

FROM A PIG PEN TO A WATER WELL

How a night club promoter went from pushing booze to pumping water.

Scott Harrison's life reads a bit like the story of the prodigal son.

He was brought up in a Christian home in suburbia by loving parents, but spent a whole decade of his life in betrayal of his upbringing. At 18 he moved to New York to join a band. When the band broke up he became a night club promoter – being paid to drink alcohol and womanise.

“I gave everyone the finger and went off and slept with the proverbial prostitutes. I smoked two packs of cigarettes a day, was drunk almost every night, gambled and did every drug except heroine,” Scott told Veritas Forum in 2017.

“Eventually I ended up in the ‘pig pen’. Not in the sense of being broke but realising ‘what a disgusting mess I have made of my life. I hate myself. I’m not honest. I do coke at 4am’.

“I felt awful, unhealthy and ashamed. I was being eaten away by my own selfishness and hedonism. I realised there would never be enough. There would never be enough girls, never be enough money, and never be enough parties.

“I was spiritually bankrupt. I was emotionally bankrupt. I was certainly morally bankrupt,” he confessed on his charity’s Youtube channel.

Meanwhile, Scott’s parents had been praying relentlessly for him.

Then he read a book his dad had sent him called *In Pursuit of God* by A.W. Tozer. In this book Scott saw the exact opposite of his life – holiness, integrity, virtue, godliness, purity - and he realised that is exactly what he wanted.

“Now I felt guilty about living with my girlfriend, doing drugs and making people drunk for a living,” he admitted.

For five or six months he fought the guilt and conviction and then

decided that was it and literally left his former way of life by getting in his car and driving away.

He decided to try living for others instead of himself, after reading in the Bible book of James (verse 1:27) “*Pure and undefiled religion before God the Father is this: to care for orphans and widows in their adversity and to keep oneself unstained by the world.*”

After selling almost everything he owned, in Moosehead Lake Maine

I FELT AWFUL, UNHEALTHY AND ASHAMED.



Fun for Kids
Pages 5,6,7

W: challengenews.online
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Above and Left: Scott Harrison visiting Africa.

Right: Dr Gary Parker with one of his patients.



at an internet café he filled out forms offering to give a year of his life to serve in a humanitarian organisation.

As regards his destructive habits, Scott decided the best way was to make a clean break from them all, all at once. He knew that would be the best thing for him, so he quit drink, drugs, porn and cigarettes just like that.

Initially, because of his past, no volunteer organisations wanted to take Scott on. Eventually Mercy Ships agreed he could volunteer with them if he paid them \$500 a month for the privilege, which he gladly did! He joined a hospital ship going to Liberia.

Scott found himself serving with “unbelievable Christian doctors who were living out their faith in the most authentic way”. Like Doctor Gary Parker, who had given up a successful plastic surgery in California in order to work removing tumours and fixing cleft palates among the poorest of the poor.

● Turn to page 2

BACK PAGE

JOY IN THE MIDFIELD
LAUREN HOLIDAY

Love is a doing, not a feeling

SOON it will be Valentine's Day and the shops will be filled with red heart cards, chocolate gifts and flowers for us to give to our nearest and dearest.

But even if you write the whole thing off as a commercial con, most of us understand that the principle behind Valentine's Day holds true - if you love someone you want to give them things. You want to do stuff for them.

Think of your closest relationship - whether it is romantic or familial - if that person tells you that they love you but never acts on that feeling, how loved would you feel?

Love does, it is not some static feeling, it propels us to act on behalf of the other. The impulse of love is to give and put the needs of our beloved ahead of ourselves.

Someone can say "I love you" 50 times over and it will mean nothing, unless they act on it.

So when the Bible says that "God so loved the world" is that just empty words? Or is it backed up by action?

Well, the next part of that well-known verse (John 3:16) gives us the answer. "God so loved the world that He gave His only Son that whoever believes in Him will not perish but have everlasting life."

God's love gave us His precious, perfect and only Son, Jesus, to die on the cross to pay the price for all the wrongs we have done, in order that we can enjoy a relationship with Him now and into eternity.

And just in case you think "well,

how could God do that to His Son?" Jesus was no victim. He said in John 10:17-18: "Therefore My Father loves Me, because I lay down My life that I may take it again. No one takes it from Me, but I lay it down of Myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This command I have received from My Father."

So both God the Father and Jesus the Son gave of themselves in order to demonstrate their heart for us.

John 15:13 says, "Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends."

And that is what Jesus Christ did.

Not only that, but God has given us this beautiful, colourful, wondrous world to live in, and each day gives us sunlight, rain, oxygen, sleep, strength and countless other blessings that we take for granted as 'normal life'.

In fact, the Bible explains that every good thing we have comes from God.

This Valentine's Day understand that all creation is shouting "GOD LOVES YOU!"

And that message is backed up by His incredible goodness and kindness to us. But because God loves you, He doesn't bully you into a relationship with Him but He invites you with open arms, His hands bearing the nail marks of His sacrificial love.

Why not read His love letter today in the book of John in the New Testament?

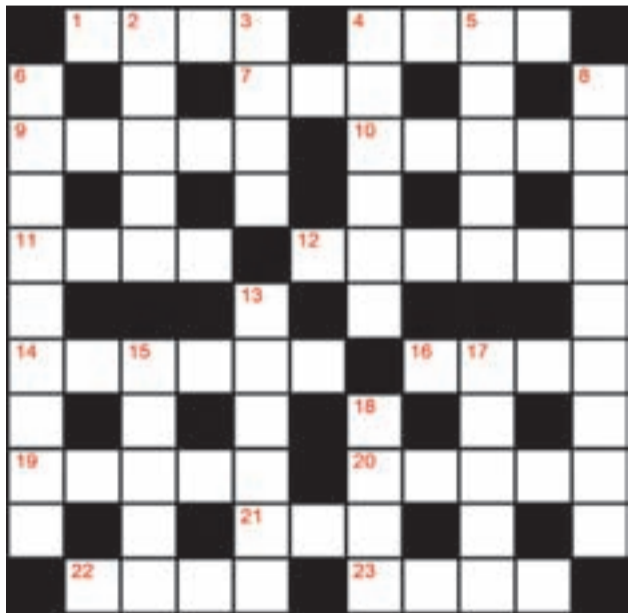


Coffee Break

CROSSWORD & SUDOKU

ACROSS

- 1 Pack down
- 4 Wild hog
- 7 Old Tokyo
- 9 Stage between egg and pupa
- 10 Ferris _____
- 11 "Blue" or "White" river
- 12 Bicarbonate of soda
- 14 Upper arm bracelet
- 16 Himalayan legend
- 19 Playful water animal
- 20 Big name in computers
- 21 Samovar
- 22 Wet bar?
- 23 Bean used to make miso



- 3 Kind of moss
- 4 Neck wear (3,3)
- 5 "Gladiator" setting
- 6 Mongolian capital (4,5)
- 8 Court in London (3,6)
- 13 Misty-eyed (4,2)
- 15 Words on coat-of-arms
- 17 Drain
- 18 Moving vehicles

DOWN

- 2 May predecessor

[SOLUTIONS PAGE 11](#)



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From a pig pen to a water well

● From page 1

While serving as a photo journalist for Mercy Ships, documenting the transformation they were bringing to the sick and deformed in poor parts of Africa, Scott was very moved by the sheer numbers of desperate people who they were unable to help because of a lack of resources. On one occasion they had to turn away thousands of people, some of whom had walked for over a month to get medical attention.

Going into the villages and communities Scott realised that many of the illness these people were suffering from were due to the poor quality of water they were drinking. They were reliant on filthy water from puddles or streams that were filled with animal faeces and parasites.

