

# Preparing For Life

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A booklet for 14-15 Year olds. The work of 133 writers from that age group.

This is a remarkable pamphlet. It is the work of 133 authors, all teenagers. It was produced at Mazenod College, Kernot Ave., Mulgrave, Victoria, 3170. Father John Wotherspoon inspired and directed this mammoth task. It is commended to all their contemporaries ( and their teachers ) by several "readers" of the same age group. It is full of good things, both new and old.

Evaluating Life: - It's Your Day - God's Work of Art - Life Means Community - Life Means Responsibility

God's Message for Life: - God's Voice Inside Me: My Conscience - God's Love Letter.. The Bible - Good News For Life: The New Testament - Preview 'With a Message: The Old Testament

## 1. IT'S YOUR DAY

DID YOU EVER STOP to think what life is all about? As I woke this morning a little later than usual (it's holiday time) I could hear the cars and trucks - thousands of them - tearing up and down the four busy lanes of Springvale Road. It's one of the busiest roads in Australia: 40,500 cars a day. I thought to myself: "Rat Race" is a good description - people rushing and racing off to work and racing each other to the city, racing to make a living, racing to have meals, racing to do some shopping, racing to get home. I thought: WHY do people race and rush? What's the use of it all? We're all going to die sooner or later and we can't take our dollars with us - so why bother working so feverishly? We're lucky if most of the time we just have enough to pay our bills. Wouldn't it be great to escape to a beautiful country area and live a slow, leisurely life in the peace and quiet. But then I suppose you'd miss all the activity and excitement of the city.

I GUESS WE ALL, THINK LIKE THAT SOMETIMES- and it's good that we do, for it's our ability to stop and think about things which makes us human beings different from ordinary rats. If we want to, we can control our lives the way we choose. We don't have to race through life like rain water speeding down the gutter. We have the power to stop and say: "Hold it, I refuse to flow another millimeter. I'm going this way, not that, and at my own pace, too!"

IF YOU ARE AN ORDINARY STUDENT, you should by now be stopping quite often to check your bearings in life. You should be asking quite often "What is life all about? Where have I come from? Where am I going to? What will I be? What is the point of it all?" You have a responsibility to live your life well, and you should be looking forward to adulthood. To face up to life you must show courage, especially at times when everyone seems to be against you and no one seems to care about you.

TO HELP YOU DO SOME solid stopping and thinking I want you to pretend that your life is only 24 hours long (I'm told that there is a kind of moth which is born and dies in a day: how hard it must be to squeeze a whole lifetime into 24 hours!).

Using all your great mathematical skill, do it this way: let 24 hours = 72 years (which is about our average life span). then 1 hour = 3 years.

This means that if you are 15 years old, you are at 5.00 a.m. if you are 18 years old, you are at 6.00 a.m. if you are 14 years old, you are at 4.40 a.m.

FOR MOST OF YOU, your "day" (= life) is just beginning. You have your life in front of you. At this moment you are still in bed (I can bear someone snoring). But soon it will be time to wake - and live. What are you going to do with your day (= life)? Are you going to have a happy day? Are you just going to just sit about and do nothing? Are you going to do something worthwhile? Are you going to get out of bed in time for breakfast (or are you lazily going to curl up until lunchtime)?

ARE YOU GOING TO WASTE YOUR DAY - or plan it out? It's never too late to do something good in life. Even if we don't start till 11.30 at night, there's still time. But you are not at 11.30 p.m.; you are at about 5.00 a.m. - and your whole day, your whole life is in front of you!

SO AS YOU PREPARE TO JUMP OUT OF BED (mind the cat!) be determined to live life well. Realize that life is full of meaning, and a happy life is a meaningful life. For sure life can be tough at times but not all the time, so face up to it with confidence.

START TO WORK OUT YOUR IDEAS, your values, your priorities for life - the guiding principles on which to build your life. As you get out of bed, ask some Big Questions: "Do I know what life means? Why was I born? What will I be?" Be brave and ask some even bigger ones: "What does the future hold for me? When will I die? What is death? Is there a life after death? Is there a God? How can I know that God exists? If God exists, how can I know what He wants me to do?"

THAT'S THE WAY: take everything inside your mind and spread it out over a table and see what you've got (don't spill the sauce). Sort everything out. It's your 'Day' - don't share it with a headache.

"Father... all LIFE... comes from You through your Son... By the working of the Holy Spirit."  
(Eucharistic Prayer 3)

## 2. GOD'S WORK OF ART

ONE THING YOU CAN BE SURE OF as you prepare to face life: God made you, and He is proud of what He has made. Every human person can say with great certainty: "I am God's work of art." I love thinking about these beautiful words in the old catechism: Why did God make you? God made me to know Him, love Him and serve Him here on earth, and to be happy with Him for ever in Heaven.

THAT'S why you're alive: God created you! He gave you the gift of life - existence. Everything a great artist makes is valuable; you, therefore, must be very valuable because God is the greatest of all artists. To destroy or damage yourself would be like burning ten million dollars. Since you are worth so much you must take good care of yourself and have a healthy respect and reverence for your life - a healthy self respect.

