



**BRIAN HARRIS**

**COULD THIS  
BE GOD?**

**Bumping into God in the everyday**

**'a delightful read that will bring  
inspiration each day'  
Sheridan Voysey**



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**BRIAN HARRIS**



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## PREFACE

Have you ever wondered what Abraham thought that hot day when he looked up and saw three strangers standing near the entrance to his tent? They had arrived during the midday siesta and obviously needed food and drink. In no time, he and Sarah were rushing around to ensure they received the finest of fare.

What did they think, before they sprang into action?

Was it an instantaneous ‘Oh, bother! There goes my nap. Just what I need in this sweltering heat.’

Or perhaps it was a more enthusiastic, ‘How exciting. Guests. Let’s hope they have some gossip to share.’

Genesis 18 doesn’t provide us with sufficient clues to give a definitive answer, but the hospitality they provided was exemplary. It turns out that the three strangers were none other than the Lord and two angels. The unnamed writer of Hebrews 13:2 was later to moralise on the incident, ‘Do not forget to show hospitality to strangers, for by so doing some people have shown hospitality to angels without knowing it.’

Entertaining angels. It sounds like a novel pastime. Who wouldn’t raise their hand for that? Trouble was that Abraham and Sarah didn’t know they were doing it. And truth to tell, it was jolly hard work. It would have been so easy to miss that transforming encounter.

‘Ah,’ you say. ‘I should be so lucky. But angels don’t drop by where I stay.’

Says who? Not scripture. In fact, it encourages us to expect more than angels. In Matthew 25, Jesus tells us that when we reach out to the least of people, we are reaching out to him. When we feed, visit or clothe strangers, we are not to be surprised if Jesus is somehow the beneficiary of our actions.

Indeed, we should approach each life experience with a searching question, 'Could this be God?'

Could this be God? What? In the midst of this muddle? Or in this insufferably boring meeting? Or in this time of excruciating pain? Or here in the supermarket? Or at the children's concert? Or in this new, insecure employee?

These readings insistently suggest that the answer might well be yes. They flow from the deep conviction that God is constantly at work in the world and in our lives. The question is not whether God is at work, but whether we have the spiritual sensitivity to spot it.

Each of the readings in *Could This Be God?* started as a column in Perth's monthly *The Advocate* newspaper—a publication of the Baptist Churches of Western Australia. The column has now been running for over a decade, and its popularity has prompted many calls to gather the collection under one cover. It is exciting to see this now come together in this publication.

I have enjoyed writing each piece. The readings chronicle a decade of my life. Before I write, I ask God to remind me of incidents that have delighted, troubled or intrigued me. I usually start completely unsure where the writing will go, and the conclusions have often surprised me as much as I hope they will surprise you.

I am grateful to readers of the *The Advocate*. Over the years their feedback and encouragement has persuaded me to continue writing. They have often duplicated a column

## Preface

they enjoyed in their church newsletter, or posted it on social media, or discussed it in small groups, or mailed it to a friend. Many of the stories have found their way into sermons and talks. Most encouragingly, some people have told me that individual pieces have touched their life, and made a difference to the way they see the world.

I hope this book finds its way into your heart, and that it helps you to approach life a little more expectantly. Perhaps 'Could this be God?' will be a question you will ask more often...

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## **PART 1**

### **LIFE**

Life. It happens one day at a time. What fills those days makes our life more or less extraordinary. But sometimes it is not about what happens in each day as much as it is about how we interpret it. We need eyes to see and to spot the God encounters along the way.

These readings were written in the flow of life, reflecting on largely ordinary things—but things that made me ask, ‘Could this be God?’

## Hitting a six for Jesus

Most Saturday mornings, I'm doing my fatherly duty and taking my youngest to play his basketball game. Truth to tell, the team is a little in the 'also-ran' category. Not that they don't have many fine qualities. They are among the most gracious losers I have ever seen. They have no flashes of temper at poor refereeing decisions, nor do they speak uncharitably about the other team. And they're able to find encouragement in unexpected places. Almost getting the ball through the hoop is a source of excitement, as is losing a game by fewer than ten points.

So, you can imagine our amazement this Saturday when they won! Now they did win once before, but that was because the other team didn't turn up. However, this time it was an eleven-point triumph. The parents' bench was so stunned we almost forgot to applaud. We've learnt how to react when they lose ('You're coming along very nicely. Just wait till next season. '), but have no experience of coping with victory. Eventually, we figured out that frivolity and joy were appropriate, and everyone stayed around enthusing about the game for somewhat longer than is our norm. No doubt about it, winning rocks!

The experience reminded me of the philosophical discussions I had with my oldest when he was young and we explored the merits of winning and losing cricket games. We came up with a pretty neat three-part formula. If you enjoy the game, you're a winner; if you enjoy the game and win it as well, you're a double winner; if you don't enjoy the game, regardless of whether you win or lose, you're a loser. Pretty profound for a then ten-year-old.

So what are we to make of Paul's instruction to those of us who follow Jesus to make sure that we run our race to win (see 1 Corinthians 9:24–28)? Indeed, what does it mean to hit a six for Jesus?

I guess it starts with knowing the rules of the game. A high score in cricket is impressive, but in golf it is not. And in the Jesus game, growing churches is critical, but not if it's by emptying the others in the area. Nor is it impressive if we launch ministries that will bless everyone else's children, but have no time for our own as a result.

Indeed, winning for Jesus must be a little different. After all, he's the one who said the first will be last, and that if we want to find our life we must be willing to lose it, and that the widow's offering is worth more than the wealthy man's gold.

