

WORTH MORE THAN GOLD

Jack Toholke always dreamed of standing in front of his family and friends after winning gold for Australia in the Olympics; but he attained a far more valuable prize.

Whilst watching the Beijing Olympics in 2008, Jack was amazed by the athletes. "From then on, my dream was to go to the Olympics to represent Australia, and win a gold medal," says Jack. "I didn't care what sport I competed in as long as I got to put on the 'Green and Gold'." "I realised, after watching the London Olympics in 2012, that in order to make my dream a reality I would need to train... hard," Jack emphasises. This started a long, intensive search to find a sport at which he excelled. Over the next couple of years he tried running the 400m, then 1500m and even javelin,

but nothing worked out.

For the first time since he had watched the Beijing Olympics Jack felt discouraged about his Olympic dream.

However, his chance of being an Olympian was not over. In mid-2015 Jack was listening to the radio when he heard a woman speak about the "South Australian Sports Institute" or SASI. She spoke about their Talent Search Campaign where they looked for athletes who could potentially become professional rowers. Applicants would be examined on their strength, height, weight, vertical jump and arm span.

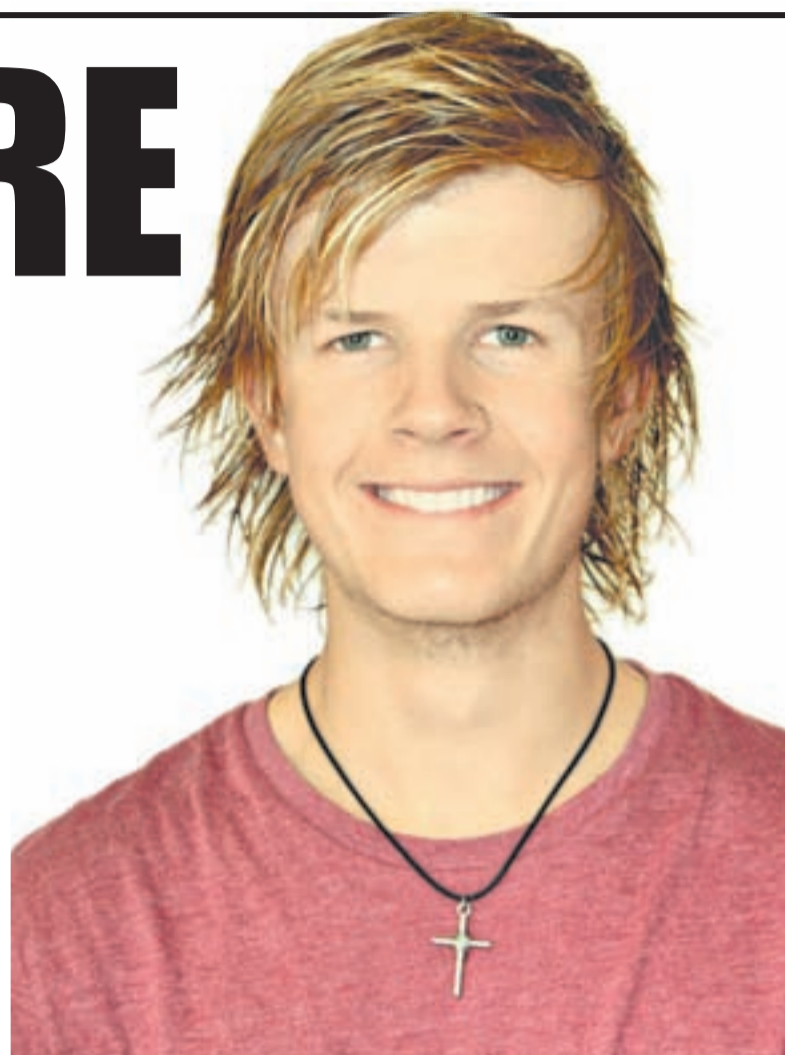
A week or so after the testing Jack received a letter in the mail,

"As I opened it, I thought that if I was accepted, my life would take on a much greater meaning. I opened the letter... and I was accepted. I was over the moon with excitement! I imagined the day when all my family and friends would be sitting in a grandstand watching me win Gold for Australia," Jack remembers.

However, Jack's parents encouraged him to postpone his dream for one year, to enable him to finish his Year 12 studies. This did not stop him dreaming of Olympic success, even creating his own training programme, in the hope of using it to help him apply for the rowing programme the following year.

Jack's life was now full of big plans and goals, "I was consumed daily by these dreams," he says. "I thought that even if I just got into the Olympic team, my life would be worth more."

Suddenly there was no room in Jack's life for the God He had known and believed in from childhood. He no longer desired to read his Bible



Jack Toholke's Olympic dreams might be dust, but his future is bright.

or spend any time praying.

Years earlier at the age of six, Jack knew he needed a saviour. "I realised I was a sinner and that I needed Jesus to forgive me. So I asked Jesus to come into my life and to wash me clean from my sin. I don't remember much in terms of my spiritual life, except going to church and reading the Bible," says Jack.

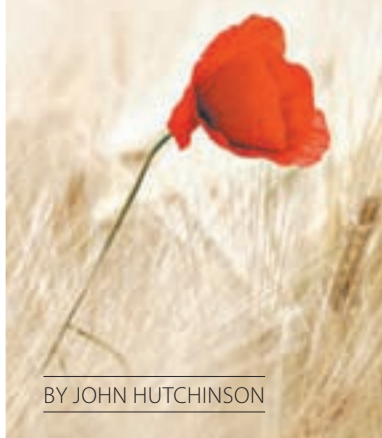
It wasn't until one night in August 2016 that Jack realised where his priorities should lie. "Our family had a movie night and we watched 'God's Not Dead'. It was about a university student who is forced to state that God is dead to his lecturer. However he stood up for his faith and refused to say so," says Jack.

"This movie spoke to me on how I should be living my life," Jack acknowledges. "Towards the end of the movie, I broke down and wept, I thought what am I doing? My life is so short compared to eternity and all I want is a chunk of metal hanging around my neck; a prize that will not last."

● Turn to page 2

Thoughts for ANZAC Day

WERE YOU THERE?



BY JOHN HUTCHINSON

'WERE you there?' - 'Did you see it?' - 'What was it like?' These can be questions of critical importance.

Jesus was once heard to say, 'I'm glad I wasn't there.' In a different context, I've said, 'I'm glad I wasn't there.' I remember talking to a wheelchair-bound fellow who fought at Tobruk. His account of the terrible bombardments, life losses and his own injuries and orders 'to keep going no matter what' made me say, 'I'm glad I wasn't there.'

I talked to an old digger about life in the trenches in France in WW1 and thought, 'I'm glad I wasn't there.'

I've read about the trench charges at Gallipoli when young soldiers obeyed their commanding officers to be machine gunned to death within seconds. 'I'm glad I wasn't there.'

I've heard about mass prison camps and death marches and the incredible suffering and deprivation of Australians in WW2 - glad I wasn't there!

Then there was Korea, Vietnam, Afghanistan and Iraq and other engagements. And, I'm glad I wasn't there!

The somber fact is - so many were there and many didn't come home. The loss of one young Australian soldier, in itself, is a huge price to pay.

We who live in this great free land of Australia should be ever grateful for those who 'were there.'

'Were you there?' is significant at this time of year when we remember our soldiers who fell in various wars and have just celebrated Easter - the crucifixion of Jesus.

I love the words of the Negro spiritual - 'Were you there when they crucified my Lord, - were you there when they nailed Him to the tree? - were you there when they pierced Him in the side?' - the chorus says, 'Sometimes it causes me to tremble, tremble, tremble, were you there when they crucified my Lord?'

We weren't there, but some were and witnessed the awful sight. Some were there to mock, some to wonder, two looked on from nearby crosses. A Roman officer stood guard and listened and pondered and when Jesus finally died said, 'Truly, this Man was the Son of God.'

