

MY LIFE, AFTER DYING

In the terms of humanity, Canadian preacher Ravi Zacharias died this week. Yet, in reality, Ravi actually “died” when he was 17 ... for it was then that he willingly gave up the life he had been living and traded it in for something more. And he has been alive ever since.

Regularly beaten by his father for being a disappointing student, written off as a disgrace to the family for preferring cricket over studies, Ravi Zacharias, who overcame his early adversity to become an internationally beloved public figure, died on May 19, 2020 of a rare cancer. He was 74.

Born in Delhi and moving to Canada with his family as a teenager, Ravi was a leading, if not the foremost, Christian apologist of his time. A Christian apologist is someone who is able to argue clearly and intellectually for the truth of the Bible and the existence of God. Never offensive, always measured, Ravi presented compelling arguments with wit and wisdom.

He was a coveted guest at seminars and conferences, speaking not only at Christian events but also in colleges and universities, including Harvard. His signature question-and-answer sessions at the end of allowed attendees to ask him anything they wanted.

Far from being an academic failure, he had an extraordinary intellect. A prolific author, he wrote 30 books, including the bestseller *Can Man Live Without God?* and the award-winning *The Logic of God*. His ministry's weekly radio program and television show, both called *Let My People Think*, are broadcast to thousands around the world.

Yes Ravi's story reads like a fair-

ytale, but as in all fairytales, he had to overcome tremendous odds to get to his happy ending.

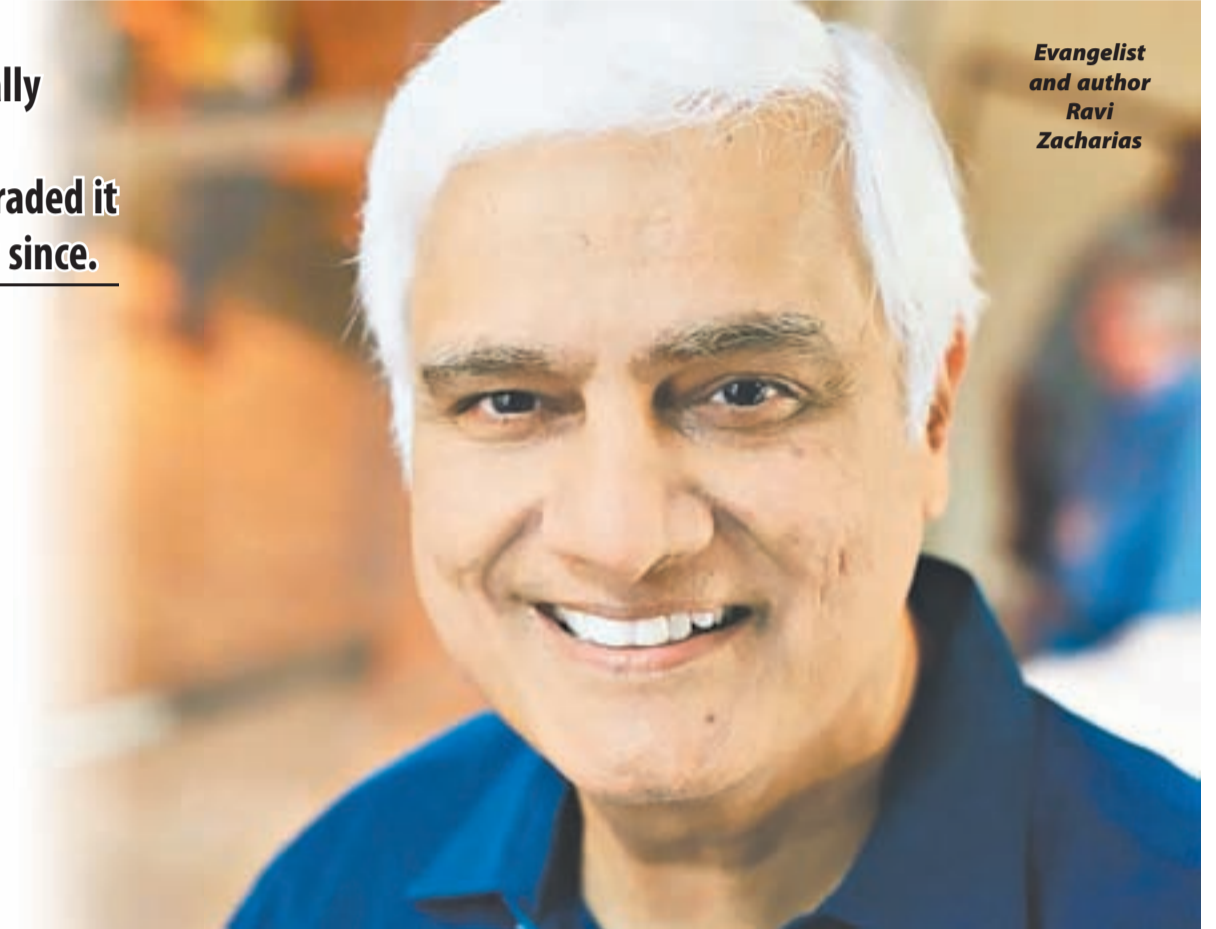
At 17 he was a nominal Christian at best, an atheist at worst. The regular beatings by his father and the feelings of failure led him to attempt suicide by drinking poison. The housekeeper heard Ravi cry out as he collapsed and broke down the bathroom door, saving his life.

“I tried to kill myself because I had lost hope,” Ravi remembers about that dark time. “I had nothing to live for. My dad had an uncontrollable temper.”

“Once, he had my head against the wall. If my mother had not intervened he would either have permanently crippled me or fatally injured me. Occasionally he would beat my mum up as well. Till this day I don't know why he had it in for me. Maybe I was the least resistant or the weakest.”

While in hospital recovering from the poison, Ravi was visited by a Christian friend, who prayed with him and read him this verse from the Bible: *“Because I live, you will live also”* (John 14:19).

“I had no idea what it meant, but as she read it to me, I broke down and cried out: ‘Jesus, if You're real, get me out of here and I will leave no stone unturned in my pursuit of



Evangelist and author Ravi Zacharias

truth’,” Ravi recounted.

“That's where it all happened. Something of an eternal transaction took place that day. Five days later I walked out of the hospital a totally different person.

“I have been living for Christ for over five decades and I am absolutely convinced there is no other answer to the questions of this life than the person of Jesus Christ.”

Ravi's life made a dramatic 180-degree turn. From being at the bottom of every class, he became a star student, never going lower

than third place. “I didn't magically become brilliant but now I had a purpose and I knew I had to work hard,” he said.

When the family moved to Canada, Ravi's father wanted him to go into business but he refused and went to theological college instead. His father didn't speak to him for five weeks.

“And then remarkably, through a series of events, my father gave his life to Christ,” said Ravi. “The transformation in his life was so dramatic. I'd never ever seen anything like it.”

And when his father was 67 and ill, he called on his middle son, with whom he had such a fractious relationship, to bring him to hospital. At that time Ravi lived nearly two hours away and was surprised his father did not ask any of his other siblings, who lived much closer, to take him.

As they drove to the hospital together, his father talked. “That conversation was life-defining,” Ravi said.

“My father told me ‘Son, what God has done in your life...all I want to say is that I will be eternally grateful that He found it fit to select one of my children to be one of His spokespersons and I want to apologise for all the years of hardship I inflicted on you and I want your forgiveness. You are in God's hands. You are His anointed servant.’”

After being diagnosed just three months before, Ravi leaves behind his wife of 48 years, Margie, and

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BACK PAGE

RESPECTED COACH

JÜRGEN KLOPP

FREE TO BE TORI KELLY

Tori Kelly is a singer, songwriter, actress, record producer and a two-time Grammy award winner. She has collaborated with famous artists such as Ed Sheeran, Lecrae and Amy Grant. However, her path to fame has not been an easy one. Recently, she shared the personal struggles she has dealt with and how her faith has helped her through.

Tori was 12 years old when she was signed to a record label. “I felt like I had the world promised to me,” she says. “People all around me all the time would say things like, ‘Oh, you're such an amazing singer,’ and that became



Tori Kelly sings the National Anthem before the 2020 NFL Pro Bowl in January 2020 in Florida. (Photo Mark Brown/Getty Images)

my identity in a lot of ways.”

