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# EAS+ER SURPRISE

**W**e know well in advance that Easter is on the way by all the Easter eggs and hot cross buns that the shops start selling around Valentine's Day. The swiftness with which the year marches towards the holiday may take us by surprise but the long weekend certainly doesn't.

However, nearly two thousand years ago that first Easter morning came as a complete surprise to those who had watched Jesus arrested, tried and crucified.

Jesus had explicitly told the disciples that He would die and rise again, and He had symbolically indicated to the religious rulers that if they "destroyed this temple" he would "raise it again in three days". His death was even prophesied in Isaiah 53 of the Torah that they all read.

Yet when faced with the reality of Jesus' broken body hanging on the cross, bloodied and suffocating, nobody really imagined that He would literally return in a few days, recognisable and yet eternally changed.

Those three days (or part days) that Jesus was in the grave surely

seemed hopeless and bleak.

There would have been lots of tears, lots of "why God?" questions, lots of disillusionment and despair. Peter, Jesus' main guy, decided to chuck the whole thing and go back to being a fisherman.

But on Easter morning Jesus did exactly and literally what He had said He would – He physically rose from the grave and walked among them. He ate and drank with them, He let them touch His scars to prove He was no figment of their imagination. And He appeared not just to His twelve closest friends, but to hundreds of others.

Maybe you are in the space between Good Friday and Easter Sunday in your life. The disaster has happened – the divorce, or illness, or retrenchment. The accident, or death, or addiction or rejection. And you cannot see how your circumstances could possibly be redeemed.

Can I encourage you to turn to the God of Easter mornings? He is a God of surprises. A God of the unexpected. A God who takes on lost causes and dead ends and turns them into triumphs of His grace. He is well-known for rescuing people out of the most dire of circumstances and turning ashes into bouquets of roses (Isaiah 61, The Message Bible).

And Easter is not the only proof of this in the Bible, it is just the most dramatic.

Nearly 100-year-old Abraham with one illegitimate son must have



day he would go from wretch to ruler.

Moses, a murderer, herding sheep in the desert, could never have foretold how he, now 80 years old, would lead all His fellow Israelites to freedom from Pharaoh after a dramatic set of never-before-seen plagues. (But God had told Abraham generations before that the exodus would happen. Genesis 15.)

Joshua, marching for the sixth time with the silent crowd around Jericho, must have wondered how the seventh time with trumpets and shouts was going to win them a war.

Daniel, thrown to the lions for remaining faithful to God, would never have predicted He would be eating breakfast the next morning, completely unscathed.

Widowed, childless Ruth never imagined she would be the great grandmother

of a king; the sisters of Lazarus, who had been rotting in the tomb for three days, never expected to hug him again; and Paul never expected to become the biggest advocate of the sect he hated most.

All these people and millions more, including myself, have been bowled over by the bigness and beauty of the plans God has for us. And He can do the same for you, if you just invite Him to take over your story too.

Let the unpredictable, untameable, all-powerful Christian God surprise you afresh this Easter.

**IF YOUR HOPE IS DEAD ... JUST WAIT SUNDAY'S COMING!**



## Good Friday indeed for homeless man

**32-YEAR-OLD** David Ruffin found himself homeless for six years, battling alcohol addiction and living in fear, until one day at the back doors of a church, he heard a call to true peace and a love that would never leave him.

"I was sleeping in an abandoned truck," David tells of his dark time on the streets. "On many nights I laid there, afraid to be there but at the same time, afraid to leave because even though it was dangerous in there, I thought that it was even more dangerous out there.

"To me, being homeless was about the worst thing that could've happened to me."

One particular incident stood out to him: "It started to rain and I would see people scurrying and



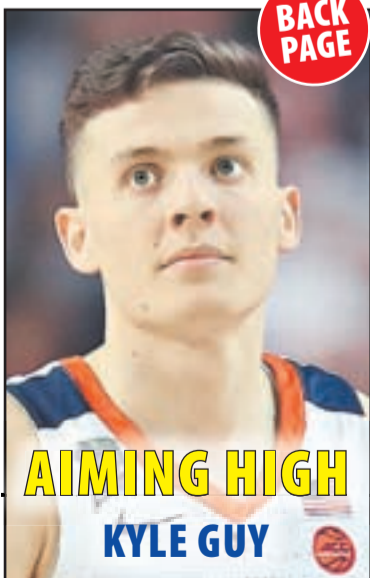
STOCK PHOTO

scattering in all different directions to their homes. Then, I looked at myself and I was like, 'Now, where do I go?'"

David moved from shelter to shelter but, he found them dangerous and he was afraid to stay. Instead, he spent most of his time collecting bot-

tles and cans so he could have enough money for his next drink. He would end up sleeping in his own urine outside the back doors of a church on many occasions.

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BACK PAGE

**AIMING HIGH**  
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# HAIL THE HEROES

BY ALAN BAILEY

THIS summer, several States of Australia have been profoundly affected by massive bushfires. Fire-fighters have experienced the most dangerous conditions ever. Facing a wall of flame and fierce heat must be daunting to say the least. Sometimes the light of day would vanish and



in its place an eerie orange and red sky. A huge fire-front would roar, driven by wild wind taking all before it. Red hot embers would fly through the air, spreading the fire-front and adding to the hazards faced by those who try to fight it.

We must recognise the bravery of these men. They risk their lives and unfortunately some of those lives are lost. Due to determined and persistent effort, homes and lives have been saved. Long hours go by and these hard workers have little or no respite. Some didn't sleep for several days. We all have a debt of thanks to pay to these heroes who have given themselves so unstintingly. No doubt, some will suffer on-going trauma.

Long ago, a man faced an incredible challenge, calling for personal sacrifice. He was cornered

by heavyweights from His own race who hated the claims He made about Himself and who were determined to have Him executed. He also faced a ruthless

Roman system that showed little mercy to those who were accused and brought to trial. As well, and most importantly, He faced the fire of His Father's anger against sin and evil.

You know who I mean. At this time of the

year especially, the event comes to light and people recognise that something unique happened just outside the city of Jerusalem on what we call Good Friday. When Jesus suffered on that cruel cross, the blame of the sins of others was upon Him—He who was innocent. In our place He bore the pain and the shame, to the end that we who were guilty could be set free.

It reads this way in 1 Peter 3:18. Christ died for your sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God. He was put to death in the body but made alive by the Spirit.

Have we acknowledged the wonder of the grace and mercy involved in this sacrifice? Have you yielded to the claims of Christ upon your life?

Now is the time.

# Christian symbol was first a torture device

The Easter story is dark, but it is also the most hope-filled of stories.

BY NATASHA MOORE

A FEW years ago, a short-lived burst of hand-wringing (and not a little mirth) met the announcement that a survey conducted at a UK shopping centre indicated that 20% of children think Jesus Christ plays football for Chelsea.

Privately, I have my doubts about the methodological robustness of that survey. Still, polls show pretty consistently that the Australian (or British or American) public have trouble telling their Scripture from their Shakespeare.

But however little the Holy Book of Christians is known in mainstream culture, the central image of the faith remains universally recognisable. Long used as a religious symbol, the crucifix is worn around necks or tattooed on biceps and wrists the world over.

