



BE NOT AFRAID

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Woman (Hebrew *ishah*). Woman, with man, was made in the image of God. 'Male and female he created them' (Genesis 1:27).

welcome...

Fear is one of the big issues of our time, perhaps even the defining issue. Fear of terrorism — or about financial issues — or of the greenhouse effect — and that's just to mention the global fears. There are lots of 'smaller' fears closer to home that eat in to our time, and energy, and faith. Hence this issue of ishah on the topic: facing fear, and suggesting constructive, Christian ways of coping with it.

This is issue 21, which means ishah has reached her 5th birthday! There have been big changes for ishah during this time. Those of you who have been reading since the start may have noticed that the names of the editorial team have changed a number of times—situations change, people move on to different things, and new people have become involved. Our readership has also expanded: there are now about 450 women (and a couple of men!) who regularly receive ishah. The magazine is being used both by individuals and groups to reflect on issues and grow in godliness. Please do pass the magazine on to other women who you think would enjoy and appreciate it — after all, it is free.

Just recently the ishah team held an all-day planning session, looking at how we can meet our aims (printed below) and best serve our readers in your Christian lives. If you have feedback about how ishah is doing, or suggestions on ways we can improve, please let us know: you can write to 56 Collier Crescent, Brunswick, VIC 3055, or email ishahmag@hotmail.com

Please enjoy this issue of ishah; take some time to reflect on the fears that haunt your life, and how you might best confront them, in God's strength.

Alexandra Pierce
for the *ishah* team

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our aims

1. To value the Bible as God's inspired Word to us and the ultimate authority on matters of faith and practice, through thinking hard about how the Bible applies to our everyday lives.
2. To encourage women to grow in godliness and maturity in Christ.
3. To equip Christian women to be creative, confident and effective in communicating the gospel.
4. To give women in a variety of roles and situations the forum to think about contemporary issues from a framework of Biblical theology and to articulate their thinking in a manner that stimulates themselves and others to live lives that are more faithful to God's Word.

ISSUES TO COME...

ISSUE 22:
Running the Race

ISSUE 23:
Facing Sin



FROM FEAR TO ETERNITY

BY BECK MILLER

Recently someone told me that she no longer allows her family to travel on public transport. She is afraid of a terrorist attack and doesn't want anything to happen to her loved ones. I'm not sure how common this response is. One thing I do know: we live in fearful times and the problems of the entire world are available for us to see everyday on our TVs.

I've been asking around and there's a lot to be afraid of these days. Here are just some of the anxieties women endure: fearing death, failure, conflict, suffering, loneliness, obscurity and, the big one, fear of something bad happening to someone we love.

Everyone experiences fear and Christians are not granted immunity. Indeed we face an entirely new fear when we accept Jesus into our lives: the fear of persecution.

Run and hide

It's worth noticing that the first recorded response to God after the fall is fear. From his hiding place Adam calls out to God: 'I heard the sound of you in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked; and I hid myself' (Genesis 3:10 NRSV).

Fear is a consequence of original sin. After disobeying God and following their own ways, Adam and Eve were right to fear God. He could see them as they were, sinful and vulnerable. He sat in judgement over them. Ever since that day people have lived in a broken world full of fear.

God has not been indifferent to this dilemma. In fact the most frequent command in the Bible is to 'fear not'. It occurs about 366 times in various forms. Time and time again God calls on his people to be courageous and trust him in an uncertain and difficult world.

My intention here is to look at how some people of God have done so, and to encourage us to live and deal with our own fears in a more godly way.

Fear leads to faith

In Psalm 55 we see King David experience intense fear. He is being sought by his

enemies and he fears for his life. He calls out to God in terror: 'I am troubled ... I am distraught' (v 2), 'my heart is in anguish within me' (v 4). He wants to run away and hide (v 6–8 NRSV).

I find it somewhat heartening to see such a brave and faithful person grappling with fear. Even the strongest believers can be afraid. The process David goes through as he prays to God is also helpful for us to observe. As we read on we see David's fear transformed into faith.

He calls upon God to judge his enemies. He knows God is just; and will not let those who 'do not change, and do not fear God' (v 19) get away with it forever. He also knows that God is in control: more powerful than his enemies and more powerful than himself. He concludes: 'But I will trust in you' (v 23).

