

CHRISTMAS: WHY DO WE GIVE GIFTS?



BY ANDREW LANSDOWN

WE USUALLY receive presents on two birthdays each year—our own and Jesus Christ’s.

Leading up to Jesus’ birthday, presents are often placed under a Christmas tree in the family room and we enjoy a sense of anticipation as we look at them in their bright wrappings. We might handle one—testing its weight, feeling its shape—trying to work out what it is. Indeed, we might even ask the giver, “What is it?” And he or she might tease, “You’ll never guess!” or “You’ll just have to wait and see!”

But sometimes, after the wait, we open the present and we still don’t “see”. Confused, we juggle it and look at it from different angles, but finally have to ask, “What is it?” or “What’s it for?”

Leading up to Christmas one

year, my wife, who is skilled in various handicrafts, spent considerable time making her mother a present. But she was a little disappointed on Christmas Day when her mother unwrapped it and, after a brief examination, asked, “What’s it for?”

As it turned out, it was for a casserole dish. It was a kind of quilted, wadded “bag” with a drawstring and its purpose was to keep a casserole dish warm—and also to keep the lid from slipping off if the dish was being transported. A casserole warmer. After the explanation, her mother was quite pleased with her gift and made good use of it for many years.

We cannot properly take pleasure in a gift or thank the giver until we know what the present is and what it is for.

Concerning Christmas, many people can identify the gift God gave to the world on the first Christmas Day, but not so many can explain why God gave us this gift. They know that baby Jesus is the gift, but they do not know (if we may say this respectfully) what Jesus is “for”.

Yet, to be of real “use” to us we need to go beyond the *fact* of Jesus’ coming to the *purpose* of his coming. And Christmastime is an ideal time to consider this.

The birth of Jesus Christ is a unique event in human history because it involved the incarnation of God. God the Son became a human being in the womb of a young virgin woman named Mary. He was

born in a stable and laid to sleep in a feeding trough. Angels announced His birth, shepherds worshipped Him, and wise men gave Him gifts. A king tried to kill Him, but His earthly father kept Him safe by smuggling Him out of the country.

These are remarkable events and are well worth remembering and celebrating! But why did they happen?

God the Son became Christ the child for a reason. There was a purpose to His coming; and He himself explained that purpose when He grew to be a man and began His ministry.

He said to the people of a certain town, “I must preach the good news of the kingdom of God ... for I was sent for this purpose” (Luke 4:43).

The Son of God came from heaven to earth for this purpose: to “preach the good news of the kingdom of God”. What is that good news? It is this: “God so loved the world, that He gave His only Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life” (John 3:16).

God’s gift of His Son to us required the death of His Son for us. Jesus understood this perfectly well and He spoke about it several days before His crucifixion. He said, “The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. ... Now is my soul troubled. And what shall I say? ‘Father, save me from this hour’? But for this purpose I have come to this hour” (John 12:23, 27).

“What is the gift for?”



BACK PAGE

CHRIS YARRAN
LIFE AFTER DRUGS

FINDING SANTA’S GRAVE?

DR. JIM DENISON

ST. NICHOLAS was born in AD 270 in Turkey. He became an influential pastor and participated in the church’s First Council of Nicaea in AD 325. Recently, researchers announced that they have discovered a tomb that could house his undisturbed remains.

Many historians thought that Italian merchants stole Nicholas’s bones from a damaged sarcophagus during the first crusade in 1087 and took them to a basilica in Italy. However, an elaborate tomb has now been found beneath the church in Turkey where he was buried. It is possible that the Italians took the bones of a different priest, meaning that the real saint’s remains are still underground. There are mosaics covering the floor, so it will take time for removal and excavation to prove the theory.

Whether we now know the location of St. Nicholas’s grave or not, his legacy is unquestioned.

Nicholas was best known for his ministry to the poor and underprivileged. He was the first in his area to initiate programs for mentally challenged children. He often visited children at night, disguised in a red and white hooded robe, leaving gifts of money, clothing, or food at their windows or fireplaces. He gave gold to three poor young women so they would have dowries and could afford to be married.

The Dutch spelled his name “Sint Nikolass,” which in America became “Sinterklass” or “Santa Claus.” Dr. Clement Clarke Moore immortalized him in his 1822 poem, “A Visit from St. Nicholas.” The illustrator Thomas Nast put Dr Moore’s description to art, creating the figure we picture as Santa Claus.

If St. Nicholas lived in your community, how would he encourage you to respond to your culture today?



Christmas: Why do we give gifts?

From page 1

The Son of God came from heaven to earth for this purpose: to experience the terrifying hour of His death, to be glorified by being lifted up on a cross, to be crucified as a sacrifice for sinners.

It is interesting to note that Jesus did not command His disciples to remember the hour of His birth, but He did command them to remember the hour of His death.

Just before His crucifixion, at the Last Supper, He instituted a memorial service whose sole focus is His body broken and His blood shed for us, a service to be conducted repeatedly by Christians throughout the world until He returns (Matthew 26:26-29; 1 Corinthians 11:23-26).

This is not to suggest that we should not celebrate Jesus' birth: it is simply to emphasise that we should

never forget His death. His birth finds its meaning in His death. Hence, to be fully meaningful and beneficial, Christmas celebrations should be tinged with Easter lamentations.

What Child is this, who, laid to rest, On Mary's lap is sleeping?

Whom angels greet with anthems sweet,

While shepherds watch are keeping?

Oh, this, this is He who came

To die for us and take our blame!*

At Christmas we remember that the Son of God came to earth. But we should also remember why He came. He came for this purpose: to preach the good news of the kingdom of God and to open a way for us to enter that kingdom by facing the hour of His death.

* "What Child Is This", a Christmas carol by William Chatterton Dix. The last two lines (in italics) have been written by Andrew Lansdown.

Was it really a miraculous birth?

IT has been argued that a virgin birth is possible in humans, just not common, through parthenogenesis (ie. reproduction from an ovum without fertilization, which occurs normally in some invertebrates and lower plants). Would this mean that Jesus' birth was not miraculous and not the only virgin birth?

Answer: There has never been a 'natural' parthenogenetic birth in humans, because of all the complex errors that would have to happen to result in a 'normal' foetus with no father. And such a baby would probably suffer severe deformity.

Any baby resulting from a natural parthenogenetic birth would have to be female, because the mother has no Y chromosome to pass to her offspring. Therefore, the fact that Jesus was male is proof that it was not a parthenogenetic fertilization.

* Slate.com (http://www.slate.com/id/2179865).

Don't mix truth and fantasy

BY ALAN BAILEY

THE line between truth and fantasy is being blurred in many modern minds. Our technology has brought us loads of both, and the difference between them is getting harder to see. The world of game-playing on screen and the world of social media aren't all that far apart. Add the deliberate deceit that is practised to take advantage of others and you have a labyrinth of notions that take a bit of analysing.

One result is that we read of Christmas "legends" where a mother and child are mixed with Santa Claus and Rudolph. The whole celebration is then based on tales and imagination meant to be pleasing to the minds and hearts of our children.

Without wanting to spoil the fun children have, we need to do some separating of fact from fiction. How much is actual history? Is there a great event being remembered or was there no great event?

If the coming of God to earth as man actually happened, it is of huge significance to us all.

TRUTH WE CAN TRUST

The record of the Christmas events in Matthew and Luke bear all the marks of authenticity.

The actual dates are implicit, the rulers of the time are named, and the state of affairs under the rule of Rome



and of Herod is clearly described.

That Jesus was born in Bethlehem just over 2000 years ago is beyond dispute.

Obviously, to deny His birth is to deny all that is written about Him. The life He lived, the death He died and the resurrection that followed would all have to be explained away. No-one has succeeded in doing that in all the years since. Also, the many forecasts about Him in Old Testament books must be taken into account. How come authors who wrote centuries beforehand gave details of the birth of the Messiah? The tribe of Judah is named, the family of David, also; the town of Bethlehem is named, even the death of the infants at that time is foretold. So much was

said that was fulfilled exactly in the life of this one man.

