

## SAVED FROM AN EARLY GRAVE



Spencer Nicholls and his family.

Looking at Spencer Nicholls today, a happily married father of three and a board member of a successful addiction recovery centre in Western Australia, it's almost impossible to imagine him at 17, unconscious on the floor of a public toilet foaming at the mouth and close to death after yet another heroin overdose.

The blonde 45-year-old is boyish and irrepressibly joyful. He is an absolute Duracell bunny of a man when he speaks to crowds about his work, hopping and bouncing on stage like he has hidden springs in his shoes.

Yet 30 years ago that is exactly where Spencer was – passed out on the filthy floor of a public toilet. Hopelessly addicted to heroin, cocaine, alcohol and promiscuity by the time he hit his early teens, he was destined for an early grave.

Ironically the person who rescued him and called the ambulance that night was his drug dealer – who himself had gone to the toilet to shoot up some drugs.

That wasn't the only time Spencer almost died. When he was 13, he was high on LSD at a beach party in his hometown of Kent in the United Kingdom. Seeing 'pretty things' in the distance, he followed them – and

walked right off the pier into the freezing water.

He would have drowned if not for the fact that he suddenly saw 'an unbelievably bright light' that led him to shore.

A few years later, he was a passenger in a stolen car being driven by a friend who was high from sniffing petrol.

Travelling at more than 100kmh in the middle of winter, the car shot around a corner, skidded, spun on the icy road, clipped another vehicle and flipped, catapulting Spencer through the windscreen, into the air and head first into a field turned to rock by ice.

Spencer blacked out. When he opened his eyes, the first thing he realised was that his head was underground. The next thing he realised was that against all odds, he was not dead.

Yet even with all these near misses, he could not break free from his addictions. As it turned out, he could do nothing to help himself. But God could. Spencer is a living testimony of that because today, the former heroin and crack cocaine addict is a pastor in one of Perth's largest churches.

"I think I was born with that propensity to addiction," Spencer told Challenge.

"Once I started taking drugs and alcohol and got involved with the sex scene I just couldn't stop."

It wasn't that he didn't try to kick his addictions. He went to several rehab centres and would stay clean for a while. But invariably the old habits would resurface and before long he would be back to square one.

Finally he was sent to a hospital that was part rehab centre, part asylum. "We could hear the screams coming from the asylum," Spencer remembers. "It was a way to scare those of us in rehab that we could become like that if we didn't get clean."

It was there that Spencer met the man who would change his life – an old village chaplain who visited regularly.

"It was mandatory for the patients to attend his talks even though we didn't want to," Spencer chuckles. "The day that I was there, he read

the story of the prodigal son (Luke 15: 11-32).

"Everyone else turned their backs to him but somehow something about that story touched a nerve in me, gripped me. As I heard it I thought to myself: 'I'm the son, I'm the son.'"

The story of the prodigal son is about a young man who demands an early inheritance from his father and leaves home with it. Before long, he squanders all of it on fast and loose living and has to go back to his father to beg for forgiveness. The father, who in the story represents God, shows his son great mercy instead of anger, and welcomes him back with open arms and a big party.

After the service, Spencer approached the chaplain who told him to kneel down that night and simply say "God if you're real, show yourself to me".

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## I know I know you

BY DR. VICTOR KULIGIN

DO you know Brad Pitt? The question is trickier than you might think.

Some people will immediately answer yes, but if I asked instead, "Do you know Brad Pitt personally?" then most of them would have to say no. You see, you may "know" Brad Pitt in the sense of knowing something about him, without really knowing him personally and having a relationship with him.

Similarly, I could ask, "Do you know God?"

How you reply to this question may be the most important thing you ever answer. Once again, it all depends on what I mean by "know."

How can we know God?

Typically, people use the word "revelation" to label this topic of knowing God. The Bible teaches that there are two categories of revelation—two ways to know God.

First, there is revelation about God that is clear to all people—what we call general revelation.

The other kind is special revelation—knowledge about God only certain people have received. You can't know this information unless someone expressly tells it to you.

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BACK PAGE



RACE & FAITH

BENJAMIN WATSON



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# Hope is still alive

BY ALAN BAILEY

**THERE** is a force in the universe called entropy. It means that everything wears out, all energies are slowly winding down, nothing lasts forever. We live with this day after day. Our rubbish bins fill up, appliances die now and then, and the car is becoming old and tired, needing replacement.



But think how it affects our bodies. Day by day we age and draw away from youth and vigour, slowly making our way to age and its limitations. Recent months have brought us a loud alarm. The virus. It has changed our world and done untold damage. There seems to be added to this a wave of natural disasters, deep divisions among people of the same country, violent crime and for some places, continual war. Leaders of countries have been sorely tried and not all have handled things well.

All this seems to have cast a shadow over many lives. A feeling of hopelessness. The question arises, "Will we ever get out of such a mess?" People can be excused for thinking in this way, wondering what lies ahead for our grandchildren.

**Hope is not lost**

So much appears to be out of control. It does look that way. But the truth is that it is not. God is Sovereign Ruler. In the Bible, warnings abound regarding the way the world will

go in its refusal to acknowledge His authority. Because God is shut out of our lives and out of our reckoning, trouble follows. The Bible points out that things will get worse toward the end of history. The times will be difficult and hope will seem to disappear completely.

But there is a way that leads to a place where entropy does not exist. It is God's plan to usher in a kingdom where there is peace and unbroken harmony. There is a reason why the present world goes on as it is. The human race is being given time. God is not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance (2 Peter 3:9). He has opened the way for us to enter His program if we will. On His part, He has shown great mercy. He sent Jesus, Son of God to take our place and pay for our sins. When Jesus rose from death, hope was assured. It is a hope that can never ever diminish.

The real life stories in this paper show how it is working out for many who have found life in Christ.

The door is open.

# When life feels meaningless

BY RICK LEWERS

**IF** you are person who would like some stark honesty about life, Ecclesiastes in the Bible is the book for you. If you look around your world confronted by its confusing nature and almost accidentally respond with a despairing sigh, then Ecclesiastes is the book for you. It is a disturbing read and deliberately so. Its sigh is the sigh captured in the words, "meaningless, meaningless, all is meaningless." This book is an analysis of life designed to help a person consider life, lived under the sun, without God.

The writer of *Ecclesiastes* is an observer, an investigator, a philosopher whose thoughts take him honestly into the dark and meaningless implications of life lived under the sun where God is absent. The writer is ancient but significantly contemporary. If you met him today you might find him on the sidewalk observing the protestations of the individualist. He'd be among the press asking questions of leadership while watching the falling markets and listening to the gasps of the money lovers. He's one of us, so you would inevitably catch a glimpse of him at the crematorium or grave side or dining at table with those dividing up inheritances. He's not a single issue writer but an observer of life where God is neglected or dismissed. He's not looking for a soap box to preach some narrow passion, nor is he looking to unite with others to make his individual voice louder. The writer of *Ecclesiastes* upon his observations is simply seeking to correspond with the bigger principles of life.

The writer of *Ecclesiastes* is a time watcher or to put it another way, a watcher of the times. He's intelligent not disregarding history. That history he knows informs the immediate and shapes one's future. His observation of the past, the present and the future, issue in a despairing sigh and force upon him an educational search for something bigger than himself and others.

His research reveals a time for everything – birth and death, planting and uprooting, killing and healing, tearing down and building up, weeping and laughing, silence or speech, war and peace. In fact he even has this Covid season covered when he says, "there is a time to embrace and a time to shun embracing." He's observed the gynaecologist, watched the horticulturalist, stood with the surgeon, held a hammer, been entertained by the comic, heard the sane and wished for the silence of the insane in a world of wars and peace. Without God his conclusion is a despairing sigh of meaninglessness.

