

## OWN YOUR CHOICES

BY ANNE LIM

Perth-based tradesman Walter Ten Haaf blames pride and a people-pleasing streak for his stupid decision to start taking methamphetamines.

Walter's construction business started doing really well and before he knew it he had 25 employees to look after. He was spread thin trying to supervise all his jobs, so he decided to burn the candle at both ends, rising early to start the teams off, as well as running a team himself, and then doing all the paper work at night.

"I made a stupid choice to start taking what I thought were amphetamines to help me stay awake at night to get through my bookwork, paperwork and maintenance," he says.

"I didn't realise it was methamphetamine and before I knew it, we were five months in and my behaviour was becoming erratic. I was making stupid decisions because I didn't realise it had altered my thought processes. A lot of irrationality and aggression were becoming normal and then I had a car accident."

Walter still had meth in his system when he got behind the wheel of his ute before sunrise one day in October 2016 and crossed into the wrong side of the road, crashing head-on into an ambulance.

Thankfully, the paramedic, although badly injured, survived and eventually recovered, but Walter hit rock bottom.

"At the time, I was done – I had nothing left. I had methamphetamine in my system – I was on the wrong side of the road; I shouldn't have been there and I deserved to go to jail," he admits.

A week after the accident, desperate to change his life, Walter checked into Shalom House in the Swan Valley, north of Perth, a Christian residential rehabilitation centre.

Shalom's founder and CEO, Peter Lyndon-James, uses a "tough love" approach to help addicts restore their lives and relationships. Residents pay for their own programs and have to quit all drugs cold turkey, including Panadol, alcohol and cigarettes, hand over their keys and mobile phones, shave their heads and avoid swearing and gossiping. They also attend three church services a week.

"I had just been in a car accident, I had a fractured sternum, three herniated disks, and coming in I received no painkillers at all. That was hard because I had been on



Walter Ten Haaf and his family.

prescription medications for about 10 years before this point, so I went through withdrawals from that as well."

Soon after Walter checked into the program, his wife Nicole decided she had had enough and moved to Queensland with their three children. She returned to Perth after five months so the kids could have a relationship with their dad, "But I wanted nothing to do with him," Nicole says.

However, when she saw the positive changes in Walter, she decided to give their marriage another go, and joined Shalom House's couples' program to start rebuilding their relationship.

Walter's rehabilitation was so extraordinary, that when he faced court for sentencing a year later, his defence lawyer hailed him as a "major, major success story." What the lawyer didn't mention was that the key to Walter's transformation

had been meeting Jesus.

"Most people can make basic changes themselves when it comes to habit," Walter says. "They can change the way they do things – but they can't change the way that they think; they can't change the way that they feel; they can't change the way that they react. That's all internal stuff – you need to have a heart transplant to change the way you are and the only one who can do that is God ... How important was God in

my recovery? Fundamental."

Although Walter had attended a Christian school and grew up in a Christian home, he says he had no relationship with God and was just "going through the motions."

"I never believed in people saying to me 'you've got to invite Jesus Christ into your heart.' For me I thought I'd done it because I was dedicated when I was younger, but then I went to a different church with Shalom House, and somebody said 'do you want to accept Jesus into your heart?' and I was like, 'oh, I'm pretty sure I've done this', but I felt compelled to respond. And I went up there and it was a heartfelt decision to actually invite Christ into my heart; and I remember that night just feeling this amazing peace despite all the consequences of my own actions I was facing – it was just amazing."

His second encounter with Jesus happened after he started digging deep into his childhood trauma in counselling sessions at Shalom.

"The first time I disclosed [my past] was with my counsellor and I remember feeling it was like a weight dropped off – I just felt lighter, literally. And because of that, that gave me the courage to start telling him all the stuff I'd done wrong. And I've done some pretty shocking stuff."

● Turn to page 2

## Infinite variety and you

BY JODY BENNETT

ONE of the wonderful things I love about God is that He is a God of infinite creativity and variety.

Look at the world He has made; all the thousands of zebras, giraffe and tigers, and not one of them has the same markings as any other. Think of all the human beings who have ever lived, and not one of us has the same fingerprints or iris design. Even every single one of billions and billions of snowflakes or stars is unique! Look at leaves. There are so many varieties of shapes and sizes and variations of colour in them. And yet they are all distinct in their species so that we can know an oak leaf from a fig leaf or a palm leaf anywhere. Did you know that there are 26 different species of flea on one stoat?!

(Incidentally I think this is a good argument for creation over evolution, since the forces of nature, had they been able to create one working design for a creature, would



have replicated it like clones, and not had any reason to individualise each one.)

In this paper you will read the stories of people who have come to know Jesus personally and you may think that coming to Christ means that God will take away your individuality and make you boring. That all Christians dress the same, or act the same. But God doesn't make cookie-cutter Christians – Christians come in as many varieties as grains of sand. Rocker Alice Cooper on page 8 is a very different sort of Christian to the ex-Muslim on page 3, or the para-Olympian on page 12. When we become Christians God doesn't erase our uniqueness but enhances it, since He is the one who made us unique in the first place! He doesn't wipe our past out of existence, but reshapes and heals our experiences, the good and the bad, to make us into a beautiful masterpiece reflecting His glory. Each of us has a special aspect of the Creator that we can display to the world through our lives.

Just as there are so many variations in human beings in terms of skin colour, facial features, body shape and hair texture, so there are a beautiful rainbow of differences in the people who follow God.

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Fun for Kids

Pages 5,6,7



Coping with Covid PAGE 9



WHEN YOU JUST CAN'T JESSICA LONG

# Own your choices

• From page 1

Walter says he had grown up not understanding God because of the violence and abuse he suffered, including being molested by a teacher, and the hypocrisy of church members.

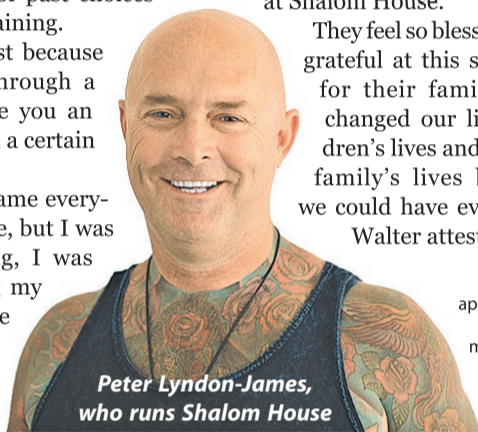
“There was a lot of hypocrisy, a lot of swearing, talking about women the wrong way and making crude jokes. I found porn material at quite a young age, from Christian people. So I had this disconnect and I blamed God for what had happened in my life.”

At the end of the five-stage program at Shalom, which can take up to three years, a resident is clean from drugs and alcohol, has started mending relationships and is working either part or full-time.

Asked what the key to graduating the Shalom program was, Walter says: “It’s pretty easy: Humble yourself – that’s it. Be teachable, be open to be taught. Zero pride. Let go of the past, stop blaming everyone for your problems, and accept the consequences of past choices without complaining.”

“I believe just because you’ve been through a lot doesn’t give you an excuse to act in a certain way.”

“I used to blame everybody for my life, but I was always running, I was always chasing my tail, but peace is elusive if you’re blaming every-



Peter Lyndon-James, who runs Shalom House

body else for the way you are. I finally realised that by owning my stuff, I’ve got a chance of dealing with it and, with support, to get through it.”

Walter and his family were in the Shalom couples’ program for 15 months when he got sentenced for the dangerous driving charge, and went to jail for nine months. “This was hard on the kids as we had just started to feel like a family again. My wife and kids stayed in the program and, once I completed my jail sentence, I went back to Shalom.”

Walter worked as the Chief Operating Officer at Shalom House after his release and he and his wife continued working there a year after they graduated.

They became guardians of a young boy who lost his dad due to addiction. They also had a baby boy in June 2020.