Periodically this symbol creates a bit of a kerfuffle in secular Western countries. But the concern that the combination of a horizontal with a vertical line might cause offence is, for most 21<sup>st</sup> century people, a relatively abstract one. The true offensiveness of the cross is mostly lost on us in a culture where its function as an object of reverence for so long obscured its inherent gruesomeness.

The Gospel accounts of the death of Jesus strike a modern reader who knows anything of the process of crucifixion as staggeringly understated: "There they crucified Him."

Crucifixion was designed to be especially painful, gory and public. The ancient reader would have known all that was implied: the nails, 13-18 centimetres long, driven through bone and nerve; the nakedness (glossed over in most religious art); the cruel tension between the need to breathe (requiring the victim to use his feet and arms to draw himself up to exhale) and the intense pain of doing so; the agonising slowness of death by exposure, asphyxiation and/or shock, which could take up to three days.

Those who had seen crucifixions were in no doubt about the offensiveness – the sheer absurdity – of the Christian claim that God Himself submitted to such an ordeal. And it seems a strange, even sinister, story to set at the heart of your own story, as Christians do. It seems strange, even sinister, to wear near your heart or ink on your skin the execution device of a long-crumbled empire – worse, one that some regimes still use.

Perhaps the closest we come now to that more visceral feeling of offence is the atheist accusation that the cross of Jesus represents an act of cosmic child abuse – God

the Father sacrificing His own Son to appease His own thundering wrath against humanity. This twisted tale, they ask, lies at the foundations of Western culture? What's wrong with you people?

And yet it's plain, surely, that something is terribly wrong with us – with all of us. You don't have to read the news for long to figure that out. The Easter story is a dark one. It matches our story, the darkness we see in the world, and (if we look honestly) in the recesses of our own hearts.

And if there is something terribly wrong with us, a more upbeat, sanitised story is not going to help us. Our real problems are not going to be addressed by something less gritty and devastating than the problems themselves. If God has, after all, come and taken our darkness onto Himself, the film of that book is not going to be PG-rated.

But Easter is also the most hope-filled of stories: sacrificial love and glorious resurrection.

British writer G. K Chesterton wrote of his confusion, as a young man, hearing the many and varied accusations flung at the Christian faith. It was inhumanly gloomy, he was told; but at the same time, foolishly optimistic, mere wish fulfilment. The charges were inconsistent.

"Christianity could not at once be the black mask on a white world," he wrote, "and also the white mask in a black world. The state of the Christian could not be at once so comfortable that he was a

coward to cling to it, and so uncomfortable that he was a fool to stand it."

People called Christianity a doormat religion, or else the mother of wars; it offered a universal ethic or was nothing but monstrous superstition. Chesterton came to see this apparent contradiction as a testament to its authenticity:

"Suppose we heard an unknown man spoken of by many men. Suppose we were puzzled to hear that some men said he was too tall and some too short; some objected to his fatness, some lamented his leanness; some thought him too dark, and some too fair. One explanation ... would be that he might be an odd shape. But there is another explanation. He might be the right shape."

The Christian story is a very odd shape. With its sharp corners and unexpected softness, it still rubs plenty of people the wrong way. And if it's merely a myth of questionable morality, then so it should.

But if it captures something profoundly true about our strange world – where the terrible darkness of human nature and the unfathomable worth of human life coexist in agonising tension – then giving offence may still be exactly what we'd expect it to do.

Dr. Natasha Moore is Research Fellow at the Centre for Public Christianity. This article first appeared in The Spectator Australia and has also appeared in Warcry.



## Crossword

**ACROSS**

- 1 Shipwrecked
- 3 Brief talk
- 7 Eager
- 8 Descend a cliff
- 10 Square block
- 11 The "I"
- 13 Checks financial records
- 15 Wince involuntarily
- 16 Let it stand!
- 17 Unwanted fluff
- 18 Unruffled

**DOWN**

- 1 Gather in crops
- 2 Arousal of senses
- 4 Doctor's oath
- 5 Skill
- 6 Printer's primary colour
- 9 The finding of a jury
- 12 Practical
- 14 Fastener

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

**SOLUTION PAGE 11**

# Left for dead he found life

In January 2012 Jack Devarajoo from Ashville, South Africa was attacked at home and left for dead. It was three days before he was found locked in his room.

In hospital he was told that he would die. He had to undergo an emergency brain operation due to his severe injuries and afterwards he was on a ventilator for two weeks. When it was turned off, Jack's family were told to prepare for his funeral.

Five surgeons had declared him clinically dead. However, through the ordeal, even though he couldn't move or talk, Jack remembers lying in a dark room and silently begging God to spare his life and save him spiritually. "Lord, You know best and I need You to save my life," he prayed.

"God came through for me. He touched me and He gave me back my life," Jack declares.



The surgeons were astonished that he survived and not only survived but was able to walk and talk.

Now eight years later, Jack says that he feels he gets stronger and stronger each day. Although he still struggles with his speech, he is teaching Sunday School and working with the local youth group.

"I can do everything that a normal person does and it is because of Jesus. I want to give Him all praise and glory and honour for restoring my life.

"This whole ordeal has taught me one thing: God unconditionally loves me. It has drawn me closer to Him."

Jack sees the assault as discipline from the Lord for the kind of life he was living before.

"I was doing some terrible things and had gone far from God. He disciplined me to bring me back into His fold and I am so, so grateful."

# Saved from being a slave

BY SALLY BRUCE

**A**shamma (not her real name) was studying in Grade Ten when her family forced her to leave school to become a Jogini sex slave. Although she loved school and was a promising student, she was no longer allowed to attend.

Ashamma's family are Dalits, those who fall below the caste system, trapped in discrimination, exploitation and oppression.

Ashamma is the oldest of four girls, and her father had fallen sick and was no longer able to care for the family. People from the village told him that there must be a curse on the family as her mother gave birth to girls instead of boys and the family suffered so many problems.

The solution, said the villagers, was to dedicate Ashamma as a Jogini.

The Jogini practice is a particularly heinous form of abuse that many Dalit girls endure. Little girls are dedicated to the temple goddess in a form of marriage. After they reach puberty they become the property of the village and can be used and abused by any man, anytime.

Dedicated without their consent, or understanding, these girls are trapped in ritualised sexual abuse. The plight of Joginis is a hidden ter-



Photo supplied by dfn (Dignity Freedom Network).

ror, denied by the authorities and unnoticed by the global community.

Ashamma was older than most Jogini girls at the time of her dedication. As Joginis are not paid for their services, she began working for an organisation as a social worker. Her family problems continued and Ashamma did not sleep well as nightmares plagued her. She barely ate and did not take care of herself.

Before long she fell pregnant and gave birth to a little boy. However he became sick soon after birth and,

despite seeking help from a witch-doctor, her baby died.

It was at this time of despair that someone gave Ashamma a Bible, and hungry for hope, she avidly read it.

She acknowledges that when she accepted the truth of the Bible that God loved her and that He had made a way for her to be released from her sin and brought into right relationship with Him, she was set free from the nightmares that had tortured her for so long.

Ashamma came into contact with

the staff from the Good Shepherd, a Christian ministry serving the poor and vulnerable in India under the banner of the Dignity Freedom Network.

She learnt that dedicating girls as Joginis was illegal, and she was empowered to reject the men who came to see her.

