

OUT OF THE DARKNESS OF DRUGS

BY JANICE TEO

For years Chelsea Ryan's life played out like the opening line of Simon & Garfunkel's *Sound of Silence* — 'Hello darkness my old friend'.

The 23-year-old tells *Challenge News* that she really did feel she lived in total darkness.

"Everything around me was dark," she shares. "I always felt such a negative energy."

"I was always sad and anxious. I never lifted my head. It was like it was always stuck in the ground. I was miserable, depressed and angry."

Chelsea's troubles began when she was a toddler. Her parents split up and she stayed with her mother. "The knowledge of what a father is and was in a person's life was unknown to me."

"I became scared of everything." Learning difficulties as she grew older made Chelsea an easy target for bullies.

She remembers she did not know the name of the man who became her stepfather several years later and she resented him for "taking" her dad's place. "My hate and anger against my stepdad began then," she says.

At 10 she began drinking and smoking. "I loved being drunk because it took away the misery for a while," she reveals. Marijuana entered the scene a year later.

The self-harm began as an accidental paper cut when she was 12. The pain brought a strange relief and within months it was a daily habit.

By the time she hit 13, Chelsea was experimenting with pills and LSD. "I was seeking something that would last longer and make my head stop thinking. I just wanted my mind to be blank."

That desire to zone out led to a nine-year meth addiction during which time she lost a best friend to

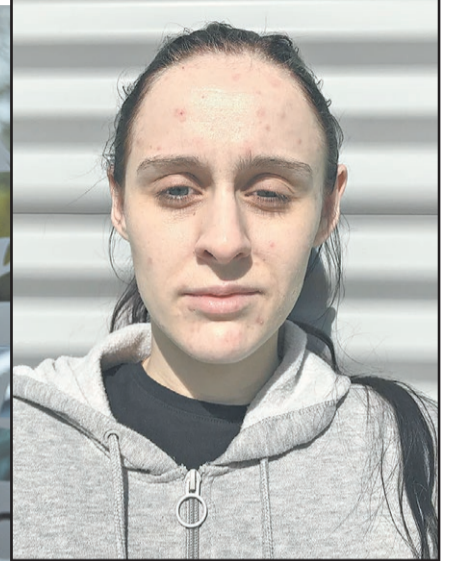
suicide, fell in love at first sight with a man who would later abuse her, and had three children with him. The darkness was by now almost impenetrable.

Chelsea's drug addiction, her record of petty thefts and the abusive atmosphere at home resulted in her children being sent to foster care. This was her breaking — or perhaps more accurately breakthrough — moment.

"I was used to being with my kids 24/7 and then suddenly I was going to go six months without seeing them. I felt hopeless, useless, worthless. By the end of the six months, I couldn't even remember what it was like to have kids. That was my rock bottom."

She enrolled in Shalom House, a residential rehabilitation facility in Perth, in March last year. She knew it was a Christian-based program. Chelsea knew nothing about God but at that point she was so desperate she was willing to try anything.

What she saw mystified her. "All the women there were so happy and I wondered 'why'? They're all the same as me, they've got the same problems. What's made them so



Chelsea Ryan's before (top) and after (left) photos dramatically show the effect that getting clean has had on her.

happy and how can I get like them?"

Someone told Chelsea it was because they had "given their hearts to Jesus". This was too weird for the recovering addict. "I didn't want to do that so I thought 'how can I get that way without giving my heart to God?' Christianity made me uncomfortable."

Still because she wanted that joy, she prayed: "Lord, if you're real, I need proof."

Chelsea was looking for an encounter, but instead at the next church service she heard a voice.

"During the worship I said 'Lord, I'm gonna ask you one more time, if you're real, I really need you to reveal Yourself to me in some way.'"

"And I heard this voice saying: 'Look around'. I put my head up and I saw all the Shalom people singing their hearts out and worshipping the

God who saved them.

"There and then I got my proof. It was a living proof all around me. I was trying to look for something in particular but it was around me the whole time."

And then, in answer to her prayer, Chelsea felt an overwhelming sense of happiness. The joy that she'd seen in the others, that she'd wanted, filled her heart too.

"Waves and waves of goosebumps went up and down my body and I felt peace and healing. I bawled my eyes out. I smiled so much my cheeks hurt. It was lovely, amazing and electrifying all at once."

She approached a mentor and prayed with her to commit her life to Christ. Her new life, she says, began on May 12, two months after she went into rehab.

"When I opened my eyes after

praying it was like a miracle. The world wasn't dark any more. It was sweet, it was bright.

Chelsea has been reunited with her children. Her relationship with her mother and stepfather has made giant strides forward. She also runs a ladies' group at Shalom House where she teaches and leads discussions on the Bible.

"The day I came to Shalom House I knew I had to leave everything behind. I knew there was no turning back. It was my last chance. When I came in I looked like the walking dead."

Chelsea says she would like to devote her time to helping other women who have been in the same situation. "I want to pull others up, just as I have been pulled up. I have a heart for women stuck in domestic violence."

She says God has given her a purpose and self-worth. "He makes me feel so loved and I know I will never be alone."

HAVE TEENS? HAVE MERCY!

BY ANON

MERCY is not really a word used in modern language — except maybe in the US South as an exclamation, "Have mercy!" It is not a concept we bandy about in conversation, although I imagine most people generally know that it is similar to the legal idea of clemency — getting off or getting a lighter sentence when you deserve punishment.

In the Bible, God is described many times as merciful — not giving us what our sins deserve.¹ In Luke 6:32, 35-36 God also tells us to be merciful.²

This is hard. We naturally want justice for others and mercy for ourselves. We want second chances but if someone hurts us they should pay!

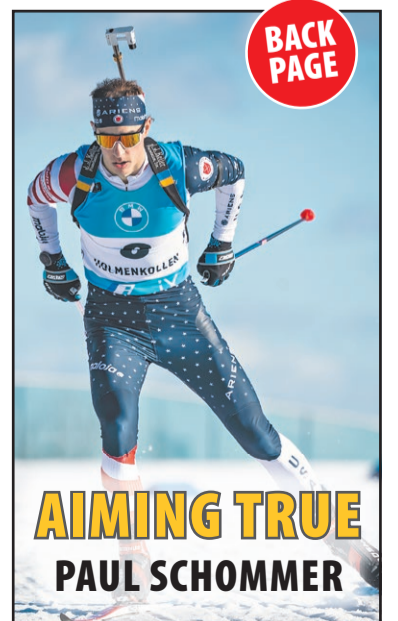
I have been learning something of showing mercy to others in a somewhat unusual way — through raising teenagers. Parents among you will know that teens can be a special grade of ungrateful, dismissive, unkind, insulting and thoughtless.

In my dealings with my teens over the last few years I have tried to enforce my will with punishments and loss of privileges, I have screamed and shouted, I have threatened to throw them out, I have wanted to shut down my heart and stop loving them because it is too hard and it hurts too much. I have wished them dead, I have been convinced I'm the wrong person to parent them, I have wept out of frustration and fear at where their choices will lead.

● Turn to page 3

Fun for Kids

Pages 5,6,7



Well, that's weird!

BARRY'S STORY
AS RETOLD BY NEIL HAWKE

GIDEON'S Organisation workers Barry and his wife Anne hand out Bibles and New Testaments to hotels, motels, schools, doctors' waiting rooms and police stations.

At Charleville High School they were met at reception by the coordinator who told them, "You people are wasting your time. No one reads the Bible these days. Last year when Gideons came a lot of the New Testaments given to students were thrown onto the roof."

Barry and Anne were introduced by the co-ordinator to the assembled students. The co-ordinator told them, "These people want to give you a Bible, but you don't have to take one." During his talk the co-ordinator mentioned at least five times that the students didn't have to take a New Testament. Amazingly, every student accepted theirs. Over the following months Barry and Anne prayed that God would use the New Testament for His glory.

Later, a friend of theirs on holiday in Mackay Queensland visited a church where a man gave his testimony. He said, "As a plumber I worked at mines and lived in Charleville. Once I was called out to the school there to fix the air conditioner. While on the roof I found this New Testament. I took it home and read it. That's how I came to faith and trust in the Lord Jesus Christ who has changed my life completely."

From Highway Evangelist

Unfaithful fiancé rocked her world

Karina had been in a relationship for almost 14 years when she discovered her fiancé had been unfaithful to her. She was devastated by the pain of his betrayal. But it was through a conversation with his mother that she discovered where to find true healing.

Karina shared her story in a video on YouTube. She said she was 18 when she and this man started dating. Thirteen years later they became engaged but after six months, they still hadn't set a date for the wedding.

One morning as Karina was getting ready to go to work, she had a gut feeling that she should pack her bags and leave the house they shared together.

"I kept asking him, when are we going to get married?" Karina shares. "I felt as if maybe he just wasn't ready to commit. Something told me to pack up my stuff and go and that is exactly what I did."

Karina hoped her fiancé would come after her and suggest a wedding date. But he didn't.

