

## BETTER THAN WALKING

UNIVERSAL CITY, CALIFORNIA - FEBRUARY 7, 2014: Singer Joni Eareckson Tada attends the 22nd Annual Movieguide Awards Gala. Photo David Livingston/Getty Images



Joni gets a hug from husband Ken in 2013, during her fight against cancer.

### One day, one choice and one prayer changed teenager Joni Eareckson's life forever.

Joni Eareckson took what she describes as a "really stupid dive" into what ended up being extremely shallow water. As a result her head snapped back as she hit the bottom of the water, crunching four of her vertebrae, which resulted in the severing of her spinal cord. Joni couldn't move a muscle.

There she was, lying face down in the water, desperately hoping that her sister Kathy, who had invited her out to the beach for a swim, would notice that she had not surfaced from her dive. But Kathy's back was to Joni and she hadn't even seen her dive off the raft! The minutes stretched longer and longer. Joni thought she was going to die.

Joni had had a happy childhood, growing up in a very athletic family who were very involved in tennis and horse-back riding.

"My earliest memory of hearing about the God of the Bible was around a campfire on the beach," Joni says. "I was with my sisters, my Mom, and my Dad, hearing stories of Noah, Moses, David, and Daniel. But God wasn't really personal to me."

All that changed though, when, at 14 years old, Joni went away on a church weekend retreat. She was challenged by the speaker there who asked the kids to measure their lives up against the Ten Commandments.

"As I measured my life up against those Commandments," Joni recalls, "one by one by one ... I got this overwhelming sense that I was missing the mark; that I was not going to make it."

Joni shares that she was hit with the realisation of why Jesus had come to Earth. He was the only One who kept the Commandments even when she didn't and even when she couldn't.

"I was only 14," Joni remembers with a smile, "but I was able to reach out and embrace Jesus and say, 'I need You.'"

Joni returned home, very excited about her new faith. Through high school, however, the enthusiasm of what she had done began to wane.

"My prayers became very self-centred," she states. "I prayed things like, 'God, I need to lose weight,'

'God, I need a new boyfriend,' 'God, I need good grades on this test'. Unfortunately, I thought I had done God a great big favour by accepting Jesus as my Saviour."

Towards the end of high school, Joni was convicted about the way she was living. She prayed, "Lord, I'm not doing this Christian thing right and I know it. I don't want to go to college and defame Your Good Name. I know it's far more than about me so do something in my life to jerk it right side up because I'm really living this life wrong."

Just a few weeks after Joni's high school graduation, Kathy took her to the beach for a swim. There, Joni made the dive that tipped the entire course of her life upside down.

"As I was lying in the water," Joni shares sadly, "Kathy got bitten by a crab. She was so startled, she turned around quickly and called out to me, 'Joni, watch out for the crabs!' It was then that she saw my blonde hair floating on the surface of the water. I was ready to drown. Kathy swam over and pulled me out of the water. I was never so grateful for fresh air!"

Kathy had saved Joni. But for what purpose? For what reason? Joni couldn't help but wonder.

Lying in the hospital, Joni was

told by the doctors that she would have to sit down for the rest of her life as a quadriplegic without the use of her legs and arms.

"I remember thinking, 'God, is this your idea of answering a prayer? A prayer for me to draw closer to you?'" Joni says. "How could He have taken me so seriously?"

Joni sank into deep depression. However, she had a few Christian friends who came to visit her in hospital.

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## The power of a single decision

BY JODY BENNETT

IN 2007, after some months of house hunting, I bought a house after seeing it once - before my husband had even viewed it (although he said I could go ahead), in an area we knew nothing about, where we knew no one and at the other end of the city from where we had been renting.

I look back now and I think about how profoundly that decision has influenced my family's lives. It determined where the children went to school, the friends and acquaintances we made, the volunteering we have done and even where I work.

And it influenced my extended family too because it determined where my parents settled when they immigrated, where my brother and his wife moved to from over East and, in turn the people they are involved with and the



schools my nieces go to.

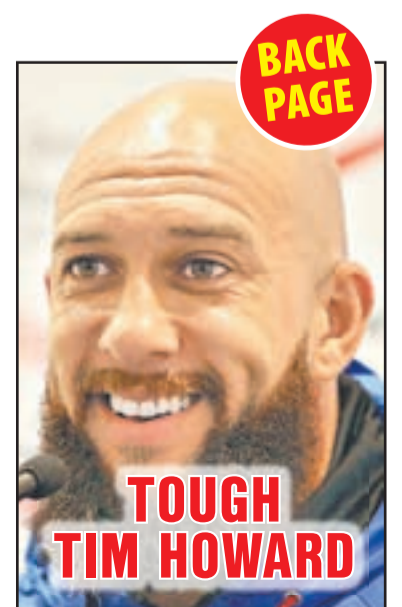
So many knock on effects from one decision.

I feel a bit frightened when I think how the destiny of so many people was influenced by signing that one document.

In the Bible there are also stories of how one woman's decision had unforeseen long-term repercussions for her family.

Think of Eve choosing to eat the forbidden fruit, which resulted in her and Adam being banished from Eden, and curses that have affected all of humanity and led to the murder of her son by his brother.

● Turn to page 2



# That feeling of insecurity

BY ALAN BAILEY

INSECURITY abounds. Lack of money has a lot to do with it for many in our society; they are constantly threatened by the inability to have enough to cover the many demands for their cash. How worrying!

Insecure relationships can make life awkward and slippery. How many wonder how long they and their partners are going to stay together. The signs of breakdown are coming up all too frequently. It's hard to sleep at night when you wonder how long the security you have enjoyed is going to last.

Job security has an unfriendly look about it to another percentage of people. Will the boss call me in and tell me not to come in on Monday? If he does, where to next? Am I past getting another position? Will I join the unemployed who have no job security whatever?

I have sympathy for those who feel threatened by the violence all around us. Old people can be attacked in their homes. Women have their bags snatched from them in broad daylight. Violent shootings and stabbings are reported daily. The road is a place of danger to all on it. No-one has a guarantee of protection.

### WHO TO TRUST?

Unfortunately, though authorities usually try to make our lives secure,

there is only a certain amount that they can do. Politicians often let us down. How can we handle dangerous dictators who want war? Then, the judicial system often lets people down. The guilty seem to get away with murder.

### CAN WE DO ANYTHING?

Ordinary people can and do feel vulnerable. Perhaps some may retreat into entertainment to avoid thinking about it all. That's understandable.

However, there may be a different approach. Is there anyone in charge in the universe? Is there a Sovereign who has ultimate control? Is there a day of justice and reckoning coming? Yes. God is allowing evil to run its course but nothing is out of hand as far as He is concerned. Wrongs will be put right. God is the great judge. The Bible makes it clear that God is to be known and trusted as a Father who loves His children. All through the Bible there are references to security for those who are in Christ. For instance, in one place it says it is impossible for God to lie. We who have fled to take hold of the hope offered to us may be greatly encouraged. We have this hope as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure. Having an anchor is all-important in a stormy sea.

In an insecure world there is nothing better to turn to than the promises of God. They will remain when all else is gone.

# Better than walking

• From page 1

A Bible verse that they shared with Joni was from Jeremiah chapter 29 verse 11: "I know the plans I have for you, plans not to harm you, but to help you, plans to prosper you, and to give you a hopeful future."

At first, Joni couldn't understand why the Lord had allowed her to become a quadriplegic if He had plans to prosper and help her. But, as she read the context around the verse, she began to understand.