Finally, David declares: 'Cast your burden on the Lord and he will sustain you; he will never permit the righteous to be moved' (v 22). David has moved from terror and helplessness to trust and perseverance. The problem hasn't disappeared, but by calling on God and remembering his justice and faithfulness towards him, David can continue on in faith.

Larissa

My friend Larissa is a gifted, young woman who has been afflicted with a panic disorder. It can happen to anyone. I asked her for insight into how knowing Jesus helps her in her struggles. She allowed me to read some of her journal and I was struck by the similarity of her prayers to Psalm 51. In times of fear she casts her burdens onto God. Again and again she cries out to him for mercy. Each prayer ends with palpable relief and remembrance of God's power in her life. She loves Psalm 116:

*I love the Lord for he heard my voice;
He heard my cry for mercy.
Because he turned his ear to me,
I will call on him as long as I live.
(v 1–2 NIV)*

Prayer is not a last resort in our troubles. We should immediately cast our fears on Jesus. If we entrust him with our fears and remember his love for us, both on the cross and in our own life experience, a deep, strong reliance on him will be grown in us.

Stepping out in faith

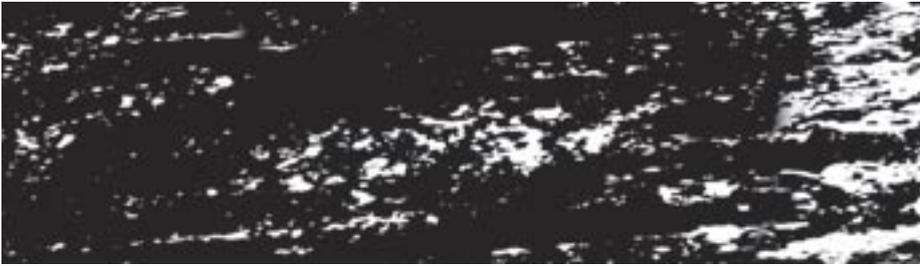
When Peter saw Jesus walking on the water towards the disciples' boat one night, he was so excited and full of faith that he decided to join him. Peter was now convinced that Jesus was the Lord. Initial joy and trust were challenged when he realized that the waves were high and that he had taken a huge risk. He became afraid and began to sink. Jesus challenged his faith at this point, took his hand and assisted him in finishing his act of extreme discipleship (Matthew 14:22–33).

What a great story! I imagine Peter remembered this event in the difficult times that were to follow. When he denied knowing Jesus after his arrest, and later when he and the other apostles faced persecution as they took the gospel out into the world, I wonder if he drew on that memory to help him continue faithfully in Christ.

You'll never catch me even thinking about climbing Mount Everest and it's true that my favourite adventure park ride is the Ferris wheel, so it is strange that I'm about to become an advocate for risk taking. But when I look at how Jesus' disciples grew from frightened, confused followers to strong and faithful servants of the risen Christ, I am convinced; even the smallest step of faith we take in the face of fear will grow perseverance and courage in us.

Sophie

Another friend of mine has struggled over the years with fears relating to her personal safety. When Sophie and her husband considered a move to begin ministry in a particular church, they were faced with a problem. Sophie was afraid of living in that area for a variety of reasons. Having gone through a process



EYES OF GRACE

BY MONIQUE LISBON

of recognising that this was a good place for them to serve God and determined to be obedient, she resolved to deal with her fear so she could live and function well in her new community. It was a risk worth taking.

She and her husband prayed and also considered what resources they had to help her feel safer. They made sure the house was adequately secure and decided on some precautions they would take to ensure she was happy enough with her level of safety. As she says, 'We do what we can, and then leave it to God'.

God has kept her safe and given her the resources to cope in the subsequent times when she has felt threatened. It has not always been easy. I praise God when I look at how she and her family, and their church family have thrived and matured in the years they have been there.

Helpful fear

Many times Jesus reassured his disciples to trust in him and not be afraid. One time however, he gave this warning:

I tell you, my friends, do not fear those who kill the body, and after that can do nothing more. But I will warn you whom to fear: fear him who, after he has killed, has authority to cast into hell (Luke 12:4–5 NRSV).