HOW WOULD YOU LIKE IT if someone borrowed all your records and just ruined them? You would expect him to take good care of them. Well, your life is like a record in God's collection. He's lent it to you - take good care of it!

AND WHAT A RECORD YOU ARE! You have a brain with millions of cells (which means you are smarter than the most expensive computer). You have arms and legs which move with such case that the most advanced robot looks clumsy by comparison. You have eyes that can see things millions of miles away (94 million, like the sun). You have a heart which beats 100,000 times a day! You have living blood inside you which travels over 100,000,000 miles a day!

NEVER THINK TO YOURSELF: "I'm worthless, I'm useless." No fear you aren't. You are a work of art, more precious than a champion racehorse like Gun synd or a famous painting like "Blue Poles." Gun synd will soon be dead, but you will live for ever - so you are infinitely more valuable than a racehorse. As Jesus once said: "You are worth more than many sparrows" (Mt 10.31).

IF YOU HAD A PRECIOUS SPORTING TREASURE (like a football autographed by everyone in your favourite team) you'd guard it like the Crown Jewels. You'd lock it away, take care of it- you'd hire an armoured truck to take it across the road to your friend's place. So you must look after yourself, because you, too, are a valuable treasure. Not to value yourself means you are destroying God's creation; not to value yourself means you are not being fair to yourself, not giving yourself a real chance to live properly.

AIM ALWAYS TO HAVE A HEALTHY SELF-RESPECT: Use this check list:

- Think and live positively. Be optimistic and cheerful. Be encouraging and positive in your speech. Avoid being over critical and negative.
- Avoid polluting your body with drugs, cigarettes, too much strong drink. Get plenty of sleep (aim at 8 hours- preferably a couple of them before midnight).
- Take pride in the way you dress. A tidy appearance helps you care about your life. Be clean; shower almost every day. Keep your fingernails clean, too. These are all small things and yet many young people forget them. By caring about such small things you will show people that you care about life.
- Remember that the most important thing you wear is your expression, so smile and try to be happy.
- Realize that everything made by God is a work of art. So show respect for animals, for the environment, for people's property and especially for other people.
- Develop yourself as a work of art. Take an interest in some sport or activity. At your age it's better to play too much sport than too little. Sport helps you to live and work with other people; helps you to adjust socially and to develop confidence, responsibility, leadership.
- With your parents' permission, learn to dance. Learn old dances and new ones. In a few years time you'll be too embarrassed to go to dancing classes.
- Have a hobby - something that will further help you to enjoy life and live more fully.
- Have a pet (not necessarily a scorpion or a dinosaur). The responsibility of looking after a living creature is satisfying and good for character development. This will help you to treat

people kindly, too. Patience, self control and thought for others are the main ingredients for a good master/mistress - all handy things for later life.

- Increase your control of yourself - your self-control. Without self-control you'll be like a car without any steering. Self-control means steering your actions, being able to control your desires, feelings, emotions. It comes with practice - so try doing without something occasionally (or doing something extra) to show you are your own boss. The season of "Lent" is a good time for this. Show that you are made of something more than jelly: hold your shoulders back, walk straight, sit up straight (at least sometimes!).

AFTER ALL, YOU ARE A WORK OF ART. Say over to yourself several times a day: "I am a work of art. I am God's work of art." Read very slowly Jesus' words on your value in Matthew 6.25-34.

"Father... through our observance of Lent you correct our faults and raise our minds to You, You help us grow in holiness and offer us the reward of everlasting life..." (Preface No. 4 for, Lent)

### 3. LIFE MEANS COMMUNITY

ONE THING ABOUT LIFE YOU CAN BE SURE OF: life means community. We human beings are all part of one big community living together on this planet and none of us should be like a rock, living by himself and keeping to himself. In community, we do things in common: a family lives in the same house, shares the same meals, uses the same car. Just replace "the same" by "common" and you see that life surely does mean sharing things with others.

IF AND WHEN YOU GET MARRIED you'll have to get along with the other (lucky?) members of your family, your neighbourhood, your club, suburb, parish. Life means living with others in community. Think for a moment of some of the communities to which you belong right now: - family - parish - school - sporting team - suburb - dance group - city - country

THAT WORD "BELONG" is an important one because it has two sides. You feel you belong to your family/parish/ team when other people care about you, are interested in your welfare and love you. But at the same time you must make an effort to belong, in order to feel wanted and cared about.

There was once a young girl who decided to leave home because no-one seemed to care about her. But she gave people little chance to care as she was rarely home, never did any jobs around the house and didn't take an interest in the activities of her brothers and sisters. No wonder she didn't have a sense of belonging.

A SENSE OF BELONGING means you join in - whether it be in a sporting club, parish or family. This is not hard because mixing with other people is one of the happiest things we can do. Perhaps it's because you don't mix enough that you sometimes feel neglected and lonely. Move out, join in - and don't let the hours tick by with your doing nothing. Activity and involvement will help you grow.

