

## BET YOUR LIFE ON IT!

**B**y the time he was 12, Daniel Abou-Zeid had lived in 33 homes. His father was an inveterate gambler and his lifestyle forced the family to move many times. While some of those homes were rentals, many belonged to Daniel's father, who gambled them away.

Like father like son, you might say, because Daniel's grandfather had wagered away an entire street of houses in Lebanon.

Daniel grew up in Geelong, Melbourne without much money. "Mum and Dad were extreme in their compulsions and Dad with his compulsive gambling," he shares with *Eternity News*. "They had no idea how to parent.

"Dad gambled on anything. When he was awarded a \$23,000 injury claim, he gambled it all away in about two days. He also gambled away three restaurants that we owned."

His parents struggled in their relationship, splitting up about 10 times but always ending up back together.

Daniel recalls crying himself to sleep while his parents screamed at each other downstairs and flung pots around. "They sounded like they were going to kill each other just when they were talking about something nice. So when they were actually angry, it was even worse!"

Growing up in this environment took its toll and Daniel says his heart became filled with anger, rage and bitterness.

"The nicest way to put it is that I didn't have much love in my heart,"



Daniel Abou-Zeid and his wife Michelle, with their five sons, Jordan, Damon, Silas, Jonas and Archer.

he admits. "I just had a growing hate and anger at life and people—abuse will do that to you.

"It's important to mention though, how well-meaning Mum and Dad were. They loved me incredibly, but due to Dad's compulsive illness and the situation they found themselves in, it wasn't possible to provide a stable family unit."

A chance meeting with a boy playing footy changed Daniel's life. They became good friends and Daniel

became a regular visitor at his new pal's home and followed the family to many outings. He remembers: "We did all kinds of fun stuff. It really was like the childhood I'd never had.

"It spoke to me in a massive way. It just changed everything."

His friend's mother, a Christian, began speaking to Daniel about God. He was fascinated.

"Something drew me into a whole heap of indoor conversations with

this lady," he recalls. "I would be thinking, 'I don't want to be here, I want to be outside playing basketball.' But I just couldn't stop listening to what she said about God. It got to the point that her son would go: 'You guys aren't talking about God again are you?'"

One statement in particular tugged at his heart for weeks. She said: "If you're going to make a decision to follow God, you've got to mean it with all your heart. You

can't just say 'okay God, I follow you. Now come on, let's see what You're going to do'. You've got to say, 'God, I really really mean this.'"

Finally, half-heartedly, he admits, he said a salvation prayer. "For about four nights in a row I prayed 'God please come into my life... forgive me my sin' but I knew I didn't mean it with all my heart. And so I'd follow up that with, 'God...You've got to help me mean this with all my heart.'"

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## Welcome to 2023, don't look back

BY JODY BENNETT

"THE past is a foreign country: they do things differently there," wrote L.P. Hartley in his 1953 novel *The Go-Between*. And so as we take our first steps into the "new country" of 2023 it may feel a bit like emigrating – frightening, yet exciting at the same time.

When my husband and I immigrated to Australia in 2006, we made a conscious decision to burn our bridges and not look back. We left our friends, we left some family; we left a lovely big house and our two dogs and my husband's stable job. It was risky and scary and thrilling to bring our three children, all still under three years old, to a new country where we had no friends, no job and no idea of what the future held.



And we have been extremely happy. I attribute that in part to the fact that we chose to face forward and not second-guess ourselves. Many fellow-immigrants we have met keep harking back to what might have been or all they left behind and they have not made the transition as well. "Whinging poms" is a well-known criticism, but "whinging Saffas" equally applies!

In the same way, launching into 2023 we need to leave the failures, disappointments, and regrets of 2022 in the past; and look with expectation and determination at what lies ahead. We can't fix yesterday, no matter how much we fret about it, but we can make the best of tomorrow.

And it is just as unhelpful to nostalgically live longing for things to be the way they once were. We need to leave 2022's achievements, milestones and joys back there too.

In the Bible is the famous story of Lot's wife looking back to the city of Sodom as God was destroying it, and being turned into a pillar of salt. There is also the story of the Israelites wandering in the desert and hankering back to the foods they ate in slavery in Egypt, rather than looking forward to the honey of the Promised Land.

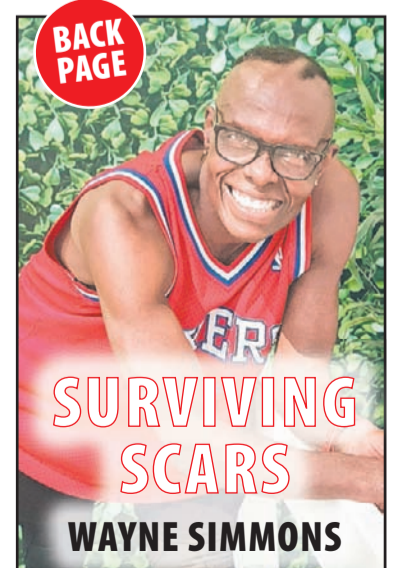
These stories illustrate how a backward focus either freezes us in place, stuck in the past; or it makes us grumble, complain and compare. We are then unable to appreciate the better things ahead.

However, we all know things in our world are not good at the moment. Looking forward into 2023 might even be a bit scary. We might be fearful about the future of the economy, or politics, or the climate, or crime, or the moral decline, or whatever else we worry about. We may be entering the year with health concerns, or relationship strife or financial burdens.

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Fun for Kids

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# Bet your life on it!

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There was no change. His anger and swearing continued unabated.

Until the priest who lived across the road died and Daniel's father insisted his son pray for the dead man's soul.

Not knowing any better, that's exactly what Daniel did. "I had no idea what I was doing but before I knew it — and without intending to — I prayed the whole salvation prayer."

It was clear the following morning something had happened. "I woke up and all I remember coming out of me was, 'I'm a Christian, I'm a Christian, I'm a Christian, I'm a Christian.' I would have looked crazy. Like I said, my family's extreme. Even my salvation experience was a bit extreme.

"No one believed me for ages but now that I'm a minister, I think they get the idea," he grins.

"It really did change my whole life. I almost instantly stopped swearing. The most important thing was my heart changed. The truth was, I had desires to hurt people as I got older, and overnight God changed my heart, my life and my desires.

"Once I was blind, but now I see—that's the work of God. I was 12 at the time."

Daniel's parents, upon seeing the changes in their son — which included a new enthusiasm to do the dishes



and clean his room — committed their lives to Christ some years later.

"They both totally changed," remarks Daniel, "and I reconciled with my father before he died. That whole gambling dysfunction has been broken. My brother is a Christian as well. God really changed my entire family."

Today Daniel is the senior pastor of a church in Victoria.

"Going into ministry was something I really desperately wanted to do. I absolutely felt called. I know there are other people out there like me, and even if their life isn't covered in abuse, we're all equally lost.

"I was fortunate enough to not have the arrogance of a nice life. My need for God was just so blatantly obvious. I identify with people's brokenness.

"It's all about Christ and the redemption He's bringing about in our lives."

The original version of this article, by Guan Un, appeared in Eternity News in December 2013.

# Turnaround from life of addiction and trauma

When Joanne Ugle, an Aboriginal woman from Perth, was 18, she lost her mother in the most horrific circumstances imaginable — killed by her own partner.

"I suppose it was that trauma which led to drug, alcohol and gambling addictions," the 52-year-old tells *Challenge News*.

"I was in and out of jail. For me, spending time in and out of prison became the norm."

Joanne's grandfather passed away in 2005, followed by her beloved grandmother in 2017.

"My grandmother was the backbone of our family and losing her was a traumatic experience. My addictions and problems became worse," Joanne shares.

In 2019 she lost her brother. "I attended each of those funerals in handcuffs. I was in jail every single time — and it was my brother's death that finally became my turning point. This was when I realised I couldn't face another prison term."