Two weeks later Karina was contacted by a woman who wanted to talk to her about her fiancé.

"Of course my heart sank," she recalls. "I called her and she dropped a bomb on me."

The woman claimed to have been in a relationship with Karina's fiancé for the past four years.

"My heart completely broke," she shares. "I couldn't believe it. I had been with him since I was 18. (He was) my best friend, the one that I knew better than the back of my hand, the one I felt knew me the best



Karina

and he had betrayed me ... I went straight to his house and just let him have it to be honest. I was hurt ... I would say I hit rock bottom. I didn't see a hope, I didn't see a future. I could not believe my best friend betrayed me this way. I just I couldn't see past the pain that I felt. I couldn't see the light at the end of the tunnel."

She says she felt worthless and unwanted. She grieved the future she thought she would have with the man she loved.

Her mother was away at the time and the next closest person to her at the time was her ex-fiancé's mother.

She poured her heart out to her.

"She said, 'Jesus! Jesus can fix this. Jesus can help you through this time,'" Karina says.

Karina went along with her ex-fiancé's mother to a Christian women's conference and it was there that she gave her life to Jesus and became a Christian.

"It was the best decision I've ever made in my entire life," she attests. "Jesus really came through. He's been the best thing that's ever happened to me. He has become the king of my heart. He has taken over my entire life and He has freed me from

so much." She could see there was light at the end of her tunnel of pain.

"The pain didn't change but I had Someone to hold on to and I held on to Jesus for dear life. When I would cry it was different because I wasn't alone anymore."

Becoming a Christian also gave Karina a new focus as she learnt more about God and read the Bible.

She also learnt how to give her former relationship to God.

"One day I felt as if the Lord was right in front of me saying, 'Do you want your ex who possibly won't change or do you trust Me?'" she remembers. "I decided to trust Him and that

is the day that I completely let go of anything and I just said whatever His will is, that's what it's going to be. The more you get to know God, the more you trust Him and the more you know that He has amazing things for you."

Karina now encourages everyone to give their lives to Jesus and take their pain to Him.

"Although time heals all wounds, it doesn't mean that they heal properly," she explains. "Only Jesus can heal wounds properly and I pray that that you give Him a chance in your life, to work in ways that you could never even imagine."

Coffee Break CROSSWORD & SUDOKU

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- 5 Adjust
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- 16 Rocks with metal
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Don't fall for the scam

BY JANICE TEO

"GOOD evening Madam, I am calling from Amazon. Hackers in China have broken into your account. They have already withdrawn \$500 to buy a gift card."

My blood turned to ice. "I will put you through to my supervisor," the caller continued. "Meanwhile please download our app and fill in all your banking information."

My hands shaking, I did just that. I downloaded the app, saw the words 'Amazon customer service', did as asked — and was promptly robbed of \$3500.

The Amazon 'customer service representative' was nothing more than a crook who used the classic one-two punch of instilling fear while feigning concern. The "app" he asked me to download was a remote viewer which recorded every keystroke I typed as I logged into my bank account.

When I realised what had happened, I think I stopped breathing.

Thankfully, my bank refunded all the money, but there are countless other victims who have lost everything and have no hope of ever getting a penny back.

And I learned a very important lesson — don't trust everything you hear, even when it sounds so very convincing.

Just as there are financial scams such as this one — and countless others which suck their victims in with outrageous promises of ridiculous returns — there are also spiritual scams. Charlatans who peddle the same products — fear and hope — but go one better by adding the allure of eternal life into the mix.

These spiritual villains cloak themselves in religion that is often a perversion of Christianity. The Bible calls them "false prophets" and "wolves in sheep's clothing".

Some false religions are clearly off the wall, with beliefs that include God descended in a flying saucer to save the world and others that force followers to fast from soap.

Others are deadly. In 1978, People's Temple founder

Jim Jones led 918 people to commit suicide by ingesting cyanide. It was reported that many were injected against their will.

As with get-rich quick financial schemes that promise much and deliver only lies, evaluating the faiths of the world requires scrutiny of the evidence, not the promises.

In the dizzying array of world religions, Christianity stands out above all the rest. It is the only one that speaks of a Savior who loved humanity so much

He went through an excruciating death on the cross to pay for our sins (John 3:16).

Jesus died and was resurrected. While the bodies of other holy men have been found, Jesus' body has not been discovered — and it's been 2000 years since He died.

Don't take my word for it. Non-Christian philosopher of religion Antony Flew says: "The evidence for the resurrection is better than for claimed miracles in any other religion. It's outstandingly different in quality and quantity."

In fact, the outspoken atheist stunned his followers when he announced in 2004 that God probably did exist.

The prophecies in the Bible have been proven time and time again. The Bible

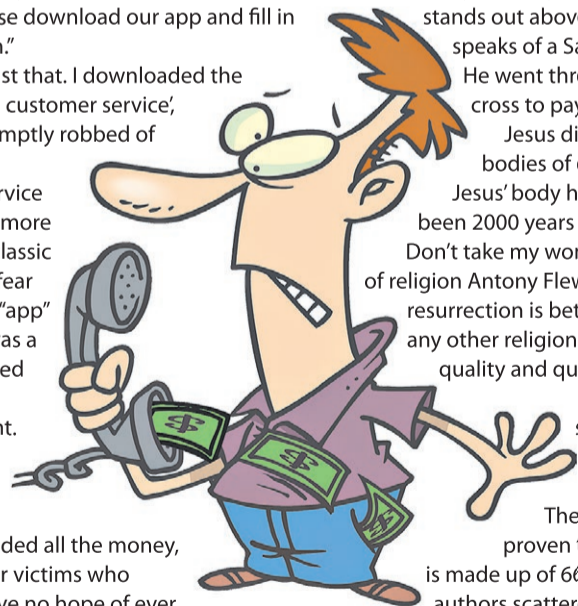
is made up of 66 books written by more than 35 authors scattered through the centuries yet its message stays unanimous and integrated.

Yes, there are certainly abuses within Christianity itself, and many atrocities have been committed in the name of Christ, but that is far outweighed by the good done by those who follow the Book.

Again, Christianity is alone in that one does not need to 'earn' one's salvation either by doing good works or giving lots of money. Salvation in Christianity comes uniquely and exclusively through faith in the work of Jesus Christ.

If you are searching for spiritual truth and fulfilment, go to the Bible. Affectionately known as God's love letter to His people, its words are life-changing. Speak to Christians whose lives are marked by love and "good fruit".

Finally, pray. Simply ask God to reveal Himself to you. Countless lives have been changed for the better by taking this simple step. And you will find that Jesus — and Christianity — are no scam.



Have teens? Have mercy!

● From page 1

And, as a Christian, I have prayed and prayed. And I have felt God telling me to lay down my life, to turn the other cheek, to forgive and keep forgiving, to do good without expecting anything in return, to love them regardless of how they treat me and to keep giving and giving – emotionally, financially, and practically. It has been excruciatingly hard and very counter to every self-preservation instinct I have.

“What about spoiling them? What about children honouring their parents?” Except, they are no longer children, they are young adults and my dealings with them have to adjust.

And mercy is what God shows us. He is maligned and blasphemed and ignored by most people every day, and yet He still gives us rain and seasons and sunsets and every heartbeat and breath we enjoy. Like my teens, we make grossly unfair accusations against Him (You don't care about me at all, you never... you always ...); we despise His presence (Just leave me alone!); and we are completely ungrateful for all He does for us, taking it as our due. And like my teens, we assume that we know so much better than God does what will make us happy or how our lives should run.

I get so very hurt by the things my kids do and say, but I can't really control it. God could though. He could wipe us all out in a blink. He could end our rebellion, He could make us conform to His will and worship Him.

But He doesn't. Why? Why does the God of the universe let us insignificant people hurt him? Why does an all-powerful God put up with our dismissive, insulting treatment? Because He loves us and He wants a relationship with us, and love can't be forced. Love has to be a choice.

I can't make my children love and respect me. I can only show them love and respect and hope they choose to repay it. Similarly, God surrounds us with His beautiful creation and His goodness every day. He chooses, for the moment, to overlook our rebellion, although if we got what we deserved we'd be blotted out in a heartbeat. He is merciful because He loves us and, the Bible says, His goodness leads us to repentance (Romans 2:4).

I am doing a very imperfect job of showing unconditional love to my teenagers, but God's love and goodness is unfailing, long-suffering and complete.

If my child chooses in the end to walk away, leave home and reject all the goodness I have shown them. If they despise my advice and live as have I warned them is dangerous, there is ultimately nothing I can do. I have to respect their choice, since chaining them up at home is not love! In the same way, God loves and forgives and gives us time to choose Him, but if we ultimately choose to do things our own way, He doesn't force us.

Hell will not be a punishment He enforces, but a choice we will have made.

1. However, He is also just. Wrongdoing has to be punished, and God balances these two things by taking our punishment on Himself in the form of Jesus on the cross – punishing the sin but letting the guilty go free (if we ask).

