

'I SET OUT TO KILL HIM'

Lexie had had enough of being bullied, things were going to change ... but not in the way she expected

BY JANICE TEO

It was 2018. Thirteen-year-old Lexie Walters was getting ready for school.

As she pulled her blazer on, she picked up the knife she had brought to her room the night before and hid it in her pocket. Lexie was getting ready for the kill.

The boy had been bullying her for months and Lexie had had enough. She'd been planning the murder for some time and that day in early 2018 seemed as good a day as any to carry it out.

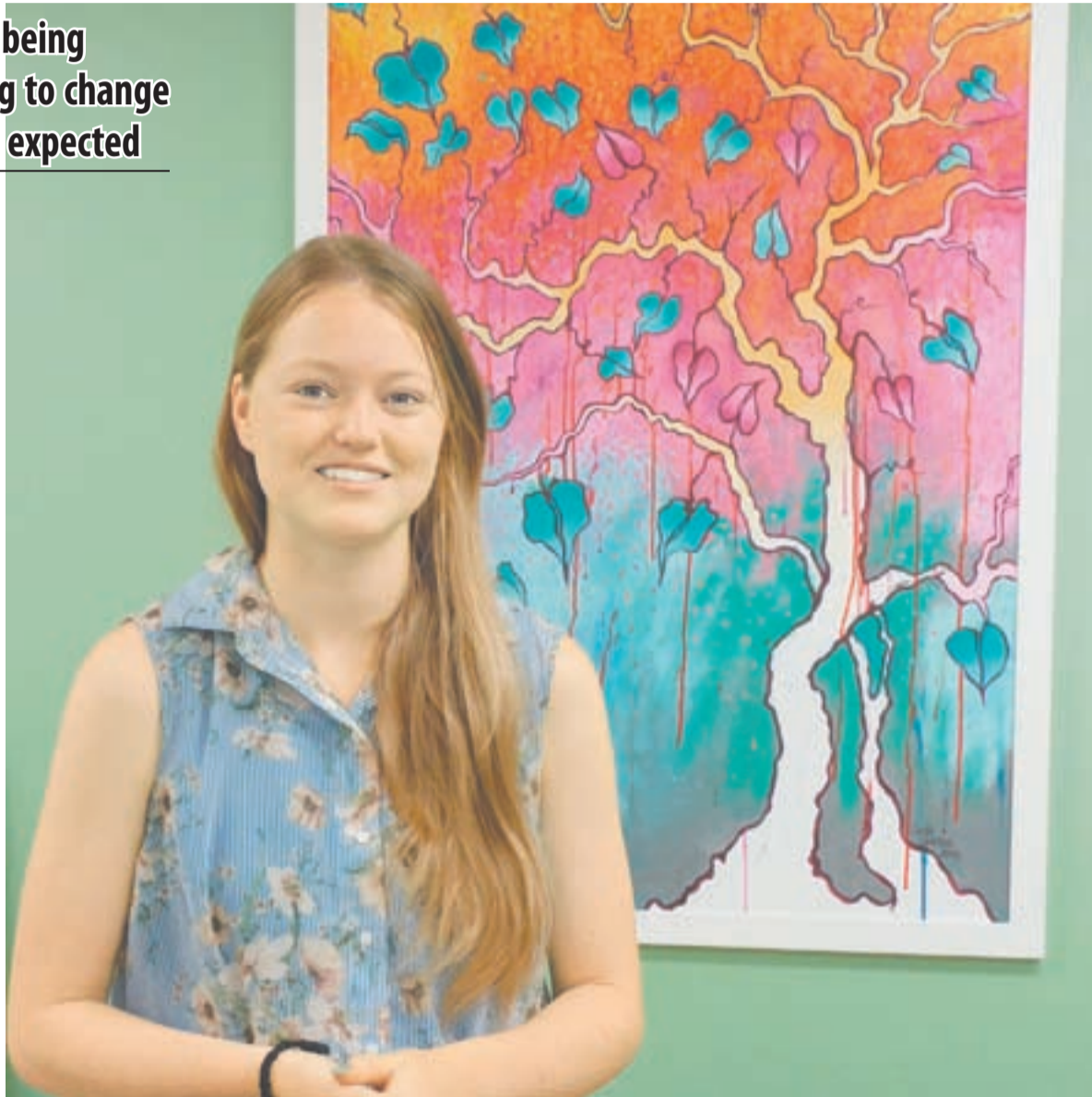
Lexie remembers little about that moment except that she was shivering with adrenalin - that and the fact that the knife slipped as she screamed "I hate you" and slashed her victim in the face, injuring but not killing him. Then she ran.

"I remember being really dizzy and shaking," says Lexie, now 16. "I remember seeing blood on the knife; the next thing I knew I was hiding behind the bin of a nearby building."

It didn't take long for the police to find the teenager, who was arrested and convicted of attempted murder. Any chance of reduction in the charges vanished when authorities found three notebooks in her room filled with handwritten plans for how she would carry out the killing. She was convicted of attempted murder and served 11 months in jail.

It's hard to imagine the person talking to *Challenge News* could ever have planned anything more sinister than a surprise birthday party. Baby-faced Lexie is the epitome of the girl next door.

