

A great testimony of a nation's leader.

The following is a record of an interview undertaken by Brisbane radio show host Matt Prater who is a pastor of New Hope Church in Brisbane with our Prime Minister of Australia Kevin Rudd. Matt hosts the radio show History Makers which features stories of people who have been successful in sport, business, politics, media, ministry and life in general. Go to http://www.historymakersradio.com/audio_new.html for the original online interview.

Q. Tell us about your faith journey. Were you brought up in a Christian home or was it a university thing? How did you come to faith?

A. My mother was a very strong, practising Catholic and she instilled in me a deep sense of the importance of faith. However, as an adult, decisions for me were not taken till much, much later; until I was on the road to university. But since I was about 18, I've been active in whatever local church I found myself in, either in Australia, in China or wherever I worked in the world.

Q. How important is church life to you and your family?

A. For me it is an important grounding. If you are in politics, it's very easy to get caught up in the detail of what you're doing and-when it comes to politics-to be caught up in some of the uglier parts of life. So, the value of church for me is to be grounded on a regular basis. It's a very simple question of what is important and what's not, what's transient and what's eternal, what is meaningful and, in fact, what is of no meaning at all.

Q. Tell us about your prayer life-is that something that's important to you?

A. It is, and I am also very thankful for the people who pray for me on a regular basis. And let me tell you, if you're in politics you need it! I have a small book of daily devotionals by Oswald Chambers, My Utmost for His Highest, that I've been working through for some time. He was actually a chaplain for the Australian Imperial Forces based in Egypt prior to being dispatched to Gallipoli. I work out of that and the scriptural readings upon which each day's devotions are based. And I try very, very hard to reflect on that before I get stuck into the day.

Q. There is a new Christian website set up called <http://www.whosjesus.com/> What would you say if someone asked you "who's Jesus"?

A. By instinct and training I'm a historian. So when I look at the historical Jesus through the accounts of the gospel writers and the testimonies of his earliest apostles in the book of Acts, and I look at the reflections of Paul-though himself not a disciple-the picture I see is of a person of all-consuming, self-giving love. In an age where there's not a lot of love shown to people and where folk are often judgmental of each other, to believe in a real historical person whose claim was to be the Son of God and who unequivocally and without reservation extends love to you, that is my answer to you as to who Jesus is.

Q. The divorce rate in Australia and around the world is creeping higher and higher. What would be your advice to someone who may be struggling in their marriage and needing some advice?

A. This is a great challenge in Australian society and those of us who are active in community life-and all of us in politics are-constantly run into those who are coping with this challenge. The person next to you who you think has the perfect marriage may not have. The place to go for help is, with confidence, to your local pastor, local priest, local minister. Someone who is going to bring you back to the first principles, which are the ultimate Christian teaching that it's not 'all about me'. When I manage to remember that principle-I should remember it every day but I don't-I'm much the better person for it.

Q. When you were on Sunrise with Joe Hockey, there was a segment about parenting and how you guys are good fathers to your children. A lot of men don't spend a lot of time with their children. How important is that to you and what advice can you give men as to how they should be fathering their children?

A. I do not set myself up as a good father; that's something for my children to answer in 20 years' time when they reflect on whether I have or haven't been one. For me the lesson is probably twofold: the principles of time, and that it is more often the small gestures not the big ones that count. I'm not trying to sound grand about this, but let me just give you an example. When it was my youngest son's last school fete at his primary school, he desperately wanted me to attend. The previous evening, I was in China. It was an overnight flight to get back in time to be with him for the fete. But I did it because my sense is that it's things like that-which may only count for an hour or two-that mean the most in a young person's life. I lost my own father when I was 11 years old. He died in an accident and, therefore, I didn't really know him well, to be quite honest. What I remember most positively were the small amounts of time he spent with me as a child. He would take me down to the creek, teach me how to boil the billy, teach me how to ride a horse, teach me to do those sorts of things. In the scale of everything (he was trying to run a property of several hundred animals), it probably was a very small part of his time, but he cared enough about me to spend that time. The other principle a good father must have is unqualified, undiluted love. No ifs, no buts. Love comes first.

Q. One of the greatest fears that has gripped us recently is terrorism. What is your advice and how

do you cope with the fear of terrorism here in Australia?

A. It's written in scripture that God did not give us a spirit of fear, but of love, power and self-discipline [2 Timothy chapter one, verse seven] and I think that's very important. You can have legitimate concerns about what's going on in the world, but I think the right response is to put it all into context and not have our lives extinguished under a blanket of fear, but to still walk with confidence. On a personal level, as well as the social one and the national one, I spend most of my life choosing to do this. I'm not saying fear is not there and that some matters need to be confronted with hard edge policing and security work; it should also be recognised that terrorists recruit out of underlying social and economic conditions of poverty and injustice around the world, and part of the reason I'm in politics is because I take the Christian message of addressing social justice issues pretty seriously. That's why Tim Costello is in charge of World Vision...doing something outside of politics, but we have a common mission when it comes to social justice in the world, and understanding that our 'brother' is the person presently living in great discomfort; living in the sort of conditions that make it possible for terrorists to recruit others.

Q. Is there a favourite passage of scripture or something that has been on your heart lately that you'd like to share?

A. My mother died at the end of last year and she and I were very close. As I said before, my father died when I was 11, so my mum was very important to me. Her favourite scripture was the simple verse, 'I am the vine, you are the branches' [John chapter 15, verse five] and that stays with me as well. It's what we had inscribed on her headstone. That verse works on multiple levels. It applies when you are running out of energy, enthusiasm, and ability to do anything in life-or in politics, in my case-just to pause and recognise that you are only a branch and that our Creator, God, is the vine. Beyond that, in family life, I think the verse is also reflected in the role of parents. We are the vine to the branches, our children. The quality of life we provide for them causes them to become, in part, the people they will be as our next generation.

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