Scott decided to attack the problem at its source and raise money for water wells. This would not only give people fresh, clean, healthy drinking water, but the women would be able to work and the girls could stay in school rather than spending most of the day trekking to get water, which they transported in heavy jerry cans on their heads.

And thus the organisation Charity Water was born.

As a former night club promoter, Scott started it all with a party. For his 31st birthday he held a huge event in a donated club and charged everyone \$20 at the door. Instead of pocketing the \$1500, he spent it building three wells and fixing three more in a refugee camp in northern Uganda. And then he sent photos, the GPS coordinates and the story back to those 700 people to show them how their money had been spent.

Because so many people don't trust charities, Scott decided to do things differently, guaranteeing that 100% of donated monies would go to clean water and creating a different fund entirely to pay for administration costs. He also proved the projects, putting GPS coordinates and photos on Google maps, so that people could find where the money went. Trackers were put on the drilling rigs and water sensors on the pumps, for people to follow how much water was being produced. They involved locals so that the projects were sustainable.

With outdoor exhibitions, water walks and innovative advertis-

ing they raised the profile of the need for clean water and people started shaving beards, climbing mountains and donating the money that would have been used on their birthday party and presents in order to raise money for wells.

Like Rachel Beckwith (see **Left**), who raised \$220 on her ninth birthday. She was disappointed that she hadn't reached her goal of \$300 and her mum said she could try again the following year. However, when Rachel was killed in a car accident before her tenth birthday, her campaign went viral and ended up raising over \$1.2 million dollars for clean water!

Clean water, through Charity Water, has led to health benefits, cleanliness, improved sanitation, improved schooling and more time and energy to earn a living for over 11 million people so far.

Scott's story proves that one life can make such a profound difference in the world, when empowered by the spirit of God and given in sacrifice for others.



One of the examples of Charity Water's eye-catching advertising.



Scott Harrison and his wife Victoria and their son and daughter.

Familiar spirits are *not* friendly

Laura Maxwell loved ghost stories, supernatural TV programs and ESP even as a child, but it wasn't until later that things really started to get scary for the former Psychic New Ager.

Laura's mother had had psychic experiences all her life but it was only when her marriage broke down, when Laura was a preteen that she really plunged into the occult. She and Laura joined a spiritualist church and got involved in psychic development classes, mediumship training and séances.

At first when they encountered scary entities, Laura and her mum dismissed them as an occupational hazard of contacting the spirits – that some of them would be unpleasant. Their spirit guides seemed to be benevolent and helpful, and they believed that the dead relatives they were contacting were really who they claimed to be. Laura was encouraged to do automatic drawing/writing through the spirit guides and ghost photography but she very soon got spooked by the experiences and stopped participating.

"Most spiritualists, psychics and mediums who we knew were lovely, genuine, kind people. I think they were attracted to Spiritism because they believed they could help people," Laura explains in her strong Scottish accent. "They really thought they were bringing people comfort, direction and guidance.

"It seemed a lovely religion to be in. It seemed helpful. A lot of the psychic predictions were really accurate and would come true." There was also no fear of death or hell because Spiritualism believes in karma and endless cycles of reincarnation.

Laura's mother was developing as a medium but then she found she was no longer in control of the spirit guides. They began to control her and come on her unannounced. Eventually, Laura's mother felt like her life was not her own anymore and there were so many spirit voices in her head she couldn't think straight.

On looking for help from others within Spiritism, they found that many other mediums were having trouble controlling the voices and the poltergeist activity in their homes.

Laura and her mother began to get disillusioned, not understanding why the previously tame spirit guides had turned on them,

Refugee finds safest haven

BY JANICE TEO

Tri Tran was 25 when he discovered why the high seas were called the high seas. He had never in his life seen waves as enormous as those that were threatening to sink the boat he was in.

It was 1978. The 24-year-old Vietnamese man was fleeing his Communist-controlled country and was crammed onto an 18-metre boat with 250 other people headed to Malaysia.

It was pitch black on their first night at sea; the stars were hidden by storm clouds which unleashed their load that night, turning everyone on board to a sodden, petrified mess.

"It was terrifying," Tri, now 66, told *Challenge News*. "Being in a storm at sea in a tiny boat is the most terrifying thing in the world. We all thought we were going to die."

Tri prayed harder than he ever had in his life and thankfully the refugees survived. That night, he thanked God for preserving their lives - and for bringing him back to the faith of his childhood.

Growing up in Bien Hoa, a town about 30 km from Ho Chi Minh City, Tri and his family were the first Christians in the town. However, he turned his back on his faith when he was 15, saying he was sick of the hypocrites in the church and started doubting the existence of God.

"It's because I thought I could see God through people but now I know you can't do that. People are imperfect and you can't take your example of Christ through them. If you do you're bound to get disappointed.

"The people in my church wanted to control things, as though they were dictators. I became disillusioned."

The infighting got so bad that one Sunday, someone stood up and shouted at the pastor in the middle of his sermon. That was the day Tri left.



Tri Tran and his wife Nancy.

He was gone for three years.

Even his mother's pleas had no effect on him - "I told my mother to stop nagging me or I would leave home for good," Tri said.

His mother bit her tongue. But quietly, she prayed for him every day.

"I got involved with the wrong people," Tri said. "They took drugs, drank alcohol, smoked. But for some reason I never joined them. My friends thought I was very strange. Now I realise it must have been the Holy Spirit (the unseen presence of God) who protected me."

Christmas Eve 1971 rolled around. Tri was 17. For all his bitterness against God, he was still a teenage

boy with a teenage boy's appetite. "Christmas at my house always meant lots of food," he grinned, "and I decided to go back that year."

As they did every year, the family went to church before dinner. Tri, unabashedly home only for the food, stayed put. Then the sound of Christmas carols wafted in over the smell of roast pork (the church was next door) and Tri found himself genuinely touched.

"The songs brought back happy

memories," he said. "I wanted to listen so I went to the church.

"Suddenly, I heard a voice in my head. Was it in my head or was

THE FEELING WAS INDESCRIBABLE. I KNEW IT WAS GOD.



it around me? I don't know. I only know I heard it so loudly, so clearly: 'Tri, why are you standing out here? Why are you not in there singing to Me?'

"I looked everywhere but there was nobody there. It was such a powerful moment. My whole body started shaking. I couldn't even stand; I had to sit down. I was just weeping and weeping. The feeling was indescribable. I knew it was God."

He felt a hand on his shoulder. It was the pastor; he smiled at Tri and said: "Welcome home."

Tri made a full 180-degree turn. He went back to church with a faith that had become personal to him in a way that his childhood faith had not been. He got his degree and was set to get married. Unfortunately life had a different plan. The communists invaded Vietnam, and Tri and his family found themselves on that boat in the middle of the South China Sea.

There were several more hair-raising incidents – pirates, a near-collision with a huge tanker and being cut loose and set adrift by Malaysian authorities – but the refugees made it to safety. Tri and his family were sent to Perth.

"Without God we would not have survived," Tri said. "We experienced one miracle of protection after another."

Never seen without a beaming smile, Tri made a good life for himself in Perth. Divine providence in the form of jobs, housing and friends, followed him here as well. There have been financial and marriage challenges, some severe. But, he said, "God has been faithful through every storm.

"We all have to go through trials in life, but if you follow His principles, if you obey Him and stay humble, He will make all things beautiful."



telling her to kill people. Meanwhile, distant Christian family in America had made contact with Laura and her mother and begun praying for them to come to know Jesus.

At this time Laura was befriended by a Christian woman, Susan, who told her that Jesus could help her mum. Not having read the Bible, Laura was sceptical. Susan explained that there were people in her own church who had had similar experiences and when they had come to Jesus He had stopped the evil influences.

