

## Being Positive

As the Pastor looked out to the bush path, he wondered how far they needed to go. The undulating terrain had proven his lack of fitness, although he felt the need to keep going. His companion Shem, a member at the Church, had suggested a peaceful mission to the Knowah Caves. The limestone caves were situated in the eucalyptus forest near Mount Gingera in NSW. He was hoping the early morning three-hour drive to the track and the two-hour return walk was worth it. However, it was going to be a long day. Seeing the large boulders to his left, his companion turned off the path towards the massive rock wall. The Pastor followed, stepping over the eucalyptus leaves and avoiding rocks and logs on the bush floor. He looked up, seeing a gap between the pillars and entered.

He was overwhelmed by the largeness of the cave. His eyes soon adjusted to the darkness. Even though it was quite cool, he felt warm inside. It was like a sense of relief or as though he had just crossed the finishing line of a 5k race.

"Father! Over here!" his friend called.

He looked across towards the voice and could just make out a glow to the left. He paused to focus on the dimness. He felt a strange feeling of being pulled toward it. The daylight from the entrance provided enough visibility to see the soft shine on the wall. His companion was standing transfixed on the brightness. He stepped beside him, looking at the indent in the rock wall. At the base of the incision was the glow. The glow appeared to be in the pool of water. The circumference of the pool was about the size of a large mixing bowl. A small stalactite was perched above it. A drop of moisture could be seen on the tip, waiting for its turn to fall. The Pastor looked towards the ceiling of the chamber, hoping to find the source. Stunned by sight, the dark roof appeared to be moving like waves on an ocean. He shivered. He looked back towards the glow. He felt the light enticing him to move closer. He glanced up towards the ceiling again and was intrigued by the movement. He felt as though he was being pulled between two ends: positive energy and negative energy. The positive was the pool of water, warm and glowing and the negative above was cold, dark, and intriguing.

They both felt the force. The Pastor reached down and touch the pool with his finger. He returned his digit to smell the scent. Then he licked it. The sweetness of the water lingered down his throat and continued to his core. It was a warm feeling, as though he has reached his life's goal, no more worries, doubting nothing, an assurance of inner peace. Finally, he bowed his head and mouthed a prayer with his companion.

Sounds of movement could be heard from the ceiling, interrupting his concentration. A substance dropped on the Pastor's shirt. He reached over to flick it off like he was shooing a fly. He felt the sliminess. It broke his trance, and he soon realised what was on the ceiling. His euphoric feeling subsided.

He had been guided to this moment by a voice—a voice which appeared to him one night not long ago. "Seek the burning light, then the anti forces will come to a balance," the voice said.

In the cave, the Pastor had come for what he sought. It was time to go.

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Pastor Kash was always jumpy before the Sunday service, but he felt reassured and his confidence had grown this time. He was hoping it would be different. The Pastor had put all the pieces in place. As he stepped up to the altar to address the congregation, he looked at his believers. He could count the number of eyes in the room on two hands. He thought, "There are so few nowadays."

The Church of Positivity had subsided in numbers over the years, which got noticeably less and less each year. "Why have people lost their faith?" he would ask himself. In answer, he thought, "It must be the imbalance."

He spoke with confidence that positivity was with them. As the service took place, it was time for communion. Each member came to be blessed, took a piece of bread and

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drank from the chalice of wine. The Pastor touched each forehead like he was Michael Angelo himself, drawing the power of God to his subjects. He noted that when they took in the wine, there was a hint of reassurance. The positivity was growing within their core, and that was what he was hoping for. As he finished the final words to the service, he looked up to the stained glass ceiling and thought, "I hope I have been guided."

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The Pastor felt he needed to entice the public back to the Church, so he tried many avenues. He handed out pamphlets that read, "Being positive is the way." He stood outside the mall delivering the leaflets to the store patrons. People felt obliged to take them, but the Pastor knew that the handouts would end up in the rubbish. If he needed more, he only needed to reach into the nearest bin and retain the copies.

Occasionally, he received praise, but sometimes, the people were aggressive towards any God nonsense. They'd say, "God isn't real". He responded, "How you feel and what is real are different things. He may not be real to you, but feeling positive will save your soul." The majority of the shoppers continued on their way without acknowledgement. Little did they know that he was trying to save their lives.

