

Answering a higher call

Cop Mike McGrew struggled to process the suffering he experienced on and off the job.

When Mike McGrew joined the police force in the early 1980s he found it came naturally to him. He liked protecting people and keeping them safe, and he found he had a cool head under pressure.

However, the constant high-stress situations and confrontations with the worst parts of humanity wore him down mentally, leading to PTSD, two failed marriages and a dependency on alcohol to dull the memories.

Growing up, things had been fairly easy for Mike; he had a happy home life, good grades and excelled at sport. But when a bad hand injury put paid to a wrestling scholarship, he dropped out of college and joined the police force.

He earned his first award for valor within the first few months as a cop, by disarming a sword-wielding man without firing his weapon.

"I believed I'd earned it, and I was proud of myself. I was blissfully unaware of the evil I would encounter on the job or the personal agony I would have to endure," Mike remembers in his biography entitled *A Higher Call to Duty* by Sara Bush.

"It wouldn't be the last time I was called to risk my life [but] it was the closest I'd come to killing someone. It was also among the many cases that set into motion some bad habits that would lead to the end of my first two marriages."

Those marriages did not have the shock-absorber of faith to help them over the bumpy patches that Mike's current marriage to Nicole has.

Growing up, God was just a vague concept to Mike. The first time he was exposed to the gospel [good news about the life, death and resurrection of Jesus] was as a 12-year-old. His best friend's dad got pancreatic cancer and came to believe in Jesus during his battle with the disease.

Mike says, "While I didn't believe I needed Jesus in a personal way at the time, I never forgot those



Sergeant Mike McGrew liked being on the Force - protecting people and helping them deal with tough situations.

conversations about how Jesus was working in that family."

As time went on, Mike had to deal

with child molestation cases, gang and date rapes, the LA riots, gruesome murders and hostage situa-

tions. Each left its mark on him and changed him ever so slightly.

"[Each] became another brick in the wall I began to build inside that would keep people out and my emotions locked so tightly inside."

Another strong influence for God in Mike's life was his cousin Dan, who consistently modelled a life of healthy perspective, ardent prayer and persistent belief in a good God.

Due in part, Mike believes, to Dan's continual prayers, "God began revealing His grace to me in the midst of the macabre. Even when covering the most tragic cases, I noticed something good would ultimately result."

The other change that Mike noticed was that "God began opening my heart for people in a way it hadn't been before." He began to see the "perps" as precious human beings who needed help, and to understand that the distinction between "good guys" and "bad guys" was not always clear.

By the end of the 1990s, Mike's career was advancing but his home-life was a mess and his self-destructive behaviour was not doing anything to deal with his pain and trauma.

To add to the agony of divorce, Mike's youngest son T.T. was

diagnosed with bone cancer, at age 12. The tumour in his leg required amputation from the knee down, and weeks of chemotherapy. He fought the disease (along with a prescription meds addiction) bravely for six years but when he turned 18 and could decide his own treatment, T.T. chose to end the fight by overdosing.

At the same time, Mike's eldest son Matt (15) was struggling with street drug addiction, for which Mike blamed himself, having set a bad example with his heavy drinking.

"I'd worked a lot of narcotics enforcement and could spot

a drug deal a mile away, but when my own son was using right under my nose, I was blind," Mike castigated himself.

When Mike admitted that the patterns and frequency with which he drank impacted his sons, he stopped drinking altogether. "Once sober, I realised there were several other areas in my life that needed to change," he admits.

Coming out of his second divorce, with T.T. still battling cancer and Matt doing drugs, Mike met a Christian woman named Nicole, who invited him to a worship band concert.

ONCE SOBER, I REALISED SEVERAL OTHER THINGS NEEDED TO CHANGE



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FINDING MEANING IN THE MIDST OF MATERIALISM

"About eight months ago," Caroline Zielinski writes in an opinion piece for ABC news, "I did a very scary thing. I quit my job to search for meaning — and it dramatically improved my health."

She goes on: "Friends couldn't quite understand why I was so miserable and so sick: you have a good job, they'd say. It pays well. You can travel."

Logically, I agreed. So, I tried to tell myself that it wasn't so bad, while every day wondering: "Is this all there is?"

As it turns out, I wasn't alone. Experts are calling this feeling of meaninglessness a "modern malaise that if left unresolved, can lead to symptoms of anxiety, depression, hopelessness, or physical decline".

Since the 1950s, psychologists and doctors have been increasingly interested in how living a purposeful life affects our wellbeing.

Many experts attribute our preoccupation with meaning to the fall of traditional religion, which seems to have left society with a collective existentialist gap.

It's actually difficult to find (Western) ruminations on the meaninglessness of existence before the 19th century, a time when the world was understood to possess intrinsic purposefulness and meaning.

With the absence of organised religion and increasing isolation from community, we're often trying to fill the vacuum with what we think defines the 21st century: work, productivity, efficiency — and money.

The problem is, it doesn't seem to be working.

Isn't that telling? Christianity used to infuse Western society with a deep sense of purpose and destiny, letting people know that they were here for a reason, their lives had meaning and they were eternal creatures with an existence beyond physical death.

Our modern, secular society offers no direction beyond the bleakness of you are here by chance, evolved from pond scum, there is no God, your life has no meaning and your soul has no future — in fact you probably don't have a soul.

No small wonder that people are committing suicide in droves, making selfish decisions that harm others in their desperate fight for happiness, and experiencing depression and anxiety on an epidemic scale.

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Goalkeeper's BIGGEST SAVE

JULIAN SPERONI

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Free from sin and sickness

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Fun for Kids

PAGES 5,6,7



We want more!

BY ALAN BAILEY

MORE and more our way of life seems to be centred around things. To possess a good house, furniture, clothes, cars and a growing array of consumer items is what life is all about, so it seems. The ever-active world of advertising keeps these alluring goods in front of us. There they are, glittering silverware, plush floor coverings, thrilling sound systems and endless electronic gadgetry.

Then added luxuries like a pool table, a caravan or cabin cruiser, are for some like a tempting bait dangling before their eyes.

Desire rules, OK?

The thinking of many families today seems to be dominated by a hunger to acquire certain goods. It almost becomes an obsession. Working, striving, saving, in order to fulfil desire, but never, it seems, actually feeling satisfied. The heart longs for even more.

Coveting

The word "covet" is not used much these days. It means to be greedy in our desires, especially in seeing what others have. So we look jealously at neighbours and friends and sit drooling over the array of prizes won by people on TV shows.

The Bible mentions coveting as a sin. The Ten Commandments were given to help people live worthwhile lives. One of these commandments

says "You shall not covet."

Why not?

There is nothing wrong with working toward the possession of material things provided we keep a balance with other factors in our lives. We should not allow desire to possess us. So often people hurt others by their greed; some enslave themselves to gain only a passing fad,



putting things before their loved ones. Sadly, many crimes are committed in the pursuit of the possession of things.

Contentment

Probably ten people out of ten would say that the principle thing they want in life is contentment.

Yet the truth is, contentment is not found in things, no matter how good or great they may seem to be. Paul, writing to his friend Timothy, said: Godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into this world and we will take nothing out of it. But if we have food and clothing, we will be content with that.... For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil.

Something that lasts

A change of attitude is needed. We need to see that the best things in life are free. Take for example the gift of God which is eternal life. Think then of forgiveness through the Lord Jesus, His peace in your heart and mind, His love that never changes. Money can't buy these yet they outlast everything else.

You can bet your life God can change you

Like many Aussies, Alan Perkins was addicted to gambling and alcohol for much of his life. However, his story is one of escape from those traps to a life of freedom with Jesus.

He tells his own story:

I was aged 17 when I went to my first Trot meeting. Gloucester Park was all the rage and the father of my friend was a bookmaker there. I remember it was a great night. I had a lot of fun and the atmosphere was electric. What a shame!

