

Famous last words

BY ANDREW LANSDOWN

I ONCE SAT with an elderly man in hospital as he died. His daughter had been with him during most of his last days, but unfortunately she was absent at his death. When she saw me shortly afterwards, one of the first things she asked was, "Did he say anything?"

We are always keen to know a person's last words. There is, we tend to feel, something special about them. We cling to them in the hope of finding some unique insight into the character of the deceased person. We ponder them in an effort to get some comfort concerning both our place in that person's heart and his or her place in eternity.

The Bible records the last words of the most important person who has ever lived—God's Son, Jesus Christ. During the six hours He hung dying in agony on the cross, the Lord Jesus made seven statements. These

**you
with
me**

Jesus to the thief on the cross

are sometimes referred to as "the seven words" or "the seven sayings" and are especially precious to Christians at Easter. One, the word of salvation, is found in Luke 23:43.

Luke informs us that two criminals were crucified with Jesus. One mocked Jesus, but the other silenced him, saying, "We are getting what our deeds deserve. But this man [Jesus] has done nothing wrong." Then he said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom." Jesus answered him, "I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in paradise" (NIV). With these last words, Jesus revealed six wonderful truths.

Firstly, He revealed his confidence that God the Father would accept His sacrifice on our behalf. Notwithstanding all He had suffered and all He was about to suffer, He trusted that His Father would neither abandon His soul to hell nor let His body decay (Acts 2:27, 31). This is evident from the fact that He expected to be in paradise that very day, the moment His ordeal was over.

Secondly, Jesus revealed that there is life after death, and that entrance into that life is immediate. You will be with me in Paradise today, He said—not some time in the future after your soul has "slept" in the grave.

Thirdly, Jesus revealed that He has the power and the authority to save people from judgment and hell. The apostle Paul states that "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners" (1 Timothy 1:15). And what better proof could there be of that than His dealings with the dying criminal?

Fourthly, by His response to the thief, Jesus revealed his concern to save individuals. He is the Saviour of the world, certainly. But that does not mean much unless He is the Saviour of individuals, for it is individuals who make up the world. The Son of God loved me and gave himself for me, Paul said (Galatians 2:20).

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Family collecting Easter eggs. The Easter egg is a symbol of the resurrection of Jesus: the empty egg is likened to the tomb from which Christ arose. (Photo: iClipart)

SINGING COBBLER FINDS HIS TRUE SONG

Peter Brocklehurst's life is one of incredible extremes

Peter Brocklehurst knows the adulation of crowds and the thrill of success – his voice was described by Maestro Vladimir Vais as "better than Pavarotti" and by broadcaster Alan Jones as "the finest on the planet" – but he also knows the depths of abuse, addiction, and despair.

When Peter was seven, he and his younger sister were abducted



Peter's album cover For You

and sexually abused for days before being released.

He was abducted again at 11, this

time with his older brother, and taken advantage of by a paedophile gang for several days before they escaped.

Later, he was again molested by another man.

This abuse led to a profound sense of self-loathing, fear, and uncertainty in Peter, magnified by his family's rootless lifestyle as they spent his childhood travelling around Australia in a station wagon. He remembers attending 37 schools by the time he reached grade five and living in 179 houses or caravans.

But in the midst of these troubles Peter discovered the music of Mario Lanza and his passion for singing was ignited. He had his first paid singing performance at age 12 with one of his idol's songs, Arrivederci Roma, while he worked at the orchards in Shepparton, Victoria with his family.

As he grew up Peter was a very angry young man. He took up martial arts, wanting retribution for the abuse and bullying he had endured. He trained six hours a day and reached black belt status.

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**RUGBY'S
LUIA AVAIKI**

A BURNING ISSUE

BY ALAN BAILEY

FIRE. This destroyer is very busy all around us these days. At least, it is the case where I live. Every day the newscasts tell us about the latest conflagration. Each night a car (or cars) is deliberately torched, sometimes a luxury model, leaving it a blackened hulk. After this, a house fire is reported with the estimated cost of the damage.



Then the fires get bigger. A warehouse, a factory somewhere, a bushfire raging out of control – all giving the impression that some evil force is trying to burn up our place of habitation.

Of course, some fires are the result of natural forces but many others are the result of carelessness or sheer crazy intention on the part of an arsonist. Thank God for the brave fire-fighters who do a gallant job of putting out the flames.

The old saying "Fire is a good friend but a bad master" is quite true. Mankind's progress in science and technology was given impetus by the control and employment of fire, especially in regard to the use of metals. Fire has kept us warm and cooked our meals. But it has also caused untold tragedy - which should make us very careful to avoid unwanted outbreaks.

A TIMELY WARNING

Some Bible verses are quite frightening. We read: Our God is a consuming fire (Hebrews 12:29). Yes, God is love, He is merciful and gracious, but He is also a God of judgment.

His judgment is referred to as a fire in more than one place. It indicates anger against evil because He totally opposes it. This should concern us as we are not free of this thing that He hates.

It is said that in a bushfire, the safest place to be is where the fire has been.

When Jesus hung on the cross, the fire of God fell on Him as He took our place. The safe place for us now is to be in Christ, that is, to be joined to Him in personal trust and love, thankful for what He has done for us.

There are many promises telling us that simple trust in the living Saviour, Jesus, is the way to forgiveness and endless life.

Famous last words

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And every person alive can and should say the same. Jesus died for each one of us personally. He does not save humanity *en masse*. Rather, as his last words to the criminal indicate, He saves us one by one and one to one.

Fifthly, Jesus revealed the reason He saves people. It is not because we are useful to Him, but because we are precious to Him. He loves us, that is why He saves us.

The dying thief had nothing to offer Jesus, nothing to bargain with. By his own confession he had lived an evil life and was justly under condemnation. There was nothing in his past to commend him to Jesus. And there was nothing in his future to commend him, either, because he had no future. With his hands and feet pinned to the cross, he had no ability and no time to make amends or to offer service. He was helpless and useless. So it is impossible to understand why Jesus saved him, unless we understand that Jesus loved him—simply loved him just as he was.

Sixthly, Jesus revealed the way of salvation. What must we do to be saved? Well, Jesus approved of what the thief did—so if we do likewise, we too will be saved. What did the thief do? To begin with, he acknowledged that he was a sinner, justly condemned. Then he acknowledged that

Jesus was innocent, unjustly condemned. And lastly, he entrusted himself to Jesus, appealing to Him for a place in His heavenly kingdom. In short, he recognised his need for salvation, then asked for it in repentance and received it by faith.

The dying thief had not been good in the past, and he had no prospect of being good in the future. He did not participate in any religious rite such as baptism or Holy

If only we love Him in return

Communion. He did not pass a theological exam. He simply turned from his sins and trusted in Jesus.

And so it is with us today. To be guaranteed a place in God's kingdom, we simply need to understand that Jesus died for us because He loves us and He will save us if only we love Him in return. And on the basis of that understanding we need to entrust ourselves to Him and love Him wholeheartedly. We are saved by grace, not by works of any kind. It is after we are saved that we undergo baptism, share in Holy Communion, grow in knowledge, and

strive to do good. The last words of Jesus were words of salvation. They give vitality to the repeated promise of Scripture that "Whoever calls on the name of the Lord will be saved" (Joel 2:32; Acts 2:21; Romans 10:13). The dying criminal did and was on that first Easter Friday. He set an example for us to follow.

The thief on the other cross

BY DR RALPH F WILSON

I don't belong here. I really don't. Paradise is the last place I expected to end up after all I've done. Let me tell you my story.

I am — I was — an armed robber, I guess you'd call it. Me and Jake and the others would live in caves in the Judean hills near the road from Jerusalem to Jericho. We made our living by violence. We wouldn't take on people in the big groups that passed. They travelled together for safety. But a family alone would be an easy mark, as well as anyone fool enough to travel by himself.