Today Ashamma is a Jogini Village Leader, working with Good Shepherd Ministries to stop the dedications of other vulnerable girls. She says that she doesn't want other girls to go through the horrors that she experienced, and she is now a proud mother of a son who is studying in Grade Three.

Although life is not easy, Ashamma continues to work in her village, preventing dedications and advocating for the end of the Jogini practice, sharing the peace and joy that she has discovered.

The Jogini practice exists in around 3,000 villages, of which Good Shepherd is currently active in 260. They hope to continue to expand, so that at-risk girls are saved from heinous abuse, and women are set free, provided with healing, counselling and economic development initiatives, and discover their God-given worth.

They hosted a campaign around International Women's Day, to support more Jogini Village Workers like Ashamma. Their ultimate goal is to see the eradication of this abuse. •

For more information visit [www.dfn.org.au](http://www.dfn.org.au) or E: [info@dfn.org.au](mailto:info@dfn.org.au), or phone: 1 800 949 774.

nudge

## HAVING RIGHT PRIORITIES

ALL of us need to know that our lives have meaning and purpose. Do you know yours?

Take up a pen and write on a piece of paper, "I exist to..." and finish the sentence.

How did you go? "I exist to ... work and make money ... make my partner happy ... have a happy family ... catch the biggest fish ... play music/computer games etc."

Have you clarified your purpose?

Have you factored in what happens if you are made redundant, your loved one dies, you go blind or your children prove disappointing? Is there anything you exist for that can't be taken away?

The Westminster Shorter Catechism says: "The chief end of man is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever." All genuine Christians exist to do just that.

Such a clarity of purpose helps one order priorities for living, and gives meaning to all you do. Then your purpose does not diminish with time, as you can glorify God at every age and stage. It is a reason for living that is broad enough to incorporate all the others, and infuse them with divine meaning.

Is it time to factor God into your purpose and priorities for this life? •

# Good Friday indeed for homeless man

• From page 1

Then, one particular Sunday, David stumbled to the back steps of the church, as usual. "I was at the end of my route and wanted to rest," he says. "As I sat there, I could hear the singing inside. The music was so heavenly and it sounded so good. I could feel that there was something wonderful going on inside of this building and I felt that I really wanted to be a part of that."

As he was sitting there, he recalls arguing with the thought of whether to go inside or not. "I was looking at myself, dirty, filthy, smelly, and drunk - and I'm thinking, 'Well, with all of what's going on inside of there should I really present myself that way?'"

"But I know it was the Lord who communicated the thought to me and told me that this was His house and I was supposed to go in there anyway I was," he continues. "And so, with that in mind, I went inside. But when I came into the building that night, I walked up to the balcony and I sat there, being a little surprised that in the condition I was in, that nobody asked me to leave."

A woman stood up to give her testimony to the congregation and David found himself listening intently to her story, which sounded similar to

his own. When the woman stopped talking, David knew that he wanted what she had: Jesus.

"The pastor gave the altar call and it was already in me to respond so I went forward and surrendered my life to the Lord," he smiles.

The pastor, Jim, clearly remembers when he saw David for the first time: "I see this wrecked guy sheepishly looking up at me and I'm thinking, 'Great, someone's going to hit me up for money.' As he gets close to me, he smelled worse than any human being I've ever smelled in my life. Matted hair, the dude was a mess. The odour was

so horrible - of the street, of filth, of sweat, of urine - that when I talked to him, I had to look away to inhale.

"I started to give him some money, just to get rid of him but he put his finger in my face and said, 'Reverend, I don't want your money. I want this Jesus that you were talking about. I'm going to die out there. I don't have a hope in this world unless somebody changes me.' At that moment, I became so convicted of my lack of love and my lack of compassion that I raised my hands and said, 'God, forgive me.' And I began to just weep for my own need and heartlessness.

"We both needed God that night," Jim admits, "me and David. David sensed what God was doing and he came close and fell against my chest

and I put my arms around him. We just stood there holding each other.

When I embraced him I felt like I embraced something that was real - that this man really stood for the Lord and it was that love that drew me," he recalls. "It was like God was telling me, 'Jesus didn't die for a nice, clean, neat little world. He came for that which was lost and ruined.'"

Pastor Jim says Jesus revealed to him: "You smell this smell? If you can't handle this smell, I can't use you because the whole world smells like this to me. This is what sin smells like in my holy nostrils."

That night, Easter Sunday, Jim introduced David to Jesus and David's life has since been completely transformed. He got into rehab for his alcoholism, started coming to church, reading the Bible and memorising verses. "He became like a model Christian," Jim jokes.

The smart, handsome young man worked for Jim's church in maintenance and security for a while, and met and married a pharmacist.

They now have two children and David is an ordained minister, serving in New Jersey.

His life inside and out is unrecognisable from the mess it was before - Jesus saw through David's filth, as He does with each one of us. He saw through Jim's filth too and that Easter Sunday was a life-changer for both men. •



David Ruffin shares his story on Youtube, sitting in the church where everything changed for him.

**YOLO**  
lol, jk. brb.  
-Jesus

An iGen Easter message. Translation: you only live once, laugh out loud, just kidding, be right back, Jesus. You too can have your best life in eternity rather than now by repenting of your wrongs and giving yourself to Christ. See page 7.

# Train-wrecked life back on track



Desley and her missionary husband of 32 years.

Desley Hable was worried that her sister was getting involved in “some weird cult.” She had been invited to attend a six-week teaching series and Desley decided to go along to “protect her”.

However, something surprising happened: “As I listened, something started to change in me. I couldn’t wait to go back the next week to hear more. I found myself sitting there nodding my head. Answers to my questions were becoming very clear,” Desley told Challenge.

Her questions began around sixty years ago as a young girl living in Sydney with her bedroom window directly opposite a strip club. Before the family made the move to Sydney, her grandmother had helped raise Desley and her sister as her parents were always working.

“Mum and Dad held on to a form of religion but my Grandma was a Christian,” Desley reveals. “I remember from a very young age seeing her kneel at her bedside often. She played a big part of our early foundational years.”

In Sydney, Desley and her sister were left largely to themselves, as her parents were publicans and very busy managing a hotel. “We rarely ate together as a family,” she says. “I remember longing to be with my dad. So I used to hang out in the bottle shop with him while he worked.”

Desley went to a top school and did well but ended up mixing with the wrong crowd. “As a teenager I got involved in drugs and started to live a very promiscuous lifestyle,” she admits. She would sneak out at night, hang out at the local bar, take drugs, and smoke. She even got involved with a bikey gang and witnessed violent acts of crime.

Things started to get worse from there and Desley relates that her life was in extreme danger several times. “I would steal money from my father’s business to buy drugs and continually lie to my parents as to my whereabouts. I had many boyfriends and got very emotionally damaged in the pursuit to find love and acceptance.”

She also had two abortions. “My life was becoming a train wreck!”

“I met my first husband and was married at 19, had my first daughter at 20 and divorced at 21,” she says. “Our home was a battlefield and I could see how damaging it would be to our daughter, Kylie, if I didn’t escape it.”

She adds, “Life was hard as a single mum. I was forever lonely and struggling to make ends meet. I started to get involved in drugs again and was in and out of relationships, chasing that elusive desire to be loved.”

Desley asked herself: “What is the purpose of my life? Why am I here? Surely, there has to be more to life than this?”