In July 2020 Walter and his family moved down to Mandurah where Walter is working for a building company doing what he loves. They still continue to run the Couples Program at Shalom House.

They feel so blessed by God and grateful at this second chance for their family. “Shalom changed our lives, our children’s lives and our extended family’s lives beyond what we could have ever imagined,”

Walter attests.

The original article appeared in the Bible Society’s Eternity magazine and it has been edited and used with kind permission.

# I wanted a faith that made things happen!

At 15 years old, Swiss-born David Ohin believed there was a God somewhere behind the clouds, but he couldn’t understand why God never answered his prayers.

David attended the local Catholic Church religiously for a while but gave up because “nothing happened”. Every week he confessed his sins and then went out and did the same things again!

Then he met true Christ followers and realised “That’s what I want! That’s real! These guys have got something that I need.”

A bit later he heard a missionary speaking about the difference between life with God and life lived without God, and David knew immediately that he was religious but had no relationship with God, which was what he desperately wanted.

From reading the Bible, he saw that the thing that stood in the way of that relationship was his sin. As Isaiah 59:2 says: “But your iniquities have separated you from your God, and your sins have hidden His face from you, so that He will not hear.”

David says he knew he was a sinner, no one had to tell him that! However, he also knew that coming to God would mean obeying God, including in what he did as a career.

“I had to choose between God and my athletic aspirations to be a long jump and 100m sprint Olympian. No one told me, but I knew athletics was my god and I had to choose which god to follow.”

For about three months he felt torn in two by this mighty internal struggle, until it came to a head one night during a dance party of all things!

“It was about 4am, I was just sitting on a chair when I felt the spirit of God come upon me. In that moment I just



David sharing his faith on the street.

lost all desire for athletics instantly. I was like a drug addict set free. And I never, ever regretted it for one minute.”

The transformation in David was so profound that within days his mother and brother also became Christians, followed by his school friend. About four months later, David’s dad realised that the changes in his family were real and also gave his life to God. David’s dad was radically changed, instantly giving up smoking and witchcraft, and

today he is a missionary in Togo, West Africa.

One of the sins on David’s list had been shoplifting. When he became a Christian, God impressed upon him that he needed to go to each of those shops and pay for what he had stolen. God even helped him to remember each item, how much it had cost and where he had lifted it from. This was an embarrassing and expensive exercise but David knew he had to obey.

After saving up the money, he went to pay for the stolen items. “When I walked out of each shop, after paying, the peace of God filled me. And after the final one, I was the happiest human being on the planet! I thought, ‘If Jesus comes back now, I’m ready!’”

Today David and his wife Donna live in England and run Global Alive Ministries, which they founded to share the good news of Jesus with others through seminars and crusades.

“God is so real! God can transform lives. It is so exciting to live with God! I tell you it is the most exciting life there can be!” David declares.

wanted to get saved!” he exclaims. “Right there I wanted to get right with God.”

Two days later, on Christmas Eve 1990, David contacted a pastor he knew and asked him if he could come to his house to pray with him and give his life to Jesus.

In preparation, David had written down a list of all the sins he could ever remember committing. “It was a long list!” he admits.

With the pastor, David got down on his knees and prayed, “Jesus please save me! Come into my life, forgive my sin. I want to follow You. I want to surrender my life to You.”

Immediately he felt like a heavy burden fell from his shoulders. God’s presence filled the room and his heart was flooded with peace. David said he felt so happy and free that he took the list of his sins and threw it in the hearth fire, knowing that God had forgiven every one of them through the death of Jesus on the cross.

“Some people say Christian faith is a crutch, but I didn’t need one,” David says. “Everything was going well for me. I was a good athlete, school was going well, I had great parents. Life was good!”

“But the day I gave my life to Jesus was the day my life really started. I

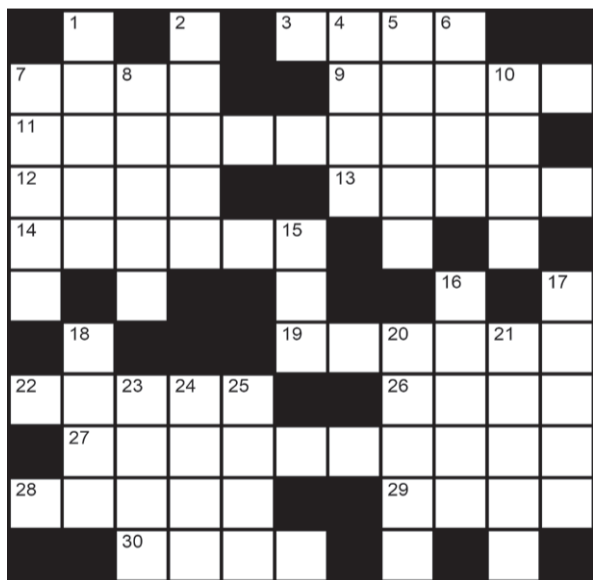
## Coffee Break CROSSWORD & SUDOKU

### ACROSS

- 3 Go without (meals)
- 7 Trunk, torso
- 9 Battery terminal
- 11 Catastrophic destruction
- 12 Unload, as stock
- 13 Exterior
- 14 Small islands
- 19 Free (from)
- 22 Prophet in a fish
- 26 Wind instrument
- 27 Miner’s lamp (6,4)
- 28 Long (for)
- 29 Lamenting word
- 30 Like a busybody

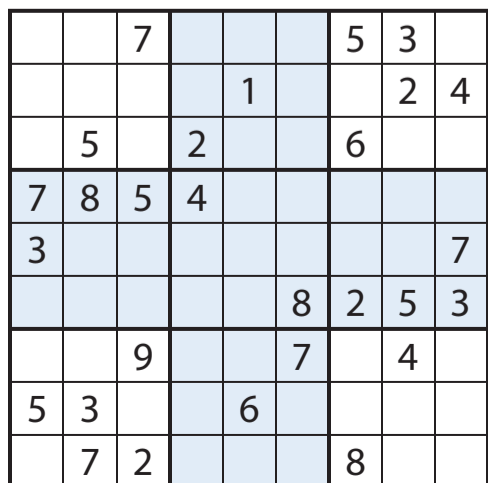
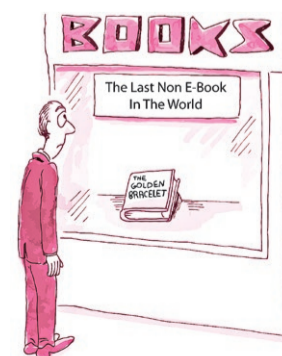
### DOWN

- 1 Aspirations
- 2 Bike around
- 4 Fight stopping event
- 5 Contribution to discussion
- 6 Stake for a sign
- 7 Plain, no frills



- 8 Barbie & Ken
- 10 Not shallow
- 15 Hit the slopes
- 16 Like a hose
- 17 Precursors of Humvees
- 18 Flower on valentines
- 20 Back tooth
- 21 Bedouin, historically
- 23 Indian bread
- 24 Bushy hairdo
- 25 Coop group

### SOLUTIONS PAGE 11



## Infinite variety & you

• From page 1

When I was a teenager I thought that if I gave myself fully to God He would send me as a single missionary into a poor, remote place. That is what I thought all true God-followers did. What did He do instead? He fulfilled my deep longing for a husband and children and helped me use my natural talents, studies and personal experiences to bring Him glory in ways that also bring me more joy than I could have imagined.

Rest assured that if you turn your life over to God, your individuality will not be erased. You become a new creation in Christ but that new you is still you. God wants all sorts of Christians – intellectual ones and practical ones, dreamers and rule followers, extroverts and introverts, laughers and criers, the impetuous and the fearful, those who like ritual and those who like spontaneity. All people from all backgrounds and histories and abilities, carrying all sorts of burdens and sins, are all invited to find their true selves in relationship with Jesus Christ, who redeems us from our pasts and gives us a purpose and an eternal future with Him.



