

ishah

exploring issues for Christian women

issue 5/ spring 2002

ISSN 1445-9612



GIVING A GOOD
ACCOUNT

Fran Boydell

'THE WORLD IS SICK
SO KISS ME QUICK'

Cath Brown

STRANGER
EVANGELISM

Helen Bell

FILM REVIEW:
SPIDERMAN

Kylie McLachlan



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

welcome...

It's so easy to get trapped in the everyday in our conversations. Sometimes it seems as though all of our talk is about trivialities – office gossip, colds, clothes, celebrities, the weather, children's eating habits, new TV shows, sore feet, dress sizes and car troubles.

As Christians we believe that our everyday conversations have eternal significance – what we say reflects the state of our hearts and God uses our words to work powerfully to build his kingdom. Yet when we reflect on the way we speak and the things we say, we are forced to recognise that this area of our lives is not what it should be. What we say matters – so how can we speak in ways that honour God and further his purposes?

In this issue of ishah we explore the everyday conversations of Christian women. Our writers acknowledge the negative feelings that often surround our efforts at evangelism – embarrassment about speaking out and guilt over past failures. They remind us that the only way forward is to shift our focus to Christ. As we work out our salvation every day, our transformed lives will overflow into our conversations. As we think about our culture and the world around us from a Christian perspective, we will have the confidence to make opportunities to speak of our faith naturally. As we trust in God's power to save and his great compassion, he will equip us to be strategic and courageous and loving in what we say.

We hope that this issue of ishah will stimulate your thinking about your everyday life and conversations and encourage you to "shine like the stars in the universe as you hold out the word of life" (Phil 2:15-16 NIV).

The Editors

FORTHCOMING ISSUES...

...SOMETHING ABOUT MARY

...WOMEN'S WORK

> ishahextras...

> Organise a gift subscription for friends and family at Christmas time. Simply log on to our web site to download a subscription form today: www.ishah.org

> Reminder: renew your subscription today and receive the next four issues uninterrupted.

> Interested in receiving additional copies of your favourite issue to send to friend? Contact us for more information: ishahmag@hotmail.com

ouraims

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.

EDITORS

Editorial Committee

Susan Bradbeer
Fiona McLean
Kirsten Deane
Heather Patacca
Cathy Altmann
Katherine Canobi
Alex Pierce

Editorial Adviser

Denise Cooper-Clarke

Design

Judith Graham

Marketing

Kirsty Bradbeer
Debs Gunthorpe

Subscriptions

Phillipa Hood
Fiona McLean

Finance

Cath Brown

SUBSCRIBE

1 year : 4 issues
hardcopy \$20 : concession \$15
electronic version (via email) \$15

> Please make cheques payable to 'ishah'.

> Interested in making a direct deposit? Email *ishah* for more details.

> Mail to: c/- 23 Bundoran Pde, Mont Albert North, VIC. 3129

> Email: ishahmag@hotmail.com

> Web: www.ishah.org

COPYRIGHT

Material published in *ishah* magazine is subject to copyright. Requests for permission to reproduce any part thereof for purposes other than private study should be directed to the editors. Additional copies and back issues can be obtained by contacting the editors.

CONTRIBUTE

You are invited to submit articles or letters to the editors for publication in *ishah*. Writers of articles are strongly encouraged to discuss their potential contribution with the editors before submitting. All material should be in electronic format and be submitted with a covering letter detailing the writer's name and contact details, requesting consideration for publication. Material will be published at the discretion of the editorial committee.

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

Giving a GOOD ACCOUNT

BY FRAN BOYDELL

I do not believe I am an evangelist. Nevertheless, I do have a strong commitment to being "able to give a good account of the hope that is in me" (1 Peter 3:15), to pray for colleagues, friends and family, and to both see and take up the opportunities God gives me to talk about Him.