Brandishing a strong staff would usually do the trick. Threaten them with a beating and they'd give up without much of a fight. But I've been known to break a few bones in my day, God forgive me. I don't think I actually killed anyone, but then I never stayed around long enough to find out.

The first time I meet Jesus is when I am invited to a party in his honour in Jericho at the home of a rich tax collector named Zacchaeus. I am introduced, we shake hands, and Jesus looks me in the eye for a long moment. He can see right into me, who I am, every crime I have ever committed. Then he smiles this big friendly smile. "You know," he says, "there's forgiveness for you in my Kingdom. How about it?"

I drop my eyes, say something non-committal, and shuffle away. The next day I'm in the crowd, hanging on every word he says. Jesus is talking about his Kingdom, comparing it to a mustard seed, calling it the Kingdom of Heaven. I want so much to go up to him after he has finished and take him up on that forgiveness thing, but I just can't bring myself to do it.

I wish I had. It isn't much later when me and my friend Jake — the guy on the third cross — get caught by a Roman patrol. The others run off, but they catch us, beat us silly, drag us into Jerusalem, and throw us in

prison. No mercy for the likes of us.

And so it happens that on the same day that they crucify Jesus, they crucify Jake and me — one of us on His left, the other on His right. This isn't any normal crucifixion. Mobs of people are there just because of Jesus. Self-righteous Pharisees are swaggering and mocking. "If you're some kind of messiah," one sneers, "come on down from that cross. If you're a saviour, save yourself — if you can!"

Jake begins cat-calling, too, if you can imagine that. I yell over at him, "You miserable thug, don't you have any fear of God? Can't you see that we're going to die just like

He is? Show a little decency! We're getting exactly what we deserve, but He hasn't done nothing wrong."

Jake quiets down and the Pharisees lose interest. But I can't get Jericho out of my mind. I can't forget Jesus' eyes, His words, His invitation. And so I call over to Him, though it's getting hard to breathe and talking makes it that much harder.

"Jesus!" I say. He turns his head towards me. "Jesus, I was there in Jericho. I met you at a party at Zacchaeus' house. Remember?"

He looks at me for a moment and then nods his head just a little. He does remember.

"I never forgot what you said. I wanted to say yes, but just couldn't. And now look at me — look at us!"

He is in bad shape — exhausted, in excruciating pain, back oozing, breath laboured. He isn't going to last long. I can see that. But somehow I can see beyond all that. He was the Messiah, is the Messiah, no matter what those priests and Romans and Pharisees have done to him. And when He dies, He will be with God. In a few hours, maybe less, He will be vindicated. He will reign in that Kingdom He told us about.



"Jesus," I call again, quieter now.

He opens his eyes. They are the same eyes, the same piercing, loving, honest eyes.

"Jesus," I say, "when You come into your Kingdom, would You remember me?"

His words are laboured, his lips parched, but I can still hear him pretty well. "Truly, I say to you..." His voice cracks, then is stronger for a moment. "Truly, this very day you will be with Me in Paradise."

His eyes droop. He is fading quickly now. But I believe Him. I do! That's what gets me through those next few hours until they break my legs to kill me. I do believe Him!

And then I find myself here in heaven, in Paradise. I sure don't deserve to be here, but here I am anyway. I guess that's what a man like me gets when the King himself grants a pardon. Full forgiveness. Pretty amazing, don't you think? •

Crossword

ACROSS

- 1 Stores secretly
- 5 She sheep
- 7 Exceed basic qualification
- 8 Cook's covering
- 9 Stone fruit
- 10 Nose-in-the-air type
- 12 At no cost
- 13 Revenue, profit
- 17 Water exercise
- 18 Part of the skull
- 19 Highlander
- 20 Untie
- 24 Rear surface
- 26 Sea swallow
- 27 So-so
- 28 Flaming
- 29 Hurting
- 30 Small change
- 31 Clothes oneself

DOWN

- 1 Prawn recipe
- 2 Bird's buoyancy aid (3,3)
- 3 Type of horse cab
- 4 Light humorous parody
- 5 Coffee order
- 6 Draw level
- 11 Public melee
- 14 Jewellery chain
- 15 Sudden angry tirade
- 16 VCR button
- 21 Showy
- 22 Plunder of war
- 23 Books of fiction
- 25 Vandalized, a car

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

	5	1	4		9	8	3	
2			3		6	1		
			1					
		9	2			5		7
	2		7		5		9	
1		5			4	2		
					2			
		7	5		1			8
	8	2	9		7	4	5	

SOLUTION PAGE 11

share your story

Do you have a story about how you came to know Jesus, that may encourage others? Send your testimony, with a colour photograph, for consideration to jodyb@challengenews.org

PART-TIME JOURNALIST NEEDED!

Are you an experienced Christian journalist with a heart for sharing the Gospel with people? If so, consider applying to be a part-time journalist at Challenge, part of the team in our Perth office, 2 days a week. For more information about this position please contact our Global Operations Director, John Palandri. Office phone: (08) 9453 3311 Email: john@challengenews.org

I would die for you

Rachel Scott was willing to give up everything for her faith. In the end, she gave up her life.

April 20, 1999. To many this date means nothing, to others it means everything. It is the date of the Columbine High School Massacre in Colorado where seniors Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold shot and killed 12 students and one teacher, injured another 24 people, and committed suicide.

Richard Castaldo is lying on the ground. He has just been shot eight times, injuries that will result in a lifelong paralysis. Beside him his friend, Rachel Joy Scott, suffering wounds to the chest, arm, and leg, is crying, and he tries to comfort her.

"I asked in vain if she was okay," he remembers. "Obviously, I knew she wasn't. I never got an answer."

Richard watches Eric grab Rachel by the hair to lift her up. "Do you believe in God now?" Eric asks her. "You know I do," Richard hears his friend say.

"Well, go be with him," Eric says before shooting Rachel in the temple.

She is the first to die that day. If she'd answered differently perhaps her life would have been spared.

But Rachel was never one to deny God, no matter the costs.

"I lost all my friends at school, now

that I've begun to 'walk my talk,' she wrote in her diary a year before the massacre. "They make fun of me.

"I have no more personal friends at school, but you know what? I am not going to apologize for speaking the name of Jesus. I am not going to justify my faith to them, and I am not going to hide the light that God has put into me.

"If I have to sacrifice everything I will. If my friends have to become my enemies for me to be with my best friend Jesus, then that's fine with me.

"If I have to give up everything, I will."

In her journals, which since her death have been published by her family, she writes of the day she met God.

"You know how some dates just stand out in your mind? Like your best

friend's birthday? Well, March 5, 1993 is one of those remember days for me."

She was at church with her aunt and uncle, and in the middle of the singing she felt a gentle push, "like an invisible hand at my back getting me out of my seat and down the aisle".

"I sorta looked around and then closed my eyes and then raised my hands toward heaven. I don't remember what I said, but I will never forget the feeling. That night, I gave my

life to Jesus. That night, I said yes to God."

From that day to her very last moment Rachel said yes to God. And when she did, she became consumed with a burning desire to share with those who did not yet know Him.

"I want you to use me to reach the unreached," she once wrote in a letter addressed to God.

"God is going to use me to reach the young people. I don't know how, I don't know when," she wrote.

"I have this theory that if one person can go out of their way to show compassion, then it will start a chain reaction of the same. People will never know how far a little kindness can go."

Rachel was a bright, bubbly girl, who wore eccentric hats and dreamed of becoming a renowned Hollywood actress – or a Christian missionary.

She would regularly pray on her knees, head down, hands on her face, and tears in her eyes. By 17, the age of her death, she was attending three churches and was also an active member of church youth groups. And she told her friends of God's love despite being mocked for it.