Some of the variety of leaf shapes in the world.

## Dear Challenge News,

I JUST picked up issue 445 from the Christian Bookstore and really enjoyed reading it.

As you rightly say, it’s good news and we certainly need a lot more of that these days. Our society has changed a lot and people have changed and I believe we need faith today more than ever. I’m finding it challenging on most days to deal with the negativity and the terrible media onslaught on us all.

I would love to receive your paper on a regular basis as it’s so good to read stories that are positive, inspirational and uplifting, which we certainly need.

Carmel Votano

Has Challenge News impacted your life?

Please tell us how at [jodyb@challengenews.org](mailto:jodyb@challengenews.org)

# From abuse and shame to freedom

**A**ishah's father had been an alcoholic for as long as she could remember. Her earliest memory of him was being spat at and kicked to the ground, being called names no five-year-old should hear.

When things deteriorated further, Aishah's mother, an American, feared for their lives so much she persuaded her husband to allow her to leave Jordan and return to the US on the pretext of improving Aishah's English.

"We moved in 2000. Dad would come and visit but his alcoholism just got worse and worse," Aishah explains.

She was about 14 when she left her home in Amman, Jordan. In the US, she fell in love with a boy at high school and got pregnant at age 17 - a disastrous turn of events for the teenager, whose Muslim family was very conservative and traditional.

"If I'd gone to my dad he would have murdered me - and I don't mean that figuratively," she shares in a video on YouTube. "And if I had told my mum, she would have told my dad. I didn't have anyone to confide in except my boyfriend."

Feeling she had no other options, Aishah had an abortion. She remembers that as being a very difficult time. "It was devastating for me. I struggled with shame, embarrassment, depression and anxiety." She admits she tried many ways to fill the void and insecurity, but reveals "that only made things worse. It made the void deeper and I went into a dangerous and dark spiral."

Aishah says she had been taught her sins were unforgivable. "I knew I was hated by Allah. In fact, I read in the Koran a verse that said those who disbelieve and commit wrong, never will Allah forgive them nor will he guide them to a path. Except the path of hell."

Grief turned to fear and hopelessness when she read that. "I was crying and thinking of ways I could end my life because, if there's no forgiveness, then what's the point in me living?"

Something made her stop in the midst of her sobs. She heard a voice, an audible voice that said the name "Jesus".

"I looked up to heaven and opened my hands. I had tears running down my face and I said, 'Jesus I don't know who you are but please reveal yourself to me because I can't go on living like this anymore.'"

As soon as she finished praying, Aishah says she felt different. "I felt peace," she smiles. "That was the first time I had ever felt any form of peace from praying."

Soon afterwards, she met a Christian man. While having dinner with his family one night, she says she found herself thinking: "I want what they have. They have love and joy and peace. They were so loving; they have Jesus in their lives."

She began attending church with them and soon heard Romans 5:8, which reads: "But God demonstrates His own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us."

"The moment I discovered that God loves us not because of our goodness but rather in spite of our lack of goodness, was the moment I realised how different Christianity is," Aishah says, smiling.

She committed her life to Jesus Christ but had one last mountain to conquer - her unforgiveness towards her father. "For years I had a lot of anger towards my dad," she says candidly. "I prayed for the Lord to soften my heart and to help me see my dad as God saw him. When he was dying I was on the phone with him and I said: 'Baba, Jesus loves you and you can spend eternity with Him and us one day. He died on the cross for you. Your sins are forgiven if you give your life to Him. Do you receive Christ into your life?'"

She expected a flat 'no'. "But instead, with a big smile in his voice he said, 'Yes, I do'. I was so excited; he said he was excited that he would see us again one day.

"Jesus says in John 10:10 that He came to give us abundant life. It's what He wants for all of us. I lived with so much shame and condemnation but now I have freedom, the freedom that comes through Jesus Christ," Aishah beams.

# COFFEY: LIFE IS MORE THAN COUNTRY MUSIC AND CANCER

**C**offey Anderson is a country music singer who is currently starring in a new Netflix reality show called *Country Ever After*, which follows his family around as they make music, do life, laugh hysterically and talk about God.

The show came out of a practical joke that he pulled on his wife that ended up going viral and being liked by 57 million people!

Coffey (pronounced Cof-fay) is a highly amusing and entertaining guy, as proved by his podcast interview with Billy Hallowell on edifi. He is also a very talented musician, who grew up in Texas in a family of church singers and song writers. At 6 foot 5, everybody thought he would be a professional basketballer, but Coffey knew he wanted to sing.

He tells Billy that when they were offered a reality show deal with Roma Downey's *Lightworkers* they agreed it would not be the run-of-the-mill, people-behaving-badly reality show, "because my wife and I agreed long ago to fight for each other, not with each other". The show, they agreed, would make peo-

ple laugh and cry but would also be safe for kids and grandmothers, and be without a political agenda.

One of the issues dealt with on the show is Coffey's wife Criscilla's battle with cancer. The couple also pray openly and go to church on screen.

Through their faith in God and the example of his dad, Coffey wants to exhibit what real care and love look like during hard times.

"Life is not fair, but God is always good," Coffey declared, revealing that his mom died of lung cancer when he was 11. "I can remember how my dad took care of my mom, and how he was the one carrying her to the bathroom and washing her



Coffey and Criscilla Anderson.

back. So now, I'm taking care of my wife."

Coffey shares that as extrovert as he is, his wife's health struggles were hard for him to share on camera. He didn't want her looking weak and tired, or their children to see later how she had suffered. He wanted to protect his family, so when Criscilla started throwing up or there was a

problem with her colostomy bag, he just threw the camera crew out. But she said, "You've got to let them in. We have to show them the whole story."

Criscilla has stage 4 metastatic colon cancer, which is now in her lymph nodes.

Coffey admits Criscilla's illness has been hard on their faith. "It's up and down. Some days it's easier to believe than others. That's why it is so important to surround yourself with people who are praying for you and with you. And to keep going back to inspiring things - the Bible, Christian music, talking to Grandma or just getting out the house for a bit."

Coffey shares that his faith journey started young, growing up in a Christian home and singing in church from age six. His house was always filled with Christian music and prayer meetings and by college he was majoring in Spanish and Bible and determined to be a missionary in South America.

While in college, he borrowed a guitar from his then girlfriend's dad. Learning chords in his dorm room and singing while having

his fellow college students lining the halls to listen. After singing in a local opening slot for a band (MercyMe) that came to town, Coffey had a small buzz. He never looked back! When record labels wouldn't sign him, he created CoffeySouthernMan on YouTube and started his own career.

His music, comedy, and personality got his channel to over 100,000 subscribers. He then started producing his own albums, booking his own shows, and editing his videos in his garage.

With Youtube and Facebook combined, Coffey Anderson has over 500 million views and has sold over 500,000 iTunes downloads. Tens of thousands of fans follow him on YouTube, Twitter, Facebook and Instagram. He has released 12 albums, six of which are country and six are gospel.

After a failed marriage, and one child (now 18), Coffey met hip-hop dancer Criscilla Crosslands in church in 2008. She had recently been introduced to Jesus and the two of them decided to learn more about God together and try to live as Jesus commanded. They married on Valentine's Day, 2010.

The couple couldn't be more different, as Coffey explains: she is vegan, he's a carnivore; she's city, he's country; and he's "a brother" and she's a white girl. Together they have a son Ethan, 9, and two daughters Emmarie, 6, and Everleigh, 3.

Of Criscilla's illness, Coffey admits, "I just sit here feeling helpless at times but still believing that God is faithful."



Coffey Anderson with his wife Criscilla in hospital.



Coffey Anderson with his wife Criscilla and children (from left) Everleigh, Ethan and Emmarie.

# Prostitute discovers new purity

BY BEN LAHOOD

Annie Lobert was raised in Minneapolis. Her alcoholic father was relentlessly harsh toward her, so when the boys paid her compliments in high school, she swooned. Her high school sweetheart talked of forming a family, but then she found out he was cheating.

