. We admire men and women who come up with new designs and inventions which is just a small way in which we reflect the inventiveness of God who delights in making all things new.

Throughout history Christians have used the arts to glorify God and edify one another. In Western history, many of the enduring artistic treasures have been produced by Christians. In earlier

periods of history many took seriously that being an artist or craftsman was a calling from God. Christians were well represented in all fields of endeavour and left their mark on history.

In our culture, we often find that people have an inability to appreciate and enjoy living and working in the world that God has made. People have become cynical and live for their own pleasure. Why is that so? Jerram Barrs suggests that postmodernism and consumerism have contributed greatly to this problem. Postmodernism says that there is nothing true or meaningful that we can learn about life and no answer to "what is life for?" At the same time we are bombarded with messages that we must acquire as many things as possible to make us happy. "A postmodern society produces people who are idolaters."¹

As Christians, we have a wonderful opportunity to challenge such false thinking and share in meaningful dialogue with our neighbours as we discuss ideas and their consequences. We can

learn to appreciate that God has stamped his own image on every person, and despite the brokenness of sin, man is still adorned with gifts from the Creator that express something of his beauty and truth.

In this issue of *The Helper* we have decided to celebrate God's gift of creativity as it is reflected in people made in his image expressing the good gifts that he has given them for his glory and for the enjoyment of others. We begin with an article that examines the whole idea of creativity and how it is expressed. We look at movies and literature and examine how we can discern the values, ideas and dreams of a culture through these media and how we can intelligently interact with those around us through them. We have also asked ladies from several different churches to share with us a creative hobby they are passionate about, how it expresses their own creativity and how the sharing of it with others builds community.

We hope this edition will stimulate much thought and discussion. We would encourage you to take a fresh look at all the creative arts. We can all learn to appreciate art in all its varied and different forms and to develop the skill of discernment by asking probing questions and reflecting on the message that the artist is communicating. Involve your family or friends as you go to a play, attend a symphony, watch a movie, read a story or go to the art gallery together. Shared experiences foster great times of discussion!

On behalf of *the Helper* Team,
- Anne Camp

¹ Jerram Barrs *Everything is Interesting* Covenant Seminary 2003



Booklist

Beaumont, Douglas	<i>The Message Behind the Movie: How to engage with a film without disengaging your faith</i>
Barrs, Jerram	<i>Echoes of Eden: Reflections on Christianity, Literature and the Arts</i>
Colson, Charles & Nancy Pearson	<i>How Now Shall we Live?</i>
Crouch, Andy	<i>Culture Making: Recovering Our Creative Calling</i>
Hunt, Gladys	<i>Honey for a Woman's Heart: Growing Your World through Reading Great Books</i>
	<i>Honey for a Child's Heart: The imaginative Use of Books in Family Life</i>
Rookmaker, Hans R.	<i>Art Needs No Justification</i>
	<i>Modern Art and the Death of a Culture</i>
Reinke, Tony	<i>Lit!: A Christian Guide to Reading Books</i>
Schaeffer, Edith	<i>Hidden Art</i>
Schaeffer, Francis	<i>Art and the Bible</i>
	<i>The God Who is There</i>

Useful Websites

www.covenantseminary.edu

www.ransomfellowship.org

www.reel-thinking.com

www.bethinking.org

In Defence of *Creativity*

Francis Schaeffer once wrote that the Christian is the one whose imagination should soar. When he penned these words Schaeffer was appealing to the idea that as people made in the image of God, human beings were created to function in this world as sub-creators. In particular he was also appealing to believers to see that their God-given imagination should work itself out in actual acts and actions of creation and creativity, to see that God has imbued us with something of his creative power and delights when we use that in accordance with his nature and purposes.

Many people, including many Christians, do not see this though. Historically there has been a tendency in conservative evangelical circles to shy away from and even be suspicious of the creative side of life, particularly the arts themselves. Many unconsciously assume that the pursuit of a creative and artistic life and the pursuit of Christ are competing endeavours. Sadder yet, I've talked with several people who feel as if getting closer to God has inevitably made them less creative. A good friend of mine, who is an excellent musician and songwriter, struggled for years after becoming a Christian because he felt as if as a Christian he could not pursue songwriting unless it was to compose praise songs that felt trite to him. Setting aside the particular case of my friend and his music let us take some time to consider the feeling he and others have experienced. Should getting closer to the God of the Bible make you less creative? Is his nature such that a close relationship to him would dull the creative side of a person's life? If we take time to observe the picture God gives us of himself through the pages of Scripture I think we are emboldened to give a resounding "No" in answer to this suggestion.

Let us begin by looking at the testimony of God's grand act of creation. Genesis 1 tells us God created this world and everything in it, including humanity. Space, time, and everything are made by God. Now consider this creation of God's. How many different types of things are there? How many different plants are there? How many different types of creatures are there? Just consider the beetle. Best estimates put the number of known beetle species at somewhere

between 400,000 to 1,000,000, with new types of beetles being discovered on a regular basis. Why would God make this many different types of beetle? What is the point? There may be all sorts of ways these hundreds of thousands of creatures contribute to the life and thriving of the planet. However, it seems that if we believe in a personal creator who is personally involved in creation then this plethora of beetle life is one small, if not strange, example of God's own diverse creativity.

In case you do not find bugs very creative or interesting, consider the everyday example of colour. Colours are a thing and therefore are something God created. Now consider how many different colours there are? Or easier, how many shades of blue do you think there are? The answer: there is no number high enough. The colour blue can be altered by adding varying amounts of other colours to it, which makes the possibilities literally endless. And that's just blue. Throw in all the other colours and try to fathom all the possible combinations. A very

good computer monitor, which pales in comparison to what the human eye can see and perceive, can simulate up to 16,000,000 different colours.

Again, this leads to the question why? Why would God create a world with a seemingly infinite number of colours? What's the point? Could it be that God is the Grand Artist whose colour pallet knows no bounds? Could it be simply that God is a creative type who enjoys beauty, intricacy, and detail? Discussions about types of bugs and blues may not seem that weighty in

themselves but throughout the Bible we see glimpses of God's creativity in other ways.

First, just consider the nature of the Bible itself. The Bible is an inspired literary work of epic proportions. In the Bible we find God communicating to his people through a collection of texts spanning various genres and styles of writing, including the book of Psalms which is a book made up completely of inspired poems and songs. Does this mean God is in some sense a musician and poet?

