

# PROOF ANYONE CAN CHANGE

**Former Sydney gangster, drug dealer and abuser Mike Eastman was radically reformed behind bars.**

BY AARON MUELLER  
(REVISED)

Mike doesn't remember much about his first few days in prison. He was in a fog while detoxing from drugs.

But he does remember one thing – he prayed.

"I hadn't done that since my childhood. But I prayed that if God was there, He would get me out of this situation," Mike recalls.

God didn't remove him from prison but He did something even better. "He drew me to Himself and never let me go."

Mike was born and raised in a suburb of Sydney, Australia. He grew up with Christian parents, attending an Anglican church. He had a happy childhood up until age 11 when he began suffering various forms of abuse at the hands of an extended family member, within the context of the church.

"The experience haunted me for most of my life and played a role in the life choices I made," Mike says.

After his family relocated, he escaped the abuse but began getting bullied in high school.

"This caused me to cry out to the God that I had grown up learning about, but to no avail," Mike says. "I was angry with God for not being there for me and not doing what everyone said He would do. As a teenager I wrote off the church, my parents and anyone else who claimed to be a Christian. I thought that I could go my own way."

After graduating from high school, Mike set out into the world with two purposes – to gain money and power. "I wanted to be the kind of person that nobody would hurt or do wrong by," Mike explains.

So he grew a successful business and developed a lavish lifestyle, while committing himself to training in the gym

to become as "big and scary" as possible.

Mike got married and a year later had a son. But his fast-paced lifestyle was a strain on his family life.

"In 2009, my wife left me, taking everything I had," he shares. "I spiralled into depression, turned to heavy drinking and started using drugs regularly."

Mike also got involved in various criminal activities as he was drawn deeper into the world of gangs and prostitution. "It led me into some very dark places. I'm ashamed to say that while I was abused as a child, I became the abuser. I became the very thing that I hated," he confesses.

In 2011 Mike sold drugs to an undercover police officer, eventually leading to his arrest. "I must be the least successful drug dealer in history, having only sold to undercover police," he jokes.

Getting locked up was the breaking point for Mike. "I was at the end of myself. I had



Mike Eastman knows the joy of leaving his past behind.

nothing left. No possessions, no friends, no income, no hope," he said.

Early in his prison stay, the prison wing was put into lock down due to a violent incident. For nearly a week Mike was confined in his cell with only a New Testament. He began reading it and never stopped. All the stories and lessons he had learnt in Sunday School as a boy came back to him.

"I remembered reading the Bible as a kid but finally I felt like I was starting to understand it and it was

making sense."

Later, when he was moved to a different prison, Mike contacted the chaplain who introduced him to the Crossroads Prison Ministries mentorship program.

"Through the studies, I was able to engage deeply with God's Word. The more I read Scripture [the Bible], the more I desired it. The words seemed to leap off the page," Mike tells.

Over time, through reading Scripture, praying and corresponding with his Crossroads mentors, Mike's

heart began to change.

"In the weeks leading up to my sentencing I poured out my heart kneeling on a prison cell floor. I spent a whole night in tears, crying to God about the wretched man I was and begging for God's forgiveness and power to live differently. Those tears continue to be part of my prayers to this day."

"The gift of life I received was totally transformative. I began hating what I once loved and loving what I once hated.

● Turn to page 2

## Fun for Kids

Pages 5,6,7



BACK PAGE

COMING UP  
ROSES

# Black Panther star wrestles black dog

Marvel's 2018 superhero movie *Black Panther* hit number one in US box offices upon its release. One of the film's breakout stars was the Black Panther's little sister, teenage scientist Shuri, played to tremendous charm and comedic effect by Letitia Wright.

The movie's success has put the Christian actress in the spotlight, where she talks openly about putting her commitment to God ahead of her Hollywood career.

Before this role, Letitia, a 24-year-old Guyanese-British actor, was relatively unknown. She found herself caught up in trying to find happiness and accept-



ance through her acting career. The pressure got too much for her and she spiralled into depression when she was just 18.

Letitia desperately wanted to make it big in Tinseltown but "the pursuit of fame left me empty and depressed," she confesses.

"I decided to take a break from acting, because I really idolized it," she explained on the UK talk show *This Morning*. "I wasn't sure if I'd ever return to it."

Depression dogged her on and off until her early 20s.

At its worst, she stayed in her darkened room, stopped eating and refused to communicate with others.

"It was very, very bad and I didn't know a way out," Letitia says. "I had many days at my mum's where she didn't even know what to do. She was like, 'What is going on with you?' We don't know about that stuff in Guyana, so we don't take it seriously and it's like a taboo to feel like that."

But the misery forced Letitia to go on a journey to find what she needed for happiness and peace.

Letitia had some friends who were Christians. They told her about their faith, but she was resistant. "I thought it was nonsense," she recalls.

Then another one of her friends invited her to a Bible study class in east London, which proved to be life-changing. Letitia decided to give this "faith-thing" a shot. "I said, 'OK, Jesus, I'll try you,' and I haven't looked back since," she says happily.

● Turn to page 2

# Proof anyone can change

• From page 1

“My thoughts changed, my words changed and my actions changed,” he explains.

All the while, Mike was dealing with court matters. He decided to give a full confession. At his sentencing, Mike shared his testimony of how God had changed his life and acknowledged everything he had done. Police and prosecutors even spoke on his behalf. Although he could have faced a 10-year sentence, he was released in less than three.

Mike used the remainder of his sentence to study God’s Word, using the Crossroads program as a guide. He also began leading Bible study and prayer groups in prison, telling anyone who would listen about Jesus. “Through this, I had the privilege of seeing Christ use me to bring others into His Kingdom,” he shares.

Since his release in January 2015, Mike has reconciled with his family, received custody of his son and has remarried, gaining three step-children. He is working toward a degree in theology, is active in his church and is now director of Crossroads Australia. “I have so



Mike Eastman has found reconciliation and healing.

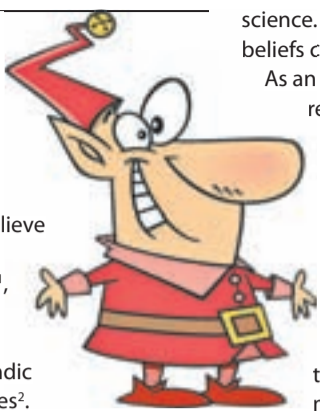
much brokenness in my life and have seen Christ redeem my past. I seek to use the rest of my years to equip men and women with broken lives to walk in their brokenness in the light of the Gospel of Jesus.”

Crossroads Prison Ministries is an international organisation that helps prisoners grow in their faith through correspondence Bible study courses. Volunteer mentors from churches across the world assist the students by guiding their studies and writing letters of encouragement. For more information, visit [crossroadspm.org.au](http://crossroadspm.org.au)

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# SEPARATING FANTASY FROM REALITY

BY BRIAN NIXON, ASSISTANT NEWS SERVICE



**A RECENT** poll conducted in Iceland found 0% of people under twenty-five believe the creation story as described in Genesis<sup>1</sup>, yet, according to a separate poll, fifty-four percent of Icelandic people believe in elves<sup>2</sup>.

The contrast between the two belief systems seem odd to me. True, both beliefs require a semblance of faith. Yet it seems that one belief has a basis in reality: creation, pointing to a Creator (nothing can create something after all). And the other belief seems quirky (the reality of elves). To my knowledge there is no strong scientific substantiation for elves. Yet this fact doesn’t seem to stop over half of the Icelandic population from believing elves exist.

Even more fascinating, there’s been some environmental trouble in Iceland due to elves: a road project was put on hold. As the *Atlantic* reported, “Jónsdóttir, a greying and spectacled seer who also operates an ‘elf garden’ in nearby Hafnarfjörður, believes the field is highly populated by elves, *huldufolk* (hidden people), and dwarves, many of whom, she says, have recently fled the area while the matter is settled”<sup>3</sup>.

Yep, you read it. Folks fought the road because it would endanger elves in the area!

The atheist would decry both worldviews (God and elves) as examples of bad belief, not rooted in either reality or

science. But the contrast between the two beliefs couldn’t be more stark.

As an example, there are dozens of reasons to believe God exists, all requiring a type of evidence (logical, historical, scientific-archaeological, etc.). Here’s just a sampling: the ontological argument (being—why something rather than nothing), the cosmological argument (first cause), the teleological argument (design), the moral argument (ethics, right and wrong), and fine-tuning argument (why is nature conducive for life). Philosopher Peter Kreeft lists 20 arguments for the existence of God, all logical and based in reality<sup>4</sup>.