Like the soldiers who left for the battle fields Jesus went of His own free will to the situation which would impale him on a cross.

Like the brave who went to war He went to the cross for our sakes. He died for us. He died for our sins. Jesus said, 'I lay down my life for the sheep.'

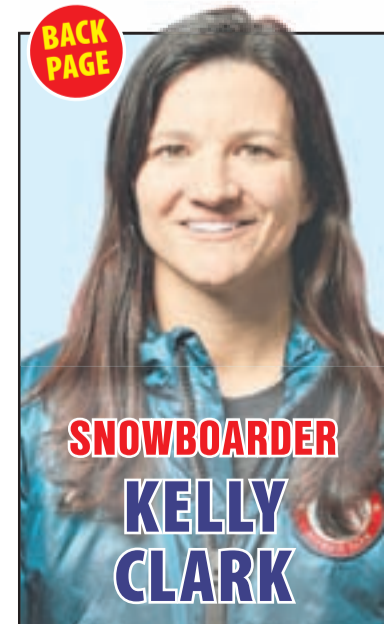
The Negro's song continues: 'Were you there when He rose up from the tomb?'

It was the bodily resurrection of Jesus from the dead which authenticated all He said and did.

It's the resurrection of Jesus which is the basis of hope.

We weren't there, but in a sense we were and need to be. When we read the record and think about it we may well conclude, 'Truly, this Man was the Son of God.'

BACK PAGE



SNOWBOARDER
KELLY CLARK

Death - the destiny of all people

The first part in a short series that explores the ultimate end of us all.

BY RICK LEWERS

WHAT'S at stake if you are unforgiven? Not many of us take time to think about this issue. Well relationally you are shot.

Have you ever thought about what happens one minute after you die, if you meet God unforgiven? I really want that question to confront you for the next few minutes.

The removal of God doesn't make any difference to death. Death is coming for all of us at some time. The presence of God, however, makes every difference to death.

Recently, I was asked to speak to a school where the students had an enormous number of questions about death and the afterlife. That is so very normal. Death being such a real thing is not a subject that can easily be swept under the carpet.

It is a topic that fills the public space on a daily basis. Death interrupts normal programing and we are forced to become visitors to death.

Television brings death into our living rooms such as what we have seen recently with the Grenfell Tower in London, but somehow we have become desensitised to it. Debates about abortion, suicide and euthanasia focus on death from the womb to old age, but somehow we manage to keep death at a distance.

Our views of death will shape our lifestyles and ethics. Death has a way of giving a person perspective. Sometimes we can be thankful when death removes dictators, the likes of a Hitler. On other occasions death can pervert perspective.

I remember an Aussie wealth expert declaring, "He who has the most at the end of life wins."

Wrong! He who has the most at the end of life ... dies. What does it profit a man if he gains the world and loses his soul?

Death's greatest perversion is captured in those well-known words: "Let's eat, drink and be merry for tomorrow we die". Strangely, such hopeless words could be the caption for modern-day Australia, the fine print on a flag that once promised much more.

Death without God can only be described as hopeless. The problem is that if you let God into the picture you suddenly have an accountability for how to live your life. But what do you do with accountability and the realities of death?

Creating a god that suits your own imaginings is of course convenient. And surprise, surprise – Such a god will nearly always agree with you and give you the stamp of approval. If the God of the Bible is not a figment of your imagination, then what is at stake if you are unforgiven?

Arnold Toynbee said: "Man alone has foreknowledge of his coming death and, possessing this foreknowledge, has a chance, if he chooses to take it, of pondering over the strangeness of his destiny.... He has at least the possibility of coping with it, since he is endowed with the capacity to think about it in advance and to face it and to deal with it in some way that is worthy of human dignity."

The Bible says: "It is better to go to a house of mourning than to go to a house of feasting, for death is the destiny of everyone; the living should take this to heart." I know forgiveness is available and I look forward to exploring with you a Christian understanding of death in the next few editions of *Challenge*.



NOTE: Death has been depicted as a person, commonly called the Grim Reaper, for many centuries. The Bible does talk about an Angel of Death but it is important to remember that death has no actual personality and our end is in the hands of God.

Psalm 68:20: Our God is a God who saves; from the Sovereign Lord comes escape from death.

The Aussie's magnificent obsession

BY ALAN BAILEY

IN a world where empires collapse, earthquakes devastate, assassins slay and armies crush, no news is as important to many Australians as who won the footy. We are sport crazy. At least, it could easily look that way to some outside observer.

Think of the hours of coverage on the telly. Then see the procession of parents following their children to the playing fields, the netball and tennis courts, the swimming pools, the gymnasiums and so on. Witness the people who run, climb, bat, kick, throw, swing, dive, drive, pedal, dance, skate, ski, wrestle, box—and add what you want.

For some, it's an interest, a pastime. For others, it's an essential ingredient of life - rendering life meaningless without it. For yet others, it is a passion, a driving force, a religion calling for supreme dedication. Those who view sport but don't play it, fall into the same categories.

THANK GOD FOR SPORT

Candidly, I wonder just where we would be without it. What would our young people get up to if sport didn't take up so much of their spare time? There are a tremendous number of doubtful alternatives that could easily captivate them.

How many would have healthy bodies if they didn't have systematic exercise? Would they learn to lose well in the game of life if they didn't learn it in sporting competition? Where would they learn team spirit, comradeship, courtesy toward rivals and a host of values like determination, courage, endurance and mental and physical discipline?

KEEPING IT IN CONTEXT

The thing that troubles people like me is the utter seriousness which surrounds organized sport. Some ceremonies rival appearances of the Pope. Think of the fanatical adherence to codes, the quoting of the Book of Rules to the point where erring umpires almost deserve to be condemned as heretics. Commentators speak of the sacred or hallowed turf. Then words like dedication, sacrifice, adoration, miracle, triumph, awe and magnificence, flow in a steady stream.

THE SAD TRUTH

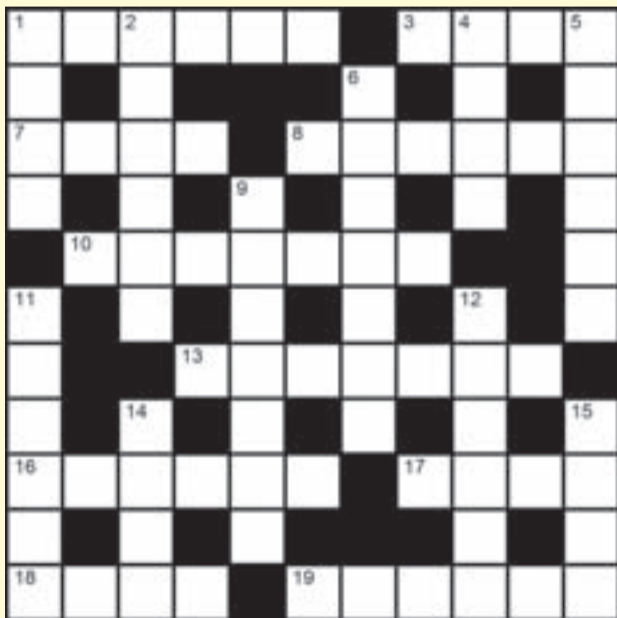
When the chips are down, that is, when life's realities set in, or death stares us in the face, it won't matter very much who could kick a pigskin full of air or who could whack a ball with a lump of wood.

When the last siren sounds and God rings down the curtain on every performance on earth, how many people will be wishing they had given attention to Him instead of being caught up in a game? At last we will see that our relationship to God matters more than anything else. How fatal, how foolish the obsession may turn out to be in the end. And, after all, wouldn't any sporting coach say that it's the end that counts?