Laura went to a Christian meeting and heard the gospel – the story of Jesus' life, death and resurrection – and then came home and prayed to Jesus asking that if He was real and the Son of God that He would show her what to do.

She was led to Bible passages like Deuteronomy 18:10-12, "There shall not be found among you anyone who makes his son or his daughter pass through the fire, or one who practices witchcraft, or a soothsayer, or one who interprets omens, or a sorcerer, or one who conjures spells, or a medium, or a

spiritist, or one who calls up the dead. For all who do these things are an abomination to the LORD, and because of these abominations the LORD your God drives them out from before you"; and 2 Corinthians 11:14-15, "For Satan himself transforms himself into an angel of light. Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also transform themselves into ministers of righteousness, whose end will be according to their works." Those verses showed Laura clearly that she needed to leave spiritualism and that the spirits guides were demons disguising themselves as relatives and angels of light.

Everything to do with the occult, Laura destroyed or burnt. She asked Jesus Christ to forgive her and cleanse her from her occult involvement. Throwing stuff out was easy but the thought processes and memories were harder to change, and took time, Laura admits.

Instead of turning to spirit guides for guidance, advice and comfort, Laura has learnt to rely on God's Holy Spirit.

She runs a website and ministry informing others of the dangers of Luciferianism, Theosophy, the New Age movement, Wicca, Tarot and other occult practices.

Find details and helpful links at ourspiritualquest.com



Sam and Kevin Taffurelli

From monetary wealth to true riches

Kevin Taffurelli had made it. He had a loving family, was running several successful businesses employing over 130 people, lived in a beautiful, huge house on the Swan River and drove expensive cars. He had everything that most Aussies aspire to. And yet sometimes he found himself in despair, staring into the mirror contemplating, not if, but how he was going to commit suicide.

Although he knew there was something missing, Kevin didn't know what.

He had no interest in religion or spirituality, although he lived a good life, generously contributing to the underprivileged and caring for those around him.

His first contact with Christianity was when his son started attending a Christian college, after moving over from a prestigious boys' school at his own request.

Kevin, with his background in business and interest in helping others, got involved in the school's Trade Centre. Initially they were involved in uplifting communities in Cambodia but then began work in the Philippines.

Kevin financed and helped with missions overseas without being at all interested in the evangelism side of the school's programs. Many times Christians would try to engage him in conversations about faith or explain the story of Jesus to him but Kevin would just politely say, "That's for you guys. It's just not my thing."

However, it was on a trip to the Philippines to discuss strategies for the work, that a deep part of Kevin was touched as he overheard a Hawaiian group worshipping at the mission house.

Suddenly he started to cry uncontrollably and feel a sense of God that he never had before. The group prayed for Kevin. Feeling overwhelmed, he went for a walk on the beach. He sat on a log looking out on God's creation, speaking out loud but not sure who he was addressing or if he was acting crazy.

The peace though, was real. The Hawaiians had told Kevin he needed to find a church. Back in Australia, he did various Google searches but one church, which happened to be just two minutes away, kept coming up within the top results.

Taking it as a sign, Kevin phoned them to check how much it was to attend! He was so unfamiliar with church that he thought one had to pay an admission fee. After being told that he was very welcome and there was no charge, Kevin started tentatively attending.

There he learnt more about how Jesus, God in human form, came and lived a perfect life, teaching us how to follow God; and then died in our place to pay for everything we had ever done wrong (our sins), in order that we might know freedom from

our sinful natures and enjoy eternity in heaven.

Kevin bought a Bible and started reading it, he began praying - which is simply talking to God - and got baptised. Baptism is a symbolic act signifying dying to one's old life and rising as a new person, belonging to God.

Kevin's sudden interest in Christianity had horrified his family. They thought he had become weak and couldn't see why someone so wealthy and successful would need to get into all that 'Jesus stuff'.

His wife, Sam, though began to see how much more at peace and joyful her husband was, especially in the face of the economic disasters the family soon faced.

For reasons outside his control, and not to do with any fault on his part, Kevin, in a series of misfortunes, lost his businesses and had to sell his expensive cars and then his fancy house.

Suddenly his whole identity as a rich and influential businessman crumbled. But in its place, Kevin was secure in his new identity as a beloved child of God. His contentment spoke volumes to Sam, and she, in time, also came to a saving faith in Jesus Christ.

Now, three years on, Kevin, who until he was 50 knew almost nothing about God and had no interest in religion, has become an active participant in church, and a full-time Christian worker, joining *Challenge News* to promote the paper, and run local and overseas missions.

"I remember conversations with my sisters and them telling me that I had lost everything because I became weak. I will never forget the confused look on their faces, when I explained to them that although, in society's eyes, I was living the dream and had lost everything; I have gained so much more than I could ever have wished for, just by following Christ my Lord," Kevin says.

The book of Jeremiah, in the Bible has been an important influence on Kevin. Jeremiah 29:11-13 has become a personal promise he embraces. "For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, says the Lord, thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you a future and a hope. Then you will call upon Me and go and pray to Me, and I will listen to you. And you will seek Me and find Me, when you search for Me with all your heart."

"When a man is getting better he understands more and more clearly the evil that is still left in him. When a man is getting worse he understands his own badness less and less."
— C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*

Think on this ...

"It is hard to believe that God would reveal His divine presence to us in the self-emptying, humble way of the man from Nazareth. So much in me seeks influence, power, success, and popularity. But the way of Jesus is the way of hiddenness, powerlessness, and littleness.

It does not seem a very appealing way. Yet when I enter into true, deep communion with Jesus, I will find that it is this small way that leads to real peace and joy."

- Henri Nouwen

How I fell in with the God-botherers

BY NAOMI REED

BRIGIT'S STORY: "For most of my life I was adamant that I would never have anything to do with Christians, or the church.

"My parents were atheists and they didn't like Christians. They said that church was rubbish and a money-making thing. In our house, it was almost like my father was the god. He had to be revered and obeyed, in everything ... so as a teenager, I was an angel. I was too scared of being hit if I did something wrong.

"But then, when I was 26, my mother died of bowel cancer. Before that, I hadn't known anyone who had died. When I heard the news, I cried a lot. The funeral was in a church, but the person running it didn't do a lot of God-bothering, so that was good. And afterwards I went back to work and I got on with it.

"Over time, though, I started to have more questions, especially after our children were born. What happens when we die? What would happen if I died? Would there be no more of me? It worried me a lot. Then, when our eldest daughter was in kindergarten, she made one friend, whose family went to church. They invited her to a kid's club at their church. It was free, and I was a busy mum of two children, so I let her go.

"At the end of the day, I went to pick her up and I looked inside the room. That's when I saw it. Everyone looked so happy - the children and the leaders. I was quite surprised. I started to think that maybe something that makes people happy can't be all that bad.

"For the rest of that year, I didn't think too much about it. But then in the January holidays, the church put on a kid's club again, and the girls went again. At the end of the

week, we were invited to the Sunday service... and I actually went to church, for the first time ever, with my husband and daughters.

"It actually wasn't that bad! We quite liked it. The people were friendly. I can't remember anything that they said, but afterwards, we talked to people at morning tea ... and then we started going regularly to church. I bought a Bible, but I never really looked at it ... until I met a Christian at the local gym.

"That was the turning point. He was an elder in his church and he was really easy to talk to. After a while, I told him about my mother dying, and then I asked him all my other questions about faith and dying and the Bible.

"A few months later, my husband and I started going to his church and that's where it started to make sense. The minister explained the Bible. He said it was made up of 66 books and that the Old Testament and the New Testament are different. He explained that Jesus is the Son of God and that He died and rose again so that we could belong to Him.

