



...the good girl?

WHO'S THE
GOOD GIRL?

Mavis Payne

FREE TO BE
GOOD

Faye West

HATING THE
GOOD GIRL

Jenny Moody

BOOK REVIEW:
FOREVER BABY

Alison Flynn



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

welcome...

How many of us were encouraged to 'be a good girl': do all your homework, be polite to visitors, help Mummy in the kitchen, and definitely don't play in the mud? After all, we learnt that little girls were made of 'sugar and spice and all things nice.' If we rebelled, we risked being labelled 'naughty' or a 'tomboy' – not really a girl at all.

As women, we receive mixed messages about goodness because our society is ambivalent about goodness. Being Christian women only further complicates the picture, since popular culture assumes Christianity is only about morality and 'doing good'. How do we strive to be good without furthering this stereotype?

This edition of ishah explores the cost of the 'good girl' syndrome. Where does the compliant behaviour expected of a 'good girl' leave us as women? Are we still feeling guilty about meeting our own needs, or about expressing negative feelings? Deep down, do we feel not 'good enough' to be loved by God or anyone else?

Our writers help expose the negative messages about goodness that we embrace and examine some of the expectation of good girls in our church culture. Finally, they point us to God, whose goodness is life-changing, freeing and genuine.

The Editors

[FORTHCOMING ISSUES...]

...EVERYDAY CONVERSATIONS

...SOMETHING ABOUT MARY

> ishah update

You may notice that this edition of ishah looks a little different. Due to financial difficulties we have had to modify our paper and printing choices. As soon as these difficulties are resolved - and we hope that is soon - ishah will return to its original format. While things may look a little different, the quality of the articles remains unchanged. We hope that you will continue to support the vision...

the ishah editorial team

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.

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The views expressed in the articles are those of the authors and are not necessarily those of the ishah editorial committee.

WHO'S THE GOOD GIRL?

BY MAVIS PAYNE

"Be a good girl," we have been told since our childhood: be nice, polite, obedient, helpful at home, do well at school, do not get yourself into "trouble". As women this translates into: be a peace-maker, look after everybody else before yourself, do not use the 'F' word (feminism), be thankful for your place, dress modestly and please your husband. Girls are meant to be nice and good.

A Christian girl married a Christian boy. Afterwards she became aware of his "secret" drinking problem, and with the encouragement of her Christian community, worked hard to support and encourage him through his difficulties. Three children later, she left her husband to face up to his own responsibilities. Is she a "good" girl?

At its heart, "goodness is excellence in moral quality" (New Dictionary of Ethics and Pastoral Theology, IVP.) Where does this concept of goodness come from? The psalmist tells us that God is good: "Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good; his love endures forever" (Psalm 106.1). Jesus tells us that only God is good (Mark 10.18).

Creation is good, because God said so after he made it. "God saw all that he had made, and it was very good" (Gen 1.31). God has made people in his image, and thus they have the capacity for good – both to be good and to do good. However, goodness in both creation and people has been marred by sin. Like an apple which is rotten, creation is still good in itself, although not as it once was.

Sin affects a woman's inner self and so her relationships with others and with God. At the heart of sin lies an independence from God (Gen 3). As a consequence, being good (being in a right relationship with God) and doing

good (living a life which reflects God's desires) have been separated. Much of the good girl syndrome flows out of this separation.

Since the Fall, human relationships have been shaped by a power struggle. "Though you may desire to control your husband, he will be your master" (Gen 3.16 NLT). Throughout history and across cultures, men are the power brokers in society, not just in marriages. This is evident in all societies, regardless of whether they are shaped by Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam, Atheism, Christianity, or Materialism. Across cultures, women are "good" in order to please men, to earn a place in society, to fulfil their role.

Sinful women use being "good" as the basis for forming relationships with others and with God. Imagine Jesus telling a story of a thirty-something female lawyer who comes to him (cf. Mark 10.17-22). "What must I do?" she asks. "Obey the rules," she is told. "I've done all of this. I've been good (not slept around, and that's hard to resist; I'm honest, and you know how difficult that is; I respect my parents, who are quite demanding really)."

"There is something else I want you to do. Abandon yourself to me". But the lawyer walked away from Jesus because he asked of her what she could not do.