Crossword

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|--------------------|------------------------------|--------------------|--------------------|
| ACROSS | 8 Covered shop walkway | 16 Breathing need | DOWN |
| 1 Parentless child | 10 Ancient galley | 17 Emerald ____ | 1 Watermelon shape |
| 3 Sturdy timber | 13 Word formed from initials | 18 Long hike | 2 Larder |
| 7 Teen spots | | 19 Curtain housing | 4 Test |



SOLUTION PAGE 11

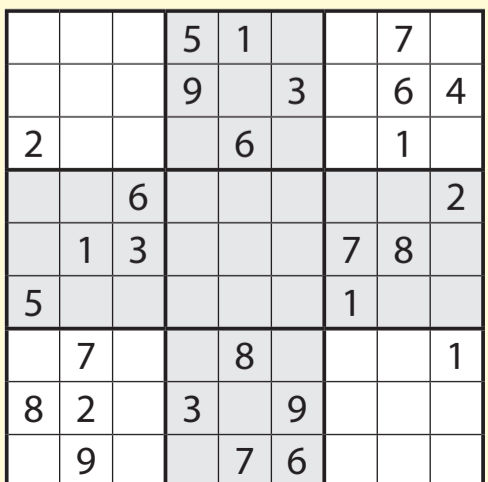
Sudoku

Fill in the grid so that every row, every column, and every 3x3 box contains the digits 1 through 9.

Puzzle Level: Medium

6 3 8
4 2 9
7 5 1

SOLUTION PAGE 11



Worth more than gold

● From page 1

"There were people in my life who did not know the saving grace of Jesus. I realised that it was way more important to speak to them about Him than go to the Olympics."

A change of mindset for this young once-aspiring athlete was not easy. "I struggled with my desire to become an athlete until December 2016 when I decided enough was enough," Jack admits.

Tired of fighting his passions, Jack decided to surrender his life totally to Jesus, asking Him to do whatever He wanted with his life.

Jack now has a prize much more valuable than a gold medal at the Olympics. "My life now has more meaning. Why? Jesus is the reason. I don't have to reach a certain level or standard for Him to love me. I can now call God 'Father'. What more could I possibly want?" Jack states happily.

One of Jack's favourite verses is Philippians 3:8: "What is more, I consider everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them



garbage that I may gain Christ."

Jack is thankful to God for his renewed faith and continues to grow more each day as a Christian.

In July 2017 he travelled to South Africa with the Impact Africa mission team. He saw this as a great opportunity and challenge for him to have more boldness in sharing his renewed faith with those who don't know Jesus. Jack will return to Africa in 2018 and is looking forward to other opportunities elsewhere.

Tat artist 'chased down' by God

Thirty-nine-year-old J. Brett Prince says he was living just fine in the secular world, without faith. "I thought that I had no need for religion, I thought that the Bible was wrong, I thought that Jesus didn't even exist. I was very, very wrong," he confesses on Youtube.

To look at, Brett is a surprising advocate for Christianity. For years he specialised as a tattoo artist in satanic imagery, as his body bears evidence. He has a sigil of Lucifer tattooed on his cheek bone, a large Baphomet (goat symbol) covering his throat, a quote by famous Satanist Aleister Crowley across his collar bones and a pentagram on his left palm. Besides these, he is inked with various other masonic symbols and demonic depictions.

"This is the place I came from," he says. "I'm not proud of these things but they are going to be my tools to reach others who are in the place where I was."

Brett was raised by his mother and went to church on and off until the age of about 10. At 12 he decided to get baptised but says there was no heart-change in him.

Brett's lifestyle in fact got a lot worse. At 13 he started smoking weed, drinking alcohol, dropping acid and having sex. He also became enthralled with heavy metal music, horror movies and "anything that was dark".

A straight-A student, despite the drugs, Brett pursued study in biological sciences because he was fascinated with the theory of evolution. But in his desire to make scientism an infallible source of truth, Brett discovered many problems and questions he was uncomfortable with. "Some things just didn't make sense," he admits.

Just after he married his first wife, they had a daughter, Hayley, but the marriage didn't last. "I was caught up in my ego, my self, my worldly desires and the satisfactions of the flesh. I was very angry as a young man and fought with my wife a lot," he confesses.

A tattoo artist got Brett interested in kabbalism, esoteric symbolism and theosophical thought, today commonly called the New Age movement.

So Brett studied art and philosophy and then went into an apprenticeship to become a tattoo artist. He later worked for a shop called Natas (Satan backwards) and his art became exclusively dark and satanic.

Brett did very well and eventually got his own shop, but he had rage issues and was prone to violence. He partied hard, drank heavily, continued smoking weed and exploited a lot of women. He also started taking cocaine at tattoo conventions.

At one convention he met Kim, a nude model, exotic dancer and high class prostitute, who later became his wife.

He and Kim had a very toxic relationship that sometimes got violent. He struggled to deal with the way she was making money but liked the lavish lifestyle that money could buy.

Brett's temper, resentment, high expectations and constant substance abuse, eventually took their toll.

"I lost time with my daughter, lost my business, lost my career. I had a terrible reputation as a womanizer and a temperamental jerk. I was violent and judgmental. I cut ties with my immediate family and threw everything from my past in their face," he shares with tears.

He and Kim eventually got married, despite the fighting, and he begged her to stop selling herself and said he would pay for everything. Then he found she was continuing to work as a prostitute and they separated.

Brett decided to fix his life up and in his studies on the internet he came across Christian apologists, whose arguments he couldn't refute and brought into question his whole worldview.

Brett says he didn't want to be a Christian



MAIN PHOTO: Screenshot of Brett sharing his testimony on Youtube. **INSET RIGHT:** Brett advertising the shop he once owned.

but he started being intellectually backed into a corner. "The truth became undeniable," he shares.

Brett looked at the moral teachings of the Bible and could see how much of a disaster his life was because he had disobeyed them. Once his head was convinced, his heart began to be touched. On December 30, 2016 it seemed Jesus was everywhere Brett turned, whether on TV, in a magazine or in books or in testimonies on social media. Brett knew God was speaking to him.

He suddenly felt so convicted

of the times he had denied Christ, mocked Him, and blasphemed Him deliberately, that he got down on his knees in tears and said sorry to God. He then thanked God for all the blessings he had been given and finally Brett asked Christ into his life.

"I knew at that very moment that I was forgiven. Right then. I didn't have to run anymore. I didn't have to search for happiness in the wrong places. I didn't have to prove myself," Brett remembers.

"I knew I was instantly forgiven right then for free. Not just one of my sins but all of them. God knew everything I had done. Not only did He not leave me, He had

chased me so hard with these lessons. It may not be comfortable at times. You might think God is punishing you but He's not, He is trying to show you He loves you. He became Christ to come into our dimension in order to show us how much He loved us through His death

on the cross for us. He is supernatural, yet personal."

Then Brett felt God say to him, "Call your wife". Kim was raised atheist but she told Brett about a dream she had had of a bright, shining being, called 'Yahweh'. She didn't know what a Yahweh was but found out it was a name for God and she had been praying ever since. The couple decided to go to a church.

Brett says that despite all his satanic, expletive filled, angry posts on social media, his Christian friends never unfriended him or judged him. One of them, realising Brett was on a journey to Jesus, messaged him saying, 'when you are ready I'm here'. So at this point Brett accepted his invitation to church.

Brett says: "Satan will tell you that the church will judge you but we had never felt such warmth in our whole lives as we did there. We were smiled at and treated like family. After five minutes of the sermon, I turned to Kim and said 'I think we're home'".

The couple later got baptised, did courses and are getting involved in serving in the church in youth ministry.

"If people can look past all my demonic tattoos and masonic symbols, and look in my eyes and see I love Christ, then they will look past your past too," Brett tells those afraid of church. "True Christians want to live like Jesus and treat others like Him. You won't be judged, you won't be condemned by the church. You'll be prayed for, you'll be welcomed, you'll be loved."