But this researcher from the past finds life under the sun

**QUOTES ON MEANINGLESSNESS**

- Words without actions are meaningless, but actions without words are confusing. - Anonymous
- I would rather die a meaningful death than to live a meaningless life. - Corazon Aquino
- So many people walk around with a meaningless life. They seem half-asleep, even when they're busy doing things they think are important. This is because they're chasing the wrong things. - Morrie Schwartz
- Man cannot stand a meaningless life. - Carl Jung
- God alone can deliver us from a life of meaningless activities. - T. B. Joshua

posing eternal questions. Here is what he says, "The more words that are spoken, the more smoke there is in the air. And who is any better off? And who knows what's best for us as we live out our meagre smoke-and-shadow lives? And who can tell any of us the next chapter of our lives?"

They are great questions and our answers either bring a meaningless sigh or purposeful joy to living.

I learnt, this week, that George Bernard Shaw, the famous 19th century atheist, put his mind to these very questions and it is worth hearing his conclusions: "Man's life is brief and powerless. On him and his race, the slow, sure doom falls pitiless and dark. Condemned today to lose his dearest, tomorrow to pass through the gates of darkness, it remains only to cherish the lofty thoughts that ennoble his little day and to worship at the shrine that his own hands have built."

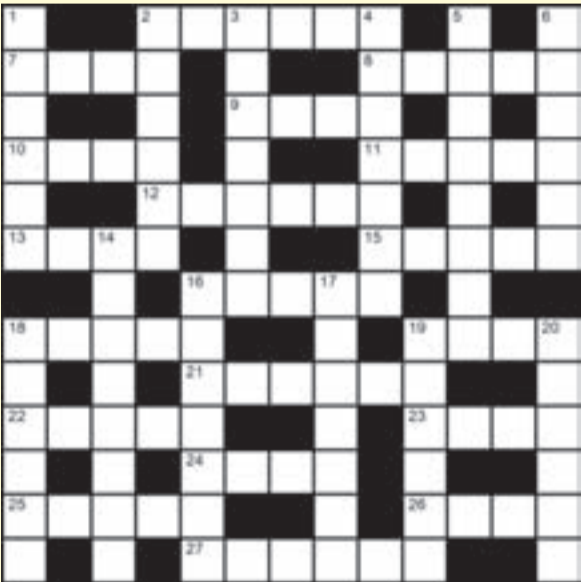
This giant of history, this great mind, this godless man offers as a conclusion to life lived under the sun the sigh of his own meaninglessness.

George Bernard Shaw is not the only one to offer the sigh of meaninglessness upon the removal of God. It is why the writer of *Ecclesiastes* presents his findings, exposing the living to the truth that we cannot live life without God. And we don't have to.

Into a world made meaningless by human rejection of God, God entered in the person of His son, Jesus Christ. His life, death and resurrection introduces us to a time when God was made obvious, where unbelief was offered forgiveness through Christ, and hope was restored through resurrection. God in that moment of time came to us with the offer of relationship with the giver of life. His purpose for us was joy and His desire for us was to bring the sigh of relief.

## Crossword

- |                    |                          |                          |                            |
|--------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|----------------------------|
| <b>ACROSS</b>      | 11 Say cheese! action    | 18 An answer or response | 23 To wander               |
| 2 Elephant worker  | 12 Wipes the board clean | 19 They blink and wink   | 24 Bible ark builder       |
| 7 A car for hire   | 13 Beach material        | 21 Closer than before    | 25 This describes seawater |
| 8 Plant anchors    | 15 Eject a tenant        | 26 A Mexican food        | 27 Short sight             |
| 9 Coastal sandhill | 16 Stores below deck     | 22 Egyptian city         |                            |
| 10 Cosmetic powder |                          |                          |                            |



- DOWN**
- 1 Standing, prestige
  - 2 To cut into very small pieces
  - 3 Fireman's hose point
  - 4 Long locks
  - 5 The aristocracy
  - 6 Route upwards
  - 14 Wedding ceremony
  - 16 Word of similar meaning
  - 17 Destroyer, say
  - 18 Ethnic prejudice
  - 19 Errors in printing
  - 20 An emblem

SOLUTION PAGE 11

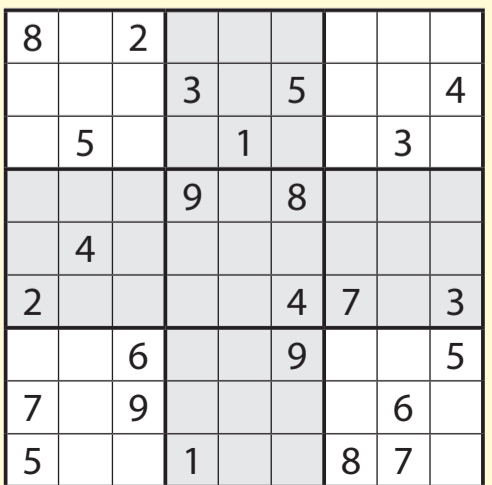
## Sudoku

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

Puzzle Level: Medium



SOLUTION PAGE 11



# I KNOW I KNOW YOU

• From page 1

Let me use some examples to clarify what I mean. As I walk around, everyone can easily see my skin colour. It's a form of general revelation about me to the world.

But what's my favourite food? This personal fact about me is not generally plain. The only way others can realise it is if I specifically reveal it to them. This is an example of special revelation.

Our knowledge of God also works in these two ways. And we can only have a meaningful relationship with someone through special revelation of that person to us, and us to them.

**What can we know about God?**

The Bible says that everybody has a general knowledge of God. He has made certain aspects of Himself clear by what He has made.

For example, King David says in Psalm 19:1-4, "The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament shows His handiwork. Day unto day utters speech, and night unto night reveals knowledge. There is no speech nor language where their voice is not heard. Their line has gone out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world."

The apostle Paul similarly writes in Romans 1:20, "For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood

by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse."

This means that something about God not only can be known, but is known, by everyone. The Bible leaves no doubt about this. We all know that a powerful and divine God exists because His world speaks of His intentional design and power.

However, this general revelation about God is not enough for us to have a loving relationship with Him. Other than knowing some general facts about God, creation does not tell us how to relate to our Creator.

That is why God revealed more about Himself through a special revelation—His very own words. God spoke to us. And we find this special revelation in the Bible.

**How can we know God?**

We call the Bible God's "self-revelation," because in it God reveals things about Himself that we couldn't otherwise know, so that we can have a relationship with Him. We can know God in a personal, even intimate way.

And the Bible makes it clear that this only happens through God's Son, Jesus. Because God the Son became a human, Jesus the "God-man" perfectly represents the nature and being of God the Father to us in a way we can understand.

Hebrews 1:3 says the Son is "the

brightness of [God's] glory and the express image of His person." We need not only have a general knowledge of God. We can know God intimately by knowing Jesus.

**Do you know God?**

In a conversation Jesus had with His followers, He makes this very clear:

"I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me. If you had known Me, you would have known My Father also; and from now on you know Him and have seen Him. . . . He who has seen Me has seen the Father." (John 14:6-7, 9)

How do we know Jesus? The best way to know Jesus is to read the Bible. A great place to start is the Gospel of John, where we are introduced to the works and words of Jesus.

So let me ask you, "Do you know God personally?"

He wants you to know Him. He's written His existence in the skies and written Himself into our humanity so that you could have a relationship with Him. Will you seek Him today? It's as easy as opening up the Bible.

Dr Victor Kuligin is an international author and speaker who served as a missionary in Africa for 24 years. He has written five books, including *Ten Things I Wish Jesus Never Said*, available at koorong.com or online.



# GNAWING SENSE OF DISSATISFACTION

For as long as I could remember, I regarded myself as a morally superior person. I would observe the happenings of the world and conclude "If the world was more like me, the world would be a better place."

At the same time however, a gnawing sense of dissatisfaction nipped at my heart as every pleasure seemed to always come to an end; much anticipated holidays would come and then just as easily pass, video games would give me a thrill for a while but then inevitably end.

This fact of life was proved to be very frustrating to me. Everything left me feeling thirsty. I thought "Is life all just about temporary pleasure?" In retrospect, I know I was thirsting after a relationship. John 7:37 states "...If anyone is thirsty, let him come to Me and drink."