I was extremely lucky to be born into a Christian home in Albany. I made a decision for Christ at age eight at a Billy Graham Beach Mission Crusade, and from that moment Jesus never left my side, although I took Him to some pretty horrible places.

In 1966 at aged 12, my Mum went to live in Midland. For the next few years I nearly drove my dad crazy by wagging school, drinking in the pine forest and establishing a whole new bunch of "friends".

I left school at 15 to join the bank, got some wheels in '71 and I was gone.

While working in Kununurra, this cute chick walked into the bank one day in 1973, and I instantly knew she was going to be my wife. I didn't even know her name yet!

Merril and I got married in 1974 and purchased our first home in Bassendean in 1975, which, as it happened, backed on to a church.

I was still drinking copious quantities of grog and spending any "spare" cash at the local Bassendean TAB. I copped my first DUI [driving under the influence] on my bike in 1975. I was close to being an alcoholic, gambling heavily, had a wife and a son and had just turned 21.

The pastor at Bassendean was a guy named Roy Aitken – an ex merchant seaman from Scotland, and he was the perfect guy to get me back into the church. After a few months of input from Roy and a few home truths, Merrill and I were baptised [immersed in water as a symbol of death to our old lives, and new life in Christ] on Mother's Day 1975.

Again the bank transferred me, this time to Bunbury. We had to sell our house in Bassendean to clear the arrears on the mortgage and fix the bank account. The next two years were miserable for Merrill, with the only blessing being the arrival of our daughter. In November 1978 I resigned from the bank – mainly again to clear debts.

I was declared bankrupt through card debt (I had five or six cards), and I spent the next four years paying it off to the Registrar's office. It was a shocking time. I joined Coles Variety Stores. I managed to cop another DUI and was thankful to again go bush as assistant manager at the Geraldton store.

I spent a lot of time at the Council Club playing snooker and drinking heaps."

Another daughter came along in 1983. The family left Geraldton in 1984, and after a brief stint at Nollamara, were transferred to Katanning. There Alan 'borrowed' \$75 from the staff booze fund, which resulted in Coles charging him with theft. He was never convicted but left Coles and Katanning in 1985 in disgrace.

"This was a horrible low point in our journey. Everyone was devastated and we returned to Perth," he recalls.

Alan found other retail work and he and his family became actively involved in a church. He ran youth group and Sunday school and coached basketball, all the while still gambling compulsively.

"The inner struggle was astounding about now because I was so into God and the church, and yet I still continued to do the most destructive thing in my life," he confesses. "I attended Gamblers Anonymous for a while, but found the whole 'Hi I'm Alan Perkins and I am a compulsive gambler' too hard. It just seemed to confirm to me week after week that I was never changing."

At the end of 1997 the family changed churches and Alan changed jobs.

"God was hammering me in my private gambling life, and there were some seriously dark times due to the conflict of Christ and Satan in my life. Suicide became a real possible outlet for me. I think this was happening because Satan was beginning to realise he might lose!

"There was a time when I gave the whole issue to God - but also denied my own accountability – stating openly that God had changed me. Within a month of that, and with me thinking I was changed and God had it all under control, I blew \$15,000



Alan has the joy of freedom from addiction.

over a couple of months.

"I had never 'owned' what I was doing, and unless you own something you can never give it away. Merrill gave me a text from James 1:14-15, which warns: 'But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed. Then, when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death.'"

A couple of friends got alongside Alan to help him work through a four-part programme that challenged him to take ownership of his problem.

As he found, we all need to get to the point of admitting our wrongdoing and confessing it as sin before a holy God before God is able to set us free from it. If we keep treating our sin as a disease or a genetic predisposition, instead of a choice, we deny our culpability and remain trapped.

"I was asked to Repent (acknowledging this was a 'me' thing), Renounce (declaring this was no longer a part of my life), Ask for forgiveness (placing it at the cross), and Accept forgiveness (a crucial part in moving forward).

"The hymn 'my chains fell off, my heart was free' was never truer than on that day for me," Alan declares. "A life of lies, deception, guilt and deep in-dwelling pain ended. Who says miracles don't happen anymore?"

"I lost a house, two jobs and a fair whack of cash, but there are stories of others who have lost much more. I have not been into a TAB or Pubtab since 2002. I am still Alan Perkins. God is still working in my life, I am not finished yet and never will be until I go home [to heaven], but I am different.

"God is good. God is gracious. He wants everyone to know Him and trust in Him. He sent Jesus to save the lost and set the captives free.

"I can't give you a miracle wonder plan or programme that will help you in your own struggle, but I can offer you Jesus whom you will meet in His Word [the Bible]. For 30 years I strived to be better, made resolutions, wanted to be a stronger person, but it's only in our weakness that His redeeming life can be our strength," Alan concludes.

Crossword

ACROSS

- 1 1000 gigabytes
- 7 Hatchling's home
- 8 Move forward
- 10 Fathers of lambs
- 11 Lingers, lurks
- 13 To express thanks or gratitude
- 16 Casserole
- 18 Restaurant handout
- 20 Giraffe relatives
- 21 Calf's meat
- 22 Climber's chipping tool

DOWN

- 2 Old Testament book
- 3 Swiss peaks
- 4 Wyoming national park
- 5 Car's motor
- 6 ___ of Capri
- 8 Deliver sermon
- 9 Trans-Siberian rail stop
- 12 Kind of monkey
- 14 Language of Kathmandu
- 15 Not shallow
- 17 Oil group
- 18 Travelers to Bethlehem
- 19 Barber's mishap

SOLUTION PAGE 11

Sudoku

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

Puzzle Level: Medium

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

SOLUTION PAGE 11

Christianity promises to make men free; it never promises to make them independent. - Willaim Ralph Inge

Don't you know that if you present yourselves to someone as obedient slaves, then, of the one whom you are obeying, you are slaves — whether of sin, which leads to death, or of obedience, which leads to being made righteous? - Romans 6:16

A Christian is the most free lord of all, and subject to none; a Christian is the most dutiful servant of all, and subject to everyone. - Martin Luther

OVERCOMING INCREDIBLE ODDS

BY JODY BENNETT

I READ a news story the other day about a woman who was born with a rare disease that means her body is full of cysts. When she was born, doctors damaged her facial nerves removing cysts “by the handful” from her face. Now Hannah Vaugh Stetzer is unable to close her eyes or mouth.

Yet this remarkable woman is now 28, married and runs a blog called Feeding Tube Fitness. She has had a feeding tube and a breathing tube since birth.

Her parents had been advised to abort her, predicting that if Hannah survived, she wouldn’t be able to walk or talk. However, her folks ignored doctors and she has defied medics by flourishing, changing her tube independently as a teenager and brushing off cruel comments from strangers.

‘I am ridiculously confident in myself. I think and know I am beautiful, I like my body, I know I’m smart and I have a lot to offer the world.

‘I also have an amazing husband, Brandon, and tribe of people who shower me with love daily and I’m very grateful.’

Hannah met Brandon, 29, online in January 2016 and the couple married in September 2017.

Last year she challenged herself to start exercising every day. Now she’s “healthier, happier, more active, more disciplined and way more grateful.”

Wow! Next time my kids complain



LEFT: Hannah Vaugh Stetzer with her husband Brandon.

ABOVE: Hannah shows off her muscles on her Feeding Tube Fitness blog.

about their looks or their tough breaks, I’m going to get them to read this chick’s blog!

Although the newspaper article had not mentioned the words faith, Christian, God, church or religious, I finished the article and thought, “I bet she’s a believer!” And sure enough I found a bio that read ‘Explorer, dog lover, voracious reader, amateur gardener. Continually seeking

laughter, Jesus, and honesty.’

How did I know? Because her incredibly positive outlook in spite of her disabilities mirrors that of other Christians like Joni Eareckson Tada, Lizzie Velásquez and Nick Vujicic, who see purpose in their lives and have done meaningful things despite their physical limitations. Instead of wallowing in self-pity, they look outward to help others and be a force

for good in the world.

