

WHAT ARE WE WAITING FOR?



A little boy in Tarawa in the Pacific Islands receives a gift from Operation Christmas Child (OCC). For some of these children they have been waiting their whole lives to get a Christmas present. OCC partners with local churches in more than 100 countries to provide children with gift-filled shoeboxes and bring them the Good News of Jesus Christ. In 2018, Australia and New Zealand collected 293,852 shoeboxes. Globally, 10.6 million shoeboxes were collected! Find out more at www.operationchristmaschild.org.au Photo: Supplied.

“I JUST CAN’T WAIT TO OPEN MY PRESENTS!” Isn’t that the cry of kids (and some adults!) at Christmas? The anticipation of seeing secret wrapped presents under the tree is often even more exciting than actually finding out what is inside them! We wait with expectation, for weeks, to find out what we will get and to taste the delicious food we specially prepare.

Waiting is hard. Not for Christmas morning, maybe. But life is full of other waiting times; we wait for a diagnosis, for true love, to recover from an illness, to stop hurting, to have children, to get work or to retire.

We might pray for patience, but learning it is difficult. Especially in our “instant” age where almost everything is available at the press of a button from microwaved food and instant coffee, to almost any information and entertainment.

A recent study I read about had people wait alone in a room, without books or phones, for 15 minutes. Some of them got so bored that after 6 minutes they chose to give themselves electric shocks rather than have nothing to do!*

The Jewish people had been waiting a long time for their Messiah when, on the original Christmas morning, Jesus was born in Bethlehem. His birth had been foretold by the prophets for hundreds of years.

From the first time that humans disobeyed God in the Garden of Eden and allowed sin to enter the world, God promised that a son of Man would crush the serpent’s head ie. that evil would be ultimately defeated.

However, for the 400 years before Jesus’ birth there had been no word from the prophets, no new message to the people, just silence from God until John the Baptist came proclaiming, “there is One who comes after me whose sandal I am not fit to untie”.

Unfortunately, the Jews had such a fixed idea of what their Messiah would be like – a conquering king who would rescue them from the Romans – that they failed to see the gift that God had given them in

the suffering Galilean who came to conquer the greater enemy of their sin.

Today, those who have embraced Jesus as the promised Christ (anointed one), are still waiting because when - after dying to pay for humanity’s sins and rising from the dead - He ascended to heaven, the angels promised He would return the same way.

This time Jesus will indeed be a conquering king who will establish His throne on earth and rule over all creation, putting an end to death and wickedness once and for all.

This second coming of Jesus has been eagerly awaited for nearly two thousand years now. No one knows when it will occur and many convincing predictions have been proved foolish. It is hard to wait in hope while disasters strike, evil increases and injustice goes unchecked. In fact the Bible says that not just people, but all creation groans waiting for the perfection of God’s rule to be restored.

So this Christmas morning, as you wait to open presents, wait for Christmas dinner to be ready or wait for your guests to leave so that you can take a nap – remember that God is waiting too. Waiting for us all to turn to Him and make Him our king, so that when He returns in bodily form to Earth it will be to reward us and not to punish us, to give us the greatest gift of all – eternal life with Him.

FROM JAIL TO JOSEPH

Shaun Crossley has gone from an alcoholic who served several jail sentences to an engineer who serves God, acting in nativity plays and passion plays.

Shaun, from Bolton in the UK, played baby Jesus’ dad, Joseph, in a shopping centre nativity the last couple of Christmases, as part of a team of actors.

But the 58-year-old might still be serving time inside today – or might have died from alcoholism – if he hadn’t sought help from the baby in the manager who grew up to be the Saviour of the world.

Shaun told *Bolton News*: “I was brought up as someone who went to church regularly until I was 16 or 17 and then I went off the rails. It dragged me to the depths of alcoholism and I was in those depths for more than 20 years, during which time I served prison sentences totalling 18 months and came close to even longer sentences.

“The last time I was sent to prison...I appealed against the six-month sentence not being long enough! The reason was I knew there was no after-care with a short sentence so I was happy for it to be changed to two years’ probation, on condition that I addressed my issues with violence and drinking.”

But it wasn’t probation that turned Shaun’s life around: “I had nowhere else to turn apart from the church...I knew that I was not in control and turned my life over to someone bigger than myself and that was God. I had no choice because I could not make it on my own. I had always had that belief, from my upbringing, but I had never tapped into it.

“I felt at ease going back to church, even after the ten to fifteen-year break, and have now been sober for over ten years, whereas previously I had never managed longer than ten months sobriety.



Shaun Crossley dressed up to play Joseph in a nativity pageant.

BACK PAGE

FIGHT OF HIS LIFE

ANDY FLUTE

A gift for the whole world

BY RICK LEWERS

IF you were to give a gift that would be suitable for the whole world, what would you give? Books? But some people are illiterate. Food perhaps? Internationally, diet is so very diverse. What about clothing? Climates will create some dilemma of choice here. I know, money? A first world answer if ever there was one. And what would you give to the man or the woman who has everything when you know that everything a man or a woman has is proving not enough.

The only answer I can come up with is "life". But not just life as we know it and contribute to it.

The real gift would be to give life that death cannot snuff out or reduce to a sentence between two full stops. The gift of an eternal life that promises a future with the loved ones we have shared this life with. An eternal life that, with age, does not look like a journey of diminishment but offers something more expansive for our future. If someone could give that gift then we would not be in want.

There is a line in the 23rd Psalm that sounds old fashioned but is eternally relevant. The person who has God as his Shepherd can say, "Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death I will fear no evil." It's a great line because it speaks of a Shepherd who takes his people "through" death such that you are not left there. It



speaks of a Shepherd who reduces death to a "shadow".

You may encounter death but only be touched by its shadow. And the Psalmist says this is the gift the Shepherd offers the whole world. It was Jesus who said, "I am the good Shepherd and I lay down my life for the sheep."

He said, "I have come that you may have life and have it more abundantly." The certainty of death robs us of so much and corrupts us in so many ways but what a gift life is, suitable for all the world! And what a Giver is the one who can reduce death to a shadow and not abandon us to it.

We know this is not just "pie in the

sky when I die" stuff because it offers us comfort, hope and perspective now. But having said that, it IS pie in the sky when I die and that's a comfort for our future.

It's a magnificent gift but in truth the gift is more than life, it's the gift of being in the care of God who

gives life. But to receive such a gift requires faith. Faith is simply another word for trust.

Like all things not seen or yet to be experienced, any gift of life beyond death must be received by faith. Of course, if we rubbish faith then the future holds no hope. The things we hope for are always unseen and require us to live by faith toward them.

If you can't put faith in another person, you will forever be alone. If you can't find faith in yourself then life will forever lack accomplishment. And if you can't put faith in God then death has no answer.

History records again and again that Jesus Christ who died for us and rose from the dead has led, guided and refreshed the souls of so many during this great and sometimes grievous journey we call life.

With such a Shepherd I am not surprised the 23rd Psalm ends like this, "Surely, Your goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever."

SO, WHAT'S NEW?

BY ALAN BAILEY

A LOT of new things come into our homes around Christmas. Then a new year dawns. Very soon, there will be a new decade. Very often, the new brings with it some new joys, new experiences, new faces—and new problems.

When each day dawns, we look to the sky to see the weather. We read the paper to find out what's new. We watch ads on TV and view the latest products being marketed. In our hearts we hope for some new thing to make our lives more enjoyable and interesting.

A COMMON EXPERIENCE

Have you ever looked forward to a new start? A new job, or maybe a move to another house in another district? Perhaps to a new school or college? Hopes are high for everything to take on a new colour, for plans to work out, for conditions to make life just wonderful. But somehow, it fails to come together. Strangely, the old creeps back. The problems haven't gone away; they slip out from the shadows and stare at us again.

So often this is the case with marriage. The second one won't be like the first. Not with this new person. He/she is just the right one—the one I wish I'd met earlier in life. Things go well for a while, but then some familiar scenes are being re-enacted. Old arguments, stand-offs and hurtful misunderstandings occur much to the surprise of both parties. Figures show that a bigger proportion of second marriages break up than first ones.

WE ARE HARD TO CONVINCE

It seems to be written in our hearts that if only some changes could be made to our environment, our happiness would be guaranteed. Some more favourable circumstances and more favourable relationships would make all the difference. So we

look for a sudden fortune, a lottery win, a new romance – some surprising new door of opportunity. But even when they come, we eventually seem to be faced with the same kind of emptiness we wanted to escape. The goods are not delivered—not entirely anyway.

Perhaps this is why we read of so many celebrities who admit to being unfulfilled. They have reached some point of achievement and notoriety and yet have an inexplicable feeling of emptiness.

Despite our frustrations, we still live in hope that better things are around the corner. No doubt, it is better to be positive and optimistic than the opposite.