Compare this with belief in elves. To my understanding the belief is rooted in two major areas: culture and eyewitness accounts. Culture is concerned with what a people group stresses to be true, regardless of its scientific or actual basis (what Francis Beckwith and Greg Koukl call “cultural relativism”<sup>5</sup>). And though Iceland would not take an official stance on elves, there’s been a deep cultural tradition in Iceland that gives elves a life outside of the evidence. Icelandic belief in elves could be likened to other cultural beliefs: Santa Claus, Easter Bunny, etc. But without any type of scientific or archaeological evidence for the tradition, a lack of sure footing for the belief is elusive.

Secondly, the eyewitness accounts. Just like people that have seen UFOs, there have been accounts of people seeing elves<sup>6</sup>. But eyewitness accounts,

independent of other supporting evidence (consistent written documentation, multiple eyewitnesses, changes in history, scientific, archaeological, etc.), are not always a good gauge for the reality of an object. Just because a person says he or she saw something doesn’t mean that they did. Other factors can influence sight (mental state, weather, atmospheric conditions, etc.). And sometimes someone may think they are seeing one thing when in fact they are seeing something else, a similar object or thing (e.g. an airplane, not a UFO). So sight, independent of supporting evidence, can lead to false ideas.

This being said, I’m intrigued why one set of beliefs is denied (Genesis 1) and another set of beliefs is upheld (elves), even when one holds greater historical, logical, and evidential strength (Genesis 1, when properly interpreted, that is). I think it is safe to ask: are we in an anti-evidence mindset in our world?

And don’t get me wrong: I’m not an elf-hater. I, like so many other people, enjoy them as a product of our creative mind. But for my own sanity and to support an evidence-based existence, we must find a way to clearly demarcate the valid from the visionary.

## ARE WE IN AN ANTI EVIDENCE MINDSET?



- <https://www.shomitrend.com/poll-0-of-icelanders-under-25-believe-bible-creation-story/>
- [https://www.huffingtonpost.com/2014/07/06/mythical-creatures\\_n\\_5525873.html](https://www.huffingtonpost.com/2014/07/06/mythical-creatures_n_5525873.html)
- <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2013/10/why-so-many-icelanders-still-believe-in-invisible-elves/280783/>
- Handbook of Christian Apologetics, chapter 2.
- [https://www.amazon.com/Relativism-Firmly-Planted-Mid-Air/dp/0801058066/ref=asap\\_bc?ie=UTF8](https://www.amazon.com/Relativism-Firmly-Planted-Mid-Air/dp/0801058066/ref=asap_bc?ie=UTF8)
- <http://www.icelandnaturally.com/article/meet-ragga-real-life-elf-whisperer-iceland>

## Crossword

<b>ACROSS</b>	9 Left unploughed	17 Jewish religious leader
1 Large chest muscle	10 Student overseer	18 River mouth feature
7 German sub	12 Mind _____ matter	19 Evening glow
8 American symbol	14 Sporty cars	

<b>DOWN</b>		
1 Sneak about		
2 A natural fibre, cloth		
3 Cooker		
4 Fish with a line		
5 Wave rider		
6 A day of the week		
11 Fast food item (3,3)		
13 Pasta shape		
15 Plane operator		
16 Window ledge		

**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

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

**SOLUTION PAGE 11**

# Black Panther star wrestles black dog

• From page 1

Like so many before her, Letitia says that everything changed after she accepted Christ into her heart and asked Him to run her life.

“I’m not perfect,” she explains, assuring her interview hosts that things weren’t all crystal clear but affirmed that her faith is a process. “As a Christian, you are not perfect, but you’re walking every day and trying to stay connected. I’m really grateful. I’m centred in who I am.”

However, Letitia was not in a rush to get back into the limelight. Once she had made a commitment to God, she delved into her relationship with Him, putting Hollywood on the back burner. She even turned down roles acting beside Nicole Kidman and Elle Fanning. It was God first, and then her career.

Eventually she felt God calling her back into acting. The *Black Panther* role seemed to come at the right moment. But rather than worry about her Hollywood career, Letitia says she just follows God’s plans for her, praying before every scene and openly sharing her faith.

“Where I go, where He takes me, that’s where I need to spread the love of God,” she shares. “People’s souls are dying. My soul was dying. He saved me. So I can’t keep this to myself. I fell in love with Jesus and I’m still in love.”

Now that *Black Panther* has thrust her into the spotlight, Letitia is certain God wants her to use her success in Hollywood as a way to glorify His Name and lead other broken souls to Jesus.

“The reason why I share this story is because I know there are people out there who are silently going through what I went through,” Letitia encourages. “I realised that acting is not my god. I don’t need to be validated by anybody else. I don’t need to be accepted or approved of for my happiness.

“Ever since then, everything’s just been really, really positive in my life. Yes, I have difficult days, like everybody else, but I deal with those difficult days differently.

“I don’t feel those depressive feelings any more. I just feel so free and happy. I won’t hide my faith, because it’s helped me so much. God has been my way out.”

Letitia wears her Christianity proudly, regularly sharing religious quotes on social media and urging others to come to Jesus. Positivity has become her mantra, and she is intent on staying humble amid the hype surrounding *Black Panther*.

The British actress’s star seems to be continuing to rise, as she is also in *The Commuter* with Liam Neeson, and in Steven Spielberg’s recently-released virtual reality movie *Ready Player One*.



Letitia Wright poses in front of a poster of her as Shuri in the Marvel Comic movie *Black Panther*.

## Home attack clarifies hope

When Nathan Wexler and his family were involved in an armed robbery where they were held captive and threatened, Nathan began to realise the true value and power of the faith he'd embraced as a child.

Nathan's family were missionaries in Kenya at the time, and he himself had prayed with his father as a five-year-old, asking God to rule his life.

"Even though I was young, I understood that I was lost," he remembers, "and there was something called sin which had come between me and God. However, I knew God had provided His Son, Jesus, to bring me back into a right relationship with Him. It was free and all I needed to do was accept that I was a sinner and ask that He save me."



Nathan Wexler

As Nathan was growing up, there were many times in his life where God's power was evident.

"He provided money when I needed it for college," Nathan remembers, "I prayed for a job, which I got, as well as all the equipment needed, as I had nothing."

However, Nathan still struggled with rebellion and other selfish desires. "When I rededicated my life to serving God, I had a hard time giving those things up," he admits.

That rededication came just before a night he will never forget, when armed robbers burst into the Wexler's home and held the family captive.

"That night I felt the presence of God like never before," Nathan recalls. "God brought Scripture to mind so fast it brought me peace."

"As my family and I prayed, the robbers became jumpy and confused."

After a while, Nathan was so on edge he prayed, "I can't take this anymore, Lord. Please, make the robbers leave."

"The instant I prayed that, the robbers locked us in my parents room, took my Dad, and left," Nathan recounts.

Eventually, the family were able to get out and Nathan's father was released.

"To me, that was a display of God's power," Nathan states with conviction.

"Since rededicating myself to Jesus, there has been such a difference in my life. It is a marvellous thing. I have come to the realization of how empty my selfish desires were, and how they left me wanting more, creating an endless cycle. Since giving them up I no longer need or want those things."

# Poetry leads atheist to faith

Doctor Holly Ordway was a proud and convinced atheist, in her words a "proto-Dawkins", "not because I hated God or didn't want to believe in Him, but simply because I did not have any compelling reasons TO believe in Him."

"Christianity didn't make sense, didn't seem like it could possibly be true and I was not going to believe nonsense. And that is a rational and respectable position that many atheists hold," she explains on the website [hearourtestimonies.com](http://hearourtestimonies.com).

"A lot of atheists have no idea what they are rejecting."

Holly had been raised in a home without any religious practice – they had no Bibles, never went to church or Sunday school and didn't know any Christians. Then she went to university where she was told Christianity was a bunch of anti-intellectual superstitious nonsense and historical baggage.

Holly found many well-meaning Christians were Biblically ignorant and unable to articulate why they believed what they believed.

As a result, Holly thought that faith had to be blind because there was no reason to believe it.

"I thought Christians used a psychological trick to convince themselves into believing unbelievable things to make them feel good about themselves," she remembers. "I thought faith was irrational."

Now she knows that although the Bible calls faith "the substance of things unseen", it doesn't mean we can't know them. "In the same way we can know our family loves us, without seeing their love; we can experience the truth of Jesus' presence without seeing it," she says.

Holly perceived the Christians she met to be stupid, science-denying, superstitious salesmen. However, she did have a high regard for several dead Christians whom she encountered in her studies: poets like John Donne and Gerard Manley Hopkins, authors like C.S. Lewis, J.R.R. Tolkien, Jane Austin and Charles Dickens, and musicians like Handel. And she knew they weren't stupid!

The one aspect Holly found hardest to deal with



Holly Ordway sharing her testimony online.

in her attempts to maintain a consistent atheism was that if atheism is true there is no reason to cherish life, protect the weak or be kind to others. "But I knew that wasn't right! I knew it was better to be kind, even if it didn't make sense in my worldview. It was just the right thing to do!"