But when someone else took over management of the record label, Tori was cut from the deal because “they didn't really believe in me in the same way.”

“After that, every executive that I talked to would have some reason why they didn't want to sign me,”

Tori talks about the pressure on her to be someone that she was not. “You're so reserved, you're too shy, quiet, loosen up a little bit. They wanted me to have this outgoing, bubbly personality which I didn't have. I really started comparing myself to other people.”

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Fun for Kids

Pages 5,6 & 7

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Come to think of it ...

BY ALAN BAILEY

DURING lockdown millions of people have found themselves pretty much confined within four walls for weeks and maybe months on end. What to do?— has been the big question. There are limits to the ways we can entertain ourselves and limits to the amount of work we can or want to do. Reading can become a bit laborious at times and it's not everyone's cup of tea.

So, I guess the outcome has been that people have thought more than they usually do. Time to reflect. To let the mind wander all over the place with no pressure or accountability. For me, when the mind is somewhat out of gear and running idly, I tend to think of olden days. I go over some of the important decisions of life and where they have landed me. Then to dismiss some regrets that start appearing.

Is that you too? Have you ever thought about the fact that you carry with you the most complex instrument on the planet? Yes, the human brain is by far the most amazing piece of equipment. In all our waking hours we are using it (and even as we sleep it is processing our day) and we must admit that the vast majority of the time we deal with fairly trivial matters. Today, the internet is the brain for many people. Just look it up. Just believe what you are told. Don't bother to think too deeply.

Why is it that people generally

avoid any thinking or discussion of the big questions of life? Here we are, squirming and struggling our way through life, never asking why we are here. Is the world and everything in it a huge puzzle with no meaning? Is it all going to end with oblivion?

Thinking won't always lead us to God but it ought to. There are powerful reasons for believing that God exists, that He made us and that we are accountable to Him. Reading

the four Gospels in the New Testament (Matthew, Mark, Luke and John) will bring us face to face with Jesus, who reveals God and tells us of our responsibility to Him. In no way can anyone explain away Jesus Christ as if He was just another man. He demands our attention.

How good the news is that while we were still rebels against God, having broken His law and spurned His authority, Jesus took our place and died as a substitute to bring us into fellowship with God. To prove who He was, and to defeat the power of death, Jesus rose from the grave and lives today. We are called to consider Him, see who He is, ask for His forgiveness and surrender to Him as Lord.

Yes, thinking is of paramount importance. Listen to these words: "Come now and let us reason together says the Lord; though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool" (Isaiah 1:18).



FREE TO BE TORI KELLY

● From page 1

Tori auditioned for *American Idol* but did not make the cut. "I was so devastated," she says.

Tori's story can be seen in a video on YouTube where she talks about being raised in a Christian home. "I committed my life to Jesus at the age of five but I've gone through seasons of thinking I'd be happier if I let other things rule my life," she admits. "As I've gotten older I've realised God's steadfast love is better than life and nothing can fulfil me more."

After failing on *American Idol*, Tori turned to journaling and prayer as a way to release her emotions. One of her prayers reads: "Lord, guide me, I don't know who I am without singing. If I'm not a singer and if this doesn't work out, what am I, what am I going to do?"

In those quiet moments, Tori leaned on God more than ever. "Finally, I just said, 'Okay, God you said you have a plan for my life, so I'm just going to trust that and even if it means that I don't get famous or anything I'm just going to surrender all of this to you and put it in your hands.'"

Once she did this, doors started to open. She began writing her own songs and uploading them onto YouTube. Her compositions went viral and snagged more than a million listeners. Before she knew it, she was signed to another record label and put out a full-length album.

"Daytime TV, morning shows, sold-out tours ... it was a dream come true," she smiles. "I'm so glad I didn't compromise who I am, how I dressed, or my beliefs, because now I get to stand on stage and I literally get to be myself."

Tori has reached heights of success in her career, but says she might not be where she is today had it not been



Tori Kelly in New York City in 2019. (Photo Jose Perez/Bauer-Griffin/GC Images)

for the low times in her life. "In my worst times I felt really lonely," she explains. "Fear of letting people down got the best of me and it got exhausting trying to live up to the image I created in my mind."

"I would take every opportunity to present myself as having it all together but then Jesus would meet me right there," she continues. "To think that such a big God would care about little old me and want to simply just spend time with me blew me away. I'm now able to spend less time thinking about myself and more time thinking about how I can share His love with other people."

Tori has this advice for other girls battling doubt and insecurity. "That little girl who feels she's too shy, or not bubbly enough, or doesn't have the right look, or isn't pretty enough, or that her life is boring, or that she's boring, is believing a lie," she says. She urges them to believe God can build them into the women He wants them to be and not to compare themselves to anybody.

Philippians 3:7-8 is a Bible passage Tori treasures. "But whatever were gains to me I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. What is more, I consider everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them garbage, that I may gain Christ."

"I think the goal is to really look at my life and say, 'Okay, if all of this went away, would I still be okay with just Jesus and all of the things that He offers?' I would say yes. I would be okay because He's everything. Through Christ, I can just be myself and just be surrounded by His love."

Coronavirus: where is God?

BY RUSTY WRIGHT

HOW could a loving, just, powerful God allow a tragedy like the coronavirus pandemic? Doesn't He care that innocent people are suffering and dying? It seems unjust. If God exists, isn't He strong enough to stop this madness?

Two young brothers were always getting into trouble. Their parents invited the pastor over, hoping a dose of religion could get them to shape up. The minister began by addressing the younger brother in the living room, while the older remained upstairs.

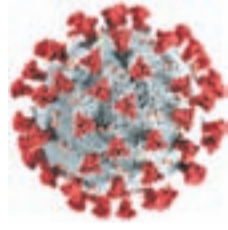
"Where is God?" the pastor asked the younger one. Petrified, the boy remained silent. "Where is God?" the minister asked again, more firmly. Still no response. "Where is God?" he asked a third time, even more resolutely. Scared to death, the boy ran upstairs and shouted to his older brother: "We're in big trouble. God's missin', and they think we did it!"

Where is God? If you or your loved ones have experienced illness, job loss, unrelenting anxiety or even death, such a question is not surprising. I've asked it myself in the past, wondering if God existed, angry with Him if He did.

Sigmund Freud called religion an illusion that humans invent to satisfy their security needs. To him, a benevolent, all-powerful God seemed incongruent with natural disasters and human evil. My graduate work focused on understanding Freud's disappointment about the biblical God and anger with believers.

The biblical documents portray God as sovereign but as giving us freedom to follow or to disobey him. Humans are not robots but free moral agents. Oxford scholar C.S. Lewis estimated that 80% of human suffering stems from human choice. He called pain God's "megaphone" that alerts us to our need for him: "God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks in our conscience, but shouts in our pains."

Did coronavirus originate from human mistakes? The



jury's still out. Did human action contribute to its spread? Little doubt. Could the pandemic's pain produce any benefits in individual lives?

In hindsight – and as a former skeptic – I'm glad God has used pain in my own life.

As a teenager, I nearly was expelled from secondary school for some problems I helped create. In my hurt and anger I wondered, "Why would God allow this to happen?" I was mad at Him! In retrospect, I realize I was blaming Him for my own bad choices. My personal anguish kept me from seeing that. But over time, my failures helped me recognize my need for a relationship with God, which I discovered as a university student. That has made all the difference.

This response about God and suffering does not answer all concerns (because the biblical God sometimes does intervene to thwart human misdeeds or natural peril), but it suggests that the problem of evil is not as great an intellectual obstacle to faith as some imagine.

Pain's emotional barrier to faith, however, remains formidable. When I see God, items on my long list of questions for Him will include a heartbreaking and unwanted divorce, betrayal by trusted coworkers, my second wife's cancer death, and all sorts of disappointing human behavior and natural disasters.

Yet in Jesus' life, death, and resurrection, I've seen enough to believe that, as one of His early followers wrote, "God causes everything to work together for the good of those who love [Him]."

Not satisfied with these brief responses to some profound questions? I don't blame you. As mentioned, I once was quite skeptical about faith matters and did not accept these ideas right away. It took time, interaction, reflection, and analysis. But exposure to this reasoning was a necessary start. Maybe this can get you thinking.