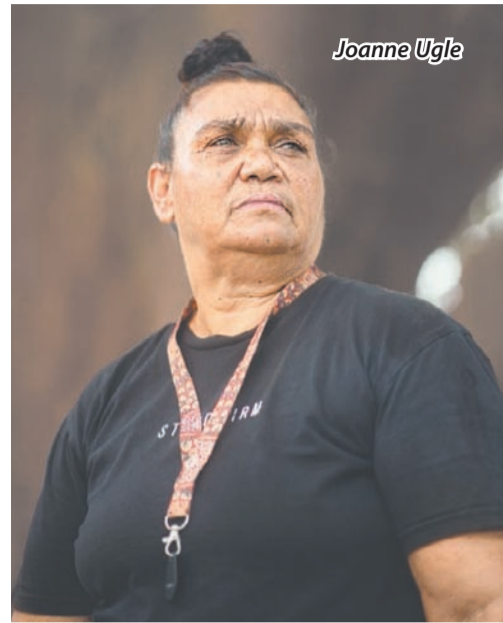
At the time of her brother's death Joanne was in prison for a methamphetamine offence. She had been sentenced to seven months — much shorter than her other prison terms — but somehow this was the final straw.

"It was just all too much," she shares. "The life I was leading just wasn't *living* and I couldn't face any more time in jail. I knew something had to change and I finally cried out to God."

Joanne learned about God when she was 13 through a woman who visited the detention centre she was in and conducted Bible study lessons. The gospel (the good news that Jesus Christ came to Earth to die for humanity's sins) meant nothing to her then.

"Even though I thought I knew God, I didn't have a relationship with His Son Jesus, and I continued backsliding as my sin became deeper," she admits. "As Proverbs 13: 15 says, *'the road of the transgressor gets harder and harder'*, and that's where my life was heading.

"But the seed that she planted in me never died. God



Joanne Ugle

was just waiting for the right time to bring it to life. He had to wait till I was broken and ready to surrender.

"I had resisted for so long but when I finally gave my life to Him I felt a peace like I never felt before and I wondered why I had waited for so long!"

Joanne remembers how sceptical her son was when she told him about her encounter with God. "Is this just one of your jail talks, Mum?" he asked her.

"Given my history he had every right to say that to me, but I knew inside that something had truly shifted. Now he says to me 'I'm so proud of you Mum — you did it!'"

"And I was able to lead him to the Lord. I truly marvel at the power of God to bring His prodigals home."

Joanne finished her prison sentence two years ago and has not re-offended since. She says she has completely lost her desire for drugs, drink and cigarettes.

"God heard my cry and He turned my life around. I finally gave Him my full attention, so much so that when I was released, I walked out of prison a completely different woman!"

Once a client of Outcare, an organisation that provides support for reintegration to the community, Joanne is now employed by them as a peer-support worker.

"I now wake up each day with a purpose," she says, beaming with joy.

"I feel a great sense of freedom and I now truly know the value of my family. My circle of friends is now full of people God has chosen to influence my life. What was once empty has now been filled with God's love, favour, and grace."

On the day of her release from prison, she went to collect her clothes but was told they were lost and was given a completely new outfit.

"It was like I had taken off the old and was putting on a new life, as it says in the book of Ephesians 4:22.

"Jesus broke every chain of addiction and truly set me free!"

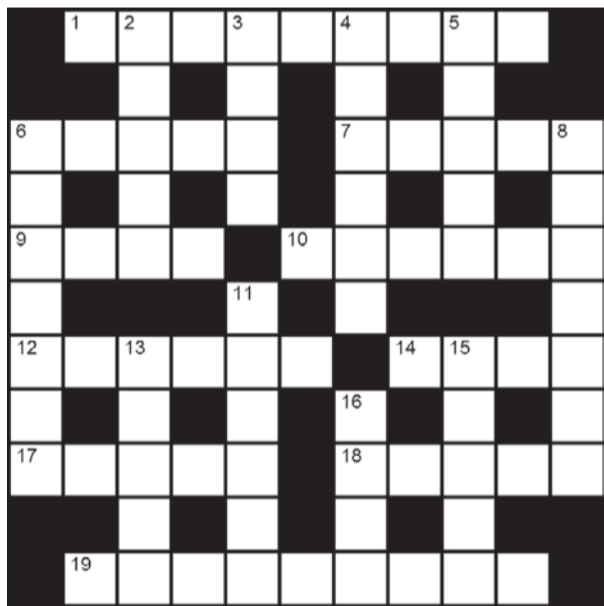
## Coffee Break CROSSWORD & SUDOKU

### ACROSS

- 1 Spicy sausage
- 6 Property or money
- 7 Police car's wail
- 9 Small coral islands
- 10 Toolbox item
- 12 One with a bill to pay
- 14 To practise boxing
- 17 Espionage persons
- 18 Bikini or Tarawa
- 19 Non-caged hens (4,5)

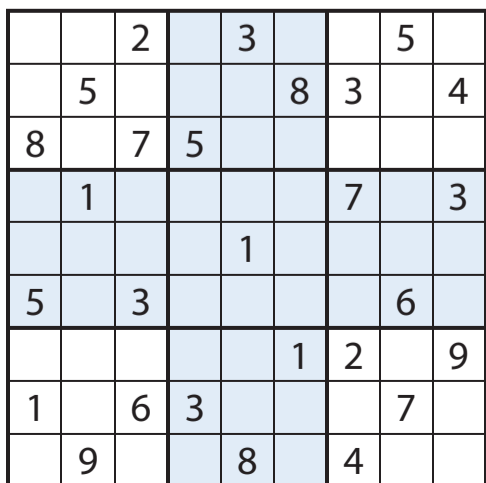
### DOWN

- 2 Short written work
- 3 Feeling of empathy
- 4 Light sound of leaves
- 5 Medical worker
- 6 Shopping streets
- 8 Nasal cavity



- 11 Foamy hair product
- 15 Fork spike
- 13 Wild rosebush
- 16 Space agency

### SOLUTIONS PAGE 11



The Story of A Lawsuit: Chapter One

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Nevertheless, Christianity gives me, and many others, the courage to look forward and face the new year with boldness because we serve a God who knows the end from the beginning. The God of the Bible already knows all about 2023. Neither the past nor the future are a foreign country to Him.

He promises those who trust in Him that He will eventually right all the wrongs in the world, evil will be judged, and pain, sin and death will finally be defeated. For Christians the best still lies ahead, at the end of the age, in a new heavens and a new earth. As some Christians like to say, if it's not good; it's not over yet.

In a religion like Hinduism, with its concepts of karma and reincarnation, your past determines your future; however, in Christianity your past sins are washed away and separated from you as far as the east is from the west, because Jesus paid for them on the cross.

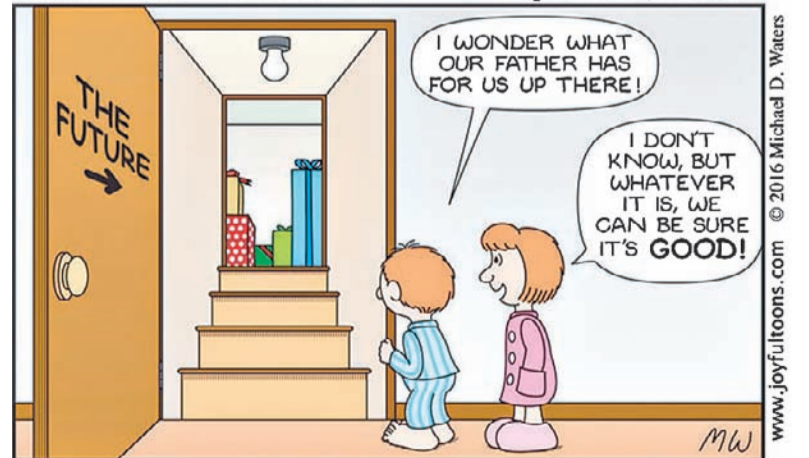
If you want your future to be bright, regardless of politics and climate

change; nuclear threats or pandemics, then throw your lot in with Jesus; let Him deal with the sins of your past, direct the plans of your present and give you a future beyond your wildest imagination.

"That is what the Scriptures mean when they say, 'No eye has seen, no ear has heard, and no mind has imagined what God has prepared for those who love Him.'" 1 Corinthians 2:9

# Welcome to 2023, don't look back

## GOOD THINGS IN STORE A Joyful 'toon by Mike Waters



How abundant are the good things that you have stored up for those who fear you, that you bestow in the sight of all, on those who take refuge in you. — PSALM 31:19 NIV

# ATHEIST GETS HER ANSWERS

BY MARILYN ADAMSON

My question seemed to annoy religious people. “How do you know that God exists?”

Maybe they wondered about my motives. Or maybe they had no idea how to answer. Most of their responses were, “Well, you just know.”

I wasn’t trying to be difficult. But I certainly did not “just know.” And I was hoping someone did!