"Atheism also means that reality is awful and meaningless and you just have to deal with it!" she explains. "I tried really hard to produce meaning myself and failed. There was a certain pride in being able to stare into the abyss and hold my own."

"I tried as hard as possible to be an intellectually consistent atheist. Although brilliant scholars had put forth all these convincing arguments for Christianity, there was zero chance that I was going to pick up a book by any of them," she admits.

However, Holly did become a Christian in 2006 at the age of 31 and, unusually, it was poetry that eventually made her open to reading literature that defended the Christian faith. God's Spirit began to work in her consciousness through good literature that drew her attention to God's work in the world. Particularly, the line "Batter my heart, three-person'd God, for you/ As yet but knock, breathe, shine, and seek to mend" from Donne's Holy Sonnet 14 had a profound effect on her.

"The classic works of English literature are deeply Christian," she realised. Holly wrote her doctrinal dissertation on the fantasy novels of C.S. Lewis and J.R.R. Tolkien.

"The world I was seeing through the eyes of these authors was different from the world that I thought I knew," she tells. "It made more sense! It was beautiful. And no one could call these men stupid. I realised faith wasn't what I thought it was."

Fortunately, Holly's fencing coach was a Christian who was willing to answer the questions she

had instead of the questions he thought she should have. He was a patient mentor who went at her pace. Holly came to realise it was all true.

She said it was absolutely terrifying! "To realise the entire ground for your belief system is different from what you thought it was and that everything you are and do has to be re-evaluated in the light of the living God is confronting, unsettling and hard!" she exclaims.

However, although she had come to realise God was real and the supernatural existed and that Jesus lived, died and rose from the dead; it did not make her a Christian, Holly emphasises. It still took a step of faith on her part to hand herself over to God.

"You have a choice at that point [of understanding] to remain captain of your own ship, retain your pride and ignore God's claims on your life, or to surrender your will, die to self and launch your life into the frightening unknown. It was a hard choice and the alternative was tempting," she candidly admits.

"When Jesus says 'Follow Me', as a non-Christian you are thinking, 'where?!' she remembers.

"That is where faith comes in, faith to trust in the character of God and hand your life over to Him."

After Holly did that, she went on to join a church that taught her the teachings of Christianity and how to live a Christian life. She learnt how to read her Bible, how to pray and what the answers to her many, many questions were.

Holly then studied theology, got a second PhD in apologetics (arguments for the Christian faith) and is now Chair of apologetics at Houston Baptist University, teaching others the importance of being able to defend their beliefs convincingly and intellectually.

**"THE CLASSIC WORKS OF ENGLISH LITERATURE ARE DEEPLY CHRISTIAN"**



## Ask Y: Does everyone go to heaven when they die?

BY PETER MEADOWS

**It is an attractive thought – that no matter what we do or how we behave, God loves everyone so He will let us all into heaven. But if we are to take Jesus' Word for it, that is not how it is.**

Jesus spoke of two separate destinations after death, where some people went one way and some

the other. He explained that after death comes judgment – not just for the very bad people like evil dictators, terrorists and murderers – but for everyone.

How does that work? Many wrongly assume it is like a religious weighing scale. They think one day they will stand at the gates of heaven where a celestial body will weigh



up their good behaviour against their bad, and so long as the good deeds outweigh the dodgy ones, the gates will swing open.

God is not like that. He does not enslave us to the eternal weighing machine, so we live life always worrying whether we will ever be good enough, never knowing whether we have done enough to get in.

A much more accurate picture of God is as the doorman at a fine banquet – where there is a dress code to get in. The right clothes have been available free and in advance – you just needed to ask for them. They are simply called 'forgiveness'.

If we turn up without the 'clothes' of being forgiven for all we have done wrong, we do not get in.

You see, being transformed like Cinderella in order to get into the ball is not something we can do for ourselves. Cinderella needed a fairy godmother to magic up a new frock. In real life, we have someone much greater – a Heavenly Father –

and we need Him to transform us for heaven. We can never be good enough ourselves, so we need God's forgiveness.

To those who say, "Ah well, I would rather be with my mates in the other place anyway," there is a warning. With God in heaven there is the perfect happiness you always longed for in this life but could never quite achieve. For those left outside the gates will not just be jealous but horrified. Jesus said there will be "weeping and gnashing of teeth" (Matthew 13:42).

It is not God's fault if we do not accept the gift of forgiveness that He freely offers others. It is our choice. Forgiveness has been arranged for us all, through Jesus' death on the cross. All we have to do is claim it.

There is no sitting on the fence. You have to choose now. It will be too late at the gates.

Peter Meadows is co-author of *The Book of Y*, the basis for the Y Course that explores life's biggest questions. If you have a question about faith or God, write to: [goodnewseditor@ntworld.com](mailto:goodnewseditor@ntworld.com) with ASK Y in the subject line, or to: Good News Editor, Po Box 9831, Nottingham NG2 9JN

# Security for eternity



The second part in a short series that explores the ultimate end of us all.

BY RICK LEWERS

IN William Shakespeare's seven stages [from the play *As You Like It*], he moves us through the wonder of childhood, the pursuit of truth in adolescence, to the fulfilment of love in the adult years, and we finally end in old age that longs for security. There wonder fades with the breakdown of the body. Truth brings the reality of a terminus for earthly existence. Love will soon be a thing of the past if death is the end of all consciousness.

Where then, does one find security that can regain wonder, know the truth and enjoy the love?

Security is an interesting thing that I would argue only God can give in this life and in the next. Without God, living in the plethora of modern ideas, security has become illusive while anxiety has become prevalent. Without a compass to guide and with nothing to hope in, anxiety will remain the epidemic of our century. It will also bring human carnage as fear and worry morph into a grasping individualism where the most important person in the world is "Me". But you will die and then what?

Somewhere behind a conversation with Jesus and the question of a certain ruler, "What must I do to inherit eternal life?" was the desire for security. Two thousand years ago another rich young bloke by worldly standards desired exactly the same thing that drives us – security.

His need for security may have been hidden behind bravado as young people's needs often are. He may, like many a proud ruler have simply wanted to hear someone important acknowledging his future beyond the grave was secure. Or maybe beneath all the luxuries of wealth, the exuberance of youth and the pride of power he knew all was not well with his soul.

Have you ever known that experience of an "all is not well with my soul?"

What was he asking? He wanted to know how to prepare for death so one minute after he died he would be ok. I think this man was smarter than most people because he at least had the good sense to ask the question.

Now the answer Jesus gives is critical.

Jesus tells him that he lacks one thing. In other words one thing is absolutely crucial for a future with God. Jesus tells him, "Sell everything and give it to the poor and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come and follow me."

It would be easy to misunderstand what Jesus is saying here. Jesus doesn't tell everyone to sell everything and give it to the poor but for this man his money and power were his security, keeping him in first place in this life while denying God first place in his life and jeopardizing his life into eternity.

When Jesus says to him, "Come follow me", the man gets the answer to his question, "What must I do to inherit eternal life?" and the one thing he lacks. He needs a saviour and that's Jesus. Jesus is the man's security and a treasure more valuable than the sum of his net worth.

To follow Jesus this man would have been taken to the cross where in death a price was paid for the forgiveness of sins, and to the resurrection of Jesus where the promised hope of eternal life is given. In Jesus the man would discover his inheritance for the life to come – forgiveness from a saviour and life eternal.

Where then, does one find security that can regain our wonder, know the truth and enjoy the love? Before you die and one minute after you die the answer is Jesus Christ, God's Son. •

# Redemption story mirrors actor's own

Well-known actor Dennis Quaid recently starred in the movie "I can only Imagine", which tells the true story of Bart Millard, lead singer of cross-over Christian band MercyMe. Dennis plays Bart's verbally and physically abusive father, who eventually finds forgiveness and redemption through listening to radio programs that Bart has sung on.

Dennis is not only a talented actor, but also a good golfer, a small aircraft pilot and musician in a band called "The Sharks". He speaks candidly about how the movie challenged his own faith and helped him to finish a song that he presented to his mom for her 91<sup>st</sup> birthday.

The song, called "On my way to heaven," was inspired by Dennis' mother who "has always been there like a rock – her faith is unquestionable, so solid."

Some of the lyrics to his song read: "My life may not be roses, but still I'm gonna be alright/ As long as I've got my Savior by my side./ He freed me from the heavy chains that had bound my broken heart/ He picked me up, gave me a brand new start./ Now I'm on my way to Heaven, on my way to Heaven. / I'm on my way to Heaven, so I can't be staying long."

Dennis says his "faith roots" lie deep in the Baptist church and he attended Sunday school regularly as a child. "I made the decision to become a Christian and got baptised when I was nine, along with my brother Randy, on the same day," he recalls.