As my thirst increased, my distorted pursuits of pleasure also increased. I fell headstrong into sexual immorality and pornography, though I had no sense that there was anything immoral about it. Shortly after, the relationship I was in ended.

My gnawing sense of dissatisfaction had now morphed into a depression that crippled me to the extent that I could not hold onto a job or complete my university studies. This resulted in me medicating myself through immorality. I felt miserable as my lack of joy sprung from the reality that there was no hope on the horizon for a failure like me.

One day I was pacing around in my kitchen thinking about my predicament, when suddenly a foreign thought seemed to penetrate my thoughts "You are not as good as you think you are". Suddenly I realised how selfish I was, especially in the context of the relationship I was in. I had used the relationship for my own gain.

I now had a new problem. I became burdened

by this new sense of guilt that was not in existence before. A family member, seeing my struggle, encouraged me to explore a book on new age meditation. This book was fascinating to me at the time; it taught that I was actually God and that there are no clear categories of moral right and wrong.

This created a perfect storm for a person like me who struggled with a sense of guilt. As I meditated upon these principles, I honestly felt like I was slowly dying inside. I would fall into sexual sin, feel guilty, and then meditate until my guilty conscience had been numbed.

I slowly began to realise that my problem was not solely dissatisfaction, but rather, a spiritual deadness. I realised I did not have the power to live a life that was morally right. I picked up the dusty Bible that sat neglected on my table and began to read the gospels. I was immediately struck by the strange, yet faultless character of Jesus Christ. I thought to myself *'this man is unusual but I cannot fault him, he is perfect!'* This realization was enough for me to begin to believe in Him.

## I REALISED I DID NOT HAVE THE POWER TO LIVE A LIFE THAT WAS MORALLY RIGHT.

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The pivotal moment that brought me to becoming a Christian was when I read the following words from Jesus in Luke 5:32 "I have not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance." I was astonished! The very reality that I thought would make me unacceptable to God, was the very reality that would lead me to eternal life, namely, the acknowledgement that I was a sinner before God in need of forgiveness!

At that moment I asked God to forgive all my sins and received the gift of the Holy Spirit to overcome my depraved addictions. I am not perfect, but I rest on Christ's finished work on the cross while pursuing his righteousness for he has said in 1 Peter 1:16 - "Be holy for I am holy"

By God's grace (undeserved love of God), I



David Barry

now have the privilege to work for Voice of The Martyrs which is a beautiful ministry that serves persecuted believers with practical and spiritual assistance. This is a highlight of my life that God would consider me, a person who could not previously hold a job, to serve countless believers who are persecuted for Christ.

Please share the gospel with family, friends, neighbours, and strangers for this is the very gospel that persecuted believers are willing to die for. The sole justifying reason for the Apostle Paul's suffering in prison is succinctly summarised in Philipians 1:12 - "Now I want you to know, brothers and sisters, that what has happened to me has actually served to advance the gospel."

nudge  
WITH KARL FAASE

## Just think!

**HUMAN** beings are equipped with the ability to learn and reason. We can grasp logical laws and relationships, sense our surroundings, remember the past, and reflect on ourselves through introspection. How did these abilities originate?

The Bible insists that God created our minds and bodies for a purpose. He made us in His image so that, among other things, we could think like Him. Although sin affects even our mental lives, it does not obliterate our capacity for reason altogether. So Christianity accounts for the fact that our reasoning powers are generally, though not perfectly, reliable.

On the other hand, if atheism were correct, humans would be the byproducts of blind forces which had no intention to produce rational creatures. From evolutionary philosopher Daniel Dennett's perspective, "the human mind is something of a bag of tricks, cobbled together over the eons by the foresightless process of evolution by natural selection."

But if our minds were not designed, why would we trust them? In a happenstance evolutionary world we would not expect our minds to guide us to truth.

As C.S. Lewis recognized, "If my own mind is a product of the irrational ... how shall I trust my mind when it tells me about Evolution?"

Dennett, D., *Breaking the Spell: Religion as a Natural Phenomenon*, Viking, New York, NY, p. 107, 2006.

Lewis, C.S., *Christian Reflections*, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, MI, p. 89, 1967.

## KEYS TO RECOVERY

BY PS. SPENCER NICHOLLS

### 1. Surrender to God

Life as a Christian is a series of surrenders. The first surrender is the unconscious one you make when you're desperate. It's that first prayer to turn your life over to God as I did when the heroin almost killed me.

But then many people find, as I did, that as you get better, you start to want to take your will back, do things your way again, or you start listening to the old voices or the fear and anxiety creep back in. That's when you need to move to the next level of surrender and make it a conscious decision to shut the door on your old life.

That surrender is about making a decision to be obedient to God contrary to what you think or feel. As we do that, we reconnect with God and the peace and victory are the fruit.

### 2. Stay connected to God.

I know that if I don't stay close to God my thoughts will still go towards suicide, not so much the alcohol and drugs, but suicide, anxiety and fear. The difficulties don't magically go away but God enables us to overcome them. •

# Saved from an early grave

• From page 1

Spencer did indeed pray that prayer before going to bed that night. "I didn't know who I was praying to," he laughs. "God, Allah, Jesus they were all the same to me. I just said 'God'."

Thankfully, God had no problem identifying Himself and answered in extraordinary ways. Beginning the next day and continuing for weeks, Spencer met Christian after Christian in the most unexpected places.

"First it was two really attractive girls from a local church youth group who came to visit one of my friends at the rehab centre," Spencer says. "Then I was moved to another rehab centre and shared a room with a guy who told me the whole gospel story because his mother was a Christian. After that, someone else came into my room with a Bible and invited me to church."

"That's when I realised the God of the Bible was the true God. I didn't suddenly get Hindus or Buddhists or Muslims popping up all over my life, only Christians. I had asked God to show Himself to me and this was how He did it."

Not long after that Spencer, now at last knowing who he was praying to, asked Jesus to come into his life. Instantly something completely foreign to him settled in his heart - peace.

"That was one of the biggest changes in my life," Spencer says. "I tried using drugs to find peace but it never worked. Then I asked Jesus into my life and that was it - the peace came, the uneasiness left."

"I realise now I was in the grip of a greater power. I began to sense another voice leading me in a different direction. I'd always wanted to change but I never had the strength. In fact, I was completely powerless against those compulsions. But miraculously, now that I had God's strength in me I was actually able to say no and turn my life around."

Soon he went back to university and graduated. He became involved with the youth and children's ministry in his local church. Feeling God was calling him to be a pastor, he went to Bible College.

One night, as he was praying for direction in his life, he says he had a vision.

"I saw my past unfolding; my

old life, the many times I nearly died. Then I felt God say very clearly to me, 'I've saved you for a purpose. If you'd died then you would have gone to hell. But I saved you for a purpose.' That's when I knew for sure I was called into the ministry."

Spencer's life is now dedicated to helping others who are in the same struggle he was. He is one of the pastors who runs a recovery program called Tenacious House, a residential program that helps men who have had life addiction problems find their feet again. He is also a member of Alcoholics Anonymous and acts as sponsor and mentor to their programs.

"The reality is the propensity towards addiction has not left me," he admits. "God did not take that away. What He did do was empower me to make different choices."

He pauses, chokes up a little. "I am so grateful for my life today. It's a miracle, a miracle. Only God could have done it."

"There is absolutely no way I would be alive today if not for Him. If He hadn't saved me, I know for sure I would be institutionalised or dead." •





# Court off court but still serving

Margaret Court remembers her first tennis racket. It was a piece of paling wood from a wooden fence, scrounged from the street near her home in Albury, New South Wales. No strings attached.

Money was tight. Her father had an alcohol problem bad enough that her mother had to cycle to his workplace every payday to make sure she got to his pay packet before he did.

There were tennis courts near Margaret's house and she would go there every day to escape the arguments at home. It was a fun thing for a seven-year-old to do.

One of Margaret's mother's friends saw her at the courts day after day and gave her one of her own rackets, never imagining the fruit that would come from such an act of kindness.