After many months of this, I thought, “Here are the people who say they believe in God, but no one knows why!” Maybe some people needed to believe in God but clearly there was no proof. I came to the most stark conclusion ... God did not actually exist.

I held this belief for years, but then I met someone who caused me to become interested in the possibility of God. She talked about God like He was her closest friend. She was convinced He deeply loved her. I knew her life well. Any concern she would take to God, trusting Him to work it out or care for her in some way. She would tell me, quite candidly, that she was merely praying that God would act upon her concerns. For over a year, I regularly saw what seemed to be answers to her prayers. I watched her life through a myriad of circumstances, and her faith in God was unwavering.

So, I wanted to believe in God on one hand, because I admired her life and her love for others. But I couldn’t believe in something against my intellect, against my better judgment. Wanting something to be true, doesn’t make it true.

I challenged my friend with every question that came to mind about God. This went on for well over a year. One day she handed me a book (*Know Why You Believe* by Paul E. Little) that briefly answered questions like, is there a God?; is Jesus God?; what about the Bible? It presented facts. No comments like, “you have to believe”.

I saw some evidence for God that was both factual and logical. The parts particularly convincing to me were the properties of water and the earth’s posi-

tion relative to the sun. It was all too perfectly designed, too perfectly put together. My faith in “nothing behind it all” seemed weaker than the possibility of God.

One night I was talking to my friend again, and she knew I had all the information I needed. She knew that I had run out of questions to ask. Yet I was still trying to debate, and prove my atheism was rational. In one clear, abrupt moment, my friend turned to me and said, “You know, I can’t make this decision for you, and God’s not going to wait forever.”

And I immediately knew she was right. I was playing around with a very important decision. So, for the next three or four hours, I reviewed everything I had read and observed. I evaluated it all.

There were scientific facts that I couldn’t dismiss by philosophical wordsmithing. Also, historical evidence about Jesus and the reliability of the Bible further

pointed to this most rational conclusion: God, a knowledgeable power infinitely greater than ourselves, does exist. This was no longer deniable.

Then I knew I had to act on that conclusion. After a few hours of thought I addressed God, “Ok, You win. I ask You to come into my life, and You may do with it whatever You’d like.”

As I read the Bible it seemed that God was spelling out who He is and how He viewed this relationship with Him. It was amazing. What really surprised me is how often He talked about His love. I hadn’t expected that. In my mind, I was simply acknowledging God’s existence. It was a logical conclusion that God exists. I had no expectations of Him, but as I read the Bible, He chose to communicate His love to me. That was a surprise.



Marilyn Adamson

Now, my basic, sceptical nature was still there. The first few months or year, I would ask myself, “Am I really believing in God? And, why am I?” And I would methodically review the objective reasons why I believed God existed. So my “faith” in God did not rest on feelings, but on facts, on reasons.

To me, it’s like the foundation of a building. The facts/reasons support my faith. It’s like someone driving across a bridge. They can feel whatever they’d like about the bridge. But it’s the construction/design/materials of the bridge itself that allows a person to safely get from one end to the other.

In the same way, the objective reality of God – the logical, historical, scientific reasons to believe in His existence, are important to me. There are people who don’t seem to need that. But I hate being fooled, and I have little regard for wishful thinking. The substantiating reasons for God’s existence mattered to me. •

## Part 2 – Further evidence of God

**SINCE** that time, now that I’ve been in a relationship with God for a number of years – why do I now believe in God? What reasons do I have for continuing to believe in God?

After beginning a relationship with God, I saw additional evidence that God is real. Such as...

1. When I have questions, concerns, or would like insight on a matter, **God speaks to me through the Bible**. God offers to do this for anyone who trusts Him. “Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path” (Psalm 119:105).

Here’s an example. One day, my schedule, deadlines, and obligations were crawling up my neck and tightening their hold. So I got out a piece of paper and pen, and asked God: “Just tell me what you want me to do, and I’ll do it.” I was fully prepared for shouldering 100% responsibility.

I then opened my Bible and immediately read where Jesus was talking with a man who was blind. Jesus was asking him, “What do you want me to do for you?”

I read it again. Jesus asked: “What do you want me to do for you?” Rather amazed, I picked up my pen and began writing an entirely different list of concerns that I would like God to act on. This, I have found, is characteristic of God. Reminding us that He is there. That He cares, He’s capable and He wanted me to rely on Him.

2. Similarly, when I need **direction** for a decision, He gives it. I believe that God cares about our decisions. I believe He has a plan for our lives, that He cares about who I marry, what kind of job I have, and some decisions smaller than that. When has God given me clear direction?

During my senior year of college, I had decided to take a job after graduation that would require a move from Chicago to California.

One evening, I was alone and thinking through a long list of friends. I was wondering, “Who could I talk into moving to California with me to share an apartment with me?”

One person named Christy came to mind. She had already settled in a job in Iowa. I thought she’d be the perfect roommate, but I hadn’t talked to her in several months. Just 30 minutes later Christy calls me on the phone.

She was moving to the same town in California and was calling to see if I would room with her!

3. **Explanations about life** – why we’re here, what the purpose is, what is important in life, what to value or strive for – God has better answers than anything I’ve ever read anywhere. I have studied multiple philosophies and religions and other life approaches. In the Bible, seeing it from God’s perspective, all the pieces of the puzzle fit.

There is still a lot I’ll read in the Bible and close the Bible saying, “I don’t get it.” So I don’t mean to suggest I fully understand everything in the Bible. Instead, I’m saying that life only makes sense from the perspective of what God has revealed. It’s like reading the operating manual to life on earth, only we are not left to merely follow the manual. The Creator is explaining to us how life works, and then offers to personally guide us through it, on a daily basis.

4. **God’s love is deeper than intimacy with any human being**. I say that married, with two children, and tons of very close friends. His love is perfect. He’s incredibly gracious. He takes me right where I’m at and gives guidance. He intervenes with actions that leave me amazed. He is not a belief or doctrine. I see Him act in my life.

5. **He has done more with my life than I would have done on my own**. This is not a statement of inferiority or lack of self-confidence. I’m speaking in terms of accomplishments that far exceeded what I ever had in mind. He provides ideas, direction, solutions, wisdom, and better motives than I could aspire to on my own.

### Bottom Line

When I think of the value of knowing God it is this: that we can understand life, we can proceed with clarity, we can avoid pitfalls, we can be led by God, know truth, be given strength/hope/peace, and enjoy the most important relationship — with the One who will be faithful to us and constantly love us. God, who created us, provides this as nothing else could.

To go through this life with success and confidence, we must be connected to Him, relying on Him. Until we come to know Him, we will always be searching, always be testing other possibilities, and find them lacking. But when we respond to God’s offer to be in relationship with Him, we are satisfied, complete. We now are equipped to live this life with a plan and with Someone who can lead us in it. •

## Religion was so confusing!

BY JALEN JENKINS

Raised in England in a Muslim family, Laila Nassali was bewildered by the number of religions and different teachings.

“It was so confusing for me,” Laila says on her YouTube video channel. “God is not a God of confusion, so why are there so many different religions out there? If He’s the one true God, why are there so many religions saying He’s this or He’s that? It looked like a confusing puzzle that I would never be able to solve.”

Like so many, she gave up on trying to compare, contrast and determine the truth. Instead, she started to live for personal pleasure and be happy-go-lucky like so many fellow university students who appeared to be having fun.

“I was literally just living my best life, and that led me to a lot of sin,” she says. “I was trapped in the flesh. I didn’t believe in God, period.”

One day she started feeling anxious and depressed because of living in the ways of sin. “I had thoughts of death, and where am I going to go [when I die]?” she says. “I had all of this torment in my heart. It led me to the point where my spirit was crying out. I couldn’t fathom that I didn’t have a purpose.

“It took me to go into the dark to realise there is a God somewhere.”



Laila Nassali

Out of her agony, Laila decided to pray: Who are you God? she asked.

She didn’t pray at a mosque, as her Muslim parents had taught her. She prayed in her bathroom.

In the following days God brought a Christian into Laila’s life. Laila just “happened” to catch a cab with a pastor, who talked the entire time about God. Next, she ran across two girls who talked to her about God.

Then it was Instagram. Scrolling through, all she saw were posts with crosses, which was weird because she knew the algorithms based on her previous interaction with Instagram would not lead her to crosses.

Then a friend invited her to church.