"God's plans for a hopeful future for me was not necessarily me jumping up, dancing, kicking, running, walking, and getting back the use of my arms and legs," Joni explains. "No. God's plans for me go far deeper. A deeper healing – of my soul. When God says He won't harm us, it doesn't mean the body, or our circumstances. He is not going to do anything that will harm our soul! Our body may be harmed, yes, but it will somehow search to enrich our soul!"

A quadriplegic of 46 years, the sufferer of chronic pain and the victim of breast cancer, Joni still continues to praise God for her many blessings.

Joni is happily married to Ken Tada. They have no children, but



Joni Eareckson Tada has never let her disabilities hold her back.

nurture and encourage many other children as if they were their own.

For over 35 years they have run the not-for-profit organisation Joni and Friends, which shares Jesus and practical help with the disabled community.

Joni is also a busy public speaker, author, singer and radio host.

One day, a few years ago, Ken was driving Joni home from chemotherapy (during the time when she had breast cancer) and they were talking about

suffering being little splash-overs from hell. As they pulled into the driveway, Ken asked, "What do you think splash-overs of heaven are? Are they those easy, breezy bright times when everything is going your way?" Joni answered: "I said no. Splash-overs of heaven is finding Jesus in your splash-overs of hell. Nothing is more heavenly, nothing is sweeter, nothing is more poignant, and nothing is more precious

than finding Jesus standing next to you in your hell. And I wouldn't trade it for any amount of walking in this world."

### "GOD'S PLANS FOR A HOPEFUL FUTURE FOR ME WAS NOT NECESSARILY ME ... WALKING"



## Unusual encounter

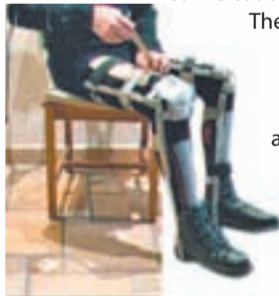
(FROM A VLOG)

SO many times Pastor Greg Locke is asked the question by sceptics and atheists: "If your God is real, if He's so good, why does He allow such suffering?"

Greg admits that if he had all the answers he would be God himself and not need faith, but one way he often responds is:

"Some years ago I was preaching in Nigeria and I took along an American preacher friend, Bobby, who has severe cerebral palsy, walks with crutches and has his legs in braces.

"We were waiting in the airport lounge on the return journey when a man tripped over my friends' legs and spilt his coffee. He apologised profusely and the two men struck up a conversation.



The man was a devout atheist and he and Bobby began to talk about the gospel

[good news of Jesus' life and death]. Bobby shared the story about how he came to believe in Jesus and about his disability.

"About 45 minutes later, the atheist stood up in anger and frustration and demanded: 'If your God is so real, why do you have those braces on your legs? Tell me that!' And Bobby calmly answered: 'So that you could trip over my legs, ask me that question and we could have this conversation.'

"You see, God reveals Himself in some of the most unbelievable ways. All you have to do is pay attention," Greg concludes.

## The power of just a single decision

• From page 1

Think of Moses' mother, Jochebed, deciding to put her little boy in a basket in the river, as a result of which he was found by Pharaoh's daughter, brought up as a prince and went on to lead the Israelites out of Egypt.

Think of Ruth choosing to leave her nation and go with Naomi back to Israel, as a result of which she met Boaz, remarried and became the great-grandmother of King David. Think of Bathsheba whose decision to bath on the roof that day led to the death of husband and baby, her marriage to David and the birth of Solomon, who became the richest most successful king of Israel.

Lot's wife chose to look back, Sarah gave her maidservant to Abraham, Rebekah chose to trick Isaac, Delilah betrayed Samson, Esther chose to speak to the king – each of these women's decisions had far-reaching consequences for whole nations.

It is scary to think about the potentially life-changing decisions we make every day. We remember very little of the past and know absolutely nothing about the future

but we are called upon to shape that future every day by our choices.

Which is why, when I was driving for an hour to an appointment with an estate agent in 2007, I prayed all the way. I knew that God could foresee all the knock-on effects of buying a house, I knew He knew the best place for us to live and I knew I could trust Him to guide me. When I



walked into our place I just knew this was home. Let me encourage you that although we see just the sliver of time that is the present and maybe have a dim memory of the past, for God the past, present and future is all laid out like one big canvas. The Bible says He knows the end from the beginning (Isaiah 46:10) and has seen each day we will live before it happens (Psalm 139:16).

If you are overwhelmed by choices, or the potential consequences of your decisions, pray and ask the One who is able to give us wisdom for every decision, has knowledge of all things and is even able to mitigate the effects of our worst mistakes.

"For I know what I have planned for you," says the Lord. "I have plans to prosper you, not to harm you. I have plans to give you a future filled with hope." (Jeremiah 29:11)

### Crossword

**ACROSS**

- 7 Cheapskate
- 12 Make certain of
- 18 Go to press
- 1 Insect that spreads sleeping sickness (6,3)
- 8 Oyster lining
- 14 Bright thought
- 19 One looking after a building
- 9 Lock openers
- 17 Downloaded novel (1-4)
- 10 Gentle sheen / glow

**DOWN**

- 1 Stopwatch official
- 2 School assignment
- 3 Zilch
- 4 Mildew or mould
- 5 Marina sight
- 6 One giving to a cause
- 11 Shares dealer
- 13 Bite-the-bullet type
- 15 Take a sip
- 16 Skewer; saliva

**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

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

**SOLUTION PAGE 11**

# Saudi finds his Saviour

**For Dr Khalid Al Shammari, his honeymoon in the United States was not just the beginning of a happy marriage, or an interesting holiday in another culture; it became the beginning of a spiritual journey that would impact every aspect of his life.**

**K**halid grew up in a Muslim home and lived his whole life in Jeddah and Mecca. At King Abdulaziz University he specialised in microbiology and eventually got his Master's degree in bacteriology.

In 1997, he and his wife honeymooned in the States, where a group of Christians tried to convince him of the truth of their religion, and he them of his. They challenged him to pray and ask whether Jesus is God. Khalid did, but nothing happened initially.

"After several months, I had a dream," he shares in his Youtube testimony, "and I knew from it that Christ is God, who suffered on the cross instead of me. But I could not admit this openly.

"Because of this dream, I decided to read the Bible so that I could know the facts before making any decisions. I searched the Christian sites in Arabic. I found that the Bible consists

of the Old and New Testaments, the old for the Jews and the new for the Christians. I decided to download the New Testament that belongs to the Christians and read it."

Khalid did this and through his reading realised: "I was supposed to die for my own sins and not [Jesus] Christ the righteous one. But He decided to leave heaven and to be crucified – to die in my place. I asked myself: why?"

Khalid says the answer is in John 3:16 – because Jesus loved us even though we were unworthy of that love, He chose to pay the price to wash us clean of sin so that we can be in eternal relationship with Him.

In the New Testament, Khalid saw that Jesus often referred to other writers like Daniel and Isaiah, or said "it is written".

"I asked myself, 'Where is it written? Who are these prophets?' A simple search led me to the Old Testament. It was as if God was saying, 'The Book of the Jews is my Word too. Read it so that the truth can be clear. See that those who lived before Christ

knew of His coming and waited for Him in faith."

So Khalid downloaded and read the Old Testament and was interested to find that many of the teachings and practices of the Jews are still found today in Saudi traditions.

