



Spiritual Care at the end of life

The Chaplain as a 'Hopeful Presence'
Steve Nolan

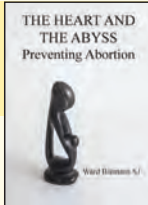
- Jessica Kingsley, 2015, £18.99, 360pp, ISBN 9781849051996
- Reviewed by **Gareth Tuckwell**, formerly of Burrswood Christian Hospital, now Regional Director of Macmillan Cancer Support

Within your working life, have you ever felt that you had nothing to offer when faced with a dying person or their family? This book is invaluable if you find yourself alongside someone who is dying.

The reader is drawn into a series of moments between a chaplain and a person who is dying. The author reflects with rich learning that is not only well researched but authentic. He develops his theory of the chaplain as a 'hopeful presence' – a presence that moves from a transference-loaded first contact to a hope-enhancing relationship.

Nolan encourages us that, when our therapeutic armoury is exhausted, what we have to offer relationally can be even more important. A person-centred relationship with the dying person often has a transforming therapeutic dynamic. At the heart of good end-of-life care is having the courage to be a loving 'presence' as much as controlling symptoms.

The balance between professionalism and humanity is never an easy ride. Can we be both professional and human whilst bringing the light and love of Jesus into our relationships? How do we enable the person who is sick to be the person they need to be?



The Heart and the Abyss

Preventing Abortion
Ward Biemans SJ (Society of Jesuits)

- Connorcourt Publishing, 2016, 390pp, ISBN 978192513892
- Reviewed by **Mark Houghton**, GP in Sheffield

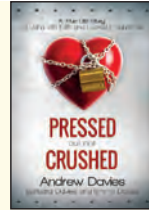
Is abortion a safe and simple solution for unplanned pregnancy? Everyone should be ready to answer that question because 2017 marks the 50th anniversary of the British abortion law. This book is a minefield of information on the unsafe side-effects of abortion. It opens up the realities of abortion risks to patients before they choose.

Ward Biemans is a Dutch-speaking Jesuit academic. He compares the British and Dutch abortion scenes. Compared to the Netherlands, one reason for the higher teenage abortion rate in Britain is the absence of a legal requirement for parental consent for teenage abortion. Citing evidence from across the world, he says teenage abortion can be

reduced by 10–20% where there is compulsory parental notification.

Biemans is compelling reading, but not easy! He compassionately explores the heart-breaking medical side-effects on women; and also the psychology, politics, law, theology, history, finances, feminism, autonomy and ethics of this divisive procedure.

How do we know about risks such as suicide and preterm birth after abortion? Because medical mass abortion has terminated about 1.5 billion unborn humans in 50 years, leaving countless damaged women and partners who testify. I was glad his closing chapter brings hope for reducing the numbers of unwanted pregnancies and the damage abortion causes.



Pressed but not crushed

A true-life story of living with faith and locked-in syndrome
Andrew Davies, Barbara Davies and Emma Davies

- Malcolm Down Publishing, 2015, £8.99, 200pp, ISBN 01707880098
- Reviewed by **Steve Sturman**, Consultant Neurologist (Neurorehabilitation) based in Warley, West Midlands

This very honest book tells the story of Andrew, a successful dentist whose life is going very well (including his Christian life). Then, one day, a stroke shatters this and leaves him with Locked In Syndrome (LIS).

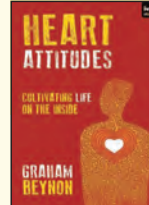
The book charts a succession of healthcare failings: the GP suggesting neck manipulation that was possibly causal; A&E that initially turned him away; unsympathetic and mechanistic acute care; nursing perceived as inadequate and disrespectful; embedded incompetent lack of compassion in the rehab unit, unchallenged by management.

Andrew, his wife and mother eloquently describe the

nightmare, redeemed only by a church family that provided amazing support. There's a lot of anger and some perplexity. Andrew is still grappling with the 'Why?' question – full credit for truthfulness. It is still early in the journey, but God's mercy shines through.

The book certainly encourages readers to see how precious church family is. Where it really scores, however, is in making us uncomfortable about the way the system endemically fails vulnerable people and delivers inadequate care.

A book that should be required reading for Christians caring for people with severe disability.



Heart Attitudes

Cultivating life on the Inside
Graham Beynon

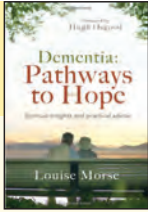
- IVP, 2014, £8.99, 174pp, ISBN 9781783591718
- Reviewed by **Stefan Gleeson**, Consultant Psychiatrist based in Hampshire

The 'heart' is referred to some 830 times in the Bible. As Graham Beynon puts it, 'God is deeply concerned with who we are, not just what we know... God wants his truth to shape us.' The gospel is central to Beynon, who makes clear from the beginning that the heart attitudes he wishes to explore are to do with our relationship with God rather than with others. Of course, we know that if you get the former right, the latter follows.

I took this book on holiday, half expecting to put it aside at some point, in favour of some novels I had brought along. Instead, I found myself reading it from cover to cover, mesmerised by disarmingly accessible prose

laced with stories, practical examples and beautifully succinct chapters on love, fear, joy, peace, humility, confidence, thankfulness, contentment and hope. I felt challenged by the contrast between the hedonistic Riviera culture I was immersed in and Beynon's incisive focus on the gospel.

