

ABOUT FINDING THE COURAGE TO DO THINGS DIFFERENTLY

Caught in the Rip is a book that aims to make sense of our every day battles with the 'treacherous undertows of life's journey'. It confronts and challenges the often uncritical way in which we make decisions and encourages the reader to have the guts to do things differently. Drawing on his experience from a long and successful business career in Australia and overseas, Thompson addresses some tough questions that lie at the heart of our decision-making process. At the outset of the book he lists three key challenges in the quest to make wise decisions in both our career and personal relationships.

The first of these challenges is to identify and re-assess some important assumptions upon which we rely in our daily lives. Many of those assumptions, says Thompson, may turn out to be received baggage or based on 'conventional wisdom' – opinions that, while not necessarily well founded, are so widely held among the rich and influential that only the rash and foolish would endanger their careers by dissenting from them. The second challenge then is to re-evaluate the way we think and engage with others. The final challenge, Thompson argues, lies in recognising the practical implications of questioning entrenched opinions and finding the courage to think and behave differently.

Mirroring these different key challenges, the book is divided into three parts. In Part I Thompson examines how 'conventional wisdom' influences our decision-making process in a dysfunctional world. Addressing key questions at a practical and philosophical level, he demonstrates that we tend to start by looking for impulses within our inner self and then usually turn to developments in cutting edge science. Both sources, however, fail to serve as ultimate reference points and indicate that there may be something beyond our understanding of the here and now.

In Part II Thompson consequently considers whether this 'something beyond' actually exists and imagines what it might be like. He turns to theology and illustrates that the need for justice constitutes humanity's most profound predicament. Examining the work and lives of history's greatest teachers – Lao Tzu, Confucius, Buddha, Hindu gurus, Moses, Muhammad, and Jesus Christ – Thompson argues that it is Christ who could provide 'one radical alternative'. In Part III he then explores the practical implications of his findings and encourages the reader to adopt three tests as the basis for wise decision-making: Is it rational? Is it real? And how certain can I be? Only after we have answered these questions for ourselves, so Thompson argues, can we put our faith in something.

He leaves it to the Postscript to outline some of his own conclusions. Having applied the 'three tests' to his own decision-making process, Thompson is 'certain beyond reasonable doubt' that 'there is a loving and holy God as revealed through creation, our hearts, biblical authors and Christ', that 'Christ is as portrayed in the Bible', and that 'the Bible is utterly trustworthy'. These personal conclusions beg the question, of course, whether *Caught in the Rip* is just another one of those Christian books with a hidden religious agenda.

But this is not the case. Even though Thompson eventually *does* advance a strong argument in favour of Christ, it would be wrong and misleading to reduce the book's content to a simplistic declaration of, or uncritical appeal for, blind evangelical faith. On the contrary, Thompson's main argument is more about rationality and reality testing than about faith *per se*. Critical of the institutional church himself, Thompson encourages the reader to approach his 'mini-journey of words' with a 'helicopter view'. Adopting the helicopter perspective, he argues correctly, enables the reader to consider his argument in its entirety and to avoid any pre-emptive judgements. This, however, is easier said than done. In fact, sticking to the 'helicopter view' throughout the book is but one of the many interesting challenges the reader faces whilst travelling with the author.

Caught in the Rip is well structured and praiseworthy for both its logic and intellectual rigour. Thompson combines sharp analysis with a fine sense of humour and a good dose of humility. His clear and unambiguous style makes the book an enjoyable, but certainly not easy or light read. Thompson makes the reader reflect on, and think deeply about, a wide range of questions of fundamental importance. As guidance, and in order to illustrate some potential pitfalls, he occasionally invokes contentious examples of contemporary debate, e.g. euthanasia, torture of terror suspects, etc, as well as personal experiences. These examples and experiences generally provide valuable context and contribute to the book's authenticity. At times, however, some of Thompson's examples and experiences weaken rather than strengthen his otherwise strong argument.

What distinguishes *Caught in the Rip* from the many other books that have attempted to wrestle with the 'big questions' of life is that Thompson largely refrains from trying to impose his own views on the reader. Instead, he sets out a useful analytical framework that enables us to tackle the important issues ourselves. As Thompson says in the book, it is all about 'putting the right kind of questions to the right kind of people' – a task that he himself manages to pull off brilliantly. In conclusion, *Caught in the Rip* is a fascinating and thought-provoking book not to be missed.