

LIFE BEYOND LIMITATIONS

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 has come together to give this booklet to every home. It contains remarkable stories from our nation's past and present. It highlights a message that is still changing hearts and lives — and it is a story of hope.

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

In this eleventh booklet, we look at how faith can help people find courage to live beyond their limitations.



“For in this hope we were saved. But hope that is seen is no hope at all. Who hopes for what they already have? But if we hope for what we do not yet have, we wait for it patiently.”

Romans 8:24-25

In the Bible

STORIES OF HOPE FROM THEN AND NOW



Celebrating 200 years of
the Christian message
in Aotearoa

Emma and her Island of Misfits

We all live with limitations — some are visible and others hidden. For some, they are emotional; for others, physical. For Emma, they are neurological.

Even as a young child, Emma knew she was different...

Diagnosed with autism — and later with ADHD — the personal and social implications hit home during Emma's teen years. *Who am I? Why do I sometimes struggle to connect with people? Am I worthy of love?* While always loved and accepted at home, she still needed to learn to accept herself.

Choosing a life of trust in God, Emma realised God didn't make mistakes — so she was created with purpose. This also gave her a rational basis for believing in the value of all people, regardless of any perceived limitation. While her brain might work differently, this could come with strengths. With confidence growing that God loved her as she was, a new desire to show that same love to others began to grow.

She thought of all the young people like her — quietly living with their own perceived limitations, pondering their identity, seeking peace, searching for hope. What could she do? Her answer was to start a support group called the *Island of Misfits*. Meeting weekly, the group offers those who, like her, are neurodivergent a place to belong and be accepted.

Emma is far from alone in her journey. Around 17% of New Zealanders live with disability. Yet if people are created by God, then every person is worthy of protection, dignity, and love — no matter their limitation. This spiritual belief is where our national value-system came from. A person's worth is not measured by their performance or value in our eyes, but by who they are to God.

For Emma, this awareness brought self-confidence — and then the desire to live for others.

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

DNA – you are amazing

While some have compared the information in a DNA molecule to a lengthy encyclopaedia series, the reality is far greater.

More complex than any software ever created, DNA reflects an extraordinary intelligence. Even if you wrote 1,000 letters per page, 1,000 pages per book, stacked 1,000 books high, you still wouldn't be even close to it. As Biophysicist Dean Kenyon points out, it is also *"the most efficient information storage system in the known universe."*

Consider this: Your body contains 23 pairs of DNA molecules in each of its 50 trillion cells. If every DNA strand in your body were stretched out end to end, they would reach to the moon and back more than 100,000 times.

The International Space Station is often described as the most complicated thing humans have built, including both hardware and software. Even the simplest living cell is far more complex. Then consider that an unborn child's body creates tens of thousands of new cells *every minute* as it develops.

You are incredible. You have been designed with care — and the Christian faith teaches that you were also created with love.



A culture of care

Our story

We are all likely at some point to be limited by some form of illness, injury, disease or disability¹. 850,000 New Zealanders are affected by a disability. Yet while human limitations are not rare in history, a culture of compassion and care is.

What made our nation so charitable? Here's a dozen short stories to paint a picture.

¹ stats.govt.nz/topics/disability

WHY EVERY HUMAN LIFE MATTERS

In the Roman Empire, about one-quarter of people were slaves. Allowing unwanted babies to die was a common practice, and places of charitable care for the sick didn't yet exist. Those with money paid for treatment in their homes while everyone else went without.



Rome did sometimes provide care for wounded soldiers, but the motive was so they could live to fight and die another day, not compassion.

Why does our culture think so differently today? Our ancestors embraced the idea that all people were created in the image of God, having a unique consciousness, free will, moral ability and

capacity to love.² This belief is the seed from which our culture of care grew, later also shaping our systems of government and law.