He visited many establishments asking and begging for patrons to come to his Church and feel the positive forces. But, unfortunately, the opposing forces were too entrenched in society, and the patrons found it easier to reject his offer than accept. He thought the weight of the two forces needed to be balanced, and soon it would be.

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The Pastor noted at each of the Sunday services, more people were attending. First, it was the family members and their friends, but it wasn't as many as he hoped as time went on. Perhaps word of mouth wasn't enough, so he started a new tact. He spent his life savings advertising on TV and radio and built enormous billboards around the city, which read, "Being positive is the way! It will save your life."

He went to the lengths of building a vast 5x5m neon yellow plus (+) sign on the Church, lit up at night with arrows pointing towards the chapel door. But, unfortunately, the advertisement hadn't done enough and only a handful of people attended. The Pastor's attempts had failed, as though the population rejected the positivity and preferred the balance towards the negative.

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One evening, he stood outside the Church and admired his work. Looking up at the yellow flashing plus (+) sign mounted high above the front door, he thought of his visit to the cave many months ago. The neon sign represented the attraction he felt in the cave, the warm glow of positivity. He looked out towards the darkness of the city and was intrigued by the coldness. He thought the magnetic forces were pulling too far into the darkness. Unfortunately, society believes in what is real more so than how they feel.

He was transfixed on the glowing warmth, and then he heard a footfall, a step from somewhere in the darkness, and it was coming towards him. The sound of the paces grew louder as though they were stamping on pebble stones. The light of the sign shined on the approaching neighbour. His house was across the road. He stopped and yelled, "HEY FATHER, can you turn your effing sign off?" The Pastor remembered the neighbour who used to come to his services, but he hadn't seen him for a while and calmly replied, "Oh Henry, How are you? Have you been well?"

The question lingered. Henry hadn't come over for a social chat. He'd had enough of the Plus sign shining through his bedroom window. It had affected his sleep, and so his rational judgement was long gone. Henry hadn't expected the Pastor to be outside the chapel, and he'd come armed and ready to end this disturbance.

"Father, turn that thing off, or I will do it for you!" he demanded.

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The Pastor noticed an object in Henry's hand. Concerned, he pleaded, "Henry! Henry, why don't we go inside to talk about this?"

Henry was a believer, but he didn't like the Pastor. He always felt that the Pastor was a bit shady, so he turned his back on the positivity.

"No! Father, if you don't turn off that sign, I will!"

The Pastor could feel the negativity projecting from Henry and begged, "Please, Henry, let's talk about this."

Henry slowly shook his head, indicating, "That's too bad!"

Henry could feel the rock in his hands. His frustration with the Pastor was too much, so he wound up and pitched the stone towards the middle of the Plus sign. As the rock hit the glass cover, the whole structure completely shattered, and the Plus appeared to vanish into thin air. The falling shards came down, littering the front entrance. The deafening sound caused the Pastor to hunch down away from the destruction. A projectile hit the Pastor's head, and he fell to the ground.

Stunned by the wreckage, the Pastor noted that somehow he had been transported to a dark cave. He looked around to see a glow in the distance. The dimness of the source was like an air-conditioner LED at night. The light was getting fainter as though he was being sucked back into the darkness. He tried to move closer to the illumination, but it kept fading away until it was no longer there.

The Pastor opened his eyes, and when he saw the mound of glass on the front steps, he remembered where he was. He looked up to where the sign should be and then down to find the symbol completely destroyed. The idea, the design, the effort and the cost to install such a thing had completely vanished as though it was never there. His anger was growing within; the positivity was gone, and only negativity would prevail. He looked back to find Henry was gone, and he was alone. He gritted his teeth and yelled into the night. "Okay, you asked for it. Now it's time to release the hounds!"

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It started with a cough, then a fever and ended with body fluids expelling from all orifices. The virus spread like water bursting from a dam. For forty days and forty nights, the people slowly suffocated from their body's determination to fight the sickness. The virus spread amongst the negativity. It spread from town to town, meandering in the houses, causing a mess of phlegm. It didn't matter whether you had social-distanced or stayed at home. The virus came for you. It was as though the virus had already spread, and it was just waiting for the right moment.