Stay safe. And inquisitive.

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

Crossword

- | | | | |
|----------------------------|--------------------------|----------------------------|--------------------------------|
| ACROSS | 9 Specific method | 24 Dental filling alloy | DOWN |
| 1 Cooked in your own house | 13 Inclines head | 26 Bring together, combine | 1 Dash joining words |
| 5 Dad's sister | 16 A small child | 27 Block of cooking fat | 2 Became liquid |
| 7 Dance step | 17 Honolulu necklace | 28 Went backwards | 3 He ___ business |
| 8 Long-serving soldier | 18 Worry, or guitar part | | 4 The day before any event |
| | 21 Separated | | 5 Pre dinner drink |
| | | | 6 1000 kg |
| | | | 8 Abbrev. of vacuum |
| | | | 10 Stay home for meal (3,2) |
| | | | 11 To reduce to half |
| | | | 12 Encourage (to do something) |
| | | | 14 Wants out: ___ out |
| | | | 15 A sudden surprise |
| | | | 19 Putting trust in person |
| | | | 20 Ridge on a screw |
| | | | 21 Inbox delivery |
| | | | 22 A stone used in jewellery |
| | | | 23 Tied tennis score |
| | | | 25 Scuba diver's need |



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

6 3 8
4 2 9
7 5 1

SOLUTION PAGE 11

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

Lonely, sick student finds home from home

The only thing Aniketh wanted when he came to Australia was to make his family proud. Moving from Mauritius at 19, he arrived in Perth four years ago full of excitement and anticipation. Instead, he journeyed into hell.

Alone and unable to speak English well, the shy Mauritian was “overwhelmed by loneliness” and became addicted to marijuana and alcohol when he started working on Sundays and could not attend church. The money he had saved to pay for his tuition was used instead to pay for his habits. He lost all of it.

He got so sick he began to vomit blood and reached the point where he could hardly eat. For someone who had grown up with a loving and supportive family, the shame was unbearable. “My parents were so concerned they planned to come to Australia to take me back to Mauritius,” he says. “I felt terrible I had let them down.

“I grew up in a loving family in Mauritius. I was a shy, high achiever who excelled in sport and academics. I loved my family and wanted to make them proud.”

Finally, Aniketh turned to God. The same God he had first heard about as a five-year-old during a rally by Indian evangelist Paul Dhinakaran. The God who was so different from the idols he used to think were gods. The evangelist’s message touched the young boy and he remembers committing his life to Jesus there and then.

“I had asthma as a child and Jesus healed me,” he says. Now 15 years later and fighting a different but no less life-threatening affliction, Aniketh turned back to the God of his childhood.

“I cried out to God for help,” he says. “The next day, I went to church and had a strong feeling that I was ‘home’.

“I knew this was God’s way of telling me that He was guiding and protecting me. That day I asked Jesus to forgive me and be my Saviour and friend. I want Jesus to be with me always.”

Aniketh’s testimony is one of several highlighted in a campaign by Eternity Church in Perth called ‘Where Will You Spend Eternity?’

The campaign features accounts by people whose lives have been transformed since turning to Jesus and says it hopes others “will be inspired by the stories of everyday people who decided to follow Jesus for eternity. Their stories show that God’s love and forgiveness are for everyone - including you”.

“Life after death is always such a hot topic,” it says on the church’s website. “Death is a reality we all must face. The most important you can ask yourself is, when you step into eternity, where will you go?”

“There is a beautiful promise in the Bible, just for you. It reads, ‘For this is how God loved the world: He gave His one and only Son so that everyone who believes in Him will not perish but have eternal life.’”

For Aniketh, one of the sweetest victories since he left his addictions behind is the effect his turnaround has had on his parents.

“They are thrilled with my new life and that for me is the greatest thing of all,” he says. “I am glad that I decided to trust in Jesus.

“I had called myself a Christian since I was saved 15 years ago but it wasn’t till four years ago that I learned what it really meant. I now dedicate my life to Him. I pray God helps me to live a good life and share what he has done for me.

“God has given me strength and courage to live on my own. Today I am free from addiction and spiritually I have grown so much. My parents and others see a great difference in me.”

Aniketh says the hardest part of being a Christian is finding the courage to share the message of the Gospel with others, but he leans on the twin assurances of God’s love and guidance. “That to me is the best part of being a Christian,” he says. “His grace (undeserved love) is sufficient for me.

“I would like to tell everyone that Jesus died for us all and that He loves us all whatever you have done, whatever you have gone through He will always love you. His love is unconditional.

Two Bible passages Aniketh treasures are: “The Lord is my Shepherd; I lack nothing. He makes me lie down in green pastures; He refreshes my soul. He guides me along the right paths for His name’s sake Even though I walk through the darkest valley I will fear no evil for You are with me; Your rod and Your staff they comfort me.” – Psalm 23: 1-4. And: “But [God] said to me, ‘My grace is sufficient for you, for My power is made perfect in weakness.’ Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ’s power may rest on me.” – 2 Corinthians 12:9

To see more inspiring stories, go to www.eternitychurchperth.com/wwwye



Face-to-face leads to about face

BY AINSLEY GAEBLER

“God knew He wouldn’t get my attention in a church. Churches didn’t care too well for people like me. Me, being a gay girl. A gay girl who knew better than to let my feet take me where I didn’t feel welcomed.”

Jackie Hill-Perry. She’s a poet, a writer, a speaker, a hip-hop artist and an ex-lesbian who believes her identity is in God and not in whether she’s gay or straight.

“Your identity is not how you feel,” she says. “If that’s the case then all of our temptations [the desire to do something wrong] will define us.”

Jackie grew up in a house where she attended church and knew all about God. However, she was not particularly interested in pursuing a personal relationship with Him. “I had grown up in the traditional black church, where sermons were presented in a loud and heavy way,” she explains.

Her childhood was rough and rocky. She grew up without a father, was sexually abused at the age of five and experienced bullying at school. From the age of six, Jackie knew that she was attracted to women and by the age of 17, she started to pursue female relationships.

“The sin I wore on my sleeve was that of a lesbian: a label I had the courage to give myself at age 17,” she says. “This label described an affection I noticed before I knew how to spell my name. When

it happened on the playground, I didn’t know what it was. I didn’t quite understand why girls made me feel *different*. I hadn’t seen any Disney movies that gave me the idea to desire sameness nor had I been challenged by some outside source to see *Beauty and the Beast* and wonder why Belle couldn’t have been with someone as beautiful and biologically similar as herself. Where it came from made no difference to me. I liked girls, and I knew it.”

Jackie recounts: “I was never the ‘cute chick’ but when I became a stud [a woman who takes the masculine role in a lesbian relationship], it seemed like every girl wanted me. I would be in straight clubs and have girls throwing themselves at me. For a girl that’s insecure and craves to feel loved, that was like a drug for me.”

Jackie frequented gay clubs and gay pride parades. She did drugs and was addicted to pornography. “I’d heard more times than I cared to count that what seemed to me a natural enough expression of love was, in fact, unnatural and flat-out abominable,” she says.

Then, one night in her bedroom, Jackie had a face-to-face encounter with the God of the universe.

“I was having a very ‘unspiritual’



kind of night,” she reveals. “The TV was on. The morning was hours away. My thoughts were boring and typical until they turned on me. Suddenly and randomly, I had the unsettling thought that my sin would be the death of me.”

God came to Jackie’s house that night and told her to leave her girlfriend and her homosexuality behind and follow Him.

“But I don’t want to be straight,” I said to God, meaning every single word. In fact, having seen God’s words for myself, I never once had felt the need to question whether what He said was true. So when my thoughts spoke of my sin, which I knew to be a prompting from God and not my subconscious behaving unnaturally, I wasn’t

offended by the idea of my identity being a product of sin. What offended me most was the idea that it was to be the death of me. Because if that were true, then surely I would be asked to lay it aside for the sake of life.

“By calling me to Himself, He was after my whole heart. That night, I knew that it wasn’t just my lesbianism that had me at odds with God—it was my entire heart.