"I completely took my entire heart and gave it to this boy and when I found out that he was sleeping with several of my best girlfriends, it was such a shock to me."

Annie moved out on graduation day. She was working three jobs to make ends meet, so when a friend told her she had a Corvette in Waikiki and a lavish lifestyle spending days on the beach, Annie agreed to visit.

"I knew something wasn't right, but the lure of the possibility of having nice things and finally having money that I never had growing up was too much to resist," she says.

Her friend was prostituting herself, and Annie joined her.

"I became a different person, a harlot, the Queen of Lies," she says. "I was embraced by the devil and his false love."

At first the money was good, really good:

between \$1,000 and \$10,000. But later she fell for a sweet-talking guy who took her to Las Vegas.

After she arrived she discovered her "boyfriend" was actually a pimp. She now had to work for him under threat of death.

After a day of working, she came home with a wad. "Break yourself," he told her, meaning that she must hand over all the money to him. This was very different from his charming demeanour earlier, so she resisted.

"He proceeded to take me out by my hair," she remembers on an I am Second video. "He choked me. He threw me on the porch on my knees and he started kicking me. My nose broke. My ribs broke.

"I was looking at the devil."

He raped her, held a gun to her head and let her know she would never escape alive.

After five years, she managed to get free.

"You'll leave the money, the cars, the houses all behind, because when you leave a pimp, you leave with nothing," she says.

Annie wasn't as young anymore, so the money wasn't as good. She developed cancer and lost all her hair undergoing chemotherapy.

She started taking painkillers for bone pain and became addicted. From there, she went on to cocaine. She was wearing wigs and staying in seedy motels. Feeling debased and dirty, she

decided one night to end it all with an overdose of freebase cocaine.

"I went completely blind," she recalls. "It's like the whole room, the light that was on in that room

turned dark, and I remember laying there. And I felt this demonic presence just come over me. I got really really scared and I just instinctively knew that I was at death's door."

Her own funeral flashed in front of her eyes.

People were crying. "She was just a prostitute," they said.

As she was slipping into death, Annie suddenly regretted her attempt at suicide. She cried out to God. "Jesus, please save me. I don't know if you are real, but I don't want to die."

An ambulance picked her up and a doctor told her she was lucky to be alive.

"Little lady, you should be dead," he told her. "God must be with you."

"I knew that Jesus heard my prayer and I

laid there," Annie says. "And I had this peace come over me that was nothing like I had ever felt in my entire life, and I knew God gave me a second chance."

As she recovered in the hospital, Annie read her Bible. She dared to attend church when she got out. She was surprised that nobody judged her.

As she read her Bible it transformed her self-concept. "God the Holy Spirit was just like speaking to me telling me that I was beautiful, that I was chosen, that I was set apart and I was a holy vessel for Him. I started to stand on Jesus' words that I'm home, that I'm healed, that I'm pure, that I'm a virgin in Him,

and that gives me peace."

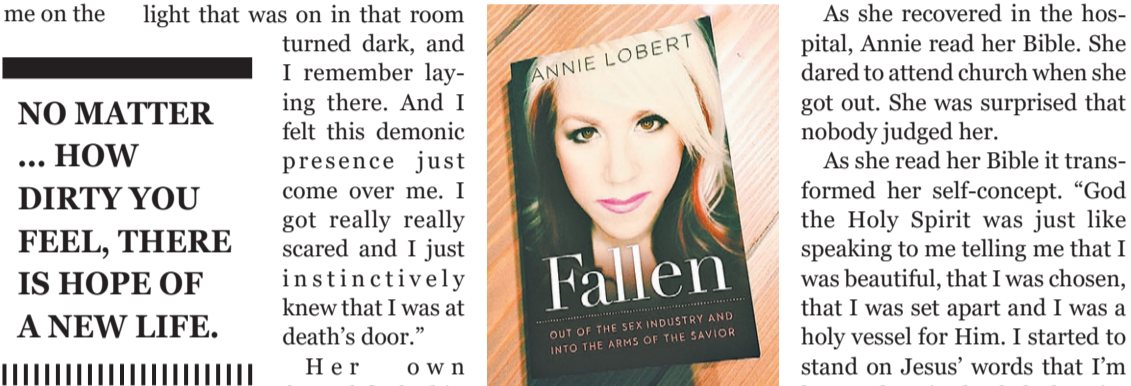
An ex-client gave her a job at an auto body and design firm.

Then God called her back to the Strip.

"I want you to go back down to that strip," he told her. "I want you to tell the girls that are in slavery, that I love them. God loves you, no matter where you are, no matter what you've done, no matter how deep, how dirty you feel, there is hope of a new life. You can be made white as snow, if you accept Him into your heart."

In 2005, she founded Hookers for Jesus outreach and opened a transition home called Destiny House for victims of sex trafficking.

**NO MATTER ... HOW DIRTY YOU FEEL, THERE IS HOPE OF A NEW LIFE.**



Annie Lobert

# Have I got a book for you!

## Christianity was the one religion where it didn't matter that Vann only had one arm.

BY MICHAEL COLLIE

As a young Buddhist, Cambodian Vann Menghoeun was prevented from joining a monastery.

"I wanted to become a Buddhist monk. But because I have only one arm the head monk said 'no'. I was not surprised. I knew this taboo was consistent with Buddhist teaching, but I felt angry. I decided to change my religion. I began to study Taoism until I again discovered that having an incomplete body made it impossible for me to enter a monastic order."

**Fearfully and wonderfully made**

But when Menghoeun met Jesus he knew he was welcome.

"A Christian friend included me in his social circle. Together we went to the beach for picnics. He invited me to church and gave me a Bible. I am by nature curious, earnest and thorough so



In his spare time Vann Menghoeun and his wife distribute books published in the Khmer language for people from a Buddhist background.

I started to read the Bible beginning at Genesis chapter one verse one. God spoke to me when I read Psalm 139:13. 'For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb.' I was overwhelmed by gratitude and joy. I decided to trust in Jesus."

**Books make us strong**

Menghoeun thanks God for many blessings. "My father was a labourer and couldn't afford to send me to university, but God enabled me to do tertiary study, have a computer, get a job, marry and find a house.

"Christian books have made me strong. If we want to become more

like Jesus we first have to know him. Reading helps us to know and follow Jesus. Christian books help us to understand God's word and put it into practice. Books are especially useful for young people making big decisions and church leaders teaching and caring for their people."

**Sharing books**

"In my spare time I distribute books published in Phnom Penh by Fount of Wisdom. These books are published in the Khmer language for people from a Buddhist background. I sell books in universities and churches. I choose books to complement each conference, lecture or sermon. Before I recommend a book, I read it so I can explain what it will teach us and how it will help us. Once people discover how useful books can be, they ask me what they should read next. They ask me to tell them when I think a new book might be important for them.

"Reading is good for you. Reading is encouraging and makes us strong. Christian books even helped me choose and court my wife."

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## TAKE TIME FOR WHAT MATTERS

BY KARL FAASE

**RESEARCH** shows that Australians have a great life. After surveying 34 countries in the OECD, Australia came out on top in almost every measure.

The survey found that average Australian houses are bigger and we live longer. We are the fourth most satisfied with our lives, when asked about perceived health. As a nation, Australians have a high level of disposable income.

So what is the area where Australians are at the bottom of the pack? Two crucial statistics; first in the hours spent at work, sometimes more than 50 hours a week, and secondly, a lack of time for sleep and personal care.

Is it possible that the big houses and the high incomes created through hard work, potentially rob us of the chance to enjoy life? Let's be sure we enjoy all of life. There is no point owning a large house but having no relationships to share inside it.

Perhaps right now, as we all spend a lot more time at home during periods of lockdown, you could make the use of this time to invest in your family relationships, and your sleep.

