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WHY LIVING A GOSPEL-SHAPED LIFE
ISN'T COMPLICATED - JUST HARD!

BETTER THAN STAR WARS - BUNYAN'S HOLY WAR

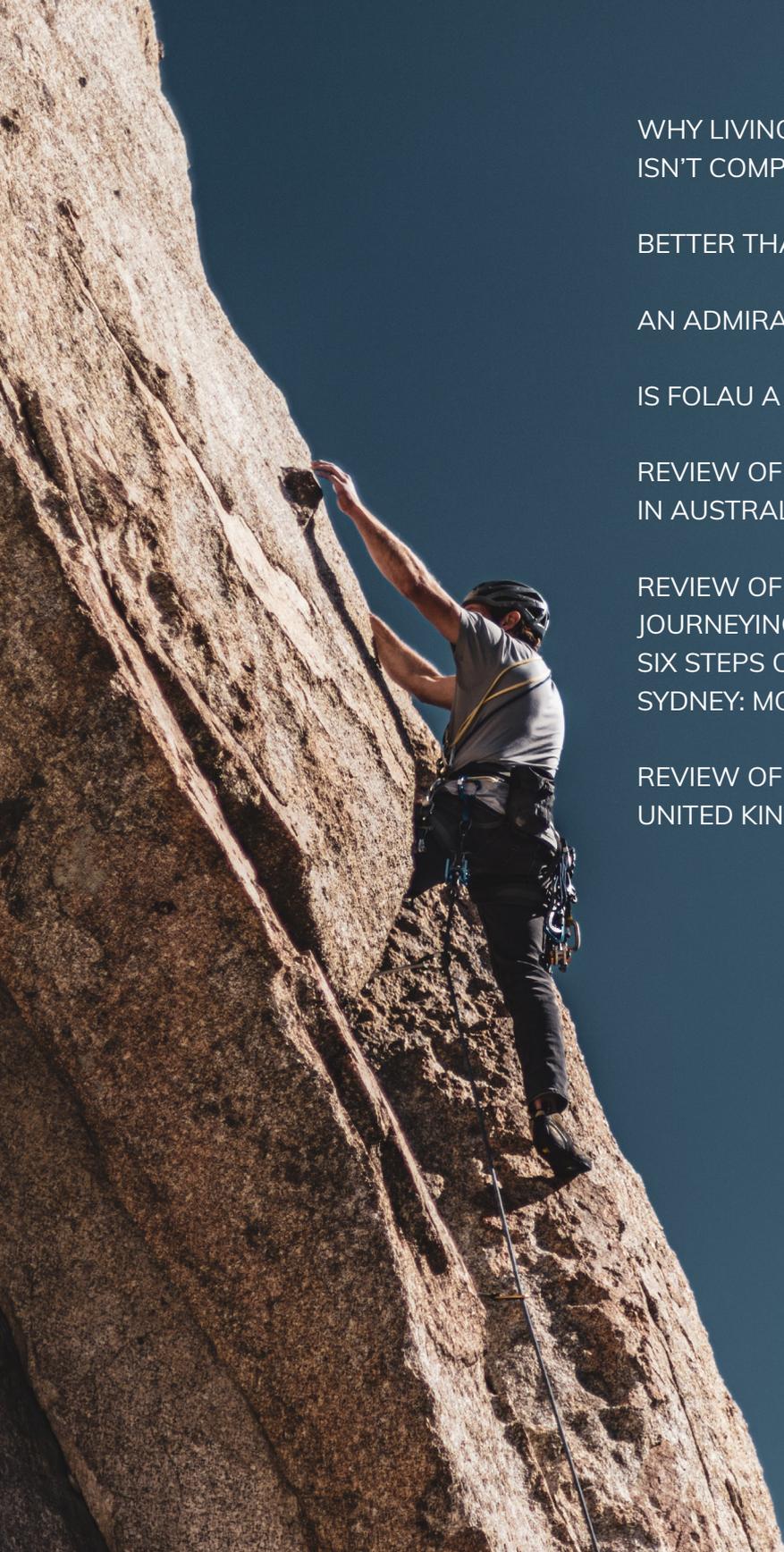
AN ADMIRABLE CHURCH

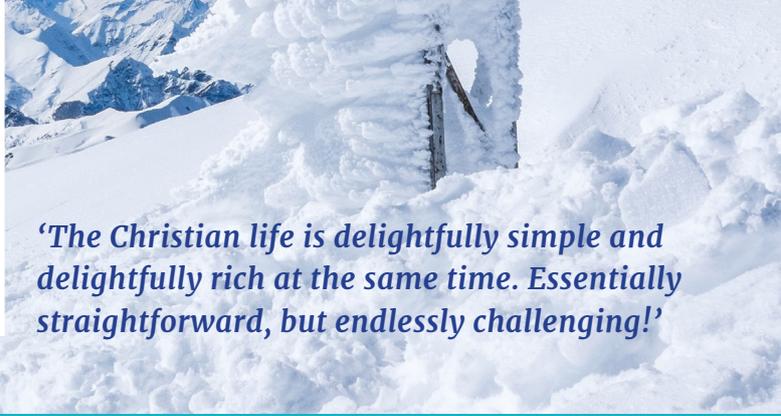
IS FOLAU A MODERN-DAY ERIC LIDDELL?

REVIEW OF MEREDITH LAKE, THE BIBLE
IN AUSTRALIA, SYDNEY: NEWSOUTH, 2018

REVIEW OF ANDREAS LOEWE AND KATHERINE FIRTH,
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UNITED KINGDOM: THE GOOD BOOK COMPANY, 2019





'The Christian life is delightfully simple and delightfully rich at the same time. Essentially straightforward, but endlessly challenging!'

Why living a gospel-shaped life isn't complicated - **just hard!**

Gary Millar
Principal of the Queensland
Theological College

There are lots of things in life that are relatively simple to explain, but hard to actually pull off. Swimming is just a matter of pulling with your arms alternately whilst kicking with your feet. Writing an essay is all about setting out a clear argument and topping and tailing it with an introduction and conclusion. Cutting through a plank of wood is just about measuring and marking, and then keeping the saw straight and the strokes smooth. Playing golf is all about keeping your head still and swinging the club through the ball. Simple. But simple as they are, all these things are also remarkably hard. And living a gospel-shaped life is like that.

When it comes to living with and for the Lord Jesus, it's easy to slip into thinking that because it feels hard a lot of the time (and in my experience, it does!) then it must be incredibly complex. But that would be a mistake. The Christian life is delightfully simple and delightfully rich at the same time. Essentially straightforward, but endlessly challenging! That's why I'm convinced that getting the 'basics' of the gospel-shaped life in place as early as possible is so important, and relatively achievable.