"It was good, but I still didn't get it ... particularly the forgiveness thing. I had so many issues with my father. I really struggled to forgive him. And then one day, we watched *The Prodigal God* by Tim Keller.

"I realised that for all those years, I didn't know what I was looking for. I was just worried about dying. And that was when I realised that it was God who was looking for me. And I understood forgiveness for the first time. I understood what Jesus did for me.

"I forgave my father. And it freed me. It felt like a weight off my shoulders ..."

Brigit's story is part of Eternity's Faith Stories series, compiled by Naomi Reed. For more Faith Stories go to www.eternity.com.au/faith-stories

nudge

True freedom

IMAGINE growing up with complete freedom. It's what most of us believe we want, especially right now as we face social distancing restrictions, and we resent the constraints placed on us.

For author Augusten Burroughs, complete freedom was the experience of his teenage years. He could do what he wanted - skipping school, doing drugs, following any desire of a young man's heart. So did he really experience true freedom? Burroughs reflected on this and said that instead of feeling free, he actually felt trapped. There was nothing to break free from so he was left feeling stuck, with nowhere to turn.

Freedom is not a lack of constraint, which ends up as just a dream to avoid responsibility and run away from life.

Jesus promised us true freedom. Freedom from the knowledge that you've disappointed yourself, others and God. Many of us are so crippled by this pain of disappointment that no amount of the freedoms that life can offer will fix our pain.

Why not turn to Jesus today and find true and lasting freedom? •

Finding true



BY CAROL ROUND

IN the early 80s, a popular Country Western song, *Lookin' for Love*, included these lyrics: "lookin' for love in all the wrong places."

The song's lyrics refrain "lookin' for love in too many faces, searchin' their eyes, lookin' for traces of what I'm dreaming of..." is all too real for those dreaming of perfect love.

Don't we all dream of being loved by someone special? We search for it. Pray for it. Seek it on dating websites as well as in the real world of venues designed to attract a significant other.

According to the dictionary, the definition of "significant other" is a "person who is important to one's well-being, especially a spouse or one in a similar relationship."

Relationships are complicated. There's no doubt. Just check the statistics for divorce.

Two of my relatives have been married multiple times. One is on her fifth marriage. The other is on his sixth. I've met people who have been married more times than that.

For almost 19 years, I've been single. After my 28-year marriage ended in 2001, I only came close to remarrying once.

What I've learned during my almost two decades of singleness is how much God loves me and wants the best for me. When I married at age 19, I was naive, under the impression many of us have, that "two halves make a whole".

In relationships, that doesn't work. When two people with emotional baggage—scarred and insecure—drag it with them into a relationship, those problems are actually intensified. It takes two whole

healthy people to make one happy healthy whole relationship.

Psalms 147:3 reveals what we really need is God's help to heal. "He heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds" (ESV). We must seek wholeness in the love of a Heavenly Father.

There's an expression, "You can't give away what you don't have." If you don't love yourself, your insecurities will lead to seeking someone else to make you feel 'fulfilled'. And that is a burden too heavy for any one person to carry.

We can only love well—giving and receiving love in all our relationships—when we've reconciled ourselves to a loving God. His love is sacrificial, perfect, pure, faithful, unconditional, lavish, forgiving, lasting, hope-filled, all-encompassing, enduring, redeeming, gracious, and so much more. God is love. And God's love is the only love strong enough to hold all our needs and expectations.

I grew up in the church. However, I was in my late 40s before I encountered the Living God and began to understand the meaning of "true love."

True love is not based on us. It's not based on our abilities or striving to be good enough. You can't earn true love. It is given freely. God's invitation is open to all who are looking for authentic love—a lifetime love that will not fail.

God's love knows no boundaries and has no limits. There's also no place too deep that His love can't reach us.

How can we discover God's amazing love? By seeking Him in the pages of His love letter to us. The Bible, God's Holy Word, is filled with truth, grace,

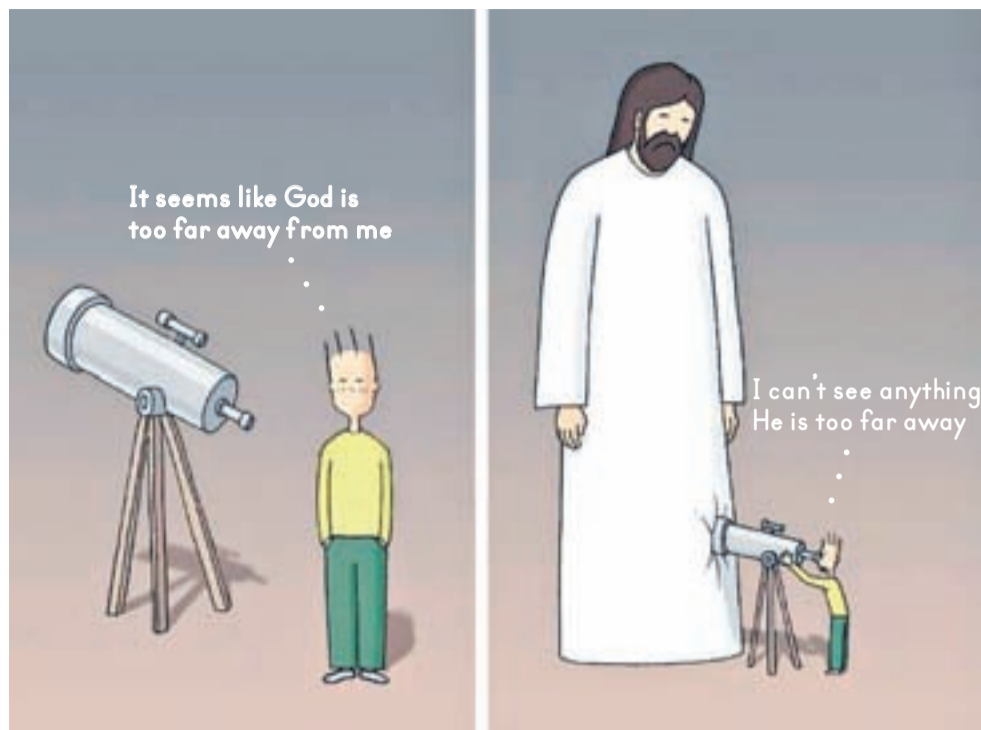
strength, hope, peace, and of course, love.

Pursuing God leads to wholeness and true love in His outstretched arms. Romans 5:8 is a reminder. "God showed His love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us."

And John 3:16 promises: "For 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."

This article appeared on the Assist News website and is used with kind permission.

by DE CHINNI 1991 on DEVIANTART.COM



WHEN WANTING STUFF TAKES OVER

Texas native Ron Shamburger, who was on the cusp of entering either pharmacy school or a Baptist seminary, ended up instead on death row for murder in 1994. He was 22.

Strapped for cash, the young man had broken into school-mate Lori Baker's room to steal money and ended up shooting her in the head when she woke up and surprised him in the act. Ron then kidnapped Lori's roommate, tying her hands with duct tape and shoving her in the boot of a car. He drove a few blocks away then abandoned the car, leaving the boot unlocked.

The murderer then returned to Lori's room, probed her head wound with a knife to retrieve the bullet, poured petrol over her body and set it alight. Then, overcome with remorse, he surrendered to police.

Ron was put to death by lethal injection on September 18, 2002.

"I grew up in a Christian home. I knew the Lord, loved the Lord and wanted to serve Him. Yet here I sit on death row," he said in a letter from prison.

"I gave my life to the Lord when I was seven years old. I had little idea of what sin was

but I knew Christ died on the cross and shed His blood for me, and that without Jesus as my Saviour I would be cast into hell when I died."