It was around this time that she and her sister attended the Christian conference. “My initial reaction was one of scepticism. But the people were very different to anybody I had ever met. There was a love and a light shining from them and I was drawn to them.”

Desley found herself wanting to learn more about God. “God was revealing Himself to me. I wanted what those people had!” she explains. “I believe God was answering the prayers of my praying grandmother all those years ago.

“They prayed with me to accept Jesus as

my Lord and Saviour. As I repented [turned away] from my sins and called upon the name of Jesus to save me, I felt my sins being washed away. I was definitely born again [spiritually renewed] and I knew my life would never be the same again.”

Desley left “a brand new person in Christ.” She was able to read and understand the Bible and know that God was speaking to her through it.

“God took away my loneliness,” she affirms. “He set me free from my smoking addiction. He healed me of my brokenness. He set me free from the guilt of having the abortions. I fell completely in love with Jesus.”

At the time, Desley was in a bad relationship. Upon feeling convicted by God, she left the compromising situation, which was the final step out of her old life.

Desley lived with her sister in the Christian Community that lead her to the Lord. However, because of previous years of instability and turmoil, Kylie’s Dad convinced Kylie to come and live with him and Desley reluctantly let her go.

“I prayed for a long time to find peace about this,” she says. “God revealed to me that He had Kylie in the palm of His Hand and she was His beloved possession.”

Finally, eight years later, when Kylie was 13, she returned and had her own encounter with Jesus. She became a committed Christian much to the joy of her mother.

“God is faithful and delights to answer our prayers!” Desley says.

On top of this, God brought an Austrian missionary into Desley’s life and they got married a few years later.

“We have been happily married for 32 years and God has been incredibly faithful in our lives,” Desley says.

“God answers your seeking questions. He is closer than you think. His promises are true and He brings them to pass in your life. He restores broken hearts and lost and broken years. He makes all things new. He delights to give you the desires of your heart. He teaches us to trust in Him, even when our circumstances would dictate otherwise.”

Desley loves many passages from the Bible but one that particularly stands out to her is 1 Peter 5:10, “In His kindness God called you to share in His eternal glory by means of Christ Jesus. So after you have suffered a little while, He will restore, support, and strengthen you, and He will place you on a firm foundation.”

Desley asserts, “God sets apart our life to become more and more like Jesus, as we surrender it and trust in Him.”

## EASTER THOUGHTS

God proved His love on the Cross. When Christ hung, and bled, and died, it was God saying to the world, ‘I love you.’ *Billy Graham*

The resurrection is the central theme in every Christian sermon reported in the [Book of] Acts. The resurrection, and its consequences were the ‘gospel’ or good news which the Christians brought. ... The first fact in the history of Christendom is a number of people who say they have seen the resurrection. *C.S. Lewis*

Because Christ lives I too shall live, Oh glorious truth divine, To think that resurrection life was His And shall be mine.

Because Christ lives I too shall live, I’ll leave this lump of clay And lift my wings to higher heights On resurrection day.

Because Christ lives I too shall live, With Him I’ll ever be Rejoicing that He broke death’s chains And set my spirit free. *Peter Sumner*

Few people seem to realize that the resurrection of Jesus is the cornerstone to a worldview that provides the perspective to all of life. *Josh McDowell*

Before Jesus can live in and through us, our selfishness must be put to death. When this happens, Easter becomes a personal reality bringing new life. *Peter Sumner*

The Gospels do not explain the resurrection; the resurrection explains the Gospels. *Peter Sumner*

# DO YOU HAVE THE COURAGE?

If you are not a Christian but are thinking of becoming one, there is something important you should know: it may cost you your life. Not just figuratively, either – literally. Christianity is not for weaklings, do you even have what it takes?



Martyrdom is possible in many places in the world now, even more so than at other times in history. One Free World International, which helps persecuted minorities, estimates that between 200 and 300 million Christians are currently being persecuted worldwide, in places like China, Pakistan, North Korea and the Middle East.

In Nigeria, Boko Haram have put the country ahead of the rest of the world in Christian martyrdoms, with 1,350 confirmed killed last year. One of the latest casualties being **Pastor Lawan Andimi (above)**, who was beheaded by the militant Muslim group, leaving behind a wife and seven children.

Organisation Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW) condemned the murder.

“As Christians, knowing there is life after death, we nevertheless value the gift of this life,” stated chief executive Mervyn Thomas, “and we join in mourning an uncommonly courageous man, who despite knowing death was a very real prospect, maintained a calm and deep faith that will continue to inspire for generations.”

He was referring to the pastor’s “hostage video”. When the group made Andimi beg for his release, he instead turned it into an opportunity to declare his faith in God and call upon others to remain strong.

“I have never been discouraged,” Andimi says on the footage, “Because whatever condition one finds himself in is in the hand of God. A God who takes care of me and gave me my life will still work in these people and touch them. By the grace of God I will be together with my wife and children. If the opportunity is not granted maybe it is the will of God. I urge you all to be patient. Don’t cry, don’t worry, but thank God for everything.”

Andimi refused to give up his faith in Jesus and turn to Islam and it cost him his life.

Gideon Para-Mallam, of the International Fellowship of Evangelical Students said: “Reverend Andimi died a martyr and therefore a Christian hero. The blood of martyrs is the seed that waters and grows the gospel of peace as good news to a broken and hurting world, which Jesus Christ called us to proclaim. Reverend Andimi’s blood will water the spread of the gospel in North East Nigeria, and other parts of the world.”

And where is the good pastor now? According to the last book of the Bible, Revelation, he is in the throne room of God.

“When [the angel] opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain because of the word of God and the testimony they had maintained. They called out in a loud voice, ‘How long, Sovereign Lord, holy and true, until You judge the inhabitants of the earth and avenge our blood?’ Then each of them was given a white robe, and they were told to wait a little longer, until the full number of their fellow servants, their brothers and sisters, were killed just as they had been.” (Revelation 6:9-11)

Later we are told “After this I looked, and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and before the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands. And they cried out in a loud voice: ‘Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb.’” (Revelation 7:9-10)

And finally: “And I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded because of their testimony about Jesus and because of the word of God. ... The second death has no power over them, but they will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with Him for a thousand years.” (Revelation 20:4b, 6b)

So, although Christianity may cost you untold pain and suffering, millions have counted the cost and decided it is worth it for the relationship they have with Jesus now, and the promised eternal life and the glory that will be revealed at the end of the age. Do you dare to join them?

# TEENTALK

## REDEFINING BEAUTY



This little piggy ...



After eight weeks of chemo, she lost her hair but not her sense of humour.

**S**uffering. It is something that 37-year-old American Katherine Wolf is all too familiar with.

On April 21, 2008, the aspiring actress, model and former beauty queen collapsed in her living room. Her family would later learn that she had suffered from a massive brain stem stroke that would leave her fighting for her life.

The surgeon that operated on Katherine said the mass of blood vessels in her brain was the largest that he had ever seen in the worst possible location with the worst amount of bleeding. Despite the odds, he operated on her. The surgery took 16 hours and at the end of it, Katherine had lost 60 per cent of her cerebellum and many vital intra-cranial nerves.

When she woke up, she couldn't walk, talk, or eat, and half of her face was paralysed. Everyone expected she would die or, at best, remain in a vegetative state but God had other plans for her.