"I found many things of great interest to me. I came across a verse that said: 'You clothe me with skin and flesh and knit me together with bones and sinews.' (Job 10:11) I almost fell off my chair in surprise, crying 'God is great!' My wife asked me, 'What is going on?' I told her: 'The Bible mentions the details of the foetal formation in the mother's womb in a precise scientific way, contrary to what is in the Koran.'"

Khalid and his wife asked a Muslim embryologist and imams about the contradiction between the Koran and the science regarding this point. Surat 23:12-14 of the Koran says: "And certainly did We create man from an extract of clay. Then We placed him as a sperm-drop in a firm lodging."

No one could explain the problem to the couple's satisfaction. However, it did cause Khalid to be reported several times for apostasy and eventually blacklisted.



Dr Khalid Al Shammari shares his story on Youtube.

He believed it was time to flee Saudi Arabia and told his wife they would have to divorce, as it is illegal for a Muslim woman to be married to a Christian man.

"I love you and want you to be with me," he said. "Choose for yourself."

She said: "I want to be with you." Khalid warned her of the dangers, but his wife decided to stay with him in the hopes of winning him back to Islam.

However, after studying in-depth and comparing the teachings of Islam to the teachings of Christ, she too became a Christian.

On October 17, 2003, Khalid planned to flee to Jordan but did not know how he would get out of Saudi

because of the travel blacklisting. For a week he prayed from Psalm 91:1 "Whoever dwells in the shelter of the Most High will rest in the shadow of the Almighty."

"On the day of travel, I said: 'Lord, I am not expecting you to open the Red Sea for me, nevertheless, please let me out of this dilemma in your way.'

"I was not demanding a miracle, as His existence in my life is the best miracle of all," explains Khalid. "Nevertheless, God gave me a miracle for at the time when I was boarding my flight, the immigration computer was shut down and the official couldn't check the records!"

Today Khalid preaches to thousands through Al Haya Arabic Christian TV.

"The whole credit is to the Lord Jesus Christ," Khalid asserts. "I didn't search for God, but He searched for me and found me. He saved me and my family.

"He is the only true living God who hears and responds and loves the people whom He created. God loves all people but He hates sin. Come today and know my Lord, Jesus Christ, because He is close.

"Words are unable to describe the joy that Christ has given me. I know this, that you too can experience this joy. Please consider the claims and the works of Christ," he urges. •

## Breaking out of an icy grip

**Twenty-three-year-old Jayden was a fearful addict, but then he started to pray**

I was bullied at school and dropped out in grade nine after I was offered a chef's apprenticeship.

But a relationship breakdown when I was 20 caused me to start using drugs, specifically ice. I grew up with quite a lot of pain in my life from my mum and dad's divorce, so when my relationship broke down, I really didn't know how to deal with it.

When I used ice, it took away the pain. I had over a year of intense addiction and there were a few rock-bottom moments. Just before Christmas, I knew my son was being born, but I wasn't allowed to see him and I threatened to kill people in the hospital. I hated the person I'd become – I just wasn't that aggressive person at all.

People were chasing me for the money I owed. I was going to be killed. I called my dad, and he gave me the money but the condition was that I had to enter rehab.

I went to a Recovery Services Centre but I was just an immature kid and threatened somebody on the program, so they asked me to leave.

I went to stay with someone close by who I knew had drugs, and I became psychotic. I was hiding in a public toilet thinking people were chasing me but there was no real threat. It was all in my head but I just couldn't escape – it was horrible.

Then a lot of really amazing things happened and I now look back and see God was there. It was



during that time I prayed my first prayer.

I knew they had no room in rehab, but my prayer was if that was where I was meant to be I'd get a place, and I did!

In my first few weeks back at the Recovery Centre, nothing much changed – but I kept praying even though I didn't know who God was. (I thank God for praying grandmas, because I found out later that mine prayed for me every day).

Then, one night, I looked up out of my window and it all got super bright and I saw a white light coming towards me and it gently kissed my face. I know now it was the Holy Spirit. Then, just as suddenly, it was gone and I fell asleep feeling truly safe and secure for the first time in a

very long time.

I did the rehab program and gained a determination and confidence that I never had before.

While I had my moments, God gave me this huge motivation. I was so determined that I did every extra course offered. I made a great friend in there who had my back, and I was invited to spiritual camps and conventions. I spend Saturday with family, but Sundays mean church services morning and night.

It seems God was truly guiding me every step of the way. While in recovery I heard they wanted to start cooking classes, so I applied and said, "I'm a trained chef and I'd be happy to teach people to cook."

I ran a course and later applied to become a full-time chef at the center.

To me, it is heaps more than a job. Because I've come straight off the program, a lot of participants come up and talk openly and the chefs' office I share has become a prayer room.

God has also brought a beautiful Christian girl into my life and we are planning our future together.

I know I'm still young, but I've experienced a lot in my life already and the one thing I am absolutely sure of is that God transforms lives! •

As told to Naomi Singlehurst. Used with permission from The Salvation Army's Warrcry magazine.

### Exercise daily - a spiritual workout

And let us **run** with perseverance the race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. Hebrews 12:1b-2a

Then he went with them into the temple courts, **walking and jumping**, and praising God. Acts 3:8

**Throw** all your anxiety onto Him [Jesus], because He cares about you. 1 Peter 5:7

# A-Team's Mr. T ain't no fool

One of the most recognisable characters on TV, cinema, animation and computer games is Lawrence Tureaud or Mr. T.

Everybody knows the man with that signature mohawk haircut, tough and intimidating image and past extravagant jewelry wearing. But certainly not all people know that Mr. T is a devout Christian and often describes himself as a "tough mama's boy".

Although his trademark hair and scowl are unchanged from the years since he played Sergeant. B.A. Baracus on 1980s hit TV show *The A-Team*, all the actor's signature gold chains are gone since Hurricane Katrina.

"As a Christian, when I saw other people lose their lives and their land and property ... I felt that it would be unnecessary and disrespectful before God for me to continue wearing my gold," he explains.

He is characteristically outspoken about his faith and the practical way he feels it should be expressed to others.

On Twitter in April 2014 he wrote:

**"MY FAME  
COULDN'T  
SAVE ME. MY  
GOLD AND  
MY MONEY  
COULDN'T  
STOP CANCER"**



"I boldly confess that I am A Christian! I believe in GOD! His son Jesus and I am Not Ashamed!! (Matthew 5:16)"

"I am a sinner who has been saved by grace. It is by the grace (undeserved love) of God that I'm here. We all have sinned and fallen short of God's glory. I come home and I ask God to forgive me for my sins. Every day I ask for a new cleansing," he told [worldreliigionnews.com](http://worldreliigionnews.com)

When asked about when he first decided to follow Christ, Mr.

T says in a YouTube interview that the hand of God was on him from a very young age when he used to be the Bible bearer in his preacher father's church services, and listened



Mr. T, with his trademark grimace and (now discarded) gold chains, at the Palladium Theatre in New York City in 1993.

to gospel messages on the radio with his mother.

At 13 he was baptized in water by his father as an outward symbol of the faith he professed, but it was only in 1995 when he was diagnosed with a rare form of cancer that the mettle of his belief was really tested.

"The story of Job gave me strength when I had cancer. Job said to God, 'Though You slay me, yet will I trust You. God giveth and God taketh away. Blessed be His holy name.' And that's how I live. You know I came with nothing, I'm going to die with nothing. But in between them two points that's what it's all about.

"I ain't going to say I was 100% [faith-filled] all the time," Mr. T admits. "But I never really faltered. I cried, I ate, I got mad, I said I wouldn't do things. That was my Job test. As I'm going through things, if I didn't read the book of Job I guess I would have fallen apart. I could have said, 'What kind of God does this and that?' But no, I understood God said it would get rough and tough."