2. Love your enemies and do good to them; lend and expect nothing back. You will then have a great reward, and you will be children of the Most High God. For He is good to the ungrateful and the wicked. Be merciful just as your Father is merciful.

'Loser' faces sudden death



Joe Kirby struggled to fit in at school. Describing himself as a loser, he says he didn't have many friends and was bullied for being different. So when he got to high school, he did everything he could to fit in – and found himself in hospital as a result.

In a video on his YouTube channel, Joe says he was raised in a Christian home and when he had school friends over to his house, his father would pray before they ate dinner.

“Being the only kid from a Christian family, that was absolute torture the next day at school,” he recalls. “I was bullied for the way I looked and I was bullied for being different.”

As he grew older, it became more and more important to Joe to fit in. He was embarrassed by his Christian home and in high school, he did what he could to distance himself from it.

“I discovered if I became the class clown, if I back-chatted to teachers, if I was cocky, if I pretended I was hard, if I got into fights, suddenly people began to like me,” Joe explains.

Joe started getting invited to parties and smoking cannabis.

“I remember the first time I smoked cannabis, I got this terrible sensation that I was dying,” he shares. “I felt like there were a thousand hearts beating in my chest and I was terrified. But I carried on doing it because I didn't want to be left out. I didn't want to go back to that position where I was the loser with no friends.”

He was enjoying his newfound popularity, until he ended up in hospital.

“My heart had been having these palpitations, when I was playing basketball or just moved in a different direction,” Joe says. “My heart would start to flutter and beat very fast.”

He went to the doctor, who ran some tests.

“I was 16 years old,” Joe recalls. “I was meant to receive my [final

exam results]. I was so excited. I was going to go there and finish school and go onto a new chapter of my life. My mother received a phone call that morning that said, ‘You need to bring your son to the hospital urgently.’”

He was diagnosed with Sudden Death Syndrome.

“Isn't that, that illness where footballers will be running on a pitch and then suddenly bang, they hit the floor and they die?” Joe thought to himself. The doctors admitted him to the coronary care ward, where he

was surrounded by elderly people with heart problems.

“I was terrified,” he admits. “And I began to cry ... I just knew this was from smoking cannabis. I'd wrecked my heart and now I was going to die.”

It was then that Joe cried out to God.

“I said, ‘Lord God, if You save my life, if You don't let me die, I promise You I'll become a Christian, I'll give my life to You,’” Joe says.

Joe then discovered he had been misdiagnosed and didn't actually have Sudden Death Syndrome. After his test results were sent to a specialist, he was diagnosed with Supraventricular Tachycardia and was able to have a simple operation to correct the problem.

Despite this, Joe went back to his partying and drug use. One night at a party, he did something that left him feeling disgusted with himself.

“I had sinned like this before, but for some reason, the days and the weeks following I just felt so unclean,” he admits. “I felt sick at the sin that I committed. I remember having showers and just trying to scrub the sin off me because I felt so guilty.”

Joe was also struggling to reach his goal of becoming an actor. He had become close to getting into drama school, but it didn't work out.

One day he was sitting at the back of his church, and the pastor approached him and asked him about his relationship with God and whether he was considering the Christian faith more. Joe told him

he was, but he wanted to be an actor and that he didn't think he could be an actor in Hollywood as a Christian.

“[The pastor] said to me, ‘We need more Christians in the media. You can be the light that stands in all of that darkness.’ I went home that afternoon and thought, he's right. I got on my knees and I said, ‘Lord God, I'm tired of running from you. I'm tired of living this life apart from you... I need to come to you, I'm committing my life to you right now.’”

Not long after that, Joe attended a Christian camp, where he met an open air preacher who encouraged him that the same gifts and skills needed for acting were also needed for street preaching.

“Maybe God's given you those gifts so you can be an open air preacher,” the man told him.

Joe met with another street preacher, who invited him to try street preaching with him.

“I loved it,” Joe says. “I loved chatting to people about God.”

A couple of weeks later, Joe was listening to another street preacher who explained that God poured out all of His wrath on Jesus for humanity's sins.

“There was a lightbulb moment where I realised that God had to be angry at someone, for my sin. God had to punish someone for my sin. And that person, that someone was Jesus Christ. The Bible puts it like this – He is the propitiation (substitute) for our sins, and not just for our sins, but for the sins of the whole world. That is what Jesus Christ did on the cross. He absorbed God's wrath for all of my lies, for all of my pride, for all of my anger, for all of my substance abuse, all of it. Jesus Christ was punished there on that cross, and He absorbed the wrath of God for my sin ... He died there on that cross, for your sin also. So if you call out to Him, if you put your trust in Him, He promises that He will protect you from God's wrath, give you eternal life, clothe you in the righteousness of God and give you a home in heaven for all of eternity.”

Joe now runs Off The Kirb Ministries, which focuses on Christian videos and street evangelism. Check out his Youtube channel.

Thanks for Challenge!

HELLO,

I have just read my first copy of your wonderful newspaper in the prison chapel. I loved it! The stories and testimonies in there were a real eye-opener. I am new to the faith and what I find most interesting and comforting and have a real passion for is hearing other people's stories, testimonies and encounters with the Almighty. What I like most about them is how our lives are changed inexplicably. I particularly like how people try to find the right words to express the joy that is now in their lives, as I do.

Thank you so much for your good news newspaper. I thoroughly enjoyed it.

Your brother in Christ

David U.

Acacia Prison, WA

Has Challenge impacted your life? Please tell us how at jodyb@challengenews.org

nudge

WITH KARL FAASE

Being good is more than not being bad

I ONCE heard someone say being good is more than the absence of not being bad. What they meant, is that we can mistakenly think that because we haven't done anything wrong, we are justified in feeling self-righteous.

However being good, is so much more than simply not being bad.

A well-known story that Jesus told is that of the Good Samaritan. There are several layers to this story, and one is that those who walked past that bleeding and injured fellow traveller had in fact acted very poorly. In their own defence, they could well have said, “But I've been good and done nothing wrong! All I did was walk down the road and mind my own business”.

But the point of the story is that these people had done wrong in what they failed to do.

When we come to Christ, God not only helps us avoid bad behaviour, but He also enables us to live proactively to make a positive difference to those around us. Being good is much more than just the absence of being bad. It's about following the example of Jesus in giving sacrificially to others.

“The first step to being happy is being grateful, so focus on counting your blessings, not your burdens. Regularly writing down all you are grateful for doesn't only make you feel good, it can improve overall well-being.” – Dr Michael Mol

Truckie relied on drugs to drive

For twenty years, 45-year-old Ben Watson was an alcoholic and a drug addict unable to get clean until, one day, he had an encounter that changed his life forever.



Ben was a truck driver who owned three trucks, running Melbourne to Horsham and Adelaide.

“I used to think I could not drive without drugs,” he shares sadly. “I used to say, ‘I need to make a mile and I need drugs to do it.’”

“I was always working and I was always angry. I was spending so much money on drugs and alcohol that I could not pay my bills. So, I got angrier and more stressed and took it out on my family, until, one day, I had a mental breakdown and lost everything and everyone in my life.”

Ben admits that he had tried many times to get clean on his own but nothing was working. Then, with the help of a pastor from his church, he admitted himself into a Christian rehab facility called Teen Challenge.

“There, I had a true encounter with Jesus,” he says.

Later, when Ben left Teen Challenge, he read the Bible constantly and surrounded myself with fellow Christians and good counsel until he felt God say he was ready to go back to driving.

Now, Ben drives “for a great company. I am also married to a beautiful Christian woman named Erin and in a blended family with eight wonderful children. God has truly blessed us and we praise Him daily.

“I know now that I did not need drugs; I needed Jesus and without Him in my life, I would not have overcome my past; in fact I believe I would not be alive today.

“I have been clean for [several] years now and I am living strong with the Lord.”

In conclusion, Ben prays, “Thank you, Lord Jesus, for becoming the ruler of my life.”

From The Highway Evangelist

Healed of agoraphobia and abuse

BY JANICE TEO

On a freezing night in Perth, Shar Hodgkinson, 20 years old and five months pregnant, lay down behind some trees in a park. She hid because she didn’t want anyone to see what she was going to do. She was going to commit suicide.

Shar had recently learned that she had been sexually abused by a close family member for years. There had been clues — the explicit nightmares followed by violent vomiting. Her promiscuous behaviour. The many broken relationships. The drinks and drugs. When her suspicions were confirmed, she said she “spun out of control”.

At the park, she closed her eyes. Then her hand brushed her swollen belly and she opened her eyes. “I looked at my stomach,” she says softly, “and something — or someone — seemed to tell me ‘it’s not just your life anymore; it’s this other person’s too.’” She changed her mind and went home.

Today, 20 years later, the curly-haired brunette is unrecognisable as the person who was once so desperately unhappy she tried to end it all. The thing that changed it all for her was an encounter with Jesus Christ in the hallway of her home in the regional town of Port Hedland.

