

Ian McCormack and his wife Jane.

Stung five times by box jellyfish

RETURN FROM THE DEAD

EASTER ANSWERS BIG QUESTIONS

BY CHRIS BRENNAN

SO, it's Easter... again. It seems to happen every year! I don't expect things to have changed much since last year either.

There will be advertisements filled with chocolate and bunnies, and there will be news reports of schools, universities, and companies who for the "good" of their students, clients and customers have made the executive decision to remove Easter from their spaces.

Usually, this is couched in terms of reducing offence, rather than more truthfully as an advancement of a different socio-political agenda.

Sadly, we'll end up swallowing the action even though we are mostly savvy enough to spot the motivation, because each little moment doesn't matter enough for us to act.

Here is the thing for me as a

"religious person". It might be that we are letting go of some really important possible answers as we allow ignorance of theological thinking to advance.

Let me give an example.

A few weeks ago, I was confronted by a person whom I had not previously met. He was clearly suffering from emotional pain, later attributed to physical and emotional abuse.

The discussion began like this: "You tell me what happens after we die! You can't can you, because no one has ever come back to tell us? We just die and the maggots get us."

Perhaps without even realising it, the pain of his situation has caused him to consider a huge philosophical question. "What happens to me once I die?" And perhaps even, "Do I have a meaning?"

These are uncomfortable questions that we mostly ignore, but

at times they come bubbling to the surface despite our best efforts of busyness or intellect.

Easter holds possible answers to both of them, even as we concern ourselves with chocolate and bunny rabbits.

What happens after we die? Well, Easter says that there is a life after death, and the accounts of Jesus speaking with people, eating, touching and being touched, after His resurrection, supply us with an objective example of someone who has come back from the dead with authority to declare what lies beyond the grave.

And do we matter? Again, Easter offers an intriguing answer. The Bible is clear that Jesus died on that very first Good Friday with purpose. It was to take a punishment due to others so that they might be spared.

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Easter, on the Christian calendar, is celebrated as the time when Jesus Christ died and rose again on the third day. But Jesus is not the only person to have ever tasted death and lived to tell about it.

Near death experiences abound. The big difference is that the Bible teaches that Jesus came back in a new, eternal body that will live forever and never die again. These other people, even the ones Jesus resurrected, like the well-known story of Lazarus, only came back in their own old bodies, which died again years later.

Surfer Ian McCormack had a near death experience in 1982, at 26, in Mauritius. He knows what it is to glimpse beyond the grave but he also learnt the secret to, one day, getting a body that will never die.

The blond Kiwi had been surfing, diving and hitchhiking around the world for two years when he ended up on the island of Mauritius, just off the coast of South Africa. There the Creole fishermen taught him to night dive for crayfish.

One night, Ian was stung a total of five times by box jellyfish, arguably the deadliest creature known to man. It usually kills an adult victim in 10-15 minutes.

"It felt like an electrical shock. I was in excruciating pain," he remembers. "[Almost immediately] I could feel the toxin pumping up through my system and up into my

lymph glands. My right lung started to be constricted. Perspiration was pouring off me, and it felt like a branding iron had been put on my arm."

Miles from the nearest hospital, Ian struggled to get people to understand the seriousness of his situation. Twice he heard a clear, unknown voice instruct him. Once it told him not to close his eyes and a second time it told him to beg for help.

Soon Ian's body went into muscular contortions, spasming uncontrollably. Then an icy cold breeze blew through him. Dehydrated and paralysed, he felt death (necrosis) creeping up from his feet.

When he eventually made it into an ambulance, Ian saw flashes of his childhood. He thought, "If I die now, where am I going?"

A professed atheist, Ian "saw" a vision of his Christian mother praying for him. She said, "No matter what you've done, Son, if you will call out to God, He will hear you and forgive you."

Ian found out later, that at that moment, on the other side of the world, his mother had been praying urgently for him as she sensed danger.

Ian spoke in his thoughts: "God, I don't know if you're real, or if you can hear me. But if You can I have no idea what to pray. Please help me."

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Teen talk



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No angel

GARETH THOMPSON

Lessons from a sausage dog



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Easter for Kids



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Essential element

BY ALAN BAILEY

ON an average day, you and I use a staggering 450 litres of it. Yes, it could only be water— and we take it for granted. It's just there at the turning of a tap. We not only drink it, we wash our dishes, ourselves and our clothes with it, water our gardens and flush our toilets. Not to mention washing the car and filling the pool.



COMMON BUT NOT SO COMMON

Our planet has water in abundance when seen as a whole. The oceans are massive. Seventy percent of the earth's surface. But those that peer into the heavens and tell us about the rest of the solar system and the portion of the universe we know anything about, find little water there.

Two gases, hydrogen and oxygen. Simple chemically, but both common and rare. Plentiful but precious.

BE THANKFUL FOR IT

Life depends on it. Life could never have begun without it. Summer days make us thankful for it. Cool water to swallow down and shower in is a blessing. Almost like a luxury. It can only be imagined what it must be like wandering in a blazing desert looking for water. As the body dehydrates, delirium increases. The craving for water decreases as the system closes down. Then a shrivelling corpse lies inert in the sun. In time it will be white bones in the glaring light, testimony to the fact that life cannot exist without water.

A NOTABLE CONVERSATION ABOUT WATER

A man sat on the side of a well in the hot Middle East. A woman came to draw water up in a bucket and carry it away. He asked her for a drink and this started a conversation that has gone down in history. There was an amazing change of direction when he said he had water for her that would quench her thirst forever. This was hard for her to understand, as it is for present day readers.

His words were, "Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks the water I give him will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life."

Life that never ends is like a stream of water that goes on and on. People everywhere are thirsting for a new kind of life – a new quality of life. So many thirst but do not find. The woman in the story had tried in many ways to find what her heart craved. Jesus knew that and made the offer of a completely satisfying answer to her need. The offer stands today. Many have found by experience what it means to tap into the eternal, to find their inner thirst quenched, to discover they need look no further.

Christ came for the purpose of giving us life. Our existence had been affected by the pollution of sin. Spiritual death held sway. His death on the cross and subsequent resurrection brought the availability of life without end.

"Whoever is thirsty, let him come; and whoever wishes, let him take the free gift of the water of life." •

Convincing evidence of life after death

BY RICHARD W INNES

MANY years ago a submarine sank off the coast of Provincetown. When divers descended, they searched for any possible signs of life within. Listening closely, they detected a slight tapping sound. Somebody was sending a message in Morse Code asking, "Is there hope?"

Facing death can be a terrifying experience – especially if there is no hope of life after death.

For example, Voltaire, who spent most of his life fighting Christianity, cried out with his dying breath, "I am abandoned by God and man. I shall go to hell."

Sir Thomas Scott, Chancellor of England, said as he was dying, "Until this moment I thought there was neither God nor hell; now I know and feel that there are both, and I am doomed to perdition by the just judgement of the Almighty."

How different are the words of the followers of Christ who, when facing death, have the hope of life after death. John Wesley, father of the worldwide Methodist movement, said on his deathbed, "Best of all, God is with us."

Sir David Brewster, inventor of the kaleidoscope, said as he was dying, "I will see Jesus. I shall see Him as He is. I have had the light for many years. Oh, how bright it is. I feel so safe and satisfied."