Since coming to Christ at the beginning of 2017, Brett says there have been enormous changes in his life. His marriage is much happier, his temper is under control and he has no more road rage. He no longer drinks or does drugs, after stopping instantly without suffering withdrawal symptoms.

"I am more pleasant, kinder, more giving, more loving. I consider everything in my life from the perspective of what God wants and approves of. I have given up revenge, I pray for my enemies. I pray for the lost to find what I have found," he explains.

Brett encourages others to explore the roots and basis of Christianity, the authenticity of the Bible and the lives of Christians to see for themselves the radical difference Jesus makes in people's lives. "Look at the evidence for yourself," he urges. "It is the truth. I can't tell you how good this is! You can find contentment. And it's free. It's free and it's immediate." •

See Brett's full testimony on Youtube.

Actor escapes porn and finds true love

Brittini De La Mora was asked to act in 'romantic' movies – but it turned out they were far from romantic.

She went on to become a top porn star, and instead of finding love, her boyfriend was murdered and Brittini descended into drugs and depression.

Just as she was about to kill herself, a voice told her to stop. It was the beginning of a long road to finding real love – God's pure love, plus real romance with a Christian man whom she has now married. She's even become a church leader.

Brittini's troubles began with a childhood filled with abuse and neglect. She then became a stripper at just 16 years old. Two years later, she began performing in adult movies after a producer asked her to try "romantic films".

Under her porn name, Brittini was hailed by *Maxim* magazine as one of the world's top 12 female porn stars in 2010. She was also dubbed "the smartest porn star," as she had made over \$3 million by the time she was just 21.

But inside Brittini was empty, battling anorexia, depression and addiction to alcohol and drugs, including cocaine, pills, heroin and meth.

According to the *Gospel Herald*, she slid further into depression after witnessing her boyfriend, a gang member, being stabbed to death by a rival gang.

In 2010, Brittini attempted to end her life in



Brittini and Richard on their wedding day.

a darkened room. But just as she began, she heard a distinct voice say: "Turn the lights on and put the scissors down". She is certain it was God. "Had God not spoken to me that evening, without a shadow of a doubt, I would have taken my life."

She called her Christian grandparents that night. Her grandfather immediately drove two hours to see her, and then took her to church. She decided to commit her life to Jesus Christ, but still looking for human love, Brittini entered into an abusive relationship with a pimp and was dragged back into porn.

Three years later, while on a flight to shoot a porn scene, she read a Bible verse which describes a woman called Jezebel, who led people into sexual immorality (Revelation 2:20).

It was a tipping point for Brittini: "That was my lightbulb moment. I started to cry and I apologised to God. I didn't understand that this is what I'd been doing all these years."

Brittini finally left the industry after meeting members of a Christian anti-porn organisation who handed out leaflets saying: "Jesus Loves Porn Stars".

"My first thought was: 'Are these people legitimate Christians, because how can Jesus love a porn star?'" recalls Brittini. But they were so loving and friendly and welcoming.

Eventually, Brittini understood that Jesus loves everyone, whatever they have done – but He demands that we leave our 'sins' behind, whatever they are, so that we can begin a new life with Him.

Completely turning from her former life, Brittini began to go to church, and later fell in love with and married Richard De La Mora – a church pastor who she now works alongside.

Her past will always haunt her, as her movies and images are still on the web. But she says: "People will always talk ... I just know that I am called to God. Nothing stops me from doing what I know God wants me to do now."

Today, she travels the country, sharing the story of her complete U-turn.

"My big goal now is just to let people know there is a God who loves them no matter what they've done," she says. •

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Why is *Black Panther* such a popular and profound film?

DR. JIM DENISON

I SAW *Black Panther* recently, which makes me anything but unusual. The movie had the highest grossing February film debut in history.

It is the highest rated superhero movie of all time. After viewing the film, I can see why.

Ryan Coogler, already famous for *Creed*, directed an astounding cast in one of the most gripping films I've seen in years. Part of the movie's appeal is clearly its amazing action sequences and outstanding performances.

But its deeper message is one I believe to be especially significant for Christians.

WHY SUPERHERO MOVIES ARE SO POPULAR

Black Panther is the eighteenth movie connected to the Marvel Cinematic Universe, beginning with *Iron Man* in 2008. DC Comics has made dozens of movies over the years as well.

Superhero movies are extremely popular these days, in part because the news reminds us daily how much we need protection.

In our post-9/11 world, the promise of superhero protection, even though fanciful, is attractive. But there's an element central to the plot of *Black Panther* that helps explain its unique appeal as well.

A DILEMMA AT THE HEART OF LIFE

Black Panther is about an African nation called Wakanda, which developed a metal called "vibranium" from a meteorite. Vibranium helped them produce an extremely advanced civilization and technology they have hidden from the world by posing as an



impoverished country.

At the heart of the movie is a dilemma: Should they share what they know with those in need?

If they do, will they lose control of their resources? Will people use their technology for evil? Is their king's highest duty to his nation or to humanity? If he refuses to help those he can, what kind of country will Wakanda become?

Martin Luther King Jr. noted, "The first question which the priest and the Levite asked was: 'If I stop to help this man, what will happen to me?' But the good Samaritan reversed the question: 'If I do not stop to help this man, what will happen to him?'"

Black Panther resonates with audiences in large part because its dilemma is our dilemma. Every day, we must face the question of serving self or serving others.

THE BEST TEST OF CHARACTER

I heard about an executive with an unusual hiring practice. He would force the prospective employee to wait in his assistant's office for ten minutes before their interview. Afterwards, he would ask his assistant how the candidate treated her. Her response was critical to his decision.

The best test of our character is how we treat

people we don't have to treat well.

We find this maxim on display in Genesis 45. In the midst of famine, Joseph's brothers returned to Egypt seeking food. Recall that they sold him into slavery some seventeen years earlier (Genesis 37:28). Now he was prime minister of the most powerful nation in the world, second only to the pharaoh himself.

His brothers' lives were in his hands. For their crimes, he could easily and justifiably have ordered their execution. Instead, he arranged for them and their families to join him in Egypt, where they would live under his protection and provision.

Thirty-eight centuries later, his benevolence serves as a model for us.

Let's learn a lesson from Joseph: When we treat with kindness those we don't have to treat well, God blesses our compassion. And we manifest the character of the One who "came not to be served but to serve" (Mark 10:45).

Albert Schweitzer was a world-renowned theologian, musician, and missionary doctor. In 1935, he gave a speech to the students of Silcoates School in England on "The Meaning of Ideals in Life."

Dr. Schweitzer told the students, "I don't know what your destiny will be. Some of you will perhaps occupy remarkable positions. Perhaps some of you will become famous by your pens, or as artists. But I know one thing: the only ones among you who will be really happy are those who have sought and found how to serve."

Will you be "really happy" today?

Abuse and torture victim finds healing

Sam Almond has had a bumpy road to travel since the day that her parents decided to get divorced. She has been beaten, abused, tortured and nearly killed, but Sam still has the faith and the energy to keep moving forward.

"When I was young, a lot of traumatic situations happened which made me rebel," Sam shares openly in a Youtube video. "As a teenager, I started smoking and drinking and running away from school and from home. I thought I knew best and refused to listen to anyone."

At the age of sixteen, Sam met a 24-year-old man and started a relationship with him. At first everything seemed fine but then things soured.

"He got very paranoid and very controlling," Sam shares sadly. "He started to beat me up a lot. I felt trapped."

She tells of a scary experience in which she thought she was going to die.

"I was looking after a friend's flat," she says, "and he locked me in and started beating me. He split my head open and punched me so hard I couldn't breathe. He grabbed the scarf that was around my neck and began choking me."