But that butter-wouldn't-melt-in-her-mouth exterior hid a troubled life. Her parents were divorced and she shuttled from one to the other. Anxiety and resentment soon turned to depression. She had nightmares, terrifying dreams of the devil ripping off the roof of her home and trying to



Lexie Walters is now filled with peace, instead of the anger that had consumed her.

drag her from her bed. There were many occasions when she said she felt an evil presence sitting on her.

She ran away from both parents' homes several times. Once she fled to the bush and promptly got lost.

Unable to find water, she believes she would have died if the police hadn't shown up and rescued her.

Let's let go of anger in 2021

BY GREG LAURIE

SOME years ago, my wife, Cathe, and I were in New York City with some friends. The ladies decided to go shopping at Macy's on a very rainy day. I offered to hail a cab so they wouldn't get wet.

As I waited with the cab, a man jumped in front of me and started to step into it.

"Sir, hold on," I said. "This is my cab." In response, the man gave me the one finger salute within three inches of my face. I nudged him aside and said, "It's my cab!"

He moved away and we all got in. I was feeling really good about myself — I showed that guy!

Then, it hit me: I was in New York City to preach. I thought: what if this guy shows up at the meeting and says: "Hey, that's the guy who shoved me when I was trying to steal his cab!"



Have you ever been disappointed in yourself? Well, we can take comfort in the fact that people in the Bible struggled with the same emotions you and I do.

Lately, I've been studying the life of Moses. He was a man who experienced anger too.

When Moses saw an Egyptian slave driver beating an Israelite slave, he murdered the Egyptian and buried him in the sand (Exodus 2:11-15).

When Moses descended from Mount Sinai with the 10 Commandments God had just given him and saw the Israelites worshipping the Golden Calf, he smashed the stone tablets on the ground (Exodus 32:15-19).

When God told him to speak to a rock so that water would come out of it, he struck the rock twice (Numbers 20:10-13).

Here are three lessons I've learned from Moses about being angry:

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"I don't know how the police found me," she tells *Challenge News*. "I only know I prayed and five minutes later they were there."

Prayer, church, God, they were just words to Lexie, who had attended a Catholic school but might as well not have. "I never paid attention, never listened to anything," she confesses with a grin. "I knew nothing about God. Yet I prayed, so I guess something must have gotten through!"

When she left jail, she was far behind in her schoolwork, so the state government assigned Lexie a care worker and tutor by the name of Ruth Brown, whose parents Chris and Rose are pastors of a church in Midvale, Perth.

The two girls hit it off and Lexie soon felt confident enough to ask Ruth about her faith. "Ruth always seemed so happy and at peace," Lexie says. "I knew she was a Christian and I wanted to know more."

"For some reason I was always interested in the Bible - maybe it was the stories that were in there. I had a really old one that I couldn't understand, so Ruth brought me to a Christian bookshop and I bought a simpler version.

"I was so happy when I was in the bookshop. I can't explain why. We sat down for a coffee and Ruth asked if I was ready to commit my life to Jesus. I didn't hesitate. I said yes, and I asked Jesus to come into my life."

Lexie has undergone a radical transformation. The blue eyes that used to be cold with defiance are now warm and welcoming. "I can't believe how different I feel and how different my life is," she laughs. "I was the worst person you could ever meet. I swore at people. I assaulted people."

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BACK PAGE

LEADING BY FOLLOWING
DARREN MOORE

Bereaved husband turns grief into free help for terminally ill

In the late 1990s, Santanu Chakraborty a young man from Kolkata, India, had just married Ruma, his long-time sweetheart and was looking forward to their life together.

Their joy didn't last long. Four years into their marriage, Ruma was diagnosed with cancer and died in his arms 22 months later.

Santanu had nursed her throughout her illness, giving up his job as a professional musician to do so.

Shattered by her death, he struggled to make sense of it all. Rage, grief and questions - so many questions - about why this had happened to him, a Christian who had come to faith in Jesus Christ from a very young age and believed in a God who would shield him from life's struggles.

As he wrestled, his thoughts began to crystallise and he soon pictured a future in which his pain could be used to help others. So, just around the corner from where Mother Teresa served the poor and downtrodden, Santanu founded the Ruma Abedona Hospice (RAH).

"I was heartbroken after losing Ruma," Santanu says. "But I realised that God wanted to use my experi-

ence to entrust me with a greater responsibility - to help patients suffering from cancer and other life-threatening ailments in their last stage of life."

Ruma Abedona (Abedona means 'without pain') opened in February 2002 and remains to this day the only totally free hospice in Kolkata with caring compassionate service open to everyone with a terminal illness.

Santanu and his team go into the homes of the terminally ill. They calm the patients' fears and the fears of their loved ones, bring physical care and medication, offer financial counselling and walk with them through the grief. Until Ruma Abedona opened, palliative care was unheard of in that part of India.

Today there are over 40 people committed to the work of the hospice - either as workers or volunteers.

Santanu committed his life to Jesus when he was still a child. His father was a Hindu priest who converted to Christianity after some dark spiritual encounters in his own religion. Young Santanu and the rest of his family followed their father into the Christian faith.

Although many patients and clients see and experience the love and light of God through the work he does, Santanu does not actively evangelise [share the story of Jesus' life and mission]. His guiding philosophy is to live his faith in Jesus Christ, not just talk about it.