It happened in 2011. At that time she was recuperating at home after suffering a breakdown brought on by the exhaustion of running a full-time business and looking after a young family at the same time. Doctors told her she would be on medication the rest of her life.

By this stage, she had already committed her life to Jesus Christ. Shar had been brought up by a Christian mother and was brought up knowing God was “the lover of my soul and the person to turn to when things are really difficult”.

However, she still struggled with personal conflicts as well as her medical issues, all of which resulted in the situation she found herself in after leaving hospital. “I was agoraphobic,” she shares. “I wouldn’t leave the house — sometimes I wouldn’t even leave my room. But I filled my time by listening to worship music and sermons.”

Things finally came to a head when, longing to attend an overseas Christian conference but too agoraphobic to even go to the supermarket, she wept bitterly. A bright light made her open her eyes. And that’s when she saw Him — Jesus was walking towards her.

Her voice lowers in awe. “Time stood still. His Presence was so beautiful, so pure and so holy — and just so full of love. His arms were outstretched and I knew He was there for my pain.

“I struggled for a while because I didn’t know how to live my life without it, but then He cupped his hands around mine and in a split second I knew I was free. It was literally like with my next breath I felt nothing but peace. I had never felt anything like it — I can only describe it as weightlessness.”

She got on a plane the very next day and flew to the conference. The



Shar Hodgkinson

agoraphobia has never returned. Neither has the need for medication. “God completely healed me,” beams the 40-year old, who got married in 2006 and has a 19-year-old daughter and 14-year-old son.

Shar gives all the glory to God for her transformation and the joy that fills her life now. Trained as a hairdresser, she once owned several salons but relinquished them all to go into full-time Christian work. All she wants to do now is to spread the good news of the Kingdom of God (that Jesus died for our sins so mankind may have eternal life).

“I gave up the salons in 2019 because I felt God told me to put down everything in this world and He would give me spiritual tools for His Kingdom, so I obeyed Him,” she says simply.

She feels she is called to share the good news of Jesus Christ and spearheads Jesus Nights, a non-denominational Christian event.

The first one, held in January 2021 in the heart of Perth city, drew an enthusiastic and receptive crowd, she reports.

Shar, who was born and bred in the remote mining region of the Pillbara, says God has given her a vision to “blanket the rural communities with the message of Jesus Christ”.

“God wastes nothing,” she declares. “My upbringing in the Indigenous community opens doors for me there.” Last year, she and a team of about 13 drove the 6000 kilometres from Perth to remote Fitzroy Crossing and the Kimberley region, holding rallies and meetings and speaking at churches.

Smiling brightly, she says: “When I look back at my life, I realise now that God has always been there. He’s always available when you yield, ready to come in and be the Good Father that He is, to take away the pain and the trauma.

“I just want to let everyone know God is always available when we yield our wills to Him. He may not change everything in an instant, but He is always a good Father. He is concerned for the pain that we sometimes endure and He wants to take it away, which is what Jesus did for me. I am so grateful to Him.”

STORIES OF THE BRAVE AND BOLD

Turk spreads hope where he can't go

Gökhan Talas always thought he was a wise man.

“I was proud to be a socialist and an atheist. Nevertheless, I was curious about God,” he admits.

“I grew up in the Alevi sect of Islam but felt dissatisfied and empty. I wanted to understand my existence.



“Why are we here? Where are we going?” he asked himself.

“I encountered Jesus for the first time while doing my military service. I found a Bible in an Islamic centre and read from Genesis to Revelation. It was logical. I saw that Jesus is real. He is alive and eager for us to have a relationship with him. God’s love changed my heart.

“However, in Turkey sharing the good news about Jesus is considered a greater threat than terrorism. When I started to believe in Jesus, my commanders burned my Bible. Many of my friends abandoned me. Christians are persecuted daily.

Many have to leave their families when they convert. When I try to share the good news about Jesus on the street the authorities beat me.”

After completing his military service, Gökhan started going to church. He met and married his wife and began training to share his knowledge of and love for Jesus with others.

“I worked in a radio station preparing programs with the intention to evangelise.”

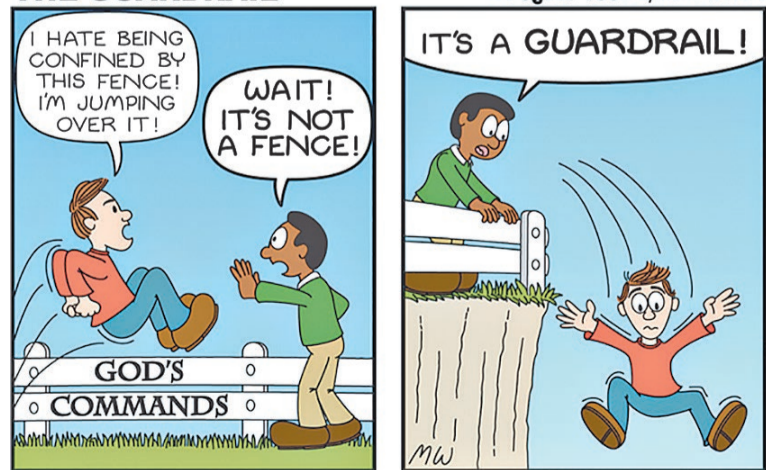
When he and his wife moved to Malatya, they were there only eight months before five fanatics entered their office building, held them captive and killed three colleagues, including their pastor. “We suffered great grief and trauma. We have lost many brothers and sisters to persecution,” he grieves.

Gökhan then moved his family to Istanbul, trained in graphic design and started a Christian magazine.

“Miras (Inheritance) magazine is easy to read, easy to hide and reaches people who have no other access to the good news about Jesus. We explain how a Turk can become a Christian. This is a strong message in such an anti-Christian culture.”

THE GUARDRAIL

A Joyful 'toon by Mike Waters



Whoever keeps commandments keeps their life, but whoever shows contempt for their ways will die.

— PROVERBS 19:16 NIV

YOUTH TRUTH

Teen's courage transforms tribe

Seventeen-year-old Rehan (not his real name) worked long days in order to provide for his family as a waiter at a roadside restaurant in Pakistan.



According to Mission Network News, a truck driver named Safdar began visiting the restaurant and surprised Rehan with the kindness he showed him.

He asked Safdar, "How is your attitude towards a waiter so gentle? Have you joined some other sect than Islam?"

Safdar, who was a Christian missionary from Forgotten Missionaries International (FMI – an organisation that supports indigenous church planters), gave Rehan an audio Bible. He took it home and listened to it.

Safdar then invited Rehan to attend the FMI Discipleship Centre, where he could ask questions and discuss God and the Bible. When he understood that Jesus loved him and died for his sins, Rehan became a Christian and was baptised [immersed in water as a symbol of death to his old life].

Although Christians face intense persecution in Pakistan, he then shared with his family about the Good News about Jesus. His family listened and understood, but were scared of backlash from their tribe.

Rehan invited missionaries from FMI to help him share the Gospel with his entire tribe of about 60 people. He gathered them in a tent and showed a movie about Jesus. Then a missionary shared a short message about the hope that is found in Jesus. Rehan's entire tribe then chose to leave behind their old religious practices and become followers of Jesus too! •

Dating and partying only left me empty

When Whitney Meade was in high school, on the surface she looked like a put-together, popular, straight-A student. Her desire for acceptance and fitting in with her friends led her to start partying every weekend and abusing alcohol, which became habits that followed her to college. But she felt empty. Miserable, she thought the answer was to leave college and go home. But when she got there, she realised the answer had been with her all along.

Telling her story in a video on her YouTube channel, Whitney said she had always craved the respect and acceptance of other people. Popularity and fitting in were her goals.

"When high school came around, and the party scene became available, popularity was really important to me, and I started going to parties and drinking alcohol," Whitney recalls.

She juggled partying with being the teacher's pet however, and made straight As throughout high school.

As high school went on, Whitney faced difficult times in her friendship group and was hurt a lot.

But she assumed her answer was just around the corner.

"I thought that college was going to be like the ticket to a happy lifestyle," she says.

"I had this perfect image of what college was supposed to be... I wanted to go to college, get into a certain sorority, meet a guy from a certain fraternity, get engaged by the end of college, get married and have babies and be a stay-at-home mum."

She was in for a rude awakening almost immediately, when she was rejected by her first three sorority choices.

"I was so devastated," she confesses.

"It was the deepest rejection I had ever experienced before, it totally blindsided me... I'd always achieved everything that I wanted when I was in high school. If I wanted to be the star of a play at the theatre, I would get that role. If I wanted to date a certain guy, I dated him."

While she did eventually join a great sorority, the initial rejection shattered her self-confidence.

The party lifestyle she found in high school continued into college, to the point where Whitney was binge-drinking. But there was an empti-



Whitney Meade

ness within her that nothing seemed to fill. "Dating guys couldn't fill it, getting a full ride to school [fully paid tuition] didn't fill it, partying on the weekend didn't fill it," she attests.