Like many people, Dennis drifted from his childhood convictions as he grew. In his late 20s, he went around the world and in his travels had a crisis of faith questioning "Who is God?" He admits to various periods of doubt in his life. "I became a seeker really."



Actor Dennis Quaid at Build Studio, New York City, on March 1, 2018, where he discussed his recent film *I Can Only Imagine*. (Photo Desiree Navarro/Getty Images)

He confesses to doing drugs, especially cocaine in the 70s and 80s and indulging in sexual immorality. He has also had an eating disorder, and been married three times, most famously to Meg Ryan.

He says he identifies with the parable of the prodigal son who left his father's house and went his own way for a while, until he realised the futility of living apart from his father's love. Dennis says his character Arthur finds grace in the "Imagine" movie. "That is the beautiful thing about the Good News that Jesus was talking about," says Dennis. "The grace of God."

"No matter what, the door is always open to

the Lord. All one has to do is open one's heart and ask, and God will be there. It's certainly been a comfort in my life," he admitted in a 2007 interview with belief.net

"I have read the Bible from cover to cover, more than once, and so I came back to my childhood faith – for me it is Jesus. Meaning in life is found in the red words of Jesus. How simple it really is."

He told belief.net that he wants his son Jack to know "about Jesus and Jesus' life, why Jesus came here, why He was on earth. He came here and died for our sins. He came here to teach us how to live. He's an example to all of us-it seems like no matter how

hard we try, even the best of us Christians, we can't come close, we fall short of living our life in that perfect way that He did. But it's all about keeping your eye on that."

In another interview, after a medical emergency with his newborn twins, Dennis confessed, "We are just too small to handle [life] ourselves. We as human beings, get filled up with ourselves and go 'I'm doing great, I've got this one handled' then life throws something at you and you feel helpless. That's when you need God on your side."

"Let God handle the big deals. There is no big deal to Him," the veteran actor advises. •

MOVIE REVIEW PAGE 11

# FORGIVENESS MENDED MY HEART

Growing up in Botswana, Osadi Molefe remembers she was a very shy child but was also drawn to fight with boys she could overpower.

"I remember while still in primary school I didn't see any problem with fighting. I fought especially with boys I was stronger than," Osadi says.

Although she loved Gospel music and often had spiritual visions and dreams, her family worshipped their ancestors.

"Every year a witchdoctor would come to our house and perform rituals on us," she recalls.

These rituals did nothing good for her however and she had many relationship disappointments.

"I was in a relationship with one guy who secretly used drugs and when I asked him about the drugs he would deny it," she says.

"I decided to end the relationship but he started threatening me. He even came to where I stayed to threaten me. I developed a spirit of fear and started hating him."

Surprisingly, a good thing came out of this experience because it led Osadi to search for God.

"I realised that the life I was living was not right," she explains.

Osadi wanted to get right with

God but was not sure how to until she attended a training day in Gaborone where she heard the message of salvation.

"I decided to become a Christian because I learnt that Jesus died for me on the cross so that I could be saved and have everlasting life."

She quotes John chapter 3 verse 16, which says, "For God so loved the world that He gave His only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life."

"I felt this love. I wanted it every day of my life. I prayed a prayer where I confessed my sins and accepted Jesus into my life as my Saviour, Redeemer and everything ... (and now) I am free!"

While Osadi had struggled with unforgiveness all of her life, it was at that point she realised that Jesus had forgiven and set her free from all of her wrongdoing, so she needed to do the same for others.

"I learnt to forgive myself and others through prayer," she explains.

"I trusted God for the changes in my life and to overcome my sins and wrong attitudes."

She was finally able to forgive her ex-boyfriend for what he did to her, stating: "forgiveness is one of the most important aspects of Christianity".

Osadi says after committing her life to Christ she saw a big change in her attitudes and gives the example of relationships that followed.

She explains that there were two men who promised to marry her but both ended up marrying other women and she was heartbroken.

"At first I started blaming myself and then I decided to focus upon God and forget about the relationships," she says.

After surrendering all her worries and disappointment to Jesus she then adds: "God showed me the right path to follow and when I started focusing on God He answered my prayer (for a husband)."

She was eventually married to a lovely pastor and says they enjoy serving in ministry together.

"God has helped me a lot through difficult experiences. Even after starting our ministry, people started saying insulting things about my husband and me but God kept showing me that He shall keep His promises to me



Osadi Molefe

and He answered my prayers," she says.

Osadi says she finds encouragement from a Scripture passage from Matthew chapter 6 verses 25-34 where Jesus says not to worry about our lives but to focus on Him, knowing that He will look after us.

"God is the Creator of Heaven and Earth ... therefore we should seek the Kingdom of God and He will supply our needs."

To others she adds: "Accept Jesus into your life so you can be saved and have eternal life. There is no life without Jesus!" •

# Cycling out of control

**All Ben King wanted was control, but that is what he lost along the way.**

**B**efore Ben became a professional cyclist and rode in the Tour de France in 2014 he faced a common but scary challenge: eating disorders.

It all started on his first cycle tour to Europe when he was 16 and his team lost very badly to the other teams. "I have never suffered like that just to finish races," Ben remembers.

It was at that moment that he decided to dedicate himself to his sport and start training much harder. Ben looked into what the pro cyclists did in regards to exercise and diet.

"They looked like skeletons and I started to believe that the lighter I got, the faster I would become," he explains.

With that mentality, Ben increased his training and exercise schedule, "I would ride in the morning, lift weights in the afternoon, then go to track practice, eventually coming home to cram in homework, go to swim practice and then die in my bed every night from exhaustion."

It got to the point where he couldn't possibly fit any more training into his days and yet that still wasn't enough; he wanted to look like the pro cyclists he saw.



**SANTA CLARITA, CALIFORNIA - MAY 16, 2016:** Ben King of the United States riding for Cannondale Pro Cycling takes the podium to receive the race leader's yellow jersey after winning stage two of the 2016 Amgen Tour of California from South Pasadena to Santa Clarita. (Photo Doug Pensinger/Getty Images)

"On the way back from swim practice I pulled off to the side of the road and made myself throw up. In a twisted way it gave me a sense of control. It became a habitual thing. I

**"MY IDENTITY ... LOVED BY GOD FIRST ... HAS ALLOWED ME TO DEAL WITH PRESSURE ..."**



began to wear down physically, mentally, emotionally and spiritually.

"I remember throwing up in the toilet and then brushing my teeth. When spitting I found blood covering the sink. I was beating my body into submission. The thing that I was trying to control was controlling me."

At only 17 "I was training three to four times a day and had been purging every time I felt like I had overeaten," he confesses.

Ben became tired and tem-

peramental and started to lash out at his family members. "I remember one night after swim practice I came home and mum told me that she had saved me dishes to do. I started doing them really angrily, eventually breaking a salad bowl that my mum liked. She yelled at me and I had just had enough so I ran out of the house to cool off in the woods."

After Ben came home, his Dad asked what was wrong but Ben didn't want to tell him about the anorexia, although he knows his dad would have been understanding. Then Ben's Dad started to pray for him asking God to take away what was troubling his son and teach him that God was really in control of everything.

Ben was raised in a Christian home and grew up being taught the answers to big questions about life. But all his knowledge only translated into a real, personal walk with Jesus during a service trip he took in middle school to Chattanooga, Tennessee.

"There the answers and theology I grew up with took on a life of their own. I saw God's people at work loving their communities and offering hope and comfort in the midst of suffering and brokenness. Since then, I've been on a number of trips like that," he shares.

So when his dad prayed for him, Ben realised he was not only hurting himself and dishonouring God, but it was also hurting the people around him.

"I knew I had to get this thing under control but I didn't want to talk to anyone about it, so I turned to God because He already knew what was going on inside of me."

Ben then underwent another major turnabout in his life. "I started to adopt a healthier lifestyle through the encouragement of my walk with God. I learnt what

was happening, down to a cellular level, to the food that I ingested. I found out if I don't get enough of the macro nutrients to recover, I won't get stronger.

"I realised that there were things in my life that I couldn't control and gave those things to God, now they no longer control me."

Ben now has a healthier attitude to his cycling and his faith in God.

"Cycling has always been something that has brought me a lot of joy and it is healthy. It is a way for me to interact with my God and has become an act of worship [bringing God applause]."

"My identity as a person loved by God first, and as an athlete second, has allowed me to deal with pressure and disappointment that accompany a sport where you're only as good as your last race, and where for every good day there are 10 bad days. On the same note, it has allowed me to approach cycling as an act of worship, pouring my whole self into it, as in any other vocation. Colossians 3:23 in the Bible says: "Whatever you do, work at it with all of your heart, as working for the Lord, not for human masters."