Last year, as the effects of the Covid-19 lockdown began to be felt, Santanu prayed about how Ruma Hospice could help. Reading the story in the Bible of Jesus feeding the crowd of 5000 with two fish and five loaves of bread (Matthew 14: 13-21), he felt God was telling him to trust Him and start feeding the destitute people.

Within weeks he saw his faith rewarded as local corporations donated supplies, enough for the RAH to put together food packages for 1000 people. The hospice also received support from around the world, including from a church in the Kimberleys of Western Australia, which donated \$5000 and,



Santanu Chakraborty and his second wife Meheli.



in a touching show of unselfishness, three children gave \$55 - which was all their pocket money.

Recently, for the first time in 20 years, elite groups from the vicinity, all of whom were non-Christians, visited the hospice to offer financial support and food. To Santanu, who has long battled India's caste system, this was nothing short of a miracle.

A doctor has also volunteered to accompany the team on its daily food distribution exercise, equipping them

with medical care.

It has been 20 years since Santanu turned his back on self-pity and moved forward into his calling. When Ruma died, a friend told him to 'move on and get married again. No good can come of what you are doing.'

Santanu did marry again, 16 years later, to a palliative care trained nurse, Meheli, who is as devoted to the cause as he is. His reply to his cynical friend then was: "Reserve your judgement. My God is not like other gods. He has a habit of bringing blessing out of tragedy."

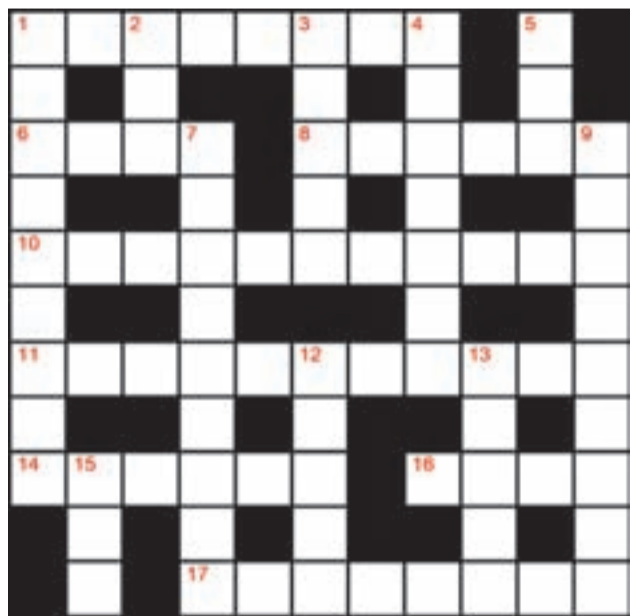
Santanu is living proof of that. •

Coffee Break

CROSSWORD & SUDOKU

ACROSS

- 1 Old-style typesetting machine
- 6 Control +Z on PC
- 8 Went a circuit ahead on track
- 10 Migrating honker, N.America (6,5)
- 11 Word in brackets
- 14 Realm, territory
- 16 Extinct bird
- 17 Bodyguard's accessory



DOWN

- 1 Take-off point (6,3)
- 2 Silent assent
- 3 WW II conference site
- 4 Blow up

- 5 Buzzing garden worker
- 7 Typically,
- 9 Guideline on attire (5,4)
- 12 Pavarotti, e.g.
- 13 Reproductive part of a fern
- 15 Metal in rocks

Life on drugs was no ecstasy

Justin Battiste lost all hope as his life descended into a nightmare of drug addiction - yet today he describes himself as "a new creation".

At school, Justin was quiet, shy and withdrawn. He felt different, and struggled to interact with other people. Although he did well in his classes early on, for the last two years he rebelled because he felt let down and harshly treated.

He started hanging around with older teenagers. "I felt that I fitted better with them," says Justin; but as a result he started smoking cigarettes, which soon led to cannabis.

After leaving school and starting work, Justin's drug addiction began to take over: "I'd get jobs regularly but just couldn't hold on to them due to the drugs.

"My life was now in a downward spiral as I started taking speed, acid and ecstasy. I was loving the 1990s rave scene. I thought I could control my drug taking, but I lost the respect of my family. Addiction landed me in prisons and mental hospitals. The drugs stripped me of all morals and values. I didn't value my life; I actually loved the drugs more than life itself."

There was one time when his drug taking stopped - after finding the girl who would become his wife, and having his first child: "I thought, 'Great, I've finally fixed my drug issues.'"

But after their second child, Justin's wife started drinking heavily and Justin sank back into drug use. When she was unfaithful and they split up, his life was totally derailed: "I ended up in a secure psychiatric unit where I almost lost touch with reality. When I came out I never really managed to take control of my life again."

Justin fell into using heroin and crack cocaine on a daily basis. "Everything I said I would never do, I did - such as injecting drugs and stealing from my family. I brought nothing but shame and misery to my family and I was no longer fit to be a dad. I could only see as far as my next hit and I would go to any length to get it.

"I was banned from all the shops in Ipswich due to shop-

lifting, so I turned to burglary and petty crime to fund my addiction. All hope I ever had just disappeared. I tried to

take my life on a few occasions. I was in and out of prison and just going round and round in circles, getting nowhere."