Over the years, I've realised that lots of our problems in living for Jesus flow from the fact that we are a bit confused about (or lose sight of) the core elements of the gospel. So we forget that knowing God is the greatest privilege in the world. We forget that he is for us, will never let us go, and is constantly speaking to us through the Bible. We insist on doing things on our own, when God has made us part of his people for our good and his glory. We get down because we aren't making as much progress as we like, and seem to be getting worse rather than better – even though God told us up front that change is a slow and painful process. We make a mess of things because we slide into thinking and making decisions in the same way that everyone around us does, rather than looking at the world through the gospel. That's why I'm convinced that taking time to lay solid foundations (or to go back and 'check our foundations' after we've been living with Jesus for a while is such a good investment.

At the heart of the 'gospel-shaped life' is, in the words of Paul from 2 Tim 2:8, remembering Jesus Christ, raised from the dead. Working out from this glorious reality will shape every part of our lives, every day. 'Need to Know' is designed to step through the amazing implications of what God has done, is doing and will do for us in Christ (the 'gospel') in a way that will set us up for living the gospel-shaped life in the long haul. It's written to help us to see that life with Jesus is not complicated – just hard. And just because it's hard doesn't mean we're doing it wrong!

A gospel-shaped life is a matter of knowing God, listening to God speaking to us through his word, speaking to other people about God, being changed by God so that we love like God and allowing his agenda to shape every opinion and action we take. It really isn't all that complex – we can boil it down to the length of a tweet – but living it? That's hard. The great news is, of course, that as Peter says, God has already given us everything we need for life and godliness in the Lord Jesus (see 2 Peter 1:3). Christianity isn't a 'try hard and do your best' thing – Christianity is built on the marvelous news that God has already done and provided everything we need in Christ to enable us to live for him. To put it a bit differently, in Christianity, God has already done all the heavy lifting - and continues to do it for us!