Fortunately, her boyfriend then left. Sam had to crawl down three flights of stairs to the police station, where she pressed charges.

"Every time I left him, he would torture me," Sam relates tearfully. "I felt that I couldn't get away. I always felt scared for my life. I would have panic attacks."

However, after the last incident, Sam knew she had to stay away or she would be killed. She stayed with various friends and ended up crashing with someone who had a cousin called Shane.

"One day, Shane walked in," Sam remembers with a smile. "I had an instant attraction to him. I later found out that he had an instant attraction to me. Shane's mum gave me his phone number, telling me to text him. So I did."

During their conversations, Shane went on and on about Jesus and even asked Sam to come to church.

"Shane would keep on about Jesus, but I would think, 'If Jesus is real, what has He done for me?'" Sam admits. "I just thought of church as a religious cult."

Sam was very reluctant to go to church, but she finally decided to give it a go. While there, a woman stood up and said, "God woke me up last night to tell me that someone here today has suffered with a lot of things in their life. God just wants you to know that He loves you and wants to be your Father." Sam knew those words were for her.

On the way out of church, a man approached Sam and Shane and asked them if he could pray. At first, he didn't know what to say so he asked the Lord to tell him. A few minutes later he said to Sam, "God has told me that you have suicidal thoughts and that He wants to be your Father." Sam was shocked as no one knew this. How could he have known about it? It had to be more than coincidence.

After a few weeks, Sam once again went to church with Shane. An ex-terrorist from Ireland had come to speak and share his story.

"After he had given his testimony," Sam states, "he asked people to come to the front if they wanted to know more about God, so I did. I got up and gave my life to Jesus. I went back to my seat and said to Shane, 'I've given my life'. He wouldn't believe me at first."

Sam's conversion, however, did not mean that life became a smooth ride afterwards.

"After being together for a little bit, Shane



Sam Almond found God to be the Father and source of true love that she had been looking for all her life.

and I struggled sexually," Sam confesses, "we had sex before marriage. Our old pastor, Rob, pulled us aside and rebuked us, saying that we needed to confess our sin to God. We went home, read the Scriptures, and got really upset. We decided we needed to listen and deal with our sin."

Not long after this, Shane and Sam wanted to get married and couldn't believe the things God did for them. In one instance, they were praying for the Lord to provide them with wedding rings, as they were financially struggling at the time. Then Shane's mum came over and said, "Me and your Dad have been talking about it and we've decided to get you the rings."

Another time they needed \$495, which they didn't have, to finish off paying for the wedding. They prayed, "Lord, You've seen our hearts; how we want to honour marriage. Please help us with this last bit of money." A few days later, a cheque arrived for the exact

amount.

"I will just say one thing," Sam shares excitedly, "at the end of God blessing us, we never paid a penny for our wedding."

Sam is so grateful to God for restoring everything that she has lost and blessing her bountifully.

"Shane and I now have 5 children, Angel, Grace, Isaac, Jacob, and Elijah," Sam says in conclusion; "Life has its ups and downs and struggles do come along but knowing Jesus makes life so much easier. I know that because of God I have a great loving husband and a wonderful family."

"I used to think of church in a religious way, but it's not true. God comes for the imperfect. Thank you Jesus for Your mercy and grace and for dying on the cross for me!"

Yet for us there is but one God, the Father, from whom all things came and for whom we live; and there is but one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom all things came and through whom we live.

1 Corinthians 8:6



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Depression turned to delight

Sal shares on Vimeo how his life was turned around.

I SAT alone and depressed. The lights were off and the silence was deafening. My ex-girlfriend and my recently born daughter were gone for good because of my selfish ways. With nothing left, I prayed to God asking Him to change my heart and give love a chance of existing in me.



Sal with his wife

I grew up going to church on Sundays but like many, never applied it to my life.

As early as fifteen I remember my first experience with drugs and for the next decade and a half I fought battle after battle with drugs, alcohol and women, trying to fill a never-ending hole in my life.

Finally, at thirty years of age I was completely broken after losing my girlfriend and daughter. I cried out to God to change me and the very next morning I felt brand-new. I didn't realize it at the time but in that moment, I'd given my life to Jesus.

In April 2015 I was baptized.

I married my girlfriend and became a father to her son and daughter and together we've had two more daughters. We're a huge, happy bunch.

This road has been difficult but God has been faithful. No matter how far you may be or how lost you may feel, I am proof that Jesus changes lives.

I am far from perfect but I am not the man I used to be. ●

Rejected and misunderstood yet Liz soars like an eagle

Growing up, Elizabeth Laine struggled with impatience, impulsiveness, and theft. Her father was in the army so they moved around a lot. Elizabeth and her family had each other, but she still battled with loneliness and insecurity.

"We were regular church attendees but I found it boring," Elizabeth admits. "It was a waste of time and a day off from school that should have been for play."

At five, Elizabeth took a little girl's flowers and at thirteen, she stole money from the church collection box to pay for a bottle of coke she wanted.

"I struggled with stealing the most," she acknowledges. "A lack of forgiveness was a close second followed by impatience. Impatience made me short-sighted, as I didn't think serious decisions through – I was impulsive and was borderline compulsive."

As a child, Elizabeth firmly believed going to church did "it" for her and her family. No harm could possibly come to a church-going, regular family of four.

"On 12th April, 1970, not long after stealing from the church," she recalls, "the story of Saul turned Paul [in the Bible in Acts 9:1-22] came to be shown at church. The movie convicted me and I became a 'Christian'. However, I never read my Bible after that."

Elizabeth got married and stayed in a doomed, loveless, abusive marriage for 27 years.

"When my husband walked out on a prayer for reconciliation by our Bible Group leader, I wanted to give up, curl up, and die," Elizabeth admits sadly.

However, this drastic turn in her life convicted Elizabeth about her relationship with God.

"I got the full message," she says.



Elizabeth Laine and her husband Don have known many trials as a couple but have learnt to overcome by trusting God and obeying His Word.

"I wanted to become the person God wanted and needed me to be. I found 'Liz' again after 27 years of an abusive marriage. God gave me a second chance with my next husband.

"He was a godly man – a true man of God. He was warned by the Lord that I was in danger and to take me quickly as his wife, which he did! No questions."

Sadly, life did not become easier for Elizabeth and her new husband. In fact, things took a downward spiral.

"In an act of revenge, my ex-husband, who blamed me for his mental illness, went around defaming and slandering me to everyone - family members, friends, church associates. I lost every primary relationship, including all four children (who were adults at

the time) and my dad. (My mum had passed away in 2007, and my sister in 2012).

"My husband and I were shunned at weddings. My dad disowned and disinherited me, saying that I was a bad wife, daughter, and mother; that I was a nothing. I was cast away like used garbage.

"Five years after the divorce that he asked for, my ex-husband committed suicide. I received the blame for this also from my children."

Elizabeth doesn't choose to wallow in self-pity and hopelessness, though. She turns to the only one who will never forsake or leave her.

"God gives me the strength every day to overcome the sadness of losing all my family, friends, and the five grandchildren I will never have in my life," Elizabeth states. "The broad way is easy and many follow it, but they face loss, negativity, racism, abuse, mental illness, drug addictions, alcoholism, anger, bitterness, lies, blame and suicidal thoughts. Ever since I let Christ into my heart, He never lets me down in my darkest times."

A Bible verse that has really helped Elizabeth get through the crises of life

is Jeremiah 29:11, "For I know the thoughts that I think towards you, says Jehovah, thoughts of peace, and not of evil, to give you hope in your latter end." She is also encouraged by other Bible passages telling her to stand on the truth and continue to pray, even though her whole family may stand on lies.

Elizabeth has written two books, *Eagles on the High Way* and *A Butterfly Landed an Eagle*. The books resonate with experience, pointing out the best way to deal with bad situations in a good, positive, healing way.