It was Justin's mum who finally got through to him. She took him to a church where, at the end of the service, Justin made the decision to become a Christian. Justin recalls: "There were tears [of joy] that day, and I now know that with God's help I can do anything I put my mind to.

"My mother noticed a change in me, as did my brother who took me into his home with open arms for the New Year. I spent my first Christmas at home free of drugs."

Justin attended a drug rehab course for the first time and it worked. A year after finding faith in Jesus, he said: "I am amazed at how far I have come in a year. I was homeless, living on the streets in Ipswich with no hope. I am now transformed into a loving, caring father, son, brother and uncle.

"I have managed to make amends to my family. I love life now, more than ever before, and it's God I have to thank for saving me. My mother and father prayed a long time for me. Through times of despair, they never gave up hope.

"I was always a taker and never thought of giving anything back, but today I am blessed to be able to give back to society by working as a volunteer at the drop-in centre at a local church. I am able now to show kindness and love to the vulnerable and homeless.

"I am also singing in the worship group in my church which is something I love, and I've applied for a job with an organisation that helps people to recover from drug addictions. God can use me and my past experience.

"One verse in the Bible which means a lot to me is: 'If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come.' This sums up what has happened to me."

This article first appeared in the UK's Good News newspaper. It is used with kind permission.

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Teenage killer a new person after finding God in prison

BY ANNE LIM

Bronson Blessington ambles into the visitors' room of the South Coast Correctional Centre in Nowra, NSW. The prisoner's bulky frame fills up his XXL white boilersuit, which is padlocked at the nape of his neck.

As he approaches me, I'm struck by his clear blue eyes and ruddy cheeks. He looks surprisingly young for a man of 47 who has been in jail for the past 31 years.

Perching himself on a stool bolted to the floor, he is gentle and respectful. It's hard to comprehend I am talking to a man convicted of a crime so heinous the sentencing judge urged he "never be released".

For Bronson, who has since become a Christian, that part

of his life seems to have belonged to someone else. He was just 14 in 1988 when he took part in the kidnapping, rape and callous murder of a young bank teller named Janine Balding.

Bronson and one of his co-accused Matthew Elliot, then 16, received life sentences.

When Bronson was arrested, a prison officer commented that he had the face of an angel, but in reality, his heart was a seething mass of anger, pain and fear.

He was six when his parents split up. They were so poor his mother cried all night when he lost

the change from a \$10 note after shopping.

Bronson became obsessed with trying to reunite his parents. Exasperated, his mother dispatched him to live with his father.

It was while he was living with his father that Bronson, frequently left alone while his father was at work, was sexually molested by four men.

By the age of 14, he was an alcoholic and petrol sniffer. He played truant, got into fights, became a thief and, though illiterate, refused to attend special needs classes. An assessment of his mental age came back with the finding that he had the maturity of a nine-year-old.



Bronson as an adult.

"At this time, I was getting molested every day," he says. "I

was going back and forth from parent to parent. I had gone to probably about 20 different schools."

Bronson remembers drinking a bottle of whisky the day he and his gang of friends rode the train to Sutherland station in Sydney's south. He insists what happened next was not premeditated.

When Janine Balding, then engaged and a month short of her 21st birthday, neared her car, she was approached by the gang, kidnapped at knife-point, sexually assaulted, beaten and drowned.

At the time, Bronson couldn't comprehend the enormity of his crime.

He tells me: "Over the years as I've matured I've been on my knees many times bawling before the Lord over what happened and how much devastation I've caused the Balding family and what my family has suffered. I pray for the family every single day."

What changed Bronson from someone who was, in his own words "a detriment to society" into a man praying humbly before God, so sorry for his sins and aware he can never make amends?

Bronson's life was transformed the day he attended a Bible study in prison and committed his life to Jesus Christ. He recalls how he felt loved for the first time and says his life changed in an instant.

"The old you dies. God works in your life to take back ground that the devil has stolen. I saw God had a purpose and a plan so I gave my life to the Lord and I became real happy. It was like falling in love.

"I used to dwell on the negative but from that time on I thought of heaven every second of every day. I



Bronson Blessington at 14, the age he raped and murdered (right) Janine Balding (20), whose brother David (inset) was only ten when she died. He strongly opposed Bronson getting any clemency from his life sentence.

went from one extreme to another.

"But I'll never stop feeling remorseful; I'll always try to become better as a person because I've taken something that was precious to so many."

The afternoon he gave his life to Christ, Bronson went back to his cell and, in what can only be described as a miracle, the illiterate young man found he was able to read the Bible, albeit slowly.

Bronson says he couldn't stop talking about what God had done in his life from the moment of his turn around.

"I was sharing about God non-stop from the time I became a Christian. I prayed to the Lord to give me the

ability to speak boldly about Him and you couldn't keep me quiet – I had to tell everyone," he says.

"After about three or four months, there were probably 10 to 15 of us meeting weekly and we'd be singing praises to God for about half an hour. It was the best thing that happened all week."

One of the men Bronson helped is Mitch Dundon. "Now I'm on a really good path and I'm with a really good

church," says Mitch.

"Without Bronson I wouldn't be where I am today ... He'd send me messages and pray for me if he sensed I was down. I'd feel that prayer from the other side of the yard."