A BASIC MISTAKE

We keep forgetting that though circumstances may change, we don't. In our hearts we are the same. Wherever we go we take our true selves with us. It is more often what is 'in here' that needs to be changed rather than what is 'out there'.

Talking of things that are new, that's what we need. A new heart. There is something seriously wrong with the old one, the Bible teaches. God also says, *I will give you a new heart and a new mind. I will take away your stubborn heart of stone and give you an obedient heart* (Ezekiel 36:26).

ALL THINGS NEW

God is bringing people to Himself and making them new. They are members of His new creation. They have a new relationship with Him, a new start, a new life. Their future is genuinely new for it is written, *If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone; the new has come*. He makes the invitation: *Come! Whoever is thirsty, let him come, and whoever wishes, let him take the free gift of the water of life* (Revelation 22:17).

And when your heart is new, your outlook on everything else is changed as well.

What are we waiting for?

• From page 1

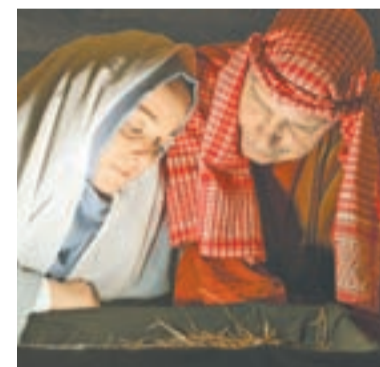
"First, I want to remind you that in the last days there will come scoffers who will do every wrong they can think of and laugh at the truth. This will be their line of argument: 'So Jesus promised to come back, did He? Then where is He? He'll never come! Why, as far back as anyone can remember, everything has remained exactly as it was since the first day of creation.'

"They deliberately forget this fact: that God did destroy the world with a mighty flood long after He had made the heavens by the word of His command and had used the waters to form the earth and surround it. And God has commanded that the earth and the heavens be stored away for a great bonfire at the judgment day, when all ungodly men will perish.

"But don't forget this, dear friends, that a day or a thousand years from now is like tomorrow to the Lord. He isn't really being slow about His promised return, even though it sometimes seems that way. But He is waiting, for the good reason that He is not willing that any should perish, and He is giving more time for sinners to repent." 2 Peter 3:3-9 (TLB)

* <https://www.sciencemag.org/news/2014/07/people-would-rather-be-electrically-shocked-left-alone-their-thoughts>

From jail to Joseph



Shaun Crossley acting as Joseph at a market place.

• From page 1

"Since then, I have dealt with everything that life has thrown at me. It is as if something was reaching out to me, and although it is hard to describe I can only think of it as a spiritual awakening.

"I have no regrets about the past but I cannot do anything about what has gone on before. I now know that God will not put anything on you that you cannot handle and that whatever happens shapes the person we become. We cannot do it on our own – we need that higher power that is God."

With thanks to Good News newspaper and Phil Taylor

Crossword

ACROSS

1 Fatal Greek gift (6,5)
7 Rotter
8 Traveling (2,5)

9 Early bicycle
12 Performance hall
16 Resentful, begrudging

18 WWW address
19 Low Countries nation

DOWN

1 Bulletin board fastener
2 Blast from the past
3 High card
4 UK vertical take-off aircraft
5 Stir from sleep
6 Ten and one
10 Beat with hands raised
11 Large grotto
13 Golfing gouge
14 Driver's 180degrees (1-4)
15 Austrian peaks
17 The sun

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

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

SOLUTION PAGE 11

Wild and free ... and miserable



Vanessa Holland and her mother's lives were a hot mess before they met Jesus

Vanessa Holland spent most of her time “drinking, smoking, and getting into fights.” Influenced strongly by her wild growing-up years, as an adult she was promiscuous, attended parties, took drugs, drank alcohol and trained in martial arts.

However, she soon spiralled into a dark tunnel of anxiety and depression. It was only when she woke up in hospital, after trying to kill herself, that Vanessa’s outlook on life began to change.

Vanessa and her mother share their inspiring story on Youtube, beginning with the early days.

“We were very laid back and we did not like rules,” Mrs Holland says. “With that sort of lifestyle though, there are no moral standards. That’s how Vanessa was brought up – wild parties, sex, drugs, rock ‘n roll.”

“By the time I was 14 going on 15, I was living with a boyfriend,” Vanessa says. “[But] it felt normal to me as I had no boundaries growing up.”

However, she explains that she felt depressed. “I remember feeling horrible and feeling dark feelings as a little girl. Life just did not seem like a good thing.”

Vanessa moved to New York to try and escape her depression. “I was trying to search for something that would make me feel better. I went through every single New Age philosophy and fad and I read every self-help book. I tried it all.”

As her mental state worsened and she began to entertain thoughts of suicide, she questioned her mother, “Why did you have to bring me into this world? My whole life has been miserable. I have been in a depression for 30-something years. What is the point?”

Finally, Vanessa had had enough and attempted suicide. She ended up in the hospital and had to have her stomach pumped.

“I was powerless to be able to help her,” Mrs Holland sadly recalls. “I did not really know how to comfort her.”

After this incident, Vanessa admits that she “thought about God but I did not know who He was.”

As Vanessa struggled to recover, Mrs Holland came face-to-face with a new reality. “I started searching for God when, after 34 years of marriage, my husband left me for another woman. I had never suffered very deeply before and a friend of mine suggested that I go to church.

“[During the service], I just started crying and crying. Later, the pastor of that church rang me up and I gave my heart to the Lord over the phone. I realised, after I invited Jesus into my life, that it was all true - God was true, Jesus was true.

“I was experiencing something in me that had never been there before. I discovered I could pray and I took to prayer like a duck to water and it was so empowering. It was like I had been waiting all my life to pray.”

Later, during an altar call at the church, Mrs Holland walked down the aisle but not for herself - for her daughter. “I said to the pastor, ‘I want to pray for my daughter’s salvation.’ So, we just prayed up a storm and there was a real power in that prayer.”

While her mum had found Jesus, Vanessa was still searching for the peace she had longed for all her life. “I got into yoga and into marital arts. This girl from the martial arts class said, ‘I can see how unhappy you are.’”

I WANTED MY PAST AND ALL OF THAT MISERY TO BE ERASED



This friend had given her heart to the Lord and started going to church. She invited Vanessa to come with her and Vanessa thought, “Fine. You know what? I will go to church. I have never tried that before.

“The second I walked in the door, I felt something different,” she says.

“I did not know what was going on but I started to cry. That was not really like me because I had become very hard at that point. But that particular day I had to be at work at a certain time and I left [early].

“The next week I had an urge to come and this time I heard more of the sermon and everything the pastor said was speaking right to my heart. He was talking about being forgiven of your sins and I wanted my sins to be forgiven and I wanted my past and all of that misery to be erased.”

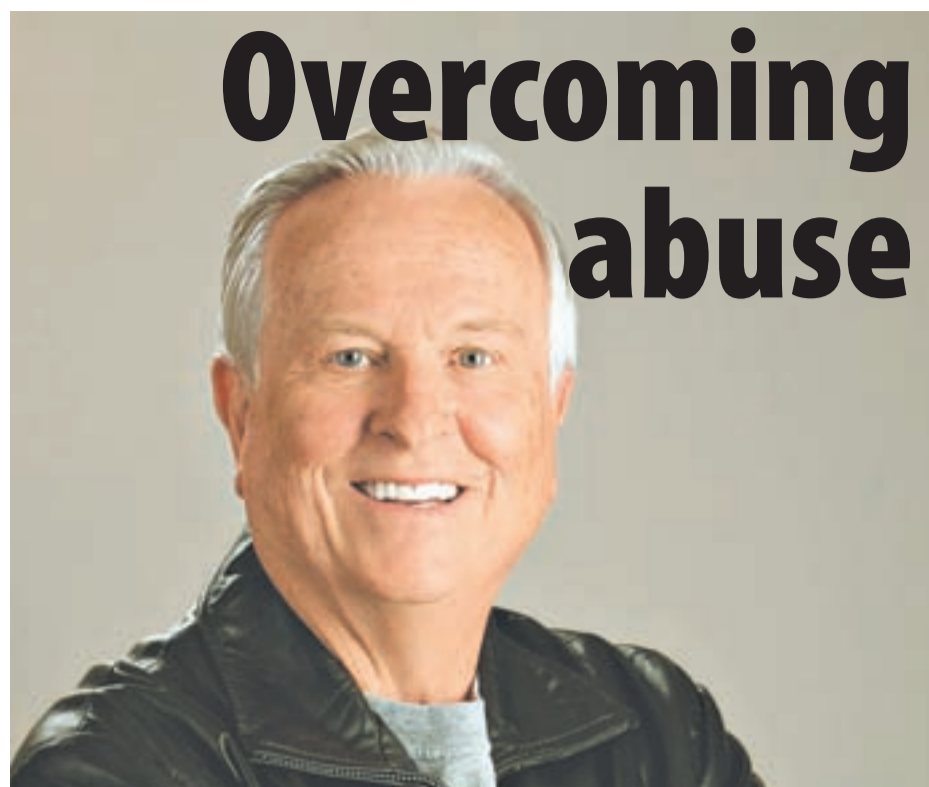
There was an altar call and Vanessa went forward. “For the first time, something sounded right, it felt right, it felt full, it felt different and the experience was just different. I did not really know what it meant to be saved yet, I just knew that it was the answer and I wanted it.”