The highlight for me is how the author addresses some fundamental questions we don't always get right as Christians. We can live a life that is in name 'Christian' but in practice continues with a worldview and heart attitude infused by the surrounding culture. Beynon rightly focuses on what God is conveying in the gospel. I cannot recommend this book enough.



Dementia: Pathways to Hope:
Spiritual insights and practical advice
Louise Morse

- Monarch, £7.99, 2015, 160pp, ISBN 9780857216557
- Reviewed by **William AM Cutting**, an Oxford-based paediatrician, carer and writer encouraging senior citizens

In a world where the word 'dementia' brings dread and despair, Louise Morse is a shining herald of hope in a book loaded with information and positive ideas.

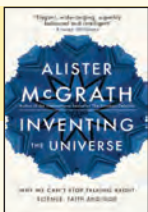
She has woven together personal stories from many people, results from various scientific studies, practical ideas and common sense, along with biblical messages of hope based on God's promises.

She indicates that dementia is a very varied disease in its presentation and progress. It is as varied and personal as the individual brain, the personality background and spirit. The diagnosis does not spell the end

of life, and there may still be good years of life.

There is no medicinal 'cure' but there is often some 'plasticity of the brain'. A range of interventions can improve the quality of life and slow the progression of the disease. In particular Morse describes the application of cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) with spiritual strengthening to 'Boost Brain and Soul'.

Hope in modern parlance is something that you desire but may or may not happen. Hope in the biblical sense, she declares, is much more. It is confident expectation that something will happen because God is in it.



Inventing the Universe
Why we can't stop talking about science, faith and God
Alister McGrath

- Hodder & Stoughton, 2015, £9.99, ISBN 9781444798463
- Reviewed by **Peter May**, retired GP based in Southampton

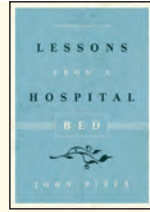
The author considers big questions raised by science and religion and how they mutually enrich one another. There is a tendency among Christians to reduce 'faith' conversations to the central details of the gospel story. Consequently, there often doesn't seem much to discuss and unbelievers feel preached at.

This is not McGrath's style. He thinks the existence of God is deeply interesting and that if we are to explore these depths with others then we need to think both broadly and deeply about the underlying issues. Using his own personal story, he describes the development of his thinking from cocky atheism adolescence to a richer understanding of both science

and faith at university.

The awesome wonder of the night sky, the limitations of scientific descriptions, the quest to find a basis for both morality and human significance drove him to find adequate 'maps' to make sense of it all. 'Human life is incredibly brief when seen against the backdrop of cosmic time,' writes McGrath. A larger and more relevant map is needed.

The result is a beautifully written, well-informed and wide-ranging account to deepen our understanding of the modern world. It's an excellent book to lend to unbelievers. While reading it, I was interrupted by an atheist and we soon got into a constructive discussion.



Lessons from a hospital bed
John Piper

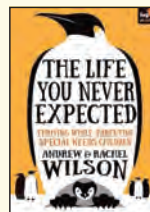
- IVP, 2016, £4.99, 75pp, ISBN 9781783594238
- Reviewed by **Janet Goodall**, retired Paediatrician based in Stoke

This is a small book, easy to hold in a weak hand and easy to read with a tired mind. The chapters are short and full of distilled wisdom. It is a little gem for anyone in hospital or for a hospital visitor.

John Piper has spent a couple of brief times in hospital, but long enough to write with insight. He first records ten beliefs he took in with him followed by ten things he learned there. He excuses patients too exhausted to get through the first ten, yet they will refresh those already sharing their faith and may draw others to it. Piper relies on God's Word,

his goodness, omniscience and control. He outlines the story of salvation and the hope of heaven, where sickness will be no more. Satan may try to shake us but is not in control. God is able to bring gain from our pain. Piper encourages us to pray for, and perhaps with, neighbouring patients. Some may welcome talk about the hope we have in the love of Jesus. And pray too that God will use for his glory every part of the (sometimes humiliating) experience of being in a hospital bed.

Many will appreciate the lessons learned. A Christian friend in hospital has already found this a book worth sharing.



The Life you Never Expected
Thriving whilst parenting special needs children
Andrew and Rachel Wilson

- IVP, 2015, 154pp, ISBN 9781783593521
- Reviewed by **Mark Pickering**, Prison GP, husband to Rachael and father to wonderfully sweet and quirky autistic teenager Zoe

This book is packed full of useful insights. It never loses sight of how parenting special needs children can be both incredibly demoralising and hugely fulfilling. It also keeps returning to an uplifting view of God's purposes for parents and children.

The many short chapters are all perceptive and easily digested in moments of respite: learning to lament like the psalmist; the value of sleep; grieving for the dreams and expectations you may have had for your children that may now never be realised. We are reminded that, whilst all children can be exhausting and challenging, and those with special needs often more so, they are sources of great blessing,

reminding us and others of God's love and faithfulness in unexpected and touching ways.

Andrew and Rachel Wilson have two young autistic children, both of whom have regressed from their previous levels of function with time. They are active in church leadership and write candidly about the effects their children's difficulties have had on their commitments outside the home, and the stresses it has placed on their marriage.

The book ends with the imagery of a ship – our journey is unpredictable (for all of us), our destination uncertain (even when we delude ourselves otherwise). Yet, our Captain journeys with us, and he sustains and guides both us and our children.