

A SURPRISING GOOD

HOPE for all



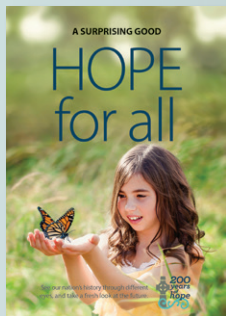
See our nation's history through different eyes, and take a fresh look at the future.



A diverse group of churches from throughout New Zealand have come together to give this booklet to every home. It contains remarkable stories from our nation's early bicultural past. It highlights the message that is still changing hearts and lives two centuries later... it's a story of hope.

Since Jesus lived on Earth, his teachings have been transforming our world in more ways than we can possibly imagine.

In this tenth 'Hope for all' booklet, we look at some of the surprising ways that faith brings hope in times of darkness.



"This means that anyone who belongs to Christ has become a new person. The old life is gone; a new life has begun!"

2 Corinthians 5:17 (NLT)
In the Bible

STORIES OF HOPE FROM THEN AND NOW



Celebrating 200 years of the Christian message in Aotearoa

Anna's story

Surprises on the path to freedom

Born into a large family, Anna's life changed forever when a family friend abused her from ages six to ten. Approaching her teens she began to feel angry and anxious — and rebelled. Disrespecting her parents, she left home when young, and at first avoided family gatherings because they felt fake.

Later, following marriage and the birth of a daughter, she avoided them because they felt unsafe.

Then something unexpected happened: she and her husband became connected to a church. There she became aware of and experienced God's great love for her. Religious words that once seemed empty took on a new life. She realised that, just as God had forgiven her when she hadn't deserved it, it was right that she now forgive others even if they didn't deserve it. But that would mean bringing a long-kept secret to light.

What Anna didn't expect was that God was giving her the strength to do this. As she chose to forgive, she found that the person she was setting free was herself. This gave her confidence to do something she'd never imagined she would — contacting her parents and the abuser. While she'd forgiven the abuser in her heart, and this wasn't about revenge, she felt it needed bringing to the light.

The initial reaction was not good. Some family members were even angry, but she discovered they had their own reasons. She wasn't the only one who'd suffered abuse. While it was a messy process, bringing it to light enabled action and accountability, to break the cycle!

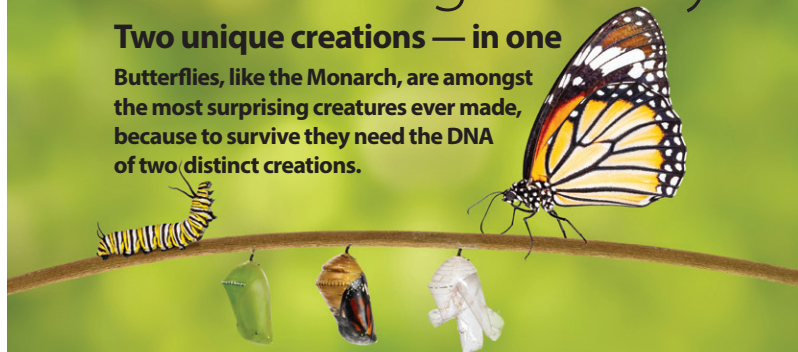
Today Anna feels much happier about joining family events. But more than that, she is free from the anxiety that once plagued her. No amount of anger thrown at her abuser would ever have achieved that. God's love enabled her to forgive. It set her free!

**Hear Anna telling her own story at
HopeProject.co.nz/stories**

The amazing butterfly

Two unique creations — in one

Butterflies, like the Monarch, are amongst the most surprising creatures ever made, because to survive they need the DNA of two distinct creations.



Step 1: Loaded with information, the small egg turns into a caterpillar with vital organs, skin, digestive systems and more — but with no ability to reproduce. It would be immediately extinct if not for some extravagant design.

Step 2: Having grown 2500 times in size, the caterpillar creates a chrysalis within which it mostly dissolves, *to morph into an entirely different creature*. 16 legs become 6 on the butterfly — with a different mouth, food and digestive system. Light as a feather it can now fly, mate and lay eggs!

Step 3: In the Americas the butterflies migrate 5000 km to feed — each living for about four weeks. Then as winter approaches a single butterfly lives for about five months. Using a complex navigation system it flies to lay eggs in the very same grove of trees as its distant ancestor the prior winter.

The process reflects remarkable design — without which the Monarch wouldn't exist!