Jesus went on to remind the disciples of their value to God. He wanted them to know and trust God, but not to lose sight of his power and sovereignty over them.

Sometimes we get so caught up worrying about the troubles of this life and the problems that come from being a follower of Jesus that we forget eternity lies ahead. A day is coming when God will judge the world. There is tension in the Bible and in our own lives between recognising God as our loving, heavenly Father and acknowledging the serious consequences of turning away from him.

This tension is relieved somewhat by Romans 8:38–39 (NRSV):

For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

This is a very motivating perspective to have when facing uncomfortable issues of obedience. We will make mistakes and we will be redeemed by Jesus' death and resurrection for us, but we are called to be faithful. We may face big threats in our lives, but we must see them with the view of eternity. If we remain in Christ we are ultimately safe.

Be encouraged by this. When Jesus returns, fear will become one of those redundant feelings, along with pain and sadness. Look forward to a time when fear and the things that frighten us will be no more (Revelation 21:1–8). For now let's continue to call on God, rely on him and grow step by step in godliness.

■ *Beck Miller loves being a full time wife and mother. Her hobbies include anything which involves people / food / music (or alternatively a good book!) She attends St Jude's Carlton and is an avid supporter of the student ministry there. She has an irrational fear of domestic dwelling rodents and can be contacted with eradication tips and other comments at robnbeck@bigpond.com*

you see the courage
throughout my fears
you see the hope
behind my tears
I cannot recognise
the way you see my face
you see through eyes of grace

where is this beauty
within my pain—
to hold my head up
through my shame?
you find what's good in me
in all that I'd replace ...

extravagance of grace

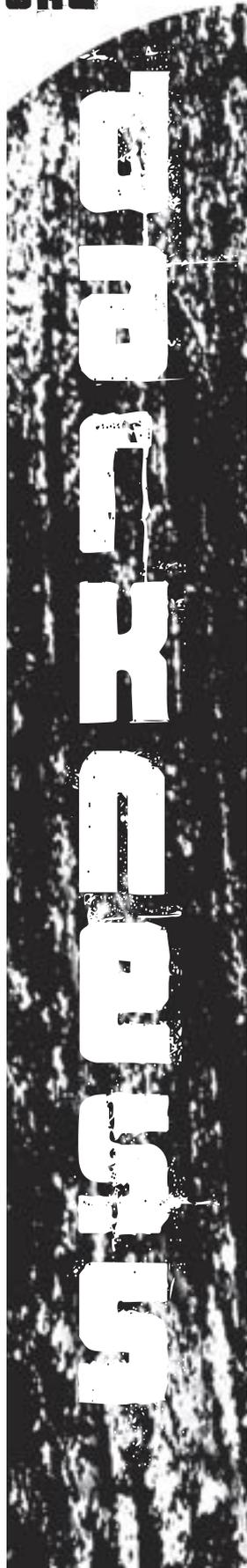
love so wasteful
absurd and true
it captures me in you

I can finally see what you can see
I can hold my pain when you hold me
I can trust in hope to set me free
I can see my beauty
within your eyes of grace

your boundless mercy
my life reclaimed
my heart lies naked
unashamed
you hold my brokenness
redeemed in your embrace
transforming love and grace

■ *Words by Monique Lisbon from the CD 'Wounded Beauty.' For more information about Monique's music, contact www.monomusic.com.au*

EVEN IN the



BY PENNY J REEVE

Until five months ago I was afraid of the dark. Not afraid of monsters under my bed, I knew they didn't exist. But I always felt in my heart that something else did exist, something that didn't like me, something that wanted to frighten me. I remember one night I lay curled in the kicked-off blankets from my parents' bed, hoping that they, and whatever it was in the darkness, would not find me.

I didn't talk about my fear, I never felt I needed to. I wasn't constantly afraid, just sometimes. As the child of missionary parents I heard stories as I grew up. I learned that some of the ceremonies performed by the Aborigines in Arnhem Land involved spirit worship and that there were objects we shouldn't touch. When we moved to Papua New Guinea I learned that Highlanders would kill with spears and guns while Coastal people used witchcraft. My fear of "something in the dark" became more defined.