"Therein lies the secret of 'overcoming' - a tried and tested phenomena," Elizabeth says in conclusion. "As a Christian, I am commanded to overcome and obey ... I challenge Christians and non-believers to ask the right kind of questions in trying situations.

"Instead of blaming God and asking, 'Why me?' I suggest that we overcome and obey. When a disaster or crisis has occurred, what are you going to do about it? We can overcome all things through Christ who strengthens us. (Philippians 4:13)."



The organic/paleo/detox movements and what they reveal about us

BY SHEBU JOHN

OKAY wow that was a long title. So I have been thinking—as I drink my single origin signature blend latte at my favourite coffee spot—is it just me, or is everything either organic or something like it these days? It seems paleo is the latest thing ... well more like the latest thing to hit mainstream. From my understanding it has been around for a while in Europe.

Anyway, I was wondering what it is that drives us to go back to the original source? It doesn't even have to do with food; I noticed recently that even old-school barber shops are back—places where you can get a razor-shave. Things have gone back to the good old days, even the bottles and marketing looks like you have stepped back into an era when things were less plastic.

I wonder if there is a deeper philosophical statement being made: "this was how it was meant to be—clean and uncontaminated." Maybe it's an attempt to get back to the first garden where it all began—where everything was organic, single origin.

I suspect we have a deep yearning for the simplicity of this first creation. And, as culture becomes more complicated and artificial, our hearts want to recover that simplicity and cleanliness—the simplicity of the place God created for us.

But it might be deeper than that. Surely there's a place that is in our hearts and souls where we realise there is

uncleanness in us. Perhaps we hope that living a more wholesome life will allow us to cleanse ourselves. That's what some of these products promote. We talk about detoxing our bodies ... I wonder if it's really a desire to detox our souls.

Yet, ironically, these attempts at clean living can make us more arrogant. They give us an excuse to think we are better than those sugar-eating, Nescafé-drinking suburbanites.

This is why I love the raw, organic aspect of the Bible. It gets to the heart always, because it's God's word and when I read verses like those below, I'm reminded that I'm free, but that my freedom came at a cost. So whether I'm single-origin or not; whether I'm organic or not, it should all be done



for the Glory of God—which makes it so much better because it moves things away from me and makes everything about God. I can get off my single-origin high horse and stop judging others who have different tastes.

So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God. (1 Corinthians 10:31 ESV)

Finally, as a follower of Jesus I'm reminded that my hope isn't to go back to how things were, but to look forward to what is to come. Because He made me clean by His life and death; because He detoxed my soul, I can live a life where I'm defined, not by what I drink, eat or abstain from, but by a person: Jesus Christ. ●

Shebu John is a pastor at Canterbury Gardens Community Church. He previously served with Campus Crusade for Christ's university student ministry and Student Life (now Power to Change). Shebu completed his Bachelor of Theology at Ridley College and is currently undertaking his Masters in Ministry. He is married to Bek, dad to three kids, a coffee snob and loves the Hawthorn Football Club.

A different kind of hope

What are you hoping for?

RODNEY OLSEN

I FIND hope to be a very interesting idea. It is about looking forward to good things or better times even though we do not yet see any evidence of the object. Sometimes we can be in a dark place, but hope says there is something better on the way.

Most of the time when we talk about hope it really is a wish for something to happen. That desire may be fulfilled at times, but it is still looking ahead with a desire that may or may not come to pass.

When we say, "I hope this year is better than last year", we are stating a desire for something good but we have no way of knowing if that will be the case. Maybe the year will be worse.

If someone says, "I hope I won't lose my job", it is possible because they see that things are tough and their job is not certain. They have a desire that their job will continue but they are not sure.

There are a lot of desires that we express in terms of hope.

The kind of hope that we find in the Bible is different. When we put our hope in God we are certain of the outcome. It is not about wishing for something that may or may not happen. God has provided certainty through the gift of His son, Jesus.

John Piper says it best when he defines hope like this: "Biblical hope is not a mere desire for something good to happen, it is a confident expectation and desire for something good in the future. Biblical hope has moral certainty in it. When the Word says, 'Hope in God!' it does not mean, 'Cross your fingers.' It means, to use the words of William Carey, 'Expect great things from God!'"

The Bible tells us that we are born again to a hope that is alive. The hope that followers of Jesus have is the hope of eternal life together with Him. It is a hope that keeps us alive, supports us, motivates us and drives us forward.

It is a hope that invigorates and spurs our souls to action, to patience, to perseverance to the end.

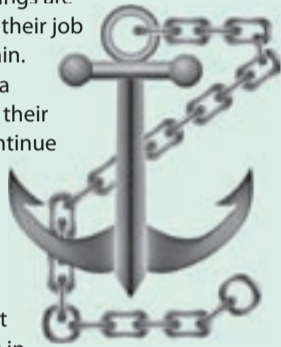
But there is more to it. It is a hope that comes through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and it comes with an inheritance.

"In [God's] great mercy He has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade" (1 Peter chapter 1, verses 3-4).

This kind of hope does not ignore our dark days or the difficulties we face; instead it looks them in the face and says that all those trials cannot compare to what is ahead of us. That is real hope.

If your hopes have been dashed again and again, can I encourage you to cling to a different kind of hope ... a living hope.

This article was originally published on rodneyolsen.net



Let beauty be the judge

Before he died in 2016, Helmut Hahn, the "shell man" of British Columbia shared his story with Carl Wieland

"My mission", said Helmut Hahn, "is to bring people to the realization that there is a God, and that He is the miracle-working God of the Bible. I do this from the intricacies of nature. Like it says in Romans 1:20, God can be clearly seen in these things."

To do this, Helmut used his splendid collection of seashells.

Born in Austria in 1923, he was once a lieutenant in Hitler's navy, and later worked as a welder, high-school teacher, research technician and inventor of a pipe-welding system. He first began giving his shell presentations in schools over 30 years ago, some 10 years after he started collecting shells in earnest. Then, Helmut's presentations developed to include churches, and also other community groups and institutions. "Sadly", he said, "in the last few years, even the mention of creation in Canada's schools is unwelcome."

Helmut chose this article's title because, he believed, "it's important not just to talk about the skill of the Creator – as a technical man, that fascinates me – but about the amazing beauty out there, too, His aesthetic sense." **TINY SHELLS GLORIFYING GOD**

His collection housed in his home in Victoria, British Columbia (on Canada's Vancouver Island) numbered some 2,000 shells from around the world. But one particular group of shells caught his special attention. These are the very tiny Guamanian nerites (Genus Nerita, Family Neritidae), and they make up all the shells pictured in this article.

"They may be small, but they have the most intricate designs of any shells I've come across," said Helmut.

Brought up a Roman Catholic, Helmut said, "After Austria's annexation by the Nazis, the political



People in Helmut Hahn's area often referred to him as "the shell man". This is not only because of his 60–90 minute presentations to audiences, but because he always carried a shell or two in his pocket "so I can refer to them when I'm talking to someone new".

climate took hold of me. Then came 25 years void of any religious content. I started looking for answers to the meaning of life, settling eventually for Theosophy, a sort of western form of Hinduism. After having lost a lot of weight through fasting, I realized I had come to a dead end in my search for 'enlightenment'.

What followed was a spiritual crisis in which he came to see the deceptive nature of so-called "spiritual masters". He said that in this experience, which led to his conversion to Christ, "I came to fully realize the power of Jesus over these demonic forces." A few years later, he said, "I saw a few shells at a friend's place and was fascinated by them. I concluded that they would be an ideal evangelistic tool, especially knowing how strongly the evolution theory ingrained itself in the younger generation."