“I sat up in my bed and thought deeply about all that was happening in me. I’d known about God for so long, but now it seemed as if God was inviting me to know Him. To love Him. To walk with Him. To be in a relationship with Him.

“Without a sermon, an altar call, or any emotionally laden music gesturing me to ‘come to Jesus’—just sitting in my bed, with the TV on and the sun not yet up—I saw Jesus. He was better than everything I’d ever known.”

So, as difficult as it was for Jackie, she, in obedience to God, left her girlfriend and her lesbian lifestyle and became a Christian.

Today, Jackie is a totally new and different person. She is married to Preston and has two daughters, Eden and Autumn. She shares the Gospel [the good news of Jesus saving us from our sins] and her inspiring

story through poetry, speaking, books and music.

“The word of God itself, apart from Jackie Hill, testifies that people can change. So if the word of God is the word of God, then we need to deal with that and believe that it’s true. I think we’ve made God very little if we believe that He cannot change people. If He can make a moon, stars and a galaxy that we have yet to fully comprehend, how can He not simply change my desires?” she asks.

Jackie has a message for people who have their own struggles with identity. “In Jesus coming to earth, dying and resurrecting from the grave, God is creating a way for us to be restored, for us to heal from our brokenness, for us to find our true identity in Christ. When we come to Jesus, in Christ, we’re able to look at our bodies, see how we’re made and actually look at them, with faith, and say, “This is actually good because God says it is.”

Jackie’s book “Gay Girl, Good God” is available in paperback and ebook.

Christianity is unique

1. Christianity is the only faith in the world that offers the forgiveness of sins here and now at the cost, not of the worshipper, but of its founder.
2. It is the only faith in the world that offers a direct relationship with the founder of the faith.
3. It is the only faith in the world that offers eternal life as a free gift here on earth to start the believer off on his heavenly pilgrimage, rather than as a goal at the end of his life.
4. All other faiths allow or encourage you to bring something to God for acceptance by Him. Christianity allows you to bring nothing but your sin.
5. All other faiths are based on the principle of man seeking after God but Christianity is essentially God seeking after man.

Source: The Herald of Hope

MY LIFE, AFTER DYING

• From page 1

His daughter, Sarah Davis, posted a message on the website of Ravi Zacharias International Ministries (RZIM), titled “Ravi Zacharias, Now With Jesus.”

“It was his Saviour, Jesus Christ, that my dad always wanted most to talk about. Even in his final days, until he lacked the energy and breath to speak, he turned every conversation to Jesus and what the Lord had done,” she wrote.

“He perpetually marveled that God took a seventeen-year-old skeptic, defeated in hopelessness and unbelief, and called him into a life of glorious hope and belief in the truth of Scripture—a message he would carry across the globe for 48 years.

“Today my beautiful father is more alive than he has ever been. We thank God for him and recommit our lives to sharing this truth with all who will hear, until He calls us to our eternal home.”



Ravi's wife, Margie Zacharias

Suddenly you're dying

After the sermon, I found out I have terminal brain cancer.
Sydney pastor Greg Peisley speaks about how his life changed a few months ago.

At church on that Sunday when everything changed, Greg Peisley gave the sermon and led the service that morning. Immediately afterwards, he was met by a swift reaction he had never received before. “A little contingency of people came up and said, ‘You should go to the hospital right now. Something is wrong.’ Everyone agreed; something’s funny. ‘You’re not yourself.’”

As Greg preached, he had paused a lot. For longer periods than was normal for a fast-talking, regular public speaker.

Going directly to the emergency department of Westmead Hospital, Greg was, in his words, put on the “trajectory of brain surgery, probably a tumour, straight away.”

This early diagnosis proved correct. After being admitted on Sunday night, Greg underwent brain surgery on Wednesday. The following Monday, biopsy results revealed Glioblastoma, a stage-four malignant cancer. Life expectancy: two years, at best.

“It’s nothing that you plan,” Greg says simply during an interview with The Pastor’s Heart podcast, weeks after he received the news of his terminal cancer.

“You’re not unaware that things can go wrong – and we live in a fallen world – but you always think it will be someone else,” admits Greg.

“There was no warning,” he continues, as he begins to chuckle casually about the week leading up to his diagnosis. His wife Sue had thought it odd how Greg had not been caring about deadlines, when he’s the kind of guy who thinks “turning up

half an hour early is about being on time”. Greg had not been able to get through his to-do list, while paying only slight attention to a lingering headache in the background.

In the aftermath of his brain surgery, surrounded by his family, Greg was told that he had brain cancer in its final stages – and it was fast moving (a “wild type” cancer). “It’s basically as bad as it can get.” Life expectancy is 15-18 months.

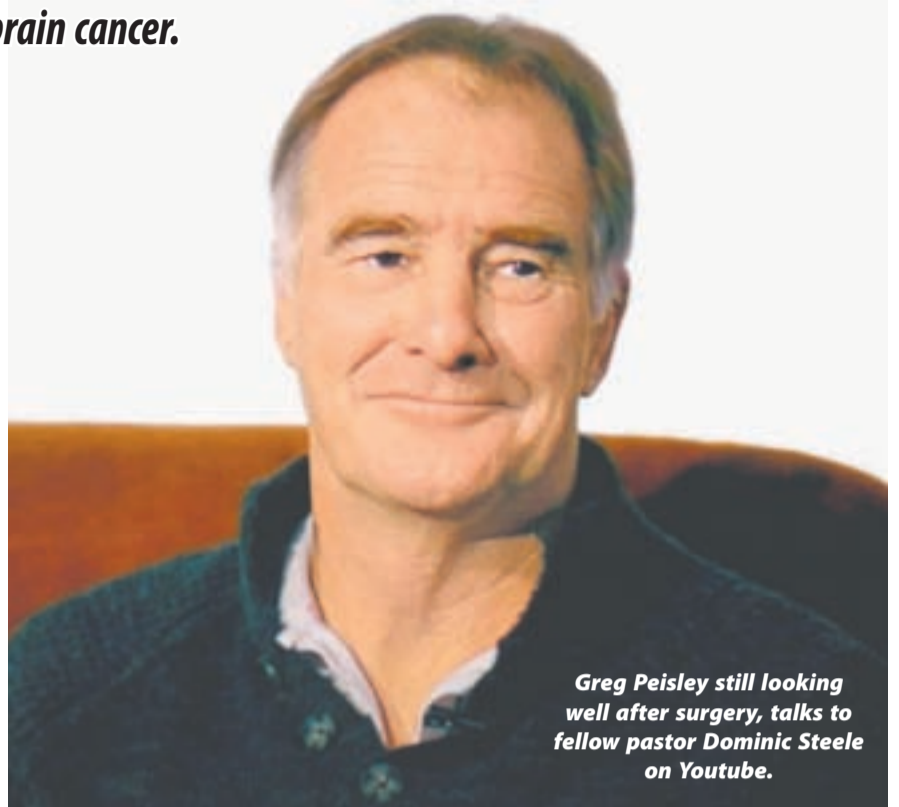
“[But] I was in hospital and I felt like a fake because even though I have this deadly or very dangerous cancer, I’m feeling fine. Other people are bedridden and struggling to go to the toilet.”

Greg admits to finding it easier to withdraw and cope alone when

things go bad. But he is moved by how people instantly wanted to help him and his family. Church staff took over his diary and divided up responsibilities. He has also received a lot of advice and his congregation gave him space when he got back to church.

Moving from earthly realities to spiritual ones, Greg talks about his conversations with God since the surgery and diagnosis.

“The things [I] have told people and encouraged them with, are the same things I told myself ... God is



Greg Peisley still looking well after surgery, talks to fellow pastor Dominic Steele on Youtube.

I WAS HOPING FOR ANOTHER PLAN, BUT I’LL TAKE GOD’S PLAN



in control and God is sovereign. God has a plan and He’s going to use this.

All will be fixed when Jesus’ returns – that kind of idea.

“I never for a moment questioned Him that [cancer] could come [to me]. I haven’t questioned that.

“I’ve felt comforted. I’ve felt His presence. I’ve felt the promises

of the gospel and the promises that He will be with me.

“I had to remember life. Remember the kids. Remember it. I couldn’t relax until I had read [the Bible] and thanked God for what I’d had. Then, I could sort of settle.”