"I feel alive on the bike. Each day of health and strength is a gift. Cycling is a beautiful sport, and I like to think that with the right mind and heart it also pleases God." •

# #Metoo fallout continues

DR. JIM DENISON

**THE** sexual harrasment "earthquake" continues to unfold, with many accusers now being reported.

Our society is clearly at a tipping point. As a friend pointed out to me this week, a relativistic culture that accepts no absolute right or wrong has declared sexual abuse to be an absolute wrong. Which clearly should be the case.

Now that we have decided on at least one objective moral standard, how can we reinforce it? Let's consider ancient wisdom that our culture has tragically rejected in recent generations.

In his Sermon on the Mount, Jesus stated: "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery.' But I say to you that anyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart" (Matthew 5:27-28).

Imagine the difference in our culture if we obeyed his command today.

**ADULTERY**

Studies show that marital infidelity has increased dramatically in the last 25 years. In over one-third of marriages, one or both partners admit to cheating on their spouse. Unsurprisingly, infidelity is a leading cause of divorce. People who have cheated before are 350 percent more likely to cheat again.

**PORNOGRAPHY**

Pornography addiction among men continues to rise. One-third of all internet porn users are women.

Scientists now report that watching pornography damages the brain and dulls responses to sexual stimulation. New research indicates that divorce rates double when couples start watching porn. Pornography objectivizes and exploits women: one study found that nearly 90 percent of porn scenes contained physical aggression toward women.

**PROSTITUTION**

There are one to two million prostitutes in America. Prostitution is one of the most dangerous professions. Studies indicate that women who are prostitutes are raped eight to ten times each year on average.

**SEX TRAFFICKING**

Sex trafficking has been called "the new slavery." Human Rights First estimates that 4.9 million people were sexually exploited in 2017, and trafficking is a \$99 billion business.

**OTHER INNOCENT VICTIMS**

When sexual immorality becomes public, it affects far more than the perpetrator. The victims can be shamed by public exposure as well. Spouses and children will live with the stigma of the scandal, perhaps for the rest of their lives.

Even though God forgives all we confess to Him (1 John 1:9), His grace does not remove all the consequences of our sin. David's adultery with Bathsheba is a permanent part of his story. Infidelity and divorce scar families for life. Victims of prostitution or sex trafficking can never regain the years taken from them.

**CONCLUSION**

If people obeyed Jesus' teaching on lust, the steady drumbeat of sexual immorality stories would cease. Marriages and families would be spared and strengthened.

So, let's be the change we wish to see in others. How?

First, if you are not a Christian you need to decide on that because trying to live the Christian life without a personal relationship with Jesus is impossible! Then decide to refuse lust. Choose with Job to "make a covenant with [your] eyes" not to "gaze at a virgin" (Job 31:1). Make a vow to be godly in your sexual attitudes and actions. Confess any lust in your heart and life, right now.

Second, get help. Ask a trusted Christian friend to partner with you in purity. Covenant to pray with and for each other and to hold each other accountable to godly morality. If you need the help of a professional counsellor, seek such support now.

Third, use your influence for godliness. Teach your children and grandchildren the priority of living by Jesus' standards. Stand up to the promiscuity of our culture. Pray and work for moral awakening in our day.

**PURITY PRINCIPLE**

Randy Alcorn has coined the "purity principle": "Purity is always smart; impurity is always stupid. Not sometimes. Not usually. Always. You're not an exception. I'm not an exception. There are no exceptions. A holy God made the universe in such a way that actions true to His character, and the laws derived from His character, are always rewarded. Actions that violate His character, however, are always punished. He rewards every act of justice; He punishes every act of injustice."

Will you choose purity today? •



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# Recovery from years of abuse

**N**ige Burr's father was a womaniser, had a violent temper and didn't like working. This wrecked any chances of Nige having what would be considered a 'normal' upbringing.

"At the heart of every abuser a coward is revealed," says Nige. "Every kick, punch, slap or grabbing of my throat moulded me."

With years of sexual abuse and secret callous bullying from his uncle, early life for Nige was far from sweet, and it didn't turn any sweeter when he was placed in secondary school.

As a state housing lad, he stood out among the sons of business men. "I arrived with my free school uniform and meal tickets and they arrived in Mercedes and Jaguars, I couldn't stand the place," Nige admits

His home life was no better with his father constantly yelling and abusing him and his siblings. "The more my father yelled, the less I cared about life, which spilled into my schooling life with me failing classes and getting into fights most of which I didn't win, but that didn't bother me. Hitting and being hit seemed to dull my inner ache," says Nige.

During this time he started to feel more and more like a lost soul with no identity. He began to fantasise about being adopted and that one day everything would be over and that he would finally feel peace.

"It was a happy and sad day when Dad left home. The last time we saw our father he was carrying his boxes out of our house. I swore I would never shed a tear for anyone again, and I didn't for years."

Throwing himself into his martial arts training, Nige made a pact with his brother: That one day they would kill their dad. "I'm not proud of it but that was the way it was," Nige confesses.

He then turned to alcohol as a way of escaping his situation and pain,

whilst attempting to exist for the moment and not worry about tomorrow.

After failing both his Maths and English exams, Nige struggled with finding work and finding something to do with his life. This all changed when his mother marched him into the local College and said that there was nothing she could do about him.

After taking an engineering paper and getting 98% Nige was accepted into a Motor Trade Engineering, Management and Law course. However, his mother, sick of his bad attitude, shipped him off to go live with his Nan who was a Christian.

Nige started to notice the difference within his Nan when, after treating her disgracefully, he was never yelled at. He concluded that there was either something wrong with her or something very different about her.

He then saw a billboard advertising Pastor Billy Graham speaking in Sheffield and whenever he saw it he felt a wave of peace wash over him, that he described as hitting him like a wrecking ball.

Considering Nige was planning to end his life through substance abuse, he thought that seeing Billy Graham wouldn't make that much of a difference, since he was going to die anyway. Little did he know that after that weekend he would never be the same again.

"At the meeting Billy Graham described clearly about God becoming a man called Jesus. That Jesus died on a cross in our place, rose from the dead and was still alive today transforming men and women.



Nigel Burr demonstrating how he is now free of the chains of abuse that bound him.

Against the battles going on within me, I knew, standing there on the pitch I had to repent (decide to leave my old ways). Jesus gave me a new life in exchange for my old life."

On that night Nige confessed his sins to God and as a result he was changed into a new man. "I was completely transformed. The inner pain disappeared, my turmoil was switched off, my guilt lifted away, and the evil fear I was experiencing, was taken away. I felt unnervingly light, free from anguish; I was given purpose. The desire to kill my dad was permanently transformed into wanting to hug him."

Nige felt forgiven for all his sins and that "God had ripped up my old life and had passed me a blank sheet of paper representing my new life, on which I could start to write a

whole new book."

His life was transformed for the better and continues to improve. From leaving school with no qualifications, to exiting the Motor Trade Engineering, Management and Law course with scores that catapulted him into the top 10 graduates in the UK. Nige feels that his life has been given a purpose through God.

"I cannot say I fully understood what happened, but I can say the change was genuine, deep and permanent. I knew I was loved, had worth and could start life all over again. God gave me a new life in exchange for the old life, a life to last," Nige gratefully acknowledges.

He can happily confirm "this Christian life was worth taking a gamble on. God was and is always with me and I know He isn't leaving me." •

## "THIS CHRISTIAN LIFE WAS WORTH TAKING A GAMBLE ON"



# At the end of the rope was God

**G**irls, alcohol, drugs, cars, money, suicide, robbery, prison, violence, rehabs – Gavin Edmonds tried it all, then encountered God.

Gavin admits he has served time in jails in four states in Australia and been addicted to drugs and violence.

"I started life in the ghettos of Brisbane," he shares in *The Highway Evangelist*, "but moved around a lot as a child. My dad was a seaman who went away for months at a time and left my mother to bring up six children. When he was home, he was a strict and violent man. We used to pray his ship would sink and he would not return."

Gavin started using drugs and alcohol at a very early age, looking for acceptance.

"By the age of 14, I was involved with a criminal family on the Gold Coast. At 17, I was sentenced to rehab. At the age of 18, I received my first of many prison sentences due to violence and drugs," he confesses.

After trying everything the world had to offer, he still had no peace. "I left hurt and damaged



Gavin Edmonds with his children Ethan and Shaya.

people in the wake of my self-indulgence. I was an unhappy, angry man. I was broken," he admits.

The only truly happy people Gavin says he had ever met in all the places he had been were Christians. He could not understand why they were forever smiling. He wanted to know what they had that he had not yet tried.

After seeing yet another smiling Christian giving

of his time to visit Gavin and his fellow inmates in prison, Gavin returned to his cell and behind a two-inch thick steel door and two-foot thick walls of rock he boldly invited God to meet with him.