That attitude is not human, it is supernatural, and comes from the Holy Spirit of God living within them.

Hannah’s happiness is not bound up in her circumstances, but in her conviction that God has a purpose in her being the way she is and a unique destiny for her to fulfil. That gives her the courage to stare down nasty comments and rude stares, and to tackle challenges that might seem impossible with her condition.

Besides this internal fortitude to cope with life, their faith also gives these inspiring Christians hope for an eternal future where their physical limitations will be no more and they will enjoy the wholeness they have dreamed of. This hard life is just boot camp for an eternity of endless rewards. That perspective gives them

the fight they need to push through.

Those three things: a deep sense of belonging and being loved, a purpose for living, and an eternal perspective – are the keys to success and happiness in life regardless of your circumstances; and each is available freely to all through the gospel of Jesus Christ.

nudge
By Inspiremore.com

Importance of ‘turning toward’

PSYCHOLOGIST

John Gottman has been researching couples for over 40 years, trying to identify what makes relationships work. In one study, he designed a lab to look like a beautiful retreat and invited 130 newlyweds to spend a day there. Gottman observed partners making something he calls “bids”.

“For example, let’s say that the husband is a bird enthusiast and notices a goldfinch fly across the yard. He might say to his wife, ‘Look at that beautiful bird outside!’”

The husband’s comment is a bid, a request for connection. The wife’s reaction to it is the key to making or breaking their relationship.

“She can either respond by ‘turning toward’ or ‘turning away.’” In other words, she can engage with her husband or dismiss the comment as unimportant.

Gottman observed how couples made and responded to bids while on the retreat; then, six years later, he caught up with the participants. He found that the couples who only had “turn-toward bids” 33% of the time were divorced. The couples still together had “turn-toward bids” 87% of the time.

Because of these findings, Gottman says he can predict with up to 94% certainty whether or not a couple will stay together — solely based on their turn-toward habits.

Whether you’re married or single, we all have relationships in our lives that matter to us. Are you someone who turns toward the people in your life?

Finding meaning in the midst of materialism

● From page 1

Without God, none of life makes any sense and none of it matters.

Like King Solomon discovered thousands of years ago: “Vanity, vanity, it all is vanity.” All the money, all the pleasures, all the opportunities, all the intelligence don’t give your life meaning unless you have a deep sense of belonging, the security of unconditional love and an awareness of your eternal destiny.

This is what Christians mean about the “God-shaped hole in your heart” that can’t be filled by anything else.

True satisfaction can only be found in relationship with your loving Creator.

“I have seen all the things that are done under the sun; all of them are meaningless, a chasing after the wind,” Solomon explains (Ecclesiastes 1:14) but by the end of the book he concludes, “Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter:

“Fear God and keep His commandments, For this is man’s all.

“For God will bring every work into judgment, including every secret thing, whether good or evil.” (Ecclesiastes 12:13-14).

Answering a higher call

● From page 1

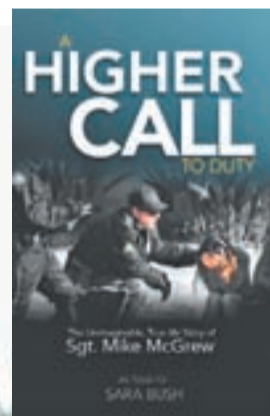
“During the concert, a pastor spoke ... and I felt like he was speaking directly to me, and something inside me cracked. I finally saw the truth: Jesus is the only One who can save me. I decided then to seek the peace that the pastor spoke of. My cousin Dan explained Christianity to me and walked me through the steps to salvation – accepting Christ died on the cross for my sin, asking Him for forgiveness and committing to follow Him.”

Although Mike’s circumstances didn’t change immediately, his outlook did. “I realized I didn’t have to carry the weight of the world on my own shoulders. Jesus said to lay my burdens at the foot of the cross, and that’s what I did.

“He brought peace amid my suffering and, ultimately, a purpose in this life. I began to ask God to speak to me and to show me how I could serve Him each day.”

Mike married Nicole, and when T.T. died he was able to lean heavily on her and on Jesus to get him through. God’s grace gave him many assurances that his son was now in heaven.

“Before I’d experienced His love, I’d likely get angry with God and question His character or even His very existence when tragedy struck. Now I know a peace that



LEFT: A more recent photo of Mike, with his wife Nicole and granddaughter Kenley.
ABOVE: The cover of Mike’s book.

transcends all understanding, and I know He has a purpose for my pain,” Mike affirms.

Since then, Mike has survived his own battle with cancer, started a new role overseeing police chaplains, begun running a program to help law enforcement officers suffering from post-traumatic stress, and witnessed God’s miraculous power in the lives of many people.

Mike concludes his book by declaring, “God is real. He speaks if we are willing to listen and obey ... Everything comes from Him and exists by His power and is intended for His glory. Amen.”

*Mike’s book is available from Amazon or his website at www.sgtmikemcgrew.com

Work friendship leads to new faith

Two important influences shaped conference manager Sudhira Sewsunker's early years – the skin disease vitiligo, which turned parts of her brown skin snow white, and her family's staunch Hinduism.

Her skin problems transformed 7-year-old Sudhs from an active, outgoing tom boy who oozed confidence, into an ashamed recluse who hid from visitors in her room and poured herself into prayers and religious service.

Later, Sudhs, by her own admission, became a party animal who indulged in her "fair share of sin".

"There were days when I partied a full month and barely had any sleep but still managed to work. My anger reached new levels and I could flip from being calm to a raging lunatic. I was an unforgiving person indeed, if you had hurt me in any way, I would plot revenge and then write you out of my life. Pride

for me was my worst enemy and I never knew how to ask for help," Sudhs explains.

She had had very little exposure to Christianity, but in 2013 Sudhs changed jobs and started working with Ankia Roux, who happened to be an ardent follower of Jesus.

Sudhs tells the story:

"One day I was at Ankia's desk

during lunch and I saw a page which was written in Afrikaans. I picked it up to read with the aim of making fun of Afrikaans, as I just scraped through it in school. Little did I know that it was the Sunday school lesson she was preparing. As I tried to pronounce weird Afrikaans words, Ankia explained what it meant.

"We never spoke about it again until one day I called Ankia at home and asked her if she would take me to her church to pray for my sick aunt (the temple was too far for me to go to). I think Ankia was shocked but she agreed and the next day we went to the church to pray for my aunt who was going to be taken off life support.

"It was strange going into a church," Sudhs remembers. "I didn't know what I should pray for or who to pray to. Ankia made it clear that I should pray to Jesus and no one else. I thought, 'Hey,

no water off my back, just want my aunt not to die.'

"We returned to the office shortly after we prayed and an hour later my mum called to inform me my aunt had opened her eyes and claimed Jesus had come to her and told her to awake! This was all very odd since only Ankia, Jesus and myself had known I was going to church. I was



Sudhs Sewsunker (right) and her colleague and friend Ankia Roux.

truly amazed and thought 'wow!'

"A few weeks later Ankia gave me a book by Angus Buchan, called *Starting the Journey*. She said to me 'Here is a book on my religion, read it and feel free to give me a book on your Hindu beliefs'. I couldn't be rude, so I took the book. A few days later I read it and at the back was the Salvation Prayer. In the following days Ankia had to field a lot of questions I had about the Bible

and Jesus."

Sudhs continues: "I did not decide to become a Christian - God decided for me. The miracles I witnessed personally and the crazy dreams that ensued became overwhelming. It is true that God draws you near. I recall the night before Ascension Day in 2016 I decided I was done with dabbling in the Christian faith and couldn't possibly change my religion. In the service at Church

that week I was furious that I had to forsake my family to follow Christ and knew my family would not take it well.