What is Jesus asking? Imagine the story of the prodigal son told with the gender reversed – the prodigal daughter (Luke 15.11-24). This woman is not good. She has left home, become a prostitute, lived a lie, dishonoured her parents. Yet she is welcomed home by her Father. A "bad" girl is seen as though she was good. This is a shocking story. But not if we consider God the Father's goodness at the heart of the relationship. God's goodness, his grace, his open arms are at the centre of our relationship with Him. He calls us to abandon our desire and expectation that apart

from Him we can be good for Him. He asks us to come to him in trust rather obedience. The lawyer, in contrast, sees only rules which require her obedience. To her this is the essence of goodness. She is not alone.

Women are under a great deal of pressure to do good without taking the time to reflect upon who they are as a daughter of God.

A woman outside of a trusting relationship with Jesus can 'do' good things, but she cannot 'be' good apart from Him. Once called to be God's daughter,

she can express that new relationship through doing good deeds, which are described in the Bible as practical reflections of God's love for us.

Be imitators of God, Paul tells us; people who do what is good, true and right (Ephesians 5.1,9). Jesus died so that he can create for himself a people who are eager to what is good (Titus 2.10). The good which flows out of a daughter of God is evidence of the work of the Spirit in her life (Galatians 5.22). As faith without works is dead, so is goodness without good works. A Christian woman does these good works in the context where she finds herself - whether married or not, with or without children, in the paid workforce, in voluntary work, as a public and private person, at home, in the community, as a leader, as a quiet achiever.

But it is important to remember that what a person is on the inside is of more value than how good they are externally. "If I give all I possess to the poor... but have not love, I gain nothing" (1 Corinthians 13.3). If I am good apart from Him, I gain nothing. This was the predicament of the lawyer who came to Jesus. God sees our heart, who we are in relationship with Him, not just what we do. Women are under a great deal of pressure to do good without taking the time to reflect upon who they are as a daughter of God. Even in Jesus' presence, for example, Martha was distracted by offering hospitality (Luke 10.41).

Just as the lawyer walked away from

Jesus because she found her security in her role, reputation and career, many women in the domestic sphere may walk away from Jesus because they find their security in who they are as wife, mother and community member. We need to find our security and strength in who we are in Christ, not in who we are in a marriage, in a partnership, in a family, in our home, in our image, in our career. All of these are affirmed by our society as the place where women can become who they truly are. Jesus calls us to be who we truly are in a trusting relationship with Him.

A good woman is someone who accepts Christ's gracious offer of forgiveness and entrusts her life to Him.

A good woman is someone who accepts Christ's gracious offer of for-

giveness and entrusts her life to Him. Empowered by the Holy Spirit, she lives each day in a way which reflects God's desires. What this looks like will vary from context to context, over time and across cultures. Our mothers, aunts, grandmothers have modelled for us how they lived as women. Male theologians may have biblical interpretations for how women should live which reflects their own characters as much as God's. However, God does not prescribe a role for women. He gave the mandate to work and care for the earth to both Adam and Eve; He calls both mothers and fathers to raise their children; He calls both men and women to honour their parents; both men and women are responsible to God for their lives.

We do not play a role because we are good women; because we have been given this place by society, by

men, by our mothers. We live lives which reflect God's character and priorities - sometimes as the servant, sometimes as the leader, always speaking the truth in love, forgiving one another, sometimes compromised by the complexities of life, always choosing to honour God's name. Women are called by God to find their home, their strength, their identity, their freedom in Christ. Only in this way can we be "good girls".

"Let us consider how we may spur one another on..." (Hebrews 10:24)

■ Rev. Mavis Payne lives with her two children in Melbourne. She works full time with the Council for Christian Education in Schools.
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women and the word: Q & A

The ministry of Women and the Word has encouraged hundreds of women throughout Melbourne. ishah asked them to describe the aims and focus of their ministry.

WHAT IS WOMEN AND THE WORD?

Women & the Word is one of the ministries of The Timothy Institute, which is committed to "teaching reliable people so they can teach others also" (see 2 Timothy 2:2).

Women and the Word is run by Mavis Payne, Fran Boydell, Claire Livingstone and Heather Patacca.