Cancer clarified his priorities: "My fame couldn't save me! My gold, my money, couldn't stop cancer from appearing on my body. If they can't save me, then I don't need them.

"We have got to keep our eyes on the prize, every day," the *Rocky III* actor encourages. "You might not have the things you want, but if you check carefully, you got all you need.

"And it's hard for some people to get believing," he acknowledges. "They say, 'But I've been hurt by so many people and by some churches, or whatever.' I explain that wasn't God. God didn't do that to you. That's somebody else. Because God will still love you even if you give up on Him."

Mr. T rails against "secret service" Christians who don't want anybody to know they love Jesus, and says Chris-



Mr. T (B.A. Baracus) and George Peppard (John "Hannibal" Smith), stars of the TV series *The A-Team*. Photo Photoshot/Getty Images.

tians should "come out of the closet" and live out their faith by meeting the needs of their communities.

"If God has touched me, I've got to touch somebody else. God has forgiven me, so I've got to forgive the people who did me wrong. If Jesus can forgive all things—with the crown of thorns upon his head on the cross..., then I've got to forgive. If I don't forgive, I'm not a follower. If I'm not kind, if I don't share, I'm not a follower, I'm a liar. I can't be greedy."

So when a Japanese company offered the tee-totalling Mr. T almost a million dollars to do a beer commercial he said, "I won't do it." He

says it would have made him a liar and a fraud.

"I say to the Lord, 'when they see me, let them see you' so you know I can't be coming out of the strip bar with a couple women on my arm. And I say 'Lord, when they hear me let them hear you'—that means I can't be telling them the nasty jokes I used to tell. Because the Bible says, Christ makes you a new creature, old things are passed away. I'm not the same man I used to be, I'm not out hell-raising, and doing stuff like that.

"I am a changed man. When I step out, I'm representing the God I serve."

nudge  
WITH KARL FAASE

## What makes humans special?

IN the preamble to the United Nations declaration to human rights it recognizes "the inherent dignity ... and inalienable rights of the members of the human family".

Everyone agrees with this statement but why should humans have more rights than some species of animals?

Evolutionary psychologist Robin Dunbar wrote: "It is hard to escape the conclusion that religion is the one phenomenon in which we humans really are different in some qualitative sense from our ape cousins."

Few want to admit this truth, but the dignity and worth of humanity is not about intelligence and ability, but the concept that we have the spark of God within us.

Here is how we are different, this is why we have a conscience, and what underpins our creativity. The gift of the divine marks humanity out as unique.

## WHAT WILL HEAVEN BE LIKE?

BY JODY BENNETT

WHEN someone says "heaven", what do you think of? Wings, harps and clouds? Doing your favourite thing all day? A bland place with lots of singing?

Many people define heaven by the things that make them feel happy and fulfilled on Earth, but what if I were to tell you that in heaven there is no marriage, no sex, no Wi-Fi, no computer games, no Netflix, no sport and probably no sleep. Would you still want to go?

The Bible actually tells us very little about heaven. But when Jesus was told about a woman who had had seven husbands and asked whose she would be in heaven, He made it clear that in the afterlife there is no marriage or sex. "When the dead rise, they will neither marry nor be given in marriage; they will be like the angels in heaven." (Mark 12:25)

In the glimpses the Apostle John had of heaven, as recorded in the biblical book of Revelation, it was a place of worship – with crowds standing around the throne of God singing praises and bowing before Him.

So, if heaven is not a place where we get to do whatever we want, or gratify all the desires we have on earth, why is it somewhere we would want to go?

Well, the people who want to go to heaven want to be there for one reason only. One thing makes heaven, heaven and the absence of that one thing makes hell the most awful, fearful place it is. That one thing is Jesus.

The people who want to go to heaven want to be there because Jesus is there.

He is the embodiment of love, mercy, kindness, goodness and truth. All our deepest longings are fulfilled in Him and therefore the yearning of those who know Him, who call themselves Christians, is to be where He is.

That is why there is so much worship in heaven. Not because it is forced, like some sort of long boring church service, but because everyone there is so overcome by God's goodness and so grateful that He has extended that goodness to them, that they cannot but praise Him endlessly.

The Bible makes two other important points about the afterlife that are also relevant.

Firstly, our desires and lusts will not be fulfilled in hell either. Hell is no endless debauched party. Jesus describes it as a blazing furnace, where



there is weeping and gnashing of teeth. (Matthew 13:42) It is a place of torment, devoid of any of the goodness, light, purity or happiness that we may know on earth.

Secondly, heaven is not the final destination of those who trust in Jesus for their salvation. John tells us in Revelation 21: "Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth," for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any

sea. I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Look! God's dwelling place is now among the people, and He will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. 'He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death' or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away." (verses 1-4)

Ultimately, there will be a new Earth and Revelation gives us only a few clues as to what it will be like but for those who know and love Jesus only one fact is important – He will be there and we will never be apart from Him again.

# Search for peace leads transgender to find true identity

Laura Perry experienced a tumultuous life during her teen years, having struggled with her sexuality for most of her childhood.

"I had always had feelings of wanting to be a boy as a young child," Laura says. "I was very athletic and enjoyed sports. I didn't get along with girls very well. I was uncomfortable being a girl.

"By my 20s, I fully embraced the transgender lifestyle," Laura admits sadly. "I called myself 'Jake' and lived as a transgender 'man' for eight years. I took opposite sex hormones and underwent a double mastectomy and a full hysterectomy to remove my female organs."

Laura lived with a partner who also identified as a transgender, attended pro-LGBT support groups and moved towards having more surgery to become less feminine.

However, she had grown up in a godly Christian home and was raised attending church, Bible study and a Christian school.

Although Laura had a lot of head knowledge of Jesus, she never had a personal relationship with Him.

"As a child, I had a lot of confusing thoughts about my identity," Laura recalls. "I was often told that God had created me perfectly and hadn't made any mistakes, but over time I began to get very angry with God. If He had created me perfectly, then why did I feel this way? Why did I struggle with this so much? Over the years, this created a lot of bitterness and frustration in my heart.

"All I could see was the things God had not given me, I didn't even see all the things He had given me and blessed

me with. I started to really doubt my faith."

Laura, in her desperation, honestly thought that being transgender "would make her happy".

When Laura accepted the transgender life style, her parents, Francine and Paul, never ceased to pray for her.

"Their prayers weren't really offensive," Laura states. "But I was more offended that they didn't accept me. I wanted them to affirm me as a man."

All the while, though, Laura was miserable and searching for real peace.

## "I'D NEVER FELT SO MUCH PEACE AND LOVE BEFORE"



"Two or three years after I became a transgender male, I remember thinking, 'I am still no happier than I was before.' I felt a bit like a hamster on a wheel. I had no purpose. I thought becoming who I really wanted to be would finally give me what I was looking for, but it left me empty."

Laura admits that her heart remained cold until, through a series of miraculous doings, God slowly began to draw her back to Him.

It started with prayer.

"My mom, Francine, turned to her ladies Bible study group for prayer. They prayed earnestly for me to turn away from the sin I was living in," Laura says. "My mom was crushed to the core by how I was living. These ladies' prayers were also releasing God's healing in her too."

Laura's transgender partner was politically conservative and got Laura into radio talk shows. This eventually led Laura to listen to the Christian radio.

"One of the biggest influences was when my Mom asked me to work on her website for her Bible study," Laura shares. "I was a programmer and she needed a website built, so I knew it wasn't intentional on her part to try and win me back.