"That night, I had the most vivid dream: the ground opened up and I was immersed in fire and there were strange creatures pulling me in. I screamed and shouted for help. Only my left hand and head were above the lava-like fire. A cool, calm and collected voice hovered above me. A Man dressed in white and glittering like nothing I have seen before, extended His arm and said, 'Do you choose now to follow Me?' I yelled out 'Yes Jesus, I will follow you' and He pulled me out of the fire.

"Since that day I haven't looked back and I believe with all my heart that Jesus is the way, the truth and the life."

At the end of October that year, Sudhs was publically baptised (immersed in water) as an outward confirmation of the inner decision she came to that day. "While I was a practicing Christian before that, that is the day I comprehensively gave my life to Jesus," she confirms.

Sudhs admits that although her spirit was willing to live for Jesus, her flesh was weak and change came slowly. "There is a constant fight to give in to temptation. There have been many days when I have to consciously remind myself 'you are a Christian'," she says. "It isn't some switch that you can flip and say here I am a born-again Christian. Some days when I want to burn a building down or tell someone exactly what I think of them, I am reminded to react differently and honour the commandment of 'love thy neighbour'.

"On most days I am a lot calmer though and I have become a forgiving person, which I didn't think was possible. God definitely has increased my faith to enable me to love people better," Sudhs shares.

She is so grateful that she had an honest, God-fearing Christian in Ankia to guide her in her search for truth and she prays that others who are seeking might have the same blessing.

"My prayer is for all who hear Jesus knocking to open their hearts, no matter what the sacrifice or consequences. You need to forsake all and follow Him. Christianity gives you an opportunity to have a one-on-one relationship with God. God is perfect, yet He continues to love His imperfect children perfectly."

Sudhs' catch cry is: "For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain" from the Bible verse Philippians 1:21.

Depressed man finds the Rock at rock bottom

BY CHRIS EYTE

Have you ever stood in a church and felt that you don't really belong there?

That's how Stuart Cookson felt as he watched everyone around him who seemed to have a perfect relationship with God.

Sometimes it was too much for him and he'd walk out of the service. He couldn't even face leaving the house for church, on more than one occasion.

"My wife and I started attending our local church in 2003, shortly after the birth of our second child in order to get both children baptised," Stuart recalled.

"I went to church thinking I was a Christian as I knew all the Bible stories from my time at Sunday school but soon realised that I was far from being a Christian.

"I never quite felt comfortable being in church or amongst Christians. I wanted what they had but didn't know how to get it or was not sure that I really wanted it."

Stuart, who lives in Surrey, England, was helped by going on Christianity Explored and Alpha courses at the church.

Life seemed to be going in the right direction - until he was hit by devastating mental illness.

"And then the depression came.

"I believe the depression is the devil's way of attacking my faith, he saw a weakness and exploited it to maximum effect.

"I've battled depression over 10 years now and with each episode my faith is attacked and almost wiped out. It feels like I'm starting again each time and it's exhausting."

He heard a voice during an acute episode, "which



Stuart Cookson's depression drove him towards suicide - until he turned his life completely over to God.

I now know was God reaching out to me", he says.

"God saw I was struggling and wanted me to hand everything over to Him. I was too proud.

"I said, 'no'. I was ok. I could handle everything." Suicidal thoughts came to Stuart but he was 'too much of a coward' to take his own life.

He added: "My life spiralled completely out of control, I hit rock bottom and then some. I did things I'm not proud of and they bring shame when I remember them now."

One day, Stuart decided he was going to definitely commit suicide. He planned to take all his medication 'in one go' and headed home to do the deed. Yet when he arrived, he found his wife was

there waiting for him.

"She knew something was wrong and hadn't gone to work but had waited at home for me to come back. That was a real God moment."

Stuart then surrendered his life - all of his life - to Jesus Christ. It happened as he sat in his local church late at night praying "like I had never prayed before" with his minister. The date was September 22, 2008.

"Tears raced down my face, and hers, and I poured all my anguish, my anger, my despair, my shame out toward a God I realised I had been desperately searching for but always held at a distance and pushed away if I allowed Him to get too close.

"I prayed to a Jesus that I knew existed but had never thought I had needed. That I had subconsciously searched for and craved but wouldn't open the door to.

"I prayed and I knew He had heard me. The release I felt was immense, the feeling of love that came over me was overwhelming and I cried all the more."

Stuart's faith is now strong and his depression under control with medication. He is an active member of his church and involved in men's ministry with Christian Vision for Men.

Stuart concludes with a smile: "Life is good, Jesus is Lord, God is great."

Like many others, Stuart has found that sometimes God lets you hit rock bottom so that you can learn that Jesus is the Rock at the bottom. He is a firm foundation on which you can build an unwavering faith that will withstand life's storms.

TEENTALK

Suicidal drug addicted mum rescued

BY CHRIS EYTE

“You’re gonna die a worthless drug addict” - the devil gloated over a hopeless married mum who cried out to Jesus Christ to rescue her.

Lisa Ortiz, now aged 42, woke up from a drugs stupor in a holding cell at Warren County Jail on August 17, 2012. She felt the weight of her sins and it was a defining moment.

“This is where Jesus Christ met me. I heard a voice speak to my heart: ‘This is your last chance’.

“Scared and not knowing what He meant, I said: ‘Lord, if you will help me, I’ll serve you!’ It was that quick, no tears - just God and me. Instantly He changed my heart, I didn’t really understand what had happened but I knew something happened.”

Lisa was used to jail but she needed no detox after her prayer. She found a new inner strength from God and started reading a cellmate’s Bible.

She recalls: “I wanted to know this God I was gonna serve. I had no more compulsions, desires or overwhelming thoughts of the drugs, as if I had never had them. I walked in that jail a liar, a thief, a manipulator, a slave to drugs, and I walked out of that jail a brand new person.”

Lisa’s grandmother would have been overjoyed. She was a positive influence in Lisa’s childhood and took the girl to

church. Lisa prayed a commitment to Jesus when she was 11 but soon after found herself ‘hanging with the wrong crowd’ and began using drugs. She was put into a facility for troubled teenage girls several times by her parents and tried to burn it down with a friend. The youngster faced 16 charges of attempted murder, which was later changed to aggravated arson. Lawmakers sent her to youth prison.

On her release, Lisa met her future husband Paul, who was in the Air Force. They relocated to New Mexico and then to Okinawa, Japan. However their marriage was difficult as Paul was addicted to porn. The couple moved back to the USA in 2004 and Lisa began taking pills for back pain, which became an addiction. She was overspending money on medical care and put herself in rehab in 2007.

“I tried not to use the pills again,” she explains, “but the compulsions were so strong. I fell after two months. This time I took Crystal meth. I became addicted after my first time, I loved it!”

“My life went from bad to worse, real quick. I started selling or trading everything we had for the drugs. I got down to 100lbs (45 kg) with sores covering my body. My mind was tormented by demons to the point I moved into my bathroom. I ate, slept and got high in there. My kids would have to come in there if they wanted to see me.

“My children, son about 15



Lisa Ortiz Shoplifting

Lisa Ortiz pictured recently (left) compared to her last jail mug shot on August 17, 2012, when she was in the grip of Crystal meth aka ‘ice’.

and daughter about 12 at this time, were very angry and ashamed, and rightly so.”

Paul moved the family to Albuquerque, New Mexico, to

help Lisa but she still sought drugs there. So the family returned to Tennessee.

“I started robbing, stealing, lying to get my drugs.

For several years I was in-and-out of jail. I got to a place in my life where I believed there was no hope for me. I did attempt suicide once but

by God’s grace I failed!”

God’s grace has been the key to Lisa’s transformation in the past six years. She and Paul now live in a small city in Tennessee. The couple have just celebrated their 24th wedding anniversary and Lisa works at a Christian Preschool. She is also ministering to women at a local jail and often uses Psalm 40: 1-3 to share her testimony.