Greg goes on to reveal how he is still having discussions with God, as he processes the truth he knows about God not needing Greg Peisley to achieve his purposes. “But my hope, my dream, my prayer was that I had more to do – in a ‘running a church’ mode. And that might be coming to an end, soon.”

Greg has had seven weeks of radiation treatment and chemotherapy. He is grateful for all those praying for him and frank about his outlook of trust, despite the disappointment he feels.

“I was hoping for another plan, but I’ll take God’s plan. I am comforted by the truth that it’s not out of control, but He’s using it for good.”

This article first appeared in Eternity News.

Desperate ISIS fighter calls infidels for answers

A Bible verse Matthew 5:44 tells Christians to love their enemies and pray for those who persecute them. In many Muslim countries, particularly those influenced by ISIS, Christians are heavily persecuted – even imprisoned, killed and tortured – but a missionary group called *Leading the Way* is seeking to love radical Muslims nevertheless.

When a Christian leader of that organisation, Peter*, first received a call from Muhammad*, he was suspicious that the man may be affiliated with ISIS.

In fact, not only was he associated with the Islamic terrorist group, Muhammad was, in fact, a ‘Prince of ISIS’ – one whom thousands had sworn allegiance to and pledged to die for.

The ISIS leader who had spent a lifetime teaching people how to memorize the Quran and join jihad, had recently begun questioning his Muslim faith. Someone had asked him why he was a Muslim and he had no answer. On examining the holy texts, he could find no hard evidence for the divinity of the god he worshipped or that Islam is true. He feared his whole life may have been a lie, and it left him with an unspeakable emptiness that became too cavernous to ignore.

Hearing that Peter preached to people about Jesus, a desperate Muhammad got hold of his number and called. Peter agreed to his request



Dr Michael Youssef who heads Leading the Way

to meet, although usually the missionaries chose to speak to enquirers on the phone.

“I had a strange feeling that he was from ISIS and that he might try to kill me,” said Peter. “But I had a peace inside that the Lord would protect me, as He had a reason behind this encounter. So I set up an appointment, knowing that the man could try to kill me.”

To make matters more challenging, Peter clearly heard God tell him “Be bold with him,” so he knew he could not present the good news of Jesus’ life and teachings lightly to this potentially violent man, but had to declare the truth to him without fear or favour.

a moment, I forgot why I came to Peter. I suddenly had one thought: How should I kill him?”

Then Muhammad started crying, without even understanding why. Peter put his hand on the Muslim’s shoulder and began to pray for him. Then Muhammad abruptly left.

They met again and this time the Muslim was very shaken. He had had a dream in which Peter came to him and gave him an envelope dripping with blood. The blood smelled like perfume but it made Muhammad scared. In the dream, Peter said to him, “Don’t be afraid.” Then he woke up.

Peter later told him that without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins,

and that Jesus’ shed blood on the cross paid for our wrongdoings.

Muhammad said, “What should I do to get forgiveness?”

Peter explained, “The Lord has given it to you for free – you just need to accept it.”

Peter then went on to lead the former Prince of Isis in a prayer of commitment to Jesus Christ and disciple him – teach him the basics of Christianity.

Later Muhammad confessed that the first time they met, he had wanted to kill Peter. “I’m sorry,” he wept, kneeling at Peter’s feet in repentance.

He began to visit Peter regularly. “In him I saw a love that didn’t exist in Islam,” Muhammad says.

Muhammad shaved his beard, changed his whole life and started following Jesus. Then he asked to be baptised – immersed in water as an outward sign of an inward change.

“Once I got out of the water, I felt a victory and joy I could not describe,” Muhammad explains. “The true book in my opinion is the Bible. I found the truth in Jesus Christ and because I have surrendered my life to the Lord, I am certain He will never forsake me.”

Muhammad now conducts Bible studies for Syrians.

*Not his real name.

TEENTALK

12 year old promises to wait for her future husband

In this sex-soaked culture where 'hooking up' is seen as a sign of growing up, one pre-teen dared to be different. And has never regretted it.

BY JORDAN LEE

WE kissed on the couch while watching a movie in his parents' basement. He asked if I wanted to go further and I froze at the question.

How much further? Should I be cool and roll with it? Should I say no?

Questions raced through my mind, and in a panic, I excused myself to the bathroom before I could answer. After an awkward conversation, I drove home feeling like a super uncool loser who just lost the cool guy's interest. I felt like the only girl in high school who couldn't keep a guy's interest long.

I encountered a similar situation early on in college. With slumped shoulders, I shuffled back to my dorm room after a disappointing evening, and mumbled under my breath, DANG IT. THIS IS SO HARD!

When I got home, I knew exactly what to do though. I went to my room, opened my closet door and searched for



Jordan Lee Dooley and (inset) her husband.

that secret little box I kept tucked in the back shelf for days like these. I tore out a piece of notebook paper and began writing another letter to him.

It started just like all the others:

Dear Future Husband...

You see, when I was just 12 years old, I promised to wait for my future husband. And that sounds like a pretty easy gig at 12 before puberty and cute boys really hit the scene. But throw in hormones, driving, dating, then college parties and cute boys who turn into hot men and WOO girls! Not so easy.

But when I made that promise, I wrote a letter to my future husband ..., and over the years, I kept writing to my future husband before I ever saw his face or knew

his name.

I'd write when I felt lonely, or when waiting was especially difficult, or even when I felt I may have pushed the limit and wrestled with shame. I'd write to him while I was in relationships with other men, I'd tell him about my frustration, or my broken hearts, or the ways I was praying for him.

Writing to my future husband in those seasons somehow lightened the burden. It made the waiting seem more doable and the hope I had been holding out for more tangible.

And on September 3, 2016, on the morning of our wedding, my groom opened a box of letters that had been addressed to him before he ever knew my name.

I'm going to share the very last letter he read before he switched from 'future husband' to 'forever husband' because you need to realize that I know it's not easy to wait but it's worth it.

Dear Future Husband,

When I was 13, my dad gave me a purity ring. Engraved inside of the band are the words: true love waits. In that moment, I promised to wait for my future husband and even signed a purity pact without hesitation (although I had no idea just how difficult that road could be). Nonetheless, I've worn that ring since the day it was given to me and done my best to be true to the promise my little middle school heart made to my earthly father, my Heavenly Father, and you, my Future Husband.

It wasn't always easy waiting for you. It wasn't always easy when boys would lose interest when I

said no. It wasn't always easy to explain to people all the reasons why I believed you were worth waiting for without even knowing your name yet. All I knew was that God's design is more beautiful than anything this world could dream up—and that was worth waiting for even when it was hard.

When I felt like giving up, I'd think of you and then I would write to you. ...

As I step out of my single life and into the mystery of marriage with you in Jesus name, I'm giving to you the purity ring my daddy placed on my hand when I was a young 13-year-old girl. In its place, I'll wear the wedding band that you'll place on my finger today as your bride.

... Although it's been a long road of waiting, God has walked with me through the steps of lonely seasons, heartbreaks, loss, frustration and so much more to prepare me to become a wife. Looking back, every single one of those steps that brought us here were so beyond worth it. And I know without a doubt that you are worth it and I'd do it all over again if I had to.

... Today we give Him everything. Today, we give each other everything.

Love, Your Forever Bride

You can find Jordan's whole letter and some wedding photos online at www.jordanleedooley.com. There are also blog posts on dating, marriage and relationships in general, and a link to her book *Own Your Everyday*.

Connect with Jordan on her website or Facebook.

Kids responding to Covid

Eddie Lin (22), an autistic balloon artist based in New Jersey, honored front-line workers and gave joy by making au-some balloon creations.



U.S. kids Jahkil Jackson (12) and Cavanaugh Bell (7) are distributing essential groceries to the needy in their communities during the coronavirus epidemic.



An American teen said his little sister decided to do her bit by learning to sew in order to make masks for health care workers.



High school science teacher Jonte Lee in Washington, D.C., converted his kitchen into a chemistry lab to conduct interesting experiments and stream them over virtual platforms for his students.