As a different sort of example consider the temple built by Solomon. This temple was the visible representation of God's

God has imbued us with something of his creative power and delights when we use that in accordance with his nature and purposes.

presence on earth and therefore became the heart of Jewish life and faith. The temple was the ultimate representation of spirituality for Old Testament believers and acted literally and figuratively as the meeting place between God and man. And this temple was a place designed by God to be a place of beauty and creativity. At God's command the temple was covered with precious metals and stones. It was also filled with ornate sculptures of flowers, fruits, birds, lions, and even angels. God commanded the creation of all sorts of beauty and creativity and then told his people to place it in the middle of the place that held the most religious and spiritual significance to Israel.

Now jump way ahead in the story God tells us of himself and consider Jesus, God in the flesh. While we are not told much about his life between ages 12 and 30ish we are told that he was a carpenter. He was a craftsman who would have designed and built things. And it is no stretch of the imagination to suggest that Jesus was creative; all we have to do is look at the way he taught. The bulk of Jesus' teaching was in the form of colourful and captivating stories called parables.

Finally, if I am right in stating that God is creative then consider that idea in the light of God's nature. The Bible teaches that God is infinite. This means he is boundless, limitless, and immeasurable. If God is also creative then it means he is infinitely creative. His creativity is boundless, limitless, and immeasurable.

So back to that earlier question: Should getting closer to this sort of God make you less creative? Definitely not. If anything it seems that drawing near to this God of infinite creativity should enflame and inspire the creativity of his people as they come to resemble him more fully. God created us in his image and calls us to bear that image faithfully in all we do; and a significant part of that image is creativity. At risk of being redundant we might say that we are created by a creative God to be creative sub-creators.

Of course none of this is to say that there is not a huge problem with human creativity in the current state of the world. Sin has marred and corrupted all things including the creative core of the human creature. We now exist as a species that has the capacity to design and use musical instruments as well as instruments of torture. The human mind can devise something as beautiful as the Sistine Chapel and as abhorrent as chemical

weapons. We compose poetry and pornography. Our creativity, which is ultimately a good gift of God, has in many circumstances been forged into a weapon we use in our revolt against him.

There is good news though. God refuses to let go of the goodness of creativity. Human creativity is fallen because humans are fallen, but as humanity has been redeemed in Christ so too has human creativity. God tells us this in Colossians 1:15-20: *He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together. And he is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent. For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross. (ESV)*

Christ, the perfect man and the Second Adam, has laid claim to all the First Adam lost, including our creativity. By the blood of his cross Jesus has reconciled not only humanity to God but all things, including human creativity. Our calling now as Christians is to live as those freed from the bondage to sin, bearing God's image in all our endeavours. We are recreated in Christ to bear the calling to be creative and live as children of the Grand Artist, the Great Poet, the Creator God. Because of this, the Christian is indeed the one whose imagination should soar.

- Travis Scott

City Presbyterian Church



Travis & Brooke Scott and their children Sophia, Zoe & Jerram



Movies

A means of connecting with others

When Peter Jackson stood on the stage at Hollywood and received multiple awards for the making of *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy, Kiwis felt an enormous sense of pride. We rejoiced with him in his achievements and flocked to the cinemas to lose ourselves in “Middle Earth”. We identified with the wonderful characters of Bilbo, Frodo, Sam, Gandalf and Aragorn in their ongoing battle with good and evil. We marvelled at the beauty of God’s creation here in New Zealand, captured so magnificently on the big screen.

As a result, a whole new generation has been introduced to the work of J. R. R. Tolkien with its wonderful array of biblical themes and images. And years later, tourists continue to make the trip “down under” to check out Hobbiton and gaze in wonder at the grandeur of our scenery. *The Lord of the Rings* has left us a lasting legacy at so many different levels.

Most of us recognise that movies are a powerful form of entertainment that capture our hearts and influence our lives. But are they more than that?

Movies are perhaps the primary art form of our time, the vehicle through which we communicate our stories, asking significant questions about life, death and the meaning of life.

A culture’s stories give us insight into the hopes, fears, values and dreams that are considered important enough to record and pass on to the next generation. Art, in all its forms, is a means through which humans respond to God’s creation in all its beauty, order and variety, seeking to make sense of it and leaving a legacy for others to contemplate and enjoy. As T. S. Eliot says “The author of a work of imagination is trying to affect us wholly, as human beings, whether he knows it or not; and we

are affected by it, as human beings whether we intend to be or not.”

Movies, then, with their ability to tell stories and raise questions about the meaning of life provide us with a wonderful bridge to connect with other people. The apostle Paul at Mars Hill, in Acts 17, was obviously familiar with the culture around him and he quoted from pagan philosophers and poets, making use of cultural connections through the power of the Holy Spirit to communicate God’s truth to his audience. We, like Paul, need to be able to converse with others about the ideas in our culture. I recently came across this quote “Theatres are the new Church of the Masses – where people sit huddled in the dark listening to people in the light tell what it is to be human.”¹ Movies provide us with a way to experience a myriad of situations that we might not otherwise get to explore. Movies create shared experiences that unite people as they try and make sense of the world around them. Given the deep impact that movies have in popular culture, it is important for us as Christians to make ourselves familiar with our culture’s stories and to be able to intelligently discuss the messages that are being communicated.

In everyday conversation with your workmates or friends it is unlikely that you will leap into such deep questions as “What is the purpose in life?” or “Is there life after death?” or “Why is there so much suffering in the world?” But if you have watched a movie with someone some of these questions come up naturally in conversation over coffee afterwards. I recently previewed a movie with the family that I thought might be suitable for the Youth Group to watch. The next day at work my colleague was asking if I knew any good movies that she could watch with her daughter. I was able to share what we had seen and a few weeks later we had a great conversation about the themes in the movie.

A few years ago we regularly attended movie nights once a month where homegroup members were invited to bring along non-Christian friends to watch a movie and discuss our



reactions to it afterwards. We watched a variety of movies and each time the leader shared some well-thought out questions which provoked some lively discussion over favourite nibbles and drinks. Our youngest son was about 12 at the time and while he didn't say much he started taking an interest in all different types of movies. He is now 16 years old and recently commented, "I am so glad that we had those movie nights. It changed the whole way I viewed movies. It helped me to think more deeply about the message and appreciate how a movie is put together."

If we are to be faithful in living among our neighbours, who perhaps share widely different convictions and values, and want to engage in meaningful dialogue, we will need to develop skill in becoming discerning. With respect to movies, we need to learn how to evaluate a movie in light of our Christian beliefs. We need to discern what message the movie is conveying through its story by evaluating how the story is told and what worldview it assumes. One way to do this is to ask some simple but probing questions that help us get to the heart of what we are reflecting on.