It has been well said that nobody ever repented of being a Christian on their deathbed.

However, the hope of life after death is not based in what others have said when they are dying, but on Christ's own resurrection from death.

As the Scriptures explain, "The fact is that Christ did actually rise from the dead, and has become the first of millions who will come back to life again someday."

"Everyone must die because all of us are related to Adam, being members of his sinful race, and wherever there is sin, death results. But all who are related to Christ will rise again ... When Christ comes back, all His people will become alive again."

"But I've never seen anybody rise from the dead," somebody said, "so I don't believe such a thing is possible."

That's understandable! However, 100 years ago very few people would have believed that television, telecommunications, the internet, and nuclear weapons were possible simply because they hadn't seen these either. Obviously, this didn't prove they couldn't happen.

And because we haven't seen anyone rise from the dead doesn't prove that it can't happen.

However with Christ's resurrection there were many who saw what happened. On at least ten occasions Christ appeared to His followers after His death and burial.

He appeared to Mary Magdalene in the garden on Easter Sunday. He appeared to the other Mary, to Peter,



APRIL 8, 2018: A girl holds a candle in Gaza City during Easter celebrations. (Photo Mohammed Abed/AFP/Getty Images)

to the two disciples on the road to Emmaus, to all the apostles except Thomas, to the eleven disciples with Thomas included, to the disciples at the Lake of Galilee, to the five hundred followers to whom He gave the Great Commission, to James, to the eleven disciples at Bethany just before His ascension to Heaven, and to Paul.

Charles McIlvaine, former chaplain of the United States Senate, suggests that if Christ did not rise from the

dead, His body must have been removed either by friends or by enemies.

And how could Christ's few friends have stolen His body from the tomb? The eleven apostles fled through fear when Christ was taken.

The remaining few women and Joseph

of Arimathea (who donated the tomb) could hardly have rolled away the massive grave stone and stolen Christ's body when the grave was so zealously guarded, under Roman authority, to prevent anyone from stealing the body.

And had the enemies of Christ stolen the body, they would have been delighted to disprove Christ's resurrection for all time – by producing the dead body. This they never did.

Thus the empty tomb is further evidence of Christ's resurrection.

Additional evidence is seen in the dramatic change in the fearful apostles.

"Within fifty days of the death of Jesus Christ, and the apparent collapse of His cause," wrote Rev G H Lunn, "the city of Jerusalem rang with the clarion cries of men who, with all boldness, declared that God had raised Christ from the dead, and that they were His witness."

"Craven cowards were changed into courageous confessors, and rude unlettered fishermen from Galilee had become royal heralds of the King, so that all who saw and heard them were compelled to acknowledge that

something had happened which had utterly transformed their lives.

"When questioned by their critics, the apostles had no hesitancy in making reply. They accounted for their own boldness by attributing everything to the risen Christ."

In speaking about life after death, Dr Von Braun, elected in 1975 President of the National Space Institute in Washington DC, said, "In our modern world many people seem to feel that science has somehow made such 'religious ideas' untimely or old-fashioned.

"But I think science has a real surprise for the sceptics. Science, for instance tells us that nothing in nature, not even the tiniest particle, can disappear without a trace.

"Think about that for a moment. Once you do, your thoughts about life will never be the same. Science has found that nothing can disappear without trace. Nature does not know extinction. All it knows is transformation!

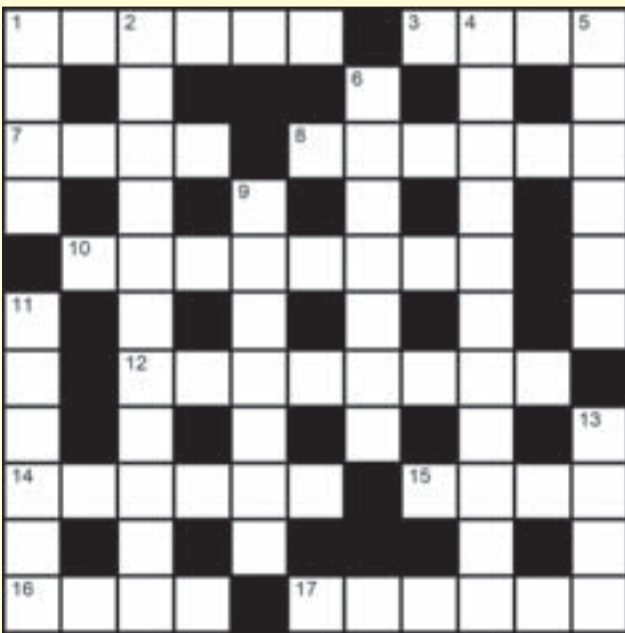
"Now if God applies this fundamental principle to the most minute and insignificant parts of His universe, doesn't it make sense to assume that He applies it also to the masterpiece of His creation – the human soul? I think it does. And everything science has taught me – and continues to teach me – strengthens my belief in the continuity of our spiritual existence after death. Nothing disappears without trace."

According to God's Word, "we have this assurance: Those who belong to God shall live again. Their bodies shall rise again! Those who dwell in the dust shall awake and sing for joy! For God's light of life will fall like dew upon them!"

And who are those who belong to God? They are not the self-righteous do-gooders. They are those who admit their failures, their sins and their need of God. They are those who believe that Jesus died on the Cross for their sins and who, in their hearts, have committed their lives to Christ and have become His true followers. Jesus said to His followers, "Because I live, you will live also." •

Crossword

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|-------------------|---------------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------|
| ACROSS | 8 Made amends for | 15 Arouse | DOWN |
| 1 Spanish capital | 10 Sense of great elation | 16 Large bird of the pampas | 1 Saying nothing |
| 3 70's hairdo | 12 Arm ornament | 17 Flowering shrub | 2 Unruly outburst |
| 7 Undertaking | 14 Not paired? | | 4 Basic, foundational |



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

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

EYE-OPENER

Encounter in empty tomb convinces Tim Cross that resurrection story is true

BY CHARLES GARDNER
(GOOD NEWS)

A trip to Jerusalem at Easter so convinced an army officer that Jesus really did rise from the dead that he was changed forever.

The dramatic experience took place when Major General Tim Cross was in Israel with his wife Christine while on leave from a peace-keeping post in Cyprus in 1981. His Christian faith is now the driving force of his life.

He was raised in what he describes as “a typical middle-class British home”, attended a Church of England primary school and, like many people, assumed he was a Christian. He even took the unusual step of being confirmed while at Sandhurst (the military academy), took communion during his wedding and had his three children christened. But there was no relationship with God.

But when the opportunity came for a short break in Israel over the Easter weekend, he and Christine hitched a ride on a United Nations plane to take in the sights of the Holy Land.

“I remember going past the bus station near the Damascus Gate and noticing the hill behind it looking like a skull” (thought by some to be the location of Jesus’ crucifixion. Referred to in the Bible as Golgotha – ‘the place of the skull’).

“On Easter Sunday we visited the Church of the Holy Sepulchre – gen-



Tim Cross

erally considered to be built over Jesus’ tomb – and then attended a service at St George’s (Anglican) Cathedral where it was suggested I visit the Garden Tomb, not far from the bus station.