In 2015, Bronson applied for clemency under the NSW governor's royal prerogative of mercy – his last avenue to end his indefinite incarceration, which was found by the United Nations to be "cruel, inhuman and degrading" because of his juvenile status and a failure to consider his prospects for rehabilitation.

Five years on, the petition reportedly remains on the desk of the NSW Attorney-General.

The only way Bronson can secure a release would be if he were dying or incapacitated to the point that he could not commit a crime. Recently, he was told he has cancer and is now awaiting a transfer to Sydney for surgery.

Bronson is adamant he would never reoffend. "God loved me after all I had done. How can I let Him down after all He has done for me?"

I'VE BEEN ON MY KNEES MANY TIMES BAWLING BEFORE THE LORD OVER WHAT HAPPENED



Let's let go of anger in 2021

● From page 1

Unchecked anger is damaging.

Unchecked anger keeps us in bondage. It hurts us, our relationships with others and our relationship with God. Moreover, anger has a negative effect on our health. According to the National Institute for the Clinical Application of Behavioral Medicine (NICABM), anger suppresses our immune systems, sets us up for heart attacks and strokes and upsets our digestive systems, in addition to a host of other maladies.

Anger is a choice.

Let's hone in on that famous moment that Moses struck the rock. Before this incident, God gives Moses specific instructions:

"Take the staff, and assemble the congregation, you and Aaron your brother, and tell the rock before their eyes to yield its water. So you shall bring water out of the rock for them and give drink to the congregation and their cattle" (Numbers 20:8 ESV).

But what does Moses do? He strikes the rock — twice. Moses was tired of the Israelites' incessant whining. He was not in the mood to speak to a rock. He wanted to hit something, and he did.

When I reflect on moments of anger in my own life and in the life of Moses, I realize anger is a choice. While it is not wrong to feel anger, it is wrong to lash out in anger.

Some may say, "But Pastor Greg, Jesus got angry and flipped tables. And He was sinless!"

They're exactly right. Jesus was God and I am not. My anger often results in sin — Jesus's didn't.

The great thing about choices is just that: they're choices.



When people or circumstances upset us, we can choose to forgive rather than be bitter. We can choose to respond in kindness rather than in anger.

Anger is less than God's best.

After Moses struck the rock, God said to him and Aaron, "Because you did not believe in me, to uphold me as holy in the eyes of the people of Israel, therefore you shall not bring this assembly into the land that I have given them" (Numbers 20:12).

After all that Moses had done, this was why he was barred from entering the Promised Land after wandering in the desert for 40 years. In his anger, Moses took matters into his own hands and missed God's blessing.

We do this all the time, don't we?

People seem especially angry these days, fighting over everything. Thankfully, anger doesn't have to have the last word in our lives.

In Hebrews 11:24-28, we read that Moses lived "by faith" as a man who "was looking to the reward."

What about Moses's failures?

Moses is not remembered for his anger because God is merciful and gracious. Ultimately, Moses did enter the Promised Land. No, he didn't lead the Israelites into the literal Promised Land. But when Jesus was transfigured [revealing his divinity] before Peter, James and John, Moses appeared with him. He received his reward.

What happened with Moses in Exodus and Numbers was just a part of his story, not the end of his story. And because God is a Redeemer, our story isn't over yet, either.

Next time, I'm just going to let the guy have my cab! You too.

Greg Laurie is the pastor and founder of the Harvest churches in California and Hawaii and of Harvest Crusades. He is an evangelist, best-selling author and movie producer. His new book *World Changers: How God Uses Ordinary People to Do Extraordinary Things* (Baker Books), releases Sept. 1.

"The worldly person treats certain people kindly because they 'like' them: the Christian, trying to treat every one kindly, finds themselves liking more and more people as they go on – including people they could not even have imagined liking at the beginning."

- C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*

I now have peace about dying and eternity



Gideon Brown

It had been a long day. University student Gideon Brown, 20, was on a semester break and was driving home after finishing work at a holiday job.

Gideon slowed down at an intersection, pausing to think about how much he was enjoying life. At 20, nothing was out of bounds to him any more and he indulged in all of it – smoking, drinking, sex and drugs.

As he waited at the intersection, a thought came from out of the blue and hit him like a punch in the gut: “You will die in a collision with a truck tomorrow”. A random thought? Gideon didn’t think so. Life, so good a moment ago, now looked decidedly bad.

Unnerved, Gideon did the first thing that came to his mind when he got home. He read his Bible. And he prayed. “I asked God to have mercy on me. I told Him I was only 20 years old and too young to die,” he said.

“It was a very long night. It felt like my prayers weren’t heard by God, that they didn’t go any further than the roof. I was so frightened – the idea of death terrified me and I realised that despite my upbringing in church, I didn’t know for sure where I would go when I died.”

Gideon had been raised in a Christian home. He had dutifully gone to church, prayed and knew the Bible stories – but still didn’t understand that he needed to have a personal relationship with Jesus.

Up to that point he had been pretty sure, despite his wayward lifestyle, he would get into heaven even if only by the skin of his teeth.

The next morning, Gideon slowly approached the crossing where he was supposed to die. “I looked in every direction for the killer truck but nothing happened,” he said.

“I was obviously relieved but now I had a great fear of death and an uncertainty of where I would end up after dying. Not even the words of my pastor that Jesus

died for my sins comforted me.”