# Surprising truth behind shock rocker's façade



Alice Cooper performs during Fire Fight Australia at ANZ Stadium on February 16, 2020 in Sydney, Australia. (Photo by Cole Bennetts/Getty Images) **INSET:** The man behind the makeup.

**K**nown as the godfather of shock rock, Alice Cooper has had a successful career spanning 50 years. But an addiction to drugs and alcohol almost ended that career, as well as his life.

Alice, whose real name is Vincent Furnier, spoke to Pastor Greg Laurie about his life in a video shared on YouTube.

Alice formed his music group in the 1960s when he was in high school and fame and success came quickly.

"When you're 20 years old you're also indestructible and fame does not come with an instruction book that says okay now you're famous and this is what you're supposed to do," Alice says.

He said as a young man making a lot of money and having a lot of energy, he was like a kid in a candy shop.

In the interview, Alice talked about how many of his friends' lives were destroyed by drugs and that his life could have gone that way.

His breaking point was when his wife Sheryl went away and had said to him before she left, "I can't watch this."

But, as Alice put it, cocaine was speaking a lot louder than her. He said he finally looked in the mirror and it looked as though blood was coming out of his eyes.

He flushed the cocaine down the toilet and went to bed for three days. When he

woke up he called Sheryl and told her what had happened and that he was done with drugs.

She told him he had to prove it to her and part of the deal they made was that Alice would attend church.

They started attending a Baptist church where the pastor preached about the reality of hell.

"I grew up in the church," Alice explains. "My dad was a pastor, my granddad was an evangelist and when the band happened it took me as far away as you could possibly go. I knew who Jesus Christ was and I was denying him because I was living my own life and I was living my life without Him. I knew that there had to come a point where I either accepted Christ and started living that life, or if I died in this [life] I was in a lot of trouble and that's what really motivated me... A lot of people say, 'I came to Christ because of my love of Jesus' - I came to Christ because of my fear of God. I totally understood that hell was not getting high with Jim Morrison. Hell was going to be the worst place ever."

Alice attended another church where the pastor preached the love of Christ.

"You put the two together and it was exactly right," he says.

Explaining what happened when he accepted Christ as his Lord and Saviour, Alice said, "I just got to a point

of saying I'm tired of this life and I know that this is right... when the Lord opens your eyes and you suddenly realise who you are and who He is, it's a whole different world."

Alice said he then got baptised [immersed in water as a sign of dying to his old

life] and he spoke to his pastor about quitting being 'Alice Cooper'. His pastor encouraged him to continue the persona.

"He said, 'What if you're Alice Cooper

but what if you're now following Christ and you're a rock star but you don't live the rock star life? Your lifestyle is now your testimony,' and that made total sense to me," he explains.

So Alice continued making music but changes were taking place.

"My lyrics were now aiming towards Christ," he says.

He also completely quit using drugs and alcohol.

"I found when I got sober I had so much more fun touring because now I could remember what I did," Alice says.

He said his peers within the music industry noticed the change in him and asked him what happened.

"The Lord is in my life now," Alice replied. "I'm still Alice Cooper, I'm still playing this dark character, but he's an agent of Christ."

Now 73, Alice is the founder of Alice Cooper's Solid Rock, a non-profit faith-based organisation which helps teenagers discover their passions by offering music, arts, vocational programs and time with each other. •

# Ex-witch changed by Cooper's story

**F**ormer 'white witch' Simone Peer grew up learning about the occult from her mother.

Horoscopes, numerology, the Ouija Board, seeing ghosts, and psychic phenomenon were all normal in her childhood home.

In an interview with CBN, Simone said she was molested by a neighbour when she was five years old and was also physically and verbally abused by a family member. These events led her to believe she was completely unlovable and worthless.

As a teenager, she attempted to numb her feelings with promiscuity, drugs and alcohol. However, she went on to experience suicidal thoughts.

In college she thought she found truth when she met a woman who taught her to use tarot cards.

"My attention would be drawn into different details of the card that would sort of open a door on that invisible side that would tell me those secrets," she remembers.

Simone immersed herself deeper into the occult as she researched more about New Age ideas and practices.

When she was 20, she became a 'white witch' – something Simone thought was divine and heavenly. In her mind it was the 'good side' of the occult.

"I kept believing that if I pursued more and more and more light that I would find the answer to what was wrong with me and somehow I would get fixed, and it would all just feel better," Simone recalls.

For the next three decades Simone pursued enlightenment, aiming to become a high priestess – the highest level of white witchcraft.

Then she got involved in other forms of spirituality such as Santeria – a religion that involves animal sacrifice. "It was the shedding of blood in which we were able to be cleansed, healed and gain power and rise through levels of initiation," Simone explains.

Despite believing she was achieving new levels of enlightenment, Simone still felt empty.

"There were so many things about the spiritual path that I loved and that made me feel happy, however, my life was a contradiction," she says. "I also was in just the deepest, darkest pit. This is the beautiful deception."

In 2017 Simone watched a video about heavy metal musician Alice Cooper. In the video Alice said he found freedom from alcoholism and new life in Jesus Christ.

"I realised that I was an ambassador for Satan," Simone says. "I didn't even know what it meant to have Jesus. I didn't understand it at all, I just knew that my heart cracked open, I knew that He was there, and I knew I was a 'Yes'. When I went through that salvation prayer and there were points of repentance, what really stood out to me was the thinking that I was God, the thinking that my spells were not manipulations of other people and other things. And I just said it out loud and raised my hand to God and I pleaded and repented and prayed over myself."

After becoming a follower of Jesus, Simone turned away from everything associated with the occult and threw away physical objects associated with her former life in the new age.

She started attending a church and went through the process of being delivered from demonic strongholds, something that enabled her to feel free in her heart and spirit.

Simone now works as a life coach and makes it her mission to tell others that Jesus is the true light of the world.

"For those who walked the same path that I did, Jesus is the answer that you are looking for," she says. •



Simone Peer as she is now.

**JESUS IS THE ANSWER THAT YOU ARE LOOKING FOR**





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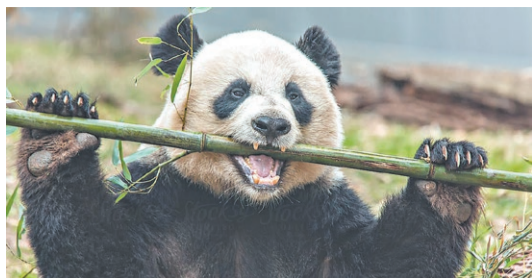
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Coping with Covid ...Coping with Covid ... Coping with Covid... Coping with Covid...



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On average, a Panda feeds for approximately 12 hours per day. This is the same as an adult at home under quarantine, which is why we call it a "Pandemic"



American Lydia Booth never expected her mask to cause a problem at school, she simply liked that, "It makes me feel like I'm protected by Jesus." School officials told her she couldn't wear it because of a policy not allowing masks with political or religious messages. However, Lydia's mother checked the handbook and dress code and didn't find that restriction. Nevertheless, Lydia's classmates have been encouraging, sending her notes of support. One requested a mask just like it, and the older sister of another said she resolved to study the whole Bible after hearing about the case.



**Be kind**



When Lisette LeJeune of Houston, Texas, and her kids, who are 14 and 3 years old, got Covid-19 in December, their family members lived too far away to help much. As a makeup artist, Lisette has been out of work throughout the pandemic, and being a single parent made it hard to cope when she was really sick. But a few days later, Lisette opened the front door to find a special care package! Inside were several get-well essentials like chicken noodle soup, crackers, and cookies. There was also a handwritten note, from Mary, their mail carrier, a stranger Lisette had only briefly spoken to one time! "Get-well wishes... I hope you all are feeling better!" the note read. Lisette was instantly choked up by the thoughtfulness of the unexpected act of kindness.