In April of 2001 my husband and I, with our one year old daughter, moved to Nepal. Pushing my fear into the background I did my duty as a good cross-cultural worker. I began studying up what my neighbours believed. I read about the roots of Tibetan Buddhism and the festivals of Hinduism and found I was in a nation of people who not only believed in the existence of the spirit world, but interacted with it on a daily basis.

Our house was the bottom floor of a three-storey house. Our landlords, strong Tibetan Buddhists, lived above us. We smelt the incense each morning and heard the ringing of bells each evening as they performed their worship rituals. They regularly invited Lamas (Buddhist monks) to visit and perform acts of worship, all essentially making deals with the Evil One for protection and

health. I soon became aware that a battle was raging around our house. Upstairs they said their prayers and downstairs we said ours, trying to live a 'good Christian witness'.

I had been a Christian since I was seven. I had sung 'I've got peace like a river in my soul' over and over, always wondering how old I'd be before I really understood the meaning of the song. Fear I knew about, but peace was not something I could define. I hated the idea that a non-Christian might challenge me one day about the meaning of the word and I'd come up with a wishy-washy definition I'd never really experienced.

As our landlords carried out their worship I would read the words of Jesus in John: 'my peace I give to you ... do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid' (John 14:27). I hit a problem when I read that verse. With each 'dong, dong, dong' that came from upstairs, and each new god they installed, my heart would bounce around with 'what spiritual attack will we face now?' My heart was troubled. I tried to pretend that I wasn't afraid, but I wasn't feeling peace at all.

Then, between October of last year and February of this, God allowed us to experience a more personal spiritual attack. I had several nights broken by nightmares in which Hindu and Buddhist imagery fought for my attention. Richard woke to sense a darkness beside him in the room and a heavy fear literally holding him down in bed. In both our cases, it was only the name of the Lord Jesus Christ that would send the evil presence away. I was afraid and yet trying not to be, because I was supposed to be trusting in God.

One day a friend came and prayed with me. She prayed

against the spirit of fear. That night I experienced nightmares again. They woke me repeatedly as if to say, 'Come on ... be afraid'. But after each, as I whispered the name of the Lord Jesus I was not afraid. The following night when I had to get up in the dark, the fear was gone.

Three weeks before we left Nepal our landlords invited three local Lamas over. For four days they recited prayers, hit cymbals and drums, and blew trumpets. This was like the final test. Our room was dark and stank slightly of incense. I lay in bed thinking about it all, the noise, the spiritual battle taking place, and I was surprised to feel something unfamiliar in my heart.

Stillness. Quietness. Peace.

That night I knew that Jesus was in the darkness. He was there, but as an overcomer (see John 16:33), and this changed everything. Even in the dark He is Lord. I will not be afraid.

Even the darkness will not be dark to you; the night will shine like the day, for darkness is as light to you.

Psalm 139:12 (NIV)

■ Penny J Reeve and her family just returned from five years serving in Nepal as TEAR Australia fieldworkers. They return to their home church in NSW, Winmalee Gospel Chapel, but are still eager to work cross-culturally again. Penny has also written some Christian books for children.

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Who's Afraid Of The

BIG-BAD WOLF?

BY ANN VAN LEERDAM

What am I afraid of? I'm scared of getting hit by a car when I'm riding my bike, of spiders, of conflict, of being in a relationship, of not being in a relationship, that my shoes don't match my outfit. I'm scared of succeeding, and of failing, and the list goes on. Fear controls a large portion of our lives. Some of our fears are actually helpful, and yet others can impede our happiness and move us away from the person God created us to be.

Fear can serve as a mechanism that protects us. It is part of the "fight or flight" syndrome. When we feel fear, our bodies respond, adrenaline starts pumping and we get ready for action, either fighting or quickly running the other way. It is healthy to fear some things: touching a poisonous spider or walking down a dark alley at night, to name a couple. Fear helps us not to hurt ourselves physically and emotionally.

