

A photograph of two women embracing warmly outdoors. The woman on the left has long, curly red hair and is wearing a brown leather jacket over a red top. The woman on the right has long, wavy blonde hair and is wearing a blue denim jacket. They are standing in front of a modern building with large windows and columns. The text 'The Big Welcome' is overlaid in a white, cursive font.

The Big Welcome



A chance
to discover





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A person is seen from the side, looking out at a sunset or sunrise over a body of water. The sky is filled with warm, orange and yellow light, and the water reflects the light. The person is wearing a dark, textured sweater.

This small booklet aims to provide some fantastic news for people like us! In a world which is so full of negatives and bad stuff, THE BIG WELCOME will attempt to lift your spirits and help you find answers for some of the questions which we all have at points in our lives, questions such as:

- **Who am I, really?**
- **Is there a true purpose for my life?**
- **Will it all make sense one day?**





People who have encountered God believe that they have found a way through on much of this. So here's some good news:

Someone Special!

When you were a small child, did you ever think that in reality you were, or would become someone very unique and important, but others around you just didn't realise it? (Don't worry if this never crossed your mind, but it is remarkable how many people did!).

A friend named Laura has a young daughter, Sophie. One evening, Sophie was snuggled up in bed with her teddy... wearing sunglasses! When Laura asked her why she was wearing sunglasses in the dark she replied "Because I'm a rockstar!"

You have potential

Not one person is without potential, or importance within the eyes of God. God looks beyond the view we have of ourselves, and even our achievements and maybe failures. God sees the potential for far more than we can even begin to imagine and that is what God's dream for us is. What is God's agenda? That we each reach our full potential as we invite him to do amazing things in and through our lives. (The Bible - Luke 1:37, Ephesians 3:20)



You are unique

No one has come from a production line; we are all individuals. Often, though, we feel that we are being treated as 'one of many'. God does not do that. God knows you, and respects you as an individual. He loves you so much, and longs to have a personal relationship with you, You are wonderfully and uniquely made - and that matters to God. (The Bible - Psalm 139:13-14)

You are known

You may feel that you are invisible, unknown and unimportant. What about if you discovered that your Creator not only knows everything about you, but to him you are also very precious?

“Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground outside your Father's care. And even the very hairs of your head are all numbered. So don't be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows.

The Bible - Matthew 10:29-31 (NIV)

”

You are wanted

How much do you feel you are worth? £10? £50? £1m? Well whatever price you have come up with, God will outbid you. If you feel worthless, God says you are worth all. In fact God says you are worth dying for! God loves you so much, he gave his very self. And better still, God is not standing there condemning you with a big stick – no, he is standing with open arms, looking forward to the beginning of a relationship where you really matter. (The Bible - John 3:16-17)



Something More!

Sometimes, it's difficult to see yourself as anything other than a meaningless blob of protoplasm drifting through life. After all, if there is no 'Big Story' which makes sense out of everything we experience and go through, then, what's it all about?

So, we get up in the morning and go to work so that we can earn money. We use the money to help us stay alive (food, shelter, clothes, etc.). Having stayed alive, we then go to bed. The next morning we get up and go to work so that we can earn money... and so it goes on...

You, like so many of us, have probably thought or said at some time "There must be more than this!". A thrash metal band called Cerebral Fix released an album in the late 1980s with the title '*Life Sucks...And Then You Die!*'. Many years later, the album title has since become a mantra for many twenty-first century people. No sense, no meaning, no ultimate purpose... just existence with the occasional episodes of happiness thrown in.

Is that really it? The most famous person who has ever lived claimed that he could change all that.

“ Jesus once again addressed them: “I am the world’s Light. No one who follows me stumbles around in the darkness. I provide plenty of light to live in.”

The Bible - John 8:12

I came so they can have real and eternal life, more and better life than they ever dreamed of.

The Bible - John 10:10”

Question:

*What if Jesus
was Right?*

Somewhere to Belong!

Just about 400 years ago, John Donne penned the immortal phrase, "No man is an island... entire of itself." The problem is that in today's world we tend to live our lives more isolated from each other than ever before.

So many of us are looking to find a context where we are accepted, respected and included. Wouldn't it be tremendous to belong to a community where we didn't have to hide who we really are, a place where we could care for others and receive care ourselves?