TRY TO MAKE YOUR PERSONALITY a bit more out- going. At the moment you are possibly isolated. No wonder you are at times scared of life. Realize that you have a lot of friends in the world waiting to meet you. Make an extra effort to make more friends. At a dance do you join in - or just sit around like a book on the shelf? Whether at dances or at home, instead of sitting around doing nothing, get moving and join in with whatever is going on - otherwise you might be like the non hero in Simon and Garfunkel's "I Am a Rock": selfish, hard to get along with, not caring,

unhappy, unwilling to mix, lacking friends, having no feelings, feeling no pain, experiencing no love.

SO DON'T BE A ROCK - be involved and start now to realize that life means community. Try to understand that being involved in community (family, parish, sporting team, school) makes you a better person because you learn to live with other people as they really are. Do some thinking also about the fact :

- that the whole human race is a family.
- that the Church is a community - the Christian Community which continues to grow under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.
- that community means friends (and, as we'll see later, your greatest friend in life is Jesus Christ, God himself).

Some great insights on community are found right through the Acts of the Apostles. Read carefully Acts 2.44-46 and 4.32-35.

"Father... hear the prayers of the FAMILY you have gathered here before You. (Eucharistic Prayer 3)

SMILE.. A cyclone ripped through Tokyo's car plant area. For days afterwards it was raining Datsun cogs...

#### 4. LIFE MEANS RESPONSIBILITY

IF LIFE MEANS COMMUNITY it also means responsibility. A dog cannot think about its actions and is not really responsible for what it does. But you and I have a brain, a reason, a free will - and we know we deserve praise or blame for what we do. Human beings are responsible creatures.

THE MORE WE FACE UP TO our responsibilities the better we are at living life. All those everyday responsibilities duties, jobs, tasks - everything from making your bed to cleaning shoes, jobs around the house, homework, duties at school, duties in a club/team - these are all good for you if you face up to them and get down and do them properly. They help your personality grow and mature. But if you avoid them and run away from them, you will never grow up. Running away from responsibilities is not only cowardly; it just doesn't help at all.

WE SHOULD ALWAYS DO THINGS when we can and not put them off till another time. If you put things off while you're young, then you'll put them off when you're an adult. Remember the old saying: "Procrastination (use your dictionary!) is the thief of time." Do you want to become the sort of Dad who won't bother mowing the lawn until a child is lost in the grass? Or the sort of Mum who won't wash up until the sink collapses with dirty dishes? Responsibility means that you are concerned enough to do things.

Responsibility means you are concerned first and foremost about people. There are many people in the world who need you - people like your future family and friends. For their sake - and for the sake of becoming a successful human being in this world - you must be overflowing with all the ingredients that make a responsible person; you must be reliable, trustworthy, a person of your word. You must be honest - so that people can depend on you to keep away from the cash register. If you don't become responsible, no one will trust you in anything you do.

BEING RESPONSIBLE MEANS THAT you care, you remember, you're reliable, you're trustworthy. Who would want to be married to an irresponsible husband/wife? Who would want an irresponsible Father/Mother?

NOW IS THE TIME TO START practicing at being a 'responsible person. Young people who carry out responsibilities response well now, become the Fathers and Mothers who carry them out well in the future. Welcome the chance to show how responsible you are by doing your duties and jobs as well as you can. Try always to be a responsible person who knows right from wrong and is able to make decisions for himself. Basically, be a person who cares. If you really care about someone or something, you won't be forgetful, you won't be careless, you won't be lazy, sloppy or late. Usually, "I forgot" means "I don't care." Life for you must mean I care!"

Increase your, capacity to CARE by reading Deuteronomy 15.7-8 and 1 John 3.10-18.

GOD HAS CREATED YOU TO LIVE a joyful and full life - so you must try really hard to understand what God's gift of life to you involves. Life is a beautiful thing that we often do not appreciate. We take it for granted that we can breathe, hear and see. I know a friendly Swiss toy maker who spends long weeks making little wooden dolls and after he has finished one, he gives it to some lucky boy or girl in a kindergarten near his home. So, too, God goes to a lot of trouble to give us life as a gift and we must try to understand and appreciate this gift.

YOUR LIFE IS MEANT TO BE like a building: Your job right now is to lay the foundations for your life on solid values and principles - and then build a skyscraper that will reach to Heaven. Before you start mixing cement to put up your building, realise that you need God's advice and help to be a successful builder.

YOUR LIFE IS ALSO, LIKE A CAR - and God's advice for life is like the manufacturer's instructions for a new car. To look after your car (= life) you must carry out the maker's recommendations or else you are likely to wreck your car.

LIFE ITSELF IS LIKE A CITY and so far we have had a quick look at some of the main features of that city: community, responsibility, self-respect, meaningfulness. These things are not make believe; they are the plain facts about life. Whether you like it or not, they are realities which await you in later life. The sooner you accept them and understand them, the smoother will be your journey through life.

LET'S NOW LEAVE THE CITY OF 'LIFE' for a while. As you go, notice the many different types of 'vehicles' and drivers on the road There are trucks and cars that are not roadworthy; there are some drivers who don't know or don't care where they are going (= don't know what life is about); there are some drivers who don't believe in stopping at red lights; some who don't use their indicators when changing lanes. These are the people who have different values from you. You'll need to be able to drive (= live) with them later on.