Initially he lived an exemplary life filled with Bible studies, church attendance, missionary outings and prayer meetings.

"I never wanted to go against God and His ways, but once I started to look at all the things that the world had to offer (so to speak), I found myself slowly following after them. I never did drugs, never had a problem with alcohol but I liked to look good, go out to all the nice places, have the best of everything," he said.

"There was nothing bad about those things," he wrote, but added "when you take your focus off the Lord and begin to seek after those things you find yourself empty. You cannot serve

two masters [God and money], we are told in Scripture because we will hate the one and love the other."

His student income couldn't support his lust for nice things and this fuelled his descent into burglary and crime.

"Crime and doing wrong soon became drugs in themselves, something to break the boredom, anything to try to find joy and fill the void in my life, which I had created by removing God.

"After you have thought about something enough and begin to take pleasure in those thoughts, you begin to act it out. What was a sin of the



love." As the deadly chemicals entered his body, he sang the old hymn "How can it be?"

Only God knows whether Ron was truly converted at age 7. He believes he was saved then, although some would argue that he only made a mental assent to Jesus as Saviour but never made Him Lord of his life. The Bible says that the truth of a person's conversion is seen in the fruit of their life.

However, the grace of God is that however late we come to Him and however much we have sinned before that, He is able and willing to forgive us. The important thing is that Ron finished the race of life well, having returned to the truth he embraced as a child.

"Am I saved now?" he asked in prison. "100 per cent. Did I commit great sin? Yes. The Lord does forgive great sin but I still have to pay the consequences of my actions.

"I hope you will not do as I did but that you will seek God and give Him your heart and mind. Seek Him with all that you are. Win the battle of your mind and meditate day and night on His goodness and His works."

The final words from a man who in life lost his way terribly, but, by God's great mercy, found peace and forgiveness before death.



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We are more sinful than we ever dared to believe, but we are more loved than we could ever hope. - Tim Keller

Error and sin both have this property, that the deeper they are the less their victim suspects their existence. - C. S. Lewis

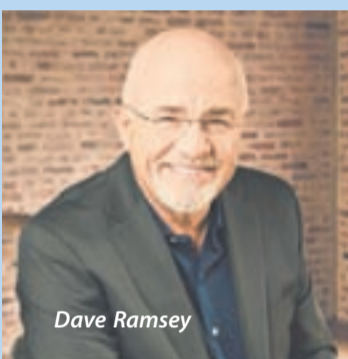
All we need is love, love, love... All we need is love, love, love... All we need is love

Paid in full

IMAGINE getting a phone call today that someone had paid off your student, medical and car debt. Completely. With no strings attached.

That's what happened to 8,000 people recently.

Dave Ramsey is the host of a US radio programme called *The Dave Ramsey Show*, which is heard by more than 16 million listeners each week. He is a personal finance expert and seven-time #1 best-selling author. Since 1992, he has been helping people regain control of their money, build wealth, and enhance their lives.



Dave Ramsey

As he explained in a recent article, "I always tell my team that we are blessed for one reason, and that is so we can be a blessing to others."

So, his company bought medical and car debt totalling \$10 million from two private debt collection companies and completely forgave it.

He reports that "every Ramsey Solutions team member got to make phone calls and deliver the good news."

Ramsey anticipates the question: "Why the heck would anyone scoop up \$10 million worth of debt and pay it off just like that? Well, the answer is simple—to show the love of Jesus Christ. You see, this whole completely forgiving a debt thing has been done before—by Him. No other gift could compare to that one, but we felt this was one small way we could continue to pass on that love."

Do you feel you owe a debt of guilt or hurt or forgiveness or love that you can never pay? Jesus is offering to take that burden, that shame, that hopelessness and wipe the slate clean - if you will just invite Him to be your rescuer and master (Saviour and Lord). •



Murderous woman becomes agent of love

Rita Chaima was a suicidal, depressed woman with a bitter hatred for people who did not share her Islamic faith.

"I hated people who weren't Muslim," she admits. "I wanted to kill them." Videos made by ISIS inspired her. "I loved to see them bleeding. I was seeing videos of decapitation and loved it."

In fact, Chaima almost joined ISIS in Syria. "I was told by a friend that if I went I would finally have what I don't have here," she says.

What Chaima did not know at the time was that she was really searching for love. She did not receive any love or affection from her father. "He never told me that he loved me," she says. "I didn't feel loved by anyone."

"As a little girl, I would always ask myself, 'What am I doing in this world?' All I saw was a cruel world and I didn't want to be a part of it."

Bit by bit, Chaima slipped into a deep, dark pit filled with hatred and hurt. The older she got the deeper she fell until finally she came face-to-face with death. "I started to be really bad," she says. "I was hurting a lot and I hurt people because of it. I tried to kill myself three times. I was doing drugs. I was smoking. I just wanted to destroy myself."

Influenced by bad friends, Chaima fantasised about joining ISIS and committing heinous acts of terrorism. "They would talk to me about terrifying things. I fell into a trap. I felt weak. I started to feel really alone."

One thing stood between Chaima and her unfolding plan to become a terrorist - her love for books. "I loved to read," she smiles. "My mother knew it. She brought me books and there was a Bible in there and she didn't know it. I started to read the Bible to prove to Christians that they were wrong but turns out I was wrong!"

Chaima could not stop turning the pages of the forbidden book. She was amazed by the story of Jesus's compassion and forgiveness and how He had died to save the world from sin.

"The grace of Jesus Christ started to touch me," she marvels. "I was reading things like 'pray for your enemies,' 'love them,' and I was someone who wanted to kill them!" she



Rita went from wanting to kill Christians to becoming one herself! Photoshop filters added.

exclaims. "Intellectually, I wasn't someone who wanted to accept Jesus, but Jesus had started to work in my heart."

At first, Chaima resisted the urge to give her life to Jesus. She still wanted to hang on to the bitterness and anger that she felt. Finally, these became such a burden she could no longer carry them by herself. She knew she needed Jesus.

"One day, my Heavenly Father told me through the Scriptures that He loved me. I started crying. It was amazing."

Soon after, she surrendered her life to Jesus. "There came the time where I had to explain to my family that I had become a Christian," she says. "I announced this to my father. That's when the persecution started. They all stopped talking to me. For months, I was alone in my room. It was like a prison."

Chaima knew her history of depression and suicidal thoughts were no good and she feared the isolation would trigger them again. But to her amazement, the depression never returned. "I read the Bible a lot, and I knew Jesus was there with me, encouraging me," she says. "The Holy Spirit was really there. I felt it. I knew it."

After connecting with other Christians through a church, Chaima expressed her desire to be baptised (an outward act to show her inward dying to self).

However as her pastor baptised her, she began to writhe, kick, and scream, "No! No! No!" Immediately, the pastor laid his hands on her and prayed for her. The evil spirit that had

taken a hold of her body left and she was filled with peace.

Chaima talks about the supernatural encounter: "I don't even remember what I did. I had to see the video of my baptism. I was completely crazy, the demon was crazy, it wasn't me. I kicked my pastor as he was trying to baptise me." (See the video of Chaima's testimony and her baptism at <https://bit.ly/37m8yvn>)

[GOD] TOLD ME HE LOVED ME ... IT WAS AMAZING



She continues, "After the baptism, I felt a heavy weight completely disappear. I wanted to talk about Jesus to everyone, even the people who encouraged me to do terrorism."

"I wanted to go and see them and tell them that they are wrong and that love is waiting for them. I want to say: 'It may seem crazy what I am saying but I've been where you are. I assure you, Islam is not the truth! Look for God with all your heart and you will find Him. Maybe you do not have a relationship with God, maybe you are just following rules, but following God is an adventure, it is something unique. That's what I'm experiencing.'"