"I started reading her notes and over time, I just got really curious. She was finding things in the Bible I had never seen or heard before. I began asking her questions about Christianity and the Christian faith, which opened up the door for communication with her."

All along, Laura had considered herself a Christian because of her upbringing, but as God opened her eyes to the truth, she realized how wrong she was.

"Slowly but surely," Laura explains, "God worked in me, making me realize that the transgender life was a dead-end."

Things didn't change overnight. Laura "was still conflicted" but after reaching a particularly low point in her life, she tearfully asked the Lord to help her.

One day, she asked her mother, "Is it OK if I come to church?"

At first, Francine was worried that if Laura came to church as a "man" it would cause embarrassment, but "grace won out".

"It was a turning point in my life," Laura says excitedly. "In August 2016, I gave my life to Jesus."

Laura broke up with her transgender partner and moved back home with her parents. It was a decision that she said came after much struggling.

"A lot of people these days tell me, 'Well that's good for you, whatever makes you happy,' but me leaving that lifestyle had nothing to do with me being happy," Laura admits. "It was extremely hard for me to leave it. I did not want to be a girl. I had no



Laura Perry today, confident in the skin she was born in.  
BELOW: Laura lived as Jake for eight years.

desire at the time to be a girl. It was really about surrendering to Christ.

"I knew it was about dying to self and it wasn't about what I felt or what I wanted. It was about what God wanted and He has redeemed and changed my heart more than I ever could have imagined!"

Laura started attending her mother's women's Bible study and was amazed because she didn't know that they had been praying for her.

"When I first came home, the first three days were extremely difficult for me," Laura says. "I just felt like I was dying and it was extremely painful. Then my Mom laid out in front of me some cards that these women had written to me. I just sat at the kitchen table, sobbing, as I read them. I couldn't believe the love that these women had for me – and they hadn't even met me."

On top of this, these ladies raised \$1,200 to buy Laura a new wardrobe and when she came to their Bible study for the first time, she was surrounded by women who were kind, welcoming, and filled with joy because of her repentance.

"It was amazing," Laura declares. "I'd never felt so much peace and love before. I am so humbled by all that God has done."

God has healed the mother-daughter relationship between Laura and Francine.

Laura has now fully embraced her God-given sexuality as a woman, her story being one of God's amazing undeserved kindness and redemption.



"I am living proof that God's love is greater than the devil's lies," she testifies.

To teens or youth who are gender confused or hurting, Laura urges, "It's not about what we want, it's about Christ. Jesus said, 'If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself, take up his cross, and follow Me. For whosoever will save his life shall lose it, and whosoever will lose his life for My sake shall find it.' Jesus will set us free." •

## WHAT IS THE MEANING OF LIFE?

IT was interesting to note that "What is the meaning of life" was the third most popular of the "What is..." google search terms for 2015—after "What is Netflix" and "What is Love" but beating "What is the Time" and "What is the Weather Today". It seems there are many people out there using Google to do some deep soul-searching.

What is the meaning of *your* life? I wonder how you would answer.

Some might bleakly claim everything in our universe was created randomly and thus has no meaning and purpose, while others might sentimentally hold to ideas of living for family or to make the world a better place.

Yet have you ever wondered what the God of the Bible has to say about the meaning of human life?

God made it clear in the Bible's book of Isaiah chapter 43 verse 7 when He said: "Everyone who is called by My name, and whom I have created for My glory, whom I have formed, even whom I have made".

God made man in His image and for His glory. He created mankind to have a

relationship with Him.

So what does He require of us? Micah chapter 6 verse 8 explains: "He has told you, O man, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?"

In the New Testament this is reiterated when Paul says, "...whatever you do, do all to the glory of God" (1 Corinthians 10:31).

Meaning comes through bringing God glory and praise through all that we do – whether that be giving 100% effort at work, showing kindness to others or choosing to do the right thing despite temptation to do wrong.

Acting justly, loving others and humbly obeying God's Word is what God calls us to do. We are called to worship Him with the way we live our lives because we are "fearfully and wonderfully made" (see Psalm 139:14).

Rather than turn to Google for answers, turn to God. He loves you and wants you to know Him personally through His Son Jesus Christ. •



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# Confronted by the Second Law of Thermodynamics

Warren Nunn chats with engineer Colin Gibson on his journey from evolution to creation

BY WARREN NUNN

Professional engineer Colin Gibson was raised in a church where he was taught six-day creation in Sunday school but that grounding was challenged at high school when evolution and millions of years were presented as fact in his science class.

That left him confused and thinking that he must have been taught fairytales at Sunday school.

"I didn't even suspect the State school I attended would have lied and therefore I believed the evolution story taught there was true," Colin remembers.

"There was no point attending church, so I stopped attending and led a very secular lifestyle. Throughout the remainder of my schooling, including two years at a 'Christian' private school, I was taught plenty of evolution but zero creation."

Colin enjoyed watching scientific TV documentaries but was puzzled by statements about species that referred to changes within animals as 'adapting to their environment'.

While studying engineering and computer programming at university he continued to have 'nagging doubts' about creatures 'adapting' from one kind to another.

"I could never really understand what the mechanism was that actually made the animals 'adapt'," he said.

He wrestled with why documentaries glossed over the 'how' of the adaptation as if it didn't need any justification.

"What magic mechanism re-wrote the DNA software to make the animal 'adapt' and change it to another kind of animal, especially before the change in environment killed it? Writing my own software at uni was hard enough and took a lot of thought, so how did DNA get re-written with no effort? What was the mechanism?"

Colin knew how much intelligence was required in engineering

design and, even then, any prototype machine typically didn't function as intended and needed to be modified.

He said: "Programming computers and designing machines are difficult tasks requiring a lot of brain power. Random guessing and mistakes simply don't produce the desired results. So exactly how did animals just magically 'adapt' without any intelligence input? How did they re-design themselves and accurately re-program their own DNA software error free? Wouldn't it be nice to have that same magic which would make programming and designing things easy?"

As he continued in his engineering studies, he came to understand the Second Law of Thermodynamics, which led to some interesting discussions.

"In our mechanical engineering class we would argue amongst ourselves about this. How can things evolve at all when the Second Law of Thermodynamics says everything will ultimately degrade?"

"Our lecturer at the time simply dismissed our questioning and said 'the Second Law doesn't apply to living things'.

"To us, this meant evolution could still occur and therefore there was no God to worry about. His statement was completely false of course, but we didn't know any better at the time, so we all continued on with our somewhat degenerate lifestyles, thinking there was no God to fear."

Long after university in 1991, Colin decided to attend a creation/evolution talk by Dr Carl Wieland fully expecting to hear how evolution fits in with the Bible.

Instead, when Dr Wieland pointed out that evolution was scientifically at odds with the Second Law of Thermodynamics, the 'lights went on' for Colin.

He said: "I knew nothing can violate the Second Law of Thermodynamics and I knew that designing things takes a lot of intelligence, not random chance. I knew the Second Law meant things go downhill and



Colin Gibson with his wife Sarah and their six children. All are Christians and creationists. As Colin says: "Our children have been taught creation and what is wrong with evolution all their lives. As a consequence, their lives have been very different from mine."

get worse, not uphill and better."

Colin said at that point he understood why TV documentaries and university lecturers never gave satisfactory explanations but continued to advocate evolution regardless.

Now, for Colin, evolution was the fairytale and his Sunday school teachers were right.