I hope you can see the glorious simplicity of a gospel-shaped life – not least because that's exactly what will help us to keep going when it's tough – and I really should warn you up front (if you haven't got it yet) – that it will be! It will be hard because our world is a broken mess, and things regularly go wrong. It will be hard because this messed-up world is populated by broken people like you and me – who regularly let each other down, and live inconsistently, and hurt each other. It's hard because the Bible also says that we are involved in a cosmic conflict, and the forces of evil are focused on making it difficult for the church to live for Christ. But 'hard' isn't the same thing as 'impossible' – and the marvelous truth of the gospel makes it clear not only how we should live, but how in the strength of the Lord Jesus, we are able to pull it off as we walk with him!



Better than Star Wars - Bunyan's Holy War

Nicos Kaloyirou
Solicitor from Adelaide

“In my Travels, as I walked through many Regions and Countries, it was my chance to happen into that famous Continent of Universe; a very large and spacious Country it is. It lieth between the two Poles, and just amidst the four points of the Heavens.”

In the tradition of Milton's *Paradise Lost*, these lines introduce John Bunyan's literary masterpiece, *The Holy War* (published in 1682), an epic tale depicting the cosmic battle between God and evil.

Bunyan conducts us across a broad sweep of God's revelation from the Old Testament to the New and back again, showing the deplorable condition of fallen humanity and the role that the conscience plays during the Fall and towards true conversion.

Bunyan tells the story of the Fall of the Town of Mansoul (Man's Soul), a walled city built for the glory of Shaddai, the LORD of the Universe, which is besieged by the devil's armies and is liberated by the forces of Shaddai's Son, Emmanuel.

Diabolus, who assumes the body of the wisest of the beasts, decides upon a plan to assail the city and deceive poor Mansoul. Satan concentrates his initial attacks on the men who represent the three main aspects of the human psyche: the Mayor of the Town who represents 'Understanding', whose eyes are hidden from the Light; the Recorder who represents 'Conscience' and 'Lord Willbewill' whose desire to serve Shaddai is completely changed so that he comes to serve Diabolus.

Diabolus' first attack is upon Captain Resistance who stands within bow shot of Eyegate and Eargate. After he is eliminated, the Will (Lord Willbewill), as the gate keeper of the soul, provides the next contact with the enemy. It is up to the Will to block the entrance of evil thoughts, vehemently resist them and not allow them to linger because if one yields to them, if they are entertained and encouraged, they will conceive and bring forth fruit, evil intentions and desires which will be translated into actions. Diabolus brings his accusation against the King and his Law concerning the forbidden fruit and alleges that this prohibition by the Law keeps Mansoul in bondage and slavery. The temptation was that by yielding, this fruit would grant Mansoul both "wisdom and honour".

Lord Willbewill accepts Diabolus' oration which is made at Eargate, consents to his words and opens the Gates so that Diabolus should be let into the Town. "And now was Mansoul brought under to purpose, and made to fulfil the lusts of the will, and of the mind."

As soon as Satan breaks in, Conscience and Understanding are the first to fall victim. Before sin entered Mr Recorder (Conscience) was well read and was in dread of the Laws of his King, but upon being defiled, he hardens his heart in the ways of vanity, his strength and resolution is gone, and is almost past all consciousness of sin.