I wonder what sort of driver (= person) you will be when you are an adult? Will you know how to look after your car (= life)? Will you be able to enjoy driving (= living) or will you continually be getting lost, having flat tyres, involved in accidents, etc? Well, now is the time to learn how to drive (= live). Now is the time to prepare for life. In fact, how you are living and growing now is already deciding what you'll be like in the future. So make the most of your opportunities now to grow in knowledge, personality and strength of character. In only a few short years you'll be driving around the City of Life!

SMILE.. Shopkeeper told police he had been robbed. "How?" asked the constable. "By an elephant with a shotgun". "Was he an Indian or an African elephant?" "Don't know", said the shop-keeper; "He had a stocking over his head".

AS YOU PREPARE FOR THE CITY OF LIFE, notice how many "traffic signs" are available to help you enjoy trouble-free motoring. These signs are the good advice provided by other people, the good advice and encouraging example provided by the way other people live, the good advice and encouragement provided by God himself in your conscience and in the Bible especially. God gives us quite a lot of messages for life - to guide us even though He leaves us free. He wants us to work out the meaning of life - and He wants us to work it out for ourselves.

GOD GIVES US HELP especially in the Bible. It's there that you learn so much about the meaning of life and the fact that you are a valuable work of art. It's there that you learn profoundly how to care about other people and how to be responsible. So, as Jesus says:

"Everyone who listens to these words of mine and acts on them will be like a sensible man who built his house on rock. Rain came down, floods rose, gales blew and hurled themselves against that house, and it did not fall; it was founded on rock. But everyone who listens to these words of mine and does not act on them will be like a stupid man who built his house on sand. Rain came down, floods rose, gales blew and struck that house, and it fell: and what a fall it had!" (Mt. 7.24-27).

SOME YOUNG PEOPLE ARE NOT SURE IF GOD EXISTS. Stories like this one can help their search for God.. A man who prided himself on being an atheist once came into the study of the famous 17th century astronomer, Kircher. He saw there a very fine working-model of the solar system. By turning a handle the planets could be made to revolve in their respective orbits around the sun. "Very ingenious indeed," the man remarked. "Who made it?" "Oh, no one made it," replied Kircher. "Tell me, I want to know - who made it?" "Nobody. It just happened." The man began to see the point and was annoyed. "I see, you are trying to be funny." "Isn't it rather you who are funny? You cannot believe that this little model just happened, and yet you can believe that the real sun and moon and stars, the whole vast universe, in fact, came into existence somehow without any Maker!"

Common sense tells the average person that there is a God. The Bible says: "The fool says in his heart, There is no God" (Psalm 14).

IF YOU ASK YOURSELF WHAT you are to God, what you mean to God, you can answer that you are His creature. And more than just a creature you are God's son/ daughter. God therefore wants you to ask His help precisely because He is your Father who is there to- help you. If you are to survive in life you have to get His help.

If you know God's message for life:

- you'll know what life is all about
- you won't get depressed or unhappy (at least not all the time!)
- you'll learn that God put you on earth to do something special for someone, and God is the One from whom we find this out
- you'll realize that this old world is a good and wonderful place to live in.

As Louis Armstrong used to sing:

I see trees of green, red roses, too, I see them bloom for me and you, And I think to myself: WHAT A WONDERFUL WORLD. I see the skies of blue and clouds of white, The bright blessed day, the dark sacred night, And I think to myself: WHAT A WONDERFUL WORLD. The colours of the rainbow, so pretty in the sky, Are also on the faces of people goin' by. I see friends shaking hands, saying "How do you do"- They're really saying "I love you." I hear babies cry, I watch them grow, They'll learn much more than I'll ever know. And I think to myself. WHAT A WONDERFUL WORLD. Yes, I think to myself: WHAT A WONDERFUL WORLD.

SO DON'T EVER BE TOO SAD: I hope there are never any of you who think about suicide. Rather than thinking about dying, you should be thinking about starting to live. You should be thinking about how you can live fully and properly, about how wonderful your life can be - if you give it and yourself and God a chance.

May our lips, our soul and our life praise you, Father, and since our very being is your gift, so may our whole life be entirely yours. We make our prayer through our Lord, Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God. for ever and ever. Amen. (- The Liturgy of the Hours, Saturday Two)

SMILE.. A fellow saw an advertisement for a chain saw guaranteed to cut 10 tonnes of wood a day or his money back. He went to the city and bought a saw. 'the first day he worked from 9 a.m. to 5.30 p.m., but managed to cut only 1 1/2 tonnes of wood. The next day he worked from 8 a.m. to 7.30 p.m., but his total was only 2 tonnes. So he took the saw down to the city to demand his money back. The salesman inspected the saw, gave the starter a tug and the motor burst into life. "Wow", said the fellow from the hills, "where's that noise coming from?"