It says: “I waited patiently for the Lord; and He inclined to me, and heard my cry. He also brought me up out of a horrible pit, out of the miry clay, and set my feet upon a rock, and established my steps. He has put a new song in my mouth - praise to our God; many will see it and fear, and will trust in the Lord.”

Lisa concludes: “God has done many, many wonderful things in my life in the past six years. He has called me to preach and teach the gospel [good news] of Jesus Christ. We had lost everything: our home, cars, jobs, furniture, everything and God has restored everything! He also has and still is restoring my relationship with my children.

“My heart is to share the gospel to all people, especially those who are in the pit I was at! I have the answer to their problem and it is Jesus Christ! No program, no steps, just turning whole-heartily to Jesus Christ! I praise God alone for my salvation. He met me in my dark place and rescued me and my family. When no man, no medicine, no program could help me, Jesus Christ did!”

And you He [Jesus] made alive, who were dead in trespasses and sins. Ephesians 2:1

Chocolatier made life sweeter

BY ANNIE HAMILTON (DIDUNO.COM)

‘WHAT to bring when you’re told not to bring a thing.’

It’s Cadbury Favourites of course. Yep, the big purple box with its treasure of miniature confections inside - chocolates as uniquely Australian as Uluru or a kangaroo.

Cadbury was started by John Cadbury, and his brother Benjamin. The Cadbury factory in Claremont, a suburb of Glenorchy in Tasmania, is part of a residential development modelled after the specially-created town of Bourneville in England, created by the family.

Factories in Victorian England were usually dark, oppressive and unhealthy places to work. Fatalities often occurred. The Cadbury brothers, who revolutionised the production of chocolate, were at the forefront of improving working conditions

for their employees.

The Cadbury family were devout followers of Jesus and His teachings. They were continually conscious of Jesus’ golden rule - do unto others as you would like them to do to you.

They built a radically innovative workplace with warm rooms to dry clothes in and rooms to cook food. They followed this with a workers’ village incorporating sporting fields and lily ponds and enough land for each house to have a vegetable garden.

To cap off these ground-breaking social benefits, there was even a retirement plan.

Despite many setbacks, John Cadbury pioneered the commercial production of drinking chocolate and cocoa. A social activist, John campaigned against slavery, the exploitation of children in the work force and cruelty to animals. (Sounds like he had some pretty modern ideas!) His dream was to produce a drink that would be an alternative to alcohol.

His belief that drinking chocolate was not only healthy but could pull families away from pubs is reflected in one

of his early brand names: Churchman’s Chocolate and Homeopathic.

His vision has continued to influence Bourneville. This district, around the original Cadbury factory outside of Birmingham, has been ‘dry’ for over a century. Even today, none of the local pubs, bars or shops serve alcohol.

John Cadbury’s concern for the welfare of workers continued through many generations of his family. His son George ploughed the profits of the firm into pension reform and, as a pacifist, opposed the Boer War.

Quakers, [a Christian group] also known as Friends, fervently believe in pacifism - non-violent solutions to the world’s problems. It has been a challenge for them during the world wars of the twentieth century to show their patriotism, despite refusing to enlist.

In the Second World War, Paul Cadbury reactivated the Friends’ Ambulance Unit to support the troops in many battle theatres. Because of the Cadbury connection, the name given to pacifists and conscientious objectors who worked in the war zone as non-combatants was



John Cadbury (1801-1889)

‘chocolate soldiers’. Unfortunately, the high ideals of the Cadbury family have been all but forgotten.

Their Christian legacy however has not totally been lost, as their efforts to create a just and equitable society have changed the face of the western world. They were people who not only put their money where their mouth was, but where their heart was. They followed the Scriptural directive: ‘...what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.’ (Micah 6:8 NIV)

And those qualities are the very things the Cadbury family has shown the world - when you’re told not to bring a thing: justice, love, mercy and humility are never out of date.



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Editor: Carl Carmody.
Staff writers: Jody Bennett, Ainsley Gaebler.

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SET FREE FROM SIN AND SICKNESS

Maria Do-rhen Cabezas-Taylor, better known as Emdy, had a difficult start in life involving poverty, hardships, and a move across the world. She thought she was okay when it came to morals, good deeds and God, but she was wrong and her wake-up call came about in a very drastic way.

"I was born in the Philippines, where anyone who is a non-Muslim automatically is a Christian," Emdy says. "My mother was very religious so I grew up observing a lot of Christian festivals and reciting different prayers."

"When I was in primary school, our family fell into poverty."

Although Emdy was too young to understand what was happening, she did start to wrongly think that being a Christian meant being really poor.

"I would ask God to give me money so I could stay in school," she recalls. "I swore to myself that I would do everything I could to not experience poverty and to work hard at everything."

In 1992, Emdy and her family immigrated to New Zealand and their lives started to improve.

"I loved God but I feared Him immensely," she admits. "So I was doing the best I could to be a good person, live a good life and not upset God too much. I had a mixed understanding of God and thought that He was to blame for everything bad that had happened in my life."

In her teens, Emdy dabbled with ESP [extrasensory perception that involves telepathy, clairvoyance, and precognition], mind over matter practices, horoscopes, stone healing, magic, and books and movies with supernatural themes.

"I was convinced that I was right with God and didn't need repentance (genuine sorrow for wrong doing). Repentance was only for those who did very bad things."

Emdy threw herself into education, work, and career and became really successful. "I was married with two daughters, had several properties, a high paying job and was completing my doctorate degree. I became obsessed with my career."

Over the years, however she became increasingly dissatisfied with her life. "I didn't know why I became so unhappy even though I seemed to have everything. Deep inside, I felt numb and alone. My life seemed pointless after all that I had done and achieved. I felt spent and got tired of living."

"I developed symptoms of depression and anxiety. I detached myself from my parents and then left my marriage not long after. I was longing to be free from an invisible trap that I was in."

One night, Emdy left work with such heaviness that she couldn't stop crying. She attempted suicide by driving into an oncoming truck.

"Suddenly, I felt something heavy take a hold of the roof of my vehicle and my steering wheel wouldn't turn. It was as if the tyres had become glued to the road."

After this experience, Emdy started searching for a deeper spirituality. At the same time, she began to explore alternative lifestyles and was pursuing relationships with the



Emdy with her husband and son and their colourful, good news-declaring mobile home.

MY SECURITY AND IDENTITY ... IS IN GOD

||||| same sex. However,

her depression and anxiety worsened.

"I decided to go on a backpacking trip to Alaska to get away from everyone and everything," she says.

Emdy was invited to a church service near her hostel and, afterwards, a young man came up to her. "Apparently, he already knew my name and my background as he had a dream

of me two weeks prior to my arrival. Unbeknown to me, God had planned to bring me to a genuine salvation."

During the next eleven days, the local church prayed for Emdy's spiritual, emotional healing and for her to be set free from demonic influence.

She relates how she had a vision of hell: "The pain, sorrow and despair I felt in that pit of darkness was indescribable. I felt the terrifying

reality of an eternal separation from God. I called out to Jesus to save me and immediately I was taken back to the physical realm where I saw everything that was here on earth as paper flaking away. Then I heard God say to me, "This is what you've been working for."

Emdy awoke, drenched in perspiration. The first thing she did was pick up the Bible that was next to her

and read John chapter 15.

"I heard the voice of Jesus for the very first time as my eyes moved from one word to the next, each word coming alive," she remembers happily.

"I thought my whole chest was going to burst. Jesus and His words came alive in me and I just cried and cried. I finally understood forgiveness and why I had to repent."

It has been over six years since Emdy exchanged her old life to take on the life that Jesus planned for her, and she has never looked back.

She left her career to obey God. "I learned that my security and identity in life is in Him. God, over time, healed my relationship with my parents and my older daughters. God also gave me a beautiful husband, who is an evangelist and loves to lead people to Jesus Christ."

"We now have a son, after a miscarriage, and are travelling around Australia in our mobile home sharing the redemptive story and good news of the Bible."