He thereafter developed a thirst for knowledge about God and was convinced that only the Bible had accurate prophecy and a true history of the world.

Colin recalled: "This meant that the all-knowing Creator was the God of the Bible and the gods of the other religions were false since they did not know everything. So I became a six-day creationist, Bible-believing Christian."

When he began to live out his faith and talk with people about Christ, he soon realised that the world was not that easy to convince.

"I remember thinking that it would now be easy for me to lead people to Christ. I thought all they needed to hear was the scientific evidence they had never heard before which points to a Creator, plus the accuracy of Bible prophecy, which points to that Creator being the God of the Bible," Says Colin. "What I didn't realise at the time was that most people don't want to know this and are not really truth seekers, but are in rebellion against God."

He then understood he was in a

spiritual battle, not an intellectual one and recognised the crucial need for prayer. "Prayer is required for the lost as well as evidence for creation, prophetic accuracy and who Christ is. The Gospel can then be preached and received," he said.

For Colin, the transformation was complete. That young man who for a time believed in the lie that is evolution returned to his foundational Sunday school teaching. God

did what He said He did in the beginning: "created the heavens and the earth" in six, 24-hour days about 6,000 years ago.

Colin did what He said He did in the beginning: "created the heavens and the earth" in six, 24-hour days about 6,000 years ago.

## OUR LECTURER SAID 'THE SECOND LAW DOESN'T APPLY TO LIVING THINGS'



Believe it or not

Turning human evolution theory upside-down

BY CREATION MINISTRIES INTERNATIONAL

DNA extracted from a supposedly 400,000-year-old femur (thigh bone) from a Spanish cave "completely changes what we know—or thought we knew—about human evolution".

For one thing, as Professor Chris Stringer of London's Natural History Museum points out, it's "shattered the previous record of 100,000-year-old DNA". (But could DNA have even lasted 100,000 years? The survival of DNA is a major problem for the evolutionary timeline—e.g. see [www.creation.com/dino-dna](http://www.creation.com/dino-dna).)

Evolutionists are also surprised that the DNA more closely matched that found in Denisova Cave in Siberia, than that of Neanderthals, in Europe. Professor Allan Cooper, Director of the Australian Centre for Ancient DNA at Adelaide University, was reported as saying this discovery "has turned human evolution theory on its head".

He also said: "Everybody is mixing with everybody else and providing a complete mess at this stage, which, really it's hard to keep up. But it certainly shows, I think, the ways in which we think about species forming and maintaining themselves is probably not that accurate."

As Australia's national broadcaster put it, "Put simply, this find means it's back to the drawing board for evolutionists, trying to trace back to a common ancestor."

DNA discovery turns human evolution theory upside-down, abc.net.au, 5 December 2013.

A mitochondrial genome sequence of a hominin from Sima de los Huesos, nature.com, 4 December 2013.



Colin in California beside one of the many ancient sequoia trees.

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# A TRUE STORY

# Sex trafficking in the US

**She grew up poor, in one of the decaying mill towns of Massachusetts.**

**After she ran away from home, she was groomed and finally drawn into the dark world of sex trafficking, a virtual prisoner in one of the most free and prosperous countries in the world.**

BY MARK ELLIS (FROM ASSIST NEWS)

“I was conceived in a violent rape, so I always felt like I was worth less than other people,” says Darlene Pawlik, author of *Testimony: the dark side of Christianity*. The rape was so brutal her mother didn’t talk about it for two years. She actually married the perpetrator, who continued to brutalize Darlene’s mother.

Sexual violence seemed to follow Darlene. “From toddlerhood I was physically and sexually abused by my biological father,” she recounts. “He used drugs and he used repressive techniques, teaching us to lie about what was going on.”

Her mother’s second husband took them to church occasionally, but it was more for a social connection. “At

six or seven I accepted the Lord, but there was no discipleship going on. I didn’t know how to follow Him.”

Darlene ran away from home after her mother’s second divorce. “I quit school at the end of the 6th grade,” she says. “I lived wandering the streets, stayed in basements, or slept in cars. I slept in the store ‘24’ for a number of months.” A world almanac was her only pillow at times.

When Darlene was 13, a handsome man calling himself ‘Ace’ showed up in town, driving a black Cadillac with a crimson interior. He struck up conversations with Darlene and her runaway friends, slowly building their trust. “When the weather got cold we would get in his car and we would talk and joke around,” she recalls.

Ace was patient, slowly grooming the girls for his vile purposes. “He

made very few references to sexuality at first, but then he started getting into it more and more.”

Darlene began using drugs such as Valium, marijuana, and alcohol – anything she could get her hands on. “I viewed him (Ace) as a way I could get what I wanted and I didn’t think I was worth anything anyway,” she says. Her relationship turned sexual with Ace, which led to the next step in his sordid plan.

On Darlene’s 14th birthday she was peddled into the world of sex trafficking. “That’s the first time

I was sold to a businessman from a neighboring town. He was absolutely thrilled I was so young.”

Some of her clients included professionals, politicians, and everyday Joes. “Often it was a routine thing that happened,” she says, referring to the sexual encounters.

“But there were times when things turned violent. I was gang-raped, kidnapped, beaten and brutalized,” she recounts.

“I attempted suicide many times, overdosing on pills; I tried to throw myself off a building; I tried to hang myself in a cell. I must have had angelic or Holy Spirit intervention, because I should not be alive.”

Ace sold her to a man named Rac, for his exclusive use. Then Rac sold her to a small-time organized crime figure, involved with loansharking and gambling. The man found her an apartment in the city, while he lived with his wife and children in the suburbs.

“I was held as a house pet for a ‘sugar daddy,’ but there was nothing sweet about it,” she notes.

When Darlene unexpectedly became pregnant, the mobster was enraged.

“He told me if I didn’t have an abortion he would kill me. One of his flunkies was my former pimp who had beaten me up and raped me so I didn’t doubt it.” He forced Darlene to

make the appointment for an abortion in his presence.

As the pressure mounted, Darlene remembered the faith of her childhood, which had been dormant for so many years. “God, if you’re real, I need you to help me!” she cried out when she was alone.

“I don’t know what to do.”

That night something unusual happened. She had a vivid, Technicolor dream about the abortion process from the vantage point of the womb.

Jolted by her God-inspired dream, Darlene called a social worker she met when she first lived on the streets. She reached out to Marilyn Birnie, founder of Friends of the Unborn, who told her she would provide a place of refuge for Darlene – a home for unwed mothers.

Darlene spontaneously devised a plan to flee – using the pretext of a failed abortion. “I pretended to go and have an abortion and after the procedure I pretended to be in pain. I went to the bathroom a lot and cried a lot. I was shaking so much as I was terrified he would find out what was going on. He believed me and let me go.”

She credits Marilyn Birnie with saving her life. “She didn’t just save my life, she saved my children’s lives and who knows how many generations.”

At the home for unwed mothers,

## Rats in the cellar

**THIS** observation by famous Christian author C. S. Lewis is very challenging: “Surely what a man does when he is taken off his guard is the best evidence for what sort of man he is? “If there are rats in the cellar you are most likely to see them if you go in very suddenly. But the suddenness does not create the rats: it only prevents them from hiding. . . . The rats are always there in the cellar, but if you go in shouting and noisily they will have taken cover before you switch on the light.”

Evangelist Dwight Moody said the same thing: “Character is what you are in the dark.” Are there rats in your cellar today?



Darlene Pawlik knows what it is to be bought and sold, but she never realised her true worth until she accepted God’s valuation of her.