Her televised funeral was attended by more than 1000 people and viewed by millions more worldwide.

From her story six books were published, including *Rachel's Tears* and *The Journals of Rachel Scott*.



Rachel Scott wanted her life to be used to reach people for Jesus.

After her death her parents started Rachel's Challenge, a non-profit organization that advocates a safe and positive climate and culture in schools and seeks to control and deal with school violence, bullying, discrimination, and homicidal and suicidal thoughts in students.

In 2001 Rachel was awarded the National Kindness Award for Student of the Year by the Acts of Kindness Association.

A movie called *I'm Not Ashamed* based on her life was released in 2016.

Seventeen years after her death, people young and old continue to be inspired by her story.

"I don't want to be labeled as average," she wrote in her journal, and who would dream of labeling her that way? •

AUSSIE SINGING COBBLER FINDS HIS TRUE SONG

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He also became heavily addicted to alcohol and drugs as a way of masking his deep despair and sadness.

One night in 1979, full of alcohol and drugs, in total despair and wanting an answer for all the confusion in his life, he looked up to heaven and cried "There must be a God. If You are there reveal Yourself to me".

Suddenly it was as if God had spoken straight to him. An instant sense of peace filled his head and heart. He realized his search was over. Peter had found the answer he was seeking. He had found God. The next day, he and his family went to a church and they all gave their lives to Jesus.

Peter spent the next four years trying to live the Christian life, but in his own strength. Alcohol was still part of his life and slowly but surely, it took over again.

Peter turned away from God. He continued to sing (in 20 different rock bands over 30 years). His marriage failed and he was left to raise his baby girl alone.

He remarried and had two more daughters but that marriage ended as well, leaving him with further drink, drug, and now gambling problems. Peter's life was empty and desperate.

Then in 2000, while he worked as a cobbler in Hawthorn, a man walked into Peter's shop and asked if the rumours about his singing voice were true. That man then introduced Peter to an entrepreneur, who helped him get on the road to fame.

Over the next eight years Peter became a household name in Australia, appearing on numerous television shows, including five episodes of *Australian Story*. He wrote an autobiography entitled *Finding my Voice*, released two CDs, met many celebrities, sung at prestigious venues, and



ABOVE: Viviana and Peter Brockelhurst say the only success worth having is gained by trusting God.



LEFT: Peter as a boy.

received the first standing ovation in 11 years from a packed house at the Sydney Opera House.

He also sung in a stage show based on his life called *Brave Men Run in our Family* in September 2007 with actress Kerry Armstrong.

Peter recalls that all the attention and adulation made him "feel like a demi-god", but through it all he held onto the secret that his alcoholism had blown out of all proportion.

He was drinking six bottles of Jack Daniel's for breakfast, two bottles of red wine for lunch and at other times, three to five litres of port a day. Sometimes he would drink 88 stubbies of beer per day. No one knew the extent of his addiction. In addition, there were masses of prescription drugs to deal with his depression and six suicide attempts.

He was an idol to many, yet behind the scenes he was depressed, lonely and suicidal.

Eventually the pressure became too much and, just as his career was about to soar internationally, Peter walked away from it all.

Then in 2010, after a seventh failed suicide attempt, Peter got together with Viviana, married her the following year and together they began to seriously search to know and follow God.

From previously being an overweight drunk, pronounced by his doctors to be a "dead man walking", Peter lost 57 kilograms and has been free from alcohol and prescription drug addiction since 2012. Peter is living proof that if a person allows God to take over, God is able to do what a person cannot do on his own.

He and Viviana now run a successful cobbling business in country Victoria and share the good news of Jesus with all who will listen. Peter also works as a preacher and evangelist, using his incredible voice to sing gospel music at churches.

Peter's testimony is that the only success worth having is gained by trusting God. •

nudge

BY KARL FAASE

HEROES

IN Australia, we worship sporting heroes.

One even acquired the nickname 'God'.

Their profiles

are used by the media and advertising industry to sell all sorts of products and promote almost any cause or project. They are lauded by the media at every turn. Yet often these same sporting heroes fail their adoring fans. They behave badly and are caught out. It seems that ultimately they are just like everyone else, ordinary humans who fail.

In several recent cases the response to the bad behaviour has been amazing. "Is it any wonder this happens?" people ask. "We put expectations on these people beyond what they can ever deliver, and yet can't understand when they disappoint us."

What we need is someone to look up to who will never fail us and who will be a constant source of inspiration and encouragement. For me, that's Jesus. While all human heroes will eventually let us down, Jesus can be trusted always. •



Smart-phone salvation

BY JOYCE STARR MACIAS

I DID a really stupid thing the other day. My son-in-law and I had been texting back and forth, so I put my smartphone on top of the car while I filled up with petrol. When the tank was full, I hurriedly got back into the car and drove off – forgetting that I hadn't retrieved my phone.

Preoccupied with thoughts, I drove all the way home without

noticing that my phone was missing. Since our house is off the beaten track, we don't usually see many strangers. But that day as I checked in my rear view mirror,



I noticed a car I didn't recognise right behind me. It stayed behind me all the way to the house, then the driver pulled into our driveway, stopped and got out.

"Your phone fell off your car. I followed you so I could give it back," he said, handing me my phone. The phone was scuffed and the cover had popped off.

"Oh no" I groaned, suddenly remembering what I'd done. It didn't appear my phone could be salvaged.

I tried turning it on but the screen was dark and unresponsive.

"I guess it's done for," I said sadly.

"Maybe not," the man answered as he retrieved the phone, deftly opened the back, pushed the battery into place and snapped it back together again.

A quick press of the 'on' button, and the light turned green. Everything seemed to be working normally.

Despite the way I had treated my phone, it was a little worse for wear, with nothing more than a small dent at the top and a couple of scratches.

As I mentally reviewed the morning's events, it seemed to me that the smartphone episode was a wonderful illustration of God's grace.

My phone had been slammed around and bore signs of damage, much the same way as trials and tribulations shatter and scar people's lives.

But God is in the business of healing messed-up people, picking up the shattered pieces and, by His undeserved kindness, restores broken lives.

We can be salvaged, just as my benefactor had rescued my phone and put it back together.

Though we may bear some scars from our experiences, God gives us another chance to be like new.

If we are willing, the Bible tells us that 'out of sheer generosity God puts us in right standing with Himself... [getting] out of the mess we're in' (see Romans 3:23).

Article courtesy of Wacry Magazine

Rediscovering our sense of awe

Renowned Australian photographer Ken Duncan reminds us to slow down, enjoy, and be thankful for the beauty around us

Have you ever wondered why days seemed to last forever when you were a child and now it feels as if we blink and another week is over?

The pace of life is faster than ever and we can trip over just trying to keep up. We have all this technology to make life easier, yet no invention that can slow down time.

A 2012 study published in Psychology Today revealed the real problem. We're suffering from a chronic lack of awe.

For the study some subjects watched funny imagery while others watched 'awe-inspiring' imagery. Those who watched the 'awe-inspiring' imagery felt like they had more time, as if the minutes had slowed down.

And it makes sense.

During our childhood we likely spent countless hours outdoors looking up at the clouds or the magnificent night sky.

But as we get older we tend to stop looking up and spend more time looking down at computer screens and smart devices.

My basic philosophy is best summed up by these words: "For since the creation of the world, God's invisible qualities – his eternal power and divine nature – have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse" (Romans chapter 1 verse 20).

I consider myself an average photographer with a great God;

I'm merely an interpreter of God's creation.

My 'office' is the lush rainforests of the Daintree, desert wonders like Uluru, and our magnificent, endless beaches. I've travelled the world interpreting God's creation and I've come to realize that the only appropriate response is an overwhelming sense of gratitude.