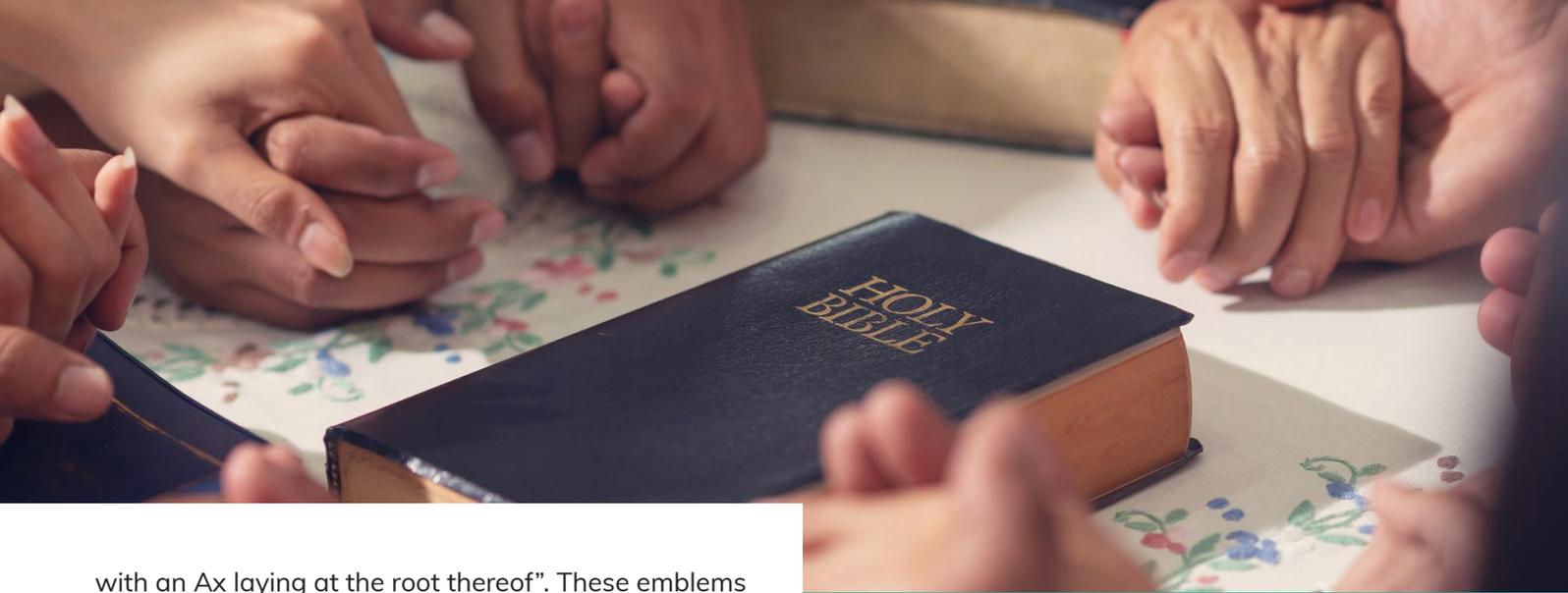
The Lord Mayor, who was an Understanding man, in admitting the Giant into the town, was put out of his place. Diabolus builds up a wall in front of Lord Understanding's palace and shut off the light so that the whole of his habitation was darkened.

Lord Willbewill now greatly debauched in his principles appoints Mr Affection as his Deputy who is wholly given to the flesh.

Diabolus replaces the Lord Mayor with Lord Lustings. The Recorder is promptly replaced by a fellow called Forget-good who could not remember anything but mischief, and do it with delight. Diabolus garrisons himself in the Town of Mansoul, defaces the Image of Shaddai and sets up his own and makes "havock of all remains of the Laws and Statutes of Shaddai". Tidings of the rebellion of Mansoul are brought to Lord Shaddai but the King and his Son had foreseen it all long before and had sufficiently provided for the relief of Mansoul.

Emmanuel is engaged by Covenant to his Father to take a journey "into the Country of Universe" to recover Mansoul and bring him back to himself "through the power of his matchless love, into a far better, and more happy condition than 'twas in before it was taken by Diabolus".

So the King immediately musters his forces and commissions four captains, to make war against Mansoul and regain it. The name of the leader was Boanerges; the second was Captain Conviction whose "Scutcheon was the Book of the Law wide open, from whence issued a flame of fire"; the third was Judgment, whose Ensign was Mr Terror; and the fourth was Execution whose Ensign was Mr Justice, who bore the red colours and his "Scutcheon was a fruitless tree



with an Ax laying at the root thereof". These emblems represent the terrors of Mount Sinai, understood as a covenant of works which would not prevail.

Captain Boanerges commands his Trumpeter to go down to Eargate and in the name of the great Shaddai to summons Mansoul to give audience to the Message of the gospel. However, the first calls for repentance are answered with defiance. The words beat against Eargate but without force to break it open. Lord Willbewill double bars the gates and refuses to submit. A battle ensues, and Understanding and Conscience are taken prisoner. Mansoul hardens his heart.

Shaddai's four captains send home a petition to beg for a new general to lead them. Emmanuel himself now takes command. Emmanuel's armour shines like the sun. He has forty-four battering rams and twenty-two slings, the sixty-six books of the Bible, each made of pure gold. Emmanuel offers mercy to Mansoul, and when it is rejected threatens judgment and terror. Diabolus goes in person to Mouthgate and begs Emmanuel to leave him to rule his subjects in peace. Emmanuel tells him that " he is a thief and a liar". Emmanuel reveals that he " became a surety" to his "Father, body for body, soul for soul, life for life, blood for blood, and so redeemed my beloved Mansoul".