Ever since Vanessa gave her life to Jesus, “every day has just been getting better and better. It is like when you compare the old me to the new me; I am a different person. I am a 100% different person.”

Mrs Holland says, “God has not only given me a daughter, He has given me a daughter as a sister-in-Christ. I’m so grateful to Him.”

Vanessa concludes, “There is a Scripture that I feel sums up what God has done in my life. It is Romans 15:13 which says, ‘May the God of hope fill you with joy and peace in your faith, that by the power of the Holy Spirit, your whole life and outlook may be radiant with hope.’ I feel radiant with hope. I feel radiant with joy. I definitely have peace.”

Overcoming abuse



BY RUSTY WRIGHT AND MEG KORPI

For author Josh McDowell, each new case of child molestation in the news brings back agonizing memories. He knows how the victims must feel. “You never get over it,” says the now septuagenarian.

A male housekeeper sexually molested Josh from ages six to thirteen. At age nine, when he told his mother, she whipped him for “lying.” As a teen, Josh finally could resist the paedophile physically, but years of torment left him angry and vengeful.

Multiple Agonies

Problems abounded in Josh’s childhood. His father was an alcoholic, “the town drunk,” who beat his mother and humiliated Josh with his public displays. Consequently, the family was a mess. One sister committed suicide. Another joined the army “just to get away from home.” His brother sued his parents.

For retribution and to avoid embarrassment when friends visited, young Josh would tie up his inebriated father in the barn. He urinated in his father’s hidden wine bottles. “I would do just about anything to humiliate him.” By eleven, Josh felt so hopeless, alone and abandoned that he damned God and cursed his father. Emotional wounds from years of sexual abuse and his father’s alcohol-fueled tirades plagued Josh with deep-seated shame and mistrust toward his assailant, his father, and God.

Intellect Overcomes Emotion

In college, hardened and cynical, Josh particularly disdained Christians. He ridiculed people who spoke warmly of a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. When one challenged him to disprove Jesus’ Resurrection, he tackled the issue with arrogant determination, researching intently. He even traveled to Europe to study historical texts.

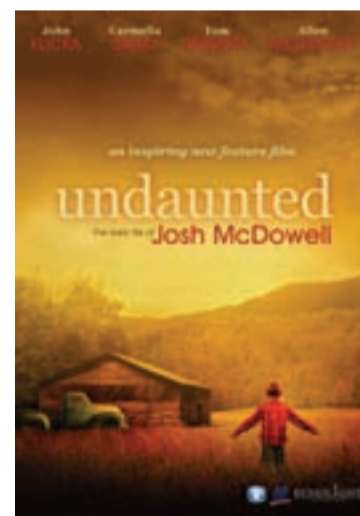
But the results of his investigation surprised him: “I had started my journey an obnoxious, agnostic university student, who thought Christians were airheads. I had set out to refute their beliefs, and disprove the Resurrection. But after all my research—in spite of my prejudice—I realized I didn’t have a valid defense. The historical evidence all pointed the other way, and I realized my rejection of the Bible and Christianity was based more on emotion than intellect.”

Changed Lives

Convinced Jesus’ story was true, Josh says God’s love drew him to personal faith. He cites an ancient Jewish prophet: “I have loved you with an everlasting love. With

tender kindness I have drawn you.” “That’s what God, in His mercy, did for me,” Josh says.

Surprising himself, Josh told his father he loved him. “I was used to loving those I loved,” he recalls, “but I never had the capacity to love someone I hated.” His father’s subsequent spiritual rebirth amazed local citizens. In a step of faith, Josh sought out and forgave the sexually abusive housekeeper.



Today Josh McDowell’s impact as a Christian activist spans the globe. A prolific author, he’s addressed millions worldwide, explaining evidences for faith in the biblical Jesus and extolling the resultant psychological and relational benefits. His humanitarian relief projects have sent over \$46 million worth of aid for children in the former Soviet Union.

Hope and Healing

“During my youth, people didn’t talk much about sexual abuse,” he said recently. Only in 2008

did he tell his wife his own experience, then his children, a close friend, and a counsellor. All encouraged him to share it publicly in order to spread hope to victims. “Don’t go it alone,” he advises. “Seek good counsel.”

Undaunted, a new DVD documentary that Josh narrates, depicts his youthful journey from abuse and anger to hope and faith.

In a world filled with personal and familial pain, *Undaunted* can help bring hope and healing. It’s well worth the look. Check out www.Josh.org/Undaunted

Rusty Wright is an author and lecturer who has spoken on six continents. He holds Bachelor of Science (psychology) and Master of Theology degrees from Duke and Oxford universities, respectively. www.RustyWright.com

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FREDERICK Buechner: “A crucial eccentricity of the Christian faith is the assertion that people are saved by grace. There’s nothing *you* have to do. There’s nothing you *have* to do. There’s nothing you *have* to *do*” (his italics). However, he adds: “There’s only one catch. Like any other gift, the gift of grace can be yours only if you’ll reach out and take it.”

Buechner is right: There is a divine-human partnership at the heart of the Christian life. God offers grace, but like any other gift, we must receive it to experience it. God offers forgiveness, but we must ask for it (1 John 1:9). God offers His “perfect” will, but we must choose to follow it (Romans 12:2).

Why I left Planned Parenthood

Sue Thayer was a former Planned Parenthood clinic manager who trained staff, oversaw patient records, maintained the financial books and participated in family counselling. She had a desire to serve other women and felt that her work in the facility could make a difference.

Then, through a remarkable chain of events, she made a 180 degree shift to become the director of her state's leading pro-life advocacy organization.

The mother of five took a job at Planned Parenthood in 1991 and worked there for nearly 18 years as a nonmedical staffer. The pay was great and within a few months of starting, she was promoted to office manager.

As a part of her induction Sue was sent to an abortion unit and required to witness at least 30 surgical procedures and account for all of the unborn babies' body parts.

"I really wasn't prepared for what I saw and experienced. That day I had seen it with my own eyes, and I knew that abortion was murder," she admits.

Sue was born in Storm Lake, Iowa and even though she had become a Christian before her start at Planned

Parenthood, "for me, the process of coming to see the truth [in that industry] was long and slow".

Sue had grown up in and attended a large denominational church which she went to for most of her life, even during her Planned Parenthood career.

"We had a pastor that was very comfortable with abortion and my job there. I had one of the pastors there say, 'When you start doing abortions, can I come down and escort the women in?' I thought, 'Aren't you supposed to be on the other side?'" Sue recalls as she remembers receiving mixed messages of support and condemnation from various pastors at her church.

During this time, Sue was struggling with her faith and her marriage. As she and her husband walked through a devastating divorce, Sue went to several other churches hoping to find peace and comfort. When



Sue Thayer

they found out who her employer was though, she was harshly turned away. "It left me feeling devastated," she says.

Then, Sue decided to attend a small church whose members protested frequently outside her clinic.

"They were all about the Gospel [good news of Jesus] and loving people," Sue says. "They welcomed me. God used them and a Christian radio station to save my life."

These gentle prompts caused Sue to finally overcome her fear and stand up to oppose a newly instituted telemedicine abortion procedure, better known as "webcam abortions," that came into use at her clinic in 2007.

"As a mom, it hurt me every time I was in, or even near, the abortion unit," she says. "As my heart softened, I knew my days in the abortion industry were numbered."

She explains how she and her nonmedical staff would be involved with the new procedure: "We would be doing invasive procedures after only a single day of training. I kept asking my boss if this was even legal. They were like, 'Our i's are dotted and our t's are crossed, nothing will stop us.'"

"I would question the wisdom or the legality or the ethics of having a nonmedical person doing an invasive procedure. They just said, 'If you are breathing, you can do it and if you can play a video game, it is a lot like using a joystick.' I was really concerned about that."

When Sue became vocal about her concerns, she was fired from the facility.

"When I told my pastor and the board what was going on they were supportive. I was a single mom and had all these kids," she says. "They were telling me that God will provide and I need to leave that to Him. He has. He has been very faithful to not

only meet our needs but just provide everything. I am just very thankful to Him for His faithfulness to see us through."

Over the years, Sue has had an important part to play in pro-life activism. The first step she took was to lead a 40 Days for Life campaign right outside the facility she had previously managed.