Grave
“Our guide, a retired military officer called Colonel Dobbie, showed us a round ... He read the Gospels [the Bible’s accounts of Jesus’ life] and, most importantly, pointed out the empty tomb cut into the rocks on the edge of the garden. I had a look inside.”

The tomb looked exactly like the Bible’s description of the grave where Jesus’ dead body was laid after He

was crucified, and where Jesus walked out alive three days later.

“I was really struck by the reality of the empty tomb – the fact that Jesus did not stay dead.”

God did something powerful in Tim’s heart. He wasn’t the same man afterwards.

“Back in Cyprus we had a very good Army padre (chaplain), and within two months I was a committed Christian. Meanwhile, Christine had started attending a Bible study and committed her life to Jesus independently of me.

“Everything changed from a personal point of view – it changed the way I led and commanded, it changed my view of the world, and the way I saw myself.”

As to whether faith should mix with firearms, he admits to taking stock of whether it was appropriate to continue in the military. He prayed about it, spoke to others and studied the Bible. He concluded that there is nothing in the Bible to

say that you can’t be a soldier and a follower of Jesus.

On the contrary, Tim believes that Christians are needed in the Army, and everywhere.

He says that the ethos of the Army

FAITH HAD TO BE PART OF ... HOW I COMMANDED



The Garden Tomb site in Jerusalem where Tim had his remarkable encounter

– the call to fight for justice and to be a force for good in the world – is rooted in Christianity, and still is, despite today’s political attempts to secularise the Army.

He also told the BBC in 2008 that, as a community, “the British Army recognises the issues of spirituality, goodness, righteousness, justice, evil and wrong, probably far more than most”.

While at college in the late 1980s, his director wrote of him: “This guy is a very committed Christian; he does not bash people over the heads with it – just lives it out.”

The General added: “Faith had to be part of who I was, how I commanded, the way I spoke and the decisions I took.”

CBE
During his third tour of the Balkans in 1999, Tim was a brigadier in charge of 5,000 multi-national troops and

civilian agencies establishing refugee camps after the Kosovo War. He received a CBE from the Queen. But he says: “I just gave the orders. The men under my command did all the hard work.”

Challenge
In a 2009 interview he said: “If you lose the moral component, you lose everything. I think we – collectively in the West – have gone through 30-40 years of pretending that this is not important, and that I do not need to have a Biblical foundation in my life. And I challenge that.”

Now 66 and retired, Tim and Christine live in Aldershot and run their own company – speaking and advising on “morally courageous leadership”. He is also a visiting professor at three universities, a lay preacher in the Anglican Church and a trustee of the Bible Society.

From an interview for New Life Publishing. Used with permission.

RETURNING FROM THE DEAD

• From page 1

He saw words appear in front of his eyes, “Forgive us our trespasses and sins,” which is part of the famous prayer Jesus taught His disciples. Ian thought God couldn’t forgive him; that it was too late and he’d done too much wrong. His mum (in the vision) said: “Pray from your heart.” But he felt his heart was like stone. He took the plunge: “I don’t know if You can forgive me, God, but if You can, please forgive me.”

Then the words appeared: “Forgive those who have trespassed and sinned against you.”

Ian thought he could do that, until the faces of those who had just refused him help came to him.

“I don’t want to forgive them, but if You can forgive me for all I’ve done wrong, I’ll forgive them,” Ian prayed.

Then the words came: “Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.” He agreed: “If You spare my life, which will take a miracle, I will follow You for the rest of my days.”

At that he “saw” and prayed the whole Lord’s Prayer and understood each line as he said it. Ian realised he was talking to God and incredible peace flooded him. He understood later that it was right then he became reborn in his spirit – a new creature, forgiven by God.

At ER Ian finally got the doctors to understand that he needed urgent attention. At this stage he was paralysed from the neck down. He closed his eyes because of the sweat pouring into them, breathed out and died. Ian was pronounced dead and his body was moved into the morgue.

But Ian didn’t realise he was dead. He thought he was asleep.

Then he felt he was standing in the pitch black



Ian McCormack as a young man.

and wondered why the hospital staff had turned out the lights. He groped around feeling for his bed. The darkness had a cold, evil presence. Voices in the dark started shouting at him. “Shut up.” “You deserve to be here.” Where? he asked. “You’re in hell! Now shut up!”

Ian didn’t believe in hell. If there was one, he thought it would be a giant party. But now he knew that he wouldn’t want even his worst enemy to be here.

Then a radiant beam of light cut through the darkness and touched Ian’s face. He felt this awesome presence go through him and his body was plucked up and rose into the light beam. It was like passing through a tunnel at supernatural speed and Ian felt filled with warmth, joy and comfort.

When he emerged from the tunnel his vision was filled with light radiating from a central core of power like a white fire. From it emanated all goodness and strength. Then it spoke to him: “Ian, do you wish to return?” Ian recognised the man’s voice as the one he had heard earlier, and realised it was Jesus.

Ian stood there grappling with reality wondering if he was in fact dead. He replied to the voice: “I don’t know where I am. If I’m dead, I want to go back to my body.” The answer came: “If you go back, you must learn to see in a new light.”

“Are you the true light?” Ian asked. Again he saw words in front of him: “God is light. And in Him is no darkness at all. 1 John 1:5.” This interested Ian because every other religion taught that god had both light and dark in him, both good and evil. This Being knew Ian’s name and his inner thoughts and

was only light, only good.

“If this is God,” thought Ian. “He must be able to see everything I’ve done wrong. I shouldn’t be here. I’m not a good man.”

As Ian began to retreat in shame, a wave of light came towards him and, instead of throwing him into the darkness, it just embraced him with love and acceptance. “Why are you loving me, God? Don’t you know what I’ve done?” Ian wept. The response was just more and more waves of love. Eventually Ian felt surrounded and filled with light, healing, purity and peace.

Pushing through the brilliance, Ian beheld a man in white robes with a face he couldn’t see because it was shining so brightly. Then he glimpsed a place of absolute perfection and beauty, which he knew was heaven. Jesus asked if he wanted to stay or return. Ian initially felt he had nothing to return for until he remembered his mother, who had loved and prayed for him all his life. He knew how broken she would be thinking he was in hell, and he chose to return.

On waking, Ian gave the medical staff a terrible fright. He’d been dead for 15-20 minutes and had been removed from all the machines. However, God’s power moved through his body and he miraculously got total movement and feeling back. He walked out of hospital the next day, scaring some of the locals, who thought he was a ghost.

Since then Ian’s outlook and motivation have been completely different. No longer did he want women, drink and drugs. He read the entire Bible, for the first time, in six weeks and later became a Christian minister, telling everyone what Jesus did for him.

Ian says now he knows, regardless of what anyone else believes, that when he dies (again) he will go straight to heaven because he has made peace with his Maker and been forgiven.

See Ian’s whole astonishing account on Youtube or check out his website and book both called *A Glimpse of Eternity*. In 2014 his story was made into a movie, entitled *The Perfect Wave*.

Easter answers big questions

• From page 1

As Jesus, God the Son went to the cross, God absorbed within Himself the punishment due to humanity for rebellion against the creator, so those who put their trust in Jesus would not have to suffer it.