The Christian church which was born after the death of Christ grew out of actual contact with the Messiah, the Saviour of the world. It was not the result of traditional stories being handed down but the result of the proclamation of the Gospel in the face of fierce opposition and persecution.

We are talking about truth here. Significant to us all. The Saviour we need has come. He died in our place. We welcome Him into our lives or we reject Him. *He came to His own and His own did not receive Him. But to those who did receive Him He gave the right to become children of God* (John 1:12).

Now that is a gift worth having.

Secret code in Christmas song

HAVE you ever wondered what the *Twelve Days of Christmas* song really means? Apparently, it was created in England during a time of religious persecution in the 16th to 18th centuries. The song was written in code so that it could be sung in public, without fear of arrest, as a learning or memory aid to Christians.

The twelve days of Christmas are the twelve days between Christmas Day, December 25th, the birth of Jesus, and the Epiphany, January 6th, the day arrival of the Magi (Wise Men) is celebrated. "My True Love" is God the Father who gives us all gifts. Here is what each gift represents:

1. The partridge in a pear tree is Jesus.
2. The two turtledoves are the Old and New Testaments.
3. Three French hens stand for

faith, hope and love.

4. The four calling birds are the four Gospels.

5. The five gold rings recall the Pentateuch, the first five books of the Old Testament.

6. The six geese a-laying stand for the six days of creation.

7. The seven swans a-swimming represent the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit.

8. The eight maids a-milking are the eight Beatitudes.

9. Nine ladies dancing are the nine fruits of the Holy Spirit.

10. The ten lords a-leaping are the Ten Commandments.

11. Eleven pipers piping represent the eleven faithful Apostles.

12. Twelve drummers drumming symbolize the twelve points of doctrine in the Apostles Creed.



Crossword

ACROSS	9 Better than good	16 US island state
1 Spanish mountains	11 Become unnerved	18 Sweetheart
6 Very noisy	12 Open-eyed	19 Ship worker
7 Over-infused tea	13 Stone gods	

1	2	3	4	5
6		7		8
9		10		11
12			13	14
		15		
16	17			18
		19		

DOWN
 1 Lie detector
 2 Course taken
 3 Sunrise direction
 4 Ship's waiter
 5 Caviar
 8 Short-legged dog
 10 Clumsy, ungainly
 14 Performance with sopranos
 15 Element with symbol Zn
 17 Do sums

SOLUTION PAGE 11

Sudoku

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

Puzzle Level: Medium

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

SOLUTION PAGE 11

											9
			6	2		8					5
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Bible prophecies fulfilled at the birth of Jesus

- | | |
|--|---|
| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. From the descendents of Shem (Genesis 9:26). 2. Through Abraham (Genesis 12:3), Isaac (Genesis 17:21) and Jacob (Genesis 28:14). 3. Through the tribe of Judah (Genesis 49:8). 4. Through the family of Jesse (Isaiah 11:1). 5. Through the house of David (Jeremiah 23:5). This genealogical address of the Messiah was fulfilled precisely in Jesus (Matthew 1:1-17). | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 6. Place of his birth (Micah 5:2) 7. His virgin birth (Isaiah 7:14) 8. His divine name (Isaiah 7:14) 9. Presentation of gifts to Him (Psalm 72:10-11) 10. Massacre of children after His birth (Jeremiah 31:15) 11. His escape into Egypt (Hosea 11:1) 12. His residence in Nazareth (Matthew 2:23) 13. His childhood poverty (Isaiah 53:2) 14. His Spirit-filled nature from birth (Isaiah 1:1-2). |
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nudge
WITH KARL FAASE

Avoiding festive kitsch

ENGLISH lecturer, the Reverend Dr Giles Fraser, vicar of Putney, London, and lecturer in philosophy at Wadham College, Oxford, said recently that we should avoid having a kitsch Christmas. Fraser quoted Czech novelist Milan Kundera, who said, "kitsch is the vision of a world where nothing unwholesome or indecent is allowed to come into view".

A kitsch Christmas is where we try to fool ourselves that the world is perfect, our lives are wonderful, and that Christmas must be kept away from the world's messiness. To have a kitsch Christmas is to play, "let's pretend everything is perfect". This makes our Christmas gatherings more about avoiding the realities of life than the real reason for the celebration.

Allow God to be a part of all of your life at Christmas. The difficulties you face are no surprise to God. Christmas is not about pretending, it's about celebrating that Jesus has come into the world so we can have a new relationship with God. We can celebrate with confidence that no matter what we face, Jesus stands with us, giving us hope and a future. Now that's a reason to celebrate.

Three wise men and other myths

What your Christmas cards got wrong

WE ARE ALL SO FAMILIAR with the nativity scene as pictured on Christmas cards and in mall displays that we can often assume parts of the story are fact that are not in the historical, biblical account.

1. JESUS WAS BORN ON DECEMBER 25

The overwhelming majority of Christians mark the birth of Jesus on December 25. But there's no biblical reason to celebrate Christmas on this particular day.

According to the Gospel of Luke, shepherds were watching their flocks at night at the time Jesus was born. This detail – the only clue in the Gospels about the timing of the birth – suggests that Jesus' birthday was not in the winter, as shepherds would have been watching their flocks only during the lambing season in the spring. In the colder months, the sheep probably would have been corralled.

As late as the 3rd century, Christians did not even celebrate the birth of Jesus.

The first record of a celebration of the birth of Jesus on December 25 comes from a 4th-century edition of a Roman almanac known as the Philokalia, in the time of Constantine. Alongside the deaths of martyrs, it notes that on December 25, "Christ was born in Bethlehem of Judea".

Some have argued that the date of Jesus' birth was selected to supplant pagan festivals that were held at the same time. However, while Pope Julius I set the date of Christmas (for Western Christians) in the 4th century, there is evidence Christians did not deliberately adapt pagan rituals until the 7th century when Pope Gregory the Great instructed bishops to celebrate saints' feast days on the days of pagan festivals.

However, some people still think that December 25th was chosen to coincide with the winter solstice or "Yule" and the ancient Roman midwinter festivals that took place around this date.

A very early Christian tradition said the Annunciation – the day

when Mary was told that she would have a very special baby, Jesus – was on March 25th. Nine months after the 25th March is the 25th December. They believed that Jesus was conceived and died on the same date of the year and the 25th of March as the day of His death is calculated from other passages in the New Testament.

2. THREE WISE MEN RIDING CAMELS ATTENDED JESUS' BIRTH

The Bible does not say that any kings or camels visited young Jesus. It does report that wise men (magi) came, but it does not say how many. Since the word "magi" used in the Bible is plural, there were apparently at least two, and there could have been more – even several more.

Nothing about the story's language suggests that these visitors were monarchs. It is more likely they were pagan astrologers.



People commonly think there were three of them because of the gifts enumerated in the Gospel of Matthew: we are told that they brought gold, frankincense and myrrh, but there could as easily have been any other number of magi.

And the only indication of the country these men came from is that they came from "the east" (Matthew 2:1).

The nativity scenes put the wise

men's visit on the night of Jesus' birth, at the same time as the shepherds, but the Bible tells us they visited him much later. Matthew 2:11 says the magi had found Jesus "on coming to the house". So by this stage He was out of the stable and living in more permanent accommodation.

When King Herod anxiously meets the Magi in Matthew 2:2, he thinks his reign might be threatened by the child they've come to visit, so some time later, when they fail to report back to him, he orders all boys up to two years old slain, based on when the star first appeared. Assuming Herod would have had a margin for error, we can infer that Jesus would have been between one and two years old when the wise men worshipped Him.

3. JESUS WAS BORN IN A STABLE/BARN/CAVE

The Bible accounts of Jesus' birth only appear in the book of Matthew and Luke and neither mention a stable, barn or cave in connection with Christ's birth, but only a manger. Luke 2:7 says "She [Mary] wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no guest room available for them."

We assume it was a stable, barn or cave because that is where the animals who ate from the manger would have been kept, but Bible archaeology experts suggest Jesus could have been born outside (under) the normal living and guest quarters of a house.