Her prayers were answered when the facility closed down permanently.

Sue has since travelled the world to speak of the horrors of the abortion industry, offered help and encouragement to those involved in its work and testified against Planned Parenthood in numerous court cases.

She has compassion for the staff at these facilities because she knows: "It is a slow process of brainwashing. In the early 1990s, we were very comfortable referring to an unborn baby as a 'clump of cells,' 'contents of uterus' or 'products of conception.' Perhaps this is how hearts are hardened to the reality of abortion."

Sue has also founded a crisis pregnancy centre in Storm Lake that offers free ultrasounds and pregnancy testing, and helps women find employment and housing.

In 2018, Sue started as the new director of outreach for 40 Days of Life, campaigning against abortion. "We learned that prayer works because God hears us. We are successful simply because God cares, and He answers," she affirms. •

Family remembers best Christmas gift ever

Baby with no kidneys lives on to enjoy Christmas... and then some!

We all like a good Christmas present, but Herrera Beutler had her best one ever when her daughter Abigail first came out of hospital – for Christmas.

Abigail Beutler, now five, is alive today because her parents refused to give up on her.

She is the first known baby to survive outside the womb without kidneys, a condition called Potter's syndrome.

Doctors told Herrera, a US Congresswoman, that her baby would die, and advised an abortion.

But she and husband Dan believe in a God who answers prayer, so the devastated couple asked family, friends and churches to pray for Abigail.

In 2013, pregnant Herrera and Dan had gone to what they thought was a normal prenatal check-up, thinking they would learn the gender of their first child.

They were in for a shock.

Herrera told *Life News*: "They took us into a back room and just said, 'There is nothing that can be done. Your baby is going to die.'"

Dan Beutler said abortion never crossed their mind; they just knew that they had to try to save Abigail.

The family shared their tragic news publicly and asked for prayer. •



Those prayers were answered when someone who had read the story in a newspaper contacted the Beutlers and told them about an experimental treatment that could save their daughter.

The Beutlers approached many different hospitals before one agreed to discuss the idea. Even then, it took a lot of urging before doctors agreed to try the treatment.

The procedure was successful and Abigail was born in July, 2013, and in December was allowed home for Christmas.

For the first two years of her life, Abigail was on dialysis, until February 2016 when she was big enough to receive a kidney from her father.

Speaking at the 2018 *March for Life* in the USA, Herrera said: "Today, we have come together to say – there's hope! For every expectant mother who has been given a devastating diagnosis. For every woman who feels fear, anger, or anxiety because she does not know how she can afford to care for a child. For every woman who feels hopeless: God loves you. For every baby given up on by status quo: God still does miracles." •

Unseen power

BY JODY BENNETT

THE movie *Unplanned* about the experience and change of heart of former Planned Parenthood director Abby Johnson, is confronting viewing.

Abby experienced two abortions herself – one surgical and one chemical – and facilitated thousands of others before assisting in a surgical abortion where she watched on the ultrasound as the baby fought for its life.

That was the point where Abby realised they weren't 'eliminating tissue' but killing children. She left the industry the next week.

Throughout her volunteering and employment at Planned Parenthood, Abby had been aware of the group 40 Days for Life, who would silently picket outside the clinic until she chased them away by turning the sprinklers on.

They would also try to engage clients in conversation and convince them to rethink their decision, before the clinic staff could usher the women inside.

There were these few, often young, people holding signs and praying, standing against this massive organisation that had money, lawyers, political clout and popularity on their side.

But those prayers were even more powerful than the protestors knew. By the end of the true story – spoiler alert! – not only has the director of that centre (Abby) joined their ranks, but the whole clinic has closed down and the building is now the headquarters of 40 Days for Life!

The Bible says God is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, and Abby's story is proof positive of that.

Outside another Planned Parenthood clinic recently, this one in West Chester, Pennsylvania, a lone father of four had also signed up to support 40 Days for Life and stood praying, holding a sign for a pro-life women's centre that



offers free counselling and ultrasounds.

"I know the whole cultural wrestling match going on – that it's a woman's decision, and I'm a guy, so what gives me the right?" the man, Adam, said. "But at the same time, I'm one of 10 kids, and I have six sisters, four of whom are nurses."

"My big prayer while I've been here, just kind of walking up and down, is that anyone coming in or going out would sense the love of Jesus," he said.

"I know that [abortion] is not an easy decision," Adam admits. "Kids are expensive. And my prayer is that people in the church, or friends, or family of the women, would rise up and just say, 'Do you need a thousand bucks?' or 'Do you need a hundred bucks?' Whatever it is."

He also prayed for the doctors and the security guard as they left the clinic for the day.

"I want to make sure they know that they are human beings, and I am no more worthy of God's love than they are," he explained. "And God wants them to know Him and to be blessed by Him."

Just one guy – what can he achieve? The Bible writer James would counter: "The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much. Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed earnestly that it would not rain; and it did not rain on the land for three years and six months. And he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain, and the earth produced its fruit." (James 5:17-18)

As the saying goes: one person and God is a majority. What 'impossible' thing is God wanting to achieve through your prayers? •

TEENTALK

How can you give up your sexuality for God?

RACHEL Gilson stole a book from her friend's college dorm room because of its fascinating title - *Mere Christianity* by C.S. Lewis, who also wrote the *Chronicles of Narnia* stories.

As she read it, Rachel had a dawning realization: "Oh my goodness — God is real, and I am in a lot of trouble. Because not only is He real; He is perfect, and I am incredibly imperfect."

But there was an element of hope there too, she says: "I understood for the first time that Jesus had come to place Himself as a kind of wall between God's wrath — His right and fair anger at my sin — and me. I knew that if I trusted in Jesus, I was going to be saved. Now, did I understand the full implications of that? Certainly not. But I knew that I could be somehow connected to Jesus and saved from God's anger.

"I remember thinking, 'Well, I like to drink a lot, I like the excessive parts of my lifestyle, I like to sleep with women—and all those things will have to go out the window. But it is stupid to pretend like what the Bible is saying isn't true just because it's inconvenient. I need to take this deal because I'm never going to get a deal like this again.' I had a sense that I needed to pray, and so I just talked to God right then."

Rachel goes on to explain how she could give up such an important part of her identity, something that had been so fundamental to her sense of self for so long.

GIVING UP THINGS IS A VERY NORMAL PART OF THE CHRISTIAN LIFE



even that very deep part of me, because of His great love.

"The Bible talks about a Christian's relationship with Christ being something we should be able to die for because it's so precious. And celibacy and singleness are not death," she says frankly.

"Not having sex or not experiencing a romantic relationship is a severe thing, but I'd be willing to give up even more than that. In fact, giving up things is a very normal part of the Christian life. There are lots of people who give up sex, who give up their bodies, who give up their money. And you don't really do it out of obligation — you do it out of love. You're captured by Christ's love, and it drives you to do things that you never thought possible before, because Jesus gives you this sense of security and purpose and an ultimate destination."

Rachel concludes, "The reason that most people aren't Christians is either because they think that Jesus isn't really real or that He isn't really worth it. But Jesus is both — really real and really worth it. God has heaped upon me beautiful and good things in place of all I've given up."

See her full testimony in the book *Finding More: Real Life Stories Worth Telling* or on her rachelgilson.com blog

God saved the queen



Kevin Whitt now (left) and in drag (above).

BY KEVIN WHITT

My name is Kevin. I am 41 years old, and I am a walking miracle. The man I am today is not the man I have always been. My life has been radically changed. Let me give you a little history to set the stage.

When I was just two years old, my parents got a divorce. My mom has always loved me and supported me through everything. When my father was around, he was verbally, physically and often sexually abusive. He said his treatment of me was his way of teaching me how to be a man.

I was introduced to God at a very young age by my grandmother and aunt. I always believed in God and loved God. But I have not always been a follower of God.

My childhood was difficult because I wasn't as masculine as other boys. I was severely bullied in school because I wasn't "manly" enough. I

despised school. I can remember being called a "faggot" in the first grade and that label seemed to form my identity for years to follow.

I really hated that I was so effeminate. I tried to be more masculine, but none my attempts to fit in were successful. I was a very sad, lonely boy with no friends.

In my early teen years, I began to be very confused about my sexuality. When I was in the 9th grade, I finally made a friend with whom I had a lot in common. One morning, when I was 14, he took me into the woods near my house and he put a rag over my face with an inhalant and raped me. I didn't know what to do. We continued to be friends because I didn't know how to tell anyone, and I didn't want to lose the only friend I ever had.

At the age of 15, I came out of the closet and told my family I was gay. In my mind my only options were to come out or to commit suicide, but I couldn't continue to live my life in that state of confusion. When I came out of the closet, it was amazing. Suddenly, I had a lot of friends. For the first time in my life, I was considered a cool kid. I finally felt normal.