ONE MAN'S PASSION MAKING A DIFFERENCE

Helmut told his story and displayed his shells to thousands of people. He said that the general reaction of onlookers was usually very positive, including total amazement at the intricacies of the designs, especially in the Guamanian nerites.

[NATURE SHOWS] ASTONISHING "ADDED" BEAUTY – MUCH MORE THAN IS NEEDED TO SURVIVE OR REPRODUCE



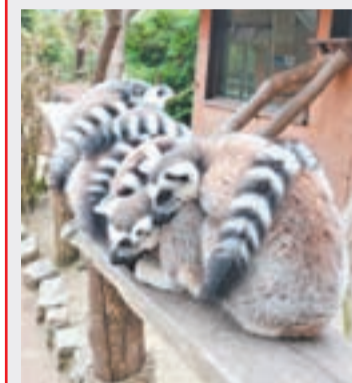
Believe it or not

Hibernation on the ark?

BY CREATION MINISTRIES INTERNATIONAL

WHEN the fat-tailed dwarf lemurs of western Madagascar were found to hibernate (for seven months of the year) in their tree-hole nests (see www.creation.com/tropical-hibern), it was thought they were the only primates to do so.

But now two other lemur species have been found to hibernate, too. Crossley's and Sibree's dwarf lemurs in eastern Madagascar spend several months each year hibernating in underground burrows.



Sleeping lemurs. Photo: Wikicommons.

Note that Noah didn't need to take all the various lemur species with him on the Ark—he only needed a male and female of the lemur 'kind'.

And with the now-demonstrated capacity of lemurs to hibernate ... well, slumbering lemurs on the Ark wouldn't have taken much looking after.

As the range of creatures found to have hibernation ability increases, the task assigned to Noah looks a whole lot more reasonable than skeptics like to portray.

(For more on hibernation, and lemur migration, see creation.com/hibern and creation.com/hitch-hiking-lemurs. For more on why hibernation is not necessary, see creation.com/noahcare.)

Looks cute, but has strange habits, New Scientist 218(2916):17, 11 May 2013.

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Building Better Marriages

MARRIAGE MEETS OUR DEEPEST NEEDS

BY ROB FURLONG

mentioned last month about how we have become obsessed in our culture with programs like *Married at First Sight* or the new kid on the block, *Date Night*.

As I also said, I do not watch these programs, nevertheless, it is interesting to hear in the promos what people have to say about *why* they are prepared to put themselves on display in this way.

They speak about finding someone to share their life with and building a genuine partnership with another.

They all want a relationship that will last a lifetime.

And they want to be loved for who they are.

These desires run deep within all of us – scratch the surface and you

discover that we are all looking for them – and they are part and parcel of what it means to be human.

But where do such notions come from?

For some of us, the answer will surprise us because these basic expressions of our humanness are found in the Bible!

Genesis 2 recounts for us the events surrounding the first wedding in history between Adam and Eve and it also unveils the core principles at the heart of marriage.

Marriage is about partnership.

When God announces that He intends to make for Adam a “... helper suitable” for him, He is stating that He will give Adam a partner in life, Eve, who will be his support, bring out the best in him and above all, *be his counterpart*.

It is tragic to see the constant struggle that goes on between the two sexes over equality when it is as plain as day that in the beginning God created men and women *fully* equal, both of them expressing what it means to be in “His image”.

The best marriages are about

partnership where the husband and wife intentionally seek to bring out the best in each other.

Marriage is about permanency.

For the man to become “united” to his wife, or as the Old English says, “to *cleave* to his wife” conveys a simple but profound truth.

It simply meant that the husband was to *stick like glue* to his wife.

Every marriage will have its tough days and tense moments. These are the times when we are faced with a choice – will we walk or will we stay? If we are committed for life, then we will choose the latter.

Marriage is about choosing wisely and well, clinging to each other with affection and loyalty – no matter what.

Marriage is about knowing each other deeply.

This is, perhaps, our deepest longing – to be known and loved for who we truly are.

In those very familiar words of the wedding ceremony, taken from Genesis 2, we are told that the “man and the woman were both naked and not ashamed.”

This concept is beautifully described as a husband and wife being emotionally, spiritually, psychologically and



physically naked before each other – “stripped and undisguised and totally open with each other” as one author has put it.

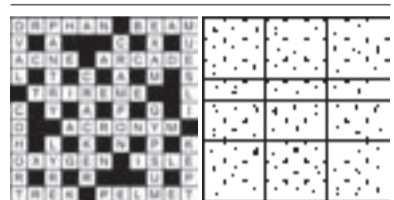
When a couple share their deepest emotions, thoughts, ideas, fears, hurts, celebrations and myriad other things, they build true intimacy and a strong, secure foundation for their physical relationship.

I believe that learning to know each other deeply will take a lifetime and, after a relationship with God, it is the most rewarding thing in the world.

It has been a gift from God for me to watch Karen grow into the woman that she is today as we have walked the road of our marriage together. As she has matured in her relationship with God and as a person I have had the enormous privilege of watching her blossom in so many areas – I can honestly say that I know her more deeply now than when we were first married!

Partnership. Permanency. Being truly known.

Deep desires that are met through the gift of marriage. •



How can I become a Christian?

Anyone can gain the eternal life offered though Jesus Christ

We read in God's word: “God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life” (John 3:16)

OUR PROBLEM:	Separation from God “Everyone has sinned. Nobody is good enough because God's standards are perfect” (Romans 3:23)	ADMIT
GOD'S REMEDY / SOLUTION:	Jesus died on the cross “God demonstrates His own love for us in this; while we were still sinners, Christ died for us” (Romans 5:8)	BELIEVE
OUR RESPONSE:	Trust Jesus by receiving Him “To all who received Him, to those who believed in His name, He gave the right to become children of God” (John 1:12)	COMMIT

Here is an example of how you can pray.

Dear Father in Heaven. I come to you now because I want to be saved. Please, forgive me of my sins. I believe that you sent your Son Jesus Christ to die for me and that you have raised him from the dead. I now ask Jesus Christ to come into my life as my Saviour and Lord. Take control of my life. Please make me the person You created me to be. In Jesus Christ's name. Amen

The Lord Jesus says: “I tell you the truth. Everyone who believes in me has eternal life.” (John 6:47). He gives life of a wonderful quality that continues forever.

AS A NEXT STEP :

<p>If you prayed the above prayer, tick this box </p> <p>I have prayed this prayer. <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>Please send me:</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Bible</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Some 'starting off' literature</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Information on a helpful church</p>	<p>If you have NOT prayed the prayer at this stage, tick this box </p> <p>I would like to think about this. <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>Please send me:</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> More information as I am inquiring about being a Christian.</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> I have a problem (see attached letter)</p>
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* Please tick and write clearly *

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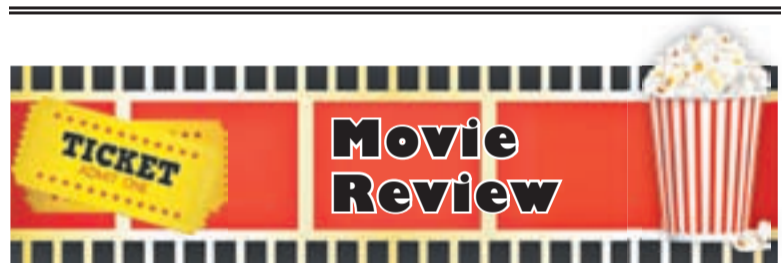
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Movie Review

Little Saroo (Sunny Pawar) lives with his mother, sister and beloved older brother Guddu in a village near Khandwa, India. One night, he falls asleep aboard an empty train and wakes to find himself travelling thousands of miles across the country, towards Calcutta.

Far from home and unable to speak the language, Saroo is swallowed up in the vastness of the city. Evading dangers at every turn, he ends up in an orphanage. The future looks bleak until he is told that an Australian couple, Sue and John Brierly (Nicole Kidman and David Wenham), want to adopt him.