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Laugh



This reddit meme was captioned: **Just broke the news to my suitcase that we will not be going on vacation this year. She is devastated.**



WHEN my company mandated that everyone take at least a week of vacation, I created staycation postcards from Backyardia and sent them to all my friends and family. On the back, I jotted a note about how much fun I was having in Los Basementos and on Isle o' Couch, and about my visit to West Porch. It was a fun and funny way to reach out to everyone and let them know that I was thinking about them.

— Emily Tuzson, Shaker Heights, Ohio
(Published in The NY Times online)

Do Christians offer more than hopes and prayers?

CHRISTIANS are often accused of just throwing “thoughts and prayers” at problems instead of doing something practical. In the ongoing Covid-19 crisis, however, Christians throughout the world have been doing a lot of practical things to ease the hardship of those ill or in lockdown.

Readers might be well aware of the controversy around Samaritan’s Purse’s field hospital in New York City. However, despite the opposition of those antagonist to faith-based help, the Emergency Field Hospital in Central Park was able to provide care for over 300 patients seriously ill with COVID-19, relieving the burden of neighbouring Mount Sinai Hospital, before it closed in May.

Samaritan’s Purse also helped out in the Italian city of Cremona. With the local hospital inundated, the mobile medical unit added 68 beds to treatment capacity.

Kelly Sites, a nurse in Italy, related the story of a patient who was admitted to the field hospital scared and apprehensive. Within hours of spending time in the women’s ward, “[The woman] was smiling for the first time in a long time,” said Kelly. “She came in nervous but felt loved and cared for.”

In addition, many Christian organisations, churches and individuals have responded to needs around them by making and distributing care packages of food and medical supplies to low-income families, elderly communities, immigrants and international students.

One organisation, Convoy of Hope, has distributed more than 10 million meals to hundreds of hard-hit communities across the U.S. using a fleet of semi-trailers.

“Lots of people have lost their jobs, and children don’t have access to school lunch programs. We’re hearing heart-wrenching stories and seeing lots of desperate faces,” said Convoy of Hope president Hal Donaldson.

In Eastern Europe and Asia, the Slavic Gospel Association has helped over 6,350 churches in more than 10 countries in the former Soviet Union to provide more than 750,000 meals to families.

Christians are also helping to get health messages out to remote communities. Wycliffe Bible translators are using their language skills to translate government health messages into local dialects to help more people be able to protect themselves.

The charity is creating posters, videos, social media posts and other materials to assist efforts to minimise the effects of the outbreak in some of the poorest regions of the world.

Luke Garvey, Director of Global Communications for Wycliffe’s partner organisation SIL, says: “Based on an analysis of decades of research, our estimate is that close to 1 in 3 people worldwide do not have the basic health information they need to protect their communities from Covid-19 in the language they understand best. If you can’t understand these types of messages, the risk of the spread of the virus and heightened death count, increases significantly.”

Wycliffe language experts are also part of a Christian group that developed a free course called *Healing from the Distress of the COVID-19 Crisis* to help those affected by the trauma of losing loved ones, jobs, financial security or certainty for the future. This has already been translated into English, Spanish and French.

Lockdown and the anxiety surrounding the pandemic have caused many mental health and addiction problems for people.

A resource for good mental health is music, and hundreds of ordinary Christians around the world have contributed to projects like *‘The Blessing’* song that can be found on Youtube, in order to lift people’s spirits and remind them that others care.

Christian speakers and counsellors are also helping by posting blogs, vlogs and tweets giving people practical and spiritual ways to deal with anxiety, get a grip on addictions and stay positive. Most of these involve directing people back to the Bible, which has proved to be a most practical source of help and comfort for people in times of crisis over several centuries. One of the most well-known passages is Psalm 23 which says;

The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want. He makes me to lie down in green pastures; He leads me beside the still waters. He restores my soul; He leads me in the paths of righteousness for His name’s sake. Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; for You are with me; Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me. ... Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life; And I will dwell in the house of the Lord Forever.

Other particularly popular passages include: Psalm 91, Philippians 4:6-7, and Luke 12:22-34. ●

Be kind



Rather than postponing their wedding, this Sri Lankan couple chose to celebrate their love by feeding the poor, distributing bags of food to their neediest neighbours after the ceremony.

Be creative



Photographer and mountain climber Ivo Popov and his daughter had fun during lockdown in Belgium taking ‘mountain climbing’ photos.



A Dutch primary school teacher missed her pupils so much due to the pandemic, she knitted a tiny doll to represent each and every one of her 23 students.

Pregnant woman beats Covid-19

Florette Johnson was pregnant and close to her delivery date when she got the nightmare news that she had Covid-19.

Florette, who graduated as a physical therapy assistant in Florida in 2017, had already come through one health scare the previous year when she was diagnosed with pheochromocytoma, a rare tumour that affects the adrenal system.

Doctors gave her baby a 50-50 chance of surviving the October surgery to remove the tumour.

Detailing her experience in a Facebook post, Florette said recovery was difficult but she managed to keep the baby.

Then in April, at the height of the Covid-19 pandemic in the United States, Florette, then heavily pregnant, started coughing non-stop. She went to hospital where doctors asked if she could hold her breath for 10 seconds - she couldn’t hold it for three. It was April 4.

The next day, the contractions started and Florette, a Christian, prayed for God

to give her the strength to push. Thirty minutes later, against all odds and to the utter disbelief of her doctor, she gave birth to a healthy baby girl.

Her baby was immediately taken away from her as medical staff turned their attention to the rapidly fading Florette. She was rushed into ICU as her blood pressure, already a dangerously low 60, continued dropping.

On April 8, three days after the birth, her nurse came with tears in her eyes to tell Florette she was dying and asked if there was anyone she wanted to call. The only contact she had had with her new daughter was over FaceTime with the NICU nurse.

Soon the doctor recommended Florette be hooked up to a ventilator to buy her a little more time, however he said the chances of her waking up from the ventilator were 1 in 100.

In her Facebook post Florette wrote: “I had a three-way conversation with my mom, my husband and my kids. I sent a text to my family and close friends. They had no

clue I was saying goodbye.”

Inexplicably, she felt no fear. “I have gone through so much the last 6-7 months and that helped my relationship with God grow more personal,” she wrote. “My reaction was like ‘wow this is really happening’.

“Honestly, I didn’t shed any tears, I wasn’t scared. Before they put me under I prayed a quick prayer and hoped that I had left the kids with a yearning for God.”

She said her last thoughts were spent wondering why, after beating the tumour and just being blessed with a new baby, she was now going to die.

“But I knew where I was going, so I was at peace,” she wrote.

“I was put under on Wednesday and I woke up on Monday. God allowed me to still be here! In that time I can’t tell you how many people were on their knees praying. I want to thank EVERYONE that prayed for me and my family. All of you are heaven sent.

“God is real. We all have our differences in what we believe in: I BELIEVE in God.” ●



Anonymous artist banksy has donated this beautiful painting to Southampton General Hospital in the UK to honour health care workers during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Japanese engineer realises he is a product of design

BY TORU YASUI

I used to work for a large Japanese electronics company as an electronics engineer in hardware development. The mid-80s was a period of high growth in Japan, and competition was fierce. I worked every day, Monday to Saturday, until midnight. I was married, with two young children—a girl and a boy—but I only saw my family on Sundays.

Enslaved to work

In Japanese business culture, it is not uncommon to be expected to put one's work well before family. My boss often used to say to me, "Your career depends on how much of yourself and your family you are willing to sacrifice."

One day, I was told we were being relocated overseas. But to my relief, the transfer was delayed by three years.

To prepare for living abroad, I enrolled in English classes, where my teacher was an American missionary. My wife wanted to learn English too. So I encouraged her to go to the English classes at a nearby church, as I knew my English teacher taught there also. But after attending this church's English class for a year, my wife told me that she had decided to follow Jesus Christ—she had become a Christian! I wondered what changes this might mean for us. It wasn't long before I began to think this was not good news for me.

Home alone

Every Sunday morning (actually, at about noon), I would wake up to find that on my only day off work, my family had all gone to church and left me all alone. I sometimes went to pick them up at the church. But because I was afraid my English teacher would notice me and invite me to go in, I always stopped the car some distance away, and ducked my head every time someone walked past.

My wife had a Bible, and one day, when she was not at home, I opened it. I started at the beginning—Genesis. I was shocked. It said that the whole universe was made in only six days, that man was made from dust, and woman from one of the man's ribs. How could Christians believe this? They must be insane!