Gazing into crystal clear water at the foot of a glorious, roaring waterfall is like staring into the face of God, truly comprehending his creative nature and his rich blessings.

"Walk out into the fields and look at the wildflowers. They never primp or shop, but have you ever seen colour and design quite like it? The 10 best-dressed men and women in the country look shabby alongside them" (Matthew chapter 6 verse 29).

Take a moment to really stop and smell the roses; lie on your back and stare up at the stars, just like you used to when you were a child.

Perhaps over the years it's not just your childlike sense of awe that's left you, but also your childlike faith.

Maybe it's time to recapture that, too.

"Enter with the password: 'Thank you!' Make yourselves at home, talking praise. Thank him. Worship him" (Psalm 100 verse 4).

When we truly immerse ourselves in God's creation, we

can't help but be thankful. It creates a certain sense of perspective – the same God who created the universe is taking care of each one of us.

I believe God has an incredible destiny for Australia and for us as Australians. As we start to say 'Thank you', [God] will start to open up those doors even more.

At a time when there is so much fear and anxiety around the world, what is the answer? I believe the answer is faith and thankfulness for what God is going to do. Our help and our hope are in him.

The National Day of Thanksgiving is on Saturday 27 May 2017. It's an opportunity for us to stop, as a nation, and say 'thanks' to God and to each other for the blessings we all enjoy.

"The only appropriate response is overwhelming gratitude"



WHEN IS A PARDON NOT A PARDON?



BY RICHARD INNES

In Pennsylvania in 1929, George Wilson was sentenced to be hanged by the United States Court for robbing the Federal payroll and for murder. President Andrew Jackson pardoned him but this was refused, and Wilson insisted that it was not a pardon unless he accepted it. That was a point of law never before raised, and the President called the Supreme Court to decide.

Chief Justice John Marshall gave the following decision: 'A pardon is a paper, the value of which depends upon its acceptance by the person

implicated. It is hardly to be supposed that one under sentence of death would refuse to accept a pardon, but if it is refused, there is no pardon. George Wilson must be hanged!' And he was.

As Chief Justice Marshall said, it is difficult to believe that a man sentenced to death would refuse to accept an unconditional pardon he was offered. But why is it that untold numbers of people have been offered a far greater pardon that George Wilson was offered and have either refused or failed to accept it.

And exactly what is this pardon? It is a full and free unconditional pardon from God, who gave His only

Son, Jesus Christ, to die in our place on the insufferably cruel Roman cross at Easter time some 2,000 years ago. Jesus did this to pay the just penalty for all our sins so that God could fully and freely pardon every one of us.

However, like George Wilson's pardon, God's pardon only becomes a reality when it is believed and accepted. But why did Jesus have to die, you might ask.

The answer is that Jesus died for us because God is a God of infinite justice and cannot forgive sin without justice being served. Otherwise He wouldn't be God. This means that all sin must be judged according to the universal moral law of God. We can no more defy this law and live than we can defy the law of gravity by jumping out of an aeroplane without a parachute and survive.

It is 'the law of sin and death,' which means that the judgement and penalty of all sin is death that, after this life, is eternal separation from God in the place God's Word calls Hell. God's Word makes it very clear that 'the wages of sin is death' – eternal death. This happens unless we apply a higher law which is 'the law of the Spirit of Life,' which is a God-given 'spiritual parachute' to

save us from eternal death.

God is a God of absolute holiness so no sin or unforgiven sinners can survive in His presence. As some bacteria are not able to survive in the light if they are exposed to it, so it is with us. In our sinful state if we were exposed to God and His incredible light, we would be destroyed instantaneously. And herein lies our dilemma.

However, God's answer to our dilemma is that God is not only a God of infinite justice and absolute holiness, but also a God of eternal love. Because of his love, God gave His very own Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, to die on the Cross in our place to pay the penalty for our sins to meet the automatic demands of God's justice and holiness. Christ's death made possible God's 'law of the Spirit of Life' – a God-given 'spiritual parachute' – to save us from eternal death. This is God's gift to you and me.

To accept this pardon all we need to do is confess our sinfulness, believe that Jesus is the Son of God and that He died in our place for our sins, and ask God for, and accept, His forgiveness and pardon. It may seem too simple but Jesus did all that needed to be done for us. All we need to do is accept the pardon.

WAS THE TOMB REALLY EMPTY?

Is there another plausible theory for Jesus' empty tomb?

BASED on overwhelming historical evidence, Christians believe that Jesus was bodily resurrected in real time and space by the supernatural power of God. The difficulties in belief may be great, but the problems inherent in disbelief are even greater.

Many people have advanced alternate theories to explain the Resurrection:

- **The wrong-tomb theory.**

Answer: If the wrong tomb were involved, the Jewish authorities would have lost no time in producing the body from the proper tomb and squashing any talk of a resurrection.

- **The hallucination theory**

Answer: It is not credible to think that five hundred people could have seen the same hallucination for forty days.

- **The swoon theory**

Answer: Jesus was pierced in the side by a soldier to prove that he was dead before they took him down from the cross. Even if he somehow survived that, it is impossible that someone half-dead, weak and ill could have rolled the heavy stone away, got passed the Roman guards and then given the disciples the impression that he was a Conqueror over death and the grave.

- **The stolen-body theory**

Answer: How did the depressed and cowardly disciples suddenly become so brave and daring as to face a detachment of select soldiers at the tomb to steal the body? And why would they do so? They didn't even understand that Jesus was going to rise from the dead.

- **The moved-body theory**

Answer: If the authorities moved the body, when the disciples started to talk about a resurrection, why didn't they recover the corpse, display it on a cart and wheel it through the centre of Jerusalem?

- **The relocated-body theory**

Answer: The Jews didn't relocate the bones to an ossuary until the body had been buried for a year. Even if it were true, all it accounts for is the empty tomb, which is not what convinced the disciples Jesus had risen - it was his appearances to them.

- **the copycat theory (Christianity copies ancient myths)**

Answer: Unlike the historical Jesus, there is no evidence for the reliability of any of the alleged parallel stories in the mystery religions. Jesus of Nazareth ate, slept, performed miracles, died, and returned to life. These accounts are supported by a reliable historical record. In contrast, the dying and rising gods of the mystery religions were timeless myths repeated annually with the changing seasons.

The greatest proof of Jesus' bodily resurrection is the change that came over his followers. They were transformed from terrified doubters, to bold, charismatic preachers who were prepared to die for what they had witnessed. And who would die for something they knew to be a lie? If the resurrection had not happened, they would have known it.

These arguments are taken directly from *More than a Carpenter* by Josh McDowell, chapter 10.

For more in depth reasoning see, among others, *More than a Carpenter* by Josh McDowell; *Who moved the Stone?* by Frank Morrison; or *Cold-Case Christianity* by J. Warner Wallace.

The power of saying "yes"

Michele Black had no idea, when she grudgingly agreed to go to Rwanda, how much of an impact she would turn out to make.

Over the course of 100 days from April to July 1994 approximately 800,000 people in Rwanda were slaughtered by Hutu nationalists, an extremist group targeting members of the minority Tutsi community during the civil war.

Almost 15 years later, in 2007, the country was still in a state of recovery. Many of the widows from the 1994 genocide needed to go back to work to support their families, but without childcare facilities they had to rely on houseboys to look after the younger children.

Sadly they discovered that a lot of the houseboys were raping the children.

This moved the Rwandan Government to have a vision that by 2020 every church in every village would have a nursery school attached to it so children could receive proper care.

To do this, they requested help from Australia to prepare teachers, because there were no qualified nursery teachers in Rwanda and nowhere for them to go for training unless they moved to Uganda.

