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**IS GOD REAL?**

***Rev Dr Noel Due***

***“Bill was paralysed from the chest down. An accident on the oil rigs. He didn’t think much of a God who would leave him crippled. But he came to think differently.”***

Stephen cut a striking figure. Tall, distinguished, intelligent eyes. Beautiful family. Stephen was a specialist surgeon. He’d grown up in an atheistic household, where science did away with religion. God? Superstitious mumbo jumbo, for people who need a crutch! Jesus? A guru perhaps, but nothing more; mostly a swear word. Faith? Only trust what you can prove, everything else is bunkum.

For Julie there was no dramatic story. Just the slow dawn of a hard reality: life wasn’t going anywhere. It was all good, but all pointless. She was doing it all every day, but joyless. She didn’t *need* God. No hidden gambling problem, no children on crystal meth. She’d done OK without him. So it was surprising when she said to me, “everything feels so empty.”

Bill. A Scot, trained with the Royal Navy, bravery personified. Not James Bond in a wetsuit—too gritty and real for that. He’d seen plenty of action and left the Navy with a clean record and a fistful of medals. Working the oil rigs paid well, but he paid the price. Who’d want a God who left him in a wheelchair?

Thomas was one of Jesus’ closest friends. He’d just seen the man he loved beaten to a pulp and nailed to a cross. Dead and buried. Game over! Not just “doubting Thomas”. Disillusioned Thomas. Cynical Thomas. Unbelieving Thomas. Angry Thomas.

These stories are ours. They’re the stories of you and me, of ordinary people, real people. Each of them had a reason not to believe in God.

And they gave it their best shot.

Stephen, the atheistic surgeon, his medical practice and life flung into the rapids after a bad business decision. He’d been undone by the very stuff he thought he could manage. In the prime of his career he saw it all go over a cliff. Yet, at the bottom, he was caught in the arms of the God he had denied all his life.

Julie, had it all, but was wasting away inside. The malnutrition of affluence. Everything she *thought* she wanted, she had. But her hands were still empty. The purse had a hole in it; her life ebbed away in a stream of dollars and cents. One night, she, her friends in the car, and about a hundred other people had gone to a meeting to hear a preacher. God showed up and none of them left the same as they’d come.

Bill’s faith had been more in himself than anyone else. But his need was beyond him. He’d known about God as a boy; Sunday School and all that. And even in the Navy he hadn’t been *totally* unbelieving, just mostly. The adrenaline highs, the teamwork, deployments to exotic places; it wasn’t that God didn’t exist, it’s just that he didn’t figure in a world that seemed so real. If God was there, Bill wasn’t looking for him.

Strangely enough, it wasn’t the accident that made him turn around. God showed up in the person of a friend in the oil game. A bloke like himself, who’d been in the forces. He gently opened Bill’s eyes and ears to see God had been with him every step of the way. Bill wasn’t seeking, but he’d been found. The accident only led him more deeply into the arms of the God who’d always been there…only to discover that God would *always* be there.

I only met Bill once. The next time I stood beside him I was taking his funeral. We lowered his coffin into the grave on a cold Scottish day. He’d had a stroke, totally unexpected and instantaneously fatal. We sang “What a friend we have in Jesus!” Bill knew that before he died. He knows it even better now.

Thomas. Doubting Thomas. Whose grief blinded his eyes to the blindingly obvious. He didn’t believe his mates when they told him that Jesus had risen from the dead. He wanted proof. Until Jesus stood before him he’d continue in his disillusioned anger, thank you very much! It’s all too easy to coddle our hurts than be healed.

When Jesus did show up—on that night two thousand years ago—Thomas’s reasons for *not* believing were blown to kingdom come. He fell on his face before Jesus “My Lord, and my God!” He ended his life on the other side of the world, telling the stories of Jesus till the day he died.

Stephen, Julie, Bill, Thomas, they gave it their best shot, to live life as if God were not real. But their best shot wasn’t good enough.

Imagine standing on the edge of a huge impact crater. Look at the rocks. Measure the rim. Peer into the sunken depth. Everything you see bears witness: Something stupendous happened here! You could learn a lot by looking at the details. The rocks tell a story. You can measure the rim and the depth. You could even work out the mass of the meteorite if you had the smarts. But they’re not the event itself! They’re the left-over traces of an incredible detonation.

The stories of Stephen, Julie, Bill and Thomas are like that. The tell-tale traces of the most astounding event in history. They tell a story, but they’re not the main event. The main event is who they found, not what blew up in their faces. Long ago a very wise man put it this way: “O God, you have made us for yourself, and our hearts are restless till they find their rest in you”.

Stephen, Julie, Bill. Me. We’re all like Thomas. We’ve all been blown to kingdom come despite our best efforts not to believe. God never gives up. We can run, but wherever we hide, he’s already ahead of us. The joy comes when we just give in! Then we’re no longer fossicking among the rocks at the edge of an old crater… we’re part of the main event.

**If you’re wondering whether God is real or know someone who is, contact us for the free booklet REASONS TO BELIEVE. Call 1800 353 350 or go to messagesofhope.org.au to order your free copy.**



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