When I was a younger person and a younger Christian I carried my evangelistic responsibility as an almost intolerable burden. I remember thinking miserably that I might as well get up on the lunchroom table, tell everyone that I was a Christian, and get it over with. There was no sense of joyful sharing, no sense of real love for or enjoyment of my colleagues, just the burden of something that I had to do that didn't feel right. You can imagine that with an attitude like that I was either going to blurt out some pretty inappropriate things or go with my gut and say nothing. I did both, depending on the prevailing level of my guilt. These days, however, I enjoy my work, my colleagues, family members and friends and opportunities to talk about most things and particularly those relating to faith and life. What changed?

Firstly, someone pointed out to me that my prime responsibility at work (and at home and in the community) was to do a good job, not to be an evangelist. This took away some of the anxiety. A number of books encouraged me to see that I had both a *creation* responsibility and a *salvation* responsibility. Through them I saw that the gospel has an impact on us and our culture in a holistic way.

I was also helped to think pre-suppositionally; that is, to see the underlying worldview behind an idea and to contrast it with my Christian beliefs. This helped me to listen and to engage in thoughtful conversations which might get to where we agreed and differed and eventually onto matters of faith. This approach gave me a better understanding of where people were coming from and gave me a respect for and enjoyment of their humanity.

Meanwhile, I began to realise that God loved these friends more than I could possibly imagine. I could relax in the knowledge that He was at work in them. I could trust Him for the outcome. My job was to pray and wait on Him for my moment (or to be willing to let someone else have the moment; see 1 Corinthians 3:6).

I also learned to be more honest about my lifestyle and my activities so that my commitments came out naturally and early in the getting-to-know-you process. (No need to stand on the lunchroom table!) I have discovered that

being natural about the little things is the first step to openness - like mentioning church in my run-down of weekend activities, rather than failing to mention it because it doesn't seem relevant. There is an uneasy balance between knowing when to be a nuisance and when to respect a person's desire not to engage on faith matters. Perhaps this is easier to get right as we learn to care for and listen to people, care more about God and his love for them, and learn more about ourselves and what we can get away with!

Being open also means being transparent about my weaknesses. Winning others by our godly lifestyle does not mean acting out something we are not in case we impact badly. That is dishonest. Witnessing is not a too-good-to-be true person telling another the truth, but, as has often been said, "one beggar telling another beggar where to find bread".

And when we do get to talk about the Lord, we need to have given some thought to the way we will express the gospel. How will we express the concept of sin or explain why Jesus' death was different without using the words substitutional or atonement? Our sub-cultural language is often unintelligible and off-putting to most unchurched people. It is not just the preacher who needs to be on the lookout for good illustrations.

I'm gradually learning to imitate the faith and godliness of other Christians but not necessarily their personal style. I believe God rejoices in our variety - the way we express ourselves through what we wear, our interests, our work and all the other things that make us different. I believe He uses us in our differences to reach a variety of people for His kingdom.

A holistic and respectful attitude to others should encourage us to prayer. Prayer is our recognition that this is God's world and we are his servants. A friend of mine who became a Christian while she was a teenager began to pray daily for the members of her immediate family. She trusted them to God, spoke clearly and boldly when appropriate and kept quiet much of the time. One by one they all came to faith in Jesus in different ways through different people. Her trust was in a mighty and faithful God who longs to bring people into his kingdom. I've always thought she got it right!

■ *Fran Boydell lives in Melbourne with her husband and two teenage children. She currently teaches part-time in a special school for students with physical disabilities and health impairments.*

contact: boydells@netspace.net.au

“The world is sick so kiss me quick”

BY CATH BROWN

Nine-thirty, Monday night. I switch on *Sex and the City*. Carrie Bradshaw's the star. She writes about sex and spends a lot of time researching. Tonight she's restless. She thought she'd found what she was looking for, the *perfect* man, and yet she's still searching for something. She tries to make sense of it and concludes, "I guess we shouldn't expect to get everything from the one man."

A few weeks earlier on *Friends*, Chandler spent the whole episode discovering the joys of taking a bath. But it's not the plot, it's *those* friends that make the show. They'll be there for you when your life's a success and when it's a mess.