“I was seeing people’s love for God,” says Laila “And I saw the way people worshipped and poured themselves out to God. And I started crying uncontrollably. I didn’t know where it came from because I didn’t feel like crying.

“It was the Spirit of God in the room,” she adds.

The power of God overcame her, and she surrendered to Jesus as her Saviour. “Jesus is my Lord,” she declares.

Since then, Laila has been attending church – and she still cries.

“I just randomly cry through songs or people worshipping Jesus,” she says. “My spirit inside is just connected to this love that He pours on all of us, not only believers but unbelievers too.” •

# 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 loved us so much that they 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 where Jesus hung on the cross to pay the debt of your sin. Why not read His love letter today in the book of John in the New Testament? •

# Korean professor found life was more than a conquest

**P**aul Lim was a happy-go-lucky nine-year-old living in Korea when one day his dad didn't come home from work. He didn't come home the next day, or the next.

His father, who was an entrepreneur with some political connections, had been imprisoned.

It was a pivotal experience in Paul's life, he shares in a YouTube video on the Dig and Delve channel.

"My mom told us that our dad was in prison and he was incarcerated under some trumped-up charges and that we didn't know when he was coming home," Paul remembers.

Paul and his siblings were raised in a non-religious home but he prayed for his father's release.

"I remember this very distinct moment saying to God, 'God if You're around, please send my dad home,'" Paul says. And, when his father wasn't released, he prayed again.

"[I said], 'You can't possibly exist,' because He threw my dad into prison and threw away the key," he shares.

Paul's father was released three years later but life in Korea became very difficult for the family. So, when Paul was 15, they emigrated to America. His parents decided to start attending church and Paul found himself in the Friday night youth group.

"The youth pastor called it BBB because we had a Bible study, then we'd go to Burger King and then we'd go bowling," Paul explains. "Something happened to my personality when I came to America. I was a really happy-go-lucky guy, I was athletic... but coming to America was a traumatic experience. What was more traumatic yet was going to church. I felt the sense of alienation even more... I wasn't wearing the right clothes, I certainly didn't speak the language, I didn't have the right haircut, and I didn't play the right sports. So I wasn't part of the cool crowd, I was part of the loser crowd."

He said no one sat with him at Bible study or Burger King. And when they went bowling — he was also on his own. He felt rejected and alienated. When the time came for him to attend col-

lege, he was excited about getting away from church and the youth group. He was accepted to Yale University and as he left, his mum encouraged him to find wisdom from God. But Paul wasn't interested.

"I was so excited that I was leaving and that I was going to plunge head-long into this intellectual pursuit," he recalls.

His college professors opened his eyes to some new ideas. One professor talked about errors and manuscript issues in the Bible. Paul respected the professor's air of authority and was keen to embrace any ideas that helped him to reject Christianity and justify some of the lifestyle choices he was pursuing.

"At that time in my life people were just objects of conquest," he admits. "Life was about conquest. I had to get a degree, get a job, get hammered, get this, and get that. It was a pathway toward conquest."

Each week Paul's mum would call and ask whether he went to church. One Sunday morning, hung over as he was, he decided to attend the Korean church.

"There are a couple of reasons that I went," Paul explains. "One — because of my mum, and two — it was the only place you could get Korean food."

Meanwhile, Paul's sister became engaged to marry a man who was studying to become a church pastor. He was running a Christian retreat and Paul's mum asked him to go along. He didn't want to go. It was his Christmas break and he had plans with his friends. But his mum was persistent, so he went — and hated it.

"Everything about the retreat was terrible," he says. "The food was bad, I didn't like the kind of people that were there." He also didn't like the Christian music the band played, but on the last night of the retreat they played a song Paul had never heard before. When he heard the lyrics, "To obey is better than sacrifice, I don't need your money I want your life," tears began to stream from his eyes.



Paul Lim

## “Coming to America was a traumatic experience”

"I heard it as if it was God speaking to me," he attests. "At that moment all the defences that I'd built up just broke down."

That was the night Paul became a Christian. He recalls feeling a mixture of joy and confusion.

"Since age nine I was always trying to get to the next stage — I was jumping through all these hoops," Paul says. "I came to understand that God was saying, 'You belong to Me.' There was a sense of joy and security as if God was saying, 'I've got you, you don't have to try anymore.'"

Paul's brother-in-law gave him a Bible and he read it seven times in one semester. He still had a lot of questions and began studying philosophy of religion as his second major.

"God answered a lot of the questions I had in my heart," Paul explains. "I still didn't quite understand everything, but what began to emerge for me was the answer in the person of Jesus Christ."

After graduating from Yale, Paul decided to attend Bible College. His intellectual curiosity impressed his professors and they encouraged him to get his PhD and come back and teach with them.

As a professor of church history at Vanderbilt University Divinity School, Paul is now paid to ask his questions and explore the answers with his students. He has also published books and won major fellowships — but his accolades mean nothing to him in comparison to his joy in knowing Jesus. •

## THE BIG QUESTION

BY GREG LAURIE

**IN** one of the oldest books of the Bible, the book of Job, the question is asked, "If a man dies, shall he live again?" (Job 14:14). That is a question everyone should ask in life. What will happen when we die? What is there beyond this place called Earth?

Before I was a Christian, I thought about this quite often. I was only a teenager. It was sort of a heavy subject to be contemplating, but I did find myself thinking about death on a semi-regular basis. My belief at the time was that once you stop living, you simply cease to exist. I wasn't certain there was a place called Heaven. I definitely was hoping there wasn't a place called Hell. My conclusion was that when you're dead, you're dead. And it really scared me to think that I could simply cease to exist.

This is something that many people are thinking about today, because numerous books have been published on the subject of spirituality and life beyond the grave. For my generation, the Baby Boomers, the inevitability of death is approaching. We are coming face-to-face with our mortality. We used to sing that we were forever young, but that song doesn't ring true like it once did. We are becoming forever old. The clock is ticking. Time is marching on. We are trying to pretend it isn't happening and trying to turn back time, but we know that death is coming.

What happens beyond the grave? According to the Bible, there is life beyond the grave, either with God or eternally separated from God and His goodness. Because of what Jesus Christ did on the cross, and His resurrection three days later, we as Christians have the certainty that when we die, we will immediately go into the presence of God to a wonderful place called Heaven.

The question you need to ask yourself is; where am I going? •



But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

— ROMANS 5:8 NIV

# YOUTH TRUTH

## I went from witchcraft to worship

BY NATASHA NAGEL  
(JOY! MAGAZINE)

I grew up in a messed up, dysfunctional home with totally absent parents. Although we were brought up as 'Christians' we were only Christian because we were nothing else; none of us knew God at all. I grew up with extremely strict parents; my dad was a very short-tempered, angry man. Although he never laid a finger on us, he was verbally abusive. He was very controlling, and because of this we did not really have any friends growing up – at home, we were not allowed to talk about anything outside of the home life.

### Getting involved with mysticism

Years ago, when I was 13 or 14, we went through a huge tragedy in our family where two of my cousins died in a big car accident – this was the closest I had come to losing someone close to me.

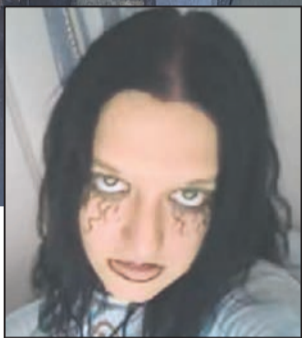
A friend of mine was into mysticism and suggested that we should play on a ouija board and call my dead cousins up to talk to them and ask questions.

We made a circle with lots of candles and she led the whole thing. Nothing really happened at that moment, BUT since that day my whole life completely changed.

Over time I started getting more and more depressed,



Natasha Nagel is now free from her occult past.  
INSET: Natasha in her Wiccan days.



experiencing dark and suicidal thoughts. I became obsessed with images of blood, death, graveyards, people being hurt, vampires, demons etc. I studied the occult and became a Wiccan in witchcraft.

### Haunted from the inside

Time went on and my thoughts continued to get darker and darker. I started feeling like I was being tormented from the inside out, literally! I felt like there was something inside my inner most being that was busy killing me – I even saw a 'vision' where I needed to stab my dad with a knife, as if demons were leading me to do this! I was scared and alone and in literal, emotional, and spiritual torment!

### A terrifying encounter

One morning in 2008, I

woke up, sat up in bed, and gazed into the mirror in front of me. As I was looking, something within me was looking straight at me through my eyes, but it was not me!