Here are seven general questions that can help you when reflecting on a movie. (These are from the www.ransomfellowship.org which regularly reviews movies. If you are looking for ideas of a good movie to watch, and questions that are specifically written for particular movies, then this website is a great resource.)²

- 1 What was your initial or immediate reaction to the film? Why do you think you reacted that way? What was it in the film that prompted that reaction?
- 2 What is the message(s) of the film, or view of life and the world that is presented in the story as it unfolds?
- 3 Consider how the film addresses themes such as: the nature of reality or what is really real; what's wrong with the world, and what's the solution; the fragmentation of life in our busy, pluralistic world; the significance and meaning of relationships and love; the significance and meaning of being human; whether there is right and wrong, and how we determine it; the meaning of life and history; and what happens at death.

4 What is attractive here? To whom? How is it made attractive?

5 Where do you agree? Where do you disagree? Why? In the areas in which we might disagree, how can we talk about and demonstrate the truth in a winsome and creative way in our pluralistic culture?

6 In what ways were the techniques of film-making (casting, direction, script, music, sets, action, cinematography, lighting, editing, etc.) used to get the film's message(s) across, or to make the message plausible or compelling? In what ways were they ineffective or misused?

7 Most stories actually are improvisations on a few basic motifs or story-lines common to literature. What other films come to mind as you reflect on this movie? What novels or short stories? What Scriptures?

Having a movie night in our homes is a wonderful way of drawing people together. Friends who are not ready to take the plunge of attending church are often very happy to be invited into your home. Watching a movie together gives a focus to the evening and warm conversation together afterwards where people are free to express their ideas and opinions in a friendly atmosphere is very inviting. Movies are a wonderful way to connect with others and to build friendships with those in our community.

- Anne Camp
Covenant Presbyterian Church

¹ From Barbara Nicolosi's weblog, *Church of the Masses*, <http://churchofthemasses.blogspot.com>

² *Discernment 101: An explanation of discernment* – Denis Haack
<http://www.ransomfellowship.org>



The Importance of Good Literature

From a very young age I have had a love for reading. This love was nurtured in many ways as I was growing up, but in particular I remember how much I loved listening to my Mum read aloud the classics to my brother and me. It was during this time that I developed my love for good literature. I still remember curling up on the couch on a winter's evening and allowing myself to get lost in other worlds, experiencing the highs and lows through the various characters I was introduced to. These were evenings well spent and my early passion for reading has never wavered.

As Christians, the first thing we must recognize when thinking about literature and our enjoyment of it is that our creator God is a master story teller and he has created us in his own image. Therefore, the ability we have as humans to tell stories and enjoy reading stories is a reflection of the fact that our God is a creative and imaginative God. God's story is the true story and the major themes of creation, fall, redemption and consummation are echoed in our writing. We are woven into his master narrative and because of this we can have a love for storytelling and an appreciation for good literature.

But the benefits of literature go a lot deeper than simply appreciating creativity. Stories are one of the most important ways that lessons have been passed down from generation to generation. Stories are about people and because of this they inevitably speak to us as we read them. Good authors are able to depict characters that automatically gain our empathy and understanding. The Bible is made up of 'stories' about a wide range of people. As Sally Davey puts it, "we can enter into the lessons of these stories so vividly because they are about real people living life as we so often do". We can imagine the betrayal Joseph felt when his brothers sold him into slavery. We are drawn to the loyalty Ruth displayed as she followed Naomi into a foreign land. We weep with David when he realises his sin before a holy God. The reason we can relate to these characters in the Bible is because they are real people just like us and as we read of their struggle with sin, we can relate to that same struggle in our own lives. God uses these characters to teach us life lessons and help us understand his wonderful plan of salvation.

In the same way, literature is a useful tool for teaching understanding and discernment of real life situations. Literature has a way of allowing us to use our imagination to experience a

range of situations we may never otherwise face. We can see through the characters' eyes and gain a new perspective from this. Rather than being told facts to believe, skilled authors can bring us to these realisations through their depiction of the main characters in their story. Take for instance Pollyanna and her well-known 'glad game' she liked to play. The concept behind this game is that of taking so-called 'bad situations' in life and with a positive outlook, turning them into blessings. Seeing her living out this mantra when she herself is faced with the possibility of never walking again makes us take a good hard look at ourselves. We are encouraged to count our own blessings and to look at life and its challenges with that same optimism. The author skillfully leads us to that conclusion through her realistic and meaningful portrayal of her main character.

I believe that God blesses the non-Christian and Christian alike with gifts in the area of the arts. Neither is superior to the other. Both are created in God's image and therefore their work can be used to edify and challenge and stimulate. As Jerram Barrs suggests, "the human mind, however much fallen and perverted from its original integrity, is still adorned and invested with admirable gifts from its Creator". We as Christians should not limit our reading material therefore just to literature produced by Christian authors. The question on our minds when choosing books to read should not be, "Did a Christian write this?" but rather, "Is this good literature?" Good literature will enrich our lives and the lives of our children. It will use real characters to make us evaluate our own lives and situations. It will show both good and evil realistically and ultimately reflect the creativity and imagination of our Creator. Rather than making strict rules about what can and can't be read we should be encouraging the next generation to read widely and discern whether the message this author is portraying reflects a biblical perspective. Evaluating worldviews will set our children up with the ability to defend their faith and discern *truth* in the future.

Because I have such a passion for reading, and because this was developed in me from a young age, I have an equal desire to pass this love of literature on to the next generation. As a teacher of intermediate students, I believe it is invaluable to spend time exposing these young minds to good literature. Every day I spend at least 15 to 20 minutes reading out loud to my class. You might think 12 and 13 year olds are too old for this, but from my

experience you're never too old for fiction. It is through these times that I have witnessed boys in particular becoming excited about reading. Often I will finish at the end of a chapter with a cliff-hanger and these formerly reluctant readers will beg me in front of their peers to keep reading. I believe reading is the foundation of educational success and that is why I think it is time well spent in class.

In closing, I would encourage you to read out loud to your children and allow them to grow their imagination and God-given creativity and to develop the discernment to recognise good literature and view all fiction in the light of God's "story".