Chaima is amazingly steadfast and firm in her faith, despite so much loss: "Today, my family has abandoned me. I am alone. I have no home. But I have a new family and they are all around the world and they are my family in Christ. This has been the best gift God has given me. I can see the grace (undeserved kindness) of Jesus Christ all through my life. He saved me from suicide, depression, from all of this." •



Love makes all the difference

BY MARK CALLAGHAN

THERE have been many adaptations of the Loren Eiseley story, *The Star Thrower*. An old man and a boy meet on a beach strewn with starfish. As the old man approaches he sees the boy gently throwing a starfish into the water. The old man comments on the thousands of starfish, and that the boy could never hope to throw them all back. The story hinges on his statement: "You won't really be able to make much of a difference," and the boy's response, "It made a difference to that one."

Some years ago, we were travelling with friends in Rajasthan in Northern India. There are multitudes of poor in India. The world's problems can seem so overwhelming: disadvantage and poverty, famine and war and disease. What difference can one person make?

Our friends had started a charitable program to assist children living on Agra Train Station - children as young as two. They lived and begged in dangerous conditions, and then slept on those platforms at night. They had touched the heart of those friends.

Our group was invited to see how the program worked, and we were asked to bring something educational or creative for those children who had come to the centre's house for the day. We were sitting, busy trying to break the language barrier as there was little English among the children. Someone had brought chalks, some brought puzzles, and someone brought plasticine, a choice I wouldn't have thought of.

The oldest that day was a 15-year-old who had been on the platforms for over four years. He was a polio victim, crippled from the waist down. Every day he sat on a board on rollers at the base of the stairs, begging small change from people buying merit by almsgiving - the custom in his part of the world. He collected enough to exist.

But his life changed. On the morning I met him, he was moulding some plasticine, and showed me what I assumed was a snake. Then more English letters written by this man who spoke no English. I sounded them out - Shrok (his name) - and his face lit up in a smile. In that moment our relationship had become personal.

Through our host I discovered that our friend had been the first person to stop, squat down and speak to Shrok, person-to-person. She asked him about himself. No-one had ever done that before. He had felt valued - even loved.

Seven years later, Shrok owns an electric auto rickshaw, earns a living and is married. Love made a difference to him.

Psalms 139 in the Bible says, "Lord You are the One who put me together in my mother's womb, and I praise you because of the wonderful way you created me." (v13-14).

We are each individually made and valued. It is personal. We are loved by the God who created us and redeemed us. Only in Him do we find our true worth. We can't fathom it, but when we receive that love through faith in Jesus, it becomes personal - tailored to our needs. And I know it made a difference to this one. •

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Intellectual skeptic dug deep to find the truth

BY RYAN ZEPEDA

Paul Ernst was a natural tinkerer who based his outlook on life on the material world that could be seen, quantified and studied.

"I liked knowing how things worked," Paul says in a CBN video. "I wanted to drill down to the basis of something where it was, you know, like taking apart an alarm clock or later a motorcycle or a car engine."

Attracted to sciences, he graduated from college with a degree in chemistry. He didn't bother much with the notion of God because if He existed, He couldn't be documented by scientific means.

"Even though I might think about where the universe came from, 'Where there's a God,' 'Is there life after death?' I pushed those into unknowables.

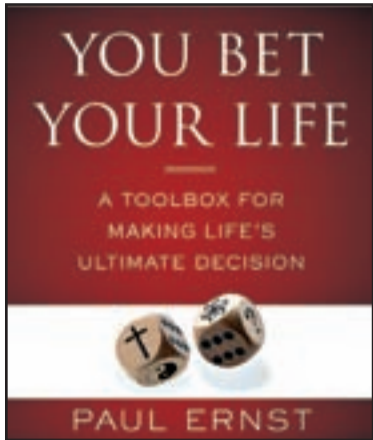
"The picture I had of Christians is that since they weren't in science, they were in another realm that was unknowable, and some of it actually looked kind of silly to me and I just wasn't interested in that."

He stayed the course of scientific atheism through his 40s, but when he turned 50, a nagging sense of his mortality began to irritate him.

"I had a fear of dying," Paul says. "I didn't want to go into oblivion or, worse yet, into some kind of judgment."

A friend, Tom Anderson, composed a paper called "A Lawyer Gives a Defence of the Divinity of Christ." After reading it, Paul realized it made a lot of sense.

"I knew if this is true, this changes everything."



This is huge. So I could immediately tell that this was something big that needed to be pursued," he says. "But the bigger part of the picture is this individual had a roadmap for connecting the dots to where I, for the first time, saw the possibility of knowing whether it was true or not. And I thought 'I'm not going to live forever; maybe I'd better look into these things and settle them.'"

Then another friend

gave him Lee Strobel's book, *The Case for Christ*.

"The book interviews Christian scholars on various topics like the resurrection and the reliability of the text, as though this investigative reporter, Lee Strobel, is interviewing these different experts. And so I begin to mimic the process of what I see going on in *The Case for Christ*.

"It put me into a turmoil," he remembers. "Is it true? Maybe it is. Maybe it isn't."

For a year, he mulled over what he was learning, not avoiding any book, be it on theology or philosophy, that might shed light on the subject.

Nevertheless, there was one outstanding omission from his reading list, the Bible.

"Up to this point I'd been reading books about the Bible and other types of evidence for it, but I hadn't actually read the Bible. I was sort of afraid to read it, that it would take me away from what I was now hoping to be true. But through my studies I learned about this passage called Isaiah 53, and I read it."

Isaiah 53 startled Paul. Its hard-to-deny portrayal of Christ's life and death in glaring detail, which pre-dated the actual occurrence by several hundred years, could only mean God inspired the writer, he realized.

"There's got to be a Transcendent Being above, who has control of this book and knows the begin-



ning and the end, because there's information in here that only a Being outside of time could know about," he realized.

Then it dawned on Paul.

"I began to see that the Christian scholars really did have the upper hand in this game," he says. "They had the goods. And it became increasingly apparent that the atheist side was a very weak argument."

"It was really based on the presupposition that the natural world was all there is. The tide really turned in favour of Christian truth. And at that point I really formed the idea 'I'm compelled to believe this.'"

Paul asked Jesus Christ into his heart as his Lord and Saviour and was born again.

"It was a feeling, I would say, of trust and of hope, because I was aware of a level of hopelessness in my life," he says. "So I would say

that the part of Christianity that struck me first and largest, was hope."

Paul has been following Jesus since 2001. That was that year he wedded his beloved wife, Mary.

"When he talks about Isaiah 53 to others, he tears up because it's so powerful," says Mary. "The deep love of Our Lord Jesus is beyond words for me. There's only victory in Christ. And both of us, if we're speaking about our faith, we speak about Jesus."

"So if Jesus rose from the dead, why did He rise from the dead?" asks Paul. "And the best explanation out of all the possible ones, both natural and from other religions, was that the God of the Bible raised Jesus from the dead."

Paul's book, *You Bet Your Life*, recounts his insightful journey to Jesus Christ.