Do we matter?

Well, we matter enough to God that He would wear what we deserved so that we might enjoy life with Him eternally. We matter enough that the Creator of the world would die for us to bring us back to Himself. Now I know that many will scoff at what I say here. There will be sniggering about sky fairies, and scoffings about the record that stands against the religious, but what’s your answer to the big questions when they are asked of you out of pain?

Would you share a “hope” in a future of maggots and meaninglessness? And, will that satisfy when the questions become your own and the chocolate and bunnies are not distraction enough? At the very least, Easter holds out a meaningful and significant alternative worthy of proper and personal consideration, don’t you reckon?

From where do we get our value?

BY JIM DENISON (ABRIDGED)

FORTNITE is an astounding cultural phenomenon. More than 125 million people play the online video game worldwide.

Are parents worried about the violence of the game or its addictive nature? For many, the answer is no. They're worried that their kids are losing.

So, according to the Wall Street Journal, they're hiring Fortnite coaches for their children. One contracting site has hired out more than 1,400 Fortnite coaches since last March.

One mother explains: "There's pressure not to just play it but to be really good at it. You can imagine what that was like for him at school."

A 1998 Mercedes-Benz was recently auctioned by Sotheby's. It had its original tool chest, owner's manuals, spare keys, and first aid kit. The starting bid was a mere \$4,250,000.

Why? The AMG CLK GTR is a street-legal version of a race car that was so successful

in 1998, competitions were cancelled the next year "due to lack of interest from Mercedes' competitors." The car is one of only twenty-five ever built.

In a similar vein, a home in Georgetown is coming on the market for \$22 million. The



Fortnite characters.

current owner bought the property in 2008 for \$11.8 million. Its claim to fame: Ted Kennedy once lived there. Speaking of prominent families, thieves stole two crowns

and an orb from the Swedish royal family's collection recently. The items belonged to King Karl IX, who died in 1611, and his wife, Queen Kristina, who died in 1625. They are so valuable because they are so unique.

The best advice I've ever received is this: always remember the source of your personal worth.

Our culture determines our value by our performance. Beginning in childhood, we are taught that we are what we do, whether on video games, athletic fields, or academic tests.

As we grow older, we value ourselves by what we own. The more unique our possessions, the better.

All the while, our Lord values us by Whose we are. Just as the former home of Ted Kennedy is more expensive because he lived there, we are valuable because our Father made us, His Son died for us, and His Spirit, if we invite Him to, lives in us (1 Corinthians 3:16).

Now we must choose to value ourselves and each day we live as He does.



Jeffery McCall had struggled with same sex attraction from the age of 12. As a 15 year old he plunged head-long into the homosexual lifestyle, seeking love in many relationships and heavy drug use.

At the age of 23, Jeffery decided he was in the wrong body and began living as a woman. As 'Scarlett' he began drinking heavily and prostituting himself.

However, during those two years, he was secretly watching sermons on YouTube by a Christian preacher, which convinced him he needed to live for God.

Jeffery has told his extraordinary life-story to Christian news site cbnnews.com.

"From 18 to 23, I lived in Nashville, Tennessee. And in those years, my whole identity was in being homosexual.

"I just partied and would shop, and that was my life, shopping, partying, and whoever was my boyfriend at the time. I was addicted to drugs. I was taking a ton of Xanax and smoking crystal meth."

He moved to Georgia to attend college but still couldn't find the love and happiness he was seeking.

"The summer after graduating, I did my first drag show. I had grown up around a lot of transgender, transsexual drag queens because I had a family member who did shows," Jeffery said.

"I would start dressing up and I started even dating men as Scarlet. And so, from there, it fed it even more that this is who

I am. I'm in the wrong body.

"I thought, I'm going to have the surgeries and transition into a woman and this is what's going to make me happy."

But soon Jeffery found himself at rock bottom, crying alone late at night.

"I was just weeping. I spoke to God, through my crying and weeping, and I said, 'God, I know people live for you, not just go to church on Sunday, not just play a religious game, like something happened and their life was transformed.'

"And I said, 'Will I ever live for you?' My voice went silent. My thoughts stopped. And I heard God say, 'Yes, you will live for me,'" he recalled.

This led to a difficult decision to reject everything that was Scarlett - the hair, the makeup, the clothes and the shoes.

"I went to a dumpster and I just threw my whole life away. And it wasn't a joke to me. It wasn't something I took lightly. I was planning to transition and have surgeries and change my body. So throwing that away was a huge step," he said.

"And I thought maybe I'll just give God a chance. He did speak to me and said I was going to live for Him. And that summer the Lord and I began to try to have a relationship.

"It was almost as if God, that summer, stripped away everything I learned from the church, from the LGBTQ community, from everyone and said, 'Everything you've heard, just throw it out and I'm going to lay a clear foundation for you'."

Jeffery's walk with God continued when he made a Facebook live video to publicly cut the ties with his previous life and acknowledge Jesus as his Saviour. It was viewed thousands of times and messages poured in. Friends and even family abandoned him, saying 'You can't leave homo-



Jeffery at a Freedom March

sexuality. You're transitioning.'

But Scarlett was gone forever.

"All of a sudden, I had a peace and joy I hadn't had since I was a little, little, little boy - that peace and joy of like everything was lifted."

Despite hatred, opposition and ridicule, Jeffery helps lead Freedom marches of ex-gay and transgender people who want the community to know it is possible to live lives of chastity to honour Jesus Christ.

"My whole life's purpose now is to continue to share Christ's love. It's like having the best thing you could get in the world and you want everyone to have it," he said.

FINDING A CURE FOR CANCER

BY JODY BENNETT

CANCER is everywhere. My father died of brain cancer, my mother survived breast cancer, my brother had skin cancer removed and my grandmother died of bowel cancer. I myself have a suspected slow-growing lung cancer and can think of six people off the top of my head whom I know are currently fighting or have recently battled the disease.

I'm sure most of you can too.

Now comes an astounding announcement from a team of Israeli scientists that they have discovered the first true cure for all types of cancer! One of them told *The Jerusalem Post*, "We believe we will offer in a year's time a complete cure for cancer."

He added, "Our cancer cure will be effective from day one, will last a duration of a few weeks and will have no or minimal side-effects at a much lower cost than most other treatments on the market."

The scientists describe their discovery as a kind of cancer antibiotic and hope to begin clinical trials almost immediately.

Could the miracle of a final solution for cancer really be true? I imagine there will be hundreds of people flying to Israel hoping to be part of the trials or to have their sick children or spouses on it.

Imagine if you created such a drug. Would you sell it at astronomical prices and live in luxury forever? Or would you

make it cheaply available and ease as much suffering as you can? Wouldn't you offer it to everyone you know who had cancer and urge them to try it?

If you were a cancer sufferer wouldn't you beg for help and spend all you had for such treatment?

What if you just had a small bit of cancer? Would you say, "No, no, I don't have as much cancer as the next guy. He needs the treatment but not me."

It would be stupid to be too proud to admit you needed treatment. It would be stupid to ignore the cancer, thinking it would go away on its own, when it is well known that cancer spreads - often rapidly.