## PRO WHICH LIFE?

BY JODY BENNETT

**A WOMAN** in my church was recently diagnosed with breast cancer around the time she was told she was pregnant with twins. She was advised to abort the babies and get immediate surgery and chemotherapy.

What a ghastly choice to face – kill your unborn babies and try to save your life for the sake of your husband and seven small children, or continue with the pregnancy and potentially end up dying and leaving your young family to fend for themselves.

This year another mother in the US was faced with the same decision. Michigan mother Carrie DeKlyen was diagnosed with a terminal brain tumour and then found out she was pregnant with child number six.

Carrie chose not to abort and died three days after her daughter was born. Sadly her baby, born at 24 weeks gestation, only lived a few days.

Did Carrie make the right choice? Would she have decided the same way knowing the outcome? What about her poor husband, left with heartbreak, doubt and kids to raise on his own? Would he have made the same choice again?

The woman I know also chose to forgo treatment for the sake of her unborn. She now has two bouncing, healthy girls, but her own health is not good and the outcome may still be a sad one.

How does one weigh the value of a life? Is an adult life with responsibilities and dependants worth more than an unknown life that is yet a few cells? Logically it would seem so. However, the Bible,

which guided both these women in their decisions, teaches that life begins at conception and that every life is equally valuable.

Psalm 139: 13-16 says, “For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother’s womb. I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well. My frame was not hidden from you when I was made in the secret place, when I was woven together in the depths of the earth. Your eyes saw my unformed body; all the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be.”

These women chose to voluntarily lay down their lives, rather than take the life of another. They had a choice and they used their strength to protect the weak who had no voice.

I’m glad that I am too old to ever have to face such an awful dilemma but I admire their courage and I believe they will be eternally rewarded for following the loving example of their Savior. Jesus said, “Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one’s life for one’s friends” and then He went to the cross to lay down His life to pay for the sins of us all.

Carrie’s husband said: “I have no explanation of why this happened, but I do know Jesus loves us and someday we will know why.”

To some people these women’s choices may seem foolish or foolhardy but they both understand this life is a blink in eternity and that “he is no fool who gives what he cannot keep [his life] to gain what he cannot lose [God’s eternal reward]” (Jim Elliot).

she finally found the missing piece to her Christianity. “Marilyn taught me how to be a Christian, to read the Bible every day, to talk to God every day. If there was an actual conversion experience, it was at her home. She saved my life and my destiny.”

In 1990, at 23, Darlene married Mark Pawlik, sales manager for an industrial equipment company. The relationship was slow to develop and rocky at first, due to the trauma she survived and her lack of self-worth. “I felt like I wasn’t good enough so I pushed him away.”

Darlene has been a practicing nurse for 26 years and worked in Pro-life ministry for more than 22 years. She has five children and two grandchildren.

“I want to give back to the pro-lifers who saved me,” she says.

See Darlene’s blog at [thedarlingprincess.com](http://thedarlingprincess.com).

This article courtesy of Assist News Service ([assistnews.net](http://assistnews.net)) and is used with permission.

## I asked but God said no!

**I ASKED** God to take away my habit. God said, “No. It is not for me to take away, but for you to give it up.”

I asked God to make my handicapped child whole, God said, “No. His spirit is whole, his body is only temporary.”

I asked God to grant me patience. God said, “No. Patience is a by-product of tribulations; it is not granted, it is learned.”

I asked God to give me happiness. God said, “No. I give you blessings; happiness is up to you.”

I asked God to spare me pain. God said, “No. Suffering draws you apart from worldly cares and brings you closer to me.”

I asked God to make my spirit grow. God said, “No. You must grow on your own, but I will prune you to make you fruitful.”

I asked God for all things that I might enjoy life. God said, “No. I will give you life, so that you might enjoy all things.”

I asked God to help me love others, as much as He loves me. God said, “Ah, finally you have the idea.”

# Building Better Marriages

## DON'T FAKE IT THIS FEBRUARY

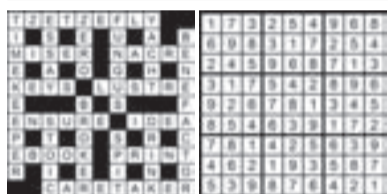
BY ROB FURLONG

IT'S FEBRUARY and this is the month when we celebrate Valentine's Day!

Sadly, what was once a time for lovers to declare and affirm their love for each other has simply become another exercise for retailers to encourage people to spend, spend, spend!

How easily our society is hoodwinked into thinking that spending money on exorbitant and highly priced gifts is the way in which you show the depth of your love for another!

Too often, when the gifts have lost their lustre and the initial flush of romance has cooled, couples find themselves in the following situation described poetically by Adrian Plass :



*Sunday is a funny day,  
It starts with lots of noise.  
Mummy rushes round with socks,  
And Daddy shouts, 'You boys!'*

*Then Mummy says, 'Now don't blame them,  
You know you're just as bad,  
You've only just got out of bed,  
It really makes me mad!'*

*My mummy is a Christian,  
My daddy is as well,  
My mummy says 'Oh, heavens!'  
My daddy says 'Oh, hell!'*

*And when we get to church at last,  
It's really very strange,  
Cos Mum and Dad stop arguing,  
And suddenly they change.*

*At church my mum and dad are friends,  
They get on very well,  
But no one knows they've had a row,  
And I'm not gonna tell.*

*People often come to them,  
Because they seem so nice,  
And Mum and Dad are very pleased  
To give them some advice.*

*They tell them Christian freedom  
Is worth an awful lot,  
But I don't know what freedom means,  
If freedom's what they've got.*

*Daddy loves the meetings,  
He's always at them all,  
He's learning how to understand  
The letters of St Paul.*

*But Mummy says, 'I'm stuck at home  
To lead my Christian life,  
It's just as well for blinkin' Paul  
He didn't have a wife.'*

*I once heard my mummy say  
She'd walk out of his life,  
I once heard Daddy say to her  
He'd picked a rotten wife.*

*They really love each other,  
I really think they do.  
I think the people in the church  
Would help them – if they knew.*

Growing a love that lasts a lifetime is not the result of expensive gifts or grand declarations of extravagance.

Love that lasts a lifetime is forged in the fires of adversity.

It is the fruit of a couple who honestly face the truth about themselves as individuals and are prepared to work for positive change and growth.

Love that lasts a lifetime grows in the seedbed of honest communication.

It is born out by travelling the hard road of dealing with one's junk.

It is recognising that the person you are married to or in love with is not perfect...and neither are you.

It is learning to accept those imperfections in each other and realising



that they can actually work in your favour.

There is enough fakery and pretend love in the world already, so why continue to go along with it.

We have become so enamoured with the version of "love" portrayed on our TV and computer screens that we have forgotten what the real thing looks like!

So do something radical this Valentines' Day.

Instead of an expensive gift why not invest *yourself* into your relationship?

Ask yourself what it is that you truly love about your partner.

Write them down. (In a card or a letter – not an email – remember what writing is?!)

And then give it to your loved one.

Spend time together talking about the things that you love about each other.

And then plan and dream about how you can build on that in the coming year.

Don't settle for what our culture says is true love – discover it's wonder and beauty for yourselves!

Happy Valentines' Day!

## Lessons from a sausage dog (Part 11)

BY JODY BENNETT

**BECAUSE** our little dog, Carrie, gets such terrible skin rashes, sometimes I have to give her a cortisone tablet, or an anti-histamine.

She is pretty good about taking tablets; she rolls on her back and I open her mouth and put it as far down her throat as I can, then I rub her neck to make her swallow. Usually this works.