Well, this may come as a shock to some (particularly if you have endured bad or boring religious services!), but when church functions well, it is this kind of community!





Think about it:

If God becomes your Father, then you are part of His family and any decently functioning family gets together from time to time.

Large parts of the population believe that 'church' is only what happens in a special building on a Sunday morning or evening for an hour or so. But what about eating together? Celebrating together? Playing sport together? Going to the cinema together? Serving the wider community together? The list could go on...

Oh, and if you haven't already discovered a church where the 'Sunday bit' is relevant, thought-provoking, energised and life-transforming, they do exist in large numbers out there!



The Big Welcome Story



**A chance
to discover**

Take a moment to read this astonishing and moving story told by Jesus:

A man had two sons. The younger son told his father, “I want my share of your estate now before you die.” So his father agreed to divide his wealth between his sons.

A few days later this younger son packed all his belongings and moved to a distant land, and there he wasted all his money in wild living. About the time his money ran out, a great famine swept over the land, and he began to starve. He persuaded a local farmer to hire him, and the man sent him into his fields to feed the pigs. The young man became so hungry that even the pods he was feeding the pigs looked good to him. But no one gave him anything.

When he finally came to his senses, he said to himself, "At home even the hired servants have food enough to spare, and here I am dying of hunger! I will go home to my father and say, "Father, I have done wrong against both heaven and you, and I am no longer worthy of being called your son. Please take me on as a hired servant."



So he returned home to his father. And while he was still a long way off, his father saw him coming. Filled with love and compassion, he ran to his son, embraced him, and kissed him. His son said to him, "Father, I have done wrong against both heaven and you, and I am no longer worthy of being called your son."

But his father said to the servants, "Quick! Bring the finest robe in the house and put it on him. Get a ring for his finger and sandals for his feet. And kill the calf we have been fattening. We must celebrate with a feast, for this son of mine was dead and has now returned to life. He was lost, but now he is found." So the party began.

The Bible - Luke 15:11-24 (NLT)





It's a powerful story which traditionally has been known as 'the parable of the prodigal son' but could equally be called 'the parable of the loving father'. In reality, it's the story of each one of our lives and our relationship, or non-relationship, with God. Here's the story unpacked:

Going Away

This boy ran away from home. Home was a place where he was loved and accepted, where he could enjoy the closest of relationships. But the temptation to please himself and misuse the gift his dad had given him was just too great. Many of us feel that we too have gone away and found ourselves separated from our loving Heavenly Father.

In a Mess

Now he was in "a distant land", far away from home. The money ran out and so did his so-called friends. Things became so bad that he became an old-fashioned swineherd, eating pig food for breakfast, lunch and dinner.



Coming Home

Jesus said that the son '...finally came to his senses...' Has that happened to you? It's like a wake up call when you realise that you are not where you're supposed to be and you're not being the person you were made to be. Things are not OK. In fact they are a mess!

In the story, the young man feels he only has one option, which is to return home, be honest with his dad, take responsibility, apologise profusely and hope that there might be a job going on the estate.



The Big Welcome!

What a shock! Instead of being condemned by his father, or forced into some manual labouring job, a party is thrown for the returning son! All dad needed to know was that his son wanted to come home. The dirty clothes are replaced with a fresh, clean wardrobe and a ring signifying belonging is placed on his finger.

The underlying message, which you may already have worked out, is that when we come back to our Father in Heaven in a transparent, honest way, he can't wait to forgive us, remove our shame and include us into His family!

Experiencing God's Big Welcome

If you are ready to take a step of faith and respond with a 'Big Yes' to God's Big Welcome, here are the words of a prayer which you can say to Him:

Dear God, thank you for caring about me as a great father cares for his own child.

Today I want to say that I am so sorry for going my own way.


As you have welcomed me, I now welcome you into my life.

I invite you, God, to live in me through your Holy Spirit.

Bring your forgiveness; bring your love; bring your power to transform me.

Help me from now on to follow Jesus in all that I am and all that I do.

Amen

A blue-tinted landscape photograph showing a field of tall grass in the foreground, with rolling hills and mountains in the distance under a cloudy sky.

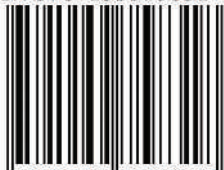
If you want to find out more about
The Big Welcome, please talk
with the person who gave you this
booklet, or look at:

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