I loved all the attention I received and decided I would take it to the next level by dressing in drag. It started out on as a fun Halloween costume, and everyone said I was so beautiful. The attention and recognition of dressing in drag became addictive. Little did I know that this was the sordid beginning of the next twenty

years living a gay lifestyle.

I started working in gay nightclubs as a drag entertainer as soon as I was old enough. Soon after, I started working in the adult industry as a transsexual prostitute. I thought this career would be temporary, but I was earning around \$1,000 a day and became addicted to the money. It supported my heavy drinking and lavish lifestyle. I couldn't do drag or prostitute myself without being drunk.

Finally, I began to realize how toxic and addictive my lifestyle had become. Many friends and acquaintances died from HIV, and I saw others ruin their lives with addictions. I was just sick and tired of being sick and tired. I constantly asked myself, "What would happen if I were to die?"

I lived in great anxiety and fear. At times I was afraid to close my eyes to sleep at night.

I had given up on God. All I had ever been taught by the church was that gay people were going to hell.

This year, one of my friends invited me to go to church at Easter. I went to be kind. God grabbed my attention. I saw this modern-day version of the resurrection of Jesus Christ being played out on stage and I began to cry. I saw all that Jesus had done for me, and the lifestyle I was living was not honoring to Him. The preacher asked if anyone was ready to accept Christ. I bowed my head and prayed and invited Him into my heart. That was the first day of my walk with Christ. When I spoke to my gay friends about God, they thought I was insane.

Suddenly I was no longer popular and lost all of my friends. The desire to do drag, party, or to attend gay clubs left me. God began speaking to me and I got rid of all of my female clothing and accessories. Despite my countless sexual encounters with men, I tested HIV negative.

God answered my prayers. My heart began to dramatically change. I contacted Living Hope (a ministry to reach the gay community for Christ) and began attending classes. I was always taught that homosexuality was a sin and I believed this to be true, but since I was convinced that I was born gay, I assumed that I must have been created to go to hell.

At Living Hope the love that Jesus showed me changed my life drastically. I learned from the pastor how a person might "think" he is born gay. I learned how God's design didn't include homosexuality.

As I watched him explain homosexuality on a white board, I saw my life unfold and it all made perfect sense. Living Hope showed me the love that Jesus has for me. All of their teachings come from a place of love, not condemnation. They love people into a closer relationship with Jesus Christ and the rest is left with Him. 2 Corinthians 5:17 says, "If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new."

Through Jesus, I am a new creation with a new heart. I also have learned to let go of any bitterness that I had in my heart for anyone. The difficulties I went through in life made me the person I am today. God uses everything for His glory. He is using me to share my experiences to help others going through the same things. No sin is too great for God to handle. In fact, what Christ did on the cross erased all of the sins of my past. He doesn't even remember any of my past sins when I repented and came to Jesus. Just understanding forgiveness gave me so much peace in my heart. Today I can honestly say that I have no desire for men, porn, masturbation, or to be a women or drag queen. Instead, I have the desire to have a wife, children and a family.

Being macho does not make a man a man. God created me to be a man! God knows my heart. In the words of Sy Rogers, "What you see in me is just the residue of my past." I am a transformed man of God and child of the King!

You may contact Kevin at kevinwhitt@yahoo.com. Kevin's testimony first appeared on peachitteachit.com Used with his permission.



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Neo-Nazi finds new way



Bryon Widner's dramatic tattoo removals over two years of painful treatments.

Bryon Widner was a skinhead from the time he was 14. Growing up in a predominantly Mexican part of town, this meant that violence became part of his life. "Either you get hard or you die, that's the rule," is how he describes his youth.

Bryon came from a broken home and was raised by his alcoholic grandmother. He realised from an early age that he had to take care of himself. "So I learned how to hate," he states.

From about 15 or 16 he started getting tattoos – often of swastikas and other symbols that he didn't really understand the meaning of. "I was just trying to look like a tough guy. I got them more for the shock value because I really didn't understand the politics behind them."

Later he learned what all the symbols meant and got into the politics of it, but initially "it was just to annoy people, honestly" he confesses.

At some point Bryon realised that the only thing he had achieved with his choices in life was "a bunch of scars, a legal record and getting half way to cirrhosis of the liver. That's it. I have achieved nothing else in life. Nothing positive."

Bryon admits he was trying to drink himself to death. "I was done. I had given up on everything. I was sick of the violence but I didn't know any other way to be. If I had told anyone I knew of my feelings, they would have branded me a traitor and I probably would've been shot. So I just bottled it up and drank."

Depressed and on the edge of suicide, Bryon was rescued by meeting Julie, falling in love, getting married and moving 10 hours away from his former gang. He got a full time job and started going straight.

When his son was born, the neo-Nazis gave him an ultimatum of either them or his family, and Brain chose his family. They told him to mail in his insignia and they would retire him formally but in reality it wasn't that simple.

The death threats started immediately and they never stopped. He and his children were threatened. His wife and he took turns staying up at night with baseball bats, on high alert. It wasn't a matter of if the gang would kick in the door one night, it was a matter of when.

Then Bryon's wife started thumbing through a little antique German Bible she had and showed Bryon the serenity prayer written in it and some other passages, which Bryon began to repeat to calm himself in the mornings.

Then, for Christmas they went to Julie's parents church and both of them felt a supernatural "something" that made them realise they needed to make a commitment to Jesus and surrender their lives to God.

They began by praying and reading the Bible regularly, and promising God that they would give themselves completely to Him if He got them out of their gang problems alive.



Bryon Widner now.

Within a couple of months they were able to move to Tennessee and one of the first things they did was become Christians and get baptised [immersed in water as an outward sign of death to their old lives].

"There is absolutely no way I could have escaped my past by myself," Bryon admits. "Once I accepted Jesus into my life I was able to smile again. I was able to enjoy a day! I was able to be polite and happy. I was able to enjoy my children."

"And Jesus did that. When God filled me, it patched the hole in my life that was always leaking. It's been amazing. It's been absolutely amazing," he says with gratitude.

Brains' face was covered in frightening tattoos, which made it difficult for him to get jobs and go to parent-teacher meetings. He couldn't afford laser removal, so he was just going to burn them off with dermal acid.

Fortunately, his wife was able to source an anonymous donor who paid for two years' worth of painful treatment that removed Bryon's tattoos. He had 23 to 25 treatments and the doctor said he had never treated someone with such extensive coverage.

"Everything that has happened has been a miracle," Bryon says gratefully. "The removal, my family is safe, we have a beautiful home. God has done it all. I didn't do anything. I'm barely a high school graduate - a former street kid. God has done miraculous things in my life and I give Him all the glory and the credit."

Bryon's story features in the documentary series *Escaping the KKK: Exposing Hate in America* (2017).

THERE IS ABSOLUTELY NO WAY I COULD HAVE ESCAPED MY PAST BY MYSELF



'Miracle' wind brings Iranian man prayer

BY TRÉ GOINS-PHILLIPS (FAITHWIRE)

Who said Hollywood can't lead someone to Jesus?

It was 2016 when an Iranian man — we will use the name "Bahram" — saw the war movie *Hacksaw Ridge*, a film about Pfc. Desmond Doss, the first conscientious objector to receive the Congressional Medal of Honor for his service as an unarmed medic during World War II.

There is a momentary scene toward the beginning of the movie when a framed lithograph of the Lord's Prayer is shown on-screen near Doss:

Father, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come. Give us each day our daily bread.

Forgive us our sins, for we also forgive everyone who sins against us.

And lead us not into temptation.



Bahram's 'miracle' Bible pages that he keeps in his Farsi Bible.

Before seeing the movie, Bahram had never heard of the Lord's Prayer, according to Lee Grady, a Christian writer and missionary living in Georgia. But that would hardly be the last time he saw the passage.

Curious about the prayer's meaning, Bahram, who now lives in Australia, looked it up on the internet.

Then, a few days later, two loose pages torn from a Bible showed up on Bahram's doorstep, apparently blown there by the wind.

The two pages were from Luke 11, in which the Lord's Prayer appears. "Bahram saw this as a sign from God, and he gave his life to Christ," Grady wrote. "To this day, he keeps those pages in his Farsi Bible as a reminder that Jesus came looking for him."

Grady learned about Bahram's incredible conversion to Christianity during a recent trip to Perth, where he spoke with several Iranian converts, several of them telling him the Christian church is thriving in the Middle Eastern country.

Who was that bright, shiny man?

In the Middle East where it is illegal to spread Christianity, and life-threatening to talk about how the good news of Jesus is advancing, "God is revealing Himself to thousands of Muslims through dreams, visions, and personal visitations," according to missionaries like Pastor David Platt, who interviewed a local Christian, Yazim.