Calvary Temple Church in Hyderabad, with more than 330,000 members, has distributed 700 tons of food supplies to families in desperate need since Covid began. Now, as India is in the grip of a devastating second wave, their church building has been converted into a 300-bed Covid Care Centre. "We admit anyone who knock on our door regardless of caste, creed, race and religion we admit them," Calvary Temple Pastor Dr P. Satish Kumar told the Global News Alliance. "And we try to provide needed treatment. The response has been tremendous. And it has been a wonderful experience in showing the love of Christ to all these needy ones. "God is love and God is expecting us to show His love in action. We don't convert people but we direct people to the one who created them so that they will find a way and find peace and happiness."

Jessica Roth, who suffered months of long Covid, decided that 'the best medicine for despair is service,' so, among other things, she and her children filled and refilled a basket of treats for delivery drivers, and sent cards to the loved ones they so desperately missed. "In suffering: serving matters," Jessica says, having found joy in the toughest of times.



Ponder

**HTML PAPI** @yehme2

the covid vaccine isn't going to have a microchip in it..... you already voluntarily gave up your biometrics and location data willingly to the phone you're reading this tweet on. that is all.

1:56 PM · Nov 11, 2020

**Emaperidol** @Emaperidol

My boyfriend got his covid vaccine yesterday and I can tell you the most prominent side effect is the inability to shut up about getting the covid vaccine.

3:02 PM · Dec 16, 2020

**jordan** @jordan\_stratton

You won't take a vaccine because you don't know what's in it? Real quick, name all the ingredients in a Pop Tart.

**Matthew Carswell** @MattyRFC72

COVID is a scam and the vaccine is being given out to control your Brians

5:44 PM · Nov 9, 2020

**Wendy Warner** 6 months ago

Run Brians... RUN!!!

22 Reply

**SO LET ME GET THIS STRAIGHT**

**PEOPLE IN YOUR COUNTRY ACTUALLY REFUSE VACCINES?**

# Christianity has solid answers to its worldview challengers

BY ROBIN SCHUMACHER

As a Gen Z wrestling with issues like global warming, transgenderism, homosexuality and truth, do you feel that the Christian church or your Christian friends, if you don't go to church, have answers to your hard questions about the relevance of faith to life?

I continue to see data suggesting that many people leave the church or consider it irrelevant because it fails to answer the tough questions that are thrown at it. The fact is, it's ugly out there and getting worse.

Data from the Barna group has identified a number of disturbing trends: Gen Z teens are much less likely to assert religious identity than generations before them with a rise in espoused atheism also being witnessed. Almost half of practicing Christian Millennials (47%) believe that evangelism is wrong, and my bet is that their lack of confidence in being able to answer hard questions from their unbelieving friends plays a role in this.

Who can blame them? In the worldview boxing ring, the opposing corner of Christianity has an impressive array of challengers that is certainly intimidating.

First up is the current **post-truth culture**. Postmodernism was one thing, but dealing with a secular mood that acknowledges something is true and yet rejects it because it goes against their personal preferences

or interferes with their social/political activism is an entirely different beast.

Then we have **scientism**, which is the default fall back foundation for those who reject spirituality. Scientism is critical for the non-religious in order to, as Richard Lewontin puts it, "not allow a divine foot in the door."

For some, scientism devolves into something more antagonistic – something I call **hatetheism**. Think of it as atheism with healthy doses of snideness, contempt, and a willingness to do anything needed to make religious faith appear idiotic and even dangerous.

Last but not least is the relatively new voice of **apatheism**.

On its opposition to Christianity, authors Paul Rowan Brian and Ben Sixsmith state: "The greatest threat to Christianity is found not in the arguments of the atheist but in the assumptions of the apathetic. The danger is not a hostile reception of belief in God but an incurious indifference to the idea."

Against these seemingly-powerful opponents to Christianity, who can blame Gen Z and others for doubting that Christianity has anything relevant to contribute to their understanding of the world?

## Appallingly Superficial

But are these four enemies of Christianity really the big, bad wolves they seem to be? I don't think so and here's why.

If there are two words that perfectly define our day, they are: appallingly superficial. The whole world of digital Babylon exemplifies this perfectly in everyday life and they apply equally well to the religious landscape.

For example, in discussing his exit from Christianity, one blogger leaning into hatetheism provided a list of books that motivated him to leave the faith. He concluded by saying that he hoped to read them one day.

Seriously?

This shallow attitude is both sad and encouraging at the same time. Sad, in that it shows how flippant some people take matters of religion. But also encouraging because when such an attitude is directly and lovingly confronted by the robust intellectualism, logic, and meaningfulness that has defined Christianity since day one, it disintegrates into the vapour that it is.

These house-of-cards foundations are likely why Christian apologist

William Lane Craig says that he is oftentimes confronted by upset atheists at the end of his debates who assert that the only way "their side" did so poorly during the event was because it was a setup. However, they get really intellectually defrocked when they discover that Craig's opponents were not chosen by Craig but instead hand-picked by their own atheist group!

The fact is, Christianity is indeed a robust, personally meaningful and intellectually satisfying alternative to its rivals who truly aren't as ferocious as they appear.

Years ago, a man came up to theologian Francis Schaeffer and asked him many deep questions about Christianity. After Schaeffer answered everything that was thrown at him, the man paused, then said: "Thank you. Now I can worship God much better."

The answers are out there for anyone curious and determined enough to find them. Don't let a 'dumb church', or uninformed Christians put you off.

### Helpful resources:

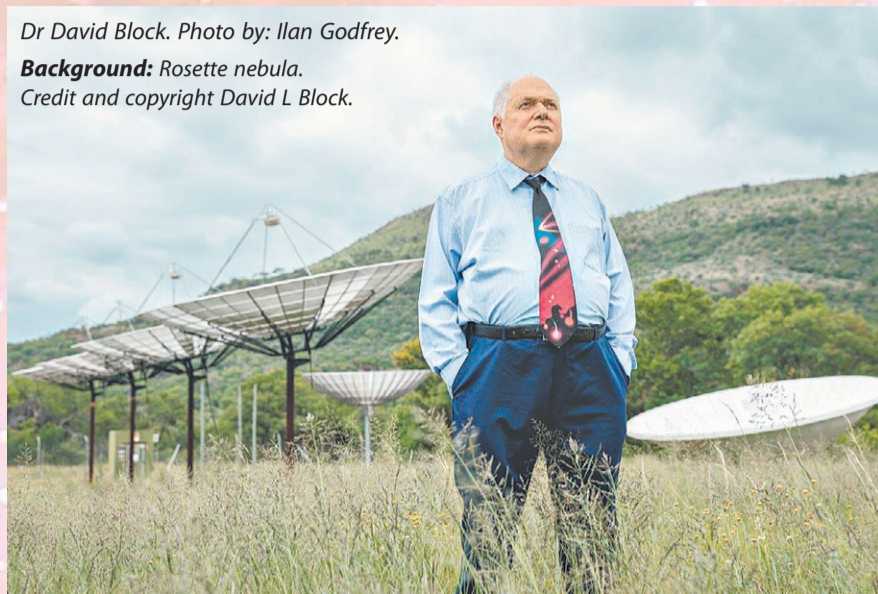
- For answers on evolution vs creation: Creation.com
- For proofs on the authenticity of the historical Jesus and the existence of God: Lee Strobel's books
- *Love Thy Body* by Nancy Pearcey
- *The Great Global Warming Debate* DVD
- *Is God Anti-Gay?* by Sam Allberry

Robin Schumacher is a software executive and Christian apologist who has written many articles, appeared on nationally syndicated radio programs, and presented at various events. He holds a Master's Degree in Christian apologetics and a Ph.D. in New Testament.

# Intellectually sharp but spiritually empty

Dr David Block. Photo by: Ilan Godfrey.

Background: Rosette nebula. Credit and copyright David L. Block.



Professor David Block's love for astronomy started as a young man growing up in Krugersdorp, South Africa, when his father built him an observatory in their garden and he looked up to see the wonders of the night sky.