There was a place where the virus didn't exist; the Church up on the hill, where the Plus (+) sign used to be. Pastor Kash stood on the steps looking down on the town, waiting to greet his members. Most were settled inside for their Sunday service, ready for more positivity. The Pastor was about to enter when he was interrupted by the sound of shuffling footsteps. A person was struggling to make it up the front path. The Pastor looked at the approaching figure. Its body was hunched over with hair sticking up, the face was covered in blood and phlegm. The clothes were worn and dirty. The Pastor knew who this was and was waiting for their reunion.

"Father! Father! Why has this happened?" Henry could hardly get the last word out.

The Pastor replied, "Well, Henry! You had your chance, the chance to become positive, the chance to come to the Church and expel the negativity, but you chose to go somewhere else. The forces of darkness were too strong but not anymore."

The Pastor turned and closed the Church door behind him, leaving Henry in his pile of sickness.

As the Pastor walked up to the altar, he thought of his plan; it had all gone like clockwork. He remembered the pool of liquid and the substance back in the cave. The ceiling of the cave was full of bats. The floor was covered with faeces like the drop that

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landed on his shirt. It contained a deadly virus. The pool of liquid included the filtered-down version of the virus, making a vaccine. The pool represented positivity, and the substance became the negativity. The Pastor took the substance and spread it on the "Be Positive" pamphlets. He took the liquid from the pool and created a vaccine. He then put it in the wine for the communion. He made his members immune as a reward for their beliefs.

As he stepped up to the altar, he turned to his believers and announced, "Being Positive is the way!"

Sitting in the front pew across from the altar was Shem. Shem's eyes had narrowed slightly when he observed the Pastor's wry smile. It didn't fit with the situation. Outside these walls were devastation. People were dying from sickness. Yet, the Pastor appeared in a sanguine manner. His actions, his movements were all too positive.

Shem remembered the trip to the cave. The Pastor had gathered the liquid from the pool and the faeces from the surfaces. Since then, he noticed that the Pastor was preoccupied and spending a lot of his time in the manor behind the Church. He once visited him in the refuge and noticed that the back room was full of lab medical equipment. Trays of test tubes could be seen in the fridge and a large unit that resemble a CD player covered by a plastic cover. Shem had asked what the device was and the Pastor replied that it was an analyser." The Pastor mentioned that he use to work as a medical technician in his past life. At the time, Shem was intrigued and admired the Pastor, but now seeing the Pastor on the altar with a smirk, he had an inkling.

As the service ended, the congregation assemble towards the exit and Shem followed behind. The Pastor was out the front farewelling his members. Shem shook the Pastor's hand as he exited down the stairs. The Pastor's parting assurance was "Make sure you come back next week; otherwise, the negativity will get you." Shem turned away from the Father and paused at the last step. He wondered what that meant. Was he reading into this too much? Should he reply and asked what he was thinking? "*Does this virus have anything to do with you?*" But he continued walking towards his car and he sat in the driver's side for a while, contemplating what to do.

Shem looked up towards the Church and noticed the Pastor had walked back inside the Church. Shem got out of the car and walked towards the Pastor house behind the Church and as he turned the corner towards the rear, he spotted the Father coming out the back door of the Church carrying the Communion chalice. Shem froze, hoping he wouldn't be seen. The Pastor had eyes for the manor beside his house and walked quickly to the back of the refuge towards the medical lab. Shem silently followed. When the Father entered, Shem noted that there was a window to the lab around the back. He looked through the pane and saw the Pastor take a drink from the cup and placed it in the fridge. Shem wondered,

*"Why would he put it in the fridge?"*

Shem heard the back door start to open and he dashed away unseen. The Pastor exited the lab and walked up to the side door of the adjacent house. When the Pastor entered his home, Shem turned towards the lab. Surprising, the door wasn't locked and he crossed the threshold. The intruder walked around the lab with a different set of eyes. Before, he had admiration, but now he was looking for clues. He opened the fridge and noted the chalice and then saw the trays of test tubes. The tubes appeared to have red wine in them. He pulled out a tray and noted that the tubes were labelled. He looked at one and it read "week 18" and dated for next Sunday. There was an empty vial and it was dated today. He took photos of the vials with his iPhone and then poured the liquid from the tubes into a plastic container he found. He refilled the tubes with tap water mixed with dye from the other tubes and returned them to the fridge. He had to work out what it was. Shem grabbed the container and returned to his car.