The various misconceptions about Christ's birth illustrate the need to test everything we hear or assume against God's Word, no matter what the source. The Bible is the final authority.

Despite human misconceptions, the actual facts about Jesus are more marvellous than words can express. He was indeed born of a virgin in the city of Bethlehem exactly as prophesied hundreds of years before by the prophets Isaiah and Micah. Jesus was conceived of the Holy Spirit of God.

As the apostle John reveals, Jesus existed before the Creation of the world (John 1). The Son of God came in human form to die as a willing sacrifice in payment for the sins of mankind. He did this to provide eternal salvation as a free gift to all who will accept it and follow Him. •

Kicked out of home on Christmas Eve

Elliott Osowitt grew up in Los Angeles California in a strict Jewish home. He had no real knowledge of Jesus Christ and was not even permitted to speak His name.

"To me, God was a rule-making Darth Vader out there in outer space somewhere," he confessed in a talk on Livestream in 2013.

Elliott grew up with a "heavy hitter" dad, with whom he had no relationship and 'escaped' the violence at home at 17 years of age, for a different kind of violence in Vietnam. The army turned Elliott, in the course of three years, from a non-drinking, non-smoking good boy into a drug addicted, alcoholic womaniser.

Elliott and his wife Polly married when he was 19 and had two daughters. Throughout the early years of his marriage, Elliott admits he was not a good husband or father. He couldn't quit the drugs and, although he was never physically abusive, he admits he was a very angry man.

"I was always yelling and swearing and ranting and raving. Putting down my wife and putting down my children," he admits.

Then his wife developed breast cancer and had to undergo radical surgery and chemotherapy treatments.

At the same time their daughter, who had already been in trouble with the law on more than a dozen occasions, got arrested again for fraud and jailed for three years, leaving Elliott and his wife to raise her two children.

To get away from these overwhelming problems, Elliott quit his job as a medical assistant and took a job as a tour director for a British company.

He travelled a great deal of the time with a company that he called "Heathen Tours." The purpose of these tours was to provide any and every sort of "pleasure" the clientele



Elliott Osowitt spent many years as an angry, alcoholic drug addict before finding a Gideon's Bible in his hotel room.

could afford. He, too, participated in the immoral acts he offered to his clients.

"I got paid to take drugs and drink with people all over the world," Elliott says. "What a great job for an addict! But it got crazy and out of hand."

On Christmas Eve of 1996, Elliott returned home only to be told by Polly to leave the house for good.

"She came to the door crying, and hairless and sick-looking from the chemotherapy treatment, and told me, 'I know where you've been, who you've been with and what you've been doing. I

can't take it anymore. You're no good for this family. Go away. We're better off without you,'" Elliott remembers sadly.

Realising how far out of control his life had become, he decided to go to a motel and commit suicide with his gun. While in the room, he noticed an open Gideon Bible on top of the television. It made Elliott so angry, he cursed God and knocked the Bible off the television. He tried to kick it under the bed, but the bed-frame was solid and the Bible could not go under. The Bible was still open, and Elliott picked it up and read John 14:27, which says: "Peace I leave with you, my peace I give to you: not as the world gives it

give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled neither let it be afraid."

"I was 47 years old and I wept for the first time in my adult life," Elliott confesses. His dad had beat into him that "men don't cry" but he knows now that men who do not cry explode.

Elliott shut the Bible and called Polly to tell her goodbye.

Polly asked him to at least call her pastor. Though it was Christmas Eve, this pastor came and spent time with Elliott. He spent the next three days in the motel reading that Gideon Bible. On Sunday, he attended church with his wife where he got on his knees and asked Jesus to forgive him, free him of his addictions and help him to live right.

"The minute I asked Him, He forgave me," Elliott marvels. "My sins were cast away as far as the east is from the west. They were cast into the deepest part of the ocean."

"God is awesome to forgive – wives are another story," he shares ruefully.

Elliott went to stay with his dying mother for a while and contacted an organisation called Jews for Jesus, which helped him to learn more about how his new faith was compatible with and had its roots in his Jewish background.

After his mother's funeral, Elliott returned home and he and Polly began to work on their marriage.

He then got a job with a Christian touring company, which put him in contact with Christians from all persuasions and allowed him to encourage others with his story.

Polly has since fully recovered from cancer and worked two jobs so Elliott could complete Bible school. Elliott became a pastor in the year 2000. Today both his daughters are now happily married, raising his six grandchildren.

"My family is proof that God does miracles even today!" Elliott concludes. •

"I was 47 years old and I wept for the first time in my adult life"

Christmas fact

HANGING Christmas stocking on the fireplace on Christmas Eve in the hope that it will be filled with presents the next morning is a custom that goes back about 400 years.

It derived from the custom in Holland of children placing wooden shoes next to the hearth the night before the arrival of St Nicholas. The children would fill their shoes with straw and food for St Nicholas' donkey that carried the gifts. In exchange he would leave a small gift.

Stockings were substituted for the shoes in Britain, most of Europe, North America and Australia.

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Transformation of a rebel church kid

BY JONO SMITH

Classic Christian kid, me. All grace before meals and prayers before bed. Sunday School gold stars plentiful as the stars in the sky.

Good stock too. Anglican on Dad's side and Baptist on Mum's. Best of both worlds; me. Dad helped lead the church. Mum was theologically trained, a missionary, a chaplain... Good stock, that.

But then it happened. 17 happened. 17 and drifting. 17 and itching.

Mum, with Jesus for a decade by now, and Dad, still labouring to raise 4 kids on his own. They had done enough. 17 had come and it was all my fault.

Was the Prodigal Son a 17 year-old?

My Dad worked two jobs to send me to an elite private school. He scraped together every cent. He scraped every plate to make dinner stretch further. He didn't eat if we ate out. He didn't buy clothes between '89 and '99. You get the picture—I've already embarrassed him.

But I made sure it was worth all the sacrifice. I studied hard and was made dux of the school!

Not really. I wasted just about every day. I set up a couch in the 7-11 carpark near school and drank Slurpee syrup and smoked Marlboro Reds. I drank Foster's Extra between classes and drew little pictures on my uniform. I skipped class but swindled marks by having an elite-level ability to talk rubbish.

Now I was 18 and everyone had gone to Uni. Except me. Uni was for the studious and the cowardly. Instead I went to America. Land



Jono Smith had some strange experiences before coming back to the faith of his roots.

of the brave, and all that. I signed up to work at a Camp because they would give me a visa and meals and somewhere to sleep. It was a Salvation Army camp. The Salvos. The tin-shakers. The Red Shield Appeal. Good ol' Salvos.

I didn't know they were Christians. They didn't know I wasn't. We collided and I was fired.

Whatever. I'm just here for the longitude. I'm here because it's not

home. This is my "distant country" (Lk.15v13)

They ended up changing their mind. I could stay, but... But then all the Hell started.

"Grandad passed away." I hate when people say that. "Passed away"—like death isn't a consuming monster. Cyril Charles Smith. One of God's own. Best Man without the bad speech. And then the girl whose pictures were all over my cabin

dumped me.

That didn't take long. Week two. And then I got sick. Nearly died, they said. "Fever of unknown origin". And then I was healed. A 250 pound (114 Kilos) football player laid his mitts on me and prayed to his God and I got better all at once.

And then the campers started freaking-the-hell-out of me. Kids from the ghetto. Kids from the projects. Black kids who carried guns and had the faraway gaze of old men. They started getting really scared. Scared enough to cower and to cry. They said there were ghosts in the room. Dark shapes and weird movements.

Then a kid's bag caught fire and the unplugged radio in my room started playing the Top 40. I heard footsteps at night over the sound of my thumping heart. I've never been so scared. I didn't sleep with the light off for more than a year. Legit.

And then God just upped and saved me.

I had a Bible with me to make my Dad feel better. A family photo, an international calling card, a Bible. That'll stop him worrying. It was given to me when I was 13, and it

still had that 'just pressed' sheen. The gilt-edge pages were gleaming like it was 1993. I cracked it open and left it on my bedside table hoping it would ward off bad vibes, or ghosts, or Satan himself. It was my imitation leather amulet. My gilt-edged talisman. My holy juju.