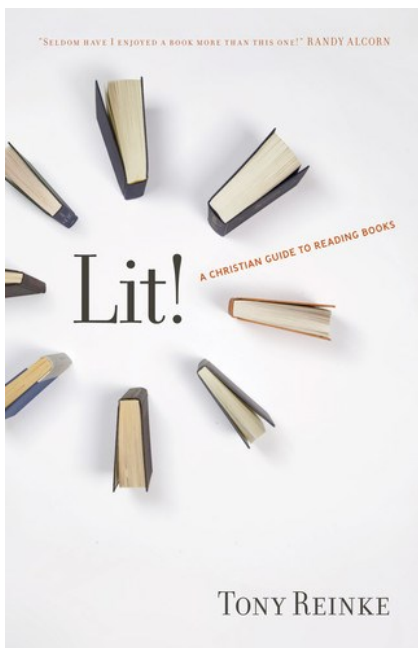
Louise Kennedy is from Covenant Presbyterian Church and teaches Intermediate level at Kingsway School in Orewa.

¹ *Read Me a Story... Please!* Sally Davy, Faith in Focus Magazine, Dec. 2001 www.rcnz.org.nz

² *Children's Books by Christians and Non-Christian's* by Jerram Barrs, 2011 www.covenantseminary.edu

Recommended books to read aloud to your children:

Kensuke's Kingdom - Michael Morpurgo
 Waiting for Anya - Michael Morpurgo
 The Secret Garden - Frances Hodgson Burnett
 A Little Princess - Frances Hodgson Burnett
 Pollyanna - Eleanor H. Porter
 The Miraculous Journey of Edward Tulane - Kate DiCamillo
 Bridge to Terabithia - Katherine Paterson
 The Silver Sword - Ian Serrailier
 Roll of Thunder Hear My Cry - Mildred Taylor
 A Walk Down Lavender Street - Belinda Hollyer
 Boy - Roald Dahl
 The Railway Children - E. Nesbit
 Chinese Cinderella - Adeline Yen Mah
 Goodnight Mister Tom - Michelle Margorian
 The Machine Gunners - Robert Westall
 Hatchet - Gary Paulson
 The Cay - Theodore Taylor
 The Coral Island - R. M. Ballyntyne



Reading... some of us spend hours in the pages of books savouring the words, characters and information, while others of us feel guilt because we don't. Reading books is hard work, and a world full of distractions does not make it any easier.

Lit! A Christian Guide to Reading Books' by Tony Reinke

is written to inspire and equip ALL of us to read and read well.

Part One lays down a theology of reading, by taking us back to the Ten Commandments and considering how God himself wrote words on stone to give to His people. Reinke shows us how God's people are people of the "Book" and as such have a special connection to the written word because God has revealed himself through words. He challenges us to build a biblical worldview that will equip us to benefit from books and even includes a chapter on the benefits of non-Christian books.

As an avid reader in a world full of books with new ones published every week there is always the question of which books to read? Part Two of "Lit!" is filled with practical tips on how to decide what to read and how we go about it. These snippets from Reinke's own journey consider the challenges we face like the

impact of the internet and the dreaded issue of whether *to mark our books or not*.

Reinke does a great job of helping us see that we read different books for different purposes and helps us ask questions of ourselves and the books we read to establish our priorities. This book challenged my approach to books; it helped build a framework of how I think in regards to fiction and the books my own girls are considering as they grow in their desire to read. The chapter on "raising readers" also had helpful tips on how to interact with them over what they are reading.

This book was practical, motivating and if you borrow one of my books you will now find it full of marks and notes!

*Reviewed by Jess Smith
 Grace Bible Church Dunedin*

Book Review

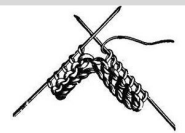
Creative Hobbies

I am not sure what runs through your mind when you hear the phrase, "Let's do something creative". Maybe you groan and feel once again that you are a rather boring person, or you shiver in fear remembering the derisive laughs last time you attempted something "creative". Or maybe your mind is instantly spinning in a thousand directions and you can not wait to start. In this section of *The Helper* a number of Grace Church ladies share with us a creative hobby that they are involved in. We thank God for the many and diverse gifts that he has blessed his people with and hope you will be inspired and encouraged to develop the gifts and talents God has given you.

We asked each of the five women to answer the following questions about their creative hobby:

1. How did you first get interested?
2. How have you developed it over the years?
3. What do you enjoy about it?
4. Do you share this with others? Have you met other people in the community through pursuing this hobby? Do you minister to others through it?

Knitting & Crocheting



I have been knitting and crocheting now for about 12 years. I was born and raised in Grand Rapids, Michigan, USA. After Travis and I were married, I knew we would be moving to St. Louis, Missouri (for Travis to begin seminary), where I didn't know anyone, so I asked my Grandma to teach me to knit because I thought at least then I would have something to do. Little did I know it would open doors to meeting new people and learning many new things.

My first project was a scarf. It was horrible! It had so many holes in it and was not straight at all. Thankfully, my Grandma

was patient with me and helped me out when I was making all these mistakes. I slowly started doing more complicated projects and she would help me learn new skills. It was a great bonding time for us.

My husband Travis loves coffee! He spent many hours in a local cafe in St. Louis studying, and through that time there, met many people. I met those people as well and found out some of the women there were also knitters. We decided to start a knitting group at the coffee shop. We met there every week, drinking coffee, talking, knitting, and helping each other out.

This group consisted of Muslims, atheists, and Christians, so we had some very interesting conversations!

When we moved to Auckland, I searched online for a knitting group here, and found out where it was and started going. It is hosted by an amazing woman who knows nearly everything about knitting, crocheting, and other needlework. She is absolutely brilliant and is an amazing resource. She hosts us (from 8-20 people) in her home twice every month and her mother bakes delicious food for us each time. These women truly know how to be hospitable





I have learned so much from my knitting groups. I have learned many things about knitting and crocheting, and have learned so much about people and how to interact with them. I have met people from all over the world including Sudan, South Africa, England, Japan, South Korea, Scotland, Australia, Iran, Spain, France, and of course NZ and USA. Knitting and crocheting are things that have been practiced, and continue to be practiced, all around the world, so we can all come together and share our common interests.

to others. She is a very serious atheist and so some interesting conversations have come up in this knitting group as well. I have to confess that many times I do not know what to say since I am not one who thinks quickly in the moment. As I drive home, or sit in bed after a knitting night, I sometimes figure out what I could have said in the conversation that had just taken place. I pray that God would give me wisdom as to how much to say, as well as what to say while I am there.

Knitting has brought about quite a few relationships in my life. I have seen a few of the women in the Auckland group outside of knitting and have gotten to know them and their families. None of them are Christians, and while I do not want to see these people as projects, I do see this as a chance to be a light to them in this dark city.

God gives different gifts to us all, and I feel that knitting and crocheting are gifts he has given to me (even if they are not developed as well as I would like) to use for my enjoyment and his glory. I have been able to give many items to people as gifts to keep them warm and cozy. I love being able to finish a project and give it to the person it was designed for. I wonder if this is how God feels, giving good gifts to his children?