Twenty years later, Saroo is a bright and athletic young Australian (Dev Patel) who is set to study Hotel Management in Melbourne. But something is missing. The taste of a food from his childhood brings memories flooding back, and Saroo realises that he can't rest until he's found home.

The true story of Saroo Brierly is a classic hero's journey: the boy who travels a long way from home, passes through a series of trials, and then finds his way back again as a changed man.

This arc gives *Lion* an inherent power, which is harnessed by screenwriter Luke Davies and director Garth Davis to great effect. It's a film of two halves, balancing India and Australia, boy and man, lost and found. Its greatest asset is tiny Sunny Pawar, who plays young Saroo with extraordinary spirit and naturalism.

Dev Patel is excellent, as is Nicole Kidman, and winningly *Lion* does not



shy away from the thornier aspects of transnational adoption. Though he settles easily at first, Saroo eventually finds himself haunted and in a sense homeless. Cut off from his roots, he cannot reconcile his childhood and adulthood selves.

Saroo's story plays out on the painful fault-line between identities. Being brought to Australia has saved him from any number of terrible fates and has afforded him wonderful opportunities. And yet there is a sense in which he shouldn't be there at all. He had a home, he had a family, and his separation from them was an injustice and a tragedy.

Little Saroo isn't just helpless because he's little: he's helpless, and is denied help, because his family is poor and illiterate. He's just one more among thousands of street children whose lives are worth little to those in authority.

It's impossible not to be moved by Saroo's bittersweet homecoming. It's a big and a broken world, *Lion* reminds us: but just sometimes, by some miracle, a small piece of it gets put back together again. •

This review is from www.demarismedia.com

Lessons from a sausage dog (Part 13)

BY JODY BENNETT

AS I was saying goodbye to my husband the other morning, the dog shot out of the door and cornered a green parrot (locally known as a 28) under the bushes, badly injuring it. After initially trying to save the poor bird, I realised it was past help and I let Carrie finish the job rather than have the parrot suffer indefinitely.

My dachshund not only killed the bird, she ate the whole thing, head, feet, feathers and all, apart from about six wing feathers.

I was shocked! Here is my little, cute lap dog behaving like a wild animal. My pet that eats tit-bits from my hand was unceremoniously ripping the head off a bird and chewing enthusiastically on its innards!



It reminded me that all dogs, no matter the breed, are originally descended from wolves. Although we can tame them, teach them tricks and dress them in pink collars, they are, underneath it all, still controlled by primeval impulses.

The same is true for me really. Although I have been a Christian for decades, it doesn't take much for my “fleshly nature” to surface again. Just the right combination of tiredness, frustration, unmet expectations or low blood sugar, and a harsh word, an expletive, a rush of rage, or some very prideful, judgemental thought gushes up.

It is usually quickly followed by shame and remorse, and I pray for forgiveness. However, I am left very much aware that “sin is [ever] crouching at the door; it desires to have you, but you must rule over it” (Genesis 4:7) and that I need to constantly submit myself to God and resist the Devil (James 4:7).

We need God's power and grace daily to fight the temptation to fall back into instinctual patterns of behaviour, and to respond to others with love rather than our own selfishness. Our salvation (rescue from the consequences of our sin) happens instantly when we ask for it, but our sanctification (rescue from the power of sin in our lives) takes a lifetime and is only fully accomplished when we die and our spirits are finally liberated from our flesh and its desires.

Next time I become pleased with my own goodness or judge others harshly, may I remember my sausage dog with a mouth full of feathers, and blush. How easily we can default to our baser nature. There but for the grace of God go I.

Therefore, let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall. (1 Corinthians 10:12) •



LOVE OVERWHELMS

US OLYMPIAN

Kelly Clark's rise in the world of snowboarding has made her a legend in the halfpipe. She has clocked up 70 competition wins, three Olympic medals (a gold and two bronze) and 10 X Games medals, nine of them gold. But although she literally soars to incredible heights in the snow, it took getting grounded in her beliefs for Kelly to really know herself.

At age 18, having been snowboarding since she was seven, Kelly won gold at the 2002 Olympics in Utah. Now, at the age of 34, the halfpipe specialist has taken part in an unprecedented five Olympics, just missing out on a medal in the women's halfpipe competition in PyeongChang in February.

But she says that in all her successes, she was looking for a sense of significance.

"I achieved the highest in my sport. I was famous," Kelly states. "I had money. I had an Olympic gold medal. I had everything that anyone could have wanted, but I found out that wasn't what I was looking for."

So she did what she thought would fill the void in her heart.

"I strived to drink the most. I strived to be the rowdiest ... all this silly stuff. It did not seem like a very good idea, but at the time that was what I thought was going to make me cool. I wanted people to like me."

Two years after her gold medal all she felt was a deep sense of emptiness.

"I had spiralled into this depression and into this place that was just really dark," Kelly says.

"I was at this contest, and I was staying by myself. I spent the morning writing about how I did not want to live anymore

and how it would not even matter [if I died]."

However, later that day, Kelly was standing at the bottom of the pipe after her run when she overheard a conversation that would change everything.

"This girl comes down, and she's crying because she fell on both of her runs and she didn't qualify. This other girl goes up to her, and I'm standing there. They didn't know anybody was listening. This girl was like, 'Hey, it's all right. God still loves you.'

"I was blown away. If there is a God who loves me, I need to know Him!"

Those words sank deep into Kelly's soul. Outside of seeing the

occasional "Jesus loves you" on a billboard or bumper sticker, she really did not know what this Christianity thing was all about – but she had a newfound desire to find out.

That same night, she dug a Bible out of her hotel room drawer and began to seek answers.

"As I started looking at the Bible, I realized that I didn't know where to look or where to start," she admits.

The girl whom she had overheard was staying in Kelly's hotel, and she found out what room number she was in. So that night, Kelly knocked on her door, saying, "I think you might be a Christian, and I think you need to tell me about God."

"She told me about having a relationship with Jesus and she

started telling me that was what it was about. My Creator wanted a real relationship with me, and He loved me very much.

"At the same time I got a little nervous because I had never thought about God before a day in my life," Kelly confesses. "I had never once wondered why we are here, I had never thought about Him, never been to church, nothing. I had no grid for any of this.

"And so I spent the next four months thinking, 'Ok, God, if You're real, reveal Yourself to me.'"

At the end of the season Kelly realised a life without God was inconceivable.

"I asked myself a few questions like, 'Could I ever wake up another day and not think about God?' And the answer was 'no' because I was thinking about Him every day and He was real and in my life," she said. "Could I ever run the other way and pretend He didn't exist? That

answer was also 'no.' And so I came to a conclusion and said, 'Alright, Jesus, come and live life with me.'

"I gave my heart to the Lord that day," she says. "It was pretty cool. The Lord [Jesus] really apprehended me at that point.

"That was a huge shifting point for me where my snowboarding became this amazing expression and fun thing, rather than this thing that I had to do. It became this thing that I was made to do and I could actually enjoy, and there was so much freedom in it because I wasn't doing it to prove to people who I was. Through my relationship with God I learned who I was, and was comfortable in who I was. But I'll tell you, I've never had more fun snowboarding, and I've never been more free."

Kelly demonstrates her commitment to Christ with a message printed on the top side of her snowboard: "Jesus, I cannot hide my love."

MAIN PHOTO: Kelly Clark of the United States competes during the Snowboard Ladies' Halfpipe Final at the 2018 Winter Olympic Games on February 13, 2018 in Pyeongchang-gun, South Korea. (Photo Cameron Spencer/Getty Images)

RIGHT: Kelly Clark poses for a portrait on the Today Show Set in Gangneung, South Korea. (Photo Marianna Massey/Getty Images)



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