"God always makes a way for me to live a life that is pleasing to Him. His mercies preserve me from making the wrong choices in all aspects of my life as I commit my everyday to Him. I love my new lifestyle," Emdy declares.

One of her favourite Bible verses that she believes applies to every situation is from James 1:22: "Do what God's teaching says; when you only listen and do nothing, you are fooling yourselves." (New Century Version) •

FINDING TRUE COMMUNITY

It took a move across the world, a brain haemorrhage and a music CD for Yoshiko Wada to realise that there was a love great enough to fill the void in her heart and cover the loneliness she was experiencing.

"Growing up as a child in Japan is very intense," she says. "It is very hard to enjoy being a kid. It is all about success and a lot of teenagers are stressed out because there is so much pressure [on them] that they have to be successful. That success is measured by one exam and if you do not make it, it is like your life is over."

Yoshiko moved to New York to pursue an interior design degree. "I was so filled with ambition. I wanted to be the best interior designer in New York. I was competitive. I did not want to be too close to my friends because I was competing with them. So I could not really relax or put my guard down. That is how I felt. I did not really have any friends that I could relax with or enjoy time with."

Deep down, Yoshiko admits that she "felt lonely. I missed my family. I think the bottom line was that I wanted to be a good person. I wanted to feel good about myself. I wanted to be accepted by people."

Then, while she was in college, Yoshiko suffered a brain haemorrhage and was unconscious for two days. When she woke up in the ICU, "I did not have any damage to any function of my body. It just hit me that God loved me so much and because of that, He sent Jesus on the cross [to die] for me."

After this miraculous revelation, Yoshiko wanted to learn more about God. Her best friend happened to be a Christian and told Yoshiko more about Jesus.

She also received a music CD from her friend's church. "For a long time, that CD was the only



LEFT: Yoshiko Wada smiles now that she knows unconditional love.

INSET: The sign at her church.

IT JUST HIT ME THAT GOD LOVED ME SO MUCH

|||||

Gospel music I had. I loved it and I used to listen to it over and over. The words spoke deeply to me and encouraged me."

Later, Yoshiko went to her friend's church. The first thing she noticed when she walked into the building was a sign hanging over the podium. It stated: God is Love.

"When I saw that sign, I knew I wanted to experience that God. I wanted to know that He loves me and He has unconditional love for me," she tells. "That is when God started speaking deeply into my heart."

Yoshiko gave her life to Christ and accepted Him as her Saviour, but not everyone was happy with her decision.

"My dad fought in the beginning and argued that I was getting involved in a cult," she says. "He was so hostile about my faith." After realising that he could not convince Yoshiko to abandon her beliefs, her father disowned her and told her to never come back to Japan.

In that dark time and even now, Yoshiko says "My heart cries to God: 'I need You. Lead me, guide

me, show me, touch me, please, change me. I need You so much'."

As she kept on going to church, "the desire grew in my heart that I want to worship God and that I want to sing for Him." She auditioned for the church choir, was accepted and started to sing every week in what she describes as "a beautiful experience."

One day, while performing with the choir, Yoshiko had a second brain haemorrhage "right when we were singing." She had to be carried into the emergency room and had to again go through a long period of recovery.

But, this time, she was not alone. Along with the presence and comfort of God, Yoshiko had friends who "would come and help me, cook for me, buy groceries for me – they took care of everything for me. All those things just make you feel so grateful. I just want to thank God for this new 'family' that He has given me."

Yoshiko is very passionate about reaching others with the good news of God's love and using her voice to praise Him.

"I will sing my heart out. That is what I do. I mean every word I sing," she concludes joyfully. •

Creation that's 'out of this world'

Jonathan Sarfati of Creation Ministries International chats with former New South Wales Government Astronomer, David King

Dr David King was a professional astronomer for eight years at Sydney Observatory (Australia). He was the last NSW Government Astronomer as the observatory ceased its research functions in the mid 1980s. He now runs his own actuarial software company.

David has been interested in astronomy since a young age. He tells us, "As a teenager I was involved in amateur astronomy at Belfield observatory in Sydney."

Dr King has also been a Christian since he was a teenager. He says, "I made a personal decision to follow Christ as a teenager thanks to a school friend who is now a geologist. He pointed me to the Bible passage John 14 verse 6 where Jesus clearly states: 'I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me'. That was the verse that convinced me that if Jesus was not a liar He must be followed."

Astronomy and Creation

However, like many Christians, he says that the idea of creation in six ordinary days was not much of an issue at first. However, at university he realized, "The creation account in Genesis and conventional theory are in conflict. There are discrepancies over both the timeframe and the order of events. Genesis 1 tells us the earth was created before the stars." So in his third year, while studying the history and philosophy of science, David explains:

"I chose to investigate the theory of evolution in detail to examine if it truly qualified to be considered a scientific theory. I examined the texts of experts in the theory who plainly admitted the inadequacies of the theory but held to it in 'blind faith' as the alternative was obviously unacceptable to them.

"Once I started investigating the subject I read anything on creation I could find. In the future, I believe, creation-believing researchers will continue to make discoveries that will undermine the theory of evolution so that more and more people will see the truth."

Since David made this statement over a decade ago, this has indeed proved to be the case, as Creation Ministries International details on their website.



Dr David King has gazed deeply into space and seen there the fingerprint of a loving Creator.



The pole and ball from Sydney Observatory where David worked for eight years before it ceased as a working observatory.

How old is the universe?

But don't many claim that long-age belief is essential for scientific research, especially in astronomy? Dr King dismisses this firmly:

"There is no evidence of any scientific breakthrough based on long ages. All that is coming out of that belief is circular reasoning and a growing set of beliefs based on falsehoods.

"Many great scientists have believed in creation, including many of the founders of astronomy like Copernicus, Galileo, Kepler and Newton."

The Bible and science

Indeed, far from long ages being essential, Dr King points out an essential source of truth missing from much of today's science, although it illuminated many of the founders of modern science:

"All science must be based on the truth. God's Word in the Bible is truth. Knowing the correct order of creation and the way God has expressed Himself in creation is fundamental to understanding the world."

He explains further: "One example of that would be the creation of 'kinds'. God created kinds of creatures (Genesis 1), kinds of stars (1 Corinthians 15:41), kinds of planets, kinds of particles etc. Diversity is also part of His creation, which shows us His love and creativity. From creation and diversity we can see how God makes each individual different. Like an artist, God cares for each one of us to make us different from everyone else.

"When you look at the photographs from the Hubble telescope and many other astronomic facts, you can't help but see 'the heavens declaring God's glory' (Psalm 19). The vastness of the universe also impresses us with His greatness (Psalm 8). I have always been fascinated with the beauty and vastness of the universe (see box 'How vast God's universe is')."

"The latest photographs of Pluto were astonishing to most astronomers when they showed recent geological activity. The new James Webb telescope due to be launched in 2021 will no doubt discover much more evidence that will confound

existing astronomical models of the universe," concludes Dr King.

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This article first appeared in CMI's *Creation* magazine and is used with kind permission.

Further info on Dr King:

He has a B.Sc. (Hons.) from Sydney University, which also awarded him a Ph.D. in applied mathematics for his thesis *Open Star Clusters*, a comparison of theory, simulations and observations. He was awarded the Young Astronomers grant by the International Astronomical Union, and was twice awarded the Archibald Ollie prize for the best paper in the *Journal of the Royal Society*.

He is also a former NSW state cycling champion, as well as a swimmer, setting over 50 national records, and one world record, in masters swimming.

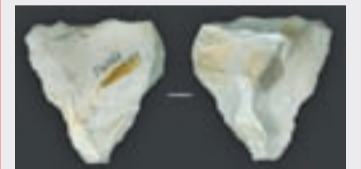
Believe it or not

BY CREATION MINISTRIES INTERNATIONAL

Inconvenient date for tools

ACCORDING to the *South China Morning Post*, "More than 400 fragments of stone implements have been found in a stratum of sediment that was originally thought to have formed 15 million years ago". The site was in northern China, in Shibaozhuang village.