So what does it mean to hit a six for Jesus? It's not always so easy to say. Perhaps it's because he's the one who usually hits sixes for us...

## On remembering the reason why

With the battle of the bulge having progressed to some new frontiers, I've decided that a new strategy is needed and, with the aid of my trusted pedometer, have committed to clocking up 80,000 steps a week. One of the many advantages of daylight savings is that it is currently light enough for a walk on my return from work. There's a pleasant walking path not far from home, and it's there that I've been plodding most evenings.

On a recent saunter, I again noticed a family of five playing cricket. I initially noticed them because the father's bowling technique is as suspect as mine. His two young sons and daughter are more impressive, as is the mother, who as wicketkeeper does an amazing job of preventing her husband's ever-wide bowling from disappearing into the beyond. On the rare occasions when the ball is roughly on target, the batting child dispatches it with fervour, and there is always great hilarity in the ensuing run chase. Truth to tell, playing like that is amazingly wholesome and wonderful fun. Knowing nothing about that family other than the way they play cricket, I'm confident they are forging deep ties with each other—relationships that will stand against whatever storms lie ahead.

Mindful of still falling short of my 80,000 steps, I continued on. I came to a second park, occupied by a father and his two young children. Baseball was their sport of choice—or at any rate, the father's choice. The children seemed more doubtful. Dad had placed a pole in the ground on which the ball rested, and he was unsuccessfully attempting to teach the finer points of a successful baseball swing. The young

boy swung his bat at the ball, hit the pole and watched the ball trickle away. The father was unimpressed, and made his displeasure clear. At around the 15th adjective used for the child's incompetence, the boy burst into tears, to which the father roared, 'Don't you cry, or I'll give you something to cry about!' Given what preceded, it was unsettling to contemplate what he had in mind.

As I trudged home, I reflected on the two very different scenarios. I thought of them as 'the parable of the two fathers'. I've no doubt that both set off to the respective parks with the best of intentions. I'm sure 'father two' did not want to make his children's lives as miserable as possible, but that he wanted to bond with them and strengthen family ties. It's just that somewhere along the way he forgot the reason for the game and hitting the ball suddenly dominated the agenda.

The importance of remembering the reason why—a parable for life, and faith, and relationship...

## From 'What if?' to 'If only...'

I knew it. When the share market index hit 3400 I said to myself, 'This is absurd. No way are these shares worth so little. Now is the time to take all my spare cash and invest.' So I did. Only problem being that my spare cash amounted to zero, so even at bargain basement rates, no shares were purchased. Today, as I write, the index is over the 4700 mark and I sense that the great buying opportunity has past. I could have been rich, but now it's not going to happen. If only...

Have you ever sat in that 'What if?' zone, only to see the opportunity pass, leaving you in the sphere of 'If only...'? Don't you know people who would have been wealthy if only they had bought that coastal property (a mere snip back then) or ventured out a little further with some scheme that started in the realm of 'What if?'

Ah well, I've long accepted that I'm not destined to be rich—not by Western world standards, that is. But it doesn't exempt me from challenging my procrastination in the realm of 'What if?'

Many 'What if?' options are not about money. Perhaps you've asked, 'What if I undertook further studies?' or 'What if I took on a ministry at the local church?' or 'What if I restructure my time to spend more of it with family?' Why not imagine playing the tape ten years on, and ask whether you'll be hearing a great 'If only...' sigh resulting from today's inactivity? The journey from 'What if?' to 'If only...' is sometimes more rapid than we'd like.

It was a routine visit to the rest home. The person I had gone to see was having some medical attention at the time of my arrival so I sat in the lounge waiting. I started chatting

to two residents I did not know. It was heavy going with the first. Regret and bitterness seeped out of every comment. No, her children never visited her. No, she did not like the rest home. No, she had no friends. Though I did not ask the question, I wondered if there had been an earlier era for her. An era where life held potential and possibility.

The second resident rescued me. 'Don't worry about her,' she said. 'She's always grumpy. I'll talk to you.' And she did. She spoke about dreams that she had dared to work for, and the memories that flowed from them. And I saw in her face the contentment of a life free from 'If only...'.  
Better get back to working on my dreams.

# COULD THIS BE GOD?

In a series of pithy, poignant and profound readings, this book explores the intersection of faith and life. Spotting parables in the everyday, it equips readers to explore whether they might be bumping into God without realising it. Heartening and often humorous, it applies biblical truth in a way that both fascinates and liberates.

Dr Brian Harris has been Principal of Perth's Vose Seminary since 2004. Born in South Africa, and a New Zealander by citizenship, he is well known in the UK through his writing. He is married to Rosemary and they have three adult children and one grandchild. In demand as a speaker, teacher and writer, Brian speaks at conferences, theological colleges and churches around Australia as well as in other parts of the world. He has a special focus on training leaders. He writes a popular monthly column for Perth's *The Advocate* newspaper, and hosts a growing blog at [brianharrisauthor.com](http://brianharrisauthor.com).

**'Brian Harris shows us that life's seemingly insignificant moments really do matter. Why? Because God can be found in them. Written with grace, cheer and deep reflection, *Could This Be God?* is a delightful read that will bring inspiration each day.'**

Sheridan Voysey, speaker, broadcaster and author

**'I couldn't stop smiling as I read this wonderful book. Don't mistake its light touch, practical stance and humorous style for shallowness. It conveys great spiritual wisdom.'**

Derek Tidball, formerly Principal of London Bible College, currently Visiting Scholar at Spurgeon's College, London

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