Studying evolution to undermine the Bible

But this gave me hope. I thought that if I studied evolution well enough to out-debate the people at church and prove that the Bible is unscientific, I would be able to get my family back. So, I studied evolution for about a year, after which I gathered courage to go and talk to the pastors at church.

"Genesis clearly goes against evolution. How do you explain this?" I asked them. However, they were American missionaries and their Japanese language ability was somewhat limited. So, we were unable to communicate on such a complex topic. I was disappointed. However, they gave me a book to read. It was

a book popular in the early days of the creation movement—*Bone of Contention* by Sylvia Baker, translated by Masami Usami. I took it home and read it.

I remember being extremely surprised because it discussed the book of Genesis—which I could only view as a myth—in a scientific way. I was intrigued, but was still determined to find flaws in it.

Eventually, though, I came to the point where I had to admit that evolution was not as scientific as I had thought it was. So much so that I found myself mumbling to my wife, "Maybe the truth really is creation, and not evolution." My wife leapt at this opportunity. "I remember you once said that if you ever came to believe in creation over evolution," she said, "You would come to church with me!" I had forgotten I'd said that. I had done so only because I was confident that I would never reject evolution!

A question of authority

When I began thinking that creation might be true, I became afraid, because it forced me to become aware of 'some being out there' who may have created me. As an engineer at a manufacturing company, I knew that every product has a designer. I knew that the meaning and purpose of every product were given to the products by the designer—it was not the products themselves that decided how they were to be used! So, if there was a Creator, that meant that the meaning and purpose of my life lay with Him, and not me! This was a question of authority.

I already had some major authorities in my life. They were my company and my boss, for I spent most of my waking hours at work. And at home I was under another authority, my wife (just joking!). I didn't need any more authorities, I thought.

So, each Sunday, I parked my car even further away from the church and reclined my seat as far as it would go so that no one could see me through the windows. I wasn't hiding from the missionaries; in reality I was hiding from God the Creator. As I look back now, I realize I was doing exactly what Adam did after he sinned, when he was awakened to God's holiness and authority over him (Genesis 3:8).

The time finally arrived for me to move abroad. But prior to the actual transfer, I had to hop around different countries on a business trip to conduct tests on our products, which meant I had to fly on many airplanes. There were quite a few hijack incidents happening around that time,



Toru Yasui and his wife.
INSET: *The Creation Answers* book in Japanese, available from creation.com



which made me very concerned. On leaving my house to go to the airport, my wife said to me, "I know you haven't yet decided to believe in Jesus, but if your plane gets hijacked or has an accident, please believe in Him before it crashes." Because I was trying to run away from God, her words upset me. So, I angrily replied, "Just leave me alone!" Then I boarded the bus.

But I soon regretted what I had said. If I did die and never saw my wife again, those would be my last words to her. I wanted to take them back. As I reached the airport, just before boarding, I finally made up my mind to call her.

"I'm sorry I told you to leave me alone. I want to take those words back," I told her.

"Oh, do you mean you want to believe in Jesus?" she immediately asked.

Oops! I had gotten myself into a hole. I was tempted to tell her to leave me alone again, but then I'd have to apologize again. Instead, on the spur of the moment, I surrendered my life to God.

"OK. I believe," I hurriedly said to my wife. "Please pray for me," and then I jumped on the plane. During the flight, I nearly came to the point of trying to undo my sudden decision. But I didn't, because I thought that would come across as being weak-willed.

So, funnily enough, this is how my Christian life began—a sequence of battles with my own pride. But thanks be to God that I did not ever take those words back.

After my business trip, I returned to Japan, got baptized [immersed in water as a symbolic death to my old self], and went to the UK a week later. My family and I spent eight years there.

Some years after my surrender to God, I realized I was completely mistaken about the nature of His author-

ity—the authority I was so afraid of. In John 10:18, Jesus says this about His authority:

"No one takes it [my life] from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again. This charge I have received from my Father."

I always thought I had to sacrifice myself for my authorities. But Jesus' authority was the other way round. His authority caused Him to sacrifice Himself for me. The Maker of the whole universe, the One who created me, sacrificed Himself to save me. Now I live in absolute awe of this amazing Authority. Praise God!

Toru Yasui, M. Eng., has been translating biblical creation resources and speaking on creation topics fulltime in Japan since 2003. He earned his Master's degree in electronic engineering from the Shibaura Institute of Technology.

This article first appeared on creation.com and is used with kind permission.

Believe It or Not

BY CREATION MINISTRIES INTERNATIONAL

'Scale ghosts' haunt long-age earth theories

A REMARKABLY well preserved fossil marine lizard has been discovered in Puglia, Italy, in a limestone deposit already well known for its abundance of fossil fish. The new species of marine lizard, named *Primitivus manduriensis*, is thought to have had a semi-aquatic lifestyle.

Easily observed on the specimen were abundant fossil soft tissues. These



included 'scale ghosts' (the impression of the outline of the outer scales preserved in the inner layer of the skin beneath them), three-dimensional collagen fibres and muscle bundles, and with slightly closer examination even its stomach contents, which included a partially digested bone. The study highlighted that the "muscle fibres are so well preserved that the single myomeres [blocks of muscle tissue] can be easily distinguished with the naked eye!"

Lead author of the study, Ilaria Paparella, explained: "There need to be very special conditions for soft tissue to be preserved on a fossil!"

In this particular case the study detailed that part of those special conditions were the "short time [that] passed between the death of the animal ... and burial after landing on the seafloor".

She went on to say, "For living species, scientists use scale patterns and skin for identification. It was unique to be using these techniques to look at a specimen that died 70 million years ago." (!)

Rather than try to continue to force such wonderful fossils into 'millions-of-years' geology it makes much more sense that this specimen was formed rapidly in the global Flood the Bible describes occurring 4,500 years ago; hence its remarkable state.

Willis, K., Scientists discover new species of ancient marine lizard, *Phys.org*, 21 June 2018.

Paparella, I., et al., A new fossil marine lizard with soft tissues from the Late Cretaceous of southern Italy. *R. Soc. open sci.* 5: 172411, 2018

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BUILDING BETTER RELATIONSHIPS

THE POWER OF YOUR THOUGHTS

BY ROB FURLONG

AS I write this article Australia's Mental Health Awareness Week 2020 has just concluded.

"What in the world does mental health have to do with relationships?" you ask.

Everything, actually – especially in this time of what has come to be called "social distancing."

The term itself has bothered me a little, subtly implying that we must cut off all contact with each other.

"Physical distancing" is much more accurate.

When we are cut off completely – voluntarily and involuntarily – from relational contact, our mental health suffers.

And so do our relationships.

We all battle negative or toxic

thoughts, some of us more than others. Left unchecked, toxic thinking becomes an ingrained pattern in our minds – one that has developed over many years. You would be right in saying it is invariably our default way of thinking.

Science has repeatedly demonstrated that it is our thoughts that determine our behavior, emotions and ultimately, our character.

The South African Psychologist, Dr. Arch Hart summarizes the powerful influence of our thoughts in this way:

"Your thinking determines whether you move toward disease or health, success or failure, achievement or decline. It influences whether you will live a long or short life and whether you will be happy or sad most of the time. It even determines if you'll get married or whether your sex life will be satisfying." (Arch Hart, "Habits of the Mind.")

What Hart is not saying is "just develop a positive mind-set!" Good mental health is certainly enhanced by more positive thinking but

we must not delude ourselves with the idea that people who suffer from a genuine mental disorder will have it all solved by being told to "think happy thoughts."

The Australian National Health Survey revealed that in 2017-2018 4.8 million Australians struggled

with a mental or behavioural condition including things such as anxiety related disorders, depression or feelings of depression. This amounts to 20.1% of the Australian population. In other words, 1 in 5 Aussies struggle with some form of mental illness, debilitating them and their relationships, robbing them of a flourishing life.

However, the good news is that through the development of healthier thinking habits, many people can be helped in their struggles. I am not saying that they should stop seeing their counselor or go off their medication. I am saying that their mental health will be greatly enhanced with the development of new ways of thinking, in addition to the treatment they are already receiving.