Yazim, who makes converts and starts churches in Middle Eastern countries, shared through a disguised voice an incredible story of one man who came to know Jesus in a miraculous way.

"This man said this to us when we visited him: 'A man wearing all white knocked at my door every night and I couldn't look at him because his face was so shiny and bright,'" Yazim shared.

"When he would come inside, he asked me to write down what he said. As I wrote, I fell asleep. The next night, he would come again for the next month."

The man, shared his notebook with Yazim to show him what he had written down.

In the notebook, the man had written down: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by Him, and without Him was not anything made that was made."

The man's notes came from the Biblical book of John, which God had revealed to him in his visitations.

"He had the whole book of John verbatim in his notebook," Yazim shared. "Jesus visited him every night until he finished the book. The amazing thing is, the man actually asked us, 'Who was this man that visited me?'"

"I learned a valuable lesson: God will do His part, but we still have to do ours," he added.

Following the vision, Yazim was able to share with the man that it was Jesus who had been visiting him in his dreams.

The visions were not unique to this man, many Muslims have come to know God and testify in His name following similar divine visits.

Yazim and his wife have been working to plant churches all over the Middle East, their next goal is another 10 in undisclosed locations.

GIDEON'S BIBLE CHANGES AUSSIE

Australian Aboriginal Paula Murphy says she comes from a "dark background". She grew up on a mission, knowing who her parents were but never knowing them as mum and dad. In Paula's community Jesus was a swear word and domestic abuse was considered normal. Relationships were filled with violence, drugs, alcohol and sexual abuse.

Paula met a man and had two daughters with him. However, he gave her "a flogging for breakfast, dinner and supper". When she used violence to protect her children, Paula was arrested for attempted murder.

While in jail for two years at Emu Plains Correctional Centre in NSW, she had a life-changing encounter with Jesus in 2008, after finding a Gideon's Bible placed there

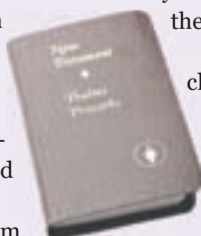
by a volunteer. Over 90 million Bibles are handed out by the Gideon's every year.

"That Bible saved me," Paula declares on a Vimeo clip from Gideon's International (TGIA).

"I pray to the Lord and praise and thank Him every day for the work of the Gideon's and ask that I too could be an evangelist [who tells others of Jesus]."

"I don't know where I would be if I hadn't met Jesus that night," Paula says, wiping away tears. "Honestly, I probably would have been dead. But by the grace of God I'm still here."

The life-saving information in a little Gideon's Bible is the same information found in any Bible. Read one today! And if you don't know where to start, begin with John in the New Testament.



Creation is the root of Christmas

BY KEN HAM AND JANICE TEO

Every December many people, Christians and non-Christians alike, celebrate Christmas.

What is Christmas? It is the time of year when there is particular emphasis on an event that occurred around 2000 years ago in the town of Bethlehem in Judea (today called Israel).

It commemorates the birth of a baby, recorded in the Bible in such New Testament passages as Luke 2:1-20 and foretold by thousands of years in several Old Testament passages such as Isaiah 7:14. The name given to this baby was Jesus.

But why is Jesus' birth still celebrated? And what, if anything, has the Biblical account of the creation of the world – specifically Adam and Eve, the first humans – have to do with it?

At first glance the two have very little connection. They are often viewed and told as two separate stories. But dig a little deeper and you will find Christmas is rooted in Genesis, the Bible's book of origins.

The appearance of Jesus Christ in the world is celebrated by Christians because it is the fulfilment of a promise God made to save the world right at the beginning of history.

But that then begs the question:



why does the world need saving?

The Bible records that on the sixth day of Creation, God made the first man and woman. From elsewhere in the Bible, we learn that all humans who have ever lived descended from these two people, Adam and Eve (Genesis 3:20; Acts 17:26; and so on).

God put the couple in the Garden of Eden and told them they could eat anything in the garden except the fruit of a particular tree.

God could have made robots who just obeyed Him or He could have chosen not to make the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, but

God gave Adam and Eve free will and a choice because He wanted their love, and love cannot be forced.

Into this paradise slithered Satan, God's archenemy, in the form of a serpent. Satan tempted Eve to disobey God and eat the forbidden fruit, and she shared with Adam. They could have refused but they didn't.

They disobeyed God, ate the fruit and ushered in spiritual death – eternal separation from God – into the world. Like a diseased gene, the sin of Adam infected all his descendants, the entire human race, right down to you and me (Genesis 3:20; Acts 17:26; Romans 5:12).

When he disobeyed his Creator's instruction (resulting in his "fall" from his state of perfection), that was the first sin. And just as God had warned, the punishment for Adam's sin was death—not only for Adam, but for all his descendants as well.

How then can we ever be reconciled with a holy God? This is an important question since we are eternal beings made in the image of God (Genesis 1:27), and as such, even though our bodies die because of sin, our spirits (the "real us") live forever.

As sinners we would be separated from God forever and live eternally getting more and more depraved. What a horrible existence that would be!

Thanks to Adam and Eve's misdirected mouthful, the world needed a saviour. God knew we could never work our way back to Him, He had to intervene to bring people back into right standing with Him.

And so right there in Genesis when all seemed lost, God revealed His plan

of salvation – it would come in the form of a man, the "second Adam", who would be born of a virgin, in a manger, to a woman named Mary.

It would come as Christmas.

God told Satan in Genesis 3: *'And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring*

and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel'

The words "your offspring" refer to Jesus, the One whose birth we celebrate at Christmas. Christ was born to fulfil a prophecy made at the beginning of time and repeated by almost all the Jewish prophets.

In a nutshell God was telling Satan a child of Eve would one day destroy him and the sin and death he introduced into the world.

Jesus was seemingly defeated when He died on the cross ("you will strike his heel"), but the cross was not where the story ended. Jesus rose from the dead three days later and in so doing, "crushed the serpent's head" – the promised death blow from God.

Satan, sin and death have not yet been ultimately annihilated, but their power was destroyed at the cross and their final defeat assured.

The forgiveness that enables a sinner to stand clean and pure in the sight of God is from God. No human being can be righteousness apart from Jesus. We can't rely on our good works or on sacraments (e.g., communion, baptism) to make ourselves right with God. It is only what God does for us that enables us to be clean before our Creator.

How? The Bible makes it very clear in Romans 10:9: *If you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved.*

When we acknowledge that we are sinners before God, turn our backs on our sin, and proclaim that we believe in the Lord Jesus, acknowledging that He died and rose from the dead, we receive the free gift of salvation from our Creator and will spend eternity in perfection with Him.

This is the real reason Christmas is worth celebrating.

Believe it
or Not

BY CREATION
MINISTRIES
INTERNATIONAL

Cross fossils and exploding whales

MOST people are under the impression that coal forms slowly in swamps over millions of years. But this view neglects the testimony of tree trunk fossils that cut across many coal layers, known as polystrate fossils. If these tree trunks were buried gradually over thousands of years the top parts of the trees would have rotted away before they could be protected by sediment.

Derek Ager, Professor of Geology at University College of Swansea recognized this when he wrote of trees buried in coal seams.

"If one estimates the total thickness of the British Coal Measures as about 1,000 m, laid down in about 10 million years, then, assuming a constant rate of sedimentation, it would have taken 100,000 years to bury a tree 10 m high, which is ridiculous."

He then went on to say, "We cannot escape the conclusion that sedimentation was at times very rapid indeed."

So the slow-swamp-story should itself be laid to rest.

.....

DID you hear about the whale that exploded?

In 2001 a dead whale floating off the coast of South Australia did just that. Authorities became worried because people who'd ferried out to the whale in charter boats where standing on the whale's carcass while white pointer sharks tore at the whale's flesh. They called in the police bomb squad to sink it, but after detonating three explosives inside the whale's belly it still refused to sink.

Many people think that when a fish or whale dies it sinks to the bottom of the ocean where it gradually gets covered by sediment and slowly becomes a fossil. But this doesn't make sense. Dead fish and whales float. If pieces do make it to the ocean floor, crabs and bacteria consume them. But we find lots of fish and even whale fossils, showing that they must have been buried quickly, like in the global flood of Noah, that the Bible records.

From Adam to Jesus

LUKE'S Gospel carries Jesus' lineage all the way back to Adam, Luke 3:38. The Adam first mentioned in Genesis!

This connects the Jesus Story, the Gospel, to the early chapters of Genesis.

In fact, 1 Corinthians 15:22 makes the link even more obvious. "For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive."

In the first Adam a miracle of creation occurred! In the Last Adam an even greater such miracle occurred!

In the first Adam God's great "hunger to fellowship with mankind" experiment failed! In the Last Adam it succeeded!

The first Adam died for his own sins. The Last Adam had no sin, yet He died for ours!