I have friends who watch these shows and can't bear to miss them. These shows give us such insight into our culture, summed up well by a North Carlton graffiti artist: "The world is sick so kiss me quick." A culture that has abandoned its search for God is gravely ill. Its people will look anywhere for relief and satisfaction. They'll try anything to quench their thirst, to satisfy their need to be accepted, valued and guilt-free.

Yet these shows offer laughable solutions to thirsty, restless people: more friends, more sex, more shoes. These shows remind us of the huge gulf between the message of the gospel and the world-views of many of our friends.

How do we, as people who long to see our friends put their faith in Christ, share the gospel with people whose world-views are worlds apart from our own? Sometimes I can be so acutely aware of our differences, I can be discouraged and fall silent.

Paul, in Acts 17:16-34, faced a similar dilemma. In Athens, he met people whose view of the world was far removed from his own. And yet Paul engaged with their beliefs, and used those beliefs as a starting point for the gospel. Paul's approach can greatly encourage us as we endeavour to share the gospel with our friends.

When Paul arrived in Athens he walked around the city and was deeply distressed. He saw a city full of idols. But he took time to see behind the façade, recognising the idols as stark evidence of the deep spiritual hunger of the people around him. He spent time getting familiar with what they valued, worshipped and believed. He even got into their poetry. He then used their world-view and religious ideas as his starting points. He explained the gospel in terms they understood. By starting with concepts they were familiar with, he connected with the people around him.

He then displayed great restraint. How tempting to say, "Well, I'm sorry, but you're wrong" - but instead he opened their minds to the possibility of something unknown to them. Paul contrasted their understanding of God with the truth about the living God, who created the universe. He spoke of a God who can't be contained, who doesn't need us to complete or appease him and yet longs for people to seek Him: a God who is so close, that if we just reached out our hand we would touch Him (Acts 17:27-28). And though he started gently and with great sensitivity, he didn't hold back on the gospel. He spoke candidly of a God who will judge all people, a God who calls on people everywhere to repent (Acts 17:30-31).

Although Paul could see and touch the idols of Athens, the idols of our times are less obvious. An idol is anything that takes God's place. When success, friendship, or the search for love, sex and acceptance displace our search for the living God, then these are our idols.

Our friends know that their friends, sex and shoes are not the answers. They know it because, in real life, our friends fail us. They disappoint and betray us. They may tell us non-stop that we've done nothing wrong, that our lives are fine, but they can't seem to rub out our guilt. Sex promises to meet our deepest needs, to be the ultimate answer, the goal and gauge of relationships. Yet in the hands of selfish people it fails miserably, it leaves us used up and in pain. Relationships are hard work and sometimes don't work. We're drifting and we're not sure where to and we're still restless.

Our conversations with our friends may touch on careers not satisfying, or being too costly; on friends disappointing; on kids being hard work and not turning out right; on partners not understanding or valuing them, or not committing to or forgiving them. These are windows into gospel conversations. They are opportunities to open our friends' minds to the possibility of something unknown to them, to speak of our God, who longs for people to seek Him, who alone can fill those deep places within us, and who alone can blot out our sin and take away our guilt. They are our opportunities to speak with courage the whole of the gospel, not holding back on the hard parts. Our friends desperately need to hear that God will judge them, that Jesus is their only hope.

Paul's example spurs us on to get in touch with what's important to our friends: to watch what they watch, to read what they read, to listen to their music, and to get into their poetry, so we might get their attention when we speak. We might get them thinking about their view of the world and their understanding of God. His example encourages us to think of ways to re-word the gospel, to use poetry and concepts that make sense to our friends.

As we speak God's words, His eternal and powerful words, we need to pray for God to work in the lives of our friends. Pray for a burden to pray for them. Pray for opportunities to proclaim the gospel message with clarity and with words of grace (Colossians 4:2-6).