Michele Black was sitting at home one afternoon of March 2007 when a friend called to ask if she would build a team to train these nursery teachers.

"I am not going back to Africa," Michele thought. Months earlier she had returned exhausted from Mozambique having contracted malaria for the second time in her three trips to the continent.

She was done with Africa, but God had other plans as her church offered to fund everything.

Initially Michele only wanted to go once, but now she says, "I have been to Rwanda nine times."

She trained 30 teachers on her first visit in 2007, then continued their training until 2010, when she helped prepare them to become the national trainers.

"Which they did - they went out to every village in every province and trained other nursery teachers," she says.

"When we came back in 2011 we were informed they had in fact trained over 5,000 new nursery teachers."

Michele says there are no laws in



Michele Black with one of the little lives she has touched in Rwanda.

Rwanda to restrict the number of students to a class, so she once met a 70-year-old man who taught a class of 194 kids.

He taught them under a tree, she explains, with no equipment, no furniture, and no building. "He just believed so passionately in giving the new generation of Rwandans a chance through education."

As she continued to go back, it began to dawn on Michele how big an impact her half-hearted "yes" was making.

"Let's say the average class size is 110 children and 5000 teachers have been trained; that is 650,000 Rwandan children's lives that have been changed forever through education,

just because I reluctantly said, 'Here I am, send me!'"

At a childhood camp, Michele recalls the decision that changed her life: "I realized I needed to make my own decision to follow Jesus, not just rely on the Christian heritage of my family.

"I wanted my life to be fulfilled and have purpose and I could see that the only way to do that was to invite Jesus

to take charge of my life and to guide my every footstep."

On August 25 last year, Michele once again found herself with two full suitcases and a passport in hand. The only difference this time was she was flying one way, with no return flight booked.

She is living in Rwanda, working alongside her friend, and together they are writing modules to start the first nursery teacher training college in Rwanda. A few years ago, they bought the land where they are believing they will one day build the Teacher Training College.

Through her experience, Michele has come to realize God's plan for her life was so much greater than her own.

"God has impressed on my heart that even though we sometimes can't see the big picture, if we look at those around us who are being influenced, He has control of the big picture," she says.

"God knows all about you. Life is so short, ask Him into your life today and then tell someone you admire and trust and can lead you in the right direction of a life living with purpose, hope and passion."

God has control of the big picture

Faith like a child

What does God say about children?

Abuse and pain, whether physical or psychological, angers and outrages us, particularly if it involves children.

When we hear of children being neglected, beaten, told they are unloved and worthless, or made to endure great loss and suffering, our hearts break for them.

Instinctively we know children are precious. Just how precious, God reminds us in His Word.

God says children are a gift and a blessing from Him. "Sons are a heritage from the Lord," it says in Psalm 127 verse 3; "children are a reward from Him."

Jesus says children are precious in His eyes. They are also an example of what we must become like to enter the kingdom of God.

In Matthew chapter 18, the disciples ask Jesus who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. "[Jesus] called a little child to him, and placed the child among them. And he said: 'Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Therefore, whoever takes the lowly position of this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. And whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me'."

"Let the children come to me, and do not hinder them, for

the kingdom of God belongs to such as these" - Jesus says in Mark 10 verse 14.

Children should not be seen as inferior. "See that you do not look down on one of these little ones," Jesus commands in Matthew 18 verse 10. "For I tell you their angels in heaven always see the face of my father in heaven."

And they should be protected, not harmed, because they belong to God.

"If anyone causes one of these little ones - those who believe in me - to stumble, it would be better for them to have a large millstone hung around their neck and to be drowned in the depths of the sea" - Jesus explains sternly in Matthew 18 verse 6.

Children have a simple and pure faith that makes it easy for them to believe in and accept God's immense love for them. If you want to know what God expects of our faith, just follow the example of a child.





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The flood chaser

Dr Ron Neller has found that his PH.D in fluvial geomorphology is no stumbling block to accepting the Biblical account of creation

BY TAS WALKER

DR Ron Neller reflects that he has had an amazing career. “I’ve travelled the world. I’ve seen incredible river systems and incredible landscapes. I’ve experienced a diversity of cultures. I’ve also been robbed. I’ve been shot at. I’ve been arrested by foreign governments. I’ve been bitten by venomous creatures, I’ve fallen into raging rivers ... and I’ve survived. It’s been an exciting life.”

FLOOD CHASER

“I was essentially a flood chaser”, Ron says. “I saw an incredible variety of fluvial systems on this planet in a diversity of environments, including arctic, temperate, subtropical, tropical, and desert environments. In these travels I came to appreciate the power of water, and to understand the landscapes such systems created.”

Raised as one of four children in what he says was a dysfunctional family, Ron explained that he saw education as an escape mechanism.

“Although I did not get the best of school grades to go to university I pleaded with my parents to let me go nonetheless—I would pay my own way. They did so, thinking that I was seeking education. But I was seeking to escape from life’s problems.”

After he had completed his Ph.D., Ron set out to see the world. Over the years he’s carried out research in many countries, including Australia, Finland, various Pacific Island nations, South Africa, China, Peru, and Libya.

On returning to Australia with his many years of experience, Ron rose quickly through the ranks. He was appointed director of a research institute aligned with over 40 researchers.

He set up a field research station on Fraser Island near Brisbane, Australia. It’s the world’s largest sand island, with an area of 1,840 km², and is World Heritage listed.

As his reputation spread, he became an adviser to state and federal governments, dealing with World Heritage sites.

“I was amazed by the diversity of environments on our planet,” Ron says.

“In Genesis 1:31 we read, ‘God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good.’ At that time I would have said that I saw everything that was there, and it was very good. So, although I now appreciate that we live in a fallen world, I think I was developing a tiny bit of the love

for creation the Lord was expressing there.”

With his wide experience, Ron began to see that the geological evidence collected during his research did not fit the slow-and-gradual thinking that permeates his profession.

He tells a story: “I was once researching in the Amazon jungle and my colleagues back home were theorizing how a changing climate formed the landscape over millions of years. But when I looked at the evidence I did not see that. What we saw were very mobile river systems rapidly changing their courses, and creating new landscapes that do not need eons of time. Why do we need to say it took many years?”

“But, of course, I was told in no uncertain terms by some colleagues to think more ‘logically.’”

PEER PRESSURE VS EVIDENCE

Sometime later, Ron, not yet a Christian, was with a research team examining continental shelf sediments off Hong Kong.

He says, “After we had analyzed the sediments in the laboratories, I looked at the data and said to university colleagues, ‘I see evidence in these ocean sediments for one flood, one enormous flood.’ Of course, I was again told to be ‘logical’, otherwise I could lose research grants.”