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I'M COMPELLED TO BELIEVE THIS



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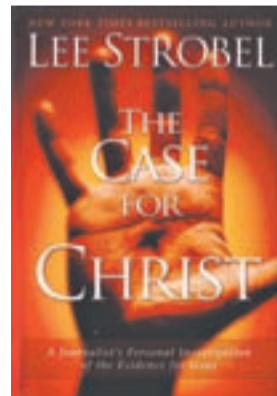
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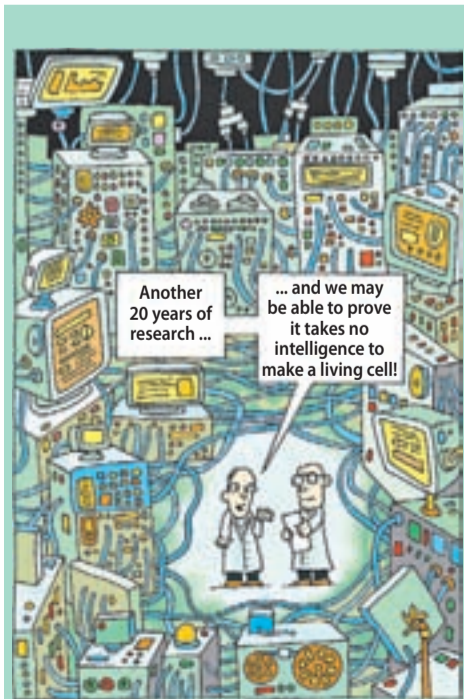
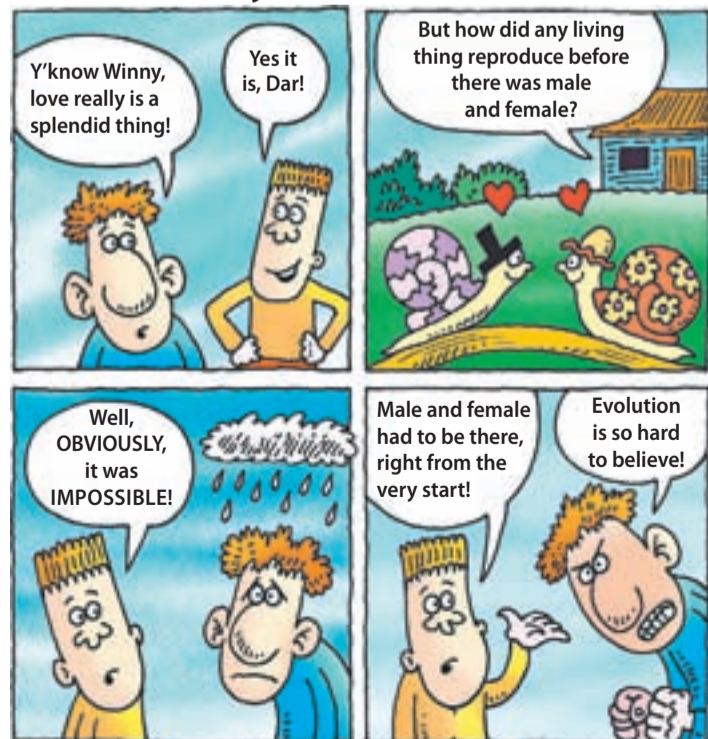


The book that had such a profound influence on Paul's journey.



Paul and Mary Ernst are equally passionate about their faith.

Dar and Winny By Richard Gunther



By Richard Gunther

Believe It or Not

BY CREATION MINISTRIES INTERNATIONAL

Antibiotic resistance pre-dates medical antibiotics



PERMAFROST samples taken from the Yukon territory in Canada, said by evolutionists to have been "continually frozen for 30,000 years", have been found to contain a variety of bacterial antibiotic-resistant genes. They include genes for resistance to penicillin, tetracycline and vancomycin – "conclusive proof that these genes truly pre-date medical antibiotics."

Of course, this demonstrates the falsehood of claims that antibiotic resistance is evidence for evolution. Quite simply, these genes for antibiotic resistance did not 'evolve' in response to human development of antibiotics, because they *already existed*. Indeed, many evolutionists have known of this for years.

Survival of such antibiotic resistant strains in hospitals is evidence of natural selection – but this is not evolution.

Natural selection is a phenomenon discovered by creationists before Darwin and a not contested idea.

What Creationists disagree with is macro evolution – that something evolved from nothing. Or that information could be added to a system without an intelligent Designer.

Ancient resistance to antibiotics found, *New Scientist* 211 (2828):14, 3 September 2011.

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BUILDING BETTER RELATIONSHIPS

BIG PICTURE THINKING ABOUT OUR RELATIONSHIPS

BY ROB FURLONG

By the time you read this article 2021 will be well under way with one month having passed by already! (I just wanted to encourage you all!)

Nevertheless, it is still appropriate to ask what your plans this year are for personal growth and change and I am specifically referring to the area of your relationships.

What motivates change in us is having a picture of how we would like things to be. Once that bigger picture is established firmly in your mind then you make a commitment to start working steadily towards that picture.

I remember being greatly impacted by this concept of the bigger picture to motivate personal change as I read Gordon MacDonald's *A Resilient Life*. As I read, I discovered how important this concept of the bigger picture is across all areas of my life.

Equally important however, is to be aware of the fact that we all tend to believe that once we have the big picture, things will sail along smoothly

but this is not so! A big picture is a wonderful thing, provided there is a strategy to help you move towards achieving it.

I remember seeing Michelangelo's statue of David when visiting Florence in 2011 and being amazed at the level of detail this marvelous sculptor brought to his masterful creation. Equally impressive is the fact that he completed this beloved sculpture before he had turned 30 years of age!

But it is important to remember this – what began as a picture in his mind was only completed when the last piece of marble was chiseled away. In between there was two years of hard work!

This same idea is wonderfully illustrated by an author who wrote about the construction of the East/West railroad in the second half of the 19th century, which connected the eastern states of the USA with the west. One of the great visionaries of the project was Collis Huntington who was invited to a public ceremony to celebrate the driving of the first spike. Surprisingly, he declined to attend, stating among his reasons for

his non-attendance: "Anyone can drive the first spike, but there are months of labor and unrest between the first and last spike."

The author goes on to say that in his opinion Huntington was saying, "Look; it's great to have a big picture but let's not celebrate until we get the job done."

The reason I am talking about the big picture is because now is an ideal time for you to sit down quietly somewhere and do an assessment of your life, marriage and relationships.

A great place to start is to ask yourself a couple of questions:

- "What am I living for?"
- "What keeps me from a full realization of what I am living for?"

Think about these questions seriously and you will find that they are not easily answered. They require us to do some hard thinking, but in the long run they are worth asking and answering because when we do we make wise choices about the kinds of relationships we want, how we would like our marriages to be and where we can best invest our lives.



The scale of Michaelangelo's David sculpture shows how 'big picture' the artist was thinking!

And take the time to work out how you are going to get there. Some areas to think about are:

- How can I be more present with people?
- What are some ways I can be more authentic in my relationships?
- What skills do I need to learn to be a better communicator?

In the coming year we will explore these areas together; but for now, why not give some thought to how you can improve your marriage and friendships by becoming more present with people?

A book you may find helpful is Gordon MacDonald's *A Resilient Life* – it is an encouraging and practical read.

See you in a month when we talk about how to be present with people!

Lessons from a sausage dog (Part 9)

BY JODY BENNETT

MY youngest daughter likes to tell me about how many dogs and other pets she is going to have one day – a sausage dog, a pug, a couple of Corgis (like the Queen has), a greyhound and a Labrador!



"Don't you realise how expensive that will be?" I asked her. "Buying the dogs is hugely expensive and then you have ongoing costs - vet bills, food, toys, equipment, grooming, kennelling when you go away; not to mention the time needed to care for and exercise all those dogs!"

I guess having dogs is a little like having children – if we really sat down and worked out how much they would cost us personally and financially - not to mention emotionally - then we wouldn't have them at all!

But almost everyone who has dogs or children will tell you that the benefits vastly outweigh the costs; and they would definitely recommend owning pets or having kids.

In the same way, becoming a Christian can be extremely costly, to the extent that often outsiders cannot understand why anyone would want to make the commitment.