Diabolus withdraws from the wall and sends a messenger to offer alternative terms, to be allowed to reside in Mansoul as Emmanuel's deputy who will show Mansoul how he has transgressed the Law. There is a great battle. Captain Conviction receives three wounds in the mouth. Eargate is beaten in, and entered. Conscience and Willbewill, borne down by shame for their sins pass the night in sackcloth and ashes. When morning breaks they prostrate before Emmanuel's throne and confess that they deserve nothing but death as a just retribution for their crimes. Emmanuel at once delivers them their pardons sealed with seven seals. He takes off their robes of mourning and clothes them with shining garments.

Emmanuel again enters the city. Lord Willbewill is now regenerate and resumes charge of the gates. The old Lord Mayor is reinstated, Mr Knowledge is made Recorder and Diabolus' image is taken down and broken to pieces. Mansoul is so happy that he sings of Emmanuel in his sleep. This is far better than Star Wars – it is truth, not fantasy.

An Admirable Church

David Cook

was principal of SMBC for many years

St Helen's Church of England is in the middle of the city of London, very close to the Headquarters of Lloyds and the Bank of England, in Bishopsgate. The church building itself is impressive, and dates back to the thirteenth century.

Yet what I most respect about this church is that at whatever point you interface with it, you are presented with an open Bible. A casual visitor to the St Helen's building is presented with an array of options, CD's, pamphlets, books, all broadcasting the Christian Gospel.

At midweek services and on Sundays the Bible is always read very well and then explained and applied by the preacher who has seriously prepared his sermon. The gathering of this Church is all about hearing God speak. The preaching at St Helen's, is expository, faithful to the text of Scripture and engaging to the crowded congregation.

Growth groups are held during the week in the adjacent St Andrews Undershaft, recently renovated to provide meals for the many groups which gather to study the Bible each week. Drop into St Andrews during the day and you will see pairs of people scattered throughout the building, reading the Bible one to one.

C.H. Spurgeon referred to John Bunyan as a living Bible: 'prick him anywhere, his blood is Bibline, the very essence of the Bible flows from him.' Because of what we believe about the Bible, what is so apparent at St Helen's must be the goal of every Church.

The Bible is God's book - J.I Packer called it 'God's Preaching' – as its source is in God himself, and so is incapable of error. It is self-authenticating, clear, totally necessary in order to know Him, and is the final court of appeal in all matters of faith and practice.

The late Reformed theologian R. C. Sproul is quoted as saying: 'I think the greatest weakness in the Church today is that almost no one believes that God invests His power in the Bible.' Do you think that is true, or was Sproul being overly pessimistic, since 'almost no one' is a very bleak assessment. He went on: 'Everyone is looking



‘Everyone is looking for power in a program, in a technique, in anything and everything except where God has placed it: His word.’

for power in a program, in a technique, in anything and everything except where God has placed it: His word.’

If what Sproul says is the case, it will be evident in our Church preaching programmes. The programme may be top heavy with social issues and topics and light on in Bible coverage. This is understandable as the culture around us becomes more and more confronting against the Christian worldview, so preachers tend to address the immediate threat to their congregations.

But Christian maturity comes from understanding and obeying the Bible. Throughout Acts, Luke shows how the Gospel is unstoppable in its powerful movement from Jerusalem, to the ends of the earth, Rome. Again and again we see how the Gospel is God’s powerful means of saving unbelievers. In Acts 20:32 Paul commends the elders of the Ephesian Church ‘to God and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up and to give you the inheritance among all those who are sanctified.’ So not only does this word bring the unregenerate to life (James 1: 18), it also leads the regenerate to Christian maturity and Christlikeness of character (2 Tim 3: 16-17).

Martin Luther stressed that the people of God are recognised by their possession of the holy word of God: ‘And even if there were no other sign than this alone, it would still suffice to prove that a Christian, a holy people must exist there, for God’s word cannot be without God’s people, and conversely God’s people cannot be without God’s word.’

So check out the literature available at your Church door; encourage the Bible reading roster to be well prepared; equip the growth group leaders for their leadership, perhaps encourage them to part-time study at a Bible College; challenge members about reading the Bible one to one, it will be a mutual benefit ; encourage a congregational Bible reading plan.

Think about having a Saturday afternoon and evening introduction to a Bible book which will be studied that term. And then check out your preaching plan: do you have a balanced nutritional diet. Will you spend time in an Old Testament book, which Gospel will be the focus this year, and which letter? Check what portion of your sermon is spent in explanation of the text, and you may be shocked by how little time you spend in actual exposition. Ask yourself: ‘At every point at which my church contacts people, does it do so with an open Bible, are our people growing in maturity, through hearing and being encouraged in the doing of the Scripture?’