That day something took over me – at times I could not talk or control my actions. My mom was busy doing laundry outside and said that she could hear me talking to deep, terrifying voices, but I was completely alone in the room!

She came into my room and I lost control of my actions, swearing at her and chasing her out with so much hate and anger. I could not speak, only demons were speaking through me.

### In the name of Jesus

There were some people who were in our house at the time, they ran into my room and started praying for me.

At the moment when they said, "Satan in the name of Jesus Christ we rebuke you" demons started to manifest inside me! I cannot explain the pain and torment I experienced, it was a huge spiritual battle.

A powerful presence manifested in my room while these people were praying for me – I felt pure love, acceptance, warmth, and compassion.

I knew that it was Jesus Christ in the room, and I knew in my heart that if I didn't accept Him in that moment, I wouldn't make it!

So I did, I started to turn away from my sin, from all my involvement in the occult and I also started to forgive all the people who had done me wrong.

At that moment, Jesus set me free! Today I am still in His service, going about where ever I can sharing my story to whoever is willing to listen. •

## Painting the process

BY ALYSSA MITCHELL

I was raised in a Christian household, but as I got older, I grew sceptical. Why, of all the religions, would Christianity be true? These initial doubts grew alongside the decline of my mental health, most of which stemmed from extreme insecurity. At home, I was told that I was precious and loved by God, but at school, I was told that I was ugly and that my value depended on my relationship status. The bullying only intensified when, at age 13, my first boyfriend leaked explicit pictures of me.

When the photos leaked, I lost a ton of friends. I tried to reclaim some sense of self-worth by pouring my energy into extracurricular activities and trying to get straight As in even the hardest classes. I aimed to combat the judgment and gossip by achieving "perfection". I managed the pressure for a bit, but I eventually fell victim to both panic attacks and self-harm. Then, towards the end of high-school, I started partying. My then-boyfriend and I partied every weekend ... drinking and doing other things we shouldn't have been doing. With each passing week, I felt like I was losing more and more of myself – and even my touch with reality.

At this point, I was still sceptical of my childhood faith, but I wanted direction from a higher power of some sort. I decided to examine religion as a whole.

I listened to a bunch of testimonies and quickly found that the Christian testimonies stood out. Every story of healing – from schizophrenia to various types of demonic possession – was centred on Jesus. Similarly, everyone with a documented near-death experience claimed to have met the same God – the God of the Bible.

Then came the overwhelming evidence for the resurrection of Jesus. I learned a lot about this from Lee Strobel, a reporter who began investigating Christianity in the hopes of disproving the resurrection.

After interviewing a slew of historians and archaeologists, he surrendered his life to Christ. Like me, he doubted the faith – until he investigated for himself.

I knew, deep in my gut, that Jesus was the truth. I started trying to pursue a relationship with Him, but my relationship with my boyfriend slowed my growth.

He wasn't merely a nonbeliever – he hated the faith to the point of blaspheming God and burning Scripture for fun. I eventually came to a crossroads: I could either stick with my boyfriend or follow God. I'd been with him for over a year and was pretty invested ... but I wanted Jesus more. Soon after our breakup, I got baptised – and since then, nothing has been the same. Jesus has changed everything. As soon as I began following Him, I noticed a



Alyssa with her painting of what has taken place in her heart.



supernatural change in my desires. Activities I once loved became nearly intolerable. As I realised this, God placed an image in my head of His shed blood pouring into my heart and renewing me, day by day. I turned that image into a painting.

This painting reflects 1 John 1:9: "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." Not only does the Lord cleanse us of addictions, idols, and other sins, He then fills us with joy, peace, and all of the fruits of the Spirit.

Before I began this project, I asked my friends and family what they thought people turned to for fulfilment. Many listed food, money, social media, beauty, drugs, and alcohol. So, I filled the heart with those things. I then added chains, because I was bound to sin and misery without God. The words on the chains represent the false identities that bind so many people. These include ugly, confused, defeated, lost, hopeless, empty, jealous, alone, depressed, rejected, misunderstood, afraid, and fragile. The wine flowing from the cup represents Christ's purifying, life-giving blood – the blood of the New Covenant.

As you can see, everything that the Blood has touched has turned bright white. This is exactly what happens to the heart of a believer.

The final piece of the painting is a portion of Ezekiel 36, written under the heart: "Then I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean; I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols. I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will keep My judgments and do them."

The Lord has sprinkled clean water on me, and if you turn to Him, He will do the same for you. •

As told to and edited by Adira Polite and originally published on Then God Moved



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# YOUTH TRUTH

## A POWERFUL ENCOUNTER

When a stranger invited 20-year-old Steven to a church service, he saw it as an opportunity to argue with people about the existence of God and why he thought they were stupid for believing in a 'sky daddy'.

Sharing his story on his YouTube channel, Steven described himself as an atheist alcoholic who had a drug problem, developing psychosis, severe depression and an anxiety disorder.

He was in his third year of college at the time and, after being raised in a strict religious home, he had grown to detest religion – especially Christianity.

"I thought going to a local church would be a pretty good opportunity for me to go and flex my intellectual prowess and argue with the people about why I think they're stupid for believing that God exists," he recalls.

Steven thought Christians were hypocrites who didn't practice what Jesus preached. He had also been introduced to some scientific arguments that seemed to bring into doubt the Bible's authenticity.

But when he arrived at the church he quickly realised he had a problem – no one in this church spoke English. A man at the front of the church was speaking in Russian.

"I sat down anyway and I just thought maybe I'll get an opportunity to speak with someone later on and that's when I can argue with them," he says.

After the man stopped speaking, the church members began praying. A woman approached Steven and asked, in broken English, if she could pray for him. He agreed, thinking if nothing happened, it would prove her prayers didn't work.

"She put her hand on me and she said, 'In Jesus' name,' and she started praying," Steven recalls. As she prayed for him, his body started to respond in an unusual way.



Steven went to church to argue but left a changed man.

"I started bouncing off the chair that I was sitting in," he explains. "I wasn't causing my body to do this – I didn't have control of my body."

Members of the church began to gather around him and pray for him in Russian. The only word he recognised was 'Jesus'.

Voices in his head were telling Steven to kill himself and that God didn't love him.

He was confused.

Why would these voices

acknowledge God if he himself didn't believe in God?

"I thought that was strange and then a thought came over me," Steven shares.

"All of this is happening for a reason and the reason is that something inside of me is directly opposed to what all of these people praying for me represent."

But then a voice pierced through the other voices in his mind.

"It said my name... I thought, 'Who are you?' and the Voice said, 'Jesus' and then it said, 'Come and follow Me.'"

The other voices stopped and Steven's mind was now clear.

"I was thinking, 'Follow You? Don't You know who I am? I hate You! I've spent the last five years of my life just detesting everything about Jesus, about religion, about Christianity, about faith. I'm

an atheist!

"Don't You know what I've done? I'm a drug addict. I'm an alcoholic. I have done so many vile and grotesque things in my life. Why do You want me to follow You?"

The Voice again said, "Come and follow Me," and when Steven asked how to do that, the Voice said, "Just say yes."

"Clearly there was power in this voice," Steven says.

"I just knew that this voice was Almighty. I knew that this voice was authority. I knew that this voice mattered. And so I realised I had regained my ability to speak and so I said, 'Yes.'"

As he did, something he described as a feeling like death came out of his body and he stopped bouncing on the chair.

"I took a breath and it felt like the first breath I had ever

taken in my entire life," he explains. "I was just absolutely acutely aware that the situation had now changed and that what was so wrong with me, in me, was no longer in my body and a part of me.

"Something had miraculously changed and I looked at my arms that had been covered in sores from the drug use – they were completely healed."

Steven felt warmth and peace flood through his body.

"I was completely different," he recalls.

"My mind wasn't feeling the same, thinking the same or comprehending things the same. My body didn't feel the same and I felt completely new."

Steven says that was the night his life radically changed and he went from being an atheist to being a believer in Jesus Christ, and he has been pursuing Christ ever since. •

“**Something had miraculously changed.**”

## Finding faith and family

Mrs Universe 2021-2022 winner Tori Hope Petersen's bright smile belies a childhood of suffering, which culminated in her entering the foster care system. Now she is using her platform to encourage those who are facing similar trials.

Tori discovered when she was nine that she had been conceived through rape.