HOW DID WOMEN AND THE WORD BEGIN?

The Timothy Institute addressed the need for people to take seriously the work of grappling with what the Bible actually says, applying it to today and preaching and teaching its message. However, we were concerned that it was not being intentional enough in addressing women.

Peter Adam, the Director of The Timothy Institute, encouraged a small group of women to develop ways of addressing this need. In 1998, Women and the Word was founded and our annual conference launched. The conference included an evangelistic dinner with Narrelle Jarrett, an evangelist, teacher and preacher from Sydney, as our guest speaker.

We have organised a number of activities in the years following both to encourage women in ministry and to give teenage girls an opportunity to study the Bible and develop leadership skills. The annual conference, however, is the work that has persisted and grown.

WHAT ARE ITS AIMS?

W&W embraces the aims of The Timothy Institute. However, the most succinct expression of our aims is "to encourage women to read the Bible with a biblical framework, depth and confidence in their lives and ministry."

WHAT IS THE FOCUS OF THE CONFERENCE IN 2002?

The W&W conference is on Saturday the 3rd August, at Glen Waverley Uniting Church. There will be a range of speakers and workshops that will explore questions of interpreting the Bible and how we listen to God.

For more information about Women and the Word, visit: <http://home.vicnet.net.au/~efac/timothy.htm>

free to be good

BY FAYE WEST

Many of us, as Western women, are likely to have strong feelings about what it means to be a 'good girl'. The dramatic social changes over the last 30-40 years (eg: altered family values, increased individualism, more women in paid employment, feminism) have contributed to a greater self-awareness than our mothers and grandmothers ever had. Amongst younger women it has become more socially acceptable to embrace qualities such as assertiveness, dominance and independence (Mackay 1997). Consequently many women are asking questions about their own girlhood and re-evaluating their present understanding of moral values. For a Christian woman, the desire to be 'good' (i.e. more Christ-like) is sometimes in tension with past expectations on her to be a 'good girl' when she did not always feel good or want to be 'good'.

I was a typical 'good girl', at least on the outside. I grew up in East Africa where my parents were missionaries. Although I came from a loving family, I grew up with expectations, not just from parents but from the church; expectations to be 'nice', passive and compliant. I also experienced long separations from parents and siblings while living overseas, but there was virtually no opportunity to grieve these losses. It was not OK to express strong emotions, much less negative emotions. Although I kept up the pretence of being 'good' on the outside, my bad feelings on the inside emerged anyway: I was depressed,

lacked confidence, and underachieved and misbehaved at school. It was not until I was in my thirties that I experienced a severe (delayed) grief reaction. It took years of therapy and inner healing to come to terms with the 'good girl' mask I had worn and the inner pain that I hadn't dared express as a child.

I believe that there are many other 'good girls' like me, even though their stories may differ. Some have experienced deep rejection; many women remember feeling loved only when they were good, or never felt good enough to be loved even though they knew their parents loved them. Sadly, many women, even Christians, don't feel 'good enough'.

Particularly for those of us who are mothers or caregivers, it is worthwhile to ask whether our expectations of a girl's behaviour are realistic. What if a girl is not passive, but noisy, easily distracted, demanding, highly creative, or has ADHD? Is she considered 'bad' when, in fact, she is desperate to please? Can we enable her to feel deeply loved while guiding her towards God's goodness?

During my own journey of recovery, I experienced deep love and acceptance from people who gave me a safe place to explore my inner pain. I learned to be less fearful of others' opinions; furthermore, I realised that I was still an OK person even when I made mistakes. Gradually I began to grasp the fact that God wanted to love all of me: he didn't just want my 'good' behaviour. As the Holy Spirit lovingly guides and corrects me, I am learning to discern and hence choose what is genuine goodness.

It seems that for many of us, being 'good' externally has been overemphasised. We have tried to hide our inner pain, and our development has been stifled. For others, however, it has been relatively safe to explore our thoughts and feelings, even negative ones, and we have learned to deal with our brokenness in an accepting environment. Whatever our past, as Christian women we are learning to be good out of who we are as children restored and accepted by God rather than out of pathological guilt or fear of rejection. This is the 'being good' that bubbles out of the spring of grace – God's grace. This is the goodness that flows from the heart (John 7:38).