Kevin Vanhoozer’s *Hearers and Doers* has as its central thesis that Israel was often held captive by secular views of Kingship. The prophets were to declare the counter reality of God’s word. So too the Church can be led astray by idolatrous practices, pursuing technique and programmes rather than fearing God and living according to his counter reality.

Pastors are the doctors of the Church, who minister health to the body of Christ by teaching the Bible. They must de-programme and re-programme disciples, ‘to follow Jesus everywhere, before everyone and at every time’. The Church exists to train disciples to read the Bible and understand their place in the city of God as they inhabit the world.

Vanhoozer quotes C.S. Lewis: “the Church exists for nothing else but to draw men into Christ and to make them little Christs.” This is the whole purpose of God for which the whole universe was created. ‘The goal is to train disciples to walk around in the strange new world of the Bible, even as they live in the familiar old world of the present! I finish with Tertullian’s words: ‘We meet to read the books of God’



Is Folau a modern-day Eric Liddell?

Mark Powell
ministers at Cornerstone in Sydney

He's only played a few games since being dumped by the Wallabies for paraphrasing a passage from the Bible but, according to Fox Sports, Israel Folau is already being feted as the top contender to take out Super League's Man of Steel. Lee Radford, the coach for Hull, said recently: He's an absolute talent, he could be Man of Steel. He's multi-talented, at league, union, AFL, you can tell he's played AFL by how he jumps, he jumps like Michael Jordan.

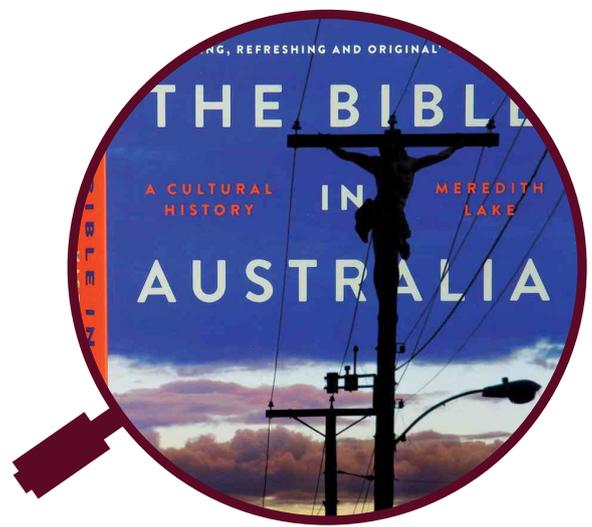
While following Christ doesn't necessarily guarantee success in every endeavor in life, Folau's example is strikingly similar to that Eric Liddell, whose story is recorded in the classic movie *Chariots of Fire*. Both men refused to compromise their biblical convictions when the world around them was pressuring them to compromise and cave in. The Lord has honoured both men for their courage and faith.

In the penultimate scene in the movie, in preparing to run at the Olympic Games of 1924 in Paris, Liddell is approached by an American athlete, Jackson Scholz, who hands him a slip of paper with a verse from 1 Samuel 2:30, which read: "He who honours me I will honour." It was a timely word since Liddell was competing over 400 metres rather than over 100 metres. For 100 metres, Liddell would hold the world record for thirty-five-years, but because the heats were on the Lord's Day, Liddell considered that he could not violate his conscience.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uwyltmUR3MU>

But not only did Liddell win the 400 metres race, he also broke the Olympic Record - a truly staggering achievement for an event that he hadn't really trained for.

However, the passage from 1 Samuel 2:30 is worth quoting in full. The second half of the verse reads: "Those who honour me I will honour, but those who despise me will be disdained." This is where both men—Liddell and Folau—feared God more than man. Whether or not Folau continues to win sporting accolades doesn't really matter for the approval that he is seeking is from above (see Matthew 25:23; Galatians 1:10). His theology has been questioned – and may well be questionable - but in his character, he is a wonderful example of what it means to be faithful in a culture that is increasingly hostile to the message of Christ.



Review of Meredith Lake, *The Bible in Australia*, Sydney: NewSouth, 2018

Peter Barnes
Moderator-General of the Presbyterian
Church of Australia

Meredith Lake has produced an intriguing and wonderfully-written work on a most significant subject. Her thesis is that the Bible is under Australian skin – quite literally in that many of the original convicts had religious tattoos. More startling was the fact that a Prayer Book was found preserved in a shark caught off the penal settlement of Norfolk Island in 1792. This work abounds with similar such captivating stories.

