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FEELING GOOD INSIDE

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Adapted from a script by Aub Podlich

When popular British comedian Tony Hancock took his own life in a Sydney hotel some years ago, the world was stunned. How could such an incredibly funny man, the hilarious hero of the well known 'Hancock's Half Hour' radio show, suffer so much hidden sadness that he was driven to despair? Suddenly the world realised it had been laughing at an illusion. The real Tony Hancock was closer to tears than to laughter.

Tony Hancock's tragedy, concealed inside a public display of jokes and laughter, is no isolated case. The lonely, sad, and insecure, often appear to be exactly the opposite. We are stunned when one of our seemingly placid children blurts out, "I have never been happy in this family!" We find it hard to believe that the outwardly happy marriage of close friends is about to disintegrate. We are astonished when a successful professional person quits their company, after apparently hiding their hurt and dissatisfaction for years. The truth is that the outward mask, the person we present for public viewing is rarely the person we are inside.

Inside ourselves, where the real person lies hidden under a calm exterior, the ripples of fear sometimes will not go away. Remember the first time you had to make a public speech, or your debut on the sports field of your school? Your chest thumped, palms sweated, legs dragged like lead. Yet outwardly none of that showed. You spoke with apparent confidence, or kicked the ball sweetly. People commenting on your performance later said that you had 'nerves of steel'. If only they knew how you really felt!

In a brash, confident nation, where there would appear to be little cause for anyone to feel insecure, we get hints of a whole nation's hidden fears when the figures for the per-capita consumption of sedatives—showing that we Australians are world leaders in the use of drugs to soothe our nerves—are published. Similarly, our ability to consume the old pacifier alcohol is almost, in some perverse way, a matter of national pride.

Many of the most insecure people are those with no obvious material concerns. It seems that wealth, owning your own home, securing wise investments or a comfortable bank balance, add up to a secure life a whole lot less frequently than the advertisers would have us believe. This should be abundantly clear to all of us from the disastrous lives of so many of the world's rich and famous. There are so many biographies of the rich, or the stars, these days, precisely because so many of their lives contain so many 'interesting' disasters, so much saleable sadness. In a sense the supremely wealthy have less to live for than those still aspiring to wealth. When people find themselves in a position where they really are able to have anything money can buy, when they have attained the dream and found it all an illusion, then it seems there is nothing left but despair. What **does** a mountain climber do after scaling the heights of Mt Everest?

The truth is that life needs a centre much more solid than anything money can buy, or can be achieved through popularity, success, or even sexual prowess. That there is confusion about such a centre can be illustrated by the way we use that word 'centre' these days.

Have you noticed how many 'centres' there are in the average sized city or large country town? Shopping centres, business centres, medical centres, sports centres! In some places

there are even Christian Faith Centres! Some places have arts centres, others have child-minding centres, and still others have centres for handicapped children. Some towns and cities are called regional centres, in which there are education centres, craft centres, and community centres.

You see what we tend to do with our lives, and our communities? We split them up into a hundred different centres, with no single unifying centre to hold them all together. Every part of our life seems to have its own centre, whether it's work, sport, or hobby. Yet by definition, every object has only one centre point. It is when we divide our lives into so many disjointed, competing centres, that the words of the poet Yeats come true:

**'Things fall apart, the centre cannot hold,
The falcon cannot hear the falconer.'**

Yeats was referring to the medieval art of falconry, where trained hawks responded to every command of their masters.

All those different centres in a community—but which one is **the** centre? We may call things centres, because certain activities, interests, or people cluster around them, but every life can really have only one centre—one central focal point around which all the other so-called 'centres' have to orbit. To live always with that one centre in sight, in mind, in heart, is to live in peace, in a hurrying fighting, hostile world.

I remember a newspaper article once about a plover bird which had made its nest just off the runway of a big capital city airport. All day long the airport teemed with people, and shook to the roar and scream of gigantic jet aeroplanes coming or going just metres away from the nest on the ground. But the bird sat still, completely unmoved, at peace in a frantic world. Peace inside is like that. And as you may have discovered already, that kind of peace cannot be bought or earned—it is mysteriously given, and joyfully received.

Peace and security are by-products. They become part of our lives when we discover that our lives are part of Someone Else, great, powerful; immeasurably good, and kindly towards us. Christians believe that, irrespective of our material, social, or intellectual wealth, true security comes only from having a God to hold on to, who is at one and the same time, both powerful and loving. Security comes from a right relationship with a great and loving Person, the man Jesus Christ.

In the Bible there is a story about Jesus walking on the wind-whipped Sea of Galilee. One of his disciples Peter, seeing who it was that was walking towards them on the waves got out of the boat at Jesus' invitation and began to walk towards Jesus. Suddenly Peter realised where he was and began to sink into the water. Jesus reached out and held him up. You can imagine how relieved Peter was to be held up by Jesus' strong arms.

When we feel that we might be sinking because of life's difficulties we can be confident that Jesus is there to hold onto us especially when we can't hold onto him. He assures us that no one can ever snatch us out of his hands.