And yet, we all have the cancer of sin. Some of us don't realise it yet because we haven't seen the tell-tale symptoms in our lives - although others probably have! We are all in need of a cure for our rebellion against God and terminal selfishness and pride.

Jesus died and rose again in order to pay for a final-solution for every type of sin for everyone who asks for treatment. He can cure all types of sin, however clinical trials have found that His cure is not always effective immediately, takes a whole lifetime to complete and has several life-altering side effects.

Those who are part of the clinical trial though (myself included), report miraculous results! I encourage you to read the Bible to explore in-depth God's diagnosis of our human condition and explanation of His wonderful cure.

And as for cancer, how poetic if its total cure comes from the land that saw the birth of sin's cure too!

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Faith at Fromelles - an ANZAC story

BY MIKE SPENCER

"AFTER passing over rough ground covered with the bodies of the dead and wounded, strewn with barbed wire and pocked by shellfire, the nineteen-year-old sergeant led his men into a water-filled ditch which had at one time passed for a German trench. Then, as he inadvertently raised his head a bit too high, a bullet quickly found its mark . . . As he began thrashing about in the water, two of the sergeant's men grabbed him to keep him from drowning. They worked desperately to staunch the flow of blood from the wound in his throat and to keep him from choking on his own blood and mucus. By strenuous effort and little surgical nicety, the two men managed to apply a field dressing and drag their wounded

leader back to their own lines." Thus Robert Linder describes John Ridley's introduction to the Battle of Fromelles (The Long Tragedy, p. 20). The young Christian sergeant would suffer the effects of that injury for the rest of his life.

The Battle of Fromelles was the first major battle fought by Australian troops on the Western Front. It was intended primarily as a diversion to draw German troops away from the Somme offensive further south. In the event, it was a complete disaster, with the Australian 5th Division suffering 5,533 casualties between 18 and 19 July 1916.

John Ridley recovered from his wounds and returned to active service. He organised a Bible Circle for the 53rd Battalion, and many diggers found Christ as their Saviour. For bravery under enemy fire, he was awarded the Military Cross.

Chaplain John J. Kennedy, said of Ridley, "He is one of the most perfect Christians I have ever met . . . Brave as the bravest, cool and manly in action,

Jack Ridley was beloved by officers and men." (The Whale Oil Guards, p. 119)

After his return to civilian life, he trained for the Baptist ministry, but suffered a nervous breakdown as a result of his wartime experiences. While recovering, he went west with the intention of becoming a jackeroo, but instead, he became involved in an itinerant ministry to isolated communities, using a horse-drawn wagon. He was joined in this ministry by his new wife Dorothy, whom he married in 1926. The pair continued for nine years, until the birth of their daughter, Ruth, put an end to their travels.

John Ridley went on to become one of Australia's most famous and beloved evangelists. His preaching was forceful and graphic. In addition to his preaching,

he published 13 books and four volumes of poems. After serving as a chaplain in World War Two, he joined with others to form the Australian Institute of Evangelism later known as Ambassadors for Christ International. He died in 1976.

On 14 November 1932, Ridley preached on the subject of Eternity. His words, "Eternity, Eternity, I wish that I could sound or shout that word to everyone in the streets of Sydney. You've got to meet it, where will you spend Eternity?" struck a chord with a member of the congregation. He was a former derelict alcoholic, who had been converted to Christianity two years previously. His name was Arthur Stace. Upon leaving the meeting, Stace, who was barely literate, proceeded to chalk the word 'Eternity' in beautiful copperplate writing, on the street pavement, a feat that he repeated about 500,000 more times over the next 35 years.

From One People, One Destiny:
A Christian History of Australia
www.facebook.com/onepeopleonedestiny



Legendary singer loses wife after 65 years

BY MICHAEL IRELAND,
ASSIST NEWS SERVICE
(AMENDED)

IN an era where nearly half of marriages end in divorce, even among so-called Christians, a 65-year marriage, and a happy one at that, is remarkable. And for such a marriage to last in the entertainment industry is nothing short of astonishing.

Legendary entertainer Pat Boone, who was popular in the 1950s and 60s, had just such a marriage, which ended on January 11, 2019 with the death of his wife Shirley at age 84.

People Magazine reports she passed away at the Boone's home in Beverly Hills, California. She had been suffering from vasculitis, an inflammation of blood vessels, for less than a year.

As she passed from this life to the next, Shirley was surrounded by her husband and their four daughters, who were by her bedside singing hymns to her.

The couple's Christian faith was a key factor in their strong marriage, and is now a sustaining force in Pat's grief.

"We lived a wonderful, blessed life together for 65 years. I've parted with my better half for a little while... but we don't die, we just move on to another place, and today was moving day," Pat said of his high school sweetheart.

"We didn't have the perfect marriage, but it helps to marry a magnificent woman," Pat told PEOPLE. "You make your commitments to God and each other, and in troubled times, you hang on to the commitment to God, and to your kids. You see the problems through and you find you're stronger because of it."

In an announcement to family

and friends, he stated: "Dear Shirley BOONE doesn't dwell in Beverly Hills now – she's just been warmly welcomed into a beautiful new mansion in Heaven, prepared specifically for her and her husband by Jesus Himself, who said 'that where I am, you may be also.' Rejoice for her, she's begun her eternal life. She loves you too, as I do."

Author and Christian minister Shawn Bolz said the Boones have been a force for God in the entertainment industry.

"Behind the scenes, they have led some of the most famous people in entertainment and music to know Jesus as their Lord and Saviour. They have hosted more events, Bible studies, and prayer meetings at their house than probably anyone else in Beverly Hills in history," Bolz explained.

Susan Stafford, former host of Wheel of Fortune, said: "Shirley is no longer in pain, but Pat will be for some time. Saying goodbye to so many causes us to focus on what is important in this life so we can be prepared for the next. Eternity is forever, it just happens to begin on earth."

Following her death, Pat, 84, who once famously said "When you get married you forget about kissing other women" told PEOPLE magazine that he will meet his long time love again.

"I expect to join her one day. I'm very confident of that," Pat added. "That took the sting out of what happened today because we know we're gonna be together again and have a whole new beginning."

Pat and Shirley began their love story at 16-years-old. "We were very much in love," Pat revealed.

It wasn't until they were 19 when Shirley's family planned to move away, that Pat realized it was time to ask her father — country singing legend Red Foley — for permission to marry Shirley.

"He tearfully asked me one thing, 'Will you take care of my girl?' and I said I would," Pat explained.

In November 1953, the pair eloped and then settled in Teaneck, New Jersey, where they welcomed their four daughters in five years.

Together, they supported each other, as their lives and careers were established — Pat was working his way through rigorous Columbia University (he graduated cum laude) and battling with Elvis for the hearts of America's teenagers, while Shirley focused on raising their four girls.

They eventually moved to Beverly Hills together, where they resided for more than 50 years, watching their four children, 16 grandchildren, and ten great-grandchildren grow up.

In addition to being by her sweetheart's side for more than half a century, Shirley was also a best-selling author, recording artist, television hostess, and humanitarian.

She started a billion-dollar Christian ministry, now called Mercy Corps, one of the most prominent worldwide hunger relief organizations.

"[Mercy Corps] started from her tears and her conviction that we could do something," Pat said. "She was always ready to interrupt what she was doing and help somebody else."