This terrible twist in what had been, up to then, an idyllic life, set Katherine and her family on a path of self-discovery and spirituality. It wasn't one they would have chosen for themselves, but their remarkable journey has touched many lives.

This is how she describes that time in her life: "Here I am, 26-years-old, a new mother, barely out of the newlywed phase of life and now I'm being told essen-

tially your life is shot, it's over, and there's no hope. The reality is, I knew on a deep level that they weren't right."

This was because Katherine had grown up in a believing home and was herself a committed Christian. She believed in Jesus and His ability to heal her but over the next few years, this trial would stretch her and her family's faith to breaking point.

In the messiest, darkest part of her life, Katherine called out to God who, she says, has helped to change her perspective. "Whatever happens to you, whether it's bad or great, it's how you respond to it that matters.

"My relationship with beauty and satisfaction with my body has always been complicated at best," she admits. "The bags under my sleep-deprived eyes suddenly paled in comparison to the reality that my body and brain no longer worked like they used to. Now, after the near-fatal stroke, the body in which I lived was not only different but altogether unknown and unsafe. Where do you run when your own body turns on you?"

Katherine's experience has completely redefined her definition of healing. Years



ABOVE: Katherine and Jay with their boys.

LEFT: Katherine and Jay when they were younger, before her accident.



of hardship, tears, pain and lots of intense rehab have seen her relationship with God grow stronger and stronger.

Since the initial stroke, she has undergone three life-saving procedures, 11 surgeries, suffered a broken leg, and had to get a brain aneurysm removed.

Throughout it all, Katherine hung onto a Bible verse from Romans 8:28, "And we know that in all things, God works for the good of those who love Him, who have been called according to His purpose."

She is truly a "miracle girl," her husband Jay says.

"The reality is that it's been a tough pill to swallow. We've been through the wringer again and again and the one thing we know for sure is that God was faithful before and He will be again."

Jay has walked a challenging journey of his own, finding "a newfound freedom, knowing that God would give us life in ways we could never have asked for or imagined."

Seven years later Katherine, against all medical odds, became a mother again. She named her second son John Nestor, after the surgeon who saved her life that fateful day. "My busted-up body made a baby — my own living reminder that beauty can come from brokenness and new life can come from near death," she smiles.

A favourite Bible verse in the Wolf family, one that reminds them of God's everlasting love and faithfulness, is Hebrews 6:19: "We have this hope [of eternal life] as

an anchor for the soul, firm and secure."

"My face is paralysed on the right side. I can't walk well and mostly require a wheelchair to get around," Katherine explains.

"I can't drive. I have severe double-vision and lack fine motor control in my right hand. While my stroke stole much of my independence and some of my 'traditional beauty', it also freed me from the lie that death can be outrun. I met death when I was 26. The magnitude of that experience means I no longer feel the need to cover up my

flaws or conceal my brokenness because I now know that life is simply too precious and short to carry the burden of shame."

Katherine wants her story to be an encouragement and a support to others who are suffering. She has

written several books and study guides, runs a blog, and regularly uploads to social media as a way to reach and teach others. She and Jay have started a ministry, *Hope Heals*, and run summer camps for people with special needs, and their families.

Throughout, Katherine demonstrates what the 'new kind of beautiful' is, one that is not just skin-deep but soul-deep.

Katherine ends her testimony with these words of wisdom: "When my standard of beauty is redemption, not weight; when it's sacrifice, not self-absorption; when it's new life, not chasing youth gone by, I can see how my body embodies the gracious gift of a second chance at simply existing. And what could be more beautiful than that?"

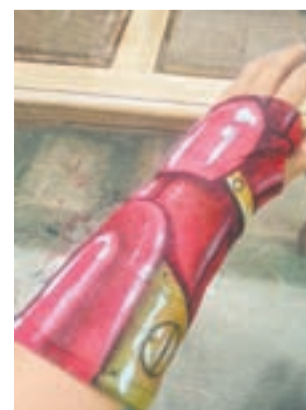
To learn more about Katherine's story, read her books *Hope Heals* and *Suffer Strong: How to Survive Anything Redefining Everything* or check out her blog or Instagram account *hopeheals*.



His real prosthetic took weeks to make, so he made himself a temporary one out of Lego!



This seven-year-old with alopecia dressed up for her school's "Crazy Hair Day."



Cast as a superhero!

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Tim Keller notes: "Worry is not believing God will get it right, and bitterness is believing God got it wrong."

- Life is like a grindstone - whether it grinds a person down or polishes them up depends on the kind of stuff they're made of.
- Laughter is a tranquilizer with no side-effects.
- God will never allow anything to come your way that He cannot handle.
- Ulcers are the result of mountain climbing over molehills.
- A person's life is a piece of metal - it can be forged into a tool to aid them or a weapon to destroy them. - E.C. McKenzie



Well, they're not wrong.



"My friend was diagnosed with Parkinson's. He thought it would be funny to send this as his Christmas letter. His wife added the sticker."



"Going back to work next week. Trying to convince my colleagues I had a beach holiday."



He met his other half at the mall.



Having fun scaring kids at the beach!

# DON'T WORRY!

BY JODY BENNETT

**BE** anxious for nothing. This is one of the strangest commandments in the Bible.

First of all, there is an awful lot to be anxious about – coronavirus for a start; climate change, child abuse, domestic violence, North Korea, species extinction, incoming asteroids, financial disaster, difficult relationships, online bullying, weight gain ... You name it and we can worry about it!

Secondly, the Bible states this as if anxiety is something we can control! The full quote says, "Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, 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 your minds in Christ Jesus." Philippians 4:6-7.

So, the Apostle Paul is saying, don't fret, instead pray and ask for God's help, remembering to focus on the good in your life and being thankful for it, and you'll have peace.

Sounds easy but it's not. However, if we believe in God, we don't have to be overwhelmed by issues. When we are faced with situations that induce fear and anxiety we have a choice: we

can either focus on the problem and watch it become bigger and more overwhelming in our imaginations (especially at three am!), or focus on God and how great, all-powerful and deeply involved He is in our world. In that case our problems tend to shrink to a manageable size and our trust in God grows bigger and bigger.

What I teach my girls is: You are not a victim, you have a choice. Even if you don't have a choice regarding your circumstance (like illness), you have a choice about your attitude towards it and how you respond to it.

You have a choice as to whether you let that circumstance make you miserable and bitter, or stronger and kinder. You have a choice whether to forgive a wrong or take an offence. You have a choice whether you let that circumstance push you into addiction, self-harm and suicide, or whether you let it push you into the arms of Jesus.

The people featured on this page and page 8 have made a choice to respond to their difficult circumstances with humour, selflessness and courage.

As we face an uncertain tomorrow, may the God of all grace help us to do the same.

## 10 TIPS TO BEAT ANXIETY

	<b>Get a good night's sleep - 8 hours is a good goal!</b>		<b>Do breathing exercises: in for the count of 4, hold for 7, out for the count of 8</b>
	<b>Read the Bible - in a book or online: Psalms or John are good places to start</b>		<b>Pray to God asking for help and telling Him all your troubles</b>
	<b>Take time to rest and relax:</b>		<b>Spend time in nature exercising or exploring</b>
	<b>Spend time with a friend or connect with others through volunteering</b>		<b>Know when to say 'no' to over-scheduling and other's demands</b>
	<b>Eat healthy food that doesn't leave you feeling bloated and tired</b>		<b>Tidy up - mess is stressful</b>

# Choosing life in spite of certain pain

BY KELLY AND DANIEL CRAWFORD

In the summer of 2015, my husband, Daniel, and I discovered I was pregnant and that our first child was a little boy!