Jesus warned His disciples in Luke 14 of that cost, "Suppose one of you wants to build a tower. Won't you first sit down and estimate the cost to see if you have enough money to complete it? ... In the same way, those of you who do not give up everything you have cannot be my disciples."

For some converts, Christianity means they have to abandon some relationships, some habits, some cherished notions. For other people it costs them even more directly when their family rejects them, they are chased out of their homes, lose their jobs, are thrown in prison or have to forfeit their very lives.

Yet I have only ever heard of Christians agreeing with the Apostle Paul when he says in Romans chapter 8 verse 18: "I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us."

Like having pets or kids, Christianity may seem to be a ridiculous investment of time, money and effort for no dollar and cents return, but those who have done it know that what they gained in joy, love, forgiveness, hope and eternal life, is immeasurably more than they have lost.

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

<p>If you prayed the above prayer, tick this box </p> <p>I have prayed this prayer. <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>Please send me:</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Bible</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Some 'starting off' literature</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Information on a helpful church</p>	<p>If you have NOT prayed the prayer at this stage, tick this box </p> <p>I would like to think about this. <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>Please send me:</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> More information as I am inquiring about being a Christian.</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> I have a problem (see attached letter)</p>
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** Please tick and write clearly **

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Age and occupation (it helps) _____

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Is lifelong rubbish choking your life?

BY PETER BRAIN

THE other day as I was pulling in our wheelie bin, I got to thinking as to how well we are served by our local council when it comes to rubbish collection. For sure the 5:45am noise of the truck can be an abrupt end to a night's sleep but having all the gunk, rubbish and garden refuse removed so regularly and efficiently is a great blessing indeed. When we compare it to other cities and places around the world we are truly fortunate. I've heard it said that what we find in our rubbish bins tells us a lot about ourselves!

Our rubbish bins also serve as a metaphor for the sin in our lives. The novelist Evelyn Waugh describes that unpopular but persistently real and awful three letter word as 'one little, flat, deadly word that covers a lifetime.' A lifetime of rubbish, consistently accumulated, day after day, week after week, month after month, year after year... for a lifetime, mounts up and causes us (and others) much pain, guilt and anxiety. If only there was an efficient rubbish removal system as regularly available as our weekly collection.

The good news is that there is. Do you remember Lonnie Donegan's great old song, 'My Old Man's a Dustman'? For us to benefit from God's rubbish collection, that wonderful removal of our sin through repentance and faith in the Lord Jesus

Christ, we have to firstly admit that we are men and women of the dust. Once we see our sinfulness we will be more likely to engage the rubbish removalists.

When Jesus died on the cross He allowed the collective weight of God's righteous judgement to fall upon Him. Here is a very efficient and priceless rubbish disposal. Priceless in both senses of the word. No one else could pay the price of our offence to God save the Son of God. As the



old hymn puts it, 'There was no other good enough to pay the price of sin; He only could unlock the gate of Heaven and let us in.' And priceless in that we need not, and could not afford to, pay for this service. Once we repent and put our trust in Jesus, God grants us a free pardon. And it is all totally undeserved.

But what sheer delight, what sublime peace, what glorious freedom from guilt this brings. And we don't have to wait each week. This is a daily service, a daily joy and privilege as we come clean with God in confident and humble prayer.

The woman asked the dustman, 'Am I too late?' and his answer echoes the loving call of Jesus: 'No, just jump up on the cart.' It's never too late to avail ourselves of this mercy but we are wise to recognise that it is never too soon either, since rubbish piled up can so easily contaminate and overwhelm us.



LIVING OUT

THE JOY

Lauren Holiday led the US women's soccer team to the FIFA World Cup victory in 2015 and has two Olympic gold medals under her belt. She was US Soccer Young Female Athlete of the Year in 2007 and US Soccer Female Athlete of the Year in 2014.

Having played as a midfielder and forward for the United States women's national soccer team from 2007 to 2015, on retiring, she was the first player in women's soccer (NWSL) history to have her jersey number retired.

With these accolades – and many more – one might fear Lauren would consider herself to be something very special indeed. Yet the 33-year-old is adamant that none of these achievements are about her.

The only thing that matters is that her life should only and always be about Jesus Christ.

Lauren, who is married to NBA star Jrue Holiday and has two children, has always been open about her Christian faith and the fact that she gives it pre-eminence in all she does.

When she was on the team she said: "The wonderful, wonderful thing about loving Jesus is, it's not about me. The spotlight isn't on me.

"So when I step out on the field, I get to play with freedom because I don't have to worry about if I score

or what happens if we lose or if I make a bad pass, because success isn't determined on that with Christ.

"My goal when I'm out on the field is that the people see joy. I know I don't always smile but I want to show people I'm on the field for a reason.

"I've never played for self-glory or anything. I've played to glorify God."

About her journey of faith, Lauren, who was raised in a traditional church, said she did not always have such a vibrant relationship with God.

"It was only in high school when I made the U20 Women's National Team that I started to seek the Lord Jesus. The entire team consisted of Christians, including the head coach, and he was excited about the Lord. I remember praying one night, 'God, I want what he has.' He was so passionate about his faith, and I wanted that too," she recalls.

"I went to some youth camps and that's where I started to discover the presence of God," she told BeliefNet. "I was able to experience God through the singing and by talking to other girls that had similar experiences. That opened my

eyes but I still had to seek out that relationship."

She admits she found her college years at UCLA challenging. "Thankfully I had older teammates that were stronger Christians who encouraged me in my faith," she said. "As those girls graduated, I was challenged to step up and be an example and a light on my team.

"Being on the national team brought me even further out of my comfort zone and helped me to be more comfortable around people that don't believe the same way I do. I have learned to love people unconditionally, and let Christ and His love shine through my actions and attitude.

"It's so easy to get caught up in a busy lifestyle," she confessed. "I try to make sure I have quiet time at least once a day and read a devotional, read my Bible and

pray. Sometimes it's actually harder at home than on the road, because at home I feel like I have so little time to get everything done that I want."

One of Lauren's favorite ways to draw close to God is through music. "Worship [music] makes me feel closer to God," she said, "and the lyrics stir up questions and emotions that encourage me to seek Him even more."

Lauren's faith went through the fire in June 2016, when she was 29 years old, and six months pregnant. Lauren began getting severe headaches. An MRI revealed a benign tumour called a meningioma on the right side of her brain.

I HAVE LEARNED TO LOVE PEOPLE UNCONDITIONALLY



Lauren Holiday #12 of the United States celebrates as she scores her first goal in the first half against Japan in the FIFA Women's World Cup Canada 2015 Final at BC Place Stadium on July 5, 2015 in Vancouver, Canada. (Photo by Jeff Vinnick/Getty Images)

Jrue Holiday, daughter J.T. and wife Lauren Holiday smile during the NBA Summer League in July 2019 in Las Vegas, Nevada. Lauren and Jrue had a second child in November 2020. (Photo by Cassy Athena/Getty Images)

Her doctors induced labour a month before her due date so they could operate on the tumour and she gave birth to a daughter, Jrue Tyler (J.T.) without complication.

Jrue took a leave of absence from his basketball career with the New Orleans Pelicans to take care of his wife and newborn daughter. He said he was devastated about Lauren's condition, but declared "there is nothing in life my wife can't conquer with Jesus Christ in her corner."

After the operation she wrote on her Instagram page: "I have never

quite known suffering like I experienced the last six months.

"I memorized scripture and some days my faith felt unshakable and others I was scared to death," she wrote beneath the photo of her daughter.

"Every time I see this smile, I'm reminded that joy does come in the morning," she said, quoting Psalm 30:5. "Maybe not the next day, maybe not even the next month but it comes. I can't imagine what heaven will be like if this is the joy I get to experience on earth." ●



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