Now an astronomer, author and inspirational speaker, David has spent the past 40 years travelling the world and encouraging people to "look up".

Sharing his story in a YouTube video, David said the observatory was big enough for a few people to stand in and had a dome attached to a motor allowing the dome to rotate with the sky.

This attracted the attention of Sir Patrick Moore, who visited David in Krugersdorp to film the observatory for the English BBC program, *The Sky at Night*.

At this time David was studying applied mathematics and computer science at university and he met Professor Lewis Hurst, who was a professor of genetics and medicine and shared David's love for astronomy. The pair would regularly discuss the complexities of the cosmos.

"I would delight in explaining to him fundamentals in astronomy such as black holes, or quasars," David remembers.

He became fascinated by the mathematical formulation of general relativity and he submitted his first research paper on that theme to the Royal Astronomical Society of London in 1973 when he was 19. It was published the following year.

"How humbling it was for me to receive requests from observatories and universities for reprints or printed copies of that research paper which I wrote at age 19," David says. "Requests from academics from Canada, to Israel, to the United Kingdom, to New Zealand were invariably addressed to 'Dr' David Block. Little did anyone know overseas that my age was 20 and that I was merely a 'Mr'."

David said although he felt intellectually stimulated, he began to feel like something was missing.

David was raised in an orthodox Jewish family and as a young boy, he would listen to his rabbi teach that God was a personal God and that He spoke to individuals in the Hebrew Scriptures.

"But He seemed so far removed from me," David remembers. "Where was the personality and vibrancy of a God who could speak to me?"

David said questions within his soul gripped him and he began sharing his thoughts, feelings and doubts with his professor friend. He wondered what the purpose for living was and whether it was possible to have a personal encounter with the creator of the cosmos.

He remembered looking through his telescope at Saturn and feeling sure there was a Great Designer but that he had zero connection with Him.

When David was 22, he was introduced to a Reverend John Spyker, who read him a verse in the New Testament which affirmed that Yeshua (Jesus in Hebrew) was a stumbling block to the Jewish people but they who freely choose to believe in Yeshua shall never be ashamed (Romans 9:33).

"It all instantaneously became very clear to me," David explains. "Yeshua was the stumbling stone. The stumbling stone. My stumbling stone. Jesus had fulfilled all the messianic prophecies in the Hebrew

Scriptures such as where the Jewish Messiah would be born, how He was to die, and much besides. While many of my Jewish people were and are still awaiting the Messiah, I suddenly knew that I knew that Jesus is the living Messiah... All I had to do that day was freely respond to His grace (undeserved kindness)."

David asked the reverend to pray for him.

"I surrendered my heart and my reason to the Lord Jesus that day. The spirit of Jesus infused every cell of my being," he says.

David said since then he has seen God work in his private life and in his career as an astronomer.

"I have travelled to and used telescopes at some of the world's greatest observatories, from Chile to Hawaii. I adore photography, and one of my greatest joys was securing a photograph of the Rosette nebula. There are truly no words to describe its intricate and delicate beauty."

David said God has guided him into one of his main areas of research - cosmic dust - after he read a verse in the Bible, which says, "I will give you the treasures of darkness and hidden riches of secret places, that you may know that I, the Lord, who call you by your name, am the God of Israel." (Isaiah 45:3)

"It was God speaking to me through the Scriptures by means of his Holy Spirit," David explains. "He was going to reveal to me the hidden treasures of darkness."

David's research featuring cosmic dust in galaxies has been featured on the cover of the world's most prestigious scientific journal, *Nature*.

He has also written multiple books, including *God and Galileo: What a 400 year old letter teaches us about faith and science*.

"Throughout my career I can bear testimony to God reaching out His hand to me, leading me, guiding me, protecting me," David says. "My motto is simple - never give up, but look up. I remain enthralled by the grace and love of Jesus, the luminous figure of the Nazarene." •

## GET ANSWERS FOR YOUR FAMILY

Young people struggle to find purpose in life, believing that 'science' has made God irrelevant. CREATION MAGAZINE provides answers for your family.



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# BUILDING BETTER RELATIONSHIPS

## THE IMPORTANCE OF RESILIENCE

BY ROB FURLONG

Every successful sprinter will tell you that the key to winning is keeping your focus on the finish line. Never look to see where your opponent is and most certainly, never look back!

In his wonderful book, *A Resilient Life*, Gordon MacDonald writes "...there are some (people) who stand out from all the rest...the further they run, the stronger they get..."

He calls such people "resilient ones" and describes the qualities he has observed in them; qualities that are the reasons behind the strong impression they leave on people.

The same thought can be applied to marriages. Why is it that some marriages make it through the toughest of times - even emerging from them

stronger - when other marriages fall apart?

It comes back to one word: resilience.

Resilient marriages are committed to finishing strong.

One of the more negative aspects to emerge from the COVID-19 crisis is the fact that people are not as resilient as they once were.

To put it bluntly, many of us have become psychologically flabby when it comes to dealing with what the present circumstances have thrown at us and this also includes our relationships.

But resilient people - and marriages - are committed to both running and finishing the race of life strongly: they take seriously the vows they have made to each other to be committed to each for life! To achieve this requires developing an intimate and open relationship with each other; a relationship where we can celebrate our successes but also be honest about our failings and above all, strengthen and support one another through the highs and

lows of life.

Being resilient does not mean denying the realities of life - it simply means that in partnership with each other, and God, your marriage commitment grows stronger over the years.

Resilient marriages are inspired by a big-picture view of life.

Resilient people finish strong because their vision of life is not simply a large one, it is a transcendent one.

The Bible often describes resilient people as men and women of incredible faith who endured to the end, despite overwhelming odds and persistent hostility directed against them.

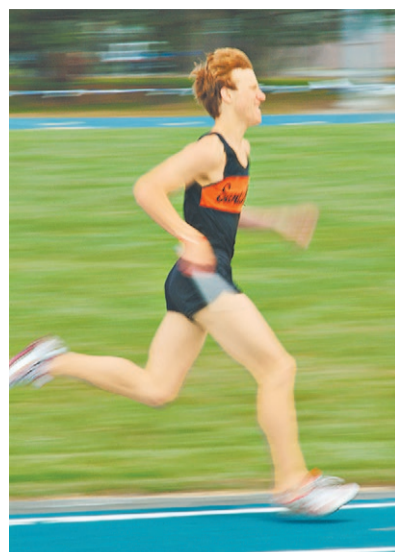
Why did they run with such patience and endurance?

Because they had a big picture about what God had promised them and they pressed on toward that goal.

I wrote earlier this year about the importance of having a big picture, asking the question, "What is the big picture you have for your marriage?" and along the way I have presented a few ideas to encourage you to pursue and realise that goal.

Karen and I were both raised in dysfunctional homes - who hasn't been? - but we determined before we married that we would do things very differently in our marriage to what had been modelled to us in our families of origin.

The big picture for our marriage included things such as always resolving conflict between us and modelling this to our children, never putting our ministry before our rela-



tionship or children and teaching and living out our faith authentically to each other and our kids.

Run with the end in mind and you will finish strong!

Resilient marriages run free of the weight of the past.

Constantly looking back is guaranteed to prevent you from finishing strong, which is why Forrest Gump said:

"You have to put the past behind you before you can move forward." Paul had this in mind when he wrote, "...forgetting what lies behind...I press on toward the goal..." (Philippians 3:13,14)

### RESILIENT MARRIAGES RUN FREE OF THE WEIGHT OF THE PAST.



Resilient people - and marriages - do not allow past hurts to drag them down.

In other words, forgive each other regularly and freely, because bitterness destroys marriages.

When tough times threaten your marriage, seeking to tear it apart, remember this: resilient couples keep their focus - it's the only way to ensure finishing strong!

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## HOW DO I BECOME A CHRISTIAN?