I should know because I suffer from an anxiety disorder myself but I have been learning the enormous value of changing my mindset. What follows is something of what I have learned and continue to learn.

What is a toxic thought?

It's a thought that says, "I'm no good", "I'm worthless", "I can't do it",



"I will fail", "I'll screw it up." (Basically fill in your own script here – you know what the thoughts are.)

These two principles below have helped me enormously in dealing with my own toxic thinking:

- When you become aware of the toxic thought, take it captive. In other words, acknowledge it and capture it, rather than allowing it to take root in your mind.
- Renounce the thought. For example, tell yourself "That is a lie! That is not who I am." "That is not what I am going to do." Don't be too hard on yourself if you don't capture the thought right away. Some really helpful advice I read recently is that it is better to take the thought captive later than not at all.

I will share some more principles next month, but for now, let the following wise words encourage you in your thinking -

"Fix your thoughts on what is true, and honourable, and right, and pure, and lovely, and admirable. Think about things that are excellent and worthy of praise." (Paul of Tarsus).

Lessons from a sausage dog (Part 3)

BY JODY BENNETT

THE favourite thing in my day is sitting on the couch after the dinner dishes have been done and reading a book or watching television with my sausage dog curled up on my lap.



Carrie's presence is a great tonic after the stresses of the day and I find every little stretch or sigh so cute that I constantly want to reach out and cuddle her.

If you are an animal person, then you know that our pets don't have to "do stuff" for us to make us love them, we love them simply because they are part of our family.

Just their very presence and affection for us is enough to warrant all the money and effort we spend on them.

Have you ever thought that God might feel the same way about those who love Him?

In the Bible, the book of Zephaniah 3:17 says "the Lord takes great delight in you, He rejoices over you with singing" and Psalm 147:11 says "the Lord delights in those who fear Him, who put their hope in His unfailing love".

Delight? Singing? Is that how you picture God? Or do you think of Him more as waiting with a rolled up newspaper to smack you every time you "mess the carpet" or "dig up the lawn"?

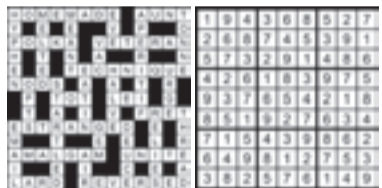
My relationship with Carrie has made me realise again that I don't have to perform for God or always "get it right".

The fact that I return His love for me – even in a sometimes very inadequate and inconsistent way – and out of that love desire to do the things that please Him, is all that He requires.

That is why you might hear some people saying that Christianity is not a religion, but a relationship.

A religion implies that you have do lots of rituals or jump through lots of hoops to get God's approval, but Christianity teaches that Jesus has jumped through all the hoops for us and all we have to do is accept His love and sacrifice on the cross for us, and bask in God's love.

Go on! Stop chasing your own tail trying to "be good enough", instead curl up on God's lap and hear Him singing over you and delighting in your very existence.



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 :

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

Name _____

Address _____

Phone _____

Age and occupation (it helps) _____

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Are you free to be free?

BY DR JIM DENISON (REVISED)

NEW York Governor Andrew Cuomo recently captured the spirit of our age when he said of declining coronavirus cases in his state, "The number is down because we brought the number down. God did *not* do that. Faith did *not* do that. Destiny did *not* do that. A lot of pain and suffering did that" (his emphasis).

In his worldview, we have a binary choice: either we do something, or God does it. The governor doesn't seem to understand that God employs people to do His work, that He can lead scientists and empower doctors in our fallen world. Or that praying for His help is essential to experiencing the fullness of His omnipotent grace: "You do not have, because you do not ask" (James 4:2).

We obviously need scientists and leaders to do their work. We need to wash our hands, social distance and wear masks if called for.

But as we search for ways to defeat this disease, how many of our leaders are turning to God for help? When we make progress in battling the virus, how many of our people are turning publicly to God in gratitude?

When we submit our lives to Jesus, we experience the paradoxical freedom that comes from making Him our Master. Consider this profound observation by Frederick Buechner:

We have freedom to the degree that the master whom we obey grants it to us in return for our obedience. We do well to choose a master in terms of how much freedom we get for how much obedience.

To obey the law of the land leaves us our constitutional freedom, but not the freedom to follow our own consciences wherever they lead.

To obey the dictates of our own consciences leaves us freedom from the sense of moral guilt, but not the freedom to gratify our own strongest appetites.

To obey our strongest appetites for drink, sex, power, revenge, or whatever leaves us the freedom of an animal to take what we want when we want it, but not the freedom of a human being to be human and control our drives.

The old prayer speaks of God 'in whose service is perfect freedom.'

The paradox is not as opaque as it sounds. It means that to obey Love itself, which above all else wishes us well, leaves us the freedom to be the best and gladdest that we have it in us to become. The only freedom Love denies us is the freedom to destroy ourselves ultimately.

How free are you today?

RESPECTED COACH



Liverpool manager Jürgen Klopp rallies his players before the start of extra-time during the UEFA Champions League round of 16 second leg match between Liverpool FC and Atletico Madrid at Anfield on March 11, 2020 in Liverpool. (Photo Michael Regan - UEFA/UEFA via Getty Images)

Liverpool Football Club manager Jürgen Klopp is without doubt one of the most respected and successful soccer managers in the world.

At the time of writing, Liverpool is following up on its 2019 UEFA Championships League victory with the strong possibility of a win in the team's first English Premier League

title in 30 years, a mark of Jürgen's skill. No doubt Liverpool fans are overjoyed about this.

Jürgen, who took over as manager in October 2015, has attracted a lot of media coverage and it has been exciting to watch him skillfully coach Liverpool back to the top of the ladder after years of languishing near the bottom.

What makes him stand out even more is his attitude to what is a very high-pressured career. Jürgen is quick to acknowledge that his Christian faith is more important to him than the game.

When interviewed in 2004 he was asked; "Who is the most important person the world has ever known?" He replied: "Jesus Christ." Then in an interview in 2018 he was asked if he remembered saying that. He replied that he did and explained why.

"This guy [Jesus] comes into the world, and He has a clear mission, but it is not exactly a walk in the park. But in the end [of His life] He took all our sins on

Himself and let them nail Him to the cross.

"For me as a Christian, that is the most decisive thing that ever happened ... because it changed everything [by squaring our debt with God]. It's the greatest act that was ever accomplished, as there was no way we could ever do it [pay for our sins] ourselves," said Jürgen.

Apart from this, Jürgen believes that being a Christian puts his life in "sensational hands." He feels it is a pity if other people "lack this sense of security, although they don't know it, of course, because otherwise they would probably look for it."

The death of Jesus on the cross and His resurrection have done all we need to come into a right relationship with Jesus Christ. As Jürgen says; "we don't need to do anything because someone else [Jesus] did it for us.

"That's a huge, huge comfort," he acknowledges. "The great comfort comes from knowing that we can have forgiveness for everything wrong we have ever done so we can know God personally."

What makes Jürgen unusual is that he does not shy away from sharing his faith. In an interview with *fr-online.de*, he said, "To be a believer [Christian], but not want to talk about it- I do not know how it would work! If anyone asks me about my

faith, I give them information."

With the success that Jürgen has enjoyed, some have proclaimed him as a coaching god, but he himself is quick to debunk that, saying that there is only one true God - the God of the Bible.

The popular coach is not alone in combining soccer and his Christian faith. "All these really likeable guys who I meet week in and week out at matches or in some cases even in training, have one thing in common: they have noticed at some stage in their careers that there must be more to life than championships and relegation battles," he says.

"They relate how a relation-

ship with God has changed their perspective."

Two weeks after starting his manager's role at Liverpool, the German from Stuttgart, showed his willingness to speak openly about his faith, stating: "I'm a Christian, I believe in God...the success is not about me."

It is refreshing to see such humility and graciousness in such a successful and famous sports personality.

In the Bible Jesus promises that "whoever confesses Me before men, him I will also confess before My Father who is in heaven". In the same way Jürgen honours God, he will be one day honoured in eternity. That is the best success of all. •



Jürgen Klopp, manager of Liverpool, during a training session at Melwood Training Ground on May 21, 2020 in Liverpool, England. (Photo John Powell/Liverpool FC via Getty Images)

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