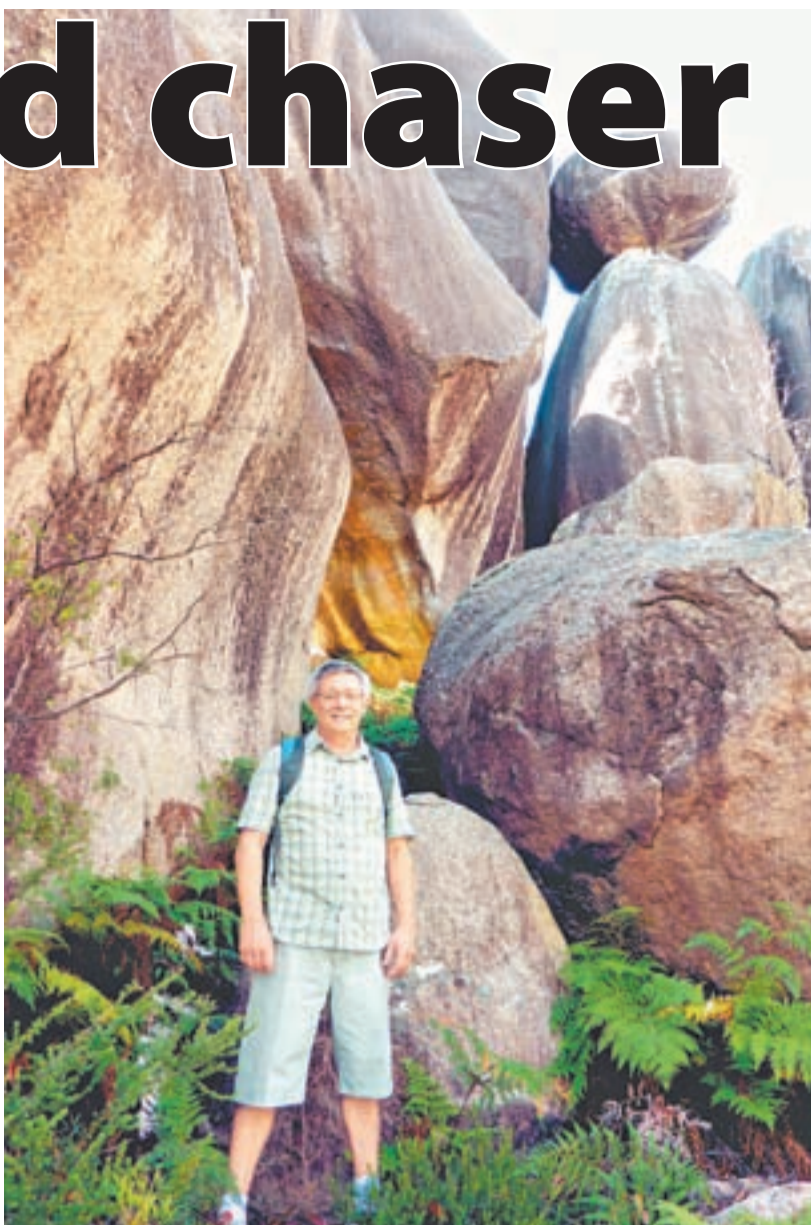
In all the time that Ron was travelling around the world, family, friends and colleagues would invite him to church. And he would go. “I don’t know what I was looking for, but I wasn’t consciously trying to connect with God,” says Ron. “I was into my early fifties before I came to accept Jesus Christ and to finally give my life to Him.”

It was only upon becoming a Christian that the geomorphological data he had gathered from decades of research finally started to make sense.

One issue that Ron faced when he became a Christian involved the age of the earth. According to the Bible, the earth’s age is about 6,000 years old, but mainstream geologists work with ages of hundreds of millions of years. Asked about this, Ron explained that all dating methods are based on assumptions.

He said that no one knows if these assumptions are valid or not. Recognizing those assumptions has for Ron destroyed any idea that radioactive dating, for instance, is a challenge to the biblical timeline. Ron indicated that he had no problem with the biblical date of 6,000 years for the earth and universe, and 4,500 years for the date of Noah’s Flood.

Most people think that scientists



Dr Ron Neller holds a B.A. (Hons), and a Ph.D. in fluvial geomorphology, one of the Earth sciences. Geomorphology (geo = earth; morph = shape) is the study of the surface features of the earth, such as the landscapes on the continents and the landforms under the oceans; ‘fluvial’ (Latin fluere = to flow) relates to rivers.

accept the results of radioactive dating without question. “They do not,” Ron said. “Large numbers of dates are rejected as being ‘contaminated’. Why? Because the dates do not match the age they already believe about that particular environment. But they do not report it that way.”

Ron’s academic strength lies in understanding erosion, sediment transport and sediment deposition, and he found that he was unable to align his deep understanding of these with the orthodox geological belief about the process of fossilization.

He argues that “Fossils are a record of death and catastrophic burial. These are clearly consistent with what we would expect from Noah’s Flood.”

FOSSILS NOT FROM RIVER FLOODS

Ron states that although fossils can be formed by a variety of processes, by far the majority of land-based plants and animals that have been fossilized were rapidly and deeply buried by sediments in an aquatic environment. To ensure fossilization, an organism must be buried deep enough to protect it from predation and to minimize decomposition by bacteria and chemicals.

“50-plus years of monitoring of rivers globally”, says Ron, “shows there is not enough sediment produced to create the large regional fossil beds that we see. There are many journal papers about sediment deposition from large floods today.

“They report only centimetres of sediment, and only over local areas. But metres of sediment are needed over extensive areas to fossilize even a small animal.”

When Ron eventually came to Christ, it was because, in his life’s journey, he was seeing Creation and the Genesis Flood in the landscapes.

Believe it or not

BY CREATION MINISTRIES INTERNATIONAL

Japanese ‘squid’ calls for evolution rewrite



The hard fossilized remains of belemnites.

FOSSIL belemnites found in Japan mean previous ideas about belemnite evolution need to be changed. Belemnites are extinct squid-like animals that leave a hard, bullet-shaped fossil ‘shell’, called a guard.

The researchers in Japan say their discoveries mean that belemnites originated 33 million years earlier than previously thought (according to their evolutionary assumptions) and that the animal did not evolve in northern Europe, but in Asia.

Once again we see that evolution is insulated from the evidence. No matter what is found, evolution is the explanation.

The story changes to absorb the new data.



Creationist geologists interpret these creatures as being buried during Noah’s Flood, as the waters were rising to inundate the earth. The order of the fossils is not the order of evolution. Rather it’s the order in which the different animals were overwhelmed during this biblical global catastrophe.

What a belemnite is thought to have looked like.

Belemnites originated in the Triassic—A new look at an old group, *Geology* 40(10):911–914, 2012.

DR TAS WALKER worked in power station design and operation, and the geological assessment of coal deposits. He works full-time researching and speaking for Creation Ministries International (Australia). For more: creation.com/walker.

DR RON NELLER has held lecturing and research positions at four universities in Australia, as well as universities in Finland and Hong Kong. He has initiated and directed a research institute in environmental sustainability, and established two research stations in natural resource management. He has undertaken landscape studies in many places around the world, and held numerous advisory positions with Australian governments and international agencies such as the OECD (Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development).

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A DEADLY DECISION

“Congratulations, you are pregnant!”
The words over the phone from the hospital nurse were like a death knell to single teenager Sharon Clayton in the summer of 1974

“What could I do?” she writes in her autobiographical book, *Reconcile Me: from Abortion’s Chains* “Dad would reject me, and my family would have to bear the shame. My whole life was ahead of me with so much I still wanted to do, and I wasn’t even nineteen yet!”

Abortion seemed to be the only sensible option.

However, lying in the doctor’s office feeling as cold and detached as the instruments that were being pushed deep inside her, Sharon began to realise this thoughtless decision might have ongoing ripple effects throughout her life.

“At home the guilt and pain washed over me in waves. I reflected on how I hated myself. How had I got myself into this predicament? I was an attractive young woman to look at from the outside, but inside I was broken.”

Sharon had known that sleeping around was wrong and she knew the abortion was just an attempt to “get rid of the evidence of my immoral conduct”.

Years before, in Grade 7, she and her sister Rose had tearfully rushed forward at a Billy Graham Christian evangelical crusade to make a decision to give their lives to Jesus Christ.

For a year afterwards, Sharon had done Bible study lessons and knew about sin and how it separates us from God, and how Jesus died on the cross to reconcile us back to God by paying for all our wrongdoing. However, after her mother abandoned the family and her father remarried and had other children, Sharon had such a deep desire to

feel loved and to belong that, despite what she knew was right, her poor boundaries and low self-esteem led her into foolish behaviour.

“You will regret having an abortion one day, you know,” Rose told her prophetically when she heard the news. But, flushing the jelly-like mass of the lifeless

embryo down the toilet shortly afterwards, Sharon was determined never to look back.