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

**What now?**

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

**AS A NEXT STEP:** Please send me:  Bible  Some 'starting off' literature  Information on a helpful church

*\* Please tick and write clearly \**

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Phone \_\_\_\_\_  
Address \_\_\_\_\_  
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**Challenge Literature Fellowship, PO Box 978, Cloverdale WA 6985**  
info@challengenews.org

All overseas enquiries are referred onto someone in their own country

## Lessons from a sausage dog (Part 14)

BY JODY BENNETT

I HAVE been suffering from back pain for the last few months, which has been quite debilitating. Last night, as I sat on the couch with my sausage dog on my lap, my daughter set me a poser: "Mum, would you rather have no pain and no dog, or have Carrie but continue to have pain?"

A choice between my comfort and my beloved pet - I had to think, but not for long. "I would keep things the way they are," I told her. "I'd keep the pain for the sake of keeping Carrie."

It occurred to me later that Jesus, and His Father God, made the same choice.



God chose the pain of our betrayal and rebellion, and Jesus chose the pain of torture and the cross, just to be in relationship with us.

They didn't need us. The triune God is complete within Himself. But He wanted relationship with us despite all that it cost Him, and the pain of rejection that it would expose Him to.

We are creatures created in His image - relationship is really important to us too.

Every time we allow ourselves to love someone, we risk pain. Every time we adopt a pet, there is near certainty that (unless they outlive us) we will be bereaved at some point and hurt. A parent knows that each child holds a little bit of your heart, making you vulnerable to intense pain. And yet a life without these connections to others is not worth living.

Who would want wealth, health, good looks, vast knowledge and even eternal life without someone with whom to share it?

God deeply longs for relationship with us and has undergone agony in order to have us as His children and be able to spend eternity with us. The often quoted verse John chapter 3 and verse 16 says it all; "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life."

How humbling to understand that He has gone to such great lengths for faithless and rebellious me. As John Newton wrote in his famous hymn: "Amazing Grace, how sweet the sound, that saved a wretch like me."

And in response to such great love, what can we do but surrender our lives to Him?

## Want to explore more?

Here are some free, helpful, Christian online resources:

Online Bible - <b>Olive Tree app</b> (we recommend that you start with an easy-to-read version like the ESV)	
Audio Bible - <b>Bible.is app</b> , or <b>Youversion Bible app</b>	
Christian radio station - <b>CBN radio app</b> (different channels for all genres of music)	
Christian podcasts and sermons - <b>Edifi app</b>	
Christian movies - <b>New Faith Network app</b> (7-day free trial)	
Daily thoughts and inspiration - <b>Our Daily Bread app</b>	
Advice on specific issues, Bible reading plans and studies for new believers - <b>Youversion Bible app</b> .	
The Bible explained with visual aides - <b>the Bible Project on YouTube</b> .	
<b>Alpha Film Series on Youtube</b> - an online introduction to Christianity.	
For kids - <b>Superbook Kids Bible, videos and games app</b>	
Comic book Bible online- <b>goodandevilbook.com</b>	
More inspiring faith stories - <b>back issues of Challenge News at challengenews.online</b>	





Jessica Long of the USA competes in the women's 100m freestyle - S8 final during the Rio 2016 Paralympic Games in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. (Photo Atsushi Tomura/Getty Images)  
**INSET:** Jessica in her prosthetics at The Women's Sports Foundation's 39th Annual Salute To Women In Sports And The Girls They Inspire Awards Gala on October 17, 2018 in New York City. (Photo Michael Loccisano/Getty Images)

# SOMETIMES I JUST CAN'T

**A**t 12 years old, Jessica Long swam in her first Paralympics Games.

As she turned her head to breathe, she said to the competitor next to her, "I did not come here to get second." And she didn't. Jessica won her first gold medal that day and went on to compete at four Paralympic games and receive 23 medals (13 of them gold) and more than 60 world championship medals.

As a child growing up with feelings of anger and rejection, Jessica had found her worth in excelling in swimming. She shared her story with the website iamsecond.com.

"When I was born I was put up for adoption by a young 16-year-old Russian girl because, due to a birth defect, she just wasn't able to care for me," Jessica recounts.

Jessica was born with fibular hemimelia, a congenital disorder where part or all of the fibular bone is missing. Jessica and another little boy from Russia were adopted by a couple in America.

"I did have a foot with three toes that they decided to amputate six months after I was adopted so I could be fitted in these little prosthetic legs and learn to walk just like everyone else," Jessica explains. "When I think back on my childhood, I didn't feel adopted. I just know I was angry – angry that I didn't have legs. Maybe that's why my birth mum didn't want me, because I didn't look like a normal person."

Jessica said she felt like she was a burden to her adoptive parents.

"Every time I grew I had to go to surgery and to get the bone cut back and that was excruciating," she says. "I don't think I knew what I did wrong to have to keep going back in for surgery. I didn't think I could even cry in front of my parents because I thought if I cried that somehow they would send me back to Russia."

Jessica was raised in a Christian family and regularly attended church.

"What I heard a lot of is that God made me this way and God always had a plan for me and God loves me and I didn't like it," Jessica admits. "I knew I didn't want anything to do with this God that made me this way. To top it all off, I was born on a leap year so all of my life the calendar would skip me every four years before I had an actual birthday on February 29 and I think in my head as a little girl that just solidified how I felt about myself – that I was non-existent."

Jessica discovered that she excelled in sports, especially swimming.

"When I first joined the swim team I was 10 years old and I was the only disabled swimmer on the team," she says. "Most people didn't know I was missing my legs until I got out of the pool. I kept going back because honestly I just liked beating these girls with legs and it started to fulfil something in me – just earning love."

Jessica's family found out about

the Paralympic Games and at age 12 she was selected to represent America in the Athens Games, where she won her first Paralympic gold medal.

"I started getting sponsorships and winning awards," Jessica says. "I signed a deal with Nike and was in *Sports Illustrated* and getting commercials and I wanted to be perfect in everything that I did."

One year Jessica had 18 world record breaking performances. She began to find her worth in her success.

"My worth was in swimming, my identity was swimming, but at the same time I was just broken and sad a lot," she recalls. "I developed an eating disorder, I really pulled away from my relationships and my family and I realised that I had no control over my life."

Jessica said she was at a youth group Bible study one night when she realised she couldn't do it alone anymore.

"I got up and I made the walk to the front and I found this woman and I said, 'I want to give God my whole heart for once' and I prayed with her and as soon as I prayed it was the first time in my entire life that I felt enough. And then I was actually a part of God's family... I realised that God was prepping my heart for what was about to come."

Jessica was approached by American broadcast television network NBC about returning to Russia to meet her birth mother. It was some-

thing she had always dreamed about so she agreed to go.

"It hit me all of a sudden as soon as we landed in Russia that maybe my birth family didn't want to see me," Jessica remembers. "I felt really scared - why did I come here, why did I do this?"

Nervous, Jessica took the 18-hour train journey to her birth parents' home. She could hear her birth parents crying as she approached the house.

Their emotional reunion was filmed by NBC for a feature called *Long Way Home: The Jessica Long Story*.

"Something (my birth mum) kept saying was that she couldn't forgive herself for giving me up for adoption and I think if I had not accepted Christ as my Saviour I don't think I would have forgiven her either," Jessica says. "But it was in that moment

that I realised that God has forgiven me my whole life and I forgave my mum."

When Jessica returned to America she said she experienced a heart change but she also had a lot of questions.

"I realised that it's okay to have those questions," she explains. "It's okay to talk to God about it."

"Since accepting Christ as my Saviour I don't have to have it all together. He knows that I don't have it all together and I think it's something I still fight. I still fight that feeling of not being in control and I am constantly reminded every day that I need to give it to God. Every day when I put on these two prosthetic legs that are heavy and they still hurt me... I think it's honestly this really cool beautiful reminder that I can't do it on my own. As determined as I am, I just can't."



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