The wooden racket was so big Margaret could hardly wrap her hand around it but it didn't matter. To Margaret, the new racket was smashing.

It was from those humble beginnings that one of the greatest tennis players of all time would emerge. By the time she retired in 1976, Margaret had won 64 Grand Slam tournament titles - including a record 24 singles titles - achievements no tennis player, man or woman, has beaten. She was inducted into the International Hall of Fame three years later.

Margaret's achievements on the tennis court are well known and deservedly celebrated. Equally well-known but far more controversial in recent times has been her second platform in life, as the founder and



Reverend Doctor Margaret Court in her office.

pastor of Victory Life Church in Western Australia.

In 2017, Australia legalised gay marriage. Right from the outset, Margaret denounced the move, going so far as to boycott Qantas because its CEO, Alan Joyce, supported the legislation. She has been heavily criticised for standing for her Biblical beliefs and been called a homophobe and a bigot.

But she has not flinched. As she had done hundreds of times on the

tennis court, Margaret defended her position with determination and dignity.

Margaret was raised a Catholic, and says that she always had an awareness of God, but no real relationship with Him.

"I would go to church on Sunday," she said. "It didn't mean much, but I knew Christmas, I knew Easter. I didn't know Jesus but I knew about Him. I used to kneel down every night and pray, even while on the

tennis circuit.

"I would thank God for helping me and protecting me. It was just there in my heart. I used to go to church even while playing, more out of fear than anything. I believed it was a mortal sin not to go. I thought if I didn't go I might lose."

She was also very open about her personal struggles, struggles that ultimately led her to a real relationship with Jesus.

She had severe post-natal depres-

sion, insomnia and heart disease (a torn heart valve) and quite an overwhelming feeling of uselessness as the demands of motherhood and life put far more pressure on her than any centre-court tie-breaker ever had.

She wrote in her autobiography: "Depression became a way of life. I became nauseated, lost weight and suffered from insomnia."

During the French Open in 1973, Margaret attended a Protestant church service. She began to think about God and what knowing Him really meant.

"I said 'God where are you? I want to know you. Are you real?' I knew there was something more than me. Even while I was playing I would talk to Him, Lord help me, Lord thank you. I want to win. This is a gift from You.

"My mum always told me my talent was a gift from God. The Press would ask me why are you so good and I'd say it's a gift from God.

"Every person has a gift. But many people get sidetracked and never fulfil their destiny or their goal, or discover what God has for them. God knew us before we were born. I look back and I see how God's hand was upon me even from when I was little." A friend gave her a small book 'How to Be Born Again,' which Margaret read over and over. Returning to Perth, she discovered another friend, Anne, who had become a 'born again' Christian and marvelled at the new radiance she saw in her.

Soon she went to a church meeting with Anne and responded to the pastor's invitation to receive Jesus Christ as her personal Saviour. Another friend, Barbara Oldfield described that moment. "A struggle of infinite proportions went on inside Margaret that night, for she knew that everyone in that meeting would know who she was if she went forward."

She was still the number one tennis player in the world at that time, and her pride in that achievement, almost stopped her from going forward.

But she was compelled to go. As soon as she prayed and asked Jesus to come into her life, she says it was as though someone had switched the light on inside. An incredible peace and joy flooded her whole being.

The verse that sparked her faith was 2 Timothy 1:7 - 'For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind'. It brought her the salvation she says she yearned for and a cure to the physical and emotional ailments that made her post-playing life such a misery that she had actually contemplated suicide.

She said she knew there and then that if she died she would go to be with the Lord. "That's how real it was to me."

When she told her husband Barry she wanted to go to Bible College, he agreed.

At Bible College Margaret said she slowly saw her heart healed, her depression drop off and her life being put back together again.

Much has changed for the tall and still fit and athletic-looking woman who stunned the tennis world. Yet this one thing remains: She serves the Lord now as single-mindedly as she served her opponents in her competitive heyday. And surely, nobody could fault her for that. •

## Ex-abortion doctor changes his tune

Dr Haywood Robinson used to be an abortionist. Lured by the profitability and thinking they were helping people in need, the doctor and his wife terminated hundreds of pregnancies in the United States.

But an encounter with Jesus Christ quite literally turned Haywood's beliefs on their head. Almost overnight he went from being a pro-choice abortionist to a pro-life advocate. His story shows how a relationship with Jesus and insight into the medical world can fundamentally change how one views abortion.

Haywood, 66, who recently became the Director of Medical Affairs and Education for pro-life group 40 Days for Life, told "The Pure Flix Podcast" about how his stunning transformation took place.

"I wanted to become a physician since the time I was about four or five years old," he said, noting that he grew up in South Central Los Angeles.

Haywood's passion for medicine spurred him on and he did his residency training close to his childhood home.

Haywood was trained in the 1970s after Roe v. Wade - the Supreme Court case that legalized abortion nationwide - became the law of the land.

"During that residency training ... is when I learned to do the abortion procedure - dilation and curettage," he said.

Discussion about the ethics of the procedures or instruction regarding alternatives was not part of the training. Performing abortion required so little effort, everyone was doing it, and they didn't seem to have a problem with it, so why should he?

"Abortion facilities were all over Southern California," he said. "I learned to do the procedure in 1978 and I spent three years training in family medicine."

He soon met Noreen, who would later become his wife and partner in the abortion clinic. As their relationship progressed, "moonlighting" together



Dr Haywood Robinson and his wife Noreen.

in abortion clinics became commonplace. Money became a motivator, as the pay was substantial.

The seeds for the change in both the Robinsons were first planted when they married and moved to a conservative area, a neighbourhood in which their abortion practice was less palatable.

"Being the community abortionist would not be something compatible with practicing in the community," Haywood said. "We no longer were involved with doing abortions though we still believed in it and we still referred patients to other doctors to do them."

One day in 1986, the couple went to a church concert. The preacher made a call for anyone who wanted to be "right with God," to stand up. Hay-

wood was deeply moved.

Up until that point, he had never heard the gospel, the good news of forgiveness for our wrong doing, or what it meant to be a Christian.

"I just didn't know the truth of the gospel but I knew something was different," he said. That experience changed everything.

Haywood prayed and asked Jesus Christ to come into his life. This led to a transformation of his worldview and prompted him and his wife to leave the abortion industry entirely and to move into pro-life advocacy.

"God opened our eyes to how heinous this war against babies is and He launched us on a pro-life career," he said.

Haywood - who says he now believes doctors break "a great human trust" when they embrace abortion - explained how being an abortion doctor can lead to

desensitization and a failure to realize the gravity of one's decisions.

"You become desensitized to the point where the physician dehumanizes that baby inside the uterus and it's no longer something that is precious in God's eyes - it's no longer a precious human life," he said.

He believes God has truly transformed him - and he offered a message to anyone else who might be looking for life-change.

"Jesus, He comes in [to your life] and He shifts everything around," the doctor said. "We become a new creature. He transforms our mind and we line up with His word by His spirit, so it's new life." •



# TEENTALK

# Child art prodigy paints the sublime

BY MARK ELLIS

**"M**y life began in an unusual way," says Akiane Kramarik, now 25, who spent her early years in rural Illinois. By unusual, she refers to her underwater birth in "a shack" on the edge of a cornfield.

"Our family had no money, no friends, no relatives, no television or radio. Our life was quite simple," she says.

Her mother, Forelli, is a Lithuanian immigrant educator. Akiane's father, Mark, is a chef from Chicago. In her early family life, there was no prayer, no discussions of God, and no visits to church. Yet in the insular atheistic environment her parents created – free from media influences or even outside babysitters – Akiane suddenly began to talk about God.

She spoke of colourful dreams and visions about heaven, Jesus, and God's amazing love. Her stunned parents realized her intense focus on God could not have been inspired by anything in the world they created for her. Indeed, Akiane seemed to be having supernatural encounters with the living God.

"Most of my spiritual experiences I kept secret, so as not to overwhelm my parents," she says.