On the same phone call, however, we learned that our son was conceived with a life-limiting chromosomal abnormality known as Trisomy 18.

Nothing can prepare you for that moment. The future you envisioned with your child begins slipping away. Instantly, I had to come to grips with the reality that our baby's life would more than likely be short if his diagnosis held true.

So, the question instantly emerged: What ought a family do in a situation like ours?

Some people, such as the first specialist we saw, encourage abortion as a means of hitting reset in order to try again for a "better" one, which is to say, a healthier one.

Others believe it would be emotionally easier to terminate the pregnancy. "If you're going to lose this child at some point, why torture yourselves by dragging out the inevitable?"

I believe that this line of thinking is rooted in a caring consideration for the parents and offered with the best of intentions. It's not hard to understand why abortion would be considered in a situation like ours.

However, I humbly propose that such a conclusion is built upon two faulty assumptions.

- The emotional fallacy

Emotionally, the faulty assumption is that joy and sorrow are incompatible and that anything

in life can fall into one of those two buckets—but never both.

However, regardless of your worldview or faith persuasion, the human experience shows us that joy and sorrow are not mutually exclusive. In fact, I think we consistently find that life is an ever-swirling blend of joy and sorrow, highs and lows, good and bad, peace and conflict and love and loss?

It is also true that as



we give our hearts fully to something or someone, this greater depth of love does, in fact, bring about greater levels of potential pain. We also know that as hard as it is to lose a loved one, the sorrow never negates the joy we shared and experienced with them.

- The psychological fallacy

Psychologically, scientific research has shown that women who terminated a child with a life-limiting diagnosis reported significantly more despair, more depression, and more post-traumatic stress than women who continued the pregnancy (Duke University, 2015).

So, it actually benefits a woman's mental health to continue with the pregnancy in such situations.

- The spiritual truth

Spiritually, above all else, I've come to see and believe that we can take God at His Word.

The Scriptures are abundantly clear: God is the Creator of every life from the moment

of conception (Psalm 139:13-16). Every human being bears His image (Genesis 1:27) and is therefore infinitely valuable.

Jesus Christ Himself is no stranger to suffering (Hebrews 4:14-16).

Believers will also experience suffering (1 Peter 4:12-13).

Yet, we can come to know Him more intimately as we share in His sufferings (Philippians 3:10) and trust that our pain is never pointless (Romans 5:3-5) as we keep our eyes fixed on the eternal hope that lies ahead (Revelation 21:1-5) for all who have accepted Christ's sacrifice on their behalf (Romans 10:9-10).

So, the choice we had was really no choice at all. Rather than giving our little boy an abortion, we gave him a name, and Abel Paul Crawford's journey on earth continued.

I carried Abel for a full thirty-nine weeks, and he was born on January 22, 2016. This happens to be same day that Roe v. Wade was passed in 1973. (I've since had two more babies born on January 22, but that's a different story).

Ultimately, we got to love and take care of Abel for fifteen days after birth.

While losing Abel was tragic, the real tragedy would have been if we had kept ourselves from truly loving him during the time we did have with him.

The truth is, aborting our son would not have spared Daniel or me an ounce of loss or despair. It would have only robbed us of the joyful memories that forever mark our season with Abel.

Our time with Abel was simultaneously the saddest and the sweetest, the hardest and the greatest season of our lives. We wouldn't trade those two weeks for anything in the world, and I cannot fathom giving them up prematurely and voluntarily.

- Abel Speaks

As we share our story in public, our goal is never to condemn or offend any families who have chosen a different story for themselves and their child. We don't want to shame families looking at the past; we want to strengthen families living in the present.

That desire has led us to found a nonprofit organization called Abel Speaks, where we exist to support families who have chosen to carry a child with a life-limiting diagnosis in pregnancy. •

Check out [www.abelspeaks.org](http://www.abelspeaks.org) for further information.

This article first appeared on the Denison Forum, [www.denisonforum.org](http://www.denisonforum.org).

# Rock solid evidence for world-wide Flood

Shaun Doyle talks to Dr. Tim Clarey about his research career in Flood geology.

Tim's interest in rocks started early in life. As he and his brothers hoed beans for money as kids, they would compete for the best fossils they could find in the rocks in the bean fields. Most were brachiopods, with an occasional trilobite; the rocks containing them had been transported by the continental glaciers to the Lower Peninsula of Michigan where they lived. That rock collecting and sibling rivalry got Tim interested in geology.

In his words, Tim "grew up in church." He dates making a personal decision to follow Jesus Christ at almost eight, at his home church's Vacation Bible School. He has remained an active believer all through his life, including during his studies.

His interest in Biblical creation also arose in the home. One of his older brothers had a copy of the creationist classic *The Genesis Flood* by John Whitcomb and Henry Morris (1961), and the brothers would take turns reading it. Tim noted: "*The Genesis Flood* really helped us learn about the evidence that backed the Bible and Flood geology."

Another influence occurred during his years as an undergraduate student. A talk given by creationist pioneer Dr. Duane Gish convinced him that the fossils really don't support evolution. He later weighed what he learned in his university classes against Dr. Gish's work and the evidence. Tim saw further confirmation that the Bible was right: the rocks and fossils are consistent with the Bible, and do not reflect evolution and deep time.

## Preparing for creation research

Tim spent over 25 years in industry and academia as a geologist, which did have its challenges:

"I kept fairly quiet in the oil and gas industry, at least until I got to know my co-workers better. Occasionally, I would gently debate evolution and the age of the earth with a few geologists I worked closely with. First, though, I let them see I was a competent oil geologist. Once I had their respect, I would bring up evidence for a young Earth."

Teaching in a secular college presented similar challenges: "I had to watch closely what I said in my lectures. I would show students that the fossils do not support large-scale evolution; they merely show sudden appearance and then stasis (staying the same) – and then disappearance. I pointed out the lack of transitional fossils between the different kinds."

## Mapping the rock record and the pre-Flood world

Tim joined ICR as a full-time geologist in 2013. His first major

(and current) research project is called the Column Project. Tim explains:

"It entails plotting stratigraphic columns from oil well, outcrop, and even seismic data into a database, continent by continent. Basically, I'm plotting the actual rocks that are in place all over the globe. So far, I have three continents completed and another nearly finished. All the continents show the same sedimentation patterns that reflect a single watery catastrophe. They all begin with minimal sedimentary coverage and rock volume, and read a peak in coverage and volume on all continents at the same time. The results are showing the true global nature of the Flood."

His completed work so far has meant compiling data from over 1,500 stratigraphic columns across North and South America, Africa, and the Middle East.

From the geologic data recorded in these columns Tim has worked to map the pre-Flood geography. He has found that the depositional patterns and arrangement of fossils help reveal where the coastlines likely may have been in the pre-Flood world. These also indicate that different ecological zones were separated roughly by elevation.