Years passed and one day Gideon, now married, was invited by his father to accompany him to church. The sermon that day hit uncomfortably close to home.

“The preacher named all my sins and how filthy and unacceptable they were in the eyes of God,” Gideon recalled.

“I couldn’t believe what I was hearing. I was furious with my dad for telling the preacher all about me. Why would he expose me like that to a stranger?”

“Turns out my father had done nothing of the sort. He didn’t even know the preacher. It was my own guilty conscience that made me so uncomfortable.”

The week following the service, Gideon said a little voice kept reminding him of his experience at the intersection. He went back to church the next week and committed his life to Jesus Christ.

You would think that would have turned the tables on his insecurity about eternity. It didn’t. The old insecurities remained and were in fact amplified by Gideon’s new drive to live a life with all the godly trimmings – he cut his long hair, stopped smoking, attended a Bible study course and diligently attended prayer meetings.

Instead of being filled with peace he ended up more depressed than ever. “I knew the Gospel inside out and I knew what to tell people about coming to the faith, but it wasn’t a reality in my own life,” he said. “I still didn’t have the assurance God accepted me as I was.”

One night in bed, exhausted by his efforts, Gideon broke down.

“I couldn’t do it any more. That night I came to God as I was, no more trying to justify my existence or earn my way into His good books.

“The minute I was done with that prayer everything changed. I had been trying to convince God to accept me as His child but at that moment I became 100% sure I was His child and I had eternal life,” he smiled. “I can remember the joy in my heart that evening. The struggle had ended. It was supernatural. God did a marvellous work in one moment.

“That evening, a verse from the Bible, John 1:12, became a truth to me, *‘Yet to all who did receive Him, to those who believed in His name He gave the right to become children of God.’*”

In the 32 years since Gideon committed his life to Jesus, not one day has passed that he has regretted his decision. “After being through some storms in my Christian life, I can definitely say that I wouldn’t have made it without Jesus on my side,” he said.

“Deep inside me the Lord has lit a fire for lost sinners. This drive in me to share the good news of Jesus Christ with other people has been burning from the moment I was truly saved.”



Gideon Brown and his wife



Former stripper Kris-Lynn Williams, who is now a financial advisor, with her five children.

Below: Kris-Lynn with her former drug-pusher turned God-lover husband, Justin.

Pastor’s kid dramatically saved from drugs, pimps

BY MICHAEL ASHCRAFT

Theirs was a marriage made in Heav...

Well, maybe not. Theirs was a marriage made in a strip club.

The first time Kris-Lynn saw Justin Williams, he was wending his way through the crowd at After Hours in Tampa, Florida, selling drugs. She saw he was popular and handsome.

The next night, they were consuming drugs together, and from that moment on, they were inseparable.

But the fast life of money, drugs, pimps and stripping eventually slowed down. It had to. After all, she was a wayward pastor’s kid whom the Good Shepherd went seeking.

And Justin got let off a 15-year prison sentence with just one year of house arrest. When the miracle of the lighter sentence occurred, he told Kris-Lynn her days of dancing were over.

Kris-Lynn was a bright child, good with the books.

Being raised as a pastor’s child in Florida didn’t mean she knew God. She went to all the retreats, heard about Moses and Daniel and constantly attended church, as was expected.

But when she saw church members doing ungodly things, she secretly wondered if there was any authenticity behind the religion.

“I didn’t like the things that I saw in the church that I knew weren’t God. Sometimes humans can pervert who He is,” she says. “I had a tainted view of what Christianity was.”

When she returned pregnant to her hometown from high school in Gainesville, she faced harsh rejection from the Christians who ought to have had compassion. She was kicked out of homes and wound up on the floor of a local Salvation Army in 2006.

“I was church hurt,” she remembers. “Wow, the people in the church are turning me away when I’m pregnant? If this is the Lord,



then I want nothing to do with it.”

Actually, she wanted more than just to disassociate herself from the church. She wanted to disassociate herself from her emotional pain.

“I never wanted to feel like that again,” she says. “So I determined in my mind not to feel anything at all. And to get money.”

Dancing in the clubs was a quick way to make big bucks. And it provided her with access to drugs to numb the internal pain.

Then she saw Justin in 2013 and was smitten. She plied her trade, he, his. Together they lived the high life of hustlers.

But God went to work to reclaim His prodigal daughter.

“As I continued dancing, the Holy Spirit would start talking to me. I would run to the bathroom and do a line in the dressing room and yell, ‘YOU STILL WANNA TALK?! Why don’t you just leave me alone?!’” she wrote on a Facebook post. “He never did.”

Instead of bucking God, things turned darker.

“I started having visions of Satan in the crowd while I was on stage, clapping for me,” she recalls.

Eventually, Justin caught a case and a conviction. As the sentencing loomed, the couple was frightened by the prospect: he could get 15 years.

“Fifteen YEARS in prison!” Kris-Lynn says. “But God showed up in the courtroom and instead he gets put on house arrest for a year following three years of a 10 o’clock curfew. Lol.

“As we’re walking out the courtroom, he says, ‘You’re not dancing no more!’ Lol. I got [my son] Isaiah

back from my mom, who had been with her for that five-month span.”

Justin and Kris-Lynn straightened up. The brush with being locked-up had scared them. They didn’t do everything perfectly immediately, but they got on the path.