We need to persevere even when the gospel is rejected, when our friends turn their backs and walk away. If they put their faith in Jesus, we'll become for them a sweet aroma; if they walk away, we'll be like the stench of death (2 Corinthians 2:16). Being caught up in God's work is personal and costly. Sometimes we might wish we could be odourless and somewhere else.

But how amazing that God relies on us so heavily, urges us on in this ministry of telling people they can be

forgiven and reconciled with their Maker. God takes the words we utter and makes His appeal to the world. God's words can change people (they changed us!). And as we tell God's story, as we speak His words, God will bring about His purposes (Isaiah 55:10-11).

God keeps reminding us; He is God of the impossible. He is a God who can open eyes to the truth, and change world-views. He gives us confidence to speak to our friends about our God in a language they understand.

■ *Cath Brown lives in West Brunswick, works part-time as a pastoral worker at Sundays @ 5 at St Jude's, Carlton, and runs a small bookkeeping business. contact: cathyb@eze.com.au*

Often we avoid conversations that allow us to share our faith because we feel ill-equipped and fear failure. The following is an extract of an evangelism training course, "Talking the Walk", which Sue Collier developed for Holy Trinity Anglican Church, Doncaster. It aims to prepare us for those everyday questions.

HANDLING QUESTIONS

- > The first thing to do is hit the emergency button - a prayer of HELP!
- > Remember that your primary task is to witness and many people have become Christians without ever asking any tough questions.
- > It is important to understand the source of the question. Those who are seeking God will accept a clear logical answer and continue on in their journey. Others will raise difficult questions as smoke-screens and are not honest in their questioning so no matter how you answer them they will not be convinced.
- > Never be offended if someone questions your faith but see it as a compliment and an opportunity.
- > Avoid arguments; even if you 'win' the discussion you may have lost further opportunities to witness to that person.
- > Show a positive attitude towards the discussion. After all, a person to whom you have wanted to witness has given you more opportunities.

GUIDELINES FOR ANSWERING QUESTIONS

- > Use the normal societal norms and treat it as any other conversation.
- > Keep the answer brief. Remember that it is not a sermon and you don't need to cover all the bases. In fact, the longer the answer the more likely you are to back yourself into a corner.
- > Show that you are more than happy to discuss such matters.
- > Don't be defensive.
- > If you think of a more appropriate answer "too late" don't be afraid to bring the subject up again: "I was thinking about..."

THE QUESTION BEHIND THE QUESTION

When you are answering questions you need to make sure that you are answering the right question! A question might be:

- > A smokescreen - it hides the real issue.
- > A red herring - the answer has no interest to the person asking the question but they are threatened/they like to be the centre of attention/all their conversations are full of tangents.
- > A genuine question - ensure you answer the question that is asked even though it may not be the one verbalised.
- > A glib easy response to something you have said or done.
- > An argument waiting to happen - this person loves to debate and argue.

When answering questions I always try to keep my aim in mind. How can I encourage this person to take one step closer to understanding and responding to the gospel? This helps me to keep the gospel as the central issue and to remind me that someone's conversion is a process in which I can be privileged to play a small role. Be encouraged to talk the walk!

■ *Sue Collier is the Outreach Coordinator at Holy Trinity Anglican Church, Doncaster and is the secretary of the Evangelism Resource Group. This is an informal sharing and resource group that meets four times a year with the aim of supporting anyone interested or involved in evangelism. To receive an ERG newsletter contact Sue Collier at collierfam@optusnet.com.au*



How does God use our everyday conversations at work?

Pam Morton and Tanya Coleman share their story...

“**Pam:** "Life in the fast lane" seems to have a personal cost, as you juggle the competing demands of family, work and church involvement. With the demands I faced as a wife and mother, in my career, and in church leadership, my life resembled a never-ending "to-do" list - prioritized into "urgent", "important" and "soon to become urgent if overlooked for much longer". No wonder I found it hard to find time to develop new friendships!