And that desire to give back was one of the things Pat says he will remember most about his wife.

"She had an honest, deep, earnest love for people," he said. "She was so easy to love because she loved so easily and so naturally."



FINDING LOVE AFTER WAR

The war in Syria made Yaccoub an atheist.

"I was walking home and a bomb fell on a school bus, right in front of me," Yaccoub says.

The shell killed every one of the children, and Yaccoub saw it all. Some of them were as young as four, the oldest no more than seven.

Yaccoub was about 14 when the war started, and not much older when he came face to face with death.

"The whole bus blew up and burned," he says.

No one would be surprised to learn that such a horrific experience as a teenager destroyed Yaccoub's faith in God. But today, he is committed to going back to Syria to serve God as a missionary.

The Baptist Times online reports that Yaccoub is studying theology at a college in another country in the Middle East, and aims to return to Syria to serve his people and share the love of God with them.

What turned him back to faith?

Yaccoub grew up in a Christian home and was

just beginning to explore faith seriously when Syria's civil war began. "That was the turning point in my life," he says. "The war started, and for me there was no God. I became a total atheist." He even got a slogan tattooed on his arm proclaiming that there was no life after death.

Watching innocent children killed on their way to school was the final nail in the coffin of his childhood faith. And yet it also left him hungry to find out what life might mean. It left him thinking "that there was some kind of power at work", but one he didn't understand.

One day Yaccoub's aunt invited him to church, and he started meeting with a Christian who talked to him about his beliefs.

But Yaccoub got so angry with him that he threw the man out of the house.

"I went back to church convinced that there was no love there. But when I got there, the person I had kicked out of my house was the first person to greet me. And after the service he was the first person to come and hug me. This really touched my heart."

Thanks to the prayers and love of his aunt, Yaccoub began to read the Bible and research into whether it was true. Through his studies and his



The aftermath of a bomb in Syria, in February 2019.

Photo: MUHAMMAD HAJ KADOUR/AFP/Getty

aunt's love for him, Yaccoub came to believe in Jesus Christ again.

"When I was intellectually searching for God, I also had the life example of my aunt with me and that was the main reason that I decided to follow Jesus," he says. And today he has a vision to take both the intellectual and the loving life example to his generation back in Syria.

"Most of my friends are outside of the Church, and I was like them. I know how they think and I know why they have this hatred towards God and towards religion in general," he says.

Yaccoub has a passion for reaching out with love. And he has a vision to use social media and financial support to impact young people. He is only 21 years old himself, but wants to bring hope and love to a nation destroyed by war.

www.bmsworldmission.org

The hummingbird: creation's superhero

BY SCOTT GILLIS

THE men at the retreat were asked what their favourite animal was. One called out, "Lion!" another, "The eagle!" Stunned silence followed when I exclaimed, "The hummingbird!" Apparently that answer was not 'manly' enough. "Why in the world would you pick the hummingbird?" they asked. In a 'glad you asked' tone, I explained aspects of this bird's incredible design.

HUMMINGBIRD FLIGHT

It would be enough to only mention the obvious: the incredible speed at which this tiny bird flaps its wings. When hovering, the wings beat at 50–80 flaps per second,¹ even increasing to as many as 200 during a short courtship chase. They utilize a figure-8 pattern, in which the wings flap forward and backward, generating lift with both motions (75% on the forward stroke and 25% on the back stroke²). This is very unlike the 'up and down' motion of most birds with typical aerofoil wings. This unique ability to hover precisely in one position, and fly backwards or take off vertically, was not completely understood until recently.

WING DESIGN

The ultra-flexibility of the hummingbird's unique wing strokes requires a very specialized design—not just of the bones, muscles, and tendons but also of the brain and nervous system controlling them. The flexibility of the shoulder joint is a unique design, allowing the wing to twist into extreme positions not found in other birds. However, unlike the wing structure of all other birds, the 'elbow' and 'wrist' joints are rigid, making the wing more like a stiff paddle.³ The relatively huge breast muscles that manipulate the rapid wing flaps represent a massive 40% of the bird's total weight.

FUEL REQUIREMENTS

The metabolism of the hummingbird is the highest among all vertebrates.⁴ When active, its heart rate is up to a staggering 1,200 beats per minute, while the respiratory rate even at rest is up to 250 breaths per minute.⁵

To support such 'breathtaking' metabolism, this marvel must eat almost constantly to get the energy needed. Every day, it extracts nectar from up to 2,000 flowers.⁶ If humans were able to operate at that energy level, we would have to ingest almost 1,300 hamburgers a day just to keep up! Furthermore, "our hearts would beat 1,260 times a minute and our body temperature would rise to 385°C [725°F] and we would burst into flames!"⁷

Although nectar is the main fuel source to keep the bird's metabolic engines 'humming,' it also eats the occasional insect for protein.

UNIQUE TONGUE DESIGN

Even the hummingbird's tongue used to gather this nectar (more than its body weight,⁸ in a mind-boggling number of sips per day) is such a complex design that it seems difficult to conceive how it could ever be explained by slow and gradual steps as required by evolution.

Until 2010, most biologists believed



the hummingbird tongue operated by simple capillary action, like 'wicking'. However, biologists from the University of Connecticut discovered that the tongue works more like a micropump.^{9,10} The hummingbird tongue is about twice as long as its beak, allowing it to probe deep into flowers. It is composed of two long narrow tubes that 'unzip' in segmented flaps when in contact with liquid nectar. Then the flaps retract to 'pump' the nectar, in less than 1/20 of a second, in rapid succession, thousands of times each day.

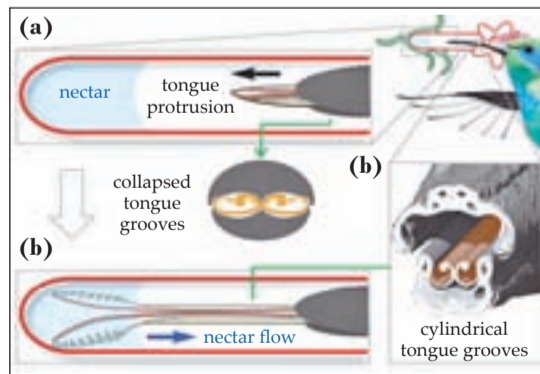
HUMMINGBIRD EVOLUTION IMPOSSIBLE

The evolutionary explanation of slow, step-by-step addition and modification of these components over millions of years fails to explain the way these birds' design has solved a daunting challenge presented by the laws of physics. You see, the blindingly fast flapping and twisting motion of the wing structure generates an incredible amount of friction, and

thus, heat (in addition to that of muscle metabolism). For comparison, fast man-made machines need sophisticated cooling systems. The brisk flapping motion allows these birds to dissipate all that generated heat from their body across their rapidly fanning wing. Other modes of heat dissipation include rapid air respiration, heat exchange through the skin and bill, and water bathing.

Evolution cannot explain the appearance of the first bird, nor how a slow process of gradual adaptation brought about all the complex structural components needed to hover and extract vast amounts of energy from flowers, all with wonderful and awe-inspiring precision and beauty. It makes more sense to explain the brilliant hummingbird design as created by a brilliant divine Designer.