They surrendered their lives to the Lordship of Jesus Christ.

“The more we fell in love with Him, the less we wanted to hurt Him,” she recalls. “Now we are drug free. His heartbeat became our own.

“People would say ‘Well you can’t turn a hoe into a housewife!’ but I am living proof that God can turn you into what you were CREATED to be in the first place!” she says.

Her husband no longer pursues women and illegal money. Kris-Lynn wakes up in the middle of the night to find him on the floor crying out to God, “Not my will, but yours.”

Justin visits the same trap houses and clubs they frequented in the past to evangelize and help pull friends out of sin.

“I’ll never know why He chased us,” she writes. “The song *Reckless Love* touches my soul. A Love so Reckless that in the middle of a strip club He thought about me?! He chased me?! SMH” (shaking my head)

“All I know is God is REAL. He will never fit in this box that we subconsciously, religiously try to contain Him in,” she notes. “He saved my life. He saved Justin’s life. How could we not follow Him?! It’s not protocol, it’s not a chore, but an honour. He took filthy rags and made us whole. He calls me...me...beautiful.”

Today, Kris-Lynn is a happily married mother of five kids and a financial advisor.

So maybe YES! “The marriage was made in Heaven,” she says.

“Satan ain’t clappin’ now.”

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

Unwanted, disgraceful and depressed

BY AINSLEY GAEBLER

Ellen Krause was unwanted by both her parents and given up for adoption when she was born.

The child of two college students who were not ready to start a family, she was dubbed “a disgrace” and went through life feeling crushed and rejected. She descended

into a dark depression where she suffered through an eating disorder and a stint in hospital.

Yet, astonishingly, she is grateful.

“I’m truly thankful that I was given life so I could tell you my story today,” she smiles.

“My life began with a bang,” she says in a YouTube video.

Ellen was adopted by a fam-



ily who held Christian beliefs. So, she went to a Christian school, to church, and to youth group. However, even though she knew about God, she did not want to pursue a personal relationship with Him.

“Those things did not establish in my heart at a young age,” she says.

When Ellen was in third grade, her adopted parents got divorced. “This was very traumatic for me and left a lifelong impression on me,” she says, wincing at the memory. “My Dad left the household and I was very close with him.”

She goes on to talk about how she felt judged and ridiculed by others for being a child of divorced parents. She did not feel like she belonged and these feelings of abandonment and loneliness carried over into high school.

“I didn’t really feel like I was a part of the school,” she says. “I didn’t like it and I made bad decisions; those were some really rough years for me.”

Then, Ellen went to university and met her husband there. “These were some of the best and the worst years of my life.”

She spiralled into a dark depression and developed an intense eating disorder that became so bad she had to be

hospitalised.

“I learned later that both of my parents were fervently praying for me,” she says. “Even though I was far away from God, He continued to bless me.”

Ellen graduated, got a job, and got married. Things seemed to be looking up. Then, in 1994, when Ellen was in her twenties, her father passed away suddenly.

“This was completely devastating for me because we were very close,” she shares. “Looking back, I realised I completely idolised my dad. He was everything to me. I put my faith in him rather than in God.”

Ellen and her husband have three children – Andrew, Ashley, and Taylor. When Andrew was in kindergarten, Ellen realised that she wanted more spirituality to be present in his life.

“One of my neighbours invited us to church and we started going there,” she says. “One day, we went to a class where the pastor went over



the basics of Christianity. It was at that moment and in that class that I realised everything I had learned as a child, all the Scripture verses, everything came to life for me.”

Right after this realisation, Ellen got down on her knees, prayed to Jesus, and accepted

Him into her life.

“Everything became crystal clear,” she smiles. “Everything I had learned made sense and I knew the importance of having God in my life. I became very involved in our church and in the women’s ministries. My spiritual walk with God grew incredibly.”

In 2012, Ellen’s mother died very suddenly from brain cancer.

“You’ll always face different trials in life,” Ellen says. She had fallen apart when her father died, but “when my mother died, it was different. It was so much easier than when my dad died because I was a believer and I knew this was a celebration of her life and that I would see her again in heaven.”

In 2015, Ellen herself was diagnosed with a serious autoimmune disease.

“If left undetected it would have left me permanently disabled,” she says. “I am grateful. I have learned that there are no coincidences in life and that God uses different things in our lives for certain

reasons.”

A few years ago, she decided to reach out to her birth parents by writing them letters. Her father never responded but her mother did.

“She indicated to me that my birth had been a disgrace to her family,” she says sadly. “This was a crushing blow as my whole life I had wondered what she would be like. I was grateful for my strong spiritual convictions because I did not let that rock my world. Now, I pray for her and my dad.”

Now Ellen and her two daughters dedicate their time to mentoring young girls through their YouTube channel, Coffee and Bible Time. She is known by many as Mentor Mama and shares words of wisdom and encouragement with her young audience.

“God has undeniably been at work in my life and I want to share with you all the lessons I have learned from that,” she tells them. “God gives us hope. When you look back on all the trials in your life, it’s so wonderful to see how God has been there all along.”

“If you turn to Him and trust in Him, He can get you through any trial and you can find encouragement and you can have joy. I would just encourage you to stay in God’s Word every day and remember to pray.”