The description of missionary encounters with indigenous Australians is fascinating. Translation work labored under extreme difficulties, not the least being that there were about 250 local languages spoken across Australia in 1788. Whatever their naivety and their paternalism, the Christians were without a doubt the greatest defenders of the first Australians.

The story is traced through into the modern era, and is a mine of information. Federation in 1901 was almost a religious event, and as late as 1960 Robert Menzies, as the Prime Minister opened Bible House in Canberra with the claim that the Bible was the text that defined the Australian people. Meredith sees the 1950s and '60s as the turning point, but the nation shifted because the Church had already shifted.

This leads to the main weakness in the work. There are rather too many open-ended comments, such as 'the Bible is a fluid thing, ever- changing.' Then there is the claim that Christianity is 'internally diverse, in its interpretation and theology'. The nineteenth century was known as 'the great age of the Bible', but increasingly it became the age when the Bible's authority was undermined. The cultural Bible cannot be maintained when the theological Bible is discarded. Strangely enough, Meredith says of the churches involved in the National Church Life Survey, that, with regard to the Bible, that 'virtually all accept it as God's word.' Rather obviously, that was not so, and so while the Bible is still proclaimed in some circles, in many other faith communities, it is explained away.

Is Jesus History?

Review of John Dickson, *Is Jesus History?*, United Kingdom: The Good Book Company, 2019

Peter Barnes
Moderator-General of the Presbyterian
Church of Australia

In an age when supposedly intelligent pundits can openly question whether Jesus even existed, this is a work to be welcomed and studied. Dickson makes the crucial point that we all operate on some kind of faith basis in the everyday things of life, or we would not operate at all. The most hardened atheist, for example, accepts the testimony of Pliny the Younger about the eruption of Mt Vesuvius in A.D. 79. In a somewhat similar way there is no reason to cast doubt on Jesus' teaching about retrieving a child or an ox which falls down a well on the Sabbath (Luke 14:5). It carries its own validity with it. Unbelievers routinely accept Arrian's *Anabasis of Alexander*, even though he wrote some 400 years after Alexander the Great's death. In short, the Gospels, while supernatural, read well naturally.

Dickson's great strength is his capacity to demonstrate the reasonable nature of believing in the historicity of the facts of the Christian Gospel. A. C. Grayling dismisses the account of the resurrection of Christ as requiring faith which is 'ignoble, irresponsible and ignorant'. Such an approach is dismantled by Dickson. He handles the evidence with assurance and a clarity that should prove helpful to all readers.

As an apologetic work, however, it is open to some criticisms. First, it is fair to say that Dickson does not take enough cognizance of the biblical teaching that sinners suppress the truth in unrighteousness (Rom.1:18). It is sin, more than a lack of evidence, which keeps us from God (see p.152 for Dickson's mild statements about where the evidence leads). Secondly, Dickson is too concessive to modern scholarship. The assertion that 'Paul certainly did not know the Gospel of Mark' (p.61) is vigorously put, but lacking in evidence. To date Matthew and Luke in the 70s-80s, and John in the 90s (p.76) is to assume that Paul preached without the benefit of a written Gospel – which is surely stretching probability. Dickson himself concedes that Paul assumes that his readers knew the life of Jesus (p.110). An oral tradition undoubtedly existed; that it lasted as long as Dickson thinks is doubtful, in my view. Thirdly, Dickson commends an author as theologically wayward as James Dunn (e.g. p.156), but this is to cast the evangelical net far too widely.