My friends' stares and chuckles turned into nods of amazement and agreement as I summarized some of the unique design and extraordinary features that make the hummingbird unlike any other of God's creatures.



Left: Detail of the hummingbird's tongue.

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Wise up!

As April Fool's Day approaches, speaker and author J. John explains what real foolishness is...

In 1758, the great biologist Linnaeus decided to give human beings the species name *Homo sapiens*, meaning 'wise man'. It's a decision that has been questioned ever since. History and our own personal experience tell us that human wisdom comes mixed with folly.

The Bible twice makes a strong statement on human foolishness: "The fool says in his heart, 'There is no God'" (Psalms 14:1 and 53:1). This may strike us as a puzzle. After all, some – but not all – of the noisiest atheists are far from fools in the normally accepted sense of the word; they are very educated men and women with degrees and academic titles. Are they really 'fools'?

The answer to this puzzle lies in the fact that what we consider to be intelligence is, in reality, not a single thing but a group of separate and very different abilities. So there is a 'mathematics intelligence', an 'artistic intelligence', an 'emotional intelligence' and so on.

This idea shouldn't be a novelty; whether from stories or personal encounters we are all aware of people such as the brilliant scientist who dazzles in astrophysics but gets lost on the Underground, or the artistic genius who struggles to hold a conversation.

To these types of intelligence, Christians and others would add 'spiritual intelligence': the ability to sense the spiritual world, to hear God's voice and know something of His will. This spiritual intelligence is what the Bible considers the most valuable of human abilities – wisdom.

As the Bible reminds us, the pursuit of wisdom should be the goal of every life (see, for example, Proverbs 3:3, 4:6–7, 16:16; Ephesians 1:17). And there's an excellent definition of wisdom in the Letter of James: "But the wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure; then peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere" (James 3:17).

Wisdom is far more important than anything else and to lack it is disastrous, both for this life and the next.

There are two important features of wisdom or spiritual intelligence. The first is that it occurs completely independently of all the other types of intelligence. So someone who is a renowned academic genius may be utterly deficient in spiritual intelligence, while someone else who is uneducated may be rich in God's wisdom.

The second and more important fact is that whereas many of the other types of intelligence are the result of either the lottery of genetics or upbringing, spiritual intelligence is a gift of God and can be sought and found.

As James again says: "If any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to you" (James 1:5).

I suspect one reason why many people who are considered intelligent by the world have overlooked the pursuit of spiritual intelligence is that their rich gifting of other types of intelligence has allowed them to feel that they don't need it. At the heart of an enormous amount of atheism, if not all of it, is pride.

Sometimes you can be so clever that one thing you can't believe is that you lack wisdom. Now that's really foolish!

This article first appeared in Good News

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DOES GOD FEEL MY GRIEF?

BY ROB FURLONG

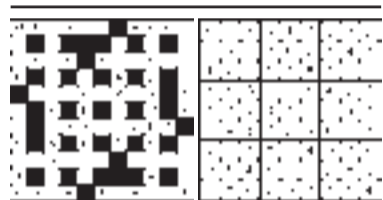
"NO ONE ever told me that grief felt so like fear. I am not afraid, but the sensation is like being afraid. The same fluttering in the stomach, the same restlessness, the yawning. I keep on swallowing."

So wrote C. S. Lewis as he processed his grief when his wife died.

When people experience devastating loss – the death of a husband or wife or someone very close to us – it is common for many to accuse God of being unfeeling and indifferent toward them.

The life of Jesus tells us quite another story and when we reflect upon it, we discover something very different indeed.

Jesus was a "trending topic" in



Galilee at one point in His ministry.

Speculation was rife about whether or not He was the Messiah - it seems everyone had an opinion about who He might be.

Then right in the middle of all of this, Jesus receives some devastating news.

His cousin, John the Baptist, has been beheaded by Herod the tetrarch.

Upon being told this, we read that, "Jesus withdrew privately to a solitary place."

I am convinced that Jesus did this in order to process the grief He was now feeling at the loss of His beloved cousin. We know very little about the childhood of Jesus but I am sure that memories of growing up and spending time with John came flooding back to His mind as He mourned John's death.

And I am also convinced that Jesus slipped away quietly in order to give Himself much needed time on His own as He grieved.

On another occasion, we find Jesus standing before the tomb of His dear friend, Lazarus. Lazarus'

sisters – Mary and Martha - are there, along with many other relatives and friends.

We are told that when Jesus saw the grief of those gathered at the tomb that He "was deeply moved in spirit and troubled". Another way of describing Jesus' response is to say that He "groaned in His spirit". It is a way of saying that Jesus was experiencing deep, deep emotion in His being for those around Him in their time of loss.

We are also told the He "wept." Jesus is certainly not unfeeling or indifferent to grief – whether it be His own or others.

April is the month in which we usually celebrate Easter.

Many of us set aside some time to reflect on and give thanks for the death and resurrection of Jesus.

One of the descriptions provided for us about Jesus is that "He was a man of sorrows, acquainted with grief..."

In haunting language we are told that Jesus knew intimately the reality of grief, sorrow and loss. He knew rejection, He knew loneliness and all the anguish of soul that comes with that.

And at a crucial juncture in the history of the world, He experienced His greatest heartbreak of all – abandonment by God.



But we are also told that He did this for us!

Among the many things Jesus did for us at the Cross, one of them was that "He carried our sorrows..."

One writer has described what Jesus did in this way:

"Great though His grief was, He went to the cross and the person who acknowledges Jesus as king of their life receives forgiveness of sins and a personal relationship with Jesus. This bond is particularly meaningful in grief, because Jesus shared our earthly experiences, including suffering and death. He is able to help us and sympathise with us."

Rather than being unfeeling and indifferent to our grief and loss, Jesus knows just how we feel!

And His heart for us perfectly expresses God's heart for us in our times of loss. If you want to know how God feels about you and your grief, just look at Jesus.

It is the very heart of the Easter story.

Lessons from a sausage dog (Part 17)

BY JODY BENNETT

I DON'T think my little dog, Carrie has very good eyesight. The other evening, just as it was getting towards dusk, she started barking and whining at the picture window that looks onto the front yard. It was her "cat whine" and she was desperate to be let out to chase what she thought was a cat out from under the front bushes (she clearly hasn't learnt from the scratches she got last time!).

I looked and saw that it was just a piece of junk mail that had got trapped under the bush, not a cat. I tried to tell her, and then to ignore her, but the dog was insistent that she needed to be let out to deal with the intruder. Eventually I put down my book and got up to let her out – sure enough she rushed under the bushes only to find that the cat was a cat-alogue! She sniffed all around just to make absolutely sure that a feline was not anywhere in the front garden and then conceded to come inside.

"I told you so" isn't very satisfying when said to a dog!

But it did make me think that sometimes I too get a bee in my bonnet about something that I want, or want to do and pray fervently for that thing to happen. I insist that I know what is going on, that my perception of the situation is correct and that nothing is going to change my mind.

I think sometimes, like I did with Carrie, God says "OK, I know you're wrong but go and find out for yourself." He allows us to make the mistake or experience the disappointment because we are being so pig-headed about the issue.