## II GOD'S MESSAGE FOR LIFE

### 1. GOD'S VOICE INSIDE ME: MY CONSCIENCE

AS YOU PREPARE TO LIVE AS WELL as you can, have you ever heard that little voice inside you that tells you what is right and what is wrong? Your conscience is that little voice and through it God helps you to know what is right and what is wrong in life. Your conscience is there as a help: it helps you to make decisions; it helps you to work out your problems in life. It's a terrific gift if you put it to the right use.

"CONSCIENCE" COMES FROM THE WORD "scio" meaning "to know." (That's where we get words like science, conscious, unconscious, conscientious.) Your conscience, we can say, is your power, your ability, to know whether something is right or wrong. It is a voice you can listen to or drown out if you want to - but it doesn't give up easily! You have probably heard of conscience money which the Taxation Department receives at times. That is when people have cheated the Taxation Department of money (large amounts or small) but they can't bear to live with the fact. They've got that bit of cheating "on their mind" or, as we say, on their consciences, and they have got to get it off their chest ("chest," "mind" - English is a funny language!). So they send in the money, usually anonymously, and put an advertisement in the paper (or ring up) to notify the Department. That is "conscience money."

YOU, TOO, HAVE GOT A CONSCIENCE which God has given you. It makes a noise, or makes you unhappy when you do something wrong - and makes you feel good and feel happy when you have done what you know is right. As thinking and responsible human beings, we have a very serious obligation to follow and obey our consciences. We can't find happiness unless we do.

Remember the words of "I Walk the Line": "And happiness I've known proves that it's right" - meaning that from doing the right thing Johnny Cash has experienced a great feeling of happiness. That is what happens to you, too, when You try to do the right thing. When you try to follow your conscience you experience a great happiness in your life - and surely that is something to aim and strive for.

IF YOU FOLLOW YOUR CONSCIENCE we say you are sincere. Sincere people are people who follow and obey their consciences and do what they think is right. But at the same time, you have an obligation and duty to form your conscience, because your conscience is like a watch - it is only useful and worth following if it is showing the correct time' If you don't look after your watch or don't wind it up, it will slowly lose time and finally stop. And the same type of thing can happen to your conscience: if you don't take care of it and make sure it has been properly formed and developed, it will go dead. It, too, can show the wrong time (= advice) and mislead you. Even if you are very sincere and following your conscience properly, you can still be doing the wrong thing. We say that people in this situation are misguided and following a "false conscience."

TO TAKE A VERY EXTREME CASE, think of someone who sincerely believes that burning down buildings is right - someone who goes and burns down a house each time he goes for a drive. Now, he is a very sincere person; he is following his conscience; but his conscience is obviously warped and misinformed (making a flaming mistake...). It should be saying that burning houses is wrong!

SO YOU HAVE THE DUTY to form and develop your conscience, as well as the duty to follow it. What you have to do is set your conscience to the truth - just as you set your watch to the right time. And this is where the Bible and prayer and experience all come in. It's by being a person who listens to God's advice in the Bible, a person who thinks and prays about life - that you will learn to know what is right and true. That's how you will be able to establish the truth and work out what is truthful in your life; that's how you will be able to set your conscience to the truth.

TRY, AS YOU PREPARE FOR LIFE, to make sure you have got your conscience helping you as well as it can. Set it to the truth and try to follow it sincerely - and then watch it help you tremendously to sort out things in life. It will help you to know and to do the right thing. It will be like a watch with an alarm which will help you to keep appointments (= responsibilities) on time and never be late (= mistaken) when it comes to doing what you should do.

YOUR CONSCIENCE IS LIKE YOUR HEART. It will keep on working and pumping away as long as you look after it. It will keep on working the whole time until you die (you won't need it in Heaven!). But it can be neglected like the watch that is not wound up or not cleaned. It can run down, get sick and fade out just as your heart can have an attack and deteriorate in condition. So keep your conscience healthy.

Jesus says something about this. He teaches that if your conscience is sound and clear you will experience great happiness. He compares our consciences with our eyes and says:

"The lamp of the body is the eye. It follows that if your eye is sound, your whole body will be filled with light. But if your eye is diseased, your whole body will be all darkness. If then, the light inside you is darkness, what darkness that will be" (Mt 6.22-23)

THIS IS A GOOD COMPARISON because your conscience is even more important than your eyes. If your conscience is sound and healthy and you are following it - then you know where you are going and can work life out and live properly. But if your conscience is not formed and developed

properly - and/or you are not following it, then you are like a blind person who is always in danger of tripping over any and every obstacle in his way. So, preparing for life means forming and following your conscience!

"To prepare ourselves to celebrate the sacred mysteries, let us call to mind our sins" (= "examine our consciences" ) ( Penitential Rite)

Smile: A tramp knocked on the door of the inn known as "George and the Dragon". The landlady opened the door and the tramp asked "Could you spare a hungry man a bite to eat ?" "NO!" , answered the landlady, slamming the door in his face. A few minutes later, the tramp knocked again. The landlady came to the door again and the tramp asked: " Could I have a few words with George ?"...