"God, if you are real, show yourself to me," I said, and He did," Gavin relates. "Suddenly I was filled with such a strong feeling of the presence of God. He was right there with me. I felt a peace and freedom like I had never known. I acknowledged to Him that I was a sinner who had done so many wrong things in my life and needed His help. I gave Him the mess that was my life."

After this Gavin felt more peaceful and free inside a maximum-security prison than he had in his whole life.

He now lives in Toowoomba, Queensland where he works in a café, sharing with others the good news of how Jesus can totally transform your life. Gavin says his life now has real meaning and purpose.

"I was not born to struggle and die. Jesus saved me and gave me real life and true peace," he concludes. •

# The world's best seller

"THE Bible – banned, burned, beloved. More widely read, more frequently attacked than any other book in history. Generations of intellectuals have attempted to discredit it, dictators of every age have outlawed it and executed those who read it. Yet soldiers carry it into battle believing it more powerful than their weapons. Fragments of it smuggled into solitary prison cells have transformed ruthless killers into gentle saints."

– Charles Colson

"The Bible does not offer a transactional religion with a distant god—it offers a transformational relationship with a loving Father."

– Jim Dennison

"The Bible is God's chart for you to steer by, to keep you from the bottom of the sea, and to show you where the harbour is, and how to reach it without running on rocks and bars."

– Henry Ward Beecher

"Time can take nothing from the Bible. It is the living monitor. Like the sun, it is the same in its light and influence to man this day which it was years ago. It can meet every present inquiry and console every present loss."

– Richard Cecil

"There came a time in my life when I doubted the divinity of the Scriptures, and I resolved as a lawyer and a judge I would try the Book as I would try anything in the courtroom, taking evidence for and against. It was a long, serious and profound study and using the same principles of evidence in this religious matter as I always do in secular matters, I have come to the decision that the Bible is a supernatural Book, that it has come from God, and that the only safety for the human race is to follow its teachings."

– Salmon P. Chase

"Other books were given for our information, the Bible was given for our transformation."

– The Defender

"The Scriptures teach us the best way of living, the noblest way of suffering, and the most comfortable way of dying."

– John Flavel

"The best evidence of the Bible's being the Word of God is found between its covers."

– Charles Hodge

"Men do not reject the Bible because it contradicts itself but because it contradicts them."

– E. Paul Hovey

# APE MEN OR GOD MEN?

BASED ON AN INTERVIEW WITH CREATION MINISTRIES INTERNATIONAL'S JOEL TAY

Dr Rick Griffith was born in Tokyo to US Navy parents. In 1991 he became a professor at Singapore Bible College. He is a strong advocate of seven-day Biblical Creation and says most people he speaks to are concerned to know if humans are really simply the result of random accidents, or the product of design.

"In Genesis 1-3 God gives answers to four of life's most fundamental questions: (1) Identity: Who am I? (2) Origin: Where did I come from? (3) Problem: How did the world get so messed up? (4) Destiny: Where will it all end up? These constantly come up when I teach or preach, even if I'm not doing a series specifically on origins."

Asked why he doesn't just teach 'Intelligent Design' (ID) instead of literal seven-day creation, Rick says: "On its own, ID actually makes God look bad as one who intelligently created the world but messed up in many ways, resulting in disease, deformities, earthquakes, etc. It doesn't tell us our sin problem that messed up God's perfect creation, so

we need Genesis 2-3 also, to teach people the full story."

## ORDER AND DESIGN

A highly organised person himself, Rick dismisses the suggestion that this ordered world could have made itself.

"When does order of the type seen in living things ever come about without someone first designing it and expending directed energy to bring it into being? One never sees self-directed chaos getting its act together. Evolutionists must assume that all the order (and often beauty) in living things is the great exception to all that we observe, since they suppose it came from millions of ultimately random events.

"This ordered complexity is apparent at a macro and micro scale. There is the amazingly designed solar system with predictable planetary orbits. Then, on the micro level, the cell is astonishingly designed. Scientists have proven that there exists no such thing as a 'sim-

ple cell', as it is incredibly complex. How else can we explain these things except that there is a Creator? Paul identified Him as none other than Jesus Himself (Colossians 1:15-17)."

## PRESSURE TO 'REINTERPRET' THE BIBLE

Rick explained why he believes Genesis should be understood plainly as real history. A few years ago, he forwarded something to his academic colleagues that indicated that he was a 'young-Earth creationist' [someone who believes the Earth was created in seven, literal 24-hour days, and is only about 6000 years old].

"A fellow professor took me aside and said, 'I just want you to know that I care for

you. That article you shared implied that you think Genesis 1 has literal days. I don't want you looking bad before our faculty.' I asked, 'Why don't you think you can take the creation account in its normal sense? Is there anything in the text that indi-



Dr Rick Griffiths believes in trusting the whole Bible.

## Man's life changed in Mecca



Ali Pektash

BY CHARLES GARDNER (ASSIST NEWS)

Ali Pektash was on a pilgrimage to the famous shrine in Mecca when something happened that changed the whole course of his life.

One of ten children in a family of Kurds, Ali was rejected by his mother, which opened a deep wound in his life. He was taken in by his uncle, who later threw him out. At 14 he ran away to work in the construction industry before returning home four years later at the invitation of his father.

The communists were gaining influence in his region, but when he started to work as a shepherd Ali couldn't understand how people could curse God, whose beautiful creation he witnessed in the fields every day.

He met and married Zehra, but was a weak-willed man who succumbed to heavy drinking - which began to destroy his life. He would start to shake if he didn't have a drink, and things got so bad that he was beat-

ing his wife every day and struggled to breathe after a few steps.

Friends persuaded him to find work in Saudi Arabia, where he could escape alcohol because it is forbidden. But in fact Ali discovered there is plenty of it available there.

Perhaps visiting Mecca was the answer, they suggested, so he agreed to join a group on the Hajj (pilgrimage).

He said: "I knew I belonged to God somehow - He was my friend - but when I circled the Ka'ba (the cube-like building at the centre of the Great Mosque) seven times (one of the rites of the pilgrimage), and watched everybody kissing this black stone, I walked the other way. I believed in a living God, not a rock."

When they retreated to their tents for the night Ali chose to sleep under the stars because it was so hot. That's when Jesus came to him in a dream: "He put His finger on my forehead and His hand on my heart. He was smiling at me and said: 'Get up and leave this place.'

"I didn't really understand, but I knew I was changed. I became very afraid, and remembered reading how too much alcohol could affect your brain. I thought maybe I was going crazy; that my end had come.

"I told my friends what had happened, but they laughed it off, saying I had eaten too much. And they asked: 'What does Jesus have to do with Mohammed?'"

Ali couldn't explain it, but he couldn't deny what had happened to him. When he told his friends he couldn't finish the Hajj, they got upset and angry, but he was determined to obey Jesus.

"I took a shower before I left and saw in a mirror that the black hair on my chest had the white imprint of hand on one side. I tried to rub it off, thinking it might be dust, but heard Jesus' voice say, 'You're going to see a lot more things than this.'

"So I got down on my knees and said: 'Lord, whatever you want from me, I will do.'

"He told me that I should go directly back home to Turkey, so I immediately left."

He rang his wife to say he was coming home with Jesus, which naturally puzzled her. When he arrived, she looked around to see where his companion was. "He's inside me," He explained.

In accordance with tradition for those who return from the Hajj, the neighbours all turned out for a welcome home party. At the party, Ali obeyed Jesus' instruction to stand up and tell everyone that he had become a Christian. Some got upset and left the room.

And although he knew he was now a Christian and passionately shared his story with others, it was six long years before Ali could obtain a Bible in his own language. "It was the most precious gift I received in my entire life. I read it all before I ate or slept again," he said. "I memorised whole portions; this book changed my life. I kept reading it over and over, understanding more as I did so."

Through trusting the truth of the Bible, God brought healing to Ali's life, cured his addictions to drink and cigarettes, and stopped him beating his wife - who has also become a Christian. A year later, he met a Christian pastor in Istanbul, studied there, and became a pastor himself in Ankara, the capital.

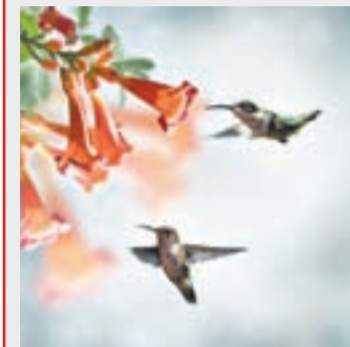
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## Believe it or not

### Hummingbirds not so sweet

BY CREATION MINISTRIES INTERNATIONAL

**BOTH** Christians and their opponents often overlook that the Bible indicates that 'all things bright and beautiful' only applied before the Genesis 3 curse on all creation.