At the time of the find (in 2013), and according to evolutionary dating methods and assumptions, the earliest tools appeared in Africa no earlier than 2.6 million years ago. So, according to a researcher: "The sediment [in Shibaozhuang] must be considerably younger than geologists thought, because no stone tools could have appeared so early."



Hence, despite it being said that the sediments had "long been determined by geologists to be at least 15 million years old" they now suddenly 'must' be much younger, as such an old date would be incompatible with evolutionary ideas of human origins.

Whilst any date of millions of years does not fit the framework of biblical creation, the above demonstrates how evolutionists confine dates to within 'acceptable' limits of their theory. i.e., the sediments can't be that old because that goes against evolutionary theory. Later, when a younger date is presumably 'found', this date can then be used to support evolutionary theory. And the whole episode may be used even as an example of how 'science' is self-correcting.

This is a great example of how, when the evidence contradicts evolution, it is the evidence that gets thrown out, not evolutionary theory.

Chen, S., Sediment in Nihewan might hold clues to the first Homo sapiens, www.scmp.com, 5 November 2013.

How vast God's universe is :

- If the Earth were 1 cm across, then the Sun would be 118 m away and 1 m wide.
- If the distance between the Sun and Earth were 1 cm, then Pluto would be 39 cm away and Alpha Centauri 3 km away.
- If the distance between the Earth and Alpha Centauri were 1 cm, then the centre of our galaxy would be 100 m away and the diameter of the galaxy 250 m.
- If the diameter of the galaxy were 1 cm, then Andromeda would be 30 cm away and the furthest galaxy 1 km away.
- Or to summarize, if the Earth were 1 cm across, then the furthest galaxy would be further than Alpha Centauri is at our own scale.



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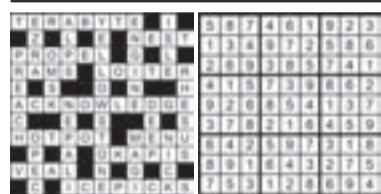
BY ROB FURLONG

A **CONSTANT** theme when talking or writing about marriage and relationships is that of communication.

It is acknowledged that good, clear communication is a vital aspect of all relationships and over the years there has been some very helpful advice given, along with practical steps on how to enhance this part of our relationships and interaction with others.

A really good one that my wife, Karen and I have been using over recent years is the *Community Temperature Reading* which has been developed by Pete and Geri Scazzero.

The genius of the CTR is that it gets people talking about different areas



of their lives in ways that are natural and fun.

The emphasis, and I stress this, is on *brief sharing* and the method allows everyone to participate! You will notice a picture of the CTR in this article which provides a helpful visual as we look at the steps involved.

We begin with *appreciations or excitements*. This is an opportunity for you to express appreciation to someone for something they have done or to share your excitement about something coming up.

"I am excited about the camping trip we have planned for next weekend" or *"I so appreciate it when you make me a cup of coffee without me having to ask for it or expect it."*

So often we miss the opportunity to thank people for the small things they do or never give voice to something that we are genuinely looking forward to!

Worries, puzzles and concerns are precisely that. They are the things that we do not have an answer to and are causing us some level of anxiety.

"I'm worried about John. His exam is

next week, but he has been so sick he has been unable to study and I am concerned he might fail."

"I'm puzzled why Gertrude has not answered my email. I sent it two days ago and I have not heard from her."

Using this type of language frees us to speak about our concerns, but in a *non-judgemental* way.

And then there are *complaints and possible solutions*.

Instead of launching into a tirade that begins along the lines of *"I don't like the way you..."* or *"I'm sick and tired of..."* why not try this approach:

"I've noticed that you often leave the toilet seat up. I would prefer that you put it down when you are finished." (This is a common complaint I am sure many men have heard before, but notice the way in which it is expressed along with a *possible solution*!)

Too often we simply like to complain as a way of expressing our displeasure at something. The CTR method challenges us to also come up with a creative solution to the complaint, allowing people to be honest but to also (hopefully) resolve frustrations.

New information is simply something new that you have not shared yet.

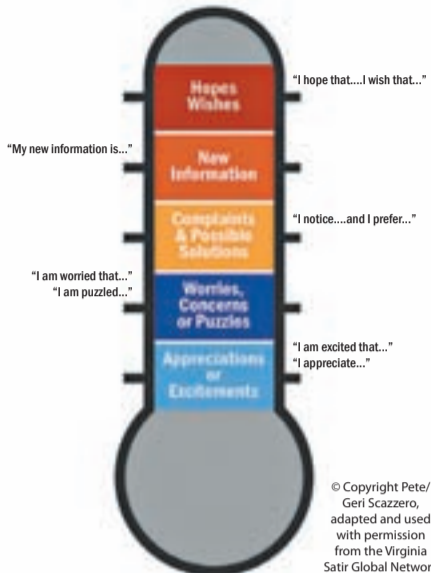
"I received a great review from my boss today!"

"I've booked us in to see Avengers: End Game tomorrow!"

The CTR concludes with *hopes and wishes*.

What are you hopeful or

COMMUNITY TEMPERATURE READING



dreaming about?

"I hope our upcoming holiday will be relaxing and life-giving."

"I would really like to take guitar lessons this year!"

The CTR can be used in a variety of situations.

Two friends over a cup of coffee.

A couple having dinner or by a family around the meal table.

Or as a new addition to your staff meetings!

It is a wonderful way to allow people to express themselves in ways they may not be used to and our experience is that it encourages and enhances *genuine community* among people.

Why not aim to use it two to three times a week?

I am confident your relationship will be the richer for it.

Make it a priority over the next month to take the temperature of your relationship!

The trouble tree

BY CAROL ROUND (EXCERPT)

A **CARPENTER** was hired to help a man restore an old house. He'd just finished his first day on the job and everything that could possibly go wrong went wrong. First, on his way to work he had a flat tire, costing him an hour's worth of pay. Next, his electric saw broke. As he prepared to leave work, his old truck refused to start.

His new boss offered to give him a lift home. During the entire drive to his house, the carpenter sat silently, staring out the window. On arriving, he invited his boss in to meet his family. As they walked toward the front door, the carpenter paused briefly at a small tree, touching the tips of the branches with both hands.

Opening the door to his house, the man underwent an incredible transformation. Hugging his two children and kissing his wife, the carpenter's face broke into a big grin.

Later, while walking his boss to his car, the man said, "Thank you

for the ride home."

However, before he opened the car door, the boss turned to his employee and said, "I'm curious about the tree by the front porch. I noticed that before going into your house you stopped and touched the tree, why?"

"Oh, that's my trouble tree," he replied. "I can't stop having troubles on the job, but one thing I know for sure – my troubles don't belong in the house with my wife and children. So, every night when I return home, I just hang them up on the tree. Then, next morning I pick them up again."

"Funny thing is," he added, "when I walk out each morning to pick them up, the troubles aren't nearly as many as I remember hanging up the night before."

What if, each evening before bed, we sat down and made a list of those things for which we were grateful for that day. Gratitude overshadows our troubles, causing them to fade and helps us see life from God's perspective.

How can I become a Christian?

Anyone can gain the eternal life offered though Jesus Christ

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

OUR PROBLEM: Separation from God

"Everyone has sinned. Nobody is good enough because God's standards are perfect" (Romans 3:23)

ADMIT

GOD'S REMEDY / SOLUTION: Jesus died on the cross

"God demonstrates His own love for us in this; while we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8)

BELIEVE

OUR RESPONSE: Trust Jesus by receiving Him

"To all who received Him, to those who believed in His name, He gave the right to become children of God" (John 1:12)

COMMIT

Here is an example of how you can pray.