## 2. GOD'S LOVE LETTER: THE BIBLE

GOD'S MESSAGE FOR LIFE AND GOD'S HELP for living life properly come to us not only through our consciences but also by many other ways. One of the greatest of these is the world's most famous book: The Bible. In the Bible, God has given us every bit of advice we need to live our lives properly. He there gives the answers to all our questions. He there gives the solutions to all our problems and our difficulties. There he gives hundreds of examples of ordinary people who had to face up to battles in life and yet solved their difficulties and lived life well.

BY READING ABOUT THESE PEOPLE and by taking God's advice to us in the Bible, we can live our lives properly, fully and happily. If you haven't read the Bible, you're missing out on a lot of things God has said to people in your position and in your situation. You should try to read a few lines every day so that you come to be like Jesus and do what He wants you to do. It's in the Bible we get Jesus' own message for life. So to shape and build up your conscience and make it tell you what is right or wrong, read the Bible. It's the best book you can find for forming your conscience. If you like, it's a Directory for Life, a map of the City of Life.

With its help you will find your way in life; without it you can easily get lost. It's a book of instruction not only for living life now at your age, but living for the future, and it can inspire anyone who reads it, can fill you with knowledge and truth, and make your life a better one.

At first the Bible may not be as enjoyable, as your favorite Western or Love Story, but as in the case of so many good things (e.g., learning to play the guitar) you will grow to love and appreciate it if you make the effort.

WE HEAR SOMETHING READ FROM THE BIBLE every Sunday at Mass, and that's one reason why you can say for sure "there's a message for me" every Sunday at Mass. So as you trudge off to Mass through rain or sunshine say to yourself, "one message coming up for me." And then, as you leave Mass, ask yourself, "Now what was the message for me?" Think about that message during the day; think about it during the week and try to put it into practice.

IF YOU CAME HOME FROM SCHOOL one day and found a letter for yourself from Suzi Quatro or the President of the United States or from some other famous person, you would certainly be hopping about with happiness at having received such a letter. You'd race inside and show your parents; you'd bring it to school next day and show it to everybody and be very proud of it. You would keep such a letter in your room; you'd look after it and regard it as a treasure all your life and feel honoured to have received a letter from such a famous person.

WE CAN SAY WITH GREAT CERTAINTY that the Bible is God's personal letter to us. You can say in fact that "the Bible is God's Love Letter to me." It's like a letter from Heaven which will thrill you and make life clear to you if you really want it to be clear. It's the most powerful letter in the world, the most moving book in the world. It is able to change your life - to help you be a better person. It can help you really improve as a person and increase your little bit of goodness. It's a book from which we can learn so many valuable things about life, because it's God actually speaking to us. It's His written word very thoughtfully put down and recorded so that People of all ages are able to know God's feelings and thoughts about everything important to us. Your conscience is God speaking to you inwardly, from inside you, while the Bible is God speaking to you from outside yourself.

WE SAY THAT THE BIBLE HAS many human authors and editors - all of whom were "inspired" and helped by God the Holy Spirit who moved them, encouraged them and guided them as they wrote. This does not mean that every single little fact in the Bible is literally true, but rather that everything God wanted to teach us is there, without error.

SOME PEOPLE MISINTERPRET THE BIBLE and take all sorts of things in the wrong way. For instance, there are people who claim that the last book of the Bible (the "Book of Revelation") says that only 144,000 people will get to Heaven, and so they say there can be only 144,000 people "saved". But that's a lot of rubbish, because 144,000 is a very special number in the Bible. It means millions and millions- an unlimited number. It's as if you were to read in the paper one morning that some prominent footballer "kicked the ball a mile" in Saturday's game. Well, we all know that those words don't literally mean the ball was kicked 1,760 yards. No, what is meant is that he kicked the ball a long way. If someone were to come along in 10 years or even 100 years and dig up that newspaper and proclaim "he-kicked-the-ball-a-mile: oh, there's a world record; someone once kicked the ball a mile"- that would be just nonsense. So, too, we've got to be careful interpreting the Bible.

Many things in the Bible are meant to be taken literally, but many other things are put poetically, sometimes things are exaggerated, sometimes things are put very emotionally to appeal strongly to us and stir us up, occasionally there's even a bit of fiction used to teach a lesson (for example some of the stories and parables made up by Jesus). What we have got to do is understand and allow for all these different types of writing and expression used by God in the Bible.

### 3. GOOD NEWS FOR LIFE: THE NEW TESTAMENT

THE WORD "BIBLE" COMES FROM THE GREEK WORD "book." The Bible is such a great book that it has come to be called quite simply "The Book"; it's the Book which God has written to all mankind. The Bible has two parts: the Old Testament and the New Testament.

The word "Testament" just means a promise or a treaty which people can make - and in this case it means a treaty which God has made with the human race. Actually He made a number of testaments or treaties or covenants with the human race before Jesus was born but then, when Jesus was born, the new covenant or testament or agreement was begun between God and man. It's the final one - to which no changes will ever be made - and the written record of this covenant or testament is itself called "the New Testament."