Through the years that followed, Sharon travelled widely around Australia and continued looking for love in sexual relationships, eventually deciding that since her looks were her greatest asset, she would go to the mining town of Kalgoorlie and become a prostitute.

“Oh how foolish my thinking was! I was 20 years old, insecure, believing I was ‘left on the shelf’. I needed love so desperately,” she remembers. At



Sharon McFee’s book cover. **INSET:** Sharon as a young woman.

that time the God she had ignored for so long stepped into her life by introducing her to Peter McFee, the man she was to marry, just before her planned trip to Kalgoorlie.

“God knew my past, and He knew my brokenness, yet He still loved me and knew exactly what I needed. I

had an unstable background, and Peter’s was rock solid ... I needed Peter’s strength and stability,” Sharon admits.

They were married the following year, just after Sharon was 21, and went on to have three sons and – after eight years, a reverse vasectomy and

much prayer – two daughters.

At 23 Sharon got more serious about her faith and started reading the Bible daily and repenting of the wrong things she had done; even making things right where possible – like paying for a purse she had stolen five years earlier.

Initially she thought being a Christian involved following a lot of rules and doing everything “perfectly” but one day as she was studying the Bible it came to her suddenly that: “I couldn’t do it in my own strength, and I wasn’t meant to”.

“Jesus Christ had already done it for me, and when God looks at me He sees Christ, in spite of all my imperfections,” she explains. “It is hard for us to receive the free gift of eternal life because we feel that somehow we have to earn it. We’re deceived into believing the lie that we have to work for our salvation.”

Eventually, 25 years after her abortion, Sharon was brought to place in counselling where she could deal with the profound grief and guilt of taking her child’s life. She was able to forgive herself and the doctor who had performed the operation.

“All the guilt and pain and denial came pouring out like pus bursting out of an infected wound. It felt like it had been buried in the pit of my stomach all this time. I cried and cried and cried,” she writes.

But her book ends with hope. “God cares and is in the business of restoring lives. Jesus Christ is the only way. One encounter with Christ will change your life – you will never be the same.”

*Read Sharon McFee’s full story in her book *Reconcile Me: from Abortion’s Chains* available from her website www.refugeofgrace.com.au

Life is in your hands

BY BISHOP RICK LEWERS

In 2015 friends of mine miscarried their baby girl. A funeral was held for their little girl which I attended with tears.

This year they are expecting another child but again, at 25 weeks, things have not been travelling well. The mother remains close to the hospital while the husband has taken compassionate leave to be with his wife.

They have asked their friends and churches to pray.

When the father rang me and asked my advice on being away from work for an extended period, I offered some time-honoured advice – make decisions that will leave you without regrets.

As we were travelling back from the western plains through some greatly-needed rain, I was drawn to an article on the ABC website regarding abortion, which on the background of my friend’s request for prayer for their unborn child, staggers belief.

Figures released by Queensland’s Health Minister Cameron Dick have revealed that 27 babies survived late-term abortions in Queensland hospitals last year but were not rendered care and allowed to die.

Mr Dick also provided the number of ‘live

birth’ abortions for the last 10 years, which shows a steady increase of those that survive, totalling in all 204 terminations with live birth outcomes.

The babies were of five months gestation or more. Queensland Health confirmed that in such cases, care is not rendered to the baby after a decision to terminate is made and it is left to perish in the clinic.

After telling my friend to make decisions that will leave him without regrets, I felt I needed to follow my own advice and respond to this ABC report.

I have since discovered that in New South Wales, an abortion is only lawful if a woman’s doctor believes on reasonable grounds it is necessary to avoid a serious danger to her life or her physical or mental health, taking into account economic, social and medical factors.

The ACT, Victoria and Tasmania have all decriminalised abortion, making it legal up to nine months’ gestation.

However, late-term abortions in Tasmania, defined as past four months, and Victoria, where late-term is classed beyond six months, require approval from two medical practitioners.

A private member’s bill to legalise abortion in Queensland has been introduced in State

Parliament by independent MP Rob Pyne.

In response, Deputy Premier and Labour MP Jackie Trad said, “I am unashamedly pro-choice.”

“What a woman decides to do with her body, in consultation with her doctor, does not belong in the criminal code.”

Now I don’t pretend to speak for women in what they do with their bodies but terminations with live birth outcomes where the living child is left to perish in the clinic has little to do with what a woman does with her body and everything to do with the value of a child’s life.

I confess to not being a supporter of abortion, but leaving a child to perish even when a termination is desired has to be something that in our humanness scars us with the saddest regret.

There are people crying out for adoption and organisations set up to assist those who need and want it.

One such organisation is Anglicare’s “Hope for Life”, a specialised service that is an advocate for the unborn child of teenage parents.

As I write, I expect that some will react



violently to what I am saying while others will be angry that I have not been much harsher.

Personally, I feel no sense of violence toward those who see termination as their option.

Nor do I want to crush those who have made a choice to terminate and now live with that decision.

To be honest I just feel a profound sense of grief and even more so as my friends seek for the life of their little one struggling but yet unborn.

In fact, if I could offer one word about how God responds to all this I think His most profound response would be grief for us while He cares eternally for the terminated.

My advice when it comes to the really crucial issues of life is to do that which will leave you without regrets in this life and for the life to come.

Make decisions you won't regret



Building Better Marriages

LIVING FREE OF REGRET

BY ROB FURLONG

“I HAS NO REGRETS!”

If you have seen the film, *The BFG*, you will know that this is the response of the evil, human-eating giant, Fleshlumpeter, when he is asked by Sophie if he is sorry for all the bad things he has done.

Regret is one of those emotions that eats away silently at our souls and rare indeed is the person who has no regrets.

Regret is so damaging to our well-being it compelled one author to state:

Regret empties anticipation, flattens dreams, and suffocates hope, because regret is a form of self-punishment ... regret beats us up with the past.

I have come to realise that I have

lived for far too long with many regrets and like the quote above says, they have beaten me up.

Many of you reading this understand precisely what I mean.

A father and son argue heatedly with each other and the father shouts out, “You’re not my son! I disown you!”

The door slams furiously as the son walks out and father and son never speak to each other again.

In the midst of a tense confrontation a husband spits out at his wife, “I wish I had never married you” and he opens a wound of rejection in her that may never heal.

A young girl rues the day she gossiped behind her friend’s back, wishing she could have the moment over, to take it all back.

Or a demanding mother with high expectations for her children makes it clear that she regards them as “failures” and an embarrassment to her.

Regret comes in all sizes, takes many forms and more often than not, it involves broken relationships.

Regret keeps us up at night, forcing



us to maintain a sleepless vigil as we rehearse our failures and shortcomings over and over in our minds.

Bear in mind, I am not talking about *hindsight*.

Hindsight is that wonderful gift which enables us to process the mistakes from our past in a healthy way and, importantly, to *learn* from them.

I remember the time I stuck my finger into a live electrical light socket at my grandmother’s home, wondering what would happen.

I soon learned and the subsequent jolt I received taught me a valuable lesson: “I will never do that again!”

Hindsight enables us to learn from our past mistakes.

Regret wants to keep us imprisoned by them.

Consider then, how Jesus deals with regret.

On that first Easter, there are regrets aplenty!

Judas, betrayer of Jesus, filled with remorse, dies a lonely, despairing death by his own hand.

Peter is humiliated and ashamed. Once the proud boaster who said he would follow Jesus anywhere and even die with him, he is haunted by the words that fell from his lips, three times, no less:

“I do not know the man!”

And two walk a dusty road together, filled with sorrow over the death of Jesus and what might have been.

But in the middle of all this sorrow, Jesus bursts out of the grave alive, confronting everyone’s regret and changing things forever.