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Shem didn't know what to do, so he drove to a spot that could help. He pulled the car up to the gate and wondered how he was going to open it. He had taken the turn from the road and inch his way up the four-wheel-drive track. This area was the highest peak of the region and behind that gate was the water storage for the city. He sat and wondered.

Every day Shem wondered whether he would succumb to the fatal virus. His brother had come down with it and he was still suffering but hanging on. If he thought that this liquid could help, then he might have a chance. Today, what he did sneaking around the lab as a thief wasn't what the Pastor had been teaching. Shem believed in positivity and his moto was "Positivity looks forward and Negativity looks backwards".

The virus had changed everything and he couldn't see a way forward with the mindset of positivity. He, too, had times of negativity where life appeared to be cold and dark. It was definitely dark times. Somehow, the Positive Church was immune to the devastation. Shem wondered how that could be, perhaps some positive force that the Pastor has tapped into. Every Church member appeared to be asymptomatic. If they kept coming back to the Sunday service, they would survive this horrible virus. The Pastor kept saying, the negativity will get you if you don't come. So the members return and even new members were attending. Months ago, the Church was nearly empty and now, the pews were packed. "What has changed?" He thought.

He reached over for the container on the passenger seat and held it in his hand and thought.

"If this liquid could save the world from the virus then how can that be and why was there a separate vial for each week? Perhaps this was the vaccine for the virus. Was ingesting the wine a way of administering the vaccine?"

If this was the case, then he knew of a way that could save thousands of lives. He looked up to the water tank and opened the car door.

Preparing for today's service, the Pastor had noted an attendance drop off from last week's sermon. He had wondered why the decline in numbers. He had to find out whether the no-shows have succumbed to the virus. He was hoping that his methods of retaining the congregation were still genuine. Although, outside the realms of the Church, the negative people were surviving this virus and life was returning to normal. "This wasn't part of the plan," he thought. He looked at his watch and noted it was time for the Sunday greeting. He walked from the manor to the front steps of the Church. He stepped up to the entrance, turned and waited. He noted the time was past the hour. Still, no one had arrived. Finally, he could hear cars coming up the driveway to the entrance. The flashing vehicle lights were alarming. Shem's car was in front of the police parade and they stopped just in front of the stairs. Shem stepped out of the car feeling warm and reassured. Like those, the positivity was taking shape. Behind him, the police were getting out of their vehicles, Shem waited for the police as they walked up to the steps. Shem spoke first,

"Pastor, I think your time is up, everybody knows what you did and your days of being positive are over."

"What is going on here? What are you saying? The Father responded.

"Oh, I think you know what I mean" Shem pulled a test tube from his coat pocket and held it up for him to acknowledge.

No more words needed to be said, the Pastor pale facial expressions were of shock, as though he just had blood sucked out of him. He didn't know what to do, the Police Sargent spoke. "Pastor Kash you are under arrest for the Crime against humanity extermination of life subsection C 268.9, which results in life in prison..."

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The Pastor looked up to where the Plus (+) sign used to be on the front entrance and stated,

“Positivity will prevail” and he turned and stepped back into the Church, locking the door behind him. His mind was racing now and he had to get away. He looked down the aisle and was confronted by a figure. The figure was well dressed as he was ready for Church, the hair was trimmed and the beard was well-groomed. The Pastor’s neighbour had notably recovered from the virus and was standing with a weapon pointed his way. Henry smiled and announced, “I knew you were up to something, I could never trust a slimy maggot like yourself. When Shem told me about your doings in the manor lab, I had to look for myself. I lost my wife and family to the substances in that lab and you are going to pay. So which is it? Prison Life or death?”

The Pastor started to plead with his neighbour, “Henry, please let’s discuss this” Just as the urgent words had come out of his mouth, He heard a click and felt a stabbing feeling in his shoulder. Henry’s crossbow had gone off. The Father fell to the floor and as he looked down at his shoulder, he noted a dart sticking out of his cloak. The Pastor looked up at Henry with confusion. Henry stated,

“Injection is far more effective than ingestion. Not sure you can survive this one. Enjoy!” Henry could hear the banging on the front door and went over to his fallen victim, pulled the dart out of the shoulder, placed it in his coat and then went to open the front door.

“Boys,” he said as the police entered, “No more positivity today, he’s all yours”. Henry walked past the men and down the front steps. He looked up to where the Plus (+) sign used to be and grimaced. “Yeah! Positivity is the way”.

The End