As far as you are concerned, the New Testament is God's good news for life, and can help you greatly as you prepare for life. In the Gospel section of the New Testament you can read of the wonderful things that Jesus said and did during His life on earth- the people He healed, the sinners

He forgave, the laws He made and the greatest thing of all: the fact that to save us and re-open Heaven for us He died on the Cross and then rose from the dead so that we too, can rise some day from the dead. As someone says in "Ben Hur": "If ever words came from God, they're in everything He says."

IN THE NEW TESTAMENT YOU WILL FIND unbeatable advice on how you can improve your life. You might ask how is this possible. Well, just go and see for yourself! Read the New Testament - especially the four Gospels - and you'll get dozens of ideas on how to live life more fully. The New Testament provides us with a highly accurate standard by which to check our lives and see what they are like. The New Testament provides us with a certain and unfailing standard to guide our lives - how to live and act - because it gives us the powerful example and words of Jesus Himself. And all you've got to do to work out how you should act is just think back to what Jesus did and what He said about this or that situation. Ask "How did Jesus act or react?" and that will tell you how you should act.

IN SOME WAYS THE BIBLE IS A VERY "dangerous" book. I mean "dangerous" here in a good sense: the Bible can really change your life, it can really affect you! In this sense it's even explosive; it can really do things for you and to you. As you pick it up you should almost tremble, realizing that you are handling "dynamite." As you start to read it, ask God to help you respect and understand His "Letter," His Bible. Here is God the Great Creator speaking to you, a \*crumby creature, and every little word He says can do great things for you, can help you in so many ways. ( \* crumby is a very suitable word here, as It refers to a "small fragment, small particle, atom.")

YOU SHOULD TRY TO READ a few sentences of the Bible every day of your life. A good time to do this is last thing at night before you go to sleep. Read just a couple of lines, think about them, say a quick prayer based on them ("Dear Lord, You once opened the eyes of a blind man; please now cure my 'blindness' which stops me from seeing the needs of people around me..."). By reading a few lines each night, you'll get God's message for life running through your brain. As a result you'll be better able to face, understand and deal with all sorts of situations in life - for you'll know what God says about this or that situation and you'll remember how He wants you to act in this or that circumstance.

READING THE BIBLE IS LIKE taking a trip down a main highway. If you were to go down that highway at 10,000 feet in a F-111 you would be lucky even to see it. If you were to go down it at 300 feet in a helicopter you would probably see it, and see a bit of the traffic and activity on the road, but not much else. If you were to speed down there by car you would see a bit more but unless you were a rather careless driver you'd be watching the road and would still miss many details. Even if you were to go by bus there would be many things you would not notice. But if you were to walk down that highway, you would see everything on the way. You'd notice other people walking, you'd notice houses, you'd smell the trees and flowers, you'd see how much work people have put into keeping their lawns clean and tidy, you'd be able to stop and talk to other people - you'd really take in everything.

WELL, THAT'S WHAT IT'S LIKE WHEN you're reading the Bible. If you just fly through it, or just flick through it, or jump from place to place, or read it only occasionally, or read it without much effort or attention - then how can you expect to get much out of it? If you listen to it only on Sundays - and then with only one ear - you're not giving the Bible a chance to bite you with God's message for life. But if you make a serious and constant effort to read it every day - to read it

carefully, thoughtfully, prayerfully, reverently - then look out! It will shock you, it will change you, it will help you tremendously!

THERE ARE 27 "BOOKS" IN THE NEW TESTAMENT: Four Gospels, the Acts of the Apostles, and the letters of St. Paul, St. Peter, St. James, St. John and St. Jude. The Gospels - Matthew, Mark, Luke and John - can be compared with the work of four reporters at a football game. Think of some famous football oval that you go to and think of four reporters going there to write about a game. To use a Melbourne example, suppose it's a game between Richmond and Collingwood. Well, the reporter who is writing up things for the local Richmond paper will naturally give everything from the point of view of the "Tigers." He might accidentally happen to mention the fact that Collingwood was the other side, but he will stress what the Richmond players did - even if they lost. So, too, the Collingwood reporter will write about everything from the point of view of the "Magpies". Neither reporter is trying to mislead his readers: he's just writing up things as we'd expect him to - with his readers' interests and background in mind.

Now suppose there was a reporter at the game from the wilderness of Queensland - someone who didn't know much about the game. He would write up things as a complete stranger not understanding what was going on: "For some strange reason they had two extra goal posts, the umpire had a funny way of carrying on - didn't seem to care much about the offside rule - they used a wrong size ball which was thrown into the air instead of being put in a scrum and there were too many players on the field... He might not even mention the names of the teams (or the result) - because he, too, is writing up things as accurately as he sees and understands them. And if the fourth reporter was someone from the "Woman's Weekly"- well, she would probably concentrate on the weather and fashions and might scarcely speak of the game at all.

Each of the four reporters would record things as accurately as he or she could and while they would not give us anything that was false or incorrect, they would be stressing and emphasising different aspects of the same game. This is often the precise reason why things are sometimes put differently in the Gospels. Not that the Gospel writers were like one eyed or ill-informed football writers - but they were writing for different audiences and stressing different aspects of Jesus' life and teaching.