- Brooke Scott
City Presbyterian Church

(I am an ex-youth worker who loved working with teenagers. I now am a couple of things I never thought I would be, a stay-at-home mum of 3 little ones and a pastor's wife far away from where I was born.)



Photography



I was introduced to the world of photography by my High School principal, an enthusiastic photographer. I had the opportunity to learn about film photography, processing the films, and producing my own prints in a dark room. After handing in my final photography assignment, Mr. Kennedy called me into his office, congratulating me on my excellent photography work, and passed a comment that I had a talent/gift in this area. I continued to do four years of film photography in high school, loving both the technical and creative aspect of it.

After high school, I went to teachers' college, and completed my Bachelor of Education. I had been working for about five years at Covenant Kids Preschool when I felt like I needed a "creative Challenge", something that used another part of my brain. It wasn't long until I re-discovered photography.

I bought my first DSLR, enrolled in an online course, and completed my Diploma in Professional Photography a year later with one of the top marks in my "class". My tutor told me I was one of his most talented students, which confirmed to me that photography was not only a passion of mine, but apparently I was good at it, and somebody believed in me! I was always a bit jealous of people who were super arty and creative. Many of my friends could draw well, paint beautiful pictures, sew clothes, play instruments; all things which I tried, but felt I never had the patience or talent for. My highest marks were always in science and maths, never art or design. I think it was that same month that I listened to Travis Scott preach on using creative passions for God! It was as if God spoke directly to me, encouraging me to use the gift and potential He had blessed me with.

Thanks to the incredible technical skill of my friend and graphic designer, Catherine Faletanoai, and web master and brother-in-

law, Daniel Willis, I set up my own business and website: Sight For Sore Eyes Photography. Through this business, I constantly meet new people, get to know families and children, and am capturing on camera that sacred moment of couples committing their lives to each other. What an absolute privilege! Photography creates an opportunity for people to welcome me into their homes and open up their lives to me to become an often very personal part of it for a few moments or a few hours. Not only do I get to spend time with my clients, but also to connect with other photographers, both students and professionals.

A few years ago, I read somewhere: "Don't dream your life; live your dreams!" That's what we decided to do! My husband Simon and I both picked very expensive life dreams: Simon chose to learn to fly and achieved his commercial pilot's licence, and I developed my passion for photography — not cheap hobbies to have. But we both strongly believe in pursuing our God-given passions and talents. It surely has added to our quality of life too.

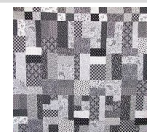
Operating within our areas of gifting means being where God wants us to be. It will always be where we are most effective as well as most fulfilled in life. God is so clearly using our passion to present opportunities for witnessing to and celebrating his goodness, love and his wonderful plan for each individual life.

Feel free to check out my website: sightforsoreeyes.co.nz or follow me on Facebook (key words: Sight For Sore Eyes Photography).

- *Melissa Macpherson*
Covenant Presbyterian Church



Patchwork



My interest in craft began as an 8 year old with my mother teaching me to knit. I started patchwork in 1990 when I was unemployed for 9 months as a way of occupying my time. I had done a few one-off needlework classes with Jean Wilson in Blenheim and enjoyed her style of teaching. When I heard she was going to be doing an intermediate patchwork and quilting night class I joined up to make a 4 block wall hanging using applique and patchwork methods.

I started by following patterns and getting books out of the library to make quilts for family and myself. One of the first quilts I made was for my first nephew for his cot. About 3 years ago I made a king size quilt for this same nephew's 21st Birthday. I would often use the pattern as a guide and adapt it so that it was unique. This then developed into finding block patterns in books and creating my own design of quilt using those blocks until just last month creating my own design and working out how to patch it together. A few years ago I purchased a pattern for a wall hanging called "Postcards of NZ". I have made the individual blocks but have not yet finished it as I have started taking photos of places I have lived and making my own pictures. The end product will be a bed quilt rather than a wall hanging. I often go to classes to learn new techniques.

There are three things I enjoy about patchwork. The first is designing a quilt, cutting out, reassembling and seeing the pattern come alive. I especially like patterns where you can see a secondary pattern once a number of blocks have been put together. Secondly I enjoy making something to give away and seeing the pleasure and surprise on the person's face when they receive the gift. When I gave the 21st quilt to my nephew, who doesn't say whether he likes something or not, he opened the parcel, spread the quilt out on the floor and just looked at it for about 5 minutes without saying a word. So I knew he liked it. It helped that he had chosen the pattern and the material.

When I was in Te Anau I made two picture quilts for children in my class as a thank you for giving me free eggs for the whole time I lived there. They both chose the type of picture they wanted. I took the photo and then converted it into fabric. Both children wanted a photo of themselves, one playing on the adventure playground at school the other playing with her dog.

The third great thing about quilting is it gives me a reason to get up and something to do when I am not working or waiting for the phone to ring with a teaching position for the day.

I have enjoyed meeting other people at the classes I have attended and when I worked in Te Anau for a year, I joined a quilters' group which I loved. It is a group which meets once a month all day Saturday and you can either bring your own work or pay \$2 and learn how to make a surprise. I have found quilting groups very friendly and everyone is keen to show and discuss what they are doing as well as helping each other with ideas and different ways of working. I find it a great environment for getting to know others through participating in projects together. When I returned to Christchurch this year I joined a group called "Hugs". It is a new group that has started in Spreydon, where I live, and meets once a week. Four of the six members live in Spreydon and I have meet with two of them outside the quilting morning. The aim of the group is to make quilts for disadvantaged children. These could be children in foster homes, children's homes or other situations where the group thinks quilts could be given. The maker gets a sense of satisfaction while the children enjoy receiving something made especially for them.

- Kristen Hammerich
Christchurch



Ukulele Workshop



The idea of a ukulele workshop for the migrant community in Dunedin came to Lien Trinh at the beginning of 2012 when she started joining the Chai and Chat Migrant Women's Group. Lien loves music and singing, but growing up in Vietnam meant music was not her family's priority. It was always about studying and excelling in academic work, rather than venturing into arts and creativity. Lien started to learn guitar in 2009, together with her son who was 5 years old. It was intimidating at first, as she always thought that learning an instrument would require a special gift and being the right age. After a lot of practice and with much love for guitar playing, Lien realised that people need not be musically gifted to be able to learn how to play the guitar; and there is always time for anyone at any age to learn music.