The first Adam took a wife, miraculously created by God. The Last Adam is also taking a Wife: the New Testament Church, the tenderly named Bride of Jesus Christ!

The first Adam was expelled from his garden home. The Last Adam has regained for us an eternal Home, a Paradise, a Garden indeed!

The first Adam confronted a serpent and lost the battle! The Last Adam confronted that same serpent, the devil, and won every time! At the temptation, at Gethsemane, at the Cross!

God's Son Jesus came to earth that first "Christmas" long ago ... to overcome and complete and fulfill all the first Adam miserably failed to do!

THE DAY THE ATHEIST MET A BEAR!

ONE day, an atheist was walking through the woods, admiring all the beauty that the "accident of evolution" had created.

"What majestic trees! What powerful rivers! What beautiful animals!" he said to himself.

As he strolled alongside the flowing river he heard a rustling in the bushes behind him. He turned to look.

There he saw a seven-foot grizzly bear charging toward him! The man screamed in horror and ran as fast as he could away from the giant bear.

As the bear's shadow fell over him, the man tripped and fell to the ground.

Feeling the hot breath of the terrifying bear on his neck, the man

rolled over. The bear loomed large over him, raising its fierce paws to strike him dead.

As the bear's shadow fell upon his face and its paws came down upon his chest, the atheist screamed, "Oh help me, God!"

Time stopped. The river he loved suddenly stopped flowing...

The trees stopped swaying... The bear froze.

Then a bright light beamed down upon the man, a voice boomed all around him, "I am God, and even though you don't believe in me, I am here for all beings on this earth."

The atheist felt relieved and

confessed to God, "I'm in a situation and wonder if you would get me out of it."

"You deny My existence your whole life, teach others I don't exist, and even credit creation to a 'cosmic accident'. Yet still, you ask for my help. Am I to count you as a new believer?"

The atheist replied, "It would be hypocritical of me to suddenly ask you to treat me as a Christian now, but perhaps you could make the BEAR a Christian?"

"Very well," said the voice. The light went out. The river resumed running. And the sounds of the forest returned.

Then the bear dropped down from its terrifying stance, clasped its paws tightly together... bowed its head and spoke: "Thank you, Lord, for this meal which I am about to receive. I am truly grateful. Amen."



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BUILDING BETTER RELATIONSHIPS



KEEP IT SIMPLE THIS CHRISTMAS

BY ROB FURLONG

By the time most of you are reading this there will be less than 30 days to go until Christmas!

Does that thought make you happy ... or does it send a chill up your spine?

I think most of us agree that Christmas is a wonderful celebration - a time to enjoy the company of family and friends - but it often feels crowded and frantic and we arrive at the day completely exhausted.

And sadly, we are also unable to take time out to contemplate the reason behind Christmas - the coming of Jesus to our world.

Wouldn't it be nice to slow the pace down a little bit and really enjoy this

special time of year?

Advent, a practice followed by many Christian traditions, is designed to encourage us to make specific time in the period before Christmas that enables us to reflect and contemplate the gift of Jesus.

A simple, but effective way to do this is to purchase an Advent calendar. Beginning on the first day of Advent (This year it is 1st December), family members take turns each day to turn back a small cardboard door that reveals a passage of Scripture focusing on the birth of Jesus. Some of the more elaborate ones even have a chocolate to be eaten!

It is a great way to build expectation in the lead up to Christmas Day and keep the focus on Jesus!

For me, personally, this Christmas season, I have been giving my attention to some of the many gifts that God has given us at Christmas.

Gifts like *simplicity* that enable us to re-focus on what is really important in life.

The Bible tells us that Jesus "became flesh and lived among us, full of grace and truth."

I m a g i n e that! Jesus, the Son of God, did not come to earth in a golden chariot complete with a royal entourage announcing that God was entering the world.

No - He became one of us - and lived among us, experiencing the pain, trouble and disappointment of life, along with its joy and excitement.

The simplicity of it all is staggering. But it is often the thing missing from our celebration of Christmas. Somehow we think that the bigger the gift, the more expensive it is - this will bring us, or the recipient, the desired happiness that is sought after.

But it doesn't. Marriages remain broken. Relationships stay strained. We lack genuine inner peace.

The coming of Jesus as a man reminds us of the simplicity of it all.

As it was announced to the shepherds on the first Christmas, this Child brought "peace on earth".

Peace and wholeness to broken human hearts, the repairing of broken relationships between people and above all, the restoration of our



relationship with God.

There are other gifts as well - *silence, solitude, study, service and prayer* - each of them designed to encourage us to slow down, think of others and take time to re-discover the wonder

of Christmas.

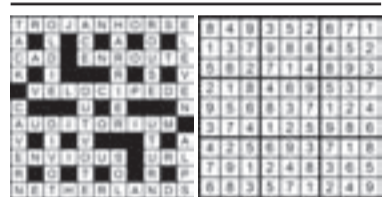
And the greatest gift of them all - *sacrifice* - so beautifully expressed in Jesus, the Son of God, being born in a humble stable, growing into manhood and through His life and death, making it possible for us to be re-united in relationship with God.

One of the great tragedies of life in the 21st century is that we move so quickly from one celebration to the next.

I guarantee that by the first week of January, hot cross buns will be on the grocery shelves. "Christmas has gone, here comes Easter" is the message of our consumerist culture.

How sad! Take time with your family to savour the wonder of Christmas this year. As much as you can, slow your pace a little and appreciate God's good gifts to you.

Reflect on them. Talk about them. Celebrate them. And above all, rejoice in them together!



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

The Fantasy Christmas

BY J. JOHN

HYPED up by the repeats of cheesy Christmas movies and endless glossy TV adverts, the Fantasy Christmas is - we know - a fantasy.

But although we recognise it as a cliché, Fantasy Christmas is something many of us still hope for...walls and bookshelves festooned with Christmas cards and decorations...a flickering log fire...a real Christmas tree bursting with decorations and twinkling lights...a tower of glittering presents...a gentle snowscape glimpsed through the frosted window...and last but not least, a table piled high with food and drinks around which an entire family sits, laughing, smiling and joking together.

The turkey will be cooked exactly right, the kids will like Brussels sprouts, the dog will not chew the presents, the broadband won't suddenly give up when we're Skyping Auntie Mollie in the States, and everybody will get exactly the present they wanted. Here in the world of Fantasy Christmas no one will snap at each other, catch the flu or have the slightest worry about how, come January, they're going to pay for it all.

Unfortunately, believing in a Fantasy Christmas almost guarantees disappointment. We will probably give someone a DVD they already have, the kids will squabble, the toys in the Christmas crackers will be naff, and worst and most poignant of all, there may be an empty seat at the table. Life has a habit of puncturing perfection.

But there is another problem with buying into the fantasy. The God who Christmas is all about seems to prefer to work when things aren't perfect. In short, God is present in messes more than successes.

Consider the first Christmas. Doesn't Jesus' birth in Bethlehem look a right mess? There's an extremely awkward pregnancy in a society that knew exactly what to do with bad girls; the birthplace is so rudimentary you might be better calling the vet than the midwife, and when the baby is born an animal food trough is the only cot available.

And, as if things couldn't get worse, in shuffle a bunch of shepherds complete, presumably, with country muck - and no hand sanitizer in sight. Oh, the first Christmas was a long, long way from perfection.

But there was a plan behind it all. It's in the messes that God is most able to help us. Perfect people in perfect situations all too easily think they don't need God. "I didn't come to call the righteous," Jesus said, "I came to call the sinners." In today's language: "I didn't come to call those who have got it right, I came to call those who are in a mess."

Those whose Christmases - and lives - need sorting out are the most likely to listen to God.

Don't get me wrong, I wish you the best possible Christmas! But if things aren't perfect in your life, be comforted. It's no bad thing if our mess makes us turn to Him. I promise you, finding God's reality for yourself is ten times better than a Fantasy Christmas.

Ask Y:

Peter Meadows answers your questions about God

QUESTION: Surely we're not supposed to believe the Christmas story actually happened?



I HEAR where you are coming from. After all, we are talking of angels, the a virgin giving birth, a wandering star and lots more of those 'it's never happened on my street' events.

Doesn't it all have to be too far fetched? With no evidence it happened? And contradictions in the stories to boot?

Probably no one has thought harder about this than award-winning script writer Tony Jordan - acclaimed for his work on *EastEnders*, *Life on Mars*, and more. It was he who picked up the job to write the script for the BBC four-part series *The Nativity*, broadcast last Christmas.

Tony admits he didn't believe it when he launched out on the detailed research that goes into to all his projects. Yet, he'd tell you, "I believe it now".

He'd started by talking to historians and scientists, who did all they could to convince him the story never happened. The academics kept pointing to the lack of evidence from outside of the Bible, and the apparent contradictions in it.