Getting to know Tanya has been a real blessing to me, and I would never have anticipated making such a friend from a "work colleague". Whilst our lives are quite different, we have many parallel experiences. The encouragement she has provided to me through her faith, integrity and wisdom has helped me work through some difficult issues. We have had the opportunity to share experiences, and have been encouraged by God's faithfulness and direction in the midst of those challenges.

It has been great to have a friend with whom to share some of the issues raised by teenage children. Tanya is very caring, astute and practical, and has a wonderful sense of humour that helps in every situation. As a professional she is highly regarded and competent, and can go from a medical appointment for one of her children to conducting a professional seminar - as all superwomen can!

Tanya is an exceptional person, and as a Christian woman and a friend, she imparts a grace and encouragement that is very precious.”

“**Tanya:** Pam and I met at work just over two years ago. She was happily married, worked full-time, was raising four kids and was an elder at her church. I admired her. She gave an obvious priority to education, which I also valued. She had a wonderful smile and a warm inclusive manner.

We got to swapping novels and cookbooks. Next it was sharing coffee. Then we found our younger children both adored acting in plays – and candlemaking. She made me laugh! And then I knew for sure that I had been blessed with a new friend.

We really don't know much about each other's past. Our families haven't even met yet. Although we have shared photographs of family weddings and school formals, we haven't yet visited each other's homes.

And yet, I hope we will be friends for life.

We gaze at the world through similar eyes - with the perspective of the saving cross of Jesus. We can speak to each other openly about a wide range of questions and pains knowing that confidences will be kept and encouragement provided. We can be happy for each other. We pray for each other. Her witness to me of faith through trials makes me stronger. Her grace under pressure has been a model for me.

It is an unlikely thing that strangers at the workplace should become friends. But even though Pam has left my workplace, we are meeting for lunch on Friday – and I cannot wait to hear what God has been doing for her and her family!”

evangelism resources...

BY SUE COLLIER

> www.gospelcom.net/guide/resources/angie.php is a site that helps you to write your testimony. An imaginary young woman, Angie, has written her testimony in three different styles:

1. For Christians, as she might tell it in church
2. Completely rewritten for non-Christians
3. Also for non-Christians – but using the style of a magazine feature article

Each style is extensively critiqued and feedback is given so that you reach your target audience. This page is also available as an RTF file for royalty-free print publication and to be downloaded for training purposes. This would be useful in assisting individuals and groups to prepare their testimonies. It could also be used to encourage people to write their testimonies for church papers or magazines in an engaging way.

> www.journeyofjoy.com describes itself as a lifestyle magazine for women. It encourages women to turn their own journey into a journey of joy. It is an interactive web site that takes women on a journey designed to encourage them to consider their relationship with Jesus Christ. It has well-presented testimonies and questions/answers that are thought provoking and encourage a response. It is written and presented in a non-threatening and 'non-churchy' style that makes it accessible for non-Christians and cringe-free for Christians, making it possible to recommend the site with confidence.

> www.powertochange.com has an excellent section of testimonies that cover issues such as alcoholism, cancer, depression, divorce, fear, self-esteem and sexual abuse. It also has a section of tough questions and special features such as 'God & Science Collide.' This site is well presented but is not as accessible for non-Christians. It is an excellent resource though, providing answers to questions. I have downloaded a testimony and passed it on to someone and this was well received. She did look the site up and explore the site further.

> *Evangelism Outside the Box: New ways to help people experience the Good News* (2000) IVP by Rick Richardson, introduces us to a fresh, simple and effective evangelism tool. Richardson argues that traditional models of evangelism don't work and he helps us get "outside the box" of familiar ways of thinking and communicating that just aren't effective. The book is full of engaging stories, an appendix of evangelism resources and ideas and it includes a chapter addressed directly to non-believers.