A NEW CULTURE OF CARE

Jesus turned normal earthly values upside down. He taught that the greatest one in society was not the ruler, but the servant. He said it is better to give than to receive. He showed that spiritual things, which last forever, are more important than temporary things — while the true way to thank God for his love is by showing love and care to the poor.³



Some early Christians began to buy slaves in order to set them free. They took in orphans and widows — even selling their own properties to help meet the needs of others.



INVENTING THE HOSPITAL

250 years later, when the Roman persecution of Christians ended, church leaders could finally meet without fear of arrest. At a gathering in AD 325 in Nicaea (north-western Turkey), a leader named Gregory of Nyssa declared that, because people with leprosy

² Genesis 1:27.

³ Matthew 22:36-40, Matthew 25:31-46.

were also made in the image of God, they should be cared for. It was agreed that places of care be established wherever the Christian faith spread.

Later that century, Basil of Caesarea was credited with founding the first large-scale Christian hospital in the Middle East. It reportedly had as many wards as there were diseases to treat, resembling a small township — including a leper colony. Around AD 400, Fabiola, a wealthy Christian woman, built what is considered the first similar hospital in the Western world in Rome.



By the 1800s, Christian workers were constructing tens of thousands of hospitals, even in the remotest parts of the world.

SOME EXAMPLES: EDUCATION FOR PEOPLE WHO ARE BLIND

In the 1800s, boys born blind who weren't abandoned or

killed at birth (infanticide) were sometimes forced to work as galley slaves on ships. Many girls born blind who survived were trapped in prostitution. Who would think to rescue them? Only someone whose deepest beliefs affirmed their value. Louis Braille (1809–1852), a blind church organist, changed their story.



Motivated by his belief in God's love, he invented the six-dot system for embossing the alphabet's letters — known as braille.

EDUCATION FOR PEOPLE WHO ARE DEAF

Those with significant hearing loss often faced a similar fate. Who would sacrifice their freedom and wealth to help? Formal education for the deaf began with a priest in Paris named Charles-Michel de l'Épée (1712–1789). In 1754, he founded the world's first public school for the deaf.



HELP FOR PEOPLE WITH LEPROSY



Before effective medicines, leprosy was greatly feared because it was contagious. It destroys nerve endings, weakens muscles, and causes paralysis. Jesus, however, showed compassion to those with leprosy — even touching them. Following his example, Christians offered widespread care, often at great personal cost.

Risking all to care for those with leprosy



Mary Reed was born in the USA in 1854. Choosing a life of Christian mission work in India, she encountered many people with leprosy and began to help them.

Having returned to the USA due to illness, she discovered she had contracted leprosy. Mary immediately went back to India to serve at a mission caring for people with leprosy in the Himalayan foothills. Miraculously, her disease went into remission for several decades. By the time it returned, modern medicines were available to manage it. Mary served faithfully until health and blindness forced her to retire in 1938. She died five years later, aged 89 — still in India.



Damien de Veuster left farming to become a Catholic priest, serving in the Pacific Islands. At that time, leprosy was widespread. He asked to serve at a leper colony on the isolated peninsula of Moloka'i, Hawaii. Arriving on a one-way trip in 1873 with newly admitted patients, he was quickly overwhelmed by the terrible conditions. The suffering of the 2,000 men and women was made worse by widespread drunkenness and lawlessness.

Damien cleaned and built houses, created the first water supply directly to the village, and organised general care. He established a dump and a cemetery — but equally important, he preached about a God of love who can offer an eternal hope beyond our sufferings. Residents began to find motivation to live differently.

The colony was transformed — while Damien contracted leprosy. He died 16 years after his arrival, still living among those he served.

Why sacrifice everything to help strangers?

This sacrifice only makes sense if we believe all people are made in the image of God — and that our actions can echo beyond this life. New Zealand's Bill of Rights is founded on this assumption of inherent human value. The American Constitution and the UN Declaration of Human Rights are built upon the same, reflected in words like "self-evident," "created," "inherent dignity," and "equal and inalienable rights."