She felt miserable and called her parents weekly, begging them to allow her to come home.

This continued for years until one day, she hit rock-bottom. Devastated by a rough break up with her boyfriend, Whitney got in her car and drove three hours to her parents' house.

"I cried all weekend and asked my parents, 'Please let me come home, I don't want to be there anymore.' And I remember my mum and dad sitting across from me, looking at me and saying, 'You know what's really wrong with you. Until you get your life right with the Lord, this emptiness that you feel is going to just eat you alive.'"

Whitney had been raised in a Christian home and had asked Jesus to come into her heart as a young child.

But in high school she struggled to balance her Christian life with her pursuit for acceptance.

"The desire for popularity was stronger than the desire for me to continue pursuing a relationship with God," she admits.

"I still prayed at nighttime, sometimes I still went to Sun-

I said, 'If You'll have me, if You'll take me, I'm ready.' And I fell asleep.

"The next morning, when I woke up, it was like the lights had been turned on in my heart and my spirit. It was like I woke up with this meaning to life, this new purpose.

"And I wasn't any different on the outside than I was the night before, but my insides had been changed 180 degrees.

"I was completely new on the inside, because I had finally let Jesus sit on the throne of my heart instead of me, or whatever I wanted to put there, and I made some very radical decisions very quickly because I knew that the temptation to go back to the old lifestyle was there."

Whitney distanced herself from some of her friends, knowing that if she hung around with them, she'd be tempted to fall back into her old lifestyle. She also started going home every weekend and attending church with her parents.

She also started dating her future husband, Chris.

Her life changed for the better – but it wasn't always easy. "We're promised in the Bible that we will have trials, but that we are overcomers," Whitney explains.

Now when Whitney looks back at her life, she says she sees God's fingerprints all over it.

"He never left me through those seasons," she attests. "He was still faithful to me,

even when I was unfaithful to Him... God can redeem any situation. It doesn't matter how far away from Him you feel right now, He is close to you." •

day school and to church every Sunday, but I wasn't walking with God. I wasn't actually letting Him sit on the throne of my heart."

Whitney got back in her car and drove back to college.

"I yelled at God, the whole way back," she recalls. "I yelled at Him out loud and said, 'Why are You making me do this? Why can't you fix this?'"

When she got back to her apartment, she felt God spoke to her.

"He said, 'Are you ready to give it up to Me? Are you ready to follow Me now?' And I was so ashamed of my behaviour..."

I WOKE UP WITH THIS MEANING TO LIFE



radapologetics Atheists are caught in a dilemma. If God doesn't exist, then everything is a matter of human opinion and objective moral rights don't exist, including all those that atheists support. If God does exist, then objective moral rights exist.

William Lane Craig in his book *On Guard* states:

"In a world without God, who's to say whose values are right and whose are wrong? There can be no objective right and wrong, only our culturally and personally relative, subjective judgments. Think of what that means! It means it's impossible to condemn war, oppression, or crime as evil. Nor can you praise generosity, self-sacrifice, and love as good. To kill someone or to love someone is morally equivalent. For in a universe without God, good and evil do not exist – there is only the bare, valueless fact of existence, and there is no one to say you are right and I am wrong."

"There is no sin too great for God's grace. There is no habit too big for his healing. There is no label too strong for his love."
- Craig Groeschel

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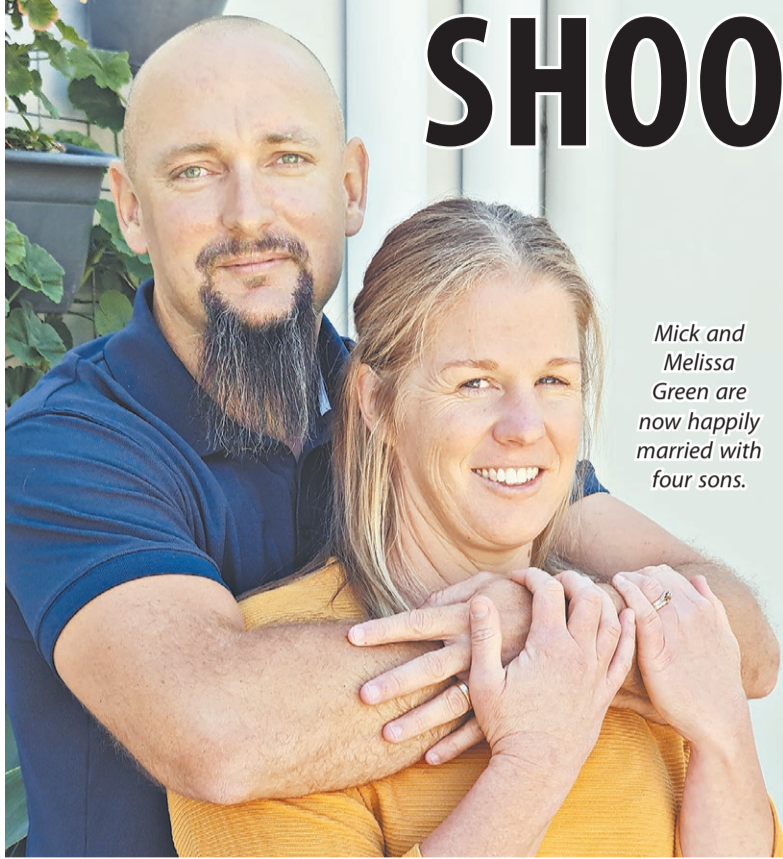
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YOUTH TRUTH

SHOOTING PLAN FOILED



Mick and Melissa Green are now happily married with four sons.

STORIES BY JANICE TEO

In 1999, young teen Mick Green decided he would show the teachers and students at his school in Mandurah exactly what he thought of them – Columbine High School style.

The media had been full of stories about the massacre in April of that year, in which two students at the high school in Colorado shot and killed 12 students and one teacher.

Like the two shooters, Mick felt he didn't fit in. His next step was chilling – he stole a rifle and a shotgun from a friend's house. Bringing the firearms to school, he told his friends he was going to “do what they did at Columbine and shoot up the school”.

The school authorities were alerted and Mick's family home was raided by the police the next morning.

Mick, now 38, still shudders at the memory. “I don't know what I was thinking,” he tells *Challenge News*. “Growing up I always felt like a square peg trying to fit into a round hole. I was always restless, angry and discontented with life.”

When Mick was 12, his parents divorced and his best friend was hit and killed by a car – making Mick angry and looking for something to numb the pain.

Marijuana seemed to fit the bill. His first experience with it left him “overwhelmed with a sense of ease and comfort. I felt like this would get me through life,” he recalls. LSD, ecstasy and amphetamines came next.

The drugs propelled him into a predictable pattern of crime; Mick stole cars, broke into houses, sold drugs and became violent, which led him in and out of the court system. Using amphetamines all day / every day and staying awake for up to a week at a time, just became a part of everyday life.

While living in Mandurah, a town in Western Australia, he met and fell in love with his neighbour Melissa, herself an addict. When she fell pregnant with Mick's child, he tried to get clean but found it impossible.

One night he told Melissa he was going out for a few beers and ended up 660 kilometres away in the town of Kalgoorlie for two nights on a drinking bender.

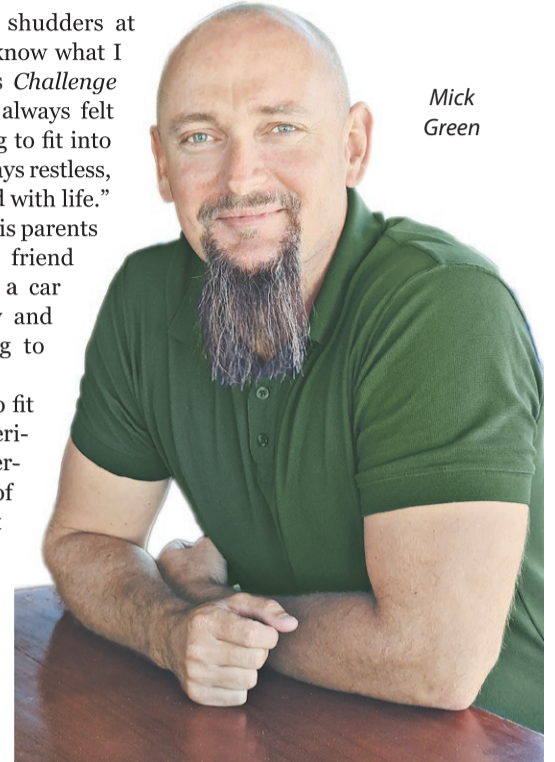
On the way home, the car Mick was in crashed. “I should have died that day,” he acknowledges. “Instead, I climbed out the windscreen and hitch-hiked home. But I remember thinking – ‘you've got a six-month old baby at home, what are you doing?’ God was looking out for me. I know that now.”