Carrie probably didn't understand me saying that the shape under the bushes wasn't a cat (all she heard was 'cat!') but there are times I have just refused to listen to contradictory advice or warnings from God's Word or His people about something I was stubborn about – and of course I ended up being hurt and wasting effort and time.

There is a verse in the Book of Psalms that I think is one of the scariest in the Bible. It concerns God's dealing with the Israelites in the desert, when they moaned about the food and demanded meat. "They did not wait for His counsel, but lusted exceedingly in the wilderness" according to Psalm 106 so, says verse 15 "He gave them their request but sent leanness into their soul."

That terrifies me! The thought that God might give in to my demands that some physical, carnal, temporary request be fulfilled, but at the cost of my spiritual health and my relationship with Him. That is why - realising that I understand God's purposes and plans about as well as my dog understands quantum physics - I now always pray, as Jesus did, "This is what I want ... 'but not my will but Thine be done!'"

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:

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 *

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Ask Y: Peter Meadows answers your questions about God

QUESTION: If Jesus was such a good person how come He ended up being executed?

YOU are so right. No one could ever say Jesus was anything other than 'good'. And that has to be the greatest understatement of all time.



So how come He died strung up like a common criminal? The answer – amazing as it must sound – is that this was God's plan from the start.

The significance of Jesus' death is ultimately wrapped up in who He was and what He came to do. You see Jesus didn't stumble onto the stage of history. The script had already been written – with Him as the central character.

Jesus was to be the kingpin of God's rescue plan. The one who would deliver us all from the mess we've created.

The Jewish scriptures had been promising such a deliverer for hundreds of years. They made clear statements – prophecies – recorded centuries before Jesus was ever born. This included specific details about the one who would come as the deliverer, such as –

- He would be born in Bethlehem and of a virgin
- He would be betrayed by a friend and sold for thirty pieces of silver
- He would be struck and spat on
- While his hands and feet would be pierced – and so would his side
- The soldiers would throw dice for his clothes but would not break

even a bone of his body • He would be buried in a rich man's grave - and would rise again from the dead

Imagine the odds for any one person living a life that matched even a few of these prophecies. Yet Jesus fulfilled them all. Without doubt He was THE one.

And God took all that trouble because of what the death of Jesus was designed to accomplish. He was to die as a sacrifice to pay the debt all of us owe to God for failing to live His way.

The picture comes clear when you take account of what happened at the time Jesus died. The record shows that at midday the sky went black – as black as midnight.

Again this had been foretold. Over 800 years before a Jewish prophet, Amos, wrote, "In that day, declares the Sovereign LORD, 'I will make the sun go down at noon and make the earth dark in broad daylight.'"

That darkness points to the magnitude of what was taking place. It was a picture of the way Jesus suffered due to our sin. As Jesus became the curse of the world He drowned in our sin on a midnight afternoon.

And all for us. To make our forgiveness possible and so we can be clean to enter into God's holy presence. But, of course, that calls for a response from us – that we hand our lives over to God.

Wrestler Gareth was no angel



**Challenge
SPORT**

BY CHRIS EYTE

The crowd roars as the contender raises his arms and gets ready to grapple with his opponent in the ring.

Not many people would know that wrestler 'Gareth Angel' had offered to pray for his opponent before the fight began. Nor would they realise that for Gareth, the real grappling happened when he was younger - surviving sexual abuse and sleeping homeless in a trash skip.

Gareth Thompson, to use his real name, recalls that his childhood was one long struggle to survive.

"My parents divorced when I was six and after this my mum hit the drink hard, she became abusive and unhinged.

"My dad wasn't to be seen at all. I would often have to take my two younger brothers to school, feed them, and find my mum in pubs to get the house keys from her."

Gareth's only escape was staying with his Christian grandmother on Friday nights, who prayed with him. His mum went out at weekends and left Gareth with babysitters. One of them sexually assaulted him between the ages of seven and eight.

"This made me withdrawn, very meek and placid. I was confused, hurt and scared. I didn't know what to do, how to stop it. I finally plucked up the courage to tell my mum one night.

"This was November 11, 1995. I remember clearly because of the poppies that everyone was wearing. That night I was taken to the hospital, examined, and my abuser was arrested. Shortly after, there was a trial and once it was all out in the open I thought things would improve.

"My mum took it really hard

though, and I was bullied at school."

Gareth says he was thrown out of home at 15 and worked as a window cleaner.

"I lost my job quickly and spent the next eight weeks sleeping in a skip before finding myself at a homeless hostel."

Gareth met his first wife there and they moved to his hometown where they struggled with their relationship and debt.

One day, on the way to get some piercings, the couple met friends who invited them to church.

"This church was different - no pews, no organ. A live band, open space to worship and dance, you could interact. During the service, I felt my heart ripped open in the worship. I caught myself crying, and a real sense of home and love that I had never felt before came over me.



Gareth Angel with the British Wrestling Championship belt he won in 2018.

"I decided at that point to give this a shot. I gave my life to Christ."

His faith was almost immediately tested when his grandmother died in March 2011, on the same night as his wedding.

"I almost instantly retreated from God, feeling hurt and blaming Him for her death. I thought things were supposed to be better once you were a Christian. I wasn't looking at things the right way," Gareth admits.

His wife later left him for another man, further adding to his troubles.

However, a friend from church helped Gareth regain his identity in Christ and get out of debt. He later made peace with his parents, as well as his now ex-wife.

The issue of his sexual abuser stuck in his mind however and he prayed about it. One day, Gareth was working in a shop when the man, released from prison for his deeds, suddenly stood in front of him.

"Here I was, face-to-face with the man who caused me so much pain, and changed the course of my life forever. My first thought was that I could hurt him, make him feel what I felt, I wasn't a little boy anymore, I was a man and I had been wrestling for a little while at this point. My second feeling: fear and trepidation. But ultimately I had two choices - make a move or make an excuse.

"I handed him his DVDs, looked him in the eyes and said, 'I forgive you.'

"I felt a huge weight lift off me. I was freaked out yet it was okay. From that moment on, I started taking God seriously."

Gareth's life got better and he now runs programmes in his church, has married a woman he met there,

**'PRAY,
EAT,
WRESTLE,
REPEAT'.**



MAIN PHOTO: Gareth Angel, with his trademark slogan, in the ring.

INSET: Gareth takes every opportunity to display his faith.

Beth, and infused his wrestling with new purpose.

"I chose the name 'Gareth Angel' to reflect my faith and having grown with Jesus. I've also evolved as a character, quoting Scripture, praying before my matches and doing my best to be a positive role model and ambassador for Christ."

Gareth has launched his own ministry (gtministries.co.uk) with Christian Vision for Men and performs at churches.

He added: "My T-shirts say: 'Pray, Eat, Wrestle, Repeat'.

"I never imagined that I would be

performing in front of crowds, with Jesus in my heart, and be leading others to know Him. I am blessed beyond my wildest dreams. Thank you, Jesus, for not giving up on me."

Gareth says he's a work in progress 'as we all are' but he has three things he has learnt already:

1. There is hope for us all and with Jesus, anything is possible.

2. Forgiveness doesn't mean you are a doormat, if someone is hurting you, its ok to cut them from your life.

3. Forgiveness is for the benefit of the forgiver, to release YOU from the burden of unforgiveness. ●

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