Sometimes though, she moves the tablet to the side of her mouth and then spits it on the carpet when I am not looking!

I try to make the whole process as painless as possible but maybe she does not realise (she is a dog after all!) that the ordeal is not a punishment but is ultimately for her benefit - I am trying to stop her being so itchy!



It made me think that sometimes I behave like this when God tries to give me a dose of His good medicine in the form of a bout of sickness, an unanswered prayer, a difficult relationship.

It might taste bitter to me at the time and feel uncomfortable to take. I fight against God and want to spit the situation out. I might think it is some sort of punishment, but perhaps if I could only see from God's perspective, I would realise that ultimately it is for my benefit and will be a blessing to me. A short inconvenience for long-term rewards.

I do explain to Carrie what I am doing when I give her the pills but she has no framework in which to understand me. Likewise, as a mere mortal bound by time and space and filled with my own selfish perspective, I probably would not understand what God was doing, even if He explained Himself.

Like Carrie, I just have to trust my Master and know that because my Master loves me and is the giver of good things, whatever He gives me must be the best thing for me at the time.

Trust God, He is not being cruel but infinitely tender in His dealings with you.

No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it.

Hebrews 12:11

## How can I become a Christian?

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

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

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

Here is an example of how you can pray.

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

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

**AS A NEXT STEP :**

**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



## LOVE STORY WITH A DIFFERENCE

AS Valentine's Day comes round this year, in the midst of all the chocolates and flowers, wouldn't we all like to know that we are loved extravagantly, unconditionally, and just for who we are? The movie *Amazing Love: The Story of Hosea* reminds us that we in fact are. Even when we manifestly don't deserve it.

It is the beautiful portrayal of the Bible prophet Hosea and his unfailing love for his prostitute wife, as told to a group at a youth camp.

Sean Astin (best known for his role as Samwise Gamgee in *The Lord of the Rings*) plays Pastor Stuart, who takes a group of his church's teenagers on a trip into the great outdoors. Joining them is unchurched and troubled Ashley who feels left out and misunderstood by the others. Stuart uses the group's infighting as an opening to tell them Hosea's story, about a man who keeps forgiving his unfaithful wife and taking her back although she claims she will "never be tamed".

The Bible uses this as an illustration of God's unconditional, all-forgiving



love for His people, who keep betraying Him by following other gods and sinning, but whom He continues to woo back to Himself. As Austin's character says "It is a picture of God's amazing love for us."

The movie interweaves scenes from the modern-day campground and the dynamics between the teenagers, with scenes set in ancient Israel between Hosea and his bride Gomer. It has some good acting (although also some predictably typecast characters), beautiful scenery, and a deep and powerful plot.

This movie is mature, yet with no sex scenes, violence, or profanity. It is however, not really suitable for young children, as it deals with themes of prostitution and adultery. And make sure you have those tissues handy!

Whether you have someone to spoil you or not, this Valentine's, know that there is a God who deeply values and longs for relationship with you.

*Amazing Love* was released in 2012 and is available only on DVD or download.



# TIM BEATS TOURETTES

SANTA CLARA,  
CALIFORNIA - JULY 26,  
2017: United States  
goalkeeper Tim Howard  
during the CONCACAF  
Gold Cup Final between  
the United States v  
Jamaica.

Photo Robin Alam/Icon  
Sportswire via Getty  
Images



NEW YORK - AUGUST 29, 2017:  
Tim Howard speaks during a  
United States men's national  
team soccer press conference.  
Photo Mike Lawrie/Getty Images

**M**aking a World Cup record of 16 goal saves against Belgium in Brazil in 2014, Team USA goalkeeper Tim Howard became a social media phenomenon, prompting a new nickname 'The Minister of Defence' and a congratulatory call from US Secretary of Defence Chuck Hagel, even as USA was knocked out by a 2-1 loss.

A 6'-3" (187cm), 210-pound full-bearded 35-year-old, and English club Everton keeper, says the most important skill for a keeper is "explosive power". "Some people are born with it naturally, and some people need to develop that," Tim shared with FCA.org. "Every move that a goalkeeper makes is an explosive movement. You're either idling or you're wide open."

Tim says that mental toughness is also essential for keepers.

"That mental fortitude is important as a goalkeeper—to believe in yourself and be mentally strong and able to handle criticism. ...It's a hard position... [as] there is no second chance. If the ball goes behind you, it's a really, really bad thing.

"To be able to deal and cope with [criticism] has been a challenge. But it's because of my faith that I have

been able to stay grounded."

Among million-dollar pay packets and fame, Tim explains, "it's very easy to lose focus and not stay grounded and forget about humility. That's the one thing I've always clung tightly to—the fact that it is important to me to stay humble... For me, that has been the biggest anchor I have had through my faith."

Howard has drawn on his faith to cope with an illness called Tourette's syndrome. He has also given much of his time to helping others with the same condition, winning a humanitarian award in 2001 for his work with children with Tourette's.

He says: "At age ten, I was diagnosed with this neurological disorder, characterised by physical and verbal tics. Living with Tourette's is not easy. It affects me all the time, even when I'm playing. And even if it's not seen by someone looking on, it's something I have to deal with on a 24-hour basis. I have been able to cope pretty well with it. I've had it for a while now, so you learn to deal with it.

"But God has blessed me with the gift of athleticism as well. He has done some powerful things in my life through the combination of these two gifts. Not only has He helped

me earn a place in the top English league, He also has shown me ways to use my position to encourage others with Tourette's."

As a child, Howard saw the effect of faith in his grandmother's life, and it greatly impacted him: "Nana's sense of peace was so powerful because it came from her faith in the Lord.

"In the midst of any storm, she had so much peace, which clearly came from one source: God.

"Through her, God revealed His love for me and it wasn't long before I was following in her footsteps. I wanted the same sense of faith and peace she had, and that is exactly what God gave me."

In a YouTube video entitled "His Decision", Tim Howard shares, "I came to the point when I was tired of being on the fence, when I didn't want to just talk about knowing God, or pretend like I knew God – but I wanted to actually live for Him, live with Him. And I just basically asked Him into my heart.

"It's as easy as ABC, because that was how it was taught to me. Accept (you are a sinner), believe (Jesus died for your sins) and confess (that Jesus is Lord of all). If you do it wholeheartedly, with all your heart and all your soul. I would say that's the first step. It's just believing in your heart that God is Lord.

"My faith in the Lord is vitally important," Tim shares with Ath-

letes in Action. "The joy I have in my life doesn't come from soccer, the winning and the losing. I have an amazing family and we share an amazing faith together.

"Faith is a joyous thing, something to be shared. I don't want it in the background of my life, but I certainly don't want it to be 'in your face', either. I just want to be open about it.

"Today, I am blessed to be living a dream. And yet, if it all went away tomorrow, I know I would still have peace.

"That probably sounds crazy to most people, but that's the kind of peace Christ gives. It is rooted in His love, and it surpasses all understanding. You can experience this

same sense of love and peace too. All you have to do is ask for it."

Howard says he really wants to be known as someone who lived for Jesus Christ; "who didn't always get it right, and who made mistakes and stumbled, but at the end of the day, believed and had faith that God is the beginning and the end.

"People are going to see your stumbles, but if people can look at me and see Christ and not just see me, that is of the utmost importance.

"The most important thing in my life is Christ. He's more important to me than winning or losing or whether I'm playing or not. Everything else is just a bonus."

And for the US World Cup team, Howard was certainly a bonus. •

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