THE MOST IMPORTANT THING ABOUT THE GOSPEL is the fact that it is good news for your life. The word "Gospel" comes from the old English "Godspel," which means "good news" - and it certainly is good news for each one of our lives if we read it and try to practise and apply it in our lives. This is because it inspires us, encourages us and sets a standard for our lives. So it's up to you whether you take any notice of it. But surely if you are genuinely trying to prepare for life, you will want to read it and understand it and put into practice every ounce of good news and advice for life that it contains.

"Father... You so loved the world that in the fullness of time You sent Your only son to be our saviour..." (Eucharistic Prayer 4)

#### 4. PREVIEW WITH A MESSAGE: THE OLD TESTAMENT

THE OTHER PART OF THE BIBLE - the Old Testament - is like the first part of a film of which the New Testament is the second half, after interval. The Old Testament is the part before interval, and no one can come into a film after interval and fully understand what's going on, unless he has already seen the first part of the film. So we need to read the Old Testament as well as the New

Testament, otherwise we won't understand the New Testament properly and might misunderstand its message for life.

#### BY READING THE OLD TESTAMENT:

we understand why Jesus came into this world we understand how important it was for Jesus to come and be our Guide and Example for life we learn how much this world needed and still needs a Saviour we learn about the preparation for the coming of Jesus we read how God the Father prepared the Jewish people to whom He would send His Son. As time went on, God told us or "revealed" to us (that's where we get the word "revelation") more and more about Himself and His Son. In doing so, He told us much about life and gave us the answers to many of life's big questions, problems and difficulties.

We read the Old Testament to preview and prepare for the New Testament - to understand the New Testament more fully, and to hear God's advice for life on a vast range of immensely important issues in life. It is in the Old Testament that we are reminded of how good it is for us to give great reverence to God's message for life: "It is the Lord who speaks... My eyes are drawn to the man of humbled and contrite spirit who trembles at my word." (Is. 66.2.)

#### 5. CONCLUSIONS

IN THE BIBLE, THEN, WE HAVE GOD'S MESSAGE FOR LIFE, full of good advice, full of tremendous encouragement. By reading the Bible, you gain greater confidence for life: confidence in yourself and confidence in God. The Bible helps you understand that fact that God made you and loves you with a mighty love. If you come across a tough problem, difficulty or decision in life, the Bible has the answer because it tells what God wants you to do in your particular situation. The Bible will bring you closer to God and help you be a better person as a result.

IF YOU HAVEN'T GOT TIME TO READ THE BIBLE, haven't got time to read God's word, you should really examine your conscience, because you are making life harder for yourself and are almost insulting God by refusing to read His "Letter" to you. If you haven't got time to read the Bible, you haven't got time to live. But you have plenty of life ahead of you and you want to live it properly and prepare for it as well as you can - so read the Bible! It will help you understand life so much more. It will help you form your conscience and help you follow your conscience. And thanks to the Bible and your conscience, you will have God guiding you and helping you as you head off to face the "traffic" in the City of Life.

YOUR CONSCIENCE WILL BE LIKE a small flashing light on the instrument panel of your car. It will show green when things are going well, and when you are doing the right thing; it will show red when something is not so good.

The Bible will be there, too, as your road map, your street directory, guiding you and helping you find your way through the joys and sorrows of life.

So USE your conscience, USE the Bible, because between and through the two of them God's message for life will be coming to you POWERFULLY and you will be able to face life with great CONFIDENCE, knowing that you are living life as God wants you to live it, knowing that the good God Himself is with you always in the drivers seat.

"The Lord be with you..." ( God is already with us, and we pray for an ever increasing awareness of His presence in our lives )

NOW THAT YOU HAVE READ THIS PAMPHLET, start to put some of its ideas into practice:

- Try to do a lot of thinking about the meaning of life.
- Often look over the important check list given earlier
- Become more involved in and a better contributor to the life and activity of your family, your school, your parish, your local community.
- Find some way of helping people less fortunate than you are.
- Accept responsibilities willingly and carry them out as well as you can.
- Examine your conscience each night to reflect on how you have lived another day of life.
- Give sincerity top priority. Follow your conscience no matter what the cost.
- Read the Bible every day of your life. Get a modern translation, leave it near your bed and start reading a few lines of the Gospel each night before you go to sleep.

#### A PRAYER FROM THE OLD TESTAMENT

How great is your name, O Lord our God, through all the earth!

Your majesty is praised above the heavens; on the lips of children and of babes you have found praise to foil your enemy, to silence the foe and the rebel.

When I see the heavens, the work of your hands, the moon and the stars which you arranged, then I stop and think:

What is man that you should keep him in mind, mortal man that you care for him?

Yet you have made him little less than a god; with glory and honour you crowned him, gave him power over the works of your hand, put all things under his feet.

All of them, sheep and cattle, yes, even the savage beasts, birds of the air and fish that make their way through the waters.

How great is your name, O Lord our God, through all the earth!

-Psalm 8

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