Tim has also incorporated Dr. John Baumgardner's Catastrophic Plate Tectonics into his model. He says it provides a more comprehensive understanding of sedimentation patterns, tectonic movement, and fossil ordering during the Flood.

Tim has felt a sense of purpose and guidance throughout his career, leading him to the creation research he is doing now:

"I see God's hand in my career path every step of the way, in the amazing fashion. First, my time in the oil and gas industry allowed me to learn about oil-well and seismic

data, sequences stratigraphy, and the geology of the continental USA. I use those skills now in the Column Project. Even getting laid off from the oil industry 'forced' me to get a Ph.D. Without that and the research skills that come along with it, I don't think I would have been able to conduct my current research as effectively."

## Standing firm on the Bible

Although Tim's work deals with rocks and fossils, it is significant for affirming the

trustworthiness of the Bible and the integrity of the Gospel. Tim explains:

"The truth of God's Word is on the line, and ultimately, salvation is on the line. The Bible makes it clear that God created everything in six literal days some 6,000 years ago. He put the genealogies in the Bible for a reason. We must believe He did what He said. Sadly, evolution and long-age thinking are turning people away from God. We need to show people that they can trust God and His written Word.

"If God's Word is shown to be untrue or even partially untrue, it would undermine Jesus' credibility. If the parts of the Bible that says certain events happened when they really didn't – are merely stories – then who's to say whether other parts of the Bible, like the crucifixion and resurrection of Christ, aren't just stories, too? We have to believe all of God's Word, from the very first word to the last. And the biggest problem most people have in doing that is with the book of Genesis and its accounts of creation and the global Flood."

Tim says these are exciting times for creation geology! He thinks it is fascinating to see where the research is leading. He says, "There are so many things we now know and can do that we didn't know and couldn't do



Dr Tim Clarey examining rock strata and (below) enjoying the mountains with his wife Renee.



## Believe it or Not

### A foot too far for evolution?

BY CREATION MINISTRIES INTERNATIONAL

FOR nearly 50 years, engineers worldwide have been trying to build humanoid robots capable of stable and efficient walking as humans do. While creditable progress has been made, they are still far from achieving that goal.



Even just to satisfactorily emulate only one of the body's joint-and-muscle systems used in walking—i.e. the ankle/foot complex, or the knee, or the hip/pelvis complex—presents huge engineering challenges.

An ideal robotic foot for example, as a recent review paper pointed out, would have at least these three human characteristics: a flexible heel (shock absorption), toe flexion (energy efficiency, staying upright when standing still), and a flexible arch capable of being stiffened at critical points during each stride (energy harvesting—mimicking the windlass mechanism of the human foot—and shock absorption).

Meanwhile a robotic ankle needs to be able to store, and release, energy at appropriate times during each stride, to attain the energy efficiency of the human ankle.

What's the progress so far towards implementing these features of the ankle/foot complex? "Due to their technical complexity," the review paper laments, "all these human-like properties are still not available in one single ankle-foot solution."

But the original design just evolved out of nothing, without a Designer? Too hard to believe.

<sup>1</sup> Torricelli, D. and 9 others, Human-like compliant locomotion: state of the art of robotics implementation systems, *Bioinspir. Biomim.* 11(5):1002, 22 August 2016.

Geologist Dr. Timothy Clarey is a Research Associate and Geologist at the Institute for Creation Research (ICR) in Dallas, Texas. He earned a B.S. in geology summa cum laude, an M.S. in geology, and an M.S. in hydrogeology and a Ph.D. in geology (1996). He and his wife Renee have four grown children and four grandchildren.

This story first appeared on [creation.com](http://creation.com) and is used with kind permission.

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# BUILDING BETTER RELATIONSHIPS

## FEAR IS A RELATIONSHIP KILLER

BY ROB FURLONG

ONE theme has dominated news headlines recently – toilet paper supplies in our supermarkets are running low as a result of “panic buying” by large numbers of the Australian population.

Why? One reason suggested is the false belief that toilet paper can be used as a face mask to protect you from contracting the Coronavirus.

Now we are getting to the root cause of this erratic behaviour – fear – fear induced by the threat the Coronavirus outbreak represents.

But what does this have to do with relationships?

Simply this – fear is a spectre that lurks, seemingly hidden, at the back of our hearts but often drives unhealthy and irrational behaviours.

And this not only damages us but also our relationships, especially the ones closest to us.

Fear destroying relationships has a long history and goes back as far as Adam and Eve.

It was fear that drove them to rebel

against God’s command not to eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. They bought the lie that God was holding out on them and so they acted on this false belief. This led to more fear.

Prior to their disobedience, the relationship between Adam and Eve was one of openness, honesty, vulnerability and no shame.

Following their disobedience and becoming aware of their nakedness, the first thing they do is cover themselves with fig leaves in a sad attempt to hide who they really are from each other.

Fear had replaced their previous experience of oneness in body, mind and spirit with shame and secretiveness.

And this is played out in relationships in the present day.

A man hides his secret addiction from his wife because deep down he is afraid to face the pain of his past that drives the addiction.

A woman strives constantly to be the “perfect” wife or mother because she is driven by a desperate fear that she is not and will never be, good

enough.

Every one of us has fears and left unchecked, they can cripple us.

Fear that my marriage may end in divorce and I will be unable to cope.

Fear that my past will always haunt me – that I can never be forgiven or find peace.

And perhaps the greatest fear of all – death – and what lies beyond the grave.

It is no surprise to discover then that God has a lot to say about fear – it should have no place in our lives!

Time and again, God speaks directly to our spectre of fear and His message is straightforward: “Do not be afraid!”

In fact, God tells us 366 times in the Bible to “not be afraid!” This is a great encouragement because we have one “do not be afraid!” for every day of the year!

God speaking to our fears is also wonderfully on display through the message of Easter.

On the first Easter morning the risen Jesus greets the grief stricken women at His tomb with the words “Do not be afraid.” (Matthew 28:10).

The supposed “failure” of Good Friday, and the fear it generated in Jesus’ followers is swept away by these words and the presence of the living, resurrected Jesus.



## Regret causes radical kindness

**JON** Potter of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania who has helped more than 1000 strangers over the last four years wasn’t always big hearted. In fact, the catalyst for the 29-year-old’s chain of good deeds is now his biggest regret.

Years ago, a woman knocked on his car window at a gas station, asking for a ride to a battered women’s shelter. Jon declined and drove away, only to quickly change his mind. But by the time he returned to the scene, she was gone. “I told myself I never want to feel that again,” Jon said. “I never want to give only when it’s convenient.”

And so began Jon’s mission to give as much as he can to as many people as possible. In 2015 he responded to a post on his city’s Reddit page, and installed someone’s roof antenna free of charge.

In the last four years, Jon has responded to hundreds of similar requests. No favour is too small — or big. He’s hosted dinners, bought gas, fixed tyres, and even loaned \$2,000 to a man so overwhelmed by his bills that he was considering suicide.

Jon’s commitment to helping others became so powerful that he even quit his job as a paragliding instructor to work as a self-taught handyman. He does charge those who can afford his services; those who can’t, he serves for free.

This is why the Gospel is good news – because the death and resurrection of Jesus has dealt with our sin and death and all the fears associated with them.

What are you afraid of today?

That if your husband or wife knew the truth about you, he or she would leave?

That your boyfriend or girlfriend might dump you?