"When I was four years old, suddenly I started experiencing vivid impressions about different dimensions and a great desire to express them through art," she says.

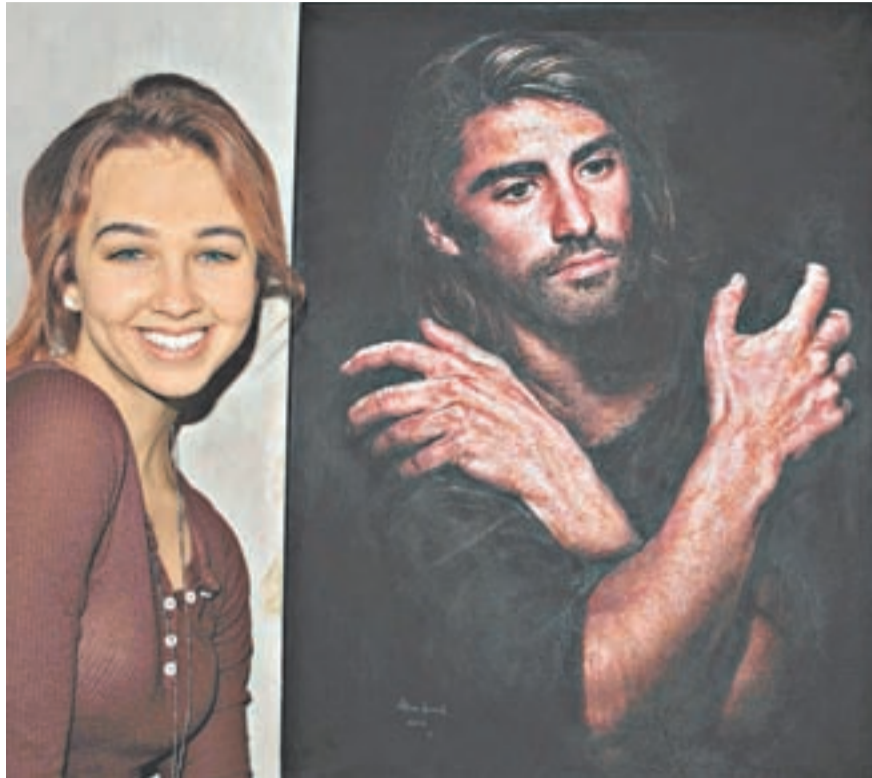
Initially, she utilized whatever medium was on hand: candles, lipstick, fruits, vegetables, charcoal or pencils.

At eight-years-old, Akiane decided she wanted to paint the face of Jesus, based on the visions she had received. She looked for a person she might use as an artist's model for a long time, and finally told her family they should pray for God to send someone.

On the day they prayed, a mysterious carpenter showed up at their front door looking for work. Akiane took one look at the man's facial features – remarkably close to the vision she received – and told her mother he was the one.

In humility, the man initially said he was not worthy to represent his Master. But reluctantly, the man agreed, although he asked to remain anonymous.

Akiane's painting of Jesus



**ABOVE:** Eight-year-old Akiane Kramarik in 2003 with the painting she did called 'Prince of Peace', and **LEFT** Akiane in 2019 with another painting of Jesus called 'I AM'.

**SINCE NOBODY TOLD ME WHO GOD WAS, I FOUND GOD MYSELF.**



was a painstaking effort. "The 'Prince of Peace' took me 40 hours to paint and another 20 hours of working with model sketching," Akiane says. "The light side of his face represents the truth, the dark side represents suffering," she notes.

Akiane was struck by the beauty of Jesus' eyes.

"All I remember were the eyes," Akiane says, "and they were like no other colours that were ever created. The

closest colour I can depict through paints is a sapphire hue."

Colton identified the colour of Jesus' eyes as blue-green.

In 2010, Akiane told Seattle station KCTS that her spiritual epiphanies caused her parents to start seeking answers. "We went through almost everything," Akiane said. "We went through being Christian, being a Catholic, we studied Buddhism. At this point every one of my siblings have their own path toward a spiritual enlightenment.

"I have my own and my parents have theirs and my brothers have theirs," she continued. "I'm the same person as when I was four-years-old. I haven't changed."

Akiane's discovery of God seems remarkably personal. "Since nobody told me who God was, I found God myself. He's been there for me through the years. I don't belong to any denomination or religion. I belong to God."

To eliminate any confusion, however, Jesus is first in her mind. "He is the only way to God – the only way to heaven and joy," she states. "My personal views on Jesus have

only matured and deepened since age four. As I grow I see how vast and unlimited His love is."

"Jesus remains my highest authority, love, and God," she adds. "I pray every day that people will one day follow Jesus, His teachings and feel His love."

Akiane completed her second painting of Jesus, "Father Forgive Them," at

age nine. "I have painted about 10 paintings of Jesus," she says, "including His mother Mary and many paintings of His creation. My current painting is another tribute to Jesus, a very special portrait, titled 'I AM.'"

As Akiane gets older, some of the early dreams and visions have begun to fade in her memory. "Although I have forgotten most of my early heavenly contacts, my recent visions continue in a special

way," she says. "I alone know how important Jesus is for me. Instead of writing it is best for me to express (this) through my personal connection – art. I portray Jesus how I see Him, as human and as divine.

"My art is only a representation of what I see – Jesus' glory is beyond any description!"

Mark Ellis is the founder of God Reports, a website devoted to promoting Christian missions. This article first appeared on godreports.com and is used with permission.

## NEVER EVER GIVE UP

**LOSING** your 12-year-old to cancer is something awful to contemplate

Being the 12-year-old getting diagnosed with the inoperable brain tumour would, one imagines, cause unquenchable grief and angry disbelief. But not for Jessica Joy Rees, who somehow lived up to her middle name through all of the short 10 months and two days the cancer took to kill her.

And not only did she bravely soldier on through her treatments in 2011-12, but she thought of other kids going through the same thing and determined to do something to help them.

Jessie, as she was known, developed the idea of Joy Jars – putting toys and lollies in plastic jars to give to cancer-affected kids in order to brighten up their lives a bit. While dying herself, Jessie filled over 3000 jars and, with the help of her parents, left a lasting legacy in the form of the charity organisation negu.org.

Now, eight years on, NEGU have given kids over 300,000 Joy Jars and raised over \$19 million for cancer research. NEGU was Jessie's slogan – Never Ever Give Up spreading love, joy and hope.

Jessie's parents Eric and Stacey Rees, who pastor a church, had prayed fervently that their daughter would be healed, that some new treatment would be developed or that a miracle would occur.

Unfortunately, their prayers were answered differently than they hoped.

"We have prayed and prayed and prayed for sweet Jessie to be healed here on earth but

God's plan was to use heaven for healing," they wrote on Facebook after she died.

"Jessie earned her wings today and is with Jesus now!!! No pain ... complete vision ... spreading joy," the post continued.

They then elaborated on their continued plans to help advance cancer research.

The response of those parents, just days after their daughter's death is just as astonishing as her own attitude towards her sickness.

Jessie wasn't out of touch with reality. Some of her posts were honest about her struggles as she underwent radiation and chemotherapy treatments; others urged readers to support paediatric cancer research and to pray for other children with the illness.

What her incredible positivity was based on was, firstly, a conviction that her life, however long, had meaning – she was put on earth with a job to do – and secondly that there was a life after death where her suffering would be rewarded and the tears of this life would be dried.

Reading her father's blog on the negu.org website it is evident that Jessie had a personal relationship with Jesus and that she was baptised to publically proclaim this on April 2, 2011.

It is also evident that although her parents grieve terribly, they are able to look forward to the day that they will see Jessie again in heaven.

"Miss you so much ... love you tons more! See you in a wink ... promise!!!" her dad ended one post.

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View of the illuminated statue of Christ the Redeemer in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil in April 2020 that reads "Thank you" in tribute to medical workers amidst the Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. (Photo Buda Mendes/Getty Images)

# On the positive side of the pandemic

BY CARL CARMODY

**THE** death toll from Covid-19 has been horrific, the losses heartbreaking. As the world reels it has caused many of us to wonder what the future holds.