At that time Mick knew next to nothing about God. “I was angry with God, with whatever or whoever caused my best friend to die,” he recalls. “To me God was someone to be angry at.”

He told Melissa he would change but broke his promises time and again. Finally, Melissa fled to a women's refuge. It was a short time after this that “I cried out to a God I didn't know or understand to help me,” he says. “That was the day I surrendered and realised I didn't have the answers.”

This proved to be the turning point for Mick, who was then in his early 20s. He checked into a halfway house, began rehab – and has been clean and sober since that day. He and Mel were reunited and are now happily married with four sons.

Mel became a Christian in her late



Mick Green

20's, but it took Mick a few more years to surrender his life. He would attend church, but Christianity and the message of Jesus were a big, unwieldy jigsaw puzzle to him until he began to read the Bible regularly.

“While reading the Bible, I was convicted about how sinful I am, and how one day I will have to stand before God and be accountable for everything I have said and done.

“I reckoned I was pretty good – I had stopped the crime, the violence, the drinking, the drugs, stopped being unfaithful and I was providing for my family. But when I read the Gospels, I met Jesus Christ and I saw what it meant to be sinless, to be sacrificial and to love unconditionally. I felt overwhelmed under the weight of my own sin and I became completely convicted by how much I needed Jesus as my Saviour.”

At work a few days later, Mick prayed and told God he finally, truly believed. At first nothing happened. Then the crying began.

“This conviction was like nothing I'd ever experienced in my life,” he recalls. “For two weeks I was a blubbery mess. I would be at work and I would start to cry and have to go to the bathroom. Looking back, I think it was repentance (sorrow) for everything I'd done, grieving for rejecting God my whole life and coming to the realisation that He died for me.”

That was five years ago. Today Mick is studying part-time at Bible College while working full-time. His dream is to start a Christian residential rehabilitation centre. He already holds regular meetings with groups of men to take them through a process of recovery and read the Bible with them.

Mick's favourite verse is Romans 5: 8: “But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.” •

A turbulent life now full of peace

Bouncing between houses and boyfriends, thinking only of her next high, 16-year-old Melissa Green just wanted to die.

What began “as a bit of fun” and a way to shed her shyness, had become a full-blown addiction to intravenous amphetamines. She became so depressed she often prayed when she shot up that she would overdose – “I just didn't want to live anymore”, she tells *Challenge News*.

“I was in a relationship with an older guy who was into crime to support his habit. I was soon breaking into cars, shoplifting, and cheating drug dealers out of money to keep my habit supplied.”

Fearful of the law – and of being found by the dealers who wanted their money back – Melissa says she lived in a constant state of fear and paranoia. “I was living in real darkness – an emotional train wreck; I just wanted out.”

The irony was Melissa swore she would never live like this. Both her parents were drug addicts. Her father had dealt drugs and his consumption triggered epileptic seizures.

“I saw what drugs did to my parents, but when I was about 14, I started experimenting. As my parents were both involved in the scene it was very easy for me to get drugs.

“I was actually a very shy girl, but I became very sociable when I was drunk; marijuana made me paranoid, so I'd prop myself up on amphetamines and alcohol to cope socially.”

At that time, Melissa lived near a church and she would occasionally break into the cars there on Sundays. Yet it was a family from this same church that took her in when things turned dangerous at home.

“When I was about 16, drug dealers came to my house and tried breaking the door down,” she recalls. “We had to leave that house – and that's when a family from that church took me in and hid me at their place for a while.”

Melissa remembers that time vividly. “They were so, so gracious, so kind to me. They had a young daughter who had a heart condition but that didn't stop them from taking me in.”

This family introduced her to God. “The father used to read the Bible to me and he taught me how to pray,” Melissa says. “Today I know it was the love of Jesus pour-



Melissa Green

ing out of him. That's where the seed of Christ was planted. That kind of unconditional love was what I wanted for my life.”

Wanting to better her life, Melissa entered a rehab program when she was 17 but left after three months, still not fully freed from her addictions. She moved to the town of Mandurah, where she fell in love with her neighbour Mick, himself an addict.

It was when Melissa got pregnant with their first child – Seth – that she kicked her habit.

But life was still turbulent for the couple and Melissa fled to a women's refuge while Mick carried on with his drug addicted lifestyle.

Relating how she became a Christian, Melissa says: “In 2006, I remembered prayer time with the family that looked after me, so I prayed and prayed for God to help me. That's when I started going to church. After a while, I committed my life to the Lord.” Change came very gradually for Melissa, now 37. She and Mick eventually reconciled and today are happily married with four sons between 10 and 18. The family is committed to serving the Lord.

Melissa says while she believed in God, she found it difficult to fully trust Him. “It took me a very long time to surrender to him because of what I'd been through.

“I found it really hard to believe that He was a good God and that He had my best interests at heart. I kept trying to take control back from Him. My faith was built more on what I thought God could do for me rather than for what He had already done for me.

“I was baptised 12 years ago but it wasn't until 2012 that I truly surrendered. By this time I had experienced His faithfulness and His goodness so one day I decided it was time to drop my guard.

“I told Him: ‘God I'm not a good person. I need You. I cannot do this in my own strength because I just constantly fall. And you know what? When I finally did let go, all I felt was absolute peace, comfort and relief. No more fear.’”

Today she is totally drug-free and gives God all the glory for that. “I know God was with me because there's no way I could have gotten off the drugs by myself,” she admits.

“I am so thankful for the life God has blessed me with. I get to live the life that the Christian family modelled to me back in my darkest days, with my own family today.” •

**WHEN I
FINALLY DID
LET GO, ALL
I FELT WAS
ABSOLUTE
PEACE**



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Journey to the age of the Earth



Danny Faulkner has a B.S. (Math), M.S. (Physics), M.A. & Ph.D. (Astronomy, Indiana University) and has been an Associate Professor at the University of South Carolina–Lancaster for 26 years, where he teaches physics and astronomy.

Danny Faulkner can't remember a time when he wasn't interested in astronomy and recalls being captivated by the night sky as a three or four-year-old. When he was about nine he went through a "dinosaur phase" – as many boys do. He read every book he could find on dinosaurs and where they came from. He recalls discussing with other neighbourhood children about how dinosaurs began in the sea and eventually changed over millions of years into the giant creatures they saw in their books.

As Danny's schooling progressed, he learned there was a name for this process – evolution. And when he was about 11 it struck him that evolution was not in line with the Bible's account of ancient cosmology.

Danny was the son of his town's church pastor and had accepted Jesus as his Lord and Saviour when he was about six at a Vacation Bible School.

"However, I managed to drift away from the faith for much of the next nine years," he says in his biography on the Answers in Genesis website.

"When I began my second year of high school, I met some other students who were living a much more vibrant Christian life in the public school. That hurt, because some of them had been Christians for only a short while. As a result, I rededicated my life to Christ."

Danny's fascination for astronomy had never left him and it was around this time that he realised that, not only did he want to make a living as an astronomer, but that he also felt that it was something God was calling him to.

He read many books about astronomy, science and the Bible – many of which taught day-age and theistic evolution.

In a presentation at the 2017 Is Genesis History conference, Danny said the writers of these books explained that the Earth wasn't just thousands of years old, but actually millions or billions of years old, and the days of creation were actually long periods of time.

"I realised pretty quickly that what they're telling me here isn't exactly what I understood the Genesis account meant and what my family understood and certainly what my church understood. I also realised that these men were Christian men that were devout and they had studied a lot. They'd studied

There is faith that God spoke and everything came into being as a result. There is also a faith that a big bang happened, and billions of years later, there are millions of different plants, animals and people. It takes faith to believe either of these scenarios.

– Jeff Rhoades



scripture a lot more than I had, and studied science. And so if that's what they were saying, it probably was correct."

But then he read *The Bible and Modern Science* by Henry M. Morris, who believed God created the earth in six literal days.

"What he was saying was very different from these other two men. So they both can't be right [but] what he was saying made a lot more sense scripturally to me... That took me back on the right path pretty quickly... If you take the Word of God seriously and you believe it's authoritative – and I think that's a non-negotiable for us – then it certainly tells us about the way to salvation and about the Lord Jesus Christ but it also tells us a lot of other things and if you can't trust it on the history of the world, can you trust it on the future of the world? And I think the simple answer is no, you can't. So it's a seamless whole – it stands together."

Danny agrees that the Hebrew word for "days" (Yom) can also be translated as a long period of time, but people need to look at the meaning of the word in the context in which it is found.

"The first time the word 'day' is found in the day one account," Danny explains. "It says, 'God separated the light from the darkness. God called the light "day," and the darkness he called "night." And there was evening, and there was morning – the first day.'"

He explains that it is clear this is referring to a literal day and to then go on to use the same word to describe millions of years is very poor writing style!

"Once you believe that the world was made in six days, then suddenly, creation is pretty easy once you get past that sticking point. So I think it comes down to an authority question: Can we trust the Bible with all matters, not just salvation and spiritual matters, but all matters of life, and the world around us?"