However, fear can also be very damaging. Fear can damage our relationships with other people and, most importantly, God. The saying "Once bitten, twice shy" illustrates that we often learn to fear things when they hurt us. The reality of the human existence is that we will frequently be hurt. And thus, this means we have the potential to be fearful of many things. Sometimes this fear turns into diagnosable phobias. Sometimes the fear just lurks under the surface of our spirits and makes it really hard for us to trust people. Often our fear results in a state of constant anxiety and desire to seek approval. And sometimes fear itself is the "Big Bad Wolf".

Although it is often tempting to ignore our fears, we need to address our unhealthy

fears. We need to have enough courage to ask God to show us what fears we need to challenge. Fear affects people in different ways. How does fear affect you? Do you feel sick in the pit of your gut? Do you feel like there is something heavy on your chest? Do you get breathless or angry? Do you retreat? Identifying how you react when you are fearful is an important step in discovering the reason for your fear and ultimately resolving your fear.

One method of resolving unhealthy fears is to spend some time revisiting the origin of your fears. If you have had traumatic experiences then make sure you do this with a professional. Close your eyes and think about the last time you were scared. Be aware about what is happening to your body. Gently think about what triggered your fear. Then think about your reaction. We need to ask: "Why did I do or say that?" "Why did I respond in that way?" "Where did that reaction come from?" Work through these questions with a counsellor or someone you trust. Also remember to listen to what God has to say. We can be encouraged and comforted through prayer, quiet time and God's Word in the Bible.

We live in a broken world, so our troubles are many. However, we don't have to let fear control us because we belong to God. God created us. He loves us and will care for us.

We need to take responsibility for ourselves to ask God to lead us back to the origins of our fear, to acknowledge it and then to ask for the ability to face it and move through it. Don't be fearful of speaking to someone you trust or a

counsellor about the things that you are afraid of. Sometimes when you talk about the "Big Bad Wolf" it doesn't seem so scary anymore.

*But now, this is what the LORD says -
he who created you, O Jacob,
he who formed you, O Israel:
Fear not, for I have redeemed you;
I have summoned you by name; you
are mine.*

Isaiah 43:1 NIV

■ Ann lives in, works in (and unfortunately for her) barracks for Collingwood. She is a community worker at St Martin's Community Church and runs an after school drop-in space for children living at the Collingwood Housing Estate. She also lives in a community/hospitality house and loves it.

Give us this day our Daily Bread?

Book Review:

French Women Don't Get Fat – Mireille Guiliano

BY GINA DENHOLM

Let's face it: most of Western civilization is very, very confused about eating. A glance at the magazine rack on the way through the supermarket checkout reveals our dualistic obsession with food: the trash mags, headlines blazing fad-dieting tips, nestle comfortably next to indulgent food and cooking magazines. It is unsurprising that many women, including Christians, find themselves in conflict with food and daunted by one of humankind's most fundamental activities: eating. On the one hand it is promoted as one of our country's top recreations; on the other it is treated as a necessary evil.

It's not a wonder, then, that a book smugly entitled *French Women Don't Get Fat* has made it to the top of best-seller lists in Australia, the UK and the US. Many readers have surely been drawn in by a mixture of curiosity and envy. How *is* it that in a country renowned for its wines, cheeses, pastries and rich sauces, women remain svelte, obesity is rare and heart disease a low threat?

It is the essence of this "French Paradox" which Mireille Guiliano sets out to distill for her readers. Guiliano's chatty narrative style draws the reader into the story of her idyllic childhood in provincial France, and her adult life split between France and America. Throughout, she reflects on her experiences with food preparing, cooking and eating, sharing the "gastronomic wisdom" that French women apparently possess as a birthright, but which the rest of the world must learn: an intuitive, pleasure-centred approach to eating, free of guilt and the "terror of kilos."

This is no diet book. Various tips and tricks are offered in a gentle, almost conspiratorial way, encouraging the reader to curb over-indulgence and regain "equilibrium" in eating and weight. However, Guiliano's major tactic is really to reacquaint the diet-weary and processed-food-addicted with the rituals and pleasures of preparing, cooking, presenting and sharing *real food*. Through tantalizing descriptions of market visits, fruit picking, champagne

drinking and pastry savouring, she draws the reader into her own infectious enthusiasm for the French approach to life and food, sharing many recipes and promoting mealtimes as central to family life and celebration, rather than just routine refuelling.