"When [my mother] saw me lay my hands underneath my head through the ultrasound and when she heard my undeniable heartbeat, she knew I was her daughter, not simply a clump of cells, but a human being with a purpose, a soul, and dignity," Tori writes in an article for her blog.

Tori explains that her mother was not perfect and she experienced abuse and neglect and was eventually taken into foster care. In an article she wrote for *Christianity Today*, Tori recalls that when staying in a group home, attending church once a week and hearing messages about forgiveness gave her the "first stirrings of hope" she could remember.

"I lived in about 12 different homes from ages 12-18," Tori writes in a blog post. "I had few stable adults in my life. Thankfully, my caseworkers kept me in the same school district, though I moved often. I remained in the same school for three years, which is unique

when a youth moves around as often as I did. The stability was crucial, because it introduced me and kept me close to the man who changed my life, Scott."

Scott was Tori's track coach during her sophomore year. He encouraged her and believed she could win the state championship if she followed her training.

"I'd often come back to him and ask if he still believed in me, doubting his faith in me. That's when he challenged me in my own faith. Though he affirmed he believed in my abilities, he'd say that it was God's opinion that mattered and God was in control of the results. No matter they'd be good, because God is good. Through continuous prayer I came to believe that truth myself."

Tori continued to wonder why God allowed innocent children to suffer so she read the Bible to find out for herself.

"When I looked at Scripture, I saw a God who didn't shy away from pain but embraced it so that others would know love. And when I looked at the lives of those who most reminded me of Jesus, I could see how they had sacrificed on my behalf. I didn't want to waste their suffering, or my own, but I wanted to receive it all as a gift – as a call to love others as they had loved me. My salvation did not happen in a single grand moment, but through small miracles that gradually chipped away at the scales of scepticism."

In an interview with Amber Cullum on *Grace Enough Podcast*, Tori shares that she had been bitter about not having a father in her life. She would ask God, 'If You love me, why wouldn't You give me a father?'

"It was this realisation, as I was getting my



Tori Hope Petersen

questions answered, that God did give me a Father. He was my Father. He was Lord of my life. He had protected me in every little thing. Every foster home prepared me for the next. Every no prepared me for the next yes. In realising that I believe God wanted to bring the most glory to Himself through my life in making Him my Heavenly Father."

When Tori turned 18 she emancipated out of the foster care system and was homeless.

"I bounced around from house to house, couch and floor surfing. I found different people to drive me to track practice every day and Scott would usually drive me to wherever I was going to lay my head that night. During

one of our drives, Scott offered me a forever home. He said he asked his daughters, and they all agreed they would love for me to be a part of their family... I felt on top of the world. Weeks later, I stood on top of the podium at the state championship meet in Ohio four times. I represented my school as the 50th girl in Ohio to win four state titles in one meet. Additionally, I became the first individual woman and the first person of colour to win a state championship title from my high school."

Despite the hardships Tori faced throughout her childhood, she is thankful her mother chose life. "I am still so grateful my mom heroically and bravely chose to not eliminate the potential sufferer, being me, because I am abundantly grateful for my life."

It was the same attitude that caused Tori to also choose life when she discovered she was pregnant while studying at a conservative Christian college.

"We were in crisis," Tori tells Amber Cullum. "We knew what to do – abortion was never a question, but we didn't know what to do in terms of our faith. How do you communicate this to people? I am still a Christian. I still love the Lord, but I have walked in sin and now everybody knows about it and no one guided us through that. I just wish someone would have asked us, 'Why do you think you guys did this? Why do you think you sinned?'"

People think this sin is having sex before marriage and it is, but the sin is caused by an idol in our heart."

Tori graduated college in 2018, becoming a part of the three percent of foster youth to graduate with a bachelor's degree or higher.

"A week after my college graduation, Scott walked me down the aisle to give me away to my husband."

Tori founded a not-for-profit organisation called the Beloved Initiative, which aims to empower foster children to share their stories.

She and her husband Jacob are raising two biological children and an adult son they adopted, as well as any foster youth who come in and out of their care.

This year, Tori released her first book, *Fostered: One Woman's Powerful Story of Finding Faith and Family through Foster Care*. •

## Develop an attitude of gratitude



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

– Dr Michael Mol

# Biochemical pathways show Designer's touch

BY MARK HARWOOD  
(EDITED AND ABRIDGED)

Chemist Michael Prodigalidad was born in the Philippines and grew up in a religious environment but says he did not hear the story of the life and death of Jesus until he went to university in Australia.

"I met some Christians in my first year of study and was intrigued by their faith so I went along to visit their church," he tells Creation Ministries International. "This is where God saved me and I became a born-again Christian [by turning away from my sin and handing my life over to Jesus]."

"However, at my church, creation was considered a secondary teaching subject, and therefore not important. So, I began my Christian walk without understanding Genesis as actual history."

Later Michael was awarded a scholarship to Cambridge to complete his PhD. While there, he attended a debate between a biblical (young earth) creationist and a theistic evolutionist who believed God used evolution to create.

This provoked him to dig deeper and to ask himself which was true: creation or evolution?

"I realised that the God who inspired the writing of the New Testament also inspired the writing of the Old Testament. If I believed the Gospel accounts of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, I concluded that the Genesis account of creation must likewise be the one true authoritative record.

"It must therefore be historically true. It follows that we can't cherry-pick which parts of the Bible we want to believe. God has not given us a 'cut and paste' version of the Bible."

At this time, Michael's research at Cambridge was in serine phosphorylation, whereby a phosphoryl group (PO<sub>3</sub><sup>2-</sup>) is attached to serine, one of the amino acids that are building blocks of proteins.

This is an important process by which cells modify protein structure and activity. Michael's task was to develop chemical tools in a laboratory to better understand this vital biological process.

To do this required considerable intelligence and careful experimental design by an external agent.

All this to make a simple chemical bond! The cells in our bodies do this millions of times per second and it is essential for life.

"The more I studied biochemical pathways, the more I was in awe of them," says Michael. "It was impossible to see such complexity as a product of random chance.

"And since many are essential for self-reproducing life, they could not be the result of natural selection either, because this presupposes reproduction."

Sometimes people say that science and Christianity don't mix, but Michael believes: "Good science should honour God our Creator. It should promote wonder, amazement, and praise."

Michael's views on Biblical creation got mixed reactions from his



Michael with wife Nicole and sons Daniel, Matthew, and Joel.

Left: Michael Prodigalidad.

colleagues at Cambridge. "Some objected, some were curious, and others were supportive," he reveals. "There were many discussions, often leading to positive opportunities to share my faith in God.

"At other times, discussion and debate generated more heat than light. I am reminded of the scriptural instruction to young men to exercise self-control in such situations (Titus 2:6), and yet also to be prepared to give an answer with gentleness and respect (1 Peter 3:15). Overall, God was kind and graciously provided people who encouraged me and sharpened my thinking."

On returning to Sydney, where he now lives, Michael moved into the business side of medical research. This included the commercialisation of research developed within the faculty of medicine at Sydney University, and business development for the Garvan Institute of Medical Research. During this time, he also completed a master's degree in business administration.

Now Michael is a pastor in Sydney, with a wife and three sons.

"On returning to Australia from Cambridge in 2000, I looked for a church that was Bible-based, which, importantly, meant it believed in creation," he explains.

"I found that at [my church]. Several years after I joined I was appointed an elder, and in 2010 was called to serve full time as pastor.

"As much as I loved working on developing new diagnostics and therapies, I knew that our deepest human need was met in Jesus Christ. So I wanted to focus on sharing the good news with others."

He says he sees a parallel between the spiritual darkness of inner Sydney and the Bible verse in Romans 1:21-22: "For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened. Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools."

"The area is affluent, educated and seemingly self-sufficient. This can lead to indifference and animosity towards the Gospel, but also a sense of hopelessness," Michael says.

"In a recent census, this part of Sydney was in the top percentile of people who indicated 'No religion'. Interestingly, this same area has been rated as among the unhappiest in Australia!"

"With such darkness and hopelessness, there are great opportunities to share the good news of Jesus Christ," Michael concludes.

References and notes

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## Cheesecakes and creation

PETER'S CORNER



I'VE been practising making my mother's baked

cheesecake recipe for a while, and I am told it is bearing good fruit.