"[Job 42] hit me like a ... lightning bolt of divine beauty"

My room-mate told me to read it. To read Job. The one about suffering. The one about Satan. The one about God's mysterious ways.

It took me a while. There's a lot to get through. But the last chapter changed everything. It stopped me in my tracks. It hit me

like a terrible lightning bolt of divine beauty. It made me fear God. And love Him.

I've underlined it in every Bible I've owned since. It made complete sense of everything then, and does to this today:

Then Job replied to the Lord: "I know that you can do all things; no purpose of yours can be thwarted. You asked, 'Who is this that obscures my plans without knowledge?' Surely I spoke of things I did not understand, things too wonderful for me to know. 'You said, 'Listen now, and I will speak; I will question you, and you shall answer me.' My ears had heard of you but now my eyes have seen you. Therefore I despise myself and repent in dust and ashes." •

This post originally published <http://www.jonosmith.com/>

Jono Smith is lead pastor of Caroline Springs Anglican in Melbourne's west, where he lives with his wife, Renée, and their two kids. He's striving to write more regularly at Dust & Ashes.

He's still doing miracles

Growing up with an alcoholic parent seemed normal to me. I could tell from the way Dad drove into the driveway after an afternoon at the pub what kind of night it would be. With my parents screaming and fighting, I felt like a child in a war zone.

My mother was too caught up in her own pain to see the damage being done to me. I knew my father loved me, but he loved his bottle better.

When I was five, Mum and I began attending church, after reading an ad in the paper. I didn't know it, but that was when God stepped into our lives.

Our family was isolated from extended family and I grew up in the environment of someone else's addiction. At eight, I was stealing my father's alcohol, stealing cigarettes at 12, at 15 I bought my own alcohol and was sneaking into nightclubs. At 16, I was smoking marijuana.

I thought that if God really loved me, he wouldn't have allowed all the bad things to happen in my life.

In my teens I married a lovely guy who was in the army. We travelled around for a number of years, and then moved back to my home town and all the mess inside me came tumbling out.

I sabotaged my marriage and moved again. I lied to my parents and friends, became involved with a bikie club, went into a new relationship and spiralled into drug and alcohol addiction.

In this cycle of selling drugs, taking drugs, and drinking every day, I went into dangerous situations, where people were dying of overdoses and being murdered.

Having lived with domestic violence and alcoholism my whole life, I didn't know I deserved to be treated better. I felt worthless and full of self-loathing, with no self-esteem or belief system to help me. But once in a while there would be a spark of hope that one day my life would change.

One such spark was becoming pregnant. I left the relationship many times, moved around for a while, and

a week before my son was born I was back in Townsville. With my beautiful son, I knew real love for the first time. I raised him on my own because I knew I couldn't return to that lifestyle.

A month before my son turned two, his father died of a massive heroin overdose. I hit the self-destruct button and old habits came back.

I started another relationship, and was soon in the same cycle of drugs, alcohol, abuse and violence.

I fell pregnant again and, although I hoped the relationship would survive, the abuse between us meant it couldn't.

Looking at my two little boys I'd cry because I didn't know how to make things better. One night, during an argument, my partner tried to choke me. I thought, "If this was to be my life, then I would rather be dead."

I don't know what made my partner stop, and that night I cried out to God to take away the severe stress headaches I'd been having. Almost immediately I felt the headache lift, peace washed over me and I just knew God was real.

I went to the church I had walked away from all those years ago, and felt like I had come home. I responded to an opportunity to give my life over to God and asked forgiveness for all that I'd done wrong.

The power of God touched me and I was delivered from my addictions to drugs and alcohol. I've not had a drink or touched drugs since.

I went through four years of counselling, completed a Diploma in Ministries and then heard God tell me to quit



my job. A friend mentioned going to university and I was accepted into a Bachelor of Social Work at James Cook University.

Almost 16 years into my journey with God, I am privileged to work for The Salvation Army.

I support every woman who walks through the doors of Grace Cottage—the Women's Out-Client Service of Townsville Recovery Services—who says she needs help and is willing to put in the hard work to work towards her recovery.

God loves us and cares for us. God's plans are always for our good and to restore dignity back into our lives. •

Used with permission. This article first appeared in the Salvation Army's magazine.

nudge
WITH KARL FAASE

New moral code

FOR generations in western democratic nations there was



an agreed moral code that has centred around basic Christian ethics, it is the foundation to our legal system. This has changed and a new moral code is emerging. Authors Lyons and Kinnaman write there are new guiding principles, here are four:

- One** - To find yourself, look within yourself
- Two** - People should not criticise someone else's life choices
- Three** - To be fulfilled in life, pursue the things you desire most
- Four** - Enjoying yourself is the highest goal in life

We are so used to these principles we don't notice them anymore. But we need to see that this is a massive shift. We have moved from looking to a creator God as our central motivation, to focussing on ourselves.

Humanity now worships itself.

A radical revolution

Over the last 18 months Josh Jacques' life has changed dramatically. Josh used to be your typical party boy, and got particularly wild and out of control after his aunt passed away.

"I did many things I regret," Josh shares about this low period in his life.

Besides getting drunk and experimenting with drugs and sex, he also suffered from low self-esteem and suicidal thoughts.

This lifestyle was very at odds with Josh's Christian upbringing. Despite giving his life to Jesus at the age of seven and attending church regularly, Josh often felt like he had never truly known God's presence.

"I always knew there was a God, His reality was a strong influence in my life but I never really felt His presence for myself," Josh shares. Just before year 12, Josh became a school prefect and attended a leader's camp where he shared how the death of his aunt had been a 'watershed moment' in his life. Afterwards he and his friend Kaleb walked around the campsite talking and then Kaleb asked if he could pray for him.

"As soon as Kaleb started praying I started

to weep," Josh remembers. "When he had finished I started to pray. I asked God to forgive me of my sins and the second I said the word amen, a wave of peace just came over me and it was there that I felt the true love of Christ."

Since then Josh has noticed changes in his attitudes towards things like church attendance and the idea of being baptised (immersed in water as a sign of his inward commitment), and in his habits. "God helps me to pray daily and read his Word," he says. Although he still goes through difficult times, he knows he has the strength, through God, to cope.

Josh feels he is also changing into a more loving, caring and faithful young man, who is willing and able to help people who are hurting.

He recently went on a mission trip to South Africa where he gladly shared his story with others.

"God has blessed me to see that, the rough patch in my life was all a part of His plan to help me come to know Him. I am no longer afraid of sharing my testimony for fear of judgement but am proud to say how my 'rough patch' has brought me to Christ," he declares happily. •



Josh Jacques

Together through trials

Fren and Carman may have had their share of setbacks, but they never gave up hope.

When Fren and Carman Lucas began dating in Chicago in 1988, Carman knew Fren struggled with a drug addiction. She just was not aware of the severity of it.

She says she did not really know what she was getting into.

"Nine months into the relationship, we had our first big incident," she says.

"We had a fight and he poured bleach on all my clothes, as well as my father's."

"I was really messed up at the time," Fren admits.

But he knew he had hope and a purpose. After suffering a stroke at a crack house, his 'friends' threw Fren's body out the door and left him to die. If the police had not raided the house at that very moment and taken him to a hospital, he would likely not have made it. To him, that was a sign he was meant to be here and there were better things in store for him.

Carman agreed.

"I always told Fren I saw something in him, something better," she says.

"It was just up to him when he would be ready to change."

Despite Carman's loyalty to Fren, they agreed to separate for a while so Fren could move to Memphis to be with his family.

But Fren got lost on the way. Stranded at the bus station downtown not knowing where to go, he was pointed in the direction of a "Mission" center for people in need.

In retrospect Fren says, "I know God pointed me in the Mission's direction".

Initially, Fren came to the Mission just to get some food and a place to sleep. But when he discovered that the Mission had a recovery program for men, he decided to enroll.

"Seeing the homeless people around downtown, God showed me where I could have been," Fren says. "And I wanted to prove I could do this."