This idea of human value is otherwise far from self-evident if we are merely the result of accidental chemical chance, or oddities in an unguided universe.

Beliefs lead to behaviour, and we benefit from the outcomes of these beliefs among our cultural ancestors every single day.



Octavius Hadfield —

So sick he might as well die here!

Young and sickly, Octavius Hadfield (1814–1904) argued to be accepted as a missionary: *"If I'm going to die young, I may as well die doing good."* He arrived in New Zealand in 1838.

Te Rauparaha had requested a missionary for the Kāpiti Coast. Through a damaged copy of Luke's Gospel, the Christian message of love and forgiveness — even towards enemies — had reached his people. They were intrigued and saw the benefits.



Thanks to Dave Hadfield, and to Rev Dr Bruce Patrick for help with this story.

Image: Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, New Zealand. Ref: 1/4-006488-G.

Reverend Octavius Hadfield. Harding, William James, 1826-1899: Negatives of Wanganui district.

In late 1839, single and just 25, Hadfield relocated to the Kāpiti Coast. He soon also became a close friend and Christian brother of Te Ātiawa chief Wiremu Kingi Te Rangitāke.⁴ Radically, Hadfield chose to live among Te Ātiawa inside Kenakena Pā, in a dirt-floor raupō hut. Often unwell, he endured poor diet, constant noise, cold, mosquitoes, and fleas. Yet his Christian message, combined with his sacrificial lifestyle, earned him great respect and influence.

When Hadfield's health failed in 1845, Māori carried him to Wellington to be nursed — expecting him to die. There for over four years, both Māori and Pākehā leaders sought his counsel. Fluent in Te Reo Māori and knowledgeable in tikanga Māori, Hadfield negotiated justice when tensions were high. Successive governors acknowledged that he maintained peace where few others could.

Unexpectedly, in 1849 he revived and returned to the coast. In 1860, Governor Thomas Gore Browne, who had promised Hadfield he would never seize disputed land by force, drove Te Ātiawa off their ancestral land at Waitara, sparking the first Land War. Hadfield campaigned tirelessly for justice in defence of Kingi, writing to newspapers and officials both in New Zealand and England. He succeeded in having Browne recalled — though, tragically, Māori still lost their land.

To make a long story short, the sickly Hadfield lived to the age of 90.

His life reminds us that our limitations don't have to hold us back, while great love can motivate us to live beyond them.

4 While from Taranaki, many of Te Ātiawa had migrated to the Kāpiti region in those times.

When lightning strikes twice



A life beyond limitations

Lani and Teremoana's story

Married young, Lani and Teremoana soon had an active young family. Life was good — but not without its struggles. Having journeyed through grief over the death of a prior partner and contending with drugs, Teremoana had — in her words — ‘encountered God’. Embraced by a local church, she discovered a new freedom. Lani's history included 10 years in and out of prison — before, as he would say it, Teremoana saved his life. She encouraged him to go to church, and slowly he too experienced the same strength and transformation. Together, they began to build a future based in faith, hope and love.

Then an unexpected storm struck. Lani felt his body weakening. Tests revealed muscular dystrophy, a degenerative muscle disease. Work became impossible, as was mowing the lawn. Even walking across a room became a battle.

Teremoana then had a devastating fall, leaving her paralysed from the neck down. Confined to bed, she prayed and refused to give up. Over three long years, movement slowly returned. Today, while relying on a wheelchair, she can take a few steps when needed — which Lani considers a testament to her faith and perseverance.

During these years, with children to raise and bills to cover, Lani felt crushed by the weight of responsibility. Where was God in this? Why do good people suffer? New hope arose. As he puts it, he came to see his sufferings through the lens of Christ's

trials, also finding strength in the promise that there is a life beyond this one.

What defines a person when strength is gone? What gives value to a man, woman or child, if not ability?