However, there are some encouraging aspects even in this present darkness I have noticed over the last few months. What this lockdown and social distancing seem to have done is to have reminded people just how important real human connection is and perhaps how much we have come to take it for granted.

From driveway street parties to communal balcony fitness sessions to clinking wine glasses held by long poles of bamboo, social distancing has ironically revived old-school neighbourliness.

Just the other day some people walking past my home shouted a good morning to me, which rarely happens. And while queuing up at Woolworths I noticed people chatting to each other and smiling as they shared their stories of what was happening at home.

I've also noticed so many more people, especially fathers, going on walks or bike rides with their children, or playing basketball in their driveway. What wonderful dividends this will pay.

There have been stories of how people have gone out of their way to care for their neighbours to make sure all is well. Normally in our busy world such acts of kindness are very much the exception.

It has been heart-warming watching families camp in their own backyard and seeing kids so excited as they watch the tent go up. What a joy it has been to see families pulling out a board game that hasn't seen the light of day in years.

It has been so nice to hear of people getting around to doing those jobs that have been on the back burner for years. Gardens are looking well-tended and, if the shortage of DIY products at Bunnings is anything to go by, houses are getting long-delayed renos and make-overs.

Let's not feel I am painting far too rosy a picture of family togetherness,

let me just say I am well aware there is a less savoury side too. Enforced family closeness, job losses and financial hardship can and have sparked a rise in domestic violence and addiction. I do not in any way want to minimise the difficulties thrust upon our community.

But let us not throw out the baby with the bathwater. Let us instead celebrate the good we do see while extending a hand in any way we can to those who are struggling.

There is another thing that has been on my mind, something I think we all need to think about. Have we ever asked ourselves what happens to us when we die? Are we ready for death? It would appear lots of people were caught off guard when Covid-19 exploded into their lives, even though we know that 100% of us will die eventually.

The Bible has some interesting things to say about this. Hebrews chapter 9 and verse 27 says; "It is appointed unto man to die once and then comes the judgment." This tells us that we are all in the queue but what makes the difference is whether we are prepared for it or not.

The sad thing is that we become so concerned about setting ourselves up for this life we forget there is another life to come, that we need to be prepared for.

A few months ago we celebrated Easter, which is all about how Jesus came to Earth and died on a cross to pay the penalty for our sins. He rose from the dead so that we can know forgiveness for our sin and be set free from the power of sin in our lives.

A pandemic reminds us how incredibly fragile we humans are, and how easily death can take us unawares. What we do with Jesus in this life, determines what He will do with us in the next.

Doubt it? Here is a thought for you; if I am wrong and there is no afterlife, you have nothing to lose but if I am right, your eternity is in the balance.

Consider this Bible verse from John chapter 3 and verse 16; "For God so loved the world, that He gave his only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life."

## Be creative

"Start where you are. Use what you have. Do what you can."  
- Arthur Ashe

A son hugs his father at the Geriatric Clinic Trés Figueiras on June 16, 2020 in Gravatai, Brazil. The clinic has created the Tunel do Abraco (hug tunnel) for elderly residents to be able to hug relatives after more than 70 days apart due to the coronavirus pandemic.

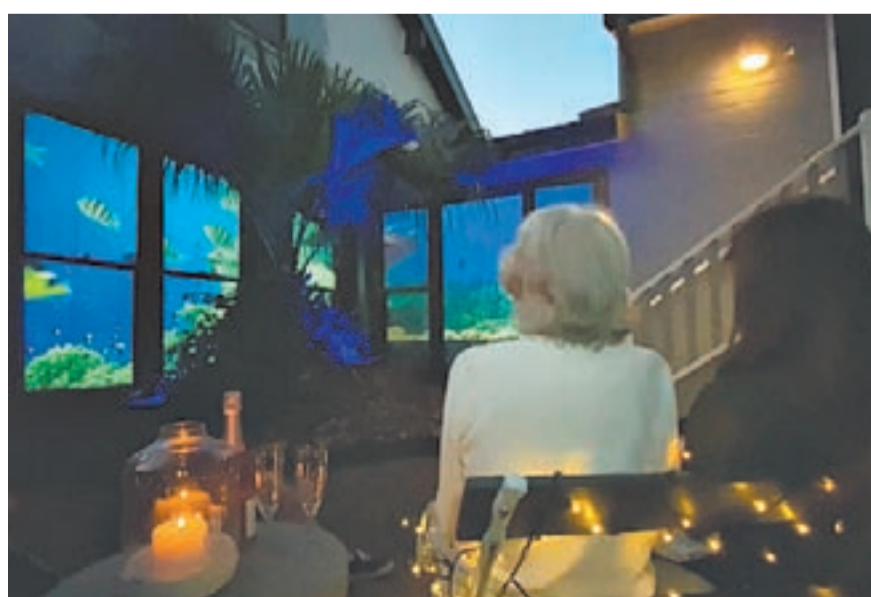
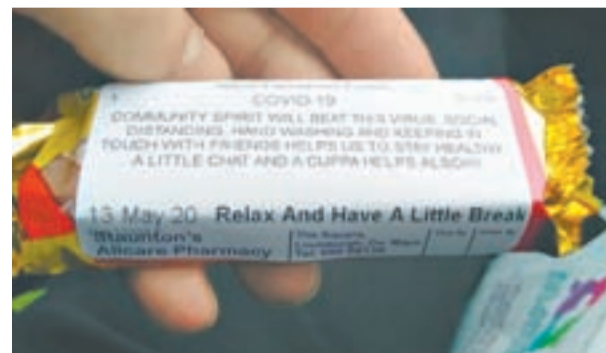
The tunnel is made of a thick plastic curtain with sleeves, which guarantees the safety of families. After each use, the environment is cleaned by a clinic professional. (Photo Lucas Uebel/Getty Images)



Peyton Manker (18) has made a prom dress entirely out of duct tape in order to win a contest for a \$20,000 scholarship. Her elaborate creation, including a facemask, jewellery, a virus handbag, shoes and a hair piece, took four months and 41 rolls of duct tape to complete.

## Be kind

An Irish pharmacy is giving out chocolate "prescriptions" to spread good will during the coronavirus pandemic. Staunton's Pharmacy in County Mayo are giving customers a milk bar after visits to the local chemist along with a kind message.



Australian filmmaker Jason van Genderen's mother Hendrika is 87 years old and has Alzheimer's disease and vascular dementia. Inspired by some of his childhood memories, Jason decided to transform their home into an aquarium, much like the one he used to visit with his parents. With help from his wife and kids, he hung parchment paper inside some large windows in their house and used two projectors to display a video of tropical fish gently gliding through the water. His mother was delighted.



# Why biologist stopped trying to blend evolution and creation

**Dr. Gary E. Parker did his doctoral work in biology and geology. He is the author of five widely used programmed instruction books in biology. He explains his evolution to creationism.**

**W**hen Gary Parker started teaching college biology he was an enthusiastic evolutionist.

“The idea of evolution was very satisfying to me. It gave me a feeling of being one with the huge, evolving universe continually progressing toward grander things. Evolution was really my religion, a faith commitment and a complete world-and-life view that organized everything else for me, and I got quite emotional when evolution was challenged,” he remembers.

“As a religion, evolution answered my questions about God, sin, and salvation. God was unnecessary, or at least did no more than make the particles and processes from which all else mechanistically followed. ‘Sin’ was only the result of animal instincts that had outlived their usefulness, and salvation involved only personal adjustment, enlightened self-interest, and perhaps one day the benefits of genetic engineering.”

However, even though Gary was such a content evolutionist, through a Bible study group he and his wife joined at first for purely social reasons, God began convincing him to lean not on his own opinions or those of other human authorities, but to acknowledge God and to let Him direct his paths.

His conversion to Christianity did not however, make Gary a creationist.