Stranger Evangelism

BY HELEN BELL

When you hear the phrase "stranger evangelism" what springs to mind? Bible-bashing? Fear? A man with a sandwich board which says "Repent for the end is nigh"? I suspect the images are not overwhelmingly positive. So it is with trepidation that I confess I sometimes engage in stranger evangelism. "Stranger evangelism", "cold-turkey evangelism", "door-knocking" - call it what you will - I do it. I approach people I have never met before with the intention of introducing them to Jesus and encouraging them to follow him.

I wouldn't say I enjoy it. I get nervous and pray like crazy before I do it. Trying to make connections with people I don't know is just plain hard work. When you don't know whether people will react positively or negatively, initiating conversations is emotionally draining. I have encountered hostility because of earlier bad experiences with Christians and I don't enjoy people actively avoiding me or making fun of me. But I persevere because I am convinced God uses stranger evangelism to build his kingdom. Here are a few reasons.

"The gospel is the power of God for the salvation of all who believe"
(Romans 1:16)

"How can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them?" (Romans 10:14). The message of the cross brings eternal life, yet so few people know it. Most people I meet think they know what it means to be a Christian but few actually do. So if I achieve nothing else, hopefully I leave the people I speak to with a better understanding of salvation through Christ.

The early church did a lot of it and it worked for them.

The book of Acts is peppered with people doing stranger evangelism. Peter, Paul, Priscilla, Apollos and others did it in synagogues, market places and the countryside, walking the streets of Jerusalem, Rome and beyond.

God still seems to use stranger evangelism today.

The thing that convinced me that this type of evangelism is worth doing was meeting someone who became a Christian because of it. While it wasn't the only thing that brought her to Christ, it was an important part of the chain of events.

There are people who are just waiting to hear our message.

The message that we take for granted brings joy and hope to people living in a world of suffering and frustration. A friend of mine tells the story of a woman she met at a shopping centre. The woman invited my friend back to her home and insisted that some of her neighbours join the conversation because she was so excited about what she was hearing.

I'm meant to be ready to take up evangelistic opportunities.

I don't think I've got the gift of evangelism (Ephesians 4:13) but there always seem to be opportunities to evangelise that I believe God wants me to take up. Setting aside a time and location to seek opportunities to talk about Jesus is only a small step away from this.

It's easier than I thought it would be.

It's a bit like removing a band-aid. The thought is often worse than the reality. I'm continually surprised at how many people are willing to talk with me when I walk up to them and say, "Hi, my name's Helen and I'm talking with people about who Jesus is. Interested in a chat?" Sometimes evangelising strangers is easier than evangelising my friends.

Despite my commitment, I know I need to be very careful about how I go about doing stranger evangelism because I've seen it done badly.

Peter tells me to proclaim my message with gentleness and respect (1 Peter 3:15-16). So I don't begin my conversations with "turn or burn". I try to talk to people when they are not particularly busy and stressed. I'm more likely to talk with people relaxing during their lunch break rather than harass them at 9:05am when they are already late for work. And I'm upfront about what I'm doing so that if they are not interested I can get out of their faces.

I've also made sure that I'm able to explain the basics of Christianity in a couple of minutes. I found this surprisingly difficult at first. So I got together with a couple of friends and we practised until we could do a decent job of it. Now, whether I go door knocking or just get into a discussion with the person sitting next to me on a bus, I've got something useful to say.

I chatted with a taxi-driver on my way to the airport the other day. He expressed surprise that anyone under 85 went to church regularly. This led to a conversation about what I believed and why. I may never see him again. Then again, he might become a Christian and I might spend eternity with him in heaven.

If you run into him, maybe you could take up where I left off.

■ Helen Bell works for the Australian Fellowship of Evangelical Students (AFES) at LaTrobe University and attends Bundoora Presbyterian Church. She owns a spectacular pair of purple suede knee-high boots.

FILM REVIEW: *SPIDERMAN*

BY KYLIE McLACHLAN

The allure of superhero movies is the escapism: that dream and hope of being someone else. Someone else who can do all the things we want to. *Spiderman* takes us back to our childhood where our play was not limited by realism. As we would expect from a big budget blockbuster, his acrobatic, web spinning, flying-through-the-air antics certainly provide plenty of action and drama. More important, however, is the kind of hero Peter Parker is – one we can relate to.