Yet Tony came to realise the issue was not the apparent differences in the record but the great similarities at the core of it all. Indeed, the two Gospel accounts by Matthew and Luke - written without cooperation - have no less than seventeen common points of agreement.

These include the names of Jesus' parents, that Mary was a virgin, Joseph's ancestral line, the angel saying the child was to be called 'Jesus', the name of the one ruling at the time, the place of the birth, and so on.

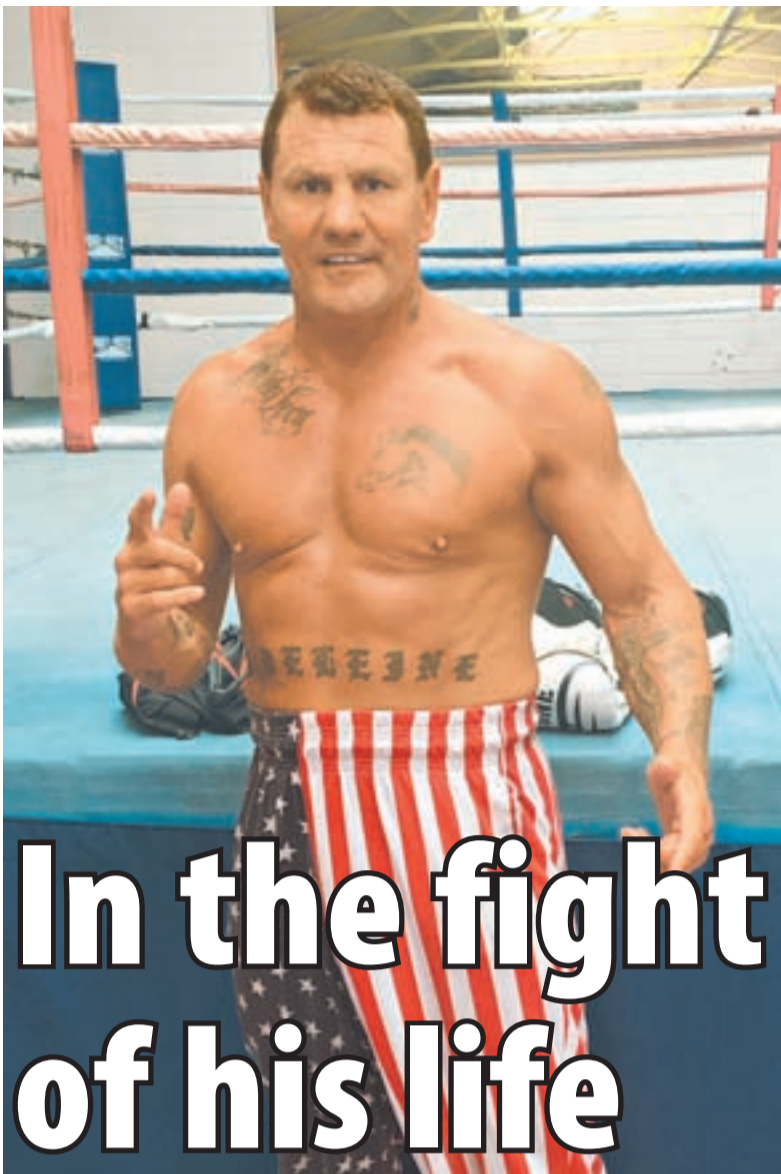
Like millions of others before him, Tony's conclusion was "It had to have happened".

Of course, some suggest the story ended up nothing like it began - having been distorted over the years. But those who know say it takes more than two generations before history starts to get distorted into legend. And the record of Jesus' birth was written down much faster than that.

And if it was all invention in the first place, why ever would those out to promote Jesus and His cause choose do so? Why paint your hero as a bastard child, born among animals. You'd want a better story than that.

All of which means, far from being just a nice story, what we have is the wonderful news of the Creator of the universe stepping into human history.

HOWZAT FOR INSPIRATION!



In the fight of his life

Boxer Andy Flute found himself in the fight of his life as he battled alcoholism and violence – but when he invited a much needed friend into his corner, he was able to give a knock-out punch to his addictions.

After retiring at the age of 30, the former British Middleweight Title Challenger was on the ropes as his life spiralled out of control. The father of three, who has shared the ring with the likes of Nigel Benn and Chris Eubank, was at the end of a ten-day booze binge when he cried out to God.

He knew this was one fight he couldn't win alone.

He said: "It's all thanks to Jesus. I tried everything but the only way out was Him. I believe that God has kept me here to reach people who wouldn't normally go to church. Through my story they can see that tough men love Jesus too!"

"I boxed at a high level but I was fighting booze the whole time," he said.

"My drinking was out of control and I'd already been to prison for alcohol-related violence. I had nowhere else to go. I came to Jesus and asked God into my life. I was in my bedroom and I dropped onto my hands and knees and I was crying out in pain. I'd lost everything. To come from such success to being a broken man, I prayed, 'Please God help me to get out of this.'"

In 2015, Andy, now 49, was healed of his addiction.

He said: "I remember saying to God, 'If I go through with it will you take my alcoholism away?' And He did! My addiction just left me."

Now Andy, who lives in the West Midlands, spends his time going into prisons telling his story to anyone who will listen.

"I think back over my life and the

times that I'd tried to kill myself," he said. "I'd had so many near misses and I knew that God has saved me for a reason.

"I've gone full circle. Now I go and tell criminals and addicts about Jesus and what He's done for me. The people who knew me before can't believe the change. I tell them that God did it!"

"My favourite Bible verse in 2 Corinthians 5:17 – 'If anyone is in Christ they are a new creation' – because that's what happened to me."

Andy's book *Jesus In My Corner* is available now.

"The book's a miracle in itself because I left school with no qualifications," he said.

"It's about reaching people who wouldn't normally want to know about God. I was a hard man and a fighter, and if I can love Jesus then maybe it can reach those people like me."

This article first appeared in *New Life* magazine and is used with kind permission.



TOP: Andy Flute fighting fit.
ABOVE: Andy with his book titled *Jesus in my Corner*.



Carlos Brathwaite of West Indies fields off his own bowling during the second MyTeam11 ODI between the West Indies and India at the Queen's Park Oval on August 11, 2019 in Port of Spain, Trinidad And Tobago.
(Photo Ashley Allen/Getty Images)

Carlos Brathwaite is a West Indies all-rounder cricketer from Barbados who took over as captain of the West Indies Twenty20 Internationals (T20I) team in 2016. He competes in Test cricket, One Day Internationals (ODIs) and Twenty20 Internationals for the West Indies. In the last over of the 2016 World T20 final against England, Carlos became the first West Indies player to hit four consecutive sixes in a T20I match.

"I always wanted to be a pro cricketer, but I also wanted to be an entrepreneur," he tells *Sport Go*.

"I think I was 19 when I came to a crossroad – should I carry on with university and pick up cricket later, or should I devote a few years to the game? I decided I would see how playing went, knowing I could get a degree at a later stage if necessary. So that was very important, and thankfully my career has turned out well."

The World T20 final changed his life.

"I don't even know how to explain how I actually hit those sixties, but it was an amazing feeling. It was just one of those fairy tales that you actually get to live out; it was a dream come true to win a World Cup and what a way to win it!"

"To be part of an epic final and then hitting four sixes in the way that I did, it was something I had never dreamed about. I was speechless," he exclaims.

Of his childhood, he shares: "I was brought up in a home that loved Christ; my mum is a very devout Christ-follower and I always went to Sunday School. It was all around me; going to church and Sunday

School would always be very much a part of the day. So from a young age I was introduced to Christ and I grew with it.

"I fell off the wagon at times but it is ingrained in me and my faith is part of my foundation."

He sees his ability as a gift from God. "My dad tells the story of me being two or three years old and playing drives in the backyard. I work very hard and I think sometimes people take gifts from God and expect that you don't have to do anything with them, that they just mature and you get better. But there is a lot of hard work to be done.

"It's like the man in the Bible who was given talents and doubled them, compared with the man who got his talent and buried it. So while this is a gift from God and I appreciate it, there is also still a lot of hard work to be done to eventually mature it and reap success.

"God is teaching me humility

right now. I have been so fortunate to share an Indian Premier League dressing room with Imran Tahir, J.P. Duminy and Rahul Dravid – guys who are so humble. They have achieved so much in cricket and when fans come up to them in cricket-mad India, hounding them for pictures, they are so polite in saying yes or no.

"For me, to get the same praise that they are showered with is hard to accept. It's now time for me to bring that humility back to the Caribbean and be a shining light to my peers, and show it wherever I go."

Carlos' favourite Bible verse comes from John 11:35: "Jesus wept."

"I think men feel they need to be strong and macho," he explains, "But if Jesus can cry, why can't I? This verse allows me to connect with my emotions."

This story first appeared in the *Sport Go* Magazine. Used with kind permission.

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