Lien related her story to many other women and thought that it would be a good idea to pass on her passion and determination to other women, especially the migrant women in Dunedin. She decided to teach them ukulele, a reasonably easy instrument to afford and learn. It would also be a creative way to reach out to the non-Christian community. Through the ukulele workshops, Lien hopes that people will be aware of the Christian faith and the Lord Jesus. Music also helps foster the connection and relationship among women of different cultures. Since September 2012, the weekly ukulele group has expanded in numbers with both Kiwi and migrant women joining. Chai and Chat Ukulele Group have also performed at various events including the annual Race Relations Day, busking at the local Farmers' Market, and on the community radio. Public performances help build confidence and a sense of feeling settled in a new country. It is most rewarding to see how much the women look forward to their weekly ukulele jam session, and how they enjoy each other's company and support one another emotionally through music.

Because the "Chai and Chat ukulele group" has been so successful, a group of women at the Grace Bible Church have come up with an initiative to form a ukulele club of our own. There is a need in the Christian community for fellowship through music and worship. Margie Davis and Lien came up with the idea of the Grace Bible Church "Valley Uke" hoping that people from the congregation would join in for a good jam session every Wednesday evening at Margie's. "Valley Uke" is

not exclusively for the Christian community; it is open to the wider community (both men and women, young and old), and especially to the people living in the North East Valley area. Since it started in May 2013, "Valley Uke" has been growing steadily and it now has 8 members. The jam session always starts with a word of prayer to God for His goodness, for His creation of music, and for fun and fellowship among the group members.

- Margie Davis & Lien Trinh
Dunedin Grace Bible Church

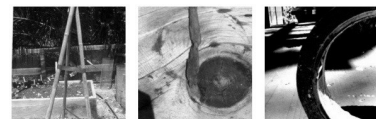


The Ukelele Group that meets in Margie's home. Margie on the left and Lien 2nd from the right.



Lien with the Chai and Chat Ukelele group before they went on Access Radio

Backyard Letters



Backyard Letters started in 2008 when my friend, Jane, and I were both home schooling young children. We were always on the lookout for projects that would encourage our “learning-to-read and reluctant-to-read” students to think outside the square. One day we stumbled across a website that did just that — finding letters of the alphabet hidden in ordinary, everyday objects. I took my 7 year old 'reluctant reader' outside in the garden, armed with our camera, to see what we could find. We found an L in some old garden frame, an O in the flower pots, a V in the wheelbarrow leg and an E in the wrought iron work on our front veranda – LOVE. I was hooked and Nathan was excited about the alphabet for the first time, so we carried on and found the whole alphabet.

Jane and I soon discovered that no-one in New Zealand was doing anything like this and the entrepreneur within us both took over. It became apparent very early on that Jane's strength was in web design and product ideas, and my strength was finding the letters (with Nathan's help) and not being embarrassed to take photos of odd things in very public places. We began developing a range of gift products: Word art, stationery, greeting cards, etc. We exhibited at several major craft fairs and the NZ Trade Gift Fair. Our products were popping up in gift shops up and down the country which was very exciting. We met some amazing people through the fairs— most notably a lady who owned Storytime Bookshop in Whangarei who helped me turn our adventure into a children's alphabet book, and the Creative Director from Jasons Products who offered us an Art License agreement to produce our images on their placemats and coasters (now available in Briscoes, Farmers and loads of other really neat gift shops). We took the opportunity to do photo shoots in Auckland, Wellington and Christchurch (pre-earthquake) to find the alphabet in each city. In hindsight, I'm very thankful that we made it to Christchurch before the quakes; many of the letters we found are now gone.

I enjoy the concept of Backyard Letters because it's quirky and gives a totally different perspective on ordinary things that we take for granted. I love it when people don't know what it is and then suddenly realise it's not just a bunch of photos but a word or name — expressions are priceless! I enjoy meeting lots of creative people who have such a wealth of God-given talent (even though most of them do not acknowledge the source of their talent). It's fascinating meeting people with such diverse skills and ideas and has given me cause to praise our Creator all the more.

Through Backyard Letters, Jane and I have been asked to speak at Ladies Network groups and Small Business meetings to share our journey. It's a great opportunity to inspire and encourage each other. In my own ministry as Councillor Helper for Cadets and Gems, Backyard Letters have come in useful for craft projects and workshops. On a personal level, I have had numerous opportunities to fellowship and encourage other Christians who have spotted our quotes and verses at the regular craft markets where we exhibit locally. We are also able to create any name or word and have often been asked to create words with quotes and verses.

- Maria Macpherson
Covenant Presbyterian Church



Book Review

Echoes of Eden

Reflections on Christianity,
Literature, and the Arts
By Jerram Barrs

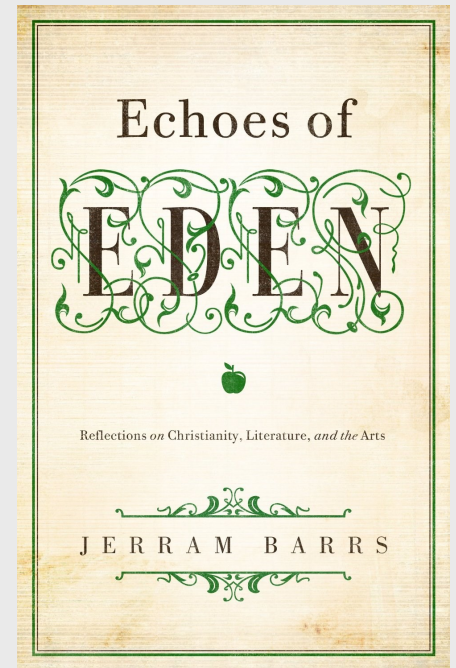
In this book Jerram Barrs recognises that there is great confusion in our churches in thinking scripturally about literature and the arts.

You may have had heated discussion with friends and family when J.K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* books and films swept the world. These stories are set in a world of wizardry and witchcraft, and Christian leaders made statements about these and the fantasy writings of C.S. Lewis and J.R.R. Tolkien. Should our children read these books and see the movies based on them? Other similar questions may have bothered your conscience.

The "echoes of Eden" in Jerram Barrs' lovely book are the God-given "memories" or themes with foundations in the biblical doctrine of

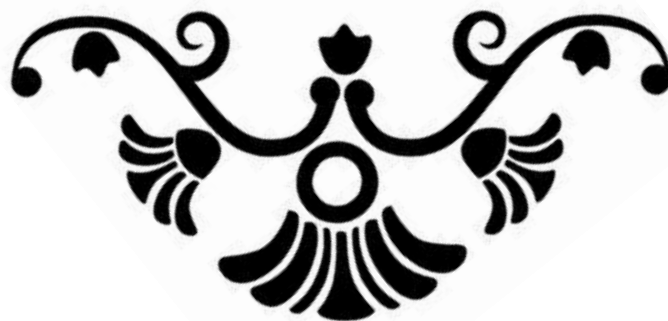
creation, present in all humans and in some form in most true art. These have to do with the beauty of creation, the reality of evil, and the longing for a better world. This book will get you searching for these themes and will help you to apply them to what you see, hear and read. Chapter Four provides a list of objective questions to ask as you discern what works are better than others, helping to clear the confusion and answering your questions.