“Like so many before and since, I simply combined my new-found Christian religion with the ‘facts’ of science and became a theistic evolutionist [God created using evolution] and then a progressive creationist [each Bible day represents millions of years]. I thought the Bible told me who created, and that evolution told me how.

“But then I began to find scientific problems with the evolutionary part, and theological problems with the

theistic part. I finally had to give it up.”

Gary’s main problem with theistic evolution centered around the phrase, “very good” in Genesis. At the end of each creation day (except the second) God said that His creation was good. At the end of the sixth day He said that all His works of creation were “very good”.

“Now all the theistic evolutionists and progressive creationists try to fit ‘geologic time’ and the fossil record into the creation periods. But regardless of how old they are, the fossils show the same things that we have on earth today – famine, disease, disaster, extinction, floods, earthquakes, etc. So if fossils represent stages in God’s creative activity, why should Christians oppose disease and famine or help preserve an endangered species? If the fossils were formed during the creation week, then all these things would be ‘very good’.

“In Genesis 3, Romans 8 and many other passages, we learn that such negative features were not part of the world that God created, but entered only after Adam’s sin. By ignoring this point, either intentionally or unintentionally, theistic evolutionists and progressive creationists come into conflict with the whole pattern of Scripture: the great themes of Creation, the Fall, and Redemption – how God made the world perfect and beautiful; how man’s sin brought a curse upon the world; and how Christ came to save us from our sins and to restore all things.”

Gary admits that intellectual pride stood in the way of him giving up theistic evolution. “I didn’t want to face academic ridicule. ... I don’t think I would have had the courage, especially as a professor of biology, to give up evolution or theistic evolution without finding out that the bulk of scientific data actually argues against evolution.

“A colleague introduced me to Morris’ and Whitcomb’s famous book, *The Genesis Flood*. At first I reacted strongly against the book, using all the evolutionist arguments I knew so well. But at that crucial time, I got a fellowship grant to study a doctorate and creationist arguments first hand. To my surprise,



and eventually to my delight, just about every course I took was full of more and more problems in evolution, and more and more support for the basic points of Biblical creationism outlined in *The Genesis Flood* and Morris’ later book, *Scientific Creationism*.

“For instance, when we started discussing uranium-lead and other radiometric methods for estimating the age of the earth. I thought all the creationists’ arguments would be shot down and crumble, but just the opposite happened.

“In one graduate class, the professor told us we didn’t have to memorize the dates of the geologic systems since they were far too uncertain and conflicting. Then in geophysics we went over all of the assumptions that go into radiometric dating. Afterwards, the professor said, ‘If a fundamentalist ever got hold of this stuff, he would make havoc of the radiometric dating system.’

“Another example is the word para-conformity. In *The Genesis Flood*, I had heard that para-conformity was a word used by evolutionary geologists for fossil systems out of order, but with no evidence of erosion or overthrusting. When paraconformities and other unconformities came up in geology class my professor said essentially the same thing as Morris and Whitcomb. He presented paraconformities as a real mystery and something very difficult to explain in evolutionary or uniformitarian terms.

“So again, instead of challenging my creationist ideas, all the geology I was learning in graduate school was supporting it.

“The evidence for creation is also very strong. For instance, all of us can recognize objects that man has created, whether paintings, sculptures, or just a Coke bottle. Because the pattern of relationships in those objects is contrary to relationships that time, chance, and natural physical pro-

cesses would produce, we know an outside creative agent was involved. I began to see the same thing in a study of living things, especially in the area of my major interest, molecular biology.

“All living things depend upon a working relationship between inheritable nucleic acid molecules, like DNA, and proteins. To make proteins, living creatures use a sequence of DNA bases to line up a sequence of amino acid Rgroups. But the normal reactions between DNA and proteins are the ‘wrong’ ones, and act with time and chance to disrupt living systems. Just as phosphorus, glass, and copper will work together in a television set only if properly arranged by human engineers, so DNA and protein will work in productive harmony only if properly ordered by an outside creative agent.”

Creationism has influenced Gary’s work as a scientist and teacher in many positive ways.

“Science is based on the assumption of an understandable orderliness

in the operation of nature, and the Scriptures guarantee both that order and man’s ability to understand it, infusing science with enthusiastic hope and richer meaning. Furthermore, creationists are able to recognize both spontaneous and created (i.e., internally and externally determined) patterns of order, and this opened my eyes to a far greater range of theories and models to deal with the data from such diverse fields as physiology, systematics, and ecology.

“Creationism has certainly made the classroom a much more exciting place. So much of biology touches on key ethical issues, such as genetic engineering, the ecological crisis, reproduction and development, and now I have so much more to offer than just my own opinions and the severely limited perspectives of other human authorities. And my students and I have the freedom to discuss both evolution and creation.

“Creationists have to pay the price of academic ridicule and occasional personal attacks, but these are nothing compared to the riches of knowledge and wisdom that are ours through Christ!” Gary exclaims. “I only wish that more people could share the joy and challenge of looking at God’s world through God’s eyes.”



Gary and Mary Parker

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# BUILDING BETTER RELATIONSHIPS

## TAKING OUT TOXIC THOUGHTS

BY ROB FURLONG

LAST month we began a discussion on the impact our mental health has on the quality of our life and relationships.

In particular, we focused on ways that we can address the toxic thinking that plagues our thought life.

Here are some more principles I have found extremely helpful in dealing with my own toxic thinking:

When you become aware of a toxic thought, actively *replace* it with a positive one. Sing a song or remind yourself of an encouraging thing someone said about you.

In my case, because I come from a Christian perspective, I find it helpful to remind myself of encouraging and meaningful passages from the

Bible. As a mentor of mine has often reminded me, when the negative “tape” (remember those?!) begins, eject it and replace it with a new, more positive one. “Changing the tape/CD/Podcast” should become your mantra.

I have discovered that one negative thought will inevitably lead to another and you can very quickly spiral out of control. Linked together, these thoughts become a chain of negativity that punishes not only you, but others around you.

When I find myself in this situation I consciously pull myself up with the words “I am not going down that trail.”

An example of this is when I think of someone who has wronged me or perhaps just did something they are unaware of but I was offended by it. My thinking goes like this: “I am offended by what they just said or did.”

“That’s typical of (whoever) – they always do this!”

“Remember the time they said/did this to you..?”

From there, I usually go into a

recital of all the bad things I see in that person, leaving me with a “set” against them.

Learning to arrest your thinking before it gets out of hand will require several attempts but over time, I have discovered that by regularly practicing this it will become a habit and you can pull yourself up more quickly.

Arch Hart recommends putting the thought on trial in the courtroom of your mind and asking it some tough questions. “What evidence do you present to say this thought is true?”

“What gives you the right to say that?”

“How do you know things will not get better?” (Arch Hart, *Habits of the mind.*)

A recent development for me has been to simply tell the toxic thought, “You are *not welcome* here!”

I am a great believer in prayer, so when I experience those times when my mind is being *bombarded* with toxic thoughts (usually when I am tired) I talk to God about it.

I say things like, “God – this is not who I am and it is not how You see me. I cannot control these thoughts right now, so please help me. I will rest in You – You are in control. Help me to do my part – I will leave the rest to You.”

Prayer may be a foreign concept for some of you reading this but as I have said before in this column – why not try it?



Photo: Getty Images

My experience is that God *does* listen to our prayers and you have everything to gain by praying. Many doctors and health professionals acknowledge that we are spiritual beings and we need to give attention to our inner lives. I certainly want to point you in the direction of God but I will not force that. I can only speak from my own experience and I have found that prayer works!

The important thing to remember is that all of the above takes time. Developing new habits always does. But don’t forget, you have spent a lifetime developing your toxic thinking so it is to be expected that you will have to work hard to eradicate it.

Healthy thinking leads to a healthier life and healthier relationships so here’s to healthier thinking! •

## Lessons from a sausage dog (Part 4)

BY JODY BENNETT

HAVING a dog is very good for one’s ego.

To have a creature greet you like a celebrity every time you come home, look at you with slavish devotion and follow you “doggedly” around as if they are afraid you will disappear at any moment is healing balm in a world of criticism and disappointments.