Though their bodies are limited, Lani and Teremoana say their spirits only remained strong because they were confident in God's love. Today they are known throughout their community for courage and faith. Teremoana works at Elevate Christian Disability Trust⁵. Lani supports in its drop-in centre. Together, they offer encouragement, compassion and hope to others.

Everyone eventually faces limitations. Where does our belief in the value of every person come from? Where can a basis for an enduring hope be found?

Teremoana and Lani live their answer daily.



Hear Lani & Teremoana telling their own story at [HopeProject.co.nz/stories](https://hopeproject.co.nz/stories)

⁵ For more: elevate.org.nz

Considering what Jesus said...

While we might sometimes feel this life is perfect when things are going well, the limitations that come upon us remind us it isn't. These challenges cause many to look up. Most people instinctively conclude there must be more.

The most famous verse in the Bible is John 3:16, because it summarises the ultimate message of hope:

1. **Love was the motive —**
"For God so loved the world..."

Jesus claimed to be God visiting Earth. He didn't have to come. He didn't have to limit himself to a human body or die, but he did.

2. **Jesus gave willingly —**
"...that he gave his one and only Son..."

Jesus wasn't sent simply to show a new way of love and then leave. He chose to die on our behalf, taking our wrongdoing upon himself so that we could receive his perfect record in exchange.

3. Our choice is needed —

“...that whoever believes in him...”

However, this gift of love isn't automatic. While all our wrongdoing can be forgiven, and friendship with God and eternal life are offered, we must turn toward him and choose to receive it.

4. Eternal life can be ours —

“...shall not perish but have eternal life.”

If we receive this gift, the result is new life both now and in the future. Our relationship with God is restored. This new life is what the stories in this booklet illustrate. We can live beyond our limitations, both in this life and for ever.

We all face limitations, sadness, and grief.

God's love affirms our value. God's love can motivate courage in our lives. God's love can leave us with a hope that never ends.

Thank you for reading.
A personal prayer
is on the next page.



A PERSONAL PRAYER

“ God, our Creator, thank you for showing us who you are — both through Creation and more fully through Jesus. Thank you for loving me for who I am, regardless of any limitations. Thank you for loving me despite the wrong things I have knowingly thought, said and done.

Thank you, Jesus, for dying to take the punishment I deserve, and for 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. Help me to understand your ways through the Bible, and to find friends to walk alongside me on this new journey. Help me to live a life that pleases you.

Amen.

”

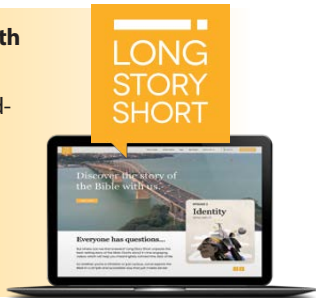
NEXT STEPS...

1 Investigate WHAT the Christian faith is about

Discover the story of the Bible with **Long Story Short**

This visually stunning, New Zealand-made video series unpacks the world's best-selling book through nine engaging episodes.

- View online or join a discussion group — LongStoryShort.co



Unpack the basics of Christian belief at **The Alpha Course**

Alpha is a series of interactive sessions designed to create a safe and honest space where people can explore life, faith and meaning.

- Find a course online or near you at Alpha.org.nz/try-alpha



The 10 Day Challenge

For a hopeful look into the Christian faith go to 10DayChallenge.co.nz, or search under 'Discover' in the YouVersion Bible app.



HopeProject *.co.nz*

Supported by a diverse group of Christian churches throughout our nation, who came together to commemorate the 200-year anniversary of Christianity's arrival and the beginning of a hope-filled partnership. Now, we look ahead with stories of hope and faith drawn from nature, history, and the lives of New Zealanders, to the 2000-year anniversary of Jesus' death and resurrection.

**In this spirit, let us work together to make New Zealand
a more hope-filled place.**