Most of us can relate to being an unsure teenager, feeling awkward and insecure, perhaps yearning after someone. Wanting desperately to be respected, to be someone better. We find Peter Parker in this familiar territory, but then watch as he discovers that he has been transformed into someone else. Someone who can climb walls and shoot webs from his wrists and do all those spidery kind of things. One of the film's charms is watching Peter explore his new powers (his first costume is memorable!) The spectacular action scenes are all the more enjoyable knowing how his skills have improved. But along with his physical prowess the film explores Peter's maturing as he comes to grips with the responsibility that his new powers bring.

Spiderman is a multi-million dollar Hollywood blockbuster, and it has the usual theme of good triumphing over evil. But it has more depth to it than many of this genre. It touches on issues such as the manipulative power of the media, and the corruption that power can

bring, even if it's all slightly over the top. Where the film fails is where many of its contemporaries do – in its treatment of women. Like many other superheroes, Spiderman demonstrates his prowess by coming to the rescue of hapless females who can't seem to avoid trouble. Despite appearing feisty and independent – think Lois Lane, think Mary Jane – in the end they all need rescuing.

Spiderman's chief theme however – that of the responsibility power brings - is one that is sympathetic to a Christian worldview. As Christians we are told by Jesus that to whom much has been given, much will be expected; that extra gifts and talents should be used responsibly and well (Mt 25:14-30). Peter's initial reaction to discovering his new powers is understandable – he uses his abilities to earn money in order to impress his unrequited love, Mary Jane. After a harsh lesson, however, he decides to use his power for higher purposes. He takes on board the advice of his Uncle Ben - "with power comes responsibility". This knowledge is heavy on Peter Parker's heart as the film reaches its bittersweet ending.

As far as superhero role models go, Spiderman is one I would be happy for kids to admire. He is gracious to his friends - and even his enemies in some ways - is devoted to his aunt and uncle, and is more earnest and humble than smooth and suave. Superheroes are often portrayed as modern day saviours – the underlying assumption is that we both need a saviour and are lacking one. We need to remember that while we agree with the imperfect condition of our world, there is a real saviour for us in Jesus. And he can do more than shoot webs from his wrists!

■ *Kylie McLachlan is a medical researcher and amateur film buff. She attends St Jude's Anglican Church, Carlton. contact: kylie.mcbylie@hotmail.com*

STARTING POINT

Tony Abbott recently stated, "If we're honest, most of us would accept that a bad boss is a little bit like a bad father or a bad husband – notwithstanding all of his faults you find he tends to do more good than harm. He might be a bad boss but at least he's employing someone while he is in fact a boss."

This statement raises a number of issues for women in the workforce. Aside from assuming that bosses are probably male, to women it says that they should be grateful for a job, and not worry if their boss yells at them or harasses them, sexually or otherwise. That any employee 'at least' has a job may be a good thing – especially for the government, whose unemployment statistics therefore look good – but it disregards quality of life.

I work in the Human Resources area, and we are constantly trying to find ways to help managers deal appropriately with their staff: helping them to be good bosses rather than bad ones. Like 'a bad father' or 'a bad husband', problems usually come down to three things: lack of communication skills; inappropriate use of power (e.g. bullying); and unrealistic expectations (e.g. excessive workload).

We live in a fallen world. This is a fact. People will continue to act contrary to God's desires until Christ returns in glory. I don't think we have to accept this, and just watch complacently. Personally, I think we should be striving toward the behaviour God wants. This means acting in a just and fair way, and encouraging everyone else – bosses, and fathers and husbands – to do the same: treat people as having been created in God's image and thus deserving of dignity.

Alex Pierce is married, attends the Unichurch congregation at St Jude's Anglican Church, Carlton, and works in the Victorian Public Service. contact: alex.pierce@bigpond.com