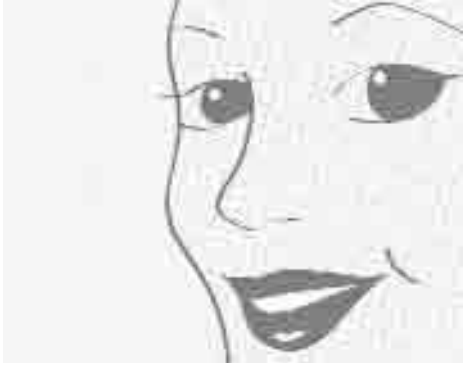
Reference:

Mackay, H. (1997) *Generations*. Macmillan: Sydney.

■ Faye West is a counsellor at Knox Community Care and attends Waverley Christian Fellowship in Wantirna South. She is married with two teenage children.
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suggested reading...

- ▶ Allender, D. (1991). *The Wounded Heart*. Navpress: Colorado.
- ▶ Berry, C. R. (1989). *When Helping You Is Hurting Me*. Harper & Row: New York.
- ▶ Campbell, R. (2001). *How to Really Love your Child*. Alpha, Paternoster Publishing: Cumbria, UK.
- ▶ Cloud, H. & Townsend, J. *Boundaries*. (1992). Strand: Sydney.
- ▶ Crabb, L. (1991). *Inside Out*. ScripturePress: UK.
- ▶ Sloat, D. (1990). *Growing Up Holy And Wholly*. Wolgemuth & Hyatt: Tennessee.
- ▶ VanVonderen, J. (1989) *Tired of Trying to Measure Up*. Bethany House Publishers: Minnesota.



hating the good girl

BY JENNY MOODY

I like to think that I am a sophisticated Christian woman. What this woman looks like is a bit vague in my mind, but I have a crystal clear picture of her opposite. She is someone who was brought up in a Christian family, and hung round church friends rather than peers at school. She may or may not have a job, but if she does, it isn't a particularly glamorous one, and she certainly isn't very ambitious. If she hasn't already done so, she looks forward to getting married and settling down - child-rearing will be her vocation. She is a faithful church-goer (she still attends the church she grew up in), is on several committees and helps with the flowers, music and making casseroles for the elderly. She giggles a lot, and not only when she is having a glass of red wine with her girlfriends - in fact, she is a teetotaler. She always wears a floral dress with puffy sleeves.

There is something about this 'good girl' that I despise, even though I haven't any clear reason to do so. However, I recently came across a passage in *The Screwtape Letters* which gave me pause to think. Written by C.S. Lewis, the book consists of a series of letters from a senior devil, Screwtape, to a junior devil, providing advice on the art of temptation. Screwtape suggests that it is wise to encourage the blossoming friendship between their 'patient' (a male Christian) and several people who are 'just the sort of people we want him to know - rich, smart, superficially intellectual, and brightly sceptical about everything in the world.'

Interestingly, Screwtape's master-plan isn't that these new friends will convince the patient to give up Christianity, but that 'he can be made to take a positive pleasure in the perception that the two sides of his life are inconsistent. This is done by exploiting his vanity. He can be taught to enjoy kneeling beside the grocer on Sunday just because he remembers that the grocer could not possibly understand the urbane and mocking world which he inhabited on the Saturday evening; and contrariwise, to enjoy the bawdy and blasphemy... with these admirable friends all the more because he is aware of a 'deeper', 'spiritual' world within him which they cannot understand. ...[T]he worldly friends touch him on one side and the grocer on the other, and he is the complete, balanced, complex man who sees around them all. Thus, while being permanently treacherous to at least two sets of people, he will feel, instead of shame, a continual current of self-satisfaction' (Lewis, 1942, pp55-56).

This resonates strongly with me. Like the patient in this story, I often feel a sense of superiority over my non-Christian friends who don't share the same wisdom and spiritual insights that being a Christian gives me. At the same time I feel a certain relief that I am not (as I see it anyway) a total Christian frump. I look down on women in the church who I think are too innocent, unworldly, naive or submissive. I'm nostalgic about my slightly-but-not-really rebellious Uni days, as if my past flirtation with some sins makes me wiser than others in the church who have led more sheltered lives. In the end I'm in the very convenient position of always being able to find someone to feel superior over. The crazy thing

is that my façade of sophistication fools none of my non-Christian friends (I am, after all, a believer in Jesus and therefore a fool by definition) and yet alienates me from some of my Christian sisters whom I am commanded to love.