The last chapters of *Echoes of Eden* are hard to put down. After earlier theoretical chapters about a Christian framework of the arts and how to evaluate and appreciate them, Jerram Barrs expertly reveals and reflects in enthusiastic detail the "echoes of Eden" in the works of C.S. Lewis, J.R.R. Tolkien, J.K. Rowling, William Shakespeare and Jane Austen; and I for one was delighted!



Echoes of Eden would be an excellent book to discuss in your next Book Club meeting. There is so much material here, including a thought provoking section on the second commandment and representational art along with plenty to talk about as we learn to evaluate the arts from a biblical perspective.

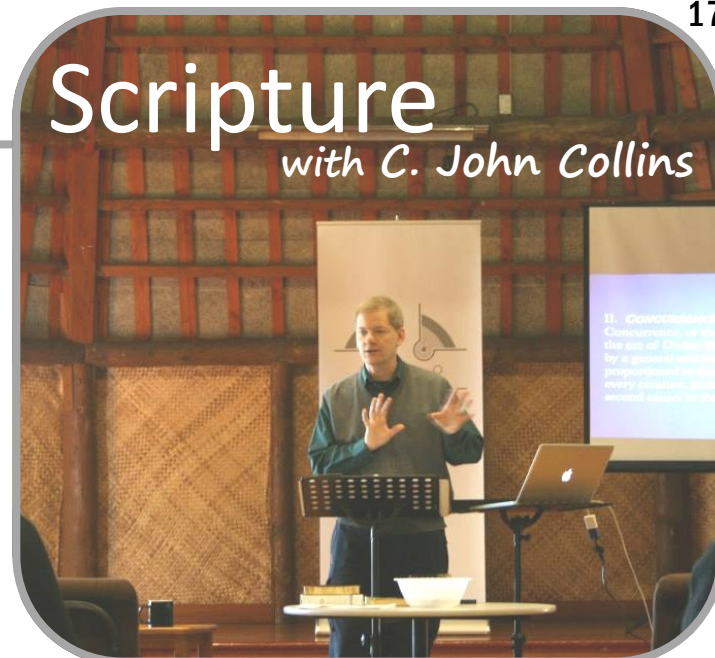
*Reviewed by Lesley Flinn
Covenant Presbyterian Church*



Science, Faith & Scripture

with C. John Collins

Jack Collins is Professor of Old Testament at Covenant Theological Seminary in St Louis, Missouri. With degrees from MIT (BS, MS) and the University of Liverpool (PhD in Hebrew Language), he has been a research engineer, a church-planter, and since 1993, a teacher. He is Old Testament Chairman for the English Standard Version of the Bible, and is author of The God of Miracles: An Exegetical Examination of God's action in the World; Genesis 1-4: A Linguistic, Literary, and Theological Commentary; Science and Faith: Friends or Foes? and Did Adam and Eve Really Exist?: Who They Were and Why You Should Care.



In July this year we were very blessed to have Dr. C. John Collins come Down Under for the first time and speak at two conferences for City Presbyterian. The first conference – *Ancient Truth For Modern Times* focused on the nature and authority of Scripture.

This included five sessions on:

- What the Bible is
- What we can say about it
- What we mean when we say it's true
- How we should read and interpret the Bible
- How we should preach and teach the Bible

He brought out how the Christian message, rooted in the Old Testament, tells the true story of the world and God's people, answers the needs that we all find in ourselves and invites us to embrace that story.

With Collins extensive knowledge and understanding of both Hebrew and Greek, he brought much insight into the linguistics of the original text and the cultural context of the author and reader's world. The Bible's message was written for the immediate audience first, and then to us as heirs. We see different authors with clearly different styles utilize various literary modes and genres to communicate God's word, who are yet theologically on the same wavelength.

Collins helpfully showed that Christ ascribes authority to the writings rather than the writers. Our belief in the Bible — in its reliability, authority and inerrancy — comes from faith in Christ, not vice versa. The Bible is not simply information but news, which calls us to respond. Collins pointed out that we should be careful to defend what the Bible teaches, and to accurately interpret it according to its genre and redemptive history. We need to avoid using Scripture to say things it was never intended to say. I found his explanation and approach to hermeneutics helpful in that we are engaging a person in a text, and we are to respect and try to co-operate with the author and what they meant at the time. So whether we are preparing a sermon, a Bible study or reading the Bible for personal devotions, it is vital that we "lay hold of the 'Big Story' that it tells... as it shapes our worldview, incorporating us

into his people and enlisting us to play our role in that ongoing story".

The following weekend's conference was on the relationship between Science and Faith – are they friends or foes? Christians have been divided on the answer to this question. Some have become fearful and hostile towards modern science and treat it as though the scientific community conspires against Christianity. Rather, Collins reinforced that the Bible offers a worldview that calls us to delight in the world God lovingly made and continues to love and uphold. This is what motivates us to explore and study it.

In the five sessions Collins touched on understanding Genesis 1-11, the image of God and human uniqueness, miracles, God-of-the-gaps, biology, evolution and design. I am unable to do any of those topics justice here, so I will share some things I have learnt. Historically, the church has varied in its interpretation of the early chapters of Genesis so we need to be gracious with one another in our differing views and not be drawn into insulting rhetoric. I have also come to see that there is no necessary conflict between God's special revelation in His Word and general revelation in the created world at its most fundamental level. Rather, as fallible human beings our interpretation of his Word (theology) and interpretation of his world (science) are where conflicts can arise. Thankfully God has blessed us with many committed Christians in the scientific field who can inform our understanding of the created order as well as sound theologians who help us interpret Scripture faithfully.

- Jonathan Camp
City Presbyterian Church

If you would like to listen to the sessions from both of these conferences the audio is available online at <http://www.citypres.org.nz>

¹ *Ancient Truth for Modern Times* C. John Collins Lecture Notes Session 5

In Brief

News & Prayer Points from around the Country

While not all our congregations feature in this issue of *The Helper*, please still be faithful in praying for them in their work of the Kingdom as well as those listed below. We trust you are encouraged by what you read, gain new ideas for what would also work for you, and are helped to pray more effectively for each location.