Nature documentary guru Sir David Attenborough famously said that when Christians asked him why he did not give credit to God for nature's designs, they always referred to "hummingbirds, or orchids, sunflowers and beautiful things"; whereupon he would remind them of bad things in nature, like the river blindness parasite.

Of course, this does not speak against biblical creation, since it overlooks the fallenness of nature (Genesis 3).

Now it appears that some hummingbirds, too, have developed violent habits since the Fall. A team led by the University of Connecticut's Alejandro Rico-Guevara found that a male Costa Rican hummingbird uses its bill for more than sipping nectar. During fights with other males over mating rights, the beaks "double as deft, dagger-like weapons", which are used "to stab at their opponents' throats."

• Rico-Guevara, A. and Araya-Salas, M, Bills as daggers? A test for sexually dimorphic weapons in a lekking hummingbird, *Behavioral Ecology* 26(1):21-29, 2015 | doi:10.1093/beheco/aru182.

• Buckley, C., Fighting for Females: The Evolution of a Hummingbird, 3 November 2014, UConn today, [today.uconn.edu/blog](http://today.uconn.edu/blog).

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CREATION MINISTRIES INTERNATIONAL

# Building Better Marriages

## SPENDING QUALITY TIME TOGETHER AS FRIENDS

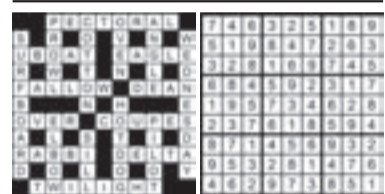
**THE** Philosopher, Plato, once quoted a story from Greek mythology that said human beings “were originally created with four arms, four legs and a head with two faces.”

The king of the gods, Zeus, afraid of the power that humans might wield, decided to limit them, splitting them into two different people which resulted in them spending the rest of their lives seeking their other half.

From this myth arose the idea of the *soul mate*, that special person who is said to complete you and with whom you want to spend the rest of your life.

Some of you may cringe at the idea of your partner being your *soul mate* – I agree it can be overstated at times – but I think that at the heart of the concept is the idea of *friendship*.

And what could be better than



being married to someone who is also your best friend?

It must be said, however, that the idea of friendship/the soul mate is not something that just happens in a relationship. Like everything else in life that is worthwhile, a growing and fulfilling friendship with your spouse is the result of *intentionality*.

One of my favourite books my mum read to me as a child began like this: “A friend is someone who likes you...”

All friendships begin at this point – you like the other person – but how does the friendship grow?

It grows as you spend quality time together, discovering you share a number of interests with each other.

To quote the Greeks again, the word for this “friendship love” is “*philia*.”

*Philia* meant that you had genuine, warm feelings toward the other person and that you shared a number of common interests and activities.

This is how friendship in marriage develops as well.

You obviously like each other – you are married – but what do you enjoy doing together?

Over the course of my marriage with Karen we have developed a great number of interests and activities in common and one of the things I have learned is that for an interest to be shared, you do not have to both “be into it” it from the outset.



This is what I mean. When I met Karen, she could not tell you the difference between

a googly or an out swinger, so in the early stages of our friendship and marriage, I introduced her to the joys of watching that greatest of all sports, cricket!

On the other hand, I could not dance to save my life but Karen loves dancing. Thanks to her tutelage and encouragement, I have regularly braved the dance floor with her over the years and now instead of looking like I have three left feet, it only looks like I have two!

The point here is that we both chose to show an interest in what each other liked and discovered the joy of not only learning something

new but also spending *fun* time together.

Some years ago James Dobson quoted research that demonstrated that one of the key elements that predicted longevity in marriage was that the couple had various “*interests in common and genuinely liked doing things together*.”

Sadly, this factor is often missing in marriage.

A husband returns home at the end of the day and after exchanging a few pleasantries with his wife, quickly retreats to his shed or garage.

Or a wife chooses the company of her friends more regularly than the opportunity of being out with her husband.

A growing friendship with each other is an important aspect of a healthy marriage.

If you are struggling with doing something together as a couple, why not start by talking about the things you enjoyed doing together when you were dating?

Who knows, a night out at a bowling alley could end up being the best fun you have had together in years!

## Lessons from a sausage dog (Part 15)

BY JODY BENNETT

**I READ** an article recently about a dog that has sat for four months outside a hospital in Brazil, waiting for its owner, who died there. Apparently, another dog in Japan waited similarly for ten years on a train station! I reckon my sausage dog, Carrie, would only wait for me until someone walked past with food!



We find such patience and loyalty endearing. The dog doesn't understand the circumstances, doesn't really know where his master is or how long he will have to wait – he just does.

Christians are in a similar situation. After Jesus rose from the dead, He spent 40 days with His followers and friends before being taken up into heaven in the clouds. When He was gone, angels told His friends that in the same way Jesus had gone, He would come back again one day.

Christians have been waiting for that event for more than 2000 years and many people believe it is now very close. But patience and waiting is hard, especially when the world is so full of scary events, violent people and injustice.

The temptation is always to forget about the future and just follow something fun and pleasurable. “Eat, drink and be merry for tomorrow we die” as the saying goes.

That seems to be the prevailing mood in society – buy that expensive item, eat that donut, sleep with that person, experiment with that drug because life is short and you need to suck all the goodness out of it while you can.

However, what if this life is but a millimetre in the endless kilometres of eternity? What if what we do in this millimetre determines where we spend all those kilometres? What if, if we choose to wait faithfully and deny ourselves a few pleasures now, we will experience more joy, goodness and abundance than we could ever have imagined?

I don't know about you but I choose to sit and wait for my Master because “I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us”. (Romans 8:18).

This is the final instalment in this series about our dachshund, and the lessons she has taught me in my relationship with my own Owner and Master – God. Her loyalty, trust and affection for me, an imperfect human being, challenge me to show those qualities in an even greater degree towards Jesus, who is so much more deserving of loyalty because of His perfect holiness and unconditional love for me.

I hope this series has helped you too. All the articles are available at [www.challengenews.online](http://www.challengenews.online)

## How can I become a Christian?

**Anyone can gain the eternal life offered through 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)

<p><b>OUR PROBLEM:</b></p>	<p><b>Separation from God</b> “Everyone has sinned. Nobody is good enough because God's standards are perfect” (Romans 3:23)</p>	<p><b>ADMIT</b></p>
<p><b>GOD'S REMEDY / SOLUTION:</b></p>	<p><b>Jesus died on the cross</b> “God demonstrates His own love for us in this; while we were still sinners, Christ died for us” (Romans 5:8)</p>	<p><b>BELIEVE</b></p>
<p><b>OUR RESPONSE:</b></p>	<p><b>Trust Jesus by receiving Him</b> “To all who received Him, to those who believed in His name, He gave the right to become children of God” (John 1:12)</p>	<p><b>COMMIT</b></p>

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

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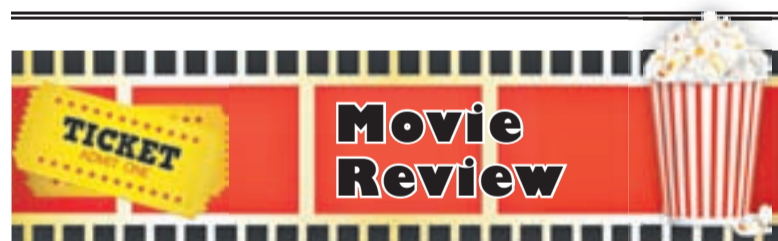
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Challenge Literature Fellowship  
PO Box 978, Cloverdale WA 6985

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## 'IMAGINE' - BEAUTY FROM ASHES

**INSPIRED** by the true-life story of the lead singer of contemporary Christian band, MercyMe, *I can only Imagine* is a beautiful, uplifting story of redemption and forgiveness.



Bart Millard's father (Dennis Quaid) was emotionally and physically abusive. His mother left when he was 10 and Bart found an escape in music and faith, playing songs by Christian musicians like Amy Grant repeatedly on his Walkman, and dreaming of being a pop star.

After graduating high school, Bart (played by J. Michael Finley in his screen acting debut) leaves home – and girlfriend, Shannon (Madeline Carroll), who has stuck by him for years - and joins a band, which they call MercyMe, an expression used by Bart's grandmother.

The band has some success but record execs turn them down because they don't seem to have an authentic voice. Bart's manager challenges him “What are you running from?”

“My dad,” he admits. “He beat you? Then write from that pain. Stop running and use it,” Brickell (Trace Atkins) advises.

So Bart goes home to deal with his relationship with his dad

and finds a changed man. Without giving too much of the story away, the resulting healing leads Bart to write MercyMe's first number one hit, “I can only Imagine”, a passionate, piano-driven ballade, which is the most successful Christian single of all time, selling 2.5 million copies and earning Bart a Dove Music Award in 2002. It also gained unexpected secular acclaim, being played on hundreds of US radio stations.