Christians believe that, just like the butterfly, we have been created with remarkable care, and for a reason.

The friendship of Ruatara and Marsden

A surprising history

The young Ruatara was Māori royalty. He had first met the church minister Samuel Marsden in 1806, but it was his trip back from England in 1809 that cemented their friendship. Ruatara had visited London to establish foundations for future relationships between Māori and the British royalty. However, in those times ships' captains could be cruel, and they had little regard for the law. Having sailed halfway around the world with the hope of meeting King George III, the young chief was laughed at by sailors and locked in the bow of a ship. To add insult to injury, he was denied access to England and not paid his wages for working on the ship. Becoming seriously ill with tuberculosis, he was then moved to the bows of a convict ship heading back to Australia.

Samuel Marsden was on that same ship, returning to Australia. Taking a look around the ship he discovered Ruatara and took him to his private room with his family. They nursed him back to health. This act of kindness is still remembered by Ngāti Torehina with tears of gratitude. It established a friendship with surprising outcomes.

In Australia Ruatara spent eight more months with Marsden's family, and many more on later visits. Ruatara was watching what Marsden was like.



Here was a man with characteristics he'd seen in other Christians who sincerely tried to follow the teachings of Jesus. Here was a breed of Pākehā unlike the whalers, sealers and traders in New Zealand, who were often cruel and disrespectful toward Māori.



AN INVITATION

Ruatara decided to invite Marsden to come to New Zealand and bring the message about God's love shown through Jesus. He also wanted him to establish a mission base from which he would teach skills and impart knowledge. In 1814 Ruatara sailed to Australia along with chiefs Hongi Hika and Korokoro to accompany Marsden on the return sailing. Together, along with three missionary families (the Kings, Kendalls and Halls), they arrived at Ruatara's Pā — Rangihoua¹ — on 22 December 1814. This resulted in the first invited Pākehā settlement.

THE FIRST NEW ZEALAND CHRISTMAS

On their first Sunday together in New Zealand, Ruatara invited Marsden to conduct a church service. He built a makeshift pulpit and arranged some old waka as seating. This resulted in the first-ever church service amongst Māori in New Zealand. And quite poetically it was Christmas day!

A crowd of about 400 Māori gathered — and as it was Christmas day Marsden naturally talked about the Christian

belief that the great Creator God is good and has made himself known to humanity through Jesus. Ruatara explained what was said and Māori then performed a haka as an extension of their welcome and to honour the occasion.

A NEW HOPE

Ruatara and Marsden had united in a vision of prosperity for all — as reflected in their friendship. It was a vision based on the principles of mutual aroha, trust, kindness and faith. Māori were spiritual people and were rich in history, intellect and resources. They were keen to learn. The missionary families were equally eager to learn and to share. As a result Rangihoua became a place for many firsts, including the first school for Māori and Pākehā boys and girls, the first horse to arrive in New Zealand, the first farming of new crops such as wheat and maize, the first farming of sheep and cattle and the introduction of carpentry and metalwork skills. Māori and missionary also learnt each other's language because of this shared vision of a better future.

It was a significant and surprisingly positive time, well before the signing of Te Tiriti, and is fondly remembered by Ngāti Tōrehina and many others to this day.

What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if someone claims to have faith but has no deeds? ... Suppose a brother or a sister is without clothes and daily food. If one of you says to them, "Go in peace; keep warm and well fed," but does nothing about their physical needs, what good is it? In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead. — James 2:14-17 in the Bible

Thanks to Herb Rihari and Te Hurihanga Rihari of Ngāti Tōrehina for their telling of this story.

¹ Now known as Oihi Bay, located about 30 minutes' drive East from Kerikeri

Matt's story

An outcome he never imagined

While he was always loved by his parents, young Matt developed a sense of rejection due to his being adopted, and when his adoptive parents separated the anger really surfaced. While good at sports, he was kicked off the team for violence. After leaving school he started using drugs, fathered a child, and was in the courts for his violence. Violence became a feature of his life.

Then a pregnant girlfriend who he had violently assaulted pressed charges, which he openly admits he deserved.

One evening, while awaiting sentence at a Christian-based drug rehabilitation centre, he found himself sitting in on a church's music practice. There he sensed God's presence,



and decided to ask God for help. His life immediately and remarkably began to change.

Sentenced to over two years in prison he had an immediate sense of God's comfort. "If God can be with me like this through my prison sentence", he thought, "I know I'm going to be fine!"