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

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

AS A NEXT STEP :

If you prayed the above prayer, tick this box

I have prayed this prayer.

Please send me:

Bible

Some 'starting off' literature

Information on a helpful church

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

I would like to think about this.

Please send me:

More information as I am inquiring about being a Christian.

I have a problem (see attached letter)

* Please tick and write clearly *

Name _____

Address _____

Phone _____

Age and occupation (it helps) _____

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Lessons from a sausage dog

(Part 20)

BY JODY BENNETT



AFTER all these sausage dog stories, I think I may have got the analogy wrong.

That my relationship with my little dog is not in fact a very good picture of God's relationship to me, after all.

You see, the other day I was eating something and Carrie was begging for a piece of it. I said "no" and one of my girls said, "Mum, she knows you don't really mean it." Sure enough, I eventually gave the dog some.

I indulge my little dog; she is not very obedient and quite overweight because I'm not very good at tough love. When my husband says "no" to her she gives up begging immediately, but with me she knows "no" means "you probably will get something, if you continue to insist!"

I laugh when she's naughty and excuse it away, and she won't come the first time I call (although she responds promptly to my husband).

We may be tempted to think that God looks at us that way – that He is our indulgent grandad in the sky who only tuts at our naughtiness and gives in to our every desire.

That is a message some people teach – that God is never cross with you, never punishes you, never wants bad things to happen to you and will give you everything you ask for "in faith". That, because He understands what motivates your sin, He isn't really angry about it.

That isn't, however, the message of the Bible.

The Bible says God doesn't only become our Father when we choose to follow Him, but our Master. We become His servants – in fact in the original language, we become His slaves (Hebrew: ebed)! We are commanded to lay down our lives, to pick up our cross, deny ourselves and obey His commands. Jesus didn't encourage His disciples to expect rewards, comfort or earthly happiness from following Him, but warned them of trouble, distress and tribulation. (John 16:33)

In a not-often quoted parable in Luke 17 Jesus gives an example of a servant (read slave) who after all the work of the day has to serve his master's food before he eats himself. "So you also, when you have done everything you were told to do, [you] should say, 'We are unworthy servants; we have only done our duty.'" (v. 10)

Perhaps a police or military dog is a better analogy then, for my relationship with God. It does exactly what it is told, it is eager and fit to do its master's will, it is not indulged and petted, although it is well-treated and loved. It is bred for conflict, not comfort. It doesn't live to do its own thing but to fulfil a greater and very important purpose. It sticks close its handler and goes where he or she goes and does what it's told, not even shrinking from danger or death in that obedience.

That is not such a cosy view of Christianity is it? However, it is Christianity as the Bible portrays it. So it is important people clearly understand that God insists on being your Lord, not just your Saviour, so they think twice before "asking Him into their hearts" and then bringing disrepute to the name of Christ by refusing to obey His commandments.

Welsh hooker undergoes radical change



Garin Jenkins of Wales under seige during the Rugby Union World Cup match between Wales and Argentina in Cardiff on 1st October 1999. Wales won 23-18. Photo: Mike Brett/Popperfoto/Getty Images

Former Welsh hooker Garin Jenkins has revealed how his tearaway days were ended.

Jenkins, who played at three Rugby World Cups during an eleven-year stint as Wales' first-choice number two, admits he was not always the best role model growing up, but discovering his Christian faith was transformational to his life.

He said: "I rebelled for a time in my teen years and I ended up going to a private school where you didn't go home at night.

"I worked on a farm. You could call it a home for naughty boys. How did I get there? Well, I didn't break into anywhere or thieve something.

"I just wouldn't go to school and I got involved in a bit of solvent abuse. If there was any action, I was there. I was not a fighter; I just wanted to fit in.

"At the age of 13 I decided I was going to France to pick grapes. I decided to go with a couple of lads who were about five years older than I was.

"One was on the run from the army, while the other lad is no longer with us. I didn't realise you had to have a passport.

"So I put my parents through a tough time for a couple of years, but I always prayed as a young boy. When I was in trouble, I prayed for my family.

"I can remember as a 13 year old crying and praying in desperation after ending up in a place where I didn't want to be."

Jenkins is now a committed Christian with faith at the heart of his life and has gone on to become a highly regarded speaker, explaining how his faith has helped him in the darkest moments of his life, including a battle with cancer.

He added: "I had a cancerous tumour in my neck when I was 40 and I remember sitting down and thinking: 'Wow'.

"I had great medical friends who helped me so much. God doesn't have to prove Himself to me,

if I was called home today, He's done enough in my life and given me enough."

"I do know this: I'm not without flaws – no one is, whether you are an Alabama preacher, a pastor, a coal miner, a rugby player, or whatever. I'm a work in progress. There is only one flawless individual – Jesus Christ.

"When I played, most opposition hookers had a soft spot for me and that was at the bottom of the garden.

"But the past is past. I've had a foot in both camps all my life. Don't portray me as some sort of pastor who used to play rugby. I've hurt and offended a lot of people. Like I say, I'm a work in progress.

"I'm a Christian and a follower of Jesus. It's not about perfection. It's about moving on.

"I'm going to get challenged and I am going to get a lot of things wrong and say a lot of wrong things, but the great thing as a believer in Jesus Christ is that defeat is never final for me." •

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



Crystal Palace's Julian Speroni during FA Cup Fourth Round between Crystal Palace and Tottenham Hotspur at Selhurst Park stadium, London, England on 27 Jan 2019. Photo: Action Foto Sport/NurPhoto via Getty Images

GOALKEEPER'S BIGGEST SAVE

Forty-year-old goalkeeper Julian Speroni ended his 15-year stint at Crystal Palace at the end of the 2018/2019 Premier League football season earlier this year, with an emotional send off after the final game against AFC Bournemouth at Selhurst Park, London, on May 12.

The Argentinian, who had been playing for the club since 2004, has played a record-breaking 405 games for the Eagles.

He has also kept a club-record 112 clean sheets (games where he conceded no goals).

Chairman Steve Parish said: "Julian ... will be remembered as a true club legend by all Palace fans and everyone at the club. You just don't get many people like Julian in elite football any more – he is a model professional, ultra-committed, immensely loyal, and has set impeccable standards for his teammates down the years."

This speaks to a personal integrity that is evidence of Julian's deep-seated Christian faith. In an interview with Passion for Sport, he explained how finding a relationship with God had changed his life.

"I became a Christian while playing for Dundee," he says. (Julian played 92 games for Dundee between 2001-2004.) "One of my teammates, Juan Sara, who was from Argentina as well, invited me to his church and we did a course together that was an introduction to Christianity. A few months later, we became Christians, together with my wife.

"After I understood what a rela-

tionship with God was, it has made a huge difference. Before, I used to believe in God, but I never actually had a relationship with Him.

"Like most people in Argentina I come from a Catholic background," Julian continues. "But I rarely went to church and never really got involved with other Christians. But when I started to read the Bible and understand the real meaning of why Jesus had to die for us, then I understood that it is black or white – you cannot be in-between. Either you are a Christian or you are not.

"So I accepted Jesus into my life and began to live a real Christian life – or at least I try! I know I do not always get it right, but I try every day.

"But salvation is not about what we do [trying to be religious] but by believing in what God has done for us. When Jesus died He paid for all

our mistakes and sin."

Julian says prayer is very important to him. "It is my communication with God – maintaining that relationship with God. I pray a lot – every day.

"Before games, I pray that He allows me to play with 100 per cent of my ability, the gift that He has given me," Julian explains. "I pray that He keeps me safe and fit, and the same for my teammates. God knows I want to win, so I do not need to tell Him that! His plans are always the best for us, anyway, so I leave it all in His hands."

And in the same way Julian, who has no plans to retire from football at this stage, knows he can leave his future in God's hands too.

His final words to his team and fans as he bid them an emotional goodbye at Selhurst Park were "God bless you all". •

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