The movie directed by the Erwin brothers, was released in theatres in March 2018, and is now available on DVD and download. It is rated PG, and has a profound message for anyone who might feel God can't forgive them, they can't forgive someone else, or that their situation is hopeless.



# THE LONG RUN BACK: OVERCOMING DEPRESSION

English Gardner, who won the women's 100 meters in the U.S. Olympic Track and Field Trials in 2013 and 2016, appears to be a confident sprinter with the world at her feet. Her personal best of 10.74 seconds, set in 2016, ranks her in the top ten all-time for the distance. But, just seven months before that, English was battling a terrible enemy: depression.

When her mother, Monica, was pregnant with her, 25 years ago, she told her husband that the baby inside her was going to do something incredible.

"I wasn't sure if she'd be a ballerina or a recording artist or a firefighter, but I knew she was going to touch the world," Monica tells *Sports Illustrated*.

As pastors, English's parents are people of faith, which they have relied on through trying times. English, too, leaned on Biblical texts as motivation for her own life.

"My parents instilled in me the importance of faith at a young age," she told *The Washington Post*.

When English started high school in Voorhees, New Jersey, her family received startling news: Monica had stage three breast cancer and was likely to die within months.

The family had known hardship before. They were homeless twice when English was young, but this was different, and English knew it.

As her father continued working

to help provide for the family, she stepped up to help raise her two younger siblings as her mother became weak, also helping to care for her mother during her illness.

Incredibly, in 2006, all of Monica's scans came back clean and the doctors deemed her cancer-free.

In fall 2007, English took part in a flag football game to raise money for breast cancer research, which resulted in her tearing her ligaments and the cartilage in her right knee. She missed an entire track season and lost all of her college scholarship offers, except for one, the University of Oregon.

English had doubts about helping revive a sprint program on life support, but when Oregon's assistant coach, Robert Johnson, took a flight to New Jersey to meet her and her family, he proved how serious he was about recruiting her.

"I decided to take a chance," English says.

Together, they turned the Oregon Ducks women's track team into a powerhouse. Anchored by English, who won two 100 meter outdoor titles (2012 and 2013) and one 60-meter indoor title (2012), Oregon took home three consecutive NCAA (National Collegiate Athletic Association) Indoor Championships (2010-12) and finished second at Outdoor four times (2009-12).

Brimming with confidence after her 2012 success, English told her

coach she had bigger plans. "I am going to run in the Olympics. We're going to do it this year."

When English took the field at the Ducks' home stadium, she ran with a plan to praise God. "I went in [the Olympic trials] knowing that if there was a great moment to happen ... that I would not waste that moment at all, that I would not be ashamed of giving Him glory, that I would not be ashamed of calling on His Name."

Just a few weeks after winning the NCAA outdoor title, English stood behind the blocks at the 2012 Olympic Trials and felt a wave of exhaustion. Burnt out after running full indoor and outdoor seasons, with her peak times behind her, English finished seventh.

She was devastated. Angry at herself for not managing her races correctly, she vowed that it would be different at the next trials in 2016.

A year later, in 2013, English moved to Los Angeles and turned pro, forgoing her final season of collegiate eligibility. She switched coaches and paired up with legendary sprints coach, John Smith.

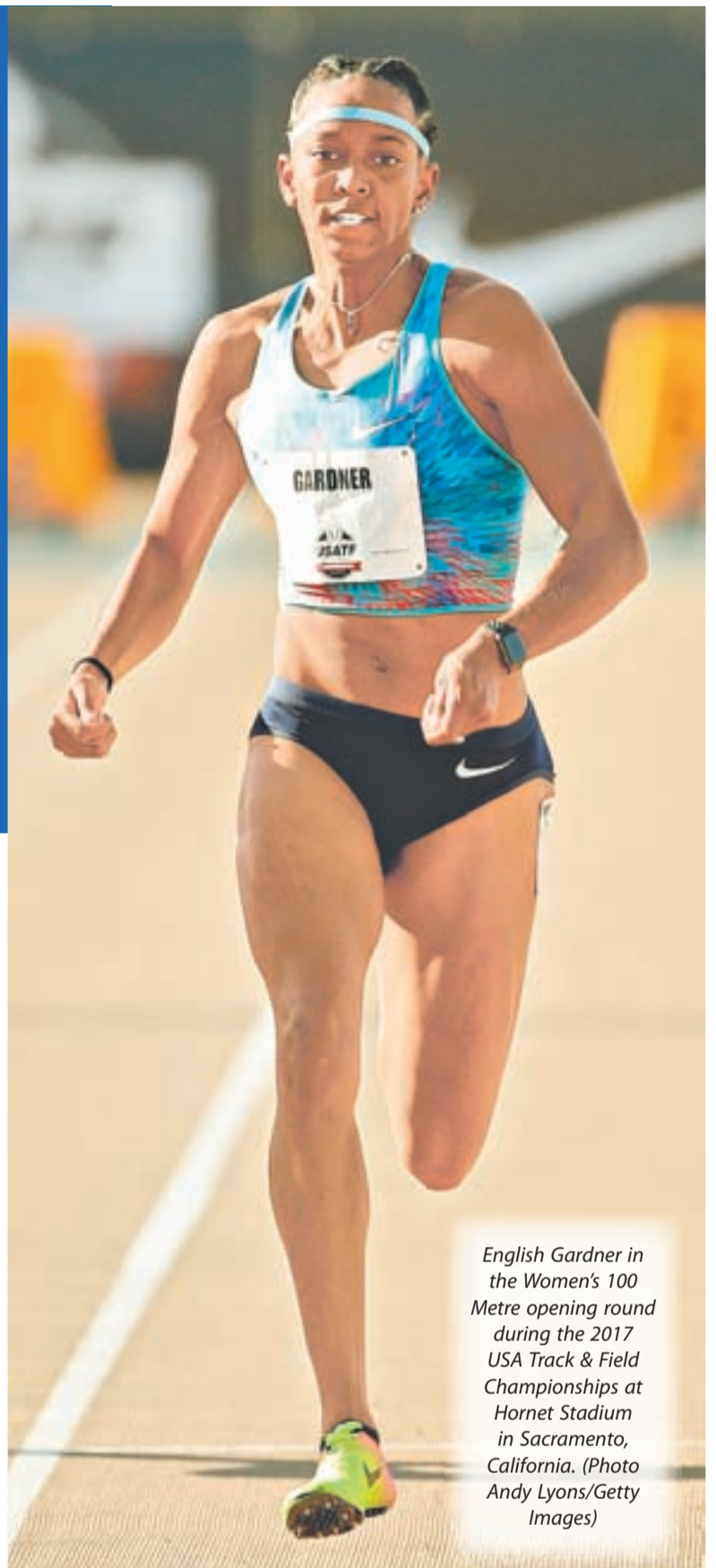
To English, it sounded and felt right at the time. But then it became anything but right.

"My first year as a pro was awful," she admits.

She felt lonely in L.A. thousands of miles away from family and friends. She lost almost a full second off her 100-meter time, and clashed with Smith, a traditionalist who wasn't concerned about being friends with her.

Finally, English settled. In the spring of 2015, she finished as runner-up at the US Athletics Track Federation outdoor championships, clocking a 10.86 in the 100 meters—her fastest time in two years. Then, in the fall, she sprinted headfirst into a wall of depression.

English says that her spiral began with a failed romantic relationship. Bereft, her mind wandered down dark paths. She sobbed herself to sleep, terrified that turning pro had been the wrong decision. She took sleeping pills, desperately trying to cure her insomnia. She lost her appetite and shed nearly a sixth of her body weight.



English Gardner in the Women's 100 Metre opening round during the 2017 USA Track & Field Championships at Hornet Stadium in Sacramento, California. (Photo Andy Lyons/Getty Images)



Gold medalist English Gardner of the United States during the medal ceremony for the Women's 4 x 100 meter Relay at the 2016 Olympic Games in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. (Photo Patrick Smith/Getty Images)

"My training was absolute trash," English recalls.

When she returned home for Christmas, she and her mother got down on their knees and prayed daily, as English cried out to God asking "for peace and understanding and to please, please take this fear away".

Her parents encouraged her by saying that "committing yourself fully and completely to your purpose is a way of honouring God and using your gifts for good."

She reminded herself that for

almost a decade, track had been her sanctuary. It could still be that.

After crossing the line first in her 100-meter final at the 2016 July Trials, English got down on her knees, praising Jesus and thanking Him for her victory.

She had recorded one of the fastest times for an American woman ever.

As she remarked in a recent Twitter post: "Lord I know for a fact ... you're not finished with me yet!" and "My God is greater than anything!"

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