Peter is restored.

Two travellers have their hope renewed.

Disciples are commissioned.

“The time for regret is over” says Jesus. “Now take this message of hope to the whole world!”

Here is what I am discovering.

I do not have to be held hostage by my regrets!

Because not only did Jesus die for my past mistakes, he completely obliterated them – and yours – when He rose from the dead!

In that decisive act, our past failures were dealt with once and for all and he has given us new life.

This changes everything, including our relationships.

We cannot change the past, but we can live free from it.

And we change our present when we rest in the fact that because of Jesus, regret can no longer “beat us up!”

Lessons from a sausage dog (Part 2)

BY JODY BENNETT

THIS last week our sausage dog got parvo virus, a gastro-intestinal disease that can easily kill a dog through dehydration or secondary infection.

Carrie was very ill and the vet warned me that should she not improve with treatment at home, she may have to be hospitalised, which would require a \$3,000 deposit!

This put us in a very difficult position. On the one hand, we didn’t really have that sort of money to spend, but on the other hand, how could we put a price on the life of our beloved pet? And how would I tell the children we killed the dog because it was too expensive?



I have heard of people who have spent \$20,000 or more on their dogs, paying for operations or ongoing treatments for various diseases or allergies.

Before we owned a pet I would have said that was completely crazy, but now I know our animals come to be part of the family and I, for one, was reduced to uncontrollable sobs at the thought that our dog might die.

But what makes our pets so valuable? They eat rotten bones on the carpet, leave poop all over the lawn and destroy our favourite shoes – from a purely practical, financial point of view they are not worth it.

A pet’s worth comes from how much we love them, the emotional investment we place in them. They are not valuable in and of themselves because of what they have done, but they are valuable because of the relationship we have with them, and it is purely subjective and often unfathomable to others.

It got me thinking that it is like God’s illogical, disproportionate love for us. We are not valuable in any objective way to Him, we don’t deserve and can’t earn the affection He places on us, but He values our lives by His deep and abiding tenderness for us.

And while we may “um” and “aah” about spending a few thousand dollars on the dog, God did not hesitate to lay down His very life for us. No cost was too great because His love for us “reaches to the heavens, [His] faithfulness to the skies” (Psalm 35:6).

If He is not yet your “owner”, may I encourage you to surrender to Him? He is the most loving master in the universe.

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)

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

Here is an example of how you can pray.

“Lord Jesus, I need You now. Please forgive me for my sins. I open the door of my life and receive You as my Saviour and Lord. Thankyou for loving me so much that You died on the cross for me. Take control of my life. Make me the person You created me to be. 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 :

If you prayed the above prayer, tick this box

I have prayed this prayer.

- Please send me:
- Bible
 - Some ‘starting off’ literature
 - Information on a helpful church

If you have NOT prayed the prayer at this stage, tick this box

I would like to think about this.

- Please send me:
- More information as I am inquiring about being a Christian.
 - I have a problem (see attached letter)

** Please tick and write clearly **

Name _____

Address _____

Phone _____

Age and occupation (it helps) _____

Challenge Literature Fellowship
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 info@challengenews.org

All overseas enquiries are referred onto someone in their own country

There’s an APP for that ...

RECYCLE RIGHT APP

WANT to do the right thing by the environment but a bit confused about what can be recycled and how? Can batteries or plastic bags be recycled? What do you do with your old toaster or nearly-empty paint tins?

Well, the free Recycle Right app, available on iOS and Android, is a great app to find out the recycling rules in your own municipality and to give you specific guidelines about what to do with your junk.

Find out the dates of your next green waste or junk collection, under the information from your council with the “Which Bin?” feature; which also tells you exactly what is allowed in your recycling bin.

With the “Find my Nearest” icon you can locate your closest charity shop, electrical or car disposal facility,



battery recycling centre, and other useful spots.

Click “Leftover Recipes” for what to do with your leftover food, instead of adding to the 4 million tonnes of food waste generated in Australia each year. For instance, turn leftover roast chicken into soup or pilaf, or turn over-ripe bananas into bread or muffins.

Under “Handy Tips”, find out how to create a worm farm or compost, reduce packaging and junk mail, opt out of the Yellow Pages, and what all those strange plastic symbols mean.

Under “A-Z Materials” you can find any item in the alphabetized list and discover the most responsible way of discarding of it.

Did you know cockroach baits should be disposed of as hazardous waste, or that you can put wire hangers in the recycling?

Finally, use the “Take Part” icon to find out how to tour a waste recycling facility, participate in Clean Up Australia or Composting Awareness Week, and what a Garage Sale Trail is.

Let’s be good managers of all we have been given, even those things we no longer want, and learn how to Recycle Right.

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A different league

Former women's rugby league captain's life changing decision

Luisa Avaiki, the former captain of Fetu Samoa, the Samoan national women's rugby league team, grew up attending a traditional Samoan church.

"I was always aware of God," she told *Beyond the Ultimate*, "but it wasn't something I thought you lived. I went to church every Sunday because I was forced to go, but during the week I did the opposite. I always tried to get out of church, so if we had a tournament on Sunday, I was happy."

Luisa's life revolved around her friends. She started drinking at 12 and was a heavy drinker by the age of 15. "I thought life was about having fun, being with friends, going out, and playing sport," she says. "I basically lived two lives: one with my family going to church and another with my friends partying."

Her family had high expectations for Luisa's academic achievements, but soon her grades started suffering.

"During all this, one of my friends kept nagging me to come to her youth group. Finally, I went. The message was convicting, but all I could think about was that I had a big party to go to," Luisa recalls.

"Before I could make a

bee-line for the door, another friend came and asked me if I wanted to go forward and accept Christ. Deep down, I knew things weren't right. People saw me as a happy-go-lucky person, but I knew my life wasn't right. I knew I was living a temporary happiness with friends, alcohol and basketball. So I went forward and accepted Christ.

"Everything was different from that night that I gave my life to the Lord. My life was a mess in my studies, with my family, and with my drinking, but I felt everything was going to be alright."

Luisa started playing rugby league a couple of years later. "Right from the start I felt God wanted me to play rugby league," she says. "I had a Christian friend playing and a

Christian coach. In the second year of playing league I got into the New Zealand team."

While rugby union is popular in Samoa, league is not as popular, and the Samoa Women's National Rugby Team, also known as Fetu Smoa, is based in New Zealand.

Luisa also played for the Kiwi Ferns for 15 years, and was captain for eight of those years. She told the *Samoa Observer* that Pacific Islanders are suited to playing in league as the physical side appeals to them, and their emphasis on family means they enjoy a team environment.

"We Pacific Islanders are always around family, both our immediate family and also our extended family," she says. "So it's natural for us to go into a team environment because that's what we do at home."

Two of Luisa's favourite verses are Philippians 4:6-7, "Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving present your requests to God. And the peace of God which transcends all understanding will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus," and Isaiah 40:31, "But those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint".

"God has taught me to not only be thankful to Him for placing me in rugby league but also to play my best for His glory," she says.

"My life was a mess ... but I felt everything was going to be alright"

Luisa now works as an assistant coach with National Rugby League Victoria.



ABOVE.
BARCELONA, SPAIN - 2002:
Samoa's Luisa Avaiki in action during the Ireland v Japan match during the IRB Women's Rugby World Cup in Barcelona, Spain.
(Photo Dave Rogers/Getty Images)

LEFT.
AUCKLAND, NEW ZEALAND - FEBRUARY 2009: Kiwi Ferns captain Luisa Avaiki holds the Women's World Cup they won during the Civic Reception for the World Cup winning Kiwi league team held at the Louis Vuitton Pacific Village in Auckland, New Zealand.
(Photo by Sandra Mu/Getty Images)

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