Danny says that while most astronomers and geologists believe the universe is 20 billion years old and the Earth is 4.5 billion years old, the evidence for this could easily be interpreted in other ways.

"There are some other astronomical suggestions that the solar system and the earth and the rest of the universe are not really that old at all," he says in an interview with

Creation Ministries International.

"Comets disintegrate too rapidly to have been in their present orbits for all those billions of years. So evolutionists theorise about a shell of comets, an 'Oort cloud' too far out to see, to act as a way to 'restock' the inner solar system with comets every so often. However, there's no scientific reason to believe that there really is an Oort cloud. The so-called Kuiper belt, closer in, has been put forward as a theoretical source of shorter period comets. However, even if there are comets in this region, it doesn't solve the problem for the evolutionists, because the Oort cloud would still be needed to resupply the Kuiper belt after a while. Then there is the moon – due to tidal friction, this is slowly spiralling away from the earth, which is slowing down its rotation. If you calculate back a billion and a half years ago, the moon would have been in direct contact with the earth. So that is a very strong indicator that the moon can't be even a third as old as the claimed 4.5 billion years, and it is probably vastly less than that. Also, theory suggests we should find plenty of, say, million-year-old supernova remnants, but we don't find any – though there are many that are thousands of years old. And that is a very startling result if you really believe in a universe that's millions of years old."

Danny says he is thankful for his college days at Bob Jones University, where the science faculty was committed to biblical creation. He went on to do graduate work at Clemson and Indiana University.

While completing his PhD, Danny started teaching astronomy and physics at the University of South Carolina-Lancaster.

"Though not all my fellow faculty members or staff agreed with me on creation, they respected me for the job that I did in the classroom and in service to the university and community," Danny shares.

Danny taught at USCL for over 26 years. He has published over 100 papers in various journals.

He is a researcher, author, and speaker for Answers in Genesis and hosts Ark Encounter trips and Stargazer's Nights. He also hosts Astronomy Live programs and *The Skies Proclaim His Handiwork* workshops at the Creation Museum.

Danny and Lynette have been married since 1976. Lynette also serves as a volunteer for Answers in Genesis at the Creation Museum.

Believe it or not

BY CREATION MINISTRIES INTERNATIONAL

Smart Slime

BY DAVID CATCHPOOLE

DESPITE consisting of only a single biological cell, the slime mould *Physarum polycephalum* can attain huge sizes. It frequently takes the form of an amoeba-like creature several centimetres long, and on occasion even stretching up to several metres. It deservedly features as the largest cell on earth in the *Guinness Book of World Records*.

But the headaches it causes evolutionary scientists are less well publicised. "Existing at the crossroads between the kingdoms of animals, plants and fungi",¹ it has long defied evolutionists' attempts to categorise it and the other slime moulds. In some ways its life cycle resembles that of a fungus, but partially also that of certain bacteria. Adding to the complication, *Physarum* makes its own cellulose, like plants do. Mostly, though, *Physarum* lives and feeds like a one-celled 'animal'. (Incredibly, some slime moulds are known to even temporarily aggregate into and 'behave' like multicellular animals!²)

Noting the striking ability of *Physarum* to "solve complex problems such as finding the shortest path through a maze", biologists have dubbed the single-celled organism "intelligent".¹ Furthermore, the slime mould has been shown to have a memory, which means it can return to food sources, and avoid places of known danger. And all this without having a nervous system, previously thought to be essential for this. No wonder this 'smart slime' has "kindled questions about decision-making on the most basic levels of life".¹

So far, researchers have identified that the creature somehow "weaves memories of food encounters directly into the architecture of the network-like body", ready to use that stored information "when making future decisions".¹ And the researchers one day hope to achieve the practical "bioinspired design" application from these findings of a soft-bodied robot that can navigate through complex environments.³

Three lessons from all this:

The architectural and self-navigation 'bioinspired design' features that engineers hope to copy point to the slime mould itself having been designed. Therefore it must have had a Designer!

The similar features that slime moulds have in common with fungi, bacteria, plants, and animals would indicate these were all made by the same Designer.

The stark differences between slime moulds and other organisms defy naturalistic attempts to draw an 'evolutionary family tree'—just as if the differences were put there for precisely that purpose, by that Designer (Romans 1:19–20).

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BUILDING BETTER RELATIONSHIPS

LOVE COVERS ALL WRONGS

BY ROB FURLONG

"Hatred stirs up strife, but love covers all wrongs." Let me tell you the story of Binyoni, the Principal of a Christian school in Burundi.

His name means "Little Bird" and he was called this because he had a beautiful gift of music and was constantly singing and encouraging people in their faith.

There came a time of political unrest in the country and the ruling Tutsis were systematically seeking out leaders in the Hutu community and murdering them.

Binyoni was a Hutu and one day, he and his eleven teachers were taken by a group of Tutsi soldiers who had been given orders to put them to death. As they were being escorted

up the hill to their place of execution, Binyoni turned to the soldiers and asked if he could pray for them.

Although shocked by this, the soldiers allowed him to do so.

Binyoni prayed, "God be with them. They will have to live with this terrible burden of what they are about to do Lord, so please send someone who will share Your love, grace, and forgiveness with them."

The 12 men then sang the old hymn, "Out of my bondage, sorrow and night, Jesus, I come..." before being shot to death.

The soldiers had never witnessed anything like this before and they headed directly to the local pub to get drunk as quickly as possible, in the hope of suppressing their guilt over what they had done.

All of them, except their leader.

Racked with guilt, the young Lieutenant sought out the local Christian Bookstore where he asked the old missionary to tell him about the "God Who enables people to die like this...I want to know Him."

This is how we know the story of Binyoni.

The Lieutenant came to faith in Christ and began leading Bible studies, telling others about Jesus. In time, he too was executed, but not before hundreds of people had become Christians.

The story of Binyoni bears out, in the most powerful way, the truth of what Solomon said:

"Hatred stirs up strife, but love covers all wrongs." Proverbs 10:12

How easy it is for anger to turn to hatred!

And when that line is crossed, it always leads to strife, and in extreme situations, death.

But Solomon's proverb tells us there is a greater force at work in the world than anger and hate: love.

Love covers all wrongs. In the worst of all circumstances, Binyoni responded with love, and the



sins and guilt of many were covered. We should not think God turned a blind eye to the injustice done to Binyoni and his friends – far from it.

But what we do see is how God reaches out with His offer of mercy and forgiveness to people who did horrible things, because one man chose to respond, not with his own hatred, but with love: the same love that enabled Jesus to endure persecution, unjust treatment, and death for us.

Jesus' love for us covered all our wrongdoing.

How can we not be challenged by this?

I think of the grievances done to me and the temptation for me to hate those who have wronged me. But then I remember I am called to follow the example of Jesus too - to love, and to live, as far as possible, in peace with those around me, no matter what they have done.

And I remember I can do this, because Jesus loves me, and gives me the power to love like He does.

Is there someone you hate? Then it's time to ask God to help you love them, because "Hatred stirs up strife, but love covers all wrongs."

ATLAS	ALIGN	6	3	1	2	7	8	5	4	9
WLLAMASO		5	2	4	3	6	9	1	7	8
VISTA	PROS	7	9	8	1	5	4	6	3	2
ANNOY	ESSAY	2	4	9	6	1	3	8	5	7
SEES	RIC	3	1	5	8	9	7	4	2	6
EACORE	REP	8	6	7	4	2	5	3	9	1
KC	ALSO	9	8	2	5	4	6	7	1	3
AGIST	IDEAS	1	5	3	7	8	2	9	6	4
TETA	NASTY	4	7	6	9	3	1	2	8	5
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HOW DO I BECOME A CHRISTIAN?

What? Salvation is an eternal relationship with God – now on Earth and, after we die, in Heaven.

The Lord Jesus says: "I tell you the truth. Everyone who believes in Me has eternal life." John 6:47

"In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world." John 16:33

Who? Anyone can gain the eternal life offered through Jesus Christ, regardless of how you have previously lived or what you have previously believed.

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

Why? Because sin separates us from a holy God. Sin is all the wrong things we do, say and think, as well as our desire to be our own boss.

For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. Romans 3:23

How? The Bible says you become a Christian by confessing with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believing in your heart that God raised Him from the dead.

If you declare with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you profess your faith and are saved. Romans 10:8b-10

Ready to change your life forever? Here is a prayer you can pray, but you can also use your own words. The words are not as important as the heart attitude – which only God can see.

Almighty God, Creator of Heaven and Earth,
I acknowledge that I am a sinner. Please forgive me for all the ways I have disobeyed and defied You.

Thank You for sending Your Son, Jesus Christ, to earth to live the perfect life I couldn't, and die on the cross for my sins. Thank You that His blood was sufficient to pay my debt to You, and His resurrection proves that there is life beyond death. I accept that His sacrifice is all I need to get right with You – I bring nothing I have done but I give you everything I am. Help me to live for You. Please be my Saviour and my Master. Amen.