Now think about this. The chef follows a recipe, or a process, or a code, that is designed to produce a perfect cheesecake. The ingredients do not become a cake just by themselves if we wait long enough. The right amount of time is part of the process – I discovered that when I forgot the cake was in the oven, but fortunately my wife Denise, instead of the fire brigade, came to the rescue.

In the same way, considering the origin of life, molecules are not going to become people by evolution, just by waiting long enough. Even after any amount of time, if there is no design, there can be no people.

The cheesecake recipe is an intelligent code that is separate from the ingredients. The flour, sugar, butter and cheese have no idea that they are on their way to becoming cheesecake. The key is this: the property of being a cheesecake does not come from the ingredients. Whenever we see that key, we see the fingerprints of intelligent design.

Another example is seen in the boomerang, which is a specially shaped wooden tool designed so that when thrown, it returns to the thrower. The property of being able to return is not a property of the wood that the boomerang is made of. That is how we know for sure it was designed.

In the same way, our DNA carries a code that does not arise from the DNA itself, and it's a great code that has all the information to make people! The DNA has no idea it is carrying this code. The wood of the boomerang has no idea that it is returning. The flour has no idea it is in a cake.

When we see these, we see clear signs of intelligent creation. So who created people? We know that ultimately, our great God takes the credit for the creation. I thank Him even for the cheesecake. I hope these words help you, as they have me, in your journey to surely trust the Creator.

Peter Mikula is a mining engineer in Kalgoorlie who loves stargazing and talking with others about Jesus.

“It was impossible to see such complexity as a product of random chance.”

### Dar and Winny

44



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# BUILDING BETTER RELATIONSHIPS

## Becoming a piece of world peace

BY ROB FURLONG

"A smile is the beginning of love."  
— Mother Teresa

**A**gnes Gonxha was born in Skopje, the capital of modern-day North Macedonia and at the age of 18 entered the Order of the Sisters of Loreto with the intention of becoming a missionary to India – she arrived there in 1929. Known then as Sister Teresa, she was deeply moved by the overwhelming poverty and destitution of people living on the streets of Calcutta and sensing the call of God, in 1948 began working to alleviate their suffering.

Eventually joined by a group of young women, she founded the Missionaries of Charity with the vision of providing "wholehearted free service to helping the poorest among the poor." They worked with AIDS, leprosy and tuberculosis sufferers, allowing them to die with dignity in the Mission's hospice, provided food, and founded orphanages, schools,

and mobile clinics. In time her ministry grew to 4,500 nuns serving in 133 countries.

It has long been recognized that poverty is a major threat to peace in the world, and because of her work to overcome poverty, she received the 1979 Nobel Peace Prize. Now known as Mother Teresa, she was asked at the time, "What can we do to promote world peace?" Her reply was profound in its simplicity: "Go home and love your family."

In a speech not long after, she expanded on her answer by saying, "I have found the poverty of the West so much more difficult to remove. When I pick up a person from the street, hungry, I give him a plate of rice, a piece of bread, I have satisfied. I have removed that hunger. But a person that is shut out, that feels unwanted, unloved, terrified, the person that has been thrown out from society – that poverty is so hurtful and so much, and I find that very difficult."

Mother Teresa demonstrated that everyone, regardless of race, gender



Kindness to the less fortunate is a tangible expression of peace making.

or religion is precious to God. She treated all people with dignity.

We can be the same kind of people. She was once asked why she cared for suffering people who never became Christians and she responded by saying, "Because everyone needs to know that they are loved when they are dying, even if they do not accept Jesus." She understood that every person is precious to God, known and deeply loved by Him.

This includes you. I have been encouraging people to be peacemakers by committing to a Peace Declaration I recently wrote:

*We, the people of this community, declare ourselves to be people of peace.*

*We believe peace begins with each one of us and that peace in our world and communities is achieved through multiple acts of love, courage, and kindness.*

PEPPERONI	9	4	2	1	3	6	8	5	7
S U U	6	5	1	9	7	8	3	2	4
ASSET SIREN	8	3	7	5	2	4	6	9	1
R A Y T S O	2	1	9	8	6	5	7	4	3
CAYS PLIERS	7	6	4	2	1	3	9	8	5
A M E T	5	8	3	4	9	7	1	6	2
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S P I E S A T O L L	3	9	5	7	8	2	4	1	6
A S S N									
F R E E R A N G E									

*Peace can be expressed through a friendly smile to a stranger, by helping a neighbour in need, standing up bravely for truth and justice, and respecting each other, regardless of culture or faith.*

*Jesus said, "Blessed are the peacemakers." Therefore, we commit ourselves to being peacemakers in our community.*

With God's help, every one of us has the capacity to bring peace to our world.

When we welcome someone into our circle of friendship who is usually ignored, we bring peace.

Helping the poor, smiling at a stranger, or refusing to "blow up" at the shop worker who is only trying to do their job, are all small ways we can encourage peace. And we are most like a peacemaker when we choose forgiveness over hatred.

Jesus came to bring us peace with God and peace in all our relationships by healing and restoring them.

Share God's love today by smiling at someone you don't know and commit to being a peacemaker in 2023 by committing yourself to the Peace Declaration, and asking God to help you live it out.

### HOW DO I BECOME A CHRISTIAN?

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

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

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

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

God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life. John 3:16

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

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

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

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

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

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

**What now?**

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

**AS A NEXT STEP :**

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

\* Please tick and write clearly \*

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Phone \_\_\_\_\_  
Address \_\_\_\_\_  
Email address \_\_\_\_\_

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

All overseas enquiries are referred onto someone in their own country

## Lessons from a sausage dog - part 23

BY JODY BENNETT

**FROM** being someone who a few years ago who wasn't very interested in pets, to the doggie lover I am today, has only taken the intervention of one little sausage dog – my shorthaired, tan standard dachshund Carrie.

In the last eight years our house has slowly accumulated several sausage dog touches in the form of ornaments and pictures. I even have sausage dogs on my shower cap and PJs!



And Carrie, herself, has five beds scattered around the house, as well as an outdoor bed, and her own drawer for her paraphernalia!

We have also adjusted our routines to the little dog. We sleep with our bedroom door open so that she can go out at night if she needs to; we only walk one lap of the park oval because she refuses to do another; I have to get up and give her treats when I watch TV, otherwise she pesters me until I do; and she has to be let out of the house to greet new arrivals otherwise she "sings" at the front door.

Today, our pets are assuming a greater part of our lives. Sixty-five percent of dog owners, in one survey, admitted to taking more photos of their pet than their significant other. Forty-seven percent of couples said leaving their pet for a week would be more difficult than their leaving their partner.

All this to say, pets can take over a good deal of our budget, heart, time and lap space but we must remember they are our pets, not our children, and certainly they should never become our objects of worship.

C.S. Lewis told the story of a woman who thought her cat was God. Unfortunately, this kept her from enjoying her cat and knowing God. Our pets can be great sources of happiness, but they can't make us whole.

Our worship should be reserved for that which fills us with awe and wonder. The ancients used to worship the sun or moon or thunder for that very reason. However, in the modern world we tend to worship much humbler things like rock stars or money – or pets.

The true and living God, Yahweh, Jehovah, Creator of all things and the Giver of Life, is in truth the only one worthy of our complete allegiance and undying devotion. Love your dog, but bow to your God.