Fren and Carman Lucas, with their son Ethan. Carman says: "I always told Fren I saw something in him, something better. It was just up to him when he would be ready to change."

Fren progressed quickly through the program, and his growing relationship with God changed him. As he talked with Carman on the phone every day she started to notice the difference.

"The more I talked with him, I could tell he was getting better," says Carman. "His attitude changed; he was less angry. And God was deal-

ing with me, too."

Things began coming together for Fren as he progressed through the program.

His broken relationship with his mother and sister were restored. Once he entered the transitional phase of the program, he got his driver's license restored for the first time in more than 20 years. And he obtained a job as well as a car.

Later, Fren asked Carman to move to Memphis so they could enroll in the Intact Family Ministry program, restore their family, and begin a new life.

"I was open to it," Carman says. "I wanted to be with him. It was a little scary, but the more I talked with him about

it, the more excited I became."

So Fren, Carman, and their eight year-old son, Ethan, started the program in February 2017. It's been a blessing for them to reunite, and a pleasant change of pace.

Fren and Carman now have a home of their own, and Fren runs his own car-detailing business.

Today, he knows that he is a blessed man. "I could go on and on," Fren says. "Every day I get blessed. God gives me what I need when I need it, not when I want it. He's brought me this far, I know He won't let me down." •

"Every day I get blessed"

Famous little towns

BY JOHN HUTCHINSON

I LOVE little towns – those out of the way places where everyone seems to know everybody. What a welcome sight they are when traveling the long, hot and dusty tracks of the outback!

Little towns sometimes rise to fame when they facilitate the birth of someone great. Auburn, a lower mid northern town of South Australia, was the birthplace of C.J. Dennis – one of Australia's great poets – and best known for his classic - 'The Sentimental Bloke.'

Just over the way from Auburn is Eudunda – the birth place of Colin Theile, an Australian author and educator who wrote children's stories – most notable being 'Storm Boy.'

Bethlehem was a tiny town, and little known until the birth of Jesus. Since then its popularity has grown – particularly at this time of year.

Interestingly, it was a town of expectation – waiting for the fulfillment of a prediction.

The incredible thing about the prediction was the improbability of Christ being born there. Joseph and Mary lived 150 km away and only journeyed to Bethlehem to register in a census – a long and tiring ordeal for an expectant mother who could have given birth at any inconvenient place on the way.

The prophet Micah, seven hundred years beforehand, had written: 'But you, Bethlehem ... though you are small among the towns of Judah, Yet out of you will come for me one who will be ruler over Israel, whose origins are from of old, even from everlasting.' (Micah 5:2-3)

The unlikely coincidence made Bethlehem one of the world's most famous little towns.

The accuracy of the prediction is something to ponder.

Added to its wonder was the setting itself – Mary and Joseph in a cowshed. There was 'no vacancy' at the inn. How incredible that the Son of God should be found, of all places, in a cow's food manger!!

For Christians, it is very special. The angelic announcer said: '...behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be for all people. For unto you is born this day in the town of David, a Saviour, who is Christ the Lord - You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger.' (Luke 2:12)

The shepherd's response: 'Let's go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened...'

Few of us can get to Bethlehem but we can read and hear about this unique and special event and be aware that the one born there was indeed, 'Christ the Lord.' •



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Caving in to creation

Carl Wieland interviews
Romanian geologist and
world cave authority
Dr Emil Silvestru

Transylvania—to Hollywood-soaked Western ears, the name of this Romanian province is likely to conjure up haunting images of swirling mists, vampire bats, and black-caped aristocrats with thick Bela Lugosi accents.

Actually, the Count Dracula of Bram Stoker's original novel probably derived from a real figure of Romanian history, the mid-fifteenth century Prince Vlad. His father was Vlad Dracul¹, so he was named Vlad Dracula (son of Dracul). Vlad junior earned his nickname, "Vlad the Impaler", by his habit of thrusting people alive onto sharpened stakes.²

Sadly, Romania is still recovering from a more recent bout of despotic evil, perpetrated by the notorious communist dictator Nicolae Ceaușescu (1918–1989) prior to his overthrow in December 1989.

In a small Transylvanian town in 1954, Emil Silvestru was born into this shadowy post-war world of repression, fear and communist secret police. From the age of 12, he began to be fascinated by the numerous caves and other karst³ features in his region, which naturally led to the study of geology.

In 1979, after five years' study, he was awarded a Master's degree⁴ from the state university in Transylvania's capital, Cluj. During his student years, he had already begun to publish research papers on 'karstology'⁵, an interdisciplinary study of the limestone region and its features which had captured his youthful attention.

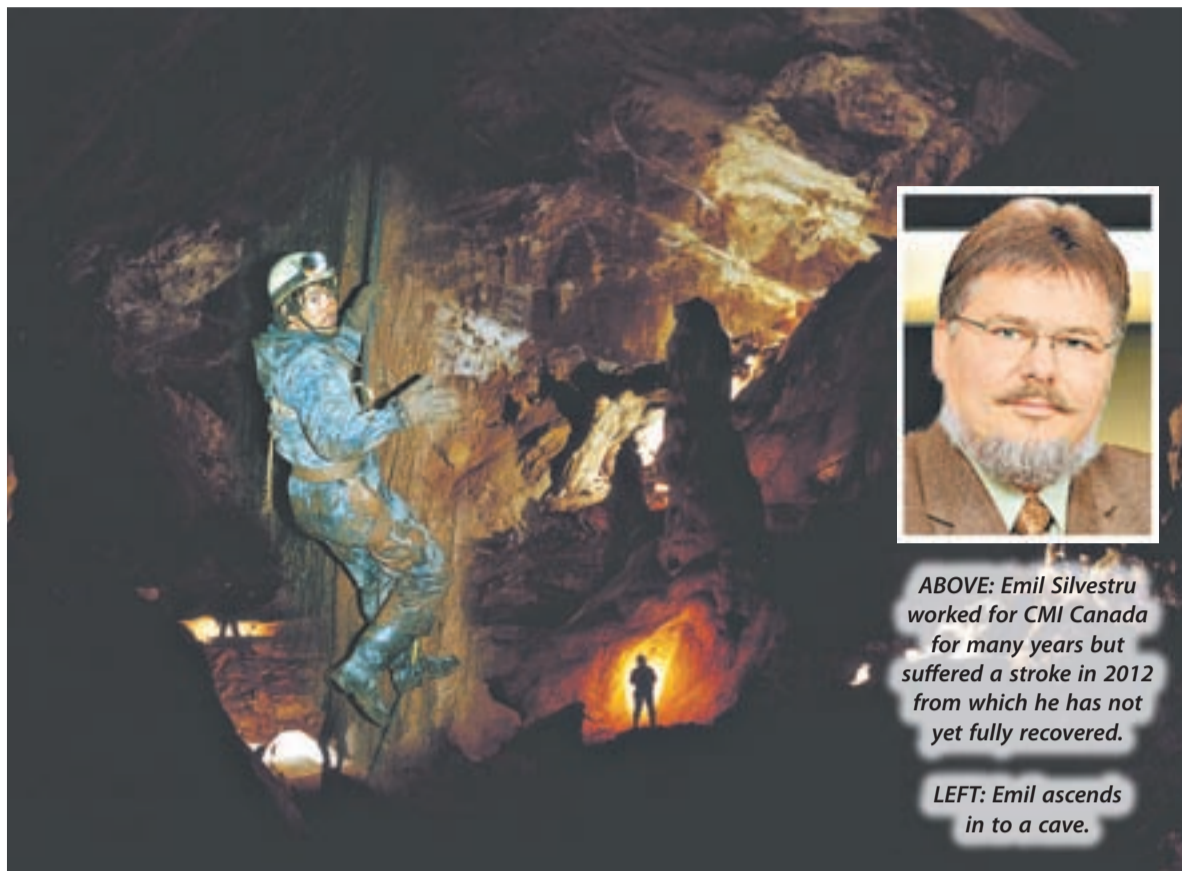
Following graduation, he spent the next seven years in geological exploration in northern Romania. He gained experience in the geology of certain types of ore bodies, and discovered several deposits amounting to about a million tonnes of lead/zinc ore.