In many ways, Guiliano's approach is far closer to the Christian idea of freedom than the legalism found in many diets. Grace, not law, produces real change. Food is promoted as morally neutral, neither 'sinful' nor 'guilt-free'; no foods are demonised. Moderation in all things is encouraged, to be achieved through embracing pleasure rather than denial. If foods are enjoyed without guilt, they are, in Guiliano's view, more likely to be enjoyed appropriately.

Some questionable elements emerge. Like many diets, the ultimate motivation offered for keeping greed in check is vanity. The author herself describes a balanced approach to food as "learning how to be a bit narcissistic as well as a bit hedonistic." And while the pleasure-centred approach may help to avoid over-indulgence in terms of quantity, it risks gluttony of a different kind, where far too much money goes on the high quality champagne-and-caviar lifestyle advocated by the author.

Despite these things, *French Women Don't Get Fat* has some wisdom to offer for those wishing to be freed from anti-social, guilt-laden approaches to eating. No doubt we'll see a Christianised version in the near future, coming to a bookstore near you!

■ *Gina Denholm is a member of the ishah team. She is married to Justin, the charitable consumer and gracious cleaner-upperer of her efforts in the kitchen. A startling number of potato chips were consumed during the writing of this review.*



write of reply

ishah welcomes reader responses to topics dealt with in previous issues. These should be no more than 200 words long and can be emailed to ishahmag@hotmail.com or posted to *ishah*, c/-56 Collier Cres, Brunswick West, Vic, 3056.

You have not come

to a mountain that can be touched
AND THAT IS BURNING WITH FIRE;
to darkness, gloom and storm;
to a trumpet blast or to such a voice speaking words
that those who heard it begged that no further word be spoken to them,
because they could not bear what was commanded:
"If even an animal touches the mountain, it must be stoned."
The sight was so terrifying that Moses said, "I am trembling with fear."

*But you have come to Mount Zion,
to the heavenly Jerusalem,
the city of the living God.*

You have come

to thousands upon thousands of angels in joyful assembly,
to the church of the firstborn, whose names are written in heaven.

YOU HAVE COME TO GOD,

the judge of all men,
to the spirits of righteous men made perfect,
to Jesus the mediator of a new covenant,
and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel.

■ *Hebrews 12:18-24. Scripture taken from the HOLY BIBLE, NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION. Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984 by International Bible Society. Used by permission.*

Starting Point is a regular column that aims to encourage readers to engage with a contemporary issue in the media.

STARTING POINT

When the rich get the picture

In June 2006 Warren Buffett, the world's second richest man, announced that he would be giving \$37 billion dollars to the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, a philanthropic organisation established by the world's richest man, Bill Gates.

While media commentators expressed surprise that Mister Buffett was not going to leave all his money to his three children, his children were not. Susan Buffett, his daughter said, 'It would be insane to leave us that much money.' (Good Morning America, 29th June 2006)

Bill and Melinda Gates formed the foundation that bears their name in 2000. Bill Gates was the founder and is the largest shareholder in the computer company Microsoft. The Gates Foundation currently holds around US\$30 billion, and mainly gives money to solve world health problems, ease poverty and increase technology among people in developing countries.

Warren Buffett said he thought the Gates Foundation could do a better job of giving his money away than he could. He believed the Foundation could take on large projects that could help all of humanity.

Rick Warren, Senior Pastor at Saddleback Church in the USA and author of the 'Purpose Driven Life' series of books recently travelled to Africa for the first time. Average family income in some African countries is approximately \$US30 per month. He commented that reading his Bible in Africa made him much more aware of how much Jesus had to say about our Christian response to the poor. He acknowledged that he had never noticed those statements and ideas when he was living in middle America.

Isn't it interesting that Warren Buffett and Bill and Melinda Gates, who are not known to hold Christian convictions, seem to have so much to teach us about generosity and using our wealth to tackle issues that have a very significant impact on the well-being of people throughout the world?

■ *Sue Bazzana is the Director of Programs and Relationship Development at Mission Travel Services, a start-up company that is seeking to serve mission agencies, churches and aid and development organisations as they seek to spread the gospel around the world. www.missiontravel.com.au*