I rarely articulate all this very clearly. Screwtape suggests that if you keep humans ignorant of their thought processes, you'll keep them from seeing their absurdity. There are times, however, when I do become aware of my sin. In these moments there are certain questions that I find it helpful to ask myself:

- ▶ What do I gain by holding onto this idea of sophistication? What do I lose?
- ▶ What personal characteristics does God value? Which of these do I resist or despise? Why?
- ▶ What does strength look like in a godly character?

No matter how sophisticated I think I am, I cannot serve two masters. Sooner or later I have to choose and I pray for the willingness and strength of character to choose what is right.

Reference:

Lewis, C.L. (1942). *The Screwtape Letters: Letters from a Senior to a Junior Devil*. Collins, Glasgow.

■ Jenny Moody is married to Andrew and they have a daughter, Emma. They have graphic design business which they run from home. They attend Holy Trinity Church in Doncaster.

book
review

FOREVER BABY:

Jenny's Story - A Mother's Diary

BY ALISON FLYNN

Burbidge, Dr. M: (2002, 1997) *Forever Baby: Jenny's Story - A Mother's Diary*, Pan Macmillan Australia

For every awareness of the unutterable joy of parenthood, there is the concomitant knowledge of its weight of responsibility. Perhaps no other calling is more fraught with potential guilt and grief. *Forever Baby: Jenny's Story - A Mother's Diary* powerfully reveals this double-edged sword of joy and suffering.

Forever Baby consists of unedited entries from the diaries of Mary Burbidge in the time surrounding the death of her daughter. The book offers a frank, unfettered expression of grief, anguish, regret, guilt, anger - all the expected emotions attendant upon the loss of a baby.

However, *Forever Baby* is unlike other accounts of the death of a baby. Mary Burbidge's baby, Jenny, was twenty-one at the time of her death; but through severe intellectual disability, she functioned at the mental age of nine months. She was in her mother's care when she slipped to the bottom of their pool and was underwater for what proved a fatal length of time. She died approximately three weeks later (precise dates are not given). Those three weeks of seesawing emotions, raised and dashed hopes, and gradual acceptance of the inevitability of bereavement form the structural core of this account. The exploration of the emotions of bereavement, in particular Burbidge's struggle with her own sense of guilt, form the emotional core.

Burbidge does battle with those feelings of her own responsibility and guilt; but she simultaneously cries out both to God and against God, fearlessly expressing her pain and her sense of the injustice of Jenny's death. In this she joins the timeless tradition of the Psalmists, Jeremiah and Job - all of whose examples in Scripture teach us that God values the honest expressions of our hearts over the so-called piety of refusing to question His judgments.

Forever Baby is as remarkable for what it isn't, as for what it is. It is not a hindsight account of what the author thinks her reactions should have been, or wishes they had been. It is not a re-rendering of events in the light of any 'bigger picture'. It is not primarily an endeavour to shine a guiding light for others suffering similar anguish.

Rather, it is the unfolding of events as Burbidge recorded them while they were happening. Life was progressing normally for the Burbidge family, when they were suddenly thrust into crisis. Burbidge's parameters shrank to the abnormal insularity of Intensive Care - everything focussed on Jenny as she fought for her life. Burbidge wrote in the small hours as she watched over her daughter. The diary entries that follow Jenny's death are an astonishing reflection of the joint phenomena of bereavement - time and 'normality' continuing inexorably even as grief alters and affects every aspect of living.

Burbidge is fiercely, often brutally honest with herself. Particularly insightful is the passage where Burbidge recounts her 'close encounter' with a train; her self-recrimination is desperately indicative of her level of grief and guilt at that time. She examines her guilt in relation to Jenny's accident with no attempt to rationalise or exonerate. She is her own harshest critic; she dreads the coroner's findings, but she judges herself with far less gentleness than he finally accords her. She also faces the conflicting emotions of losing a fully-grown, permanently dependent child - though her love and joy in Jenny undoubtedly outweigh any sense of regained freedom. But the account is all the more admirable for dealing honestly with this issue. Equally extraordinary is the humour: wry, self-deprecatory, sometimes biting; unapologetically present on even the most miserable of days, and in extreme moments of grief and loss.