Having a cat, as far as I remember from my cat-owning days, does not bestow on you the same king-like status though; cats might yawn from where they are curled up on the couch as you walk in the door, or perhaps get up to meow near their food bowl in complaint at the delay in feeding them.

Or they just won’t be there if they have better things to do.

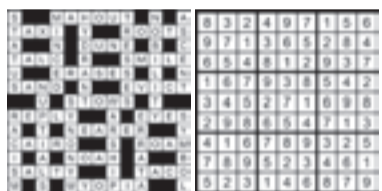
Dogs are dependant, cats are independent. That is why dogs have a reputation for being man’s best friend and are the inspiration for such tales of faithfulness as *Red Dog* or *Lassie*.

I am not trying to get into a cat-lovers versus dog-lovers argument here, as I think both make good pets, but they do display two extremes of responses to kindness; much like our own attitudes towards God when we realise He loves us and wants to be in relationship with us so much that He sent Jesus to die in our place for our sins (wrongdoing).

We can have the cat’s attitude of, “My master cares for me, feeds me, pets me, provides for me and lets me sleep on his bed, which is proof that I am special and valuable, and it is only what I deserve.”

Or we can have the dog’s attitude, which says: “My master cares for me, feeds me, pets me, provides for me and lets me sleep on his bed, which is proof that he is such a wonderful, loving master, and it is more than I deserve.”

God loves and draws you to Himself, not because you are so important or talented, but because He is so gracious and long-suffering, as the Bible says “all our good deeds [done in our own strength] are as filthy rags”. But when we do come to Christ, we realise we are valuable, unique and beloved in Jesus and our gratitude causes us to love, obey and praise Him even more. •



## 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)

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

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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\* Please tick and write clearly \*

Name \_\_\_\_\_

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## FREE TO PICK YOUR MASTER

BY DR JIM DENISON (ABRIDGED)

**NEW** York Gov. Andrew Cuomo captured the spirit of our age when he said of declining coronavirus cases in his state, “The number is down because we brought the number down. God did not do that. Faith did not do that. Destiny did not do that. A lot of pain and suffering did that” (his emphasis).

In his worldview, we have a binary choice: either we do something, or God does it. The governor doesn’t seem to understand that God employs people to do His work, that He can lead scientists and empower doctors in our fallen world. Or that praying for His help is essential to experiencing the fullness of His omnipotent grace: “You do not have, because you do not ask” (James 4:2).

We obviously need scientists and leaders to do their work. We need to shelter in place until we can return to “normal.”

But as we search for ways to defeat this disease, how many of our leaders are turning to God for help? When we make progress in battling the virus, how many of our people are turning publicly to God in gratitude?

**The only path to perfect freedom**

When we submit our lives to Christ Jesus, we experience the paradoxical freedom that comes from making Him

our Master. Consider this profound observation by Frederick Buechner:

*We have freedom to the degree that the master whom we obey grants it to us in return for our obedience. We do well to choose a master in terms of how much freedom we get for how much obedience.*

To obey the law of the land leaves us our constitutional freedom, but not the freedom to follow our own consciences wherever they lead.

To obey the dictates of our own consciences leaves us freedom from the sense of moral guilt, but not the freedom to gratify our own strongest appetites.

To obey our strongest appetites for drink, sex, power, revenge, or whatever leaves us the freedom of an animal to take what we want when we want it, but not the freedom of a human being to be human.

The old prayer speaks of God “in whose service is perfect freedom.” The paradox is not as opaque as it sounds. It means that to obey Love itself, which above all else wishes us well, leaves us the freedom to be the best and gladdest that we have it in us to become. The only freedom Love denies us is the freedom to destroy ourselves ultimately. How free are you today? •

See the full article at denisonforum.org





Matthew Slater #18 and Benjamin Watson #84 of the New England Patriots kneel to pray with Christian Wilkins #94 and John Jenkins #95 of the Miami Dolphins after a game at Gillette Stadium on December 29, 2019 in Foxborough, Massachusetts. (Photo Billie Weiss/Getty Images)

# REASON, RACE AND FAITH

Amid the violence, hatred and anger that has been expressed around racial issues recently, former NFL player Benjamin Watson has emerged as a voice of thoughtful reason.

His speech at the recent “Boston Pray” rally held on June 14 pointed his audience to truth, justice, kindness and faith, echoing his 2015 book *Under Our Skin: Getting Real About Race--And Getting Free From the Fears and Frustrations That Divide Us*.

Benjamin who has long been outspoken about both his Christian faith and opposition to racism believes, as most Christians do, that the two are inseparable.

The former tight end, who retired this past March and has played 16 seasons for various teams in the NFL, opened the prayer rally by quoting Jeremiah 9:24: “Let him who boasts boast in this, that he understands and knows Me, that I am the Lord who practices steadfast love, justice, and righteousness in the earth. For in these things I delight, declares the Lord.”

This verse reflects Benjamin’s own values showcased on his website - truth, justice, faith, family, fatherhood and kindness.

Benjamin declared, “Our ultimate purpose in life is to glorify God. If you ever think you’re too important, ask your kid about your grandfather; she doesn’t know him. That’s how fast we are here. You are two generations from being forgotten.”

But we can influence the next generation, our kids, and Benjamin is a strong advocate for the importance of fathers. He encourages parents: “Our children watch our nonverbal reactions to race as well as hear our comments.

“Be mindful of both because they are equally destructive. Racial jokes, generalisations, and stereotypes inevitably influence their expectations as they grow older and form the bias that sometimes creates the outcomes we witness on our television screens.”

Christians can sometimes think that they have to focus on either Biblical values or social justice issues, but Benjamin is a great believer that the two go together.

“As believers, the Gospel informs how we view the world, it doesn’t mean that we don’t see what’s really happening. It doesn’t mean that we neglect facts. It doesn’t mean that we aren’t hurt and upset when injustice occurs. What it does mean is that we know a God who can correct all of those things. And it means that when we enter into these types of issues we need to enter in with truth and humility,” he told *Faith Driven Athlete*:

On his website, he states: “The Gospel must always remain at the center of our lives because it is the power of God unto salvation for all who believe. I fervently address

the physical ills of the world with the hope of sharing the essential, equalizing and everlasting spiritual cure for mankind’s most pressing dilemma [sin].”

Raised in a pastor’s home, with loving parents, Benjamin chose to follow Jesus as a six year old. Even at such a young age he realised his sins separated him from a holy God and that Jesus offered him salvation and eternal life. He says that his mom remembers that he always wanted to be a football player and a missionary. He met his wife, Kirsten, through the Fellowship of Christian Athletes at the University of Georgia, and together they now have seven children. He is also a vocal opponent of abortion, and an advocate for the homeless.

Benjamin remembers that when he first started to play NFL football he was such a perfectionist and so afraid of failure. However, through an ACL injury and deep discussions with his father, he came to realise that the grace (undeserved love) Jesus Christ offers means he doesn’t have to be perfect, he can try and maybe fail and always be forgiven. This insight gave him the freedom to boldly live out his convictions and attain new heights both professionally and personally.

He and Kirsten established the One More Foundation in 2008, devoted to meeting real needs, promoting education and providing

enrichment opportunities through charities in order to spread the love and hope of Christ to One More soul.

As regards racial issues, Benjamin wrote on Facebook in 2016: “Only in Christ do the temporal distinctions between us fade, as our oneness in Him takes precedence over our color, creed and culture; and our allegiance to Him compels us to make those who matter to Him, matter most to us.”

He told Fox News in June, “Right now at a time of turmoil and a time of trying to figure out where we go next as a nation, we need to seek kindness, we need to treat people with compassion, we need to seek justice - whether that is protection or punishment, and we need to seek righteousness – the moral law that we all should live by.”



Benjamin Watson and his wife, Producer and Host of *Divided Hearts of America* Kirsten Watson, attend *Stork Ball 2020* in Washington, DC. (Photo Leigh Vogel/Getty Images)

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