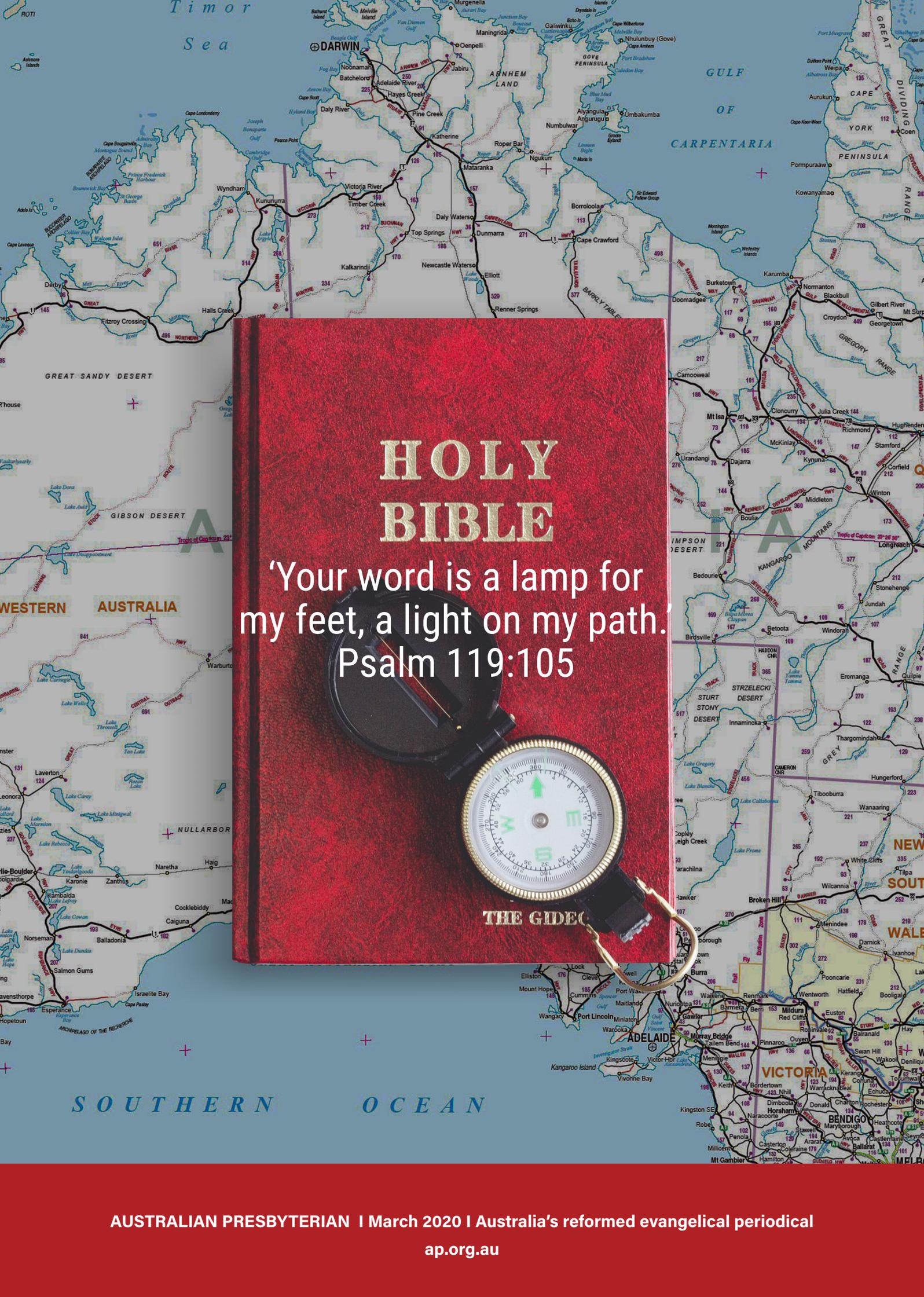
This is a most worthwhile work, but its strength is also its weakness. Historical reasonableness is important, but may also be a substitute for facing the claims of Christ.

Review of Andreas Loewe and Katherine Firth, *Journeying with Bonhoeffer: Six Steps on the path of Discipleship*, Sydney: Morning Star Publishing, 2019

Peter Barnes
Moderator-General of the Presbyterian
Church of Australia

The martyr, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, hanged by the Nazis in 1945, is often portrayed in political terms, but he was a pastor who knew the depths of the human heart. So, for example, he pointed out that a love of interpretations often disguised an unwillingness to obey. There are many more such insights. To seek to avoid suffering was a way to allow Satan to enter the Church (Matt.16:21-23). Those who fear God will not fear the world. Bonhoeffer on discipleship is always pungent and heart-searching.

Loewe and Firth are sometimes askew with their applications. Bonhoeffer does have a way of appealing to all who wish to use him. He could be ambiguous, and once wrote that Christ forgives both Christians and heathens – whatever exactly he meant by that. This is the weakest part of the book. In the end, the best idea for the reader would be to go to the original sources, and read for himself or herself Bonhoeffer's *The Cost of Discipleship*.



HOLY BIBLE

'Your word is a lamp for
my feet, a light on my path.'
Psalm 119:105

THE GUIDE