In this time, he says, "I continued my speleological [cave] investigations, discovering karst processes during the pneumatolytic⁶ phase—a world first—and investigating many hydrothermal [hot water] caves as well."

In 1986, he began work at the Emil Racovitza Speleological Institute (the world's first, founded in 1920).

His wife Flory was a Baptist believer for many years before he was. Emil says, "This brought nothing but problems from the communist regime. I had already begun to doubt the atheist dogma I had been taught. It was through my scientific work that I came to realise that the order, beauty, and sense of fine humour with which the world is built cannot possibly come from chaos and randomness—I was sure there was a Designer.

"And for a long time, that was enough for my inflated ego. I recall



ABOVE: Emil Silvestru worked for CMI Canada for many years but suffered a stroke in 2012 from which he has not yet fully recovered.

LEFT: Emil ascends in to a cave.

asking Flory, who was reading her Bible regularly, when she was going to finish 'that book'. I believe it was then that God began to work on me."

SECRET MEETINGS

Emil said that even though watching Christian videos was illegal, it was very popular in a country groaning under communist repression. When Zefirelli's film *Jesus of Nazareth* arrived in Romania on video, "secretly seeing it became a noble act of resistance to the regime".

"So I suddenly found myself going to remote places, sometimes isolated mountainous areas, often in poor peasants' homes, invited to help show the film. Sometimes, up to three films in one night - *The Ten Commandments* and *Quo Vadis* in addition. We had no dubbing facilities, so I had to do the translation live, 47 times in all. After a while I was very familiar with the visuals,

and I preferred facing the audience while translating. I couldn't help but notice the profound impact all this was having on people."

With so many meetings, there was a high risk of being caught by the secret police. Just a month after Emil transferred to a new job, one such showing was raided, and the equipment he had used was confiscated.

MIRACULOUS ESCAPES

God's providential care was also evident in what Emil calls "several opportunities to leave this world". In one, he was climbing a rock wall and fell, seemingly to his death. Yet even after a freefall of 20 m, his fall was somehow stopped by his partner. In another, a huge rock falling 100 m was heading straight for him down a wall when it split into many pieces, none of which hit him or his colleagues.

Perhaps the most memorable was when Emil was wading through a narrow gorge. Massive boulders began falling from the top of the

gorge, about 400 m directly above him. He says, "It is quite hypnotic to watch such an event from below. With the walls less than 4 m apart, and me waist deep in water, there was very little chance I would survive. Yet, it happened."

Emil says, "All this made me understand that it was unfair to attribute my survival to my good reflexes ... as a scientist I had to accept that 'somebody upstairs' loved me. I started attending my wife's church regularly, and on one apparently ordinary evening in church, I accepted the Lord Jesus Christ as my Saviour. The truth is that the long years of my wife's silent prayers for me were answered. Without her, I would still be wandering around on quicksand."

CHRISTIANITY AND SCIENCE

"Once I became a Christian," Emil says, "I knew I had to 'tune up' my scientific knowledge with the Scriptures." He briefly tried to maintain belief in an old earth via a 'gap' theory, but this was an unsatisfactory compromise for a thinker like himself. He says, "Although philosophically and ethically I accepted a literal Genesis from my conversion, at first I was unable to match it with my 'technical' side."

However, email discussions with qualified creationist geologists, creationist books, *Creation* magazine and especially the *Journal of Creation* helped him realise what he calls 'two essential things':

- Given exceptional conditions (e.g. the Genesis Flood) geological processes that take an extremely long time today can be unimaginably accelerated.
- The Genesis Flood was global, not regional.

He says, "I had heard this before, but was unable to fully grasp its significance at first. It involved an incredible 'brainquake' in changing my scientific paradigm.

"These factors were immensely important in my conversion and my Christian life. I am now convinced of six-day, literal, recent, Genesis creation. That doesn't mean that there are not still some unanswered problems,

but researching such issues is what being a scientist is all about."

Along with a few academics and others, Emil was involved in the embryonic creationist movement in Romania, as well as in translating creation books.⁷

In January 2002 he immigrated to Canada with his wife and two daughters to do research, lecturing and writing for CMI.

Sadly, in 2012 Emil suffered a stroke from which he has not yet fully recovered.

References and notes

1. Because he was a knight of the order of the dragon (= draco in Latin, drac in ancient Romanian).
2. Dr Silvestru told us that, "According to our history, he constantly impaled thieves and pick-pockets. Therefore, foreign visitors were amazed to find out that a purse full of gold left in the middle of the road would stay there for days, as nobody dared risk a 'high rise'."
3. Karst is a term which initially referred to barren regions of mostly limestone and dolomite, noted for spectacular and distinctive landforms, and with substantial underground drainage features—caves, underground rivers, etc. It has come to refer more to the entire geosystem, above and below ground—see also note 5.
4. This is the closest equivalent in western terms—it included a 60-page dissertation.
5. This discipline approaches karst as a geosystem. Dr Silvestru says, "Karstology therefore deals with all features (above and below ground, physical and biological) related to limestones, including, for example, the sources of most of the rivers reaching the limestones."
6. Pneumatolysis: the alteration of rock or crystallization of minerals by gaseous emanations from the late stages of a solidifying magma.

Believe it or not

Giving ear to imaginary voices

BY CREATION MINISTRIES INTERNATIONAL

A NEW global movement among professional clinical psychologists is taking a very different approach to treating patients who 'hear' phantom voices. Instead of trying to silence or ignore the voices, patients are being encouraged to 'engage' with the voice—whether perceived as benign or malevolent.



Rufus May, a UK clinical psychologist who himself is part of the four percent of the population that hears voices, was recently treating a patient when one of her voices, called 'Top Dog', asked for its own Facebook page.

When they granted its request, Top Dog "went on a forum for other people who hear voices and said, 'Hey you lot, I'm a voice. Is anybody else out there a voice and they want to share ideas with me?'" Now May says there's a whole community of voices online, who talk to each other from different countries around the world.

Many older readers would no doubt have once regarded such overt encouragement of the 'voices' as unthinkable in any western ('Christian') country a few years ago. However, it's right in line with the adage (often attributed to G.K. Chesterton) that if people stop believing in the God of the Bible, they don't then believe in nothing, they'll believe in *anything*—see www.creation.com/superstition.

Why it's healthy to give imaginary voices their own Facebook pages, abc.net.au, 5 December 2013.

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CREATION MINISTRIES INTERNATIONAL

Purpose restored

Christopher Selvanayagam's life was spiralling out of control and he was gripped by fear, lust and worry.

Born in Sri Lanka into a Christian home, Christopher felt drawn to God, but never took that personal step of commitment until he and his family migrated to Australia in 1986.

They started to attend a church in Adelaide and in the summer of 1987 had a visiting speaker. "The speaker invited people to respond to the message he had spoken, and I responded by accepting Jesus Christ as my Lord and Saviour," says Christopher.

However, sometime after he became a Christian, Christopher made some wrong decisions that had a big impact on his new life. "I started moving with the wrong sort of friends," he admits, "which led to me living a double life and to my life spiralling out of control.

"I found myself in bondage to the fear of evil, and lust. The fear of evil caused my mind to be constantly engaged in thinking and worrying.

In addition I was harassed daily with wrong sexual thoughts, and thoughts that brought into question my relationship with God.

"Everything became so difficult to do. Even doing the normal simple things in life, like work and sleeping was a struggle, as I found myself gripped by fear.

"I realised the enemy, Satan, had a grip on my life and I was imprisoned by him. I was merely existing rather than living life the way God meant me to. I could not see any way out of my situation," he acknowledges.

A Bible verse in Psalm 142 verse 7 spoke to him during this time which says, 'Bring my soul out of prison, that I may praise Your name; The righteous shall surround me, for You shall deal bountifully with me.'

Christopher then experienced God intervening in his life to bring him out of his dilemma. "In December 2003 God miraculously took me to

Christopher and his wife celebrate the healing that has come about in his life.