### Want to explore more?

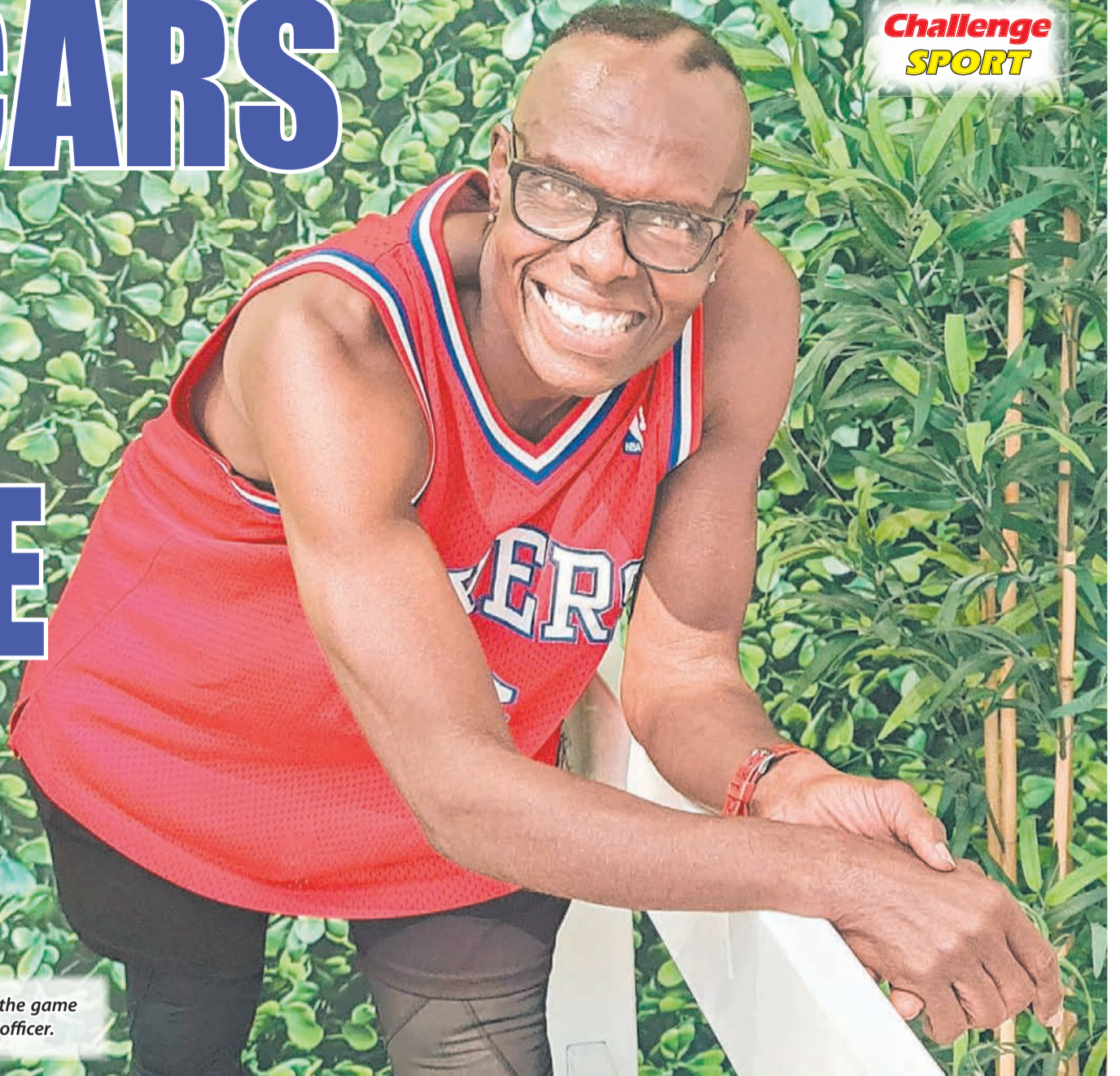
Here are some free, helpful, Christian online resources:

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



# MY SCARS DON'T DEFINE ME

**Challenge  
SPORT**



*Wayne's competitive days are behind him but he stays in the game as a youth basketball coach and activity development officer.*

It doesn't take much to remind 64-year-old American basketball player Wayne Simmons that he's cheated death more times than he's comfortable with. All he has to do is start walking or look in the mirror.

The limp when he walks reminds him of the bullet that missed his forehead by a whisker and hit him in the hip instead during his tour of duty as a Marine in Beirut in 1983 when he was 25.

The deep scar on his right leg brings back memories of the night he was at a party at the Sari Nightclub in Bali on October 12, 2002.

At 10.30 pm, in the middle of the celebrations, Wayne says he had "a strange feeling in my gut" and went back to his hotel.

Half an hour later the bombs that would kill 202 people ripped through the club.

He has that scar because the explosion was so powerful it shook his hotel and sent him catapulting into the bedpost in his room.

Then there was the time he was 14 and at a friend's house. While they were chatting on the front porch, a car slowed down and drove past several times.

When his friend, who was a gang member, ducked into the house and re-emerged with a baseball bat, Wayne knew it was time to go home.

Forty-five minutes later that friend was dead, shot by the gang in that car. While Wayne has no physical scars from this incident, it made an impression on him that will never be erased.

Wayne grew up in a ghetto neighborhood in New York, but managed to stay out of the gangs and drugs culture that many fell prey to.

A talented basketball player, he was spotted by the Spanish basketball team FC Barcelona and played for them from 1980-1983.

He visited Perth, Western Australia on a holiday in 1987, fell in love with the place and has been here ever since.

Within weeks of arriving in WA, he contacted basketball team the Perth Wildcats and signed on with

them from 1987-1989. Not bad for someone who was told he would never walk again after the Beirut shooting four years before.

Wayne's competitive days are behind him but his love for the game remains and he is now a youth basketball coach and activity development officer for a city council in Perth.

Life has been good for Wayne in WA, but he carried scars on the inside from his life in New York, scars that were invisible but just as real as his physical injuries.

His father was an alcoholic and his mother struggled with mental illness. She would often "hear voices". Neither parent was very present for Wayne and his siblings — it was their grandmother who took care of them.

"I remember my grandma would buy groceries for us and walk five kilometres carrying those bags to our place," he shares. "We lived in a ghetto, yet she was never robbed or troubled by anyone.

"I know God protected her. Without her, we would have eaten a lot more sugar sandwiches. Even today, every time I get tired in life, I think about what she did and I suck it up and keep going.

"I know she prayed for us. She would read the Bible to us and teach us about Jesus. She was an amazing

Christian woman."

Wayne had grown up going to church, but, in his own words, "went off the rails later on".

"I had some things happen to me that made me question my faith," he admits. "There were a lot of family dramas and I asked myself if this whole church thing was really working for me.

"I was getting racist treatment at work too. So all in all, I wasn't in a good place."

Yet through his work as a youth basketball coach Wayne realised he needed to live the values he was teaching his students — that life would always throw tests at you but not to give up.

It was at these training sessions that one of the mothers invited him to her church. That Sunday, after an absence of 20 years, Wayne went to church.

"I can't describe what happened when I got there," Wayne says.

"All I know is that God met me

there and all the stuff the pastor said made sense and really touched me on the inside.

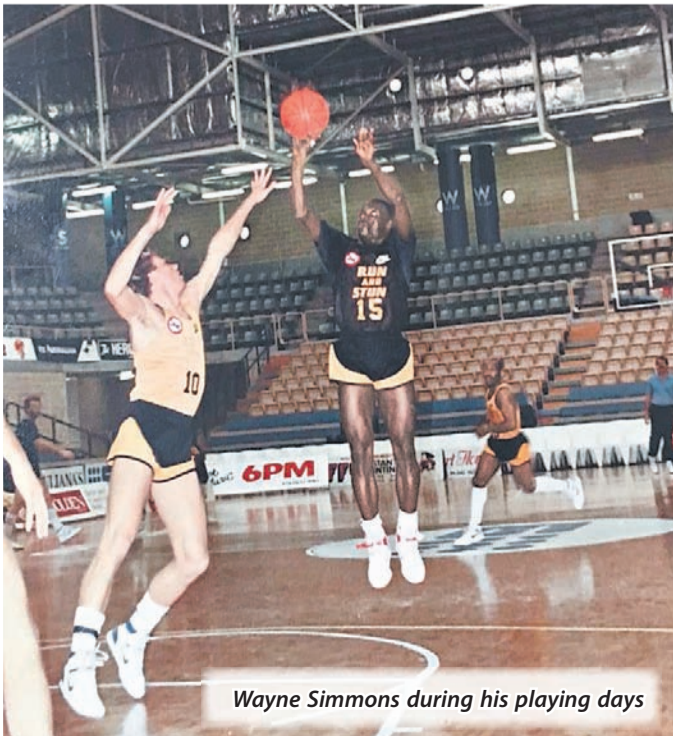
"I started to question how I was living and my attitude on certain things. The messages made me see the flip side of how I should have reacted to those situations.

"I saw that over the years I was wallowing in self-pity. I knew I had to clean up my life and get back to God. I had to be all in, not just ask God to put out one fire here and one fire there, so I re-committed my life to Him.

"Now on Sundays I reserve time for church whereas in the past I'd be at basketball training."

Wayne says he has found it such a relief to be able to hand over his challenges and pressures to God.

"Being able to pray and give everything to God takes the pressure off myself. It's a great release to realise I don't have to do it everything myself and that I have His divine help to get through life."



*Wayne Simmons during his playing days*

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