What now?

1. Tell someone - either a Christian that you know or email us at info@challengenews.org
2. Use the resources in the green box on this page to find a Bible to read and more information regarding Christianity.
3. Keep praying. Talk to God anywhere, about anything. He is always listening, and you don't need a formula.
4. Find a Bible-teaching church to attend.

AS A NEXT STEP:

I have prayed this prayer. Please send me: Bible Some 'starting off' literature Information on a helpful church

* Please tick and write clearly *

Name _____ Phone _____

Address _____

Email address _____

Challenge Literature Fellowship, PO Box 978, Cloverdale WA 6985
info@challengenews.org

All overseas enquiries are referred onto someone in their own country

Want to explore more?

Here are some free, helpful, Christian online resources:

Online Bible - Olive Tree app (we recommend that you start with an easy-to-read version like the ESV)	
Audio Bible - Bible.is app , or Youversion Bible app	
Christian radio station - CBN radio app (different channels for all genres of music)	
Christian podcasts and sermons - Edifi app	
Christian movies - New Faith Network app (7-day free trial)	
Daily thoughts and inspiration - Our Daily Bread app	
Advice on specific issues, Bible reading plans and studies for new believers - Youversion Bible app .	
The Bible explained with visual aides - the Bible Project on YouTube .	
Alpha Film Series on Youtube - an online introduction to Christianity.	
For kids - Superbook Kids Bible, videos and games app	
Comic book Bible online- goodandevilbook.com	
More inspiring faith stories - back issues of Challenge News at challengenews.online	

Ask Y:

QUESTION: What does God do if I agree to follow Him?



THE exciting news is this is not a one way deal, with you doing all the giving (your heart and your life) and God doing all the taking. Instead, think of becoming a Christian as rather like a marriage ceremony. In response to the bride's promises of commitment you've never heard the groom reply, "That sounds like a good deal to me. I'll take it now. Let's go and eat."

Instead, both publicly lay out the terms of their mutual commitment to one another. They each say to the other "I will," with every intention of doing just that. With each trusting the other will keep their vow.

In legal language this is called a 'covenant' — a two-sided mutually binding agreement between two willing parties. Why am I telling you this? It's because this is exactly what God offers to each of us. It's not about you saying 'I will' to God and Him saying 'Thanks very much.' Instead, His response is 'And so will I!'

Throughout history, God has made a series of such covenants — mutual 'I will if you will' agreements — with His people on Earth.

One was made with Moses when God gave the Ten Commandments. "I will be your God," said God, "if you honor me through these commandments." "We will honor you through these commandments," said the people, "if you will be our God."

He made another through Jesus, a new covenant offering to give all of Himself to those who gave themselves to Him.

Interestingly, the word for "covenant" in the ancient Jewish language (Hebrew) means to cut, or to shed blood. That's where the term "blood brothers" comes from.

Jesus said that He came to introduce a new covenant, one signed in His blood.

Through His death, a new relationship with God became possible. Not on the basis of keeping rules and regulations —but based on the offer of free forgiveness through the death of Jesus.

As you weigh up your decision, remember you would be getting far more from the deal — all of God's love and forgiveness and help — than He could ever ask of you.

Seems like a no-brainer to me!

"There is no sin too great for God's grace. There is no habit too big for His healing. There is no label too strong for His love." — Craig Groeschel

"Faith is taking the first step even when you don't see the whole staircase." — Martin Luther King, Jr.

Paul Schommer of Team United States competes during Men's Biathlon 20km Individual at National Biathlon Centre on February 08, 2022 in Zhangjiakou, China. (Photo by Cameron Spencer/Getty Images)

Paul Schommer competes during the Sprint Men at the IBU World Cup Biathlon Oslo on March 18, 2022 in Oslo, Norway. (Photo by Kevin Voigt/DeFodi Images via Getty Images)



Paul and Jillian with their dog. Source: Instagram.

TRUTH IN HIS SIGHTS

Representing the US in the Biathlon team in the 2022 Beijing Winter Olympics was a dream come true for 30-year-old Paul Schommer, but until he was in college, his attention had been on other sports. He was a wrestler, like his father, and also played soccer and ran cross-country.

The road to the Olympics wasn't a smooth ride for Paul. As he became passionate about sport as a child, he also tried to make healthy choices regarding his diet and fitness. But at age 14, that morphed into anorexia. He was hospitalised and faced months of unsuccessful therapy, but eventually received residential treatment at an eating disorder centre.

Then, while still learning to cope with his diagnosis, Paul's father died in a car accident.

Paul walked away from athletics at age 15, with no intention of returning.

Then his brother Philip started a cross-country skiing club at their high school in Appleton, Wisconsin.

"I tried it out, and I really enjoyed it," he told the Star Tribune. "It was an escape for me."

That escape turned into a passion and after he graduated high school, Paul left for The College of St. Scholastica with two pairs of skis, one ski jacket, and a dream of competing at a collegiate level.

"When I arrived at St. Scholastica, I was just a suburban kid looking to improve as a skier," Paul writes on

his website biography.

"My head coach, Chad Salmela, was a retired professional biathlete and quickly noticed I had the work ethic and talent to become an elite level biathlete."

So Paul combined his skill at cross-country skiing with rifle shooting and attended a biathlon screening course in 2014.

After that he decided to completely focus on biathlon and was accepted into the US Biathlon development team in 2016.

According to his website bio, Paul graduated from The College of St. Scholastica with a bachelor's degree in chemistry, All American accolades as an NCAA skier, and a dream of representing his country as an Olympic biathlete.

But his first attempt at making the Olympic team was a false start. He battled illness during the 2018 Winter Games trials and ended up one place short. But he didn't give up and spent the next four years

training hard to try again.

His hard work paid off and he was one of the first men named in the 2022 Beijing Winter Olympics US biathlon team. At 29, Paul's Olympic dream was finally realised.

"I think it's extremely humbling to be able to represent (the US) on that big stage," Paul told nbc26.com. "At the same time I feel like the exact same guy. I'm still just a kid from Appleton who found his way into a sport that I am good enough at to make it to the Olympics."

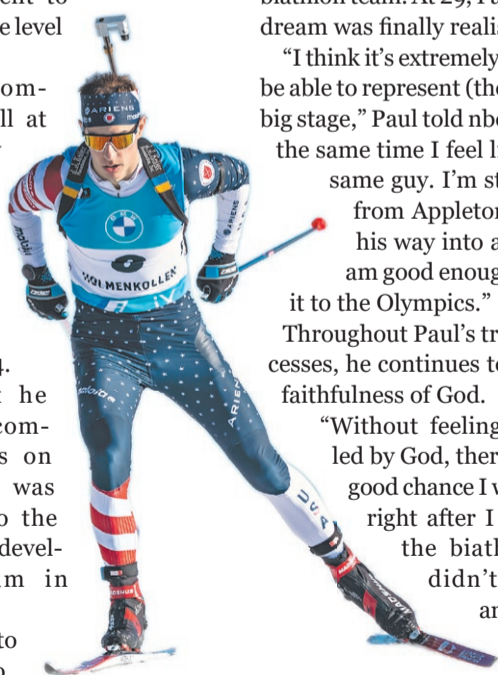
Throughout Paul's trials and successes, he continues to rely on the faithfulness of God.

"Without feeling called and led by God, there would be a good chance I would've quit right after I first started the biathlon; I just didn't really see any success in my future based off

the things happening at that time," Paul told fca.org.

Although he attended church as a child, it was during high school that Paul's faith began to flourish when he got involved in the Fellowship of Christian Athletes (FCA).

"When I started going to FCA, I really started to see [my faith] wasn't something that was just supposed to be inside the four walls of the church. It was supposed to go out into the world; it was a lifestyle.



My FCA leader in high school took me under his wing and became my mentor as I grew up. He was the first person I met who I saw really living this thing out. He had this joyful heart and an obedience because he had this revelation at some point in his life where this is worth it.

FCA is where I really started to take hold of the fact that we can be transformed by this gospel in a way that frees us."

A quick glance at Paul's website and social media reveals his Christian faith is of utmost importance to him, but Paul wants his faith to be evident by the way he lives not just the verses he quotes on his website.

"My beliefs are shown through my actions every day in how I react to different situations," he told fca.org.

"I don't want [people to see] I'm a Christian only from my Facebook profile. I want it to be a life lived in a way that it's like, 'There's something different about him.'"

In January, Paul placed ninth in a World Cup 20km in January, the highest US men's result in nearly two years.

In the 2022 Beijing Winter Games, he placed 7th in mixed relay (with Susan Dunklee, Clare Egan and Sean Doherty), 13th in men's relay, 35th in 20km individual, and 74th in 10km sprint.

Paul is married to Jillian and, when he's not training and competing, he enjoys reading, "getting lost", mountain biking, camping, a dexterity game called kendama, and fixing cars.

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