Perth to meet my soulmate by providing me with a job with all expenses paid.

"Then in 2007, through my wife, God gave me a promise from his Word, the Bible, from the Book of Amos chapter 9 and verse 11 to restore me back into a right relation-

ship with him. The verse says, 'On that day I will raise up The tabernacle of David, which has fallen down, and repair its damages; I will raise up its ruins and rebuild it as in the days of old.'

Christopher took that as a promise that God would restore his Christian

life to where it should have been. In July 2010 he was supernaturally healed of a problem he had with his neck. Then in 2011 God began to do the work of restoration in Christopher's life that God had promised to do.

"He began the mighty work of restoring my spiritual life and fulfilling the promise He had given me in 2007. From this point onwards, I would often wake up in the morning and clearly notice a change had taken place on the inside. I distinctly felt like a new man.

Once again a Bible verse brought comfort to Christopher, from Psalm 23 verse 3; 'He restores my soul: He leads me in paths of righteousness for His name's sake.'

"The bondage to fear, evil, worry, lust and mental torment were taken out of my mind and life day by day. The constant harassment of sexual thoughts were suddenly stopped in just one day.

I began to experience great freedom, peace and strength in my inner being. Once again God started to become real to me and I had a hunger to know Him more deeply," says Christopher.

Another verse that spoke to him was Psalm 40 verse 2; 'He also brought me up out of the horrible pit, out of the miry clay, and set my feet upon a rock, and established my steps.'

Christopher's inward transformation soon led to outward changes. "At the time I was working in engineering as a project manager," he says. "I felt an unmistakable boldness and an unstoppable desire to serve God. This led to me leaving my job to pursue what God had for me to do.

"In 2014 God gave me a vision for a ministry to men. Then in June 2016 Young Men in Christ was born, with the goal to enable men to become spiritually strong, with the strength to live a victorious Christian life in God. It is a work for all men from all walks of life, whether they be professionals, students, ex-prisoners or drug addicts.

"I cannot put into words what God has done for me, or have the words to thank God for all that He has done. I do know that what God did for me He can do for you also," says Christopher joyfully. ●

His website is www.youngmeninchrist.org

EX-STRIPPER BRINGS HOPE TO CLUBS

Jaime Hindman wants to rescue strippers from the horrifying abuse she also suffered

Feeling unloved by her broken family led Jaime Hindman to become a nightclub stripper, but now love motivates her to reach out to strippers whose experiences of rape and sexual assault have often lead to drug addictions.

Backed by a team of volunteers, many from a similar background, Jaime visits strip clubs in Orange County, California to offer the strippers gift bags of makeup, candy and Christian tracts.

"Who is going to go back and love these girls? Someone's gotta do it," Jaime said in an interview with USA's ABC News.

Seeing as she was, as her website notes, "broken, lost, neglected and abused" Jaime says the dancers often appreciate being cared about by someone who has been where they are.

She took up stripping at age 19 as her way of seeking love in the wake of her parent's divorce.

Just a child when her parents split up, Jaime says on her website Divineoc.com that her wounded and emotionally distant mother developed a "devastating personality disorder" and began telling lies about her father.

"I was lead to believe my dad was a selfish deadbeat, who did not care that his children feared being without food and shelter."

These lies, Jaime says, "ultimately led me to feel so badly about myself that I started to self-destruct.

"My life began to spiral out of control once I entered this very dark world. I was raped and sexually assaulted multiple times. I chose abusive boyfriends. All the money I

made in that industry was spent on either drugs to survive or given away because I felt the money was dirty and I didn't deserve it."

Her ministry, Divine, cites a revealing statistic that 73% of prostitutes have been raped more than five times and more than 60% of women in the industry were sexually abused in their childhood.

"I stayed in the industry for three years," Jaime says, "feeling hopeless, numb and wanting to die until God came in to that strip club and changed my life."

Jaime does not reveal how God intervened, but says she put her trust in Jesus Christ, after she learned that He died so her sins could be forgiven.

"Thankfully," she shares, "today I know I have a God that loves me so much that He would come down [from heaven] and rescue me from myself.

"He [Jesus Christ] taught me how to love myself because He loved me."

Not everything was healed instantly though, as she admitted to the ABC: "I lived in shame of [my former lifestyle], for 10 years, and it still destroyed me, because I had no one to talk to about it, and I felt like people would be disgusted by who and what I was in the past."

Through her church and Christian friends, who she calls her spiritual family, Jaime says she was shown "the healthy love I desired so much growing up", which enabled her to heal.

The memories of her childhood have also been healed.

"God has allowed me to see the truth with my parents," she shares. "He has helped me to better under-



These women "are valued, worthy, cherished and beautifully made", says Jaime Hindman.

stand the stories about my dad that were actually just lies from a wounded ex-wife."

Because she knows Jesus Christ, Jaime says she knows "unconditional love and an endless amount of hope".

Through her Divine ministry, Jaime says on her website that she is going back to the strip clubs to bring "hope, love, and encouragement to the women who are still lost and hurting in that dark world" and to show these women that "they are valued, worthy, cherished and beauti-

fully made".

Jaime hopes they will know "the amazing freedom that only God can bring".

"As He heals all of the pain and despair I have experienced, He teaches me that all the pain in my life will never be wasted, and He will use it for good to help others," she adds.

One of her favorite verses is 2 Corinthians 5, verse 17: "Anyone who belongs to Christ has become a new person. The old life is gone; a new life has begun!" ●

Building Better Marriages

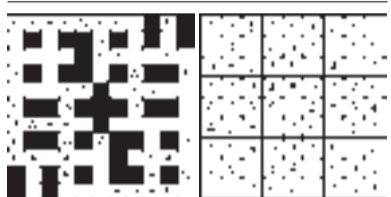
LIGHT IN THE DARKNESS

BY ROB FURLONG

THE *Voyage of the Dawn Treader* by C.S. Lewis describes the ship sailing into an unearthly, inky blackness and rescuing a sailor who had been lost in the darkness for years. Taking the man onboard, the crew begins to fear that they too, will be unable to find their way out.

Then Lucy breathes a prayer to Aslan that leads to this:

"Look!" cried Rynelf's voice hoarsely from the bows. There was a tiny speck of light ahead, and while they watched a broad beam of light fell from it upon the ship. It did not alter the surrounding darkness, but the whole ship was lit up as if by searchlight. Caspian blinked, stared round, saw the faces of his companions all with wild, fixed expressions.



Everyone was staring in the same direction: behind everyone lay his black, sharply-edged shadow.

Lucy looked along the beam and presently saw something in it. At first it looked like a cross, then it looked like an aeroplane, then it looked like a kite, and at last with a whirring of wings it was right overhead and was an albatross. It circled three times round the mast and then perched for an instant on the crest of the gilded dragon at the prow. It called out in a strong sweet voice what seemed to be words though no one understood them. After that it spread its wings, rose, and began to fly slowly ahead, bearing a little to starboard. Drinian steered after it not doubting that it offered good guidance. But no one except Lucy knew that as it circled the mast it had whispered to her, "Courage, dear heart," and the voice, she felt sure, was Aslan's, and with the voice a delicious smell breathed in her face.

In a few moments the darkness turned into a greyness ahead, and then, almost before they dared

to begin hoping, they had shot out into the sunlight and were in the warm, blue world again. And all at once everybody realized that there was nothing to be afraid of and never had been. They blinked their eyes and looked about them. The brightness of the ship herself astonished them: they had half expected to find that the darkness would cling to the white and the green and the gold in the form of some grime or scum. And then first one, and then another, began laughing.

There are times when our lives are filled with personal darkness.

It may be the darkness of a marriage breakup. It could be the darkness of depression or an unexpected diagnosis that has left you feeling as if you are groping around blindly, looking for hope and finding none.

Perhaps you are struggling with your personal failures.

Or it could be that feeling that has dogged you for years, that sense that no matter how hard you try, you just never quite measure up – "I will never be good enough" you conclude.

And our personal world of darkness often feels particularly pronounced at



Christmas time.

"Everyone else seems to be enjoying themselves, if only I could too!"