Northern Presbytery

AUCKLAND CITY

City Presbyterian Church

- That God would establish the work of City Pres. in the heart of Auckland.
- We give thanks for new members joining over the next few months.
- Please pray that God would continue to draw Christians and non-Christians to City Pres. that many would come to know the gospel.
- Pray for many of our women who are working in demanding professions that God would give them wisdom and endurance as they seek to serve Christ faithfully in all the circumstances of their lives.

MANGERE

Providence Presbyterian Church

- Please pray for Providence as we continue to negotiate the use of our buildings for next year.
- Pray also for the Presbytery committee set up to find a new pastor for us, due to Uaita Levi's retirement.
- Pray also for our planned church camp in October — that a good number will come and grow and be encouraged by the teaching and fellowship.
- Pray for our monthly ladies Bible study as we study "Why Jesus died for us".

MANUREWA

Covenant Presbyterian Church

- Pray for the ministry of the pre-school, school and Music 'N More that the Mums from church would seek opportunities to build friendships with other families from the community.
- Give thanks for the opportunity that Anne Camp had via a lady at her workplace to speak at a Muslim Women's Interfaith Conference on *Marriage – A Christian*

Perspective. Pray that the seed of the gospel sown would bear fruit and draw women to Christ.

- Pray for some of our older women in the church that are suffering from cancer and other serious illnesses that they would know the comfort of Christ and the blessing of fellowship with those who visit.

MANUKAU

Redeemer Grace Presbyterian Church

- Give thanks for the recent marriages of Aaron Ebert and Deborah Young and Marco de Jesus and Jam Balmes and pray that the Lord will bless their marriages richly.
- Give thanks that Katherine Young could have a six week break back in New Zealand and pray for her as she settles back into missionary life in South Sudan. Pray that she would have wisdom as she trains nurses and pray for more South Sudanese who would want to train as nurses.



Marco de Jesus and Jam Balmes

GISBORNE

Grace Church

- Please pray for the Lord's guidance as we look to Him for the future.



Aaron Ebert and Deborah Young

Southern Presbytery

DUNEDIN

Grace Bible Church

We have had a relatively mild and pleasant winter here in Dunedin, so it is somewhat of an irony that on the one social evening for the women it was a cold and snowy night. The gathering was far from cold, as Gail Johnson opened up her home and it was filled with women chatting over coffee and nibbles.

The game revolved around participants writing down random questions to be answered. We learnt a lot about each other as we went around the room answering things such as... What's your favourite movie? What's a great place to holiday in NZ? What do you fear? If you were an animal what would you be?

Our book club is currently reading "Rid of My Disgrace" by Lindsay & Justin Holcomb as we continue our journey to equip women in how to point one another to Christ in the midst of crisis. We have also recently said good-bye to this year's CCP

team from Tennessee. The team was a great blessing and an encouragement to the whole congregation and they have made significant connections which our campus team have been following up through Christianity Explored in recent weeks.

Prayer Points

- Give thanks for opportunities for women to gather, spend time in fellowship and get to know one-another better. This has become more of a challenge with multiple services and a bigger congregation. Pray for growing relationships between the younger and older women.
- Give thanks for the opportunities our women have to use their gifts in the community. Pray for Lien and Margie as they use their musical interests to connect and build relationships for the sake of Christ.
- Pray for the book club ladies as we seek to consider the impact of the gospel in some challenging areas of life. Pray that we would develop a group of women able to bring the grace and love of Christ to these situations.
- Give thanks that God is continuing to provide the financial support for Emily Rounce, who is planning to come on staff with Engage Otago. Pray that she would be at 100% in the next few months.
- Our intern from Tennessee, Megan Sparks is being greatly used on our campus amongst the girls. She is having many opportunities with the lost and investing in a number of students here. Pray that as she is seeking to stay longer than the planned year, that immigration would be favourable of this and God would open the way for her to extend her stay.
- There have been a number of non-Christian girls attending the Christianity Explored course we are running over the past few weeks. Pray that these women would be convicted of the gospel and see their need for Christ!

WYNDHAM

Wyndham Evangelical Church

- The children's holiday programme in October will see the conclusion of the Pilgrim's Progress series. Please pray for this week as many children in the Wyndham area have heard the story and memory verses that go with the story. Putting together a team of helpers in October is not always easy but we pray that people will willingly come forward and be blessed during the week.

In Brief

- We have a youth group running now on Friday nights. The students study God's word together along with games and supper. Pray that the Lord will bless this work and bring others from the town to join in.
- We continue to be warmly received in the local primary schools for Bible in Schools. Pray that this work will be protected and the Word of God will be firmly planted in the lives of the many children who hear the gospel each week.

INVERCARGILL

Grace Presbyterian Church

The Women's activities at Grace Church Invercargill continue under the guidance of faithful leaders. Those involved in community work are at present working with five families; helping with the cost of living, groceries, clothing for children and financial assistance for those wishing to attend Christian Camps at Waihola. A source of bread products has recently become available and these are generously delivered when available.

Our monthly T.O.O.T meetings are a great time of fun and fellowship when 15-20 ladies gather together. The craft or activity, roll call and devotion all centre round a chosen theme. Recently our thoughts have been directed to Birds, Water, Cars and Exercise. The laughter and the sharing helps deepen our friendships and knowledge of each other and provides a relaxed atmosphere where non-Christian friends can experience the love of Jesus expressed through his followers.

Three Bible Study groups meet weekly at various times. The "Senior" group meets each Thursday morning and has just completed an in-depth study on prayer using Phillip Keller's

book "His Way to Pray". This has been a real blessing to all and hopefully will revitalise our prayer times that they may become "*Living* encounters with the *Living* God."

One evening group studied Women of Faith from first the Old Testament and then the New Testament. They were encouraged by realising these women experienced the same struggles, trials and temptations as we do to-day in a different time and culture.

Our other evening group has found much help and blessing through studying "Search for Significance" and coming to a greater realisation of their worth to their Loving Heavenly Father.

These study groups are so much more than the name implies. They have brought us much closer together, establishing trust and support and reducing shyness as we experience the reality of living in the "Sisterhood of Christ".

Ladies are involved in many other ministries in and outside of our church and are a further blessing to those who benefit from them.

For Prayer

- Our elderly folk — some very frail, some recovering from major surgery and some cheerfully enduring non-curable illnesses.
- Above all that we may walk in a manner worthy of the Lord and pleasing to him.
- Please pray for the workers in the community outreach as they seek to share the gospel in addition to meeting physical needs.