Forever Baby may not be considered traditionally 'comforting' reading for a bereaved parent. But it offers the nourishment of genuine empathy and refreshing honesty, and therefore has a definite place in the reading of those bereaved, and those who wish to better comfort them.

■ A new edition of *Forever Baby* has recently been released, and is available directly from the author.

For contact details, please call the Victorian Writers' Centre on 9326-4619 or email info@writers-centre.org

■ Alison Flynn, married to Michael and mother of four, is a writer and homemaker, and worships at St John's, Upper Beaconsfield, where her husband ministers.

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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/- 23 Bundoran Parade, Mont Albert North VIC 3129).



In response to "Materialism in a Global Context" (#3)

O for contentment without resentment - to count blessings, not pressing goals of acquisition. Not to wander in indecision about giving - but be living aware of heavenly treasure (not by earthly measure). "To take hold of the life that really is life."

Karen McLean
East Doncaster, VIC

has a particular temptation, that in moments of weakness and distance from God, has the ability to drive us to look for our needs to be met in any form other than the true God.

Jeremiah 2:13 pointed out clearly to me what is the core of my sin which leads me to temptation: "My people have committed two sins: They have forsaken me, the spring of living water, and have dug their own cisterns, broken cisterns that cannot hold water."

I will forever struggle with why something of this world is more tempting, appearing to be able to meet our deepest needs, than our loving God who created it all. This struggle is what defines temptation (for me), as we all, like Adam and Eve, turn to temporary creation, rather than our eternal Creator, not being able to fully trust in him who we cannot see.

Rachel Barclay
Mildura, VIC

thanks and encouragement...

The ishah team has been incredibly encouraged by the feedback we have received about the magazine. It is evident that the magazine is helping you to apply the Bible to everyday life and develop the confidence to discuss new ideas. Write of reply provides you with a unique opportunity to challenge, affirm and debate the ideas you encounter in the magazine. We would urge you to help one another grow in godliness and maturity by using this space to develop your ideas.

Please forward your letter to c/- 23 Bundoran Pde, Mont Albert North, VIC. 3129, or send your email to ishahmag@hotmail.com

The editorial team



I would like to thank Jean Williams for her article "Confessions of a shopaholic". There is more help in her honesty and openness than I can grasp hold of. It is so easy to apply what Jean says to our personal struggle with any form of sin. Each individual

Crime and Punishment

BY SUSAN BRADBEER

Wayne Carey committed adultery. He had a relationship with his best friend's wife. Media discussions at the time focused on Carey's betrayal of his team North Melbourne, and, in particular, vice-captain Anthony Stevens. We were told of the public implications of Carey's liaison and the enormous threat this posed to team mateship. In all of this, marital infidelity was made out to be incidental to the 'real' issues.

The fact that the media did not condemn Carey's behaviour outright suggests we are complacent when it comes to extramarital affairs. Most Australians were happy to excuse the infidelity of the golden boy of AFL, regarding Carey's actions as simply 'human', even seeking to know the tawdry details of Carey's affair. The problem with this is that it undermines the seriousness of sin and disregards the cost our 'human mistakes' have on others. Our failure to condemn such behaviour is an acceptance of adultery – how then should we read the Australian media's presentation of the Carey story?

We must challenge the superficial and false reporting that allows the 'Carey story' to be one of football and mateship and not one of moral abhorrence. Sin is serious and we must not allow society to weaken our view. Furthermore, as Christians we must see marriage as sacred and be diligent in our preservation of this relationship. Our inherent sinfulness makes none of us immune from transgressing the covenant of marriage.

Wayne Carey's affair has had an impact on Australians but for all the wrong reasons. The real issue is that we fail to challenge the insidiousness of sin. Our inaction is punishing us all.

Susan Bradbeer is married with three children. She is currently doing a Phd in education and completing some project work for VATE. She attends St Jude's Anglican Church, Carlton.

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STARTING POINT