In prison Matt re-evaluated his life. Joining weekly Bible studies, he made choices to change, and has been free from the drugs and the violence ever since. However, he also had a new son he'd never met and a restraining order had been made against him. Once out he looked to God, accepted his situation, found a job and began building a new life.

It was then that something unexpected happened. Unknown to Matt, his ex-partner had also connected with the Christian faith. Against all expectations she contacted Matt, and with supervision in place they met. What happened next astounded him.

His ex-partner not only forgave him for his past, but seeing changes in his life also gave him a chance he didn't deserve. In a surprising turn of events they later married and 15 years later they have six children. Their experiences have also positioned them to help others — and this is what they've since chosen to give their lives to.

While our wrongs have natural and fair consequences in this life, God can still do the unexpected. While there are things that cannot be fixed in this life, with God there is always hope!

Hear Matt telling his own story at
HopeProject.co.nz/stories

FROM THE BIBLE:

God can do unexpected things

(What Christians believe)

At every level, who Jesus is and what he did are surprising.

The Bible says that about 2020 years ago, in a time of important people like Tiberius Caesar, Pontius Pilate and King Herod, the message of God came to none of these (Luke 3), but instead to a humble man known as John the Baptist who lived in a desert in Israel.

John was given surprising news: that God was to visit Earth in human form, but he wouldn't defeat their Roman occupiers as expected. He'd instead live a life of love and service to others without ever using power to dominate. God was about to model how he wanted us to live — even to the point of allowing people to kill him!

God then arrived — but not as a king in a palace. He visited as baby Jesus born in a barn (Luke 2)! *So what is God actually like?*

While God is *powerful* enough to make the world, *intelligent* enough to make the butterfly, and *good and just* enough to see that all wrongs are eventually punished ... his visit in Jesus showed that he is also *incomprehensibly humble and loving!*



God's love opens a door to hope

Like in Matt's story, God wants to give us all an unexpected second chance. Christians believe God came in Jesus because each one of us had already messed up. Because of love, the punishment we rightly deserve was voluntarily taken by Jesus on the cross and through the grave prior to his resurrection. Our forgiveness is therefore possible if we'll turn to God to ask his forgiveness and follow him. Jesus paid a debt we could never repay — but the choice remains ours.

At the very beginning of Jesus' ministry he *went into Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God. "The time has come," he said. "The kingdom of God has come near. Repent [turn] and believe the good news!"* (Mark 1:14-15).

It's a surprisingly generous message.

Everlasting hope is offered to all — affecting the present and the future, and as many can testify, it's surprisingly good.

Thanks for reading.

There is an optional prayer on the next page.

A PERSONAL PRAYER

“

God, our Creator, in spite of any and all wrongs I have ever done, I thank you for loving me, for providing for my needs and for giving me life.

I thank you, Jesus, for taking my punishment when you died, and for then coming back to life to invite me into an eternal friendship with you. Today I choose that friendship.

Please forgive me for the selfish and wrong things I have done.

Please help me to understand the Bible, to find friends for this new journey and to love others as you have loved me — for I know this is what you want.

Thank you.

”

SOME OPTIONS FOR YOU:

1 Investigate WHY many believe this faith to be true

See a seven-part video series (with PDF booklet options) free online at WhyChristiansBelieve.nz



2 Investigate WHAT the Christian belief and life involves

The Alpha Course – interactive sessions exploring life, faith and meaning with others. To find a course near you or join one online, see alpha.org.nz/try-alpha



The 10 Day Challenge – a simple online introduction to the Christian faith. See 10DayChallenge.co.nz or search for it under 'Plans' in the YouVersion Bible app.



3 Visit a church near you

Find one on the map at: 10DayChallenge.co.nz/churches

4 Start reading a Bible

Download a Bible app like the one at YouVersion.com/the-bible-app

OR ask for a hardcopy of the New Testament about Jesus, via admin@hopeproject.co.nz or write to Hope Project, PO Box 6078, Brookfield, Tauranga 3146.



5 View personal hope stories

HopeProject.co.nz/stories
Facebook.com/HopeProjectNZ
Instagram.com/HopeProjectNZ



HopeProject
.co.nz

10DayChallenge.co.nz

Supported by a diverse group of Christian churches throughout New Zealand, who came together to commemorate the 200-year anniversary of the arrival of Christianity in New Zealand and the beginning of a 'hope-filled' bicultural partnership with Māori.

In this spirit, let's make New Zealand a more hope-filled place.