That you are not good enough to be loved?

Then take courage from this – you are loved deeply and infinitely by God and He longs for you to know this.

The Easter message – that Christ died and rose for your sins – dispels all our fears and opens up new freedom in our relationships!

## How can I become a Christian?

**Anyone can gain the eternal life offered though Jesus Christ**

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

**OUR PROBLEM:** Separation from God  
“Everyone has sinned. Nobody is good enough because God’s standards are perfect” (Romans 3:23) ADMIT

**GOD’S REMEDY / SOLUTION:** Jesus died on the cross  
“God demonstrates His own love for us in this; while we were still sinners, Christ died for us” (Romans 5:8) BELIEVE

**OUR RESPONSE:** Trust Jesus by receiving Him  
“To all who received Him, to those who believed in His name, He gave the right to become children of God” (John 1:12) COMMIT

Here is an example of how you can pray.

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

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

**AS A NEXT STEP:**

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

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# Empty Easter egg is egg-cellent symbol

BY RICK LEWERS

**AS A** not-so-long-ago diagnosed diabetic, my problems with chocolate were solved.

The diagnosis taught me wisdom about things I needed to change and even some things I like that had to go. Interestingly at this time of the year it is chocolate that reminds me of another problem solved. The diagnosis has been and still is that you and I have a problem with sin. Sin may be a bit of a joke to some people until we understand the diagnosis and realize it’s a diet that will kill you.

Now with the arrival of chocolate chip hot cross buns and those hollow chocolate eggs, which for some unknown biological reason come from chocolate rabbits, you’d be forgiven for thinking that chocolate is the sin.

I want to assure you chocolate is not a sin but a good gift from God. But to make the Easter chocolate taste even better, that empty chocolate egg holds a message of solved sin. It points to the person of Jesus Christ as the best bloke you would ever want to meet. Well, He’s more than a bloke but let me focus on why He is so good.

You may have heard the expression that you can load the very bullets that others use to shoot you down. We do that when it comes to God. We load up the ammunition



love the Easter Egg. It is a bit of fun but its the emptiness of the egg that is really good. I was reminded of someone who loaded bombs in the Second World War for an enemy they did not support. On investigating an unexploded shell it was found with nothing in it but a letter explaining that emptying the bomb of its power was the best they could do to protect those upon whom it would be dropped.

The empty egg of Easter is just such a work by God. The death of Jesus emptied all that would otherwise ruin us, disarming the condemning power of sin, silencing every accusative voice and replacing condemnation with forgiveness. Now that is chocolate of the best kind.

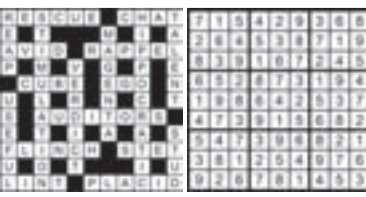
But as if to offer even more, death was left an empty space when Jesus rose up from it and hope for all was given. Death is not the end for those forgiven – eternal life is promised.

That’s better than chocolate! What a great reminder the Easter egg is of all that Jesus emptied. Of course the chocolate egg is a reminder of the sweetest truths of the new beginnings Easter brings – sins forgiven and life that springs eternal.

No wonder we take a holiday at Easter. How could you not stop and celebrate all that Jesus Christ has done for our lives?

I might just open up one of those hollow chocolate eggs to remind myself of all these Easter gifts... and if the dietician’s not watching I might just enjoy a little of the sweetness of it all...

Happy Easter to you all and drive carefully in the holiday season.





# Aiming high with feet firmly on the ground



**T**wenty-two year old basketballer Kyle J Guy has got the world at his fingertips. Last year he got married and, after helping Virginia win the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCCA) championship and garnishing the Final Four Most Outstanding Player award, was picked as shooting guard for the NBA's Sacramento Kings.

However, he has not let success go to his head, understanding it is all an undeserved gift.

"Every last praise and all glory goes to God" he tweeted last April when he was picked by the New York Knicks, and then traded to Sacramento. "Beyond blessed."

His Twitter byline reads I AM THIRD, which references a Christian website, I AM SECOND, which tells the stories of those who have put God first. Kyle's phrase takes it one step further, putting the needs of others ahead of his own too.

Besides social media accounts, another way people display their allegiances is by their body art. Kyle has a large tattoo on the front of his right thigh of the Bible character David standing on the slain body of Goliath in the mouth of a lion. One of the names for God is the Lion of Judah. Author CS Lewis also portrayed God as a lion – Aslan – in his allegorical children's series about Narnia.

As Kyle makes plain in his tweet from Easter 2017: On this day, the word impossible was deleted from our dictionary ... we have a lot to be thankful for and Thursday through Sunday of this weekend is the whole



*Kyle and his wife Alexa in a photo from his Twitter feed of them leaving for honeymoon.*

reason I got this tattoo. Jesus is my Savior, he is the Savior of all of us. ... Don't take anything for granted because God's plan will trump our plan every single time."

And God's plan for Kyle's career trumped the ideas of many basketball pundits who didn't think the relatively short and slight six-foot-twoer from Indianapolis had what it took to make the cut.

As one sports writer wrote shortly after he was picked: "Guy is a strong shooter, works well off of screens, and is an adept passer. His athleticism and size is a knock against him, but he's a proven winner at every stage."

After preparation meets opportunity, Kyle says he leaves everything else in God's hands.

"I would not be here without Him. I always shower before games and that's kind of how I get my mind right, say a little prayer or whatever. I am always praying ... I want to win more than anything. But I

know God's plan is greater so that's something I can hang my hat on," he says.

Kyle's attitude is due in part to Virginia Cavaliers coach Tony Bennett, who is also unafraid of letting people know that he's a Christian. He is widely credited with reversing the fortunes of the Virginia men's basketball program, partly by bringing his faith into the locker room and praying with his players.

Kyle's mother, Katy, told the Daily Progress, "Coach Bennett is the only coach who talked about his faith with Kyle. That was very important." That's why Guy went to Virginia after being a star high school player in Indianapolis.

Coach Bennett explains his motivation: "There's a verse that says always be prepared to give a reason for the hope that you have but do it with gentleness and respect. I know what my hope is for me. I know what my life is grounded on - my faith in Christ. That, for me, is where I draw my strength from, my peace, my steadiness in the midst of things.

*Kyle Guy #5 of the Virginia Cavaliers reacts against the Texas Tech Red Raiders in the second half during the NCAA men's Final Four National Championship game at U.S. Bank Stadium on April 08, 2019 in Minneapolis, Minnesota.*

*The tattoo on his leg reads sisi ni sawa, which is Swahili for "we are the same" referring to Kyle and David of the Bible. (Photo Streeter Lecka/Getty Images)*

There's nothing that touches it. It's a joy that's unspeakable.

"Our [training] program is built on five pillars - they're actually biblical pillars," he explains. "Humility - do you know who you are as a team and as a player? Passion - do you play with passion? Unity - being part of something bigger than yourself. Servanthood - the way to greatness is through being a servant. And

thankfulness. We use those for our team specifically. And again, you always hope that through sports they become better players and young men, and they'll always return what you model to them."

Last July, in Hawaii, talented young Kyle scored big again when he married high school sweetheart Alexa Jenkins, whom he had been dating since eighth grade. ●

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