Centuries ago Isaiah made a wonderful promise concerning what God would do about our personal darkness:

"Nevertheless, that time of darkness and despair will not go on forever... there will be a time in the future when...the people who walk in darkness will see a great light. For those who live in a land of deep darkness, a light will shine."

He described what God did on that first Christmas – He sent His Son Jesus to shine the light of His love and grace into the world's – and our – darkness.

No matter how dark your world is right now, God wants you to know how much He loves you. So why not open the door of your heart and let the light of His love shine in? •

Lessons from a sausage dog (Part 10)

BY JODY BENNETT

AS I was making lunch to bring to work today, Carrie, our sausage dog, sat at my feet in the kitchen wanting a bit of everything. A little square of cheese, a slice of cucumber, a wedge of capsicum, a bit of sausage.

It doesn't matter what I am eating, she wants some. I imagine her thinking, "If it is good enough for my master, it is good enough for me." (This may be, of course, why she is a little overweight!)

Carrie thinks this way about the places I frequent too – the couch, the double bed, the hammock, and the driver's seat in the car! If that is where I am, that is where she wants to be; whatever I am doing she wants to be close by.



If we go to the dog beach or swim in the pool she will only get in the water if I do; if the children ever want to find me they look for Carrie, because she is usually right beside me.

In the famous Bible story in Luke 2 of 12-year-old Jesus wondering away from his family and being found in the temple, he says to his parents, "Why were you searching for me? Didn't you know I had to be in my Father's house?"

In another place Jesus said: "Very truly I tell you, the Son can do nothing by Himself; He can do only what He sees his Father doing, because whatever the Father does the Son also does." John 5:19

Jesus, although He Himself is God in human form, lived as an example to us of the relationship we should have with God.

The Apostle Paul told his readers to follow his example as he followed Christ's (1 Corinthians 11:1).

Like Carrie, my motto should be "If it's good enough for my Master, it's good enough for me."

If Jesus suffered, it is no surprise that I do too; if Jesus forgave His enemies, so should I; if Jesus approved or disapproved of something, I should too; and whenever people are looking for Jesus, they should be able to find Him through my example.

My life should be lived at the feet of my Master and my gaze focused upwards in adoration, looking to where we go next, listening for His command. •

How can I become a Christian?

Anyone can gain the eternal life offered though Jesus Christ

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

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

Here is an example of how you can pray.

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

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

AS A NEXT STEP:

If you prayed the above prayer, tick this box

I have prayed this prayer.

Please send me:

- Bible
- Some 'starting off' literature
- Information on a helpful church

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

I would like to think about this.

Please send me:

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

** Please tick and write clearly **

Name _____

Address _____

Phone _____

Age and occupation (it helps) _____

Challenge Literature Fellowship
PO Box 978, Cloverdale WA 6985

Fax (08) 9453 3006 or email
info@challengenews.org

All overseas enquiries are referred onto someone in their own country

There's an APP for that ...

Festive Christmas apps

WITH Christmas just around the corner one can feel overwhelmed with how many things need to get done. Why not use your phone to help you make the season fun again with these festive



apps?
CHRISTMAS RINGTONES FOR ANDROID (BY JRJ UNLIMITED)

Start with some festive music by

updating your ringtone to one of 45 cheerful tunes that will fill you with holiday spirit and drive those around you nuts!

CHRISTMAS COUNTDOWN

Then add one of several Christmas countdown apps to help keep on-task for gift shopping and fill you with a sense of anticipation. Many of these include a holiday wallpaper that will remind you of Christmas everytime you look at your phone.

25 DAYS OF CHRISTMAS FOR IPHONE

This is a free app that includes daily mini games and discounts on other apps as fun way to count down until the big day.

GIFTSTER

If you never know what to get people for Christmas, Giftster gift registry is a great tool that allows your friends and family to sign up to a group and make wish lists of what they want, ranking their choices for others to see.

It has space for clothing sizes, general preferences, things not to buy, where to get the gift and for a photo or website address to make finding the gift a cinch.



Each member of the group can mark what they have already bought, to

avoid doubling up. The app is free in both the App Store and Play Store. You can also use it to make private lists of what you have bought so far or things you might like in future.

With it's easy to understand format this app is perfect for all gift giving occasions. Happy shopping!

GREETING CARD MAKER

Send beautiful Christmas e-cards to remind your loved ones you are thinking of them. The best one we found in the Play Store was this free one,

which is highly customisable, allowing you to add text, drawings and photos to one of many backgrounds. You can freely add-on bundles for different occasions but can also upgrade to get rid of the adds. Cards can be sent by Messenger, WhatsApp, email or SMS.

PERFECT CHRISTMAS DINNER / CHRISTMAS DINNER

Having the whole family over but don't know what to cook for the perfect Christmas dinner? Well, there's an app for that too!

For Android users the Christmas Dinner app is free and offers a full range of recipes for appetisers and snacks through to main meals and desserts.

The app also offers Christmas recipes for vegetarian, gluten free and health conscious diets, as well as food from various ethnicities.

For both Android and iOS the free Perfect Christmas Dinner app offers over 25 step-by-step video tutorials on all of your Christmas favourites like turkey with all the trimmings and delicious fruit mince pies.

With all these great apps, Christmas is sorted! •





Out of darkness

Former AFL Richmond listed player Chris Yarran shares in a Youtube interview how he tried to drown out the darkness in his life with footy and success, but how that darkness eventually destroyed all he had achieved.

Chris grew up in an unstable home in WA. At the age of nine his father was incarcerated for 18 years. His mother tried her best to raise five kids alone, moving around from town to town to avoid violent relationships. The children kept having to change schools, and struggled to make friends.

It was not unusual to witness and be involved in fights every weekend. "Some of the memories I will never forget are seeing my own mother being beaten in front of me," Chris recalls. "Football was my escape."

He says football was something he could gain respect in. "I grew up resenting my surroundings and prepared to do anything to get away from them. Football was my ticket."

In seven years Chris went from being a kid who had nothing to being on top of the world.

"I had it all but it was only treating the symptoms of my unhappiness," he confesses.

"My eighth year was when my life began to fall apart. I was introduced to methamphetamines by a family member."

Chris had despised drugs up to that point and remembers thinking before he took the ice "this will either just be a good night, or this will destroy me".

"It ruined me," he admits frankly. "It destroyed my relationships, my career, my finances, and my health – both physical and mental. I went from being a fit young athlete to being a slob."

"Once I no longer got a kick from smoking ice, I started injecting it."

Chris tried every avenue of help the professionals recommended – counselling, a psychiatrist and rehab – once spending four weeks in rehab at \$1000/night only to shoot up on the day he got out.

Chris's football career ended and he moved back to Perth where he realised he had hit rock bottom and lost everything. Then he met a pastor called Steve who invited him to a special series of meetings at church. Chris decided he had tried every human resource available; he needed something supernatural to fix him.

Although he had grown up knowing God was real, Chris had never known who God was. That day, the

20th of February 2017, Chris went down to the front of the church to pray a prayer asking God to forgive him for his sins and to become ruler of his life.

"I met God," Chris says simply. "For so long I had tried to overcome the darkness inside me but the moment I accepted Jesus Christ as my Lord and Saviour, everything changed. I felt like a new person. The darkness was gone, replaced with a light that gives me the joy and peace I hadn't found in my career or drugs. I no longer had a desire for drugs, drink, partying and gambling. It was like I was made an entirely new person from the inside out. I was born again."

To those who identify with his upbringing and experiences, Chris says "You don't have to live a life in depression and hopelessness. There is hope. You don't have to go through this alone because Jesus Christ loves you. The Bible says in John 3:16 that God loved the world so much that He gave His one and only Son that whosoever believes in Him will not die but have life everlasting.

"If you surrender your life to Jesus Christ, I am 110% certain He can change you like He changed me."

ABOVE: Chris Yarran of the Richmond Tigers marks the ball during a media session in Melbourne last year. (Photo Michael Dodge/Getty Images)

RIGHT: Chris passes the ball during a session in 2015. (Photo Scott Barbour/Getty Images)

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