Ellen has chosen to live by this Scripture verse, despite everything she has been through: “Let us rejoice today and be glad [Psalm 118:24].”



Ellen Krause. Other pics in this article are from coffeandbibletime.com

‘I set out to kill him’

● From page 1



“I was drawn to death. I watched videos of people dying and went to websites where people posted terrible things. I’d be terrified but I’d go back. I was addicted.

“But since becoming a Christian everything has changed. I used to be angry and fearful but now I’m filled with so much peace. Whenever I’m afraid I just pull out my Bible and I read His promises and the fear goes away. I just want to tell people how good He is.”

That desire to talk about Jesus is what drew her to join Revive the Streets, an evangelistic program run by Lexie’s church in which teams visit the neighbourhood to share their faith.

Sarah Smith, who runs the program, said Lexie is a huge asset. “She is so open with her life,” Sarah said. “She has led people to the Lord simply by sharing her testimony. Many people just can’t believe what she’s gone through and where she is now.”

Far from being uneasy about sharing her story, Lexie says she loves doing it. “I’m so happy I can tell others about what I’ve been saved from. The difference is like night and day and I know it’s all because of God.”



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Judith Bryant, Harriet Tubman's great-great-grandniece, talks to actress Cythina Erivo at the Washington, DC premiere of Harriet at the Smithsonian National Museum Of African American History on October 22, 2019. (Photo by Shannon Finney/Getty Images)

HARRIET'S HOPE

British actress Cythina Erivo played American abolitionist Harriet Tubman in the 2019 movie *Harriet*, earning her a best actress Oscar nomination.

Born into slavery, Harriet Tubman escaped and then made 13 rescue missions to liberate approximately 70 other enslaved people, including family and friends, using a network known as the Underground Railroad. She died in 1913 at the age of 91.

Cynthia said playing the legendary political activist was life changing.

"Harriet was led by her faith, and in that, I was encouraged to search for my own faith, be braver about my faith and talk more about it," she says. "Harriet's faith was astounding.

"It made me braver in my prayers. It made me want to pray, and not be afraid to do it out loud if I needed to. That's the thing that was really wonderful. It's comforting to be able to reach into your faith to tell the story of somebody else who has faith."

Cynthia talks about a scene in the film where Harriet is praying in a moment of need.

"I was listening to Gospel music just before I went in. I asked God to give me the strength to get through the day and to tell the story as truthfully as I could. As I said that prayer, it didn't feel like I was just saying it as Harriet. It felt like I was saying it as me."

Cynthia grew up in a Christian home in south London with a hard-working, believing mother. "It was my mother who taught me how to pray," she shares.

"We prayed over dinner, and she heard my bedtime prayers. I also heard her pray in the shower and in the bathroom when she was getting dressed before work. She prayed out loud, talking to God as though He was right there in the room with her. There were no restrictions when it came to prayer. You could pray at any time and all times. God was with you."

Cynthia's father was not in the picture during her childhood. She has only seen him once since she was 16 and she is now 33. However, she holds no resentment towards him. "I still had a pretty cool childhood," she says warmly.

She attended a Christian school and had been interested in singing and acting since she was five. She went on to train as an actor at the Royal Academy of Dramatic Arts and has secured very prominent roles in film and TV following the world-wide success of *Harriet*.

Still, Cynthia has had her fair share of struggles and disappointments, including discrimination because of the colour of her skin. However, she continues to stay grounded in her relationship with God. "I do have faith.

I do believe in God. My faith is always with me. The idea that faith really can bring you through something like suffering [is so powerful]. It's wonderful to be able to speak about it so openly."

Cynthia is proud of her culture and where she's from even when others can't seem to look past it.

"The first things people see are the colour of my skin and my sex. That's how I have lived my whole life. I have seen people insult my mother, for being Nigerian, and I've been insulted for that."

However, Cynthia is passionate about helping make a change in the world and assisting others achieve their goals. "I hope that *Harriet* will teach people that, even if they feel they're unimportant, they hold the power to change the world and change the things in this world with the help of God."

Cynthia praises God for the freedom and joy she feels. "I'm consistently grateful for what I have, what I go through, what I get to do and how free I am, because there was a lot sacrificed in order for that to happen."

When the script for *Harriet* was named the winner for Most Inspiring Screenplay by Movieguide, screenwriter Katherine Craddock shared this poignant thought: "If someone were to give Harriet this award, she would say, 'It wasn't me. It was the Lord.'"

"I have to completely agree, because the Lord is the best storyteller if we give our lives to Him. We should all use our lives as a reflection of the greatest storyteller, Jesus Christ." •



Cynthia Erivo as Harriet (right) and Janelle Monáe as Marie Buchanon in Harriet.

Miracle healing from awful case of shingles

BY MARK ELLIS

He had the worst case of shingles in the history of Toronto General Hospital and doctors prepared him for the worst.

"My skin was burning as if someone had doused it with gasoline and then threw a match on it," says Dr. Nasir Saddiki, the founder of Wisdom Ministries. "I felt like I was on fire from my inside."

In a sterile room on the eighth floor of the hospital, his doctor informed him "the blisters are multiplying so fast I can literally watch them grow. Your body has stopped fighting back."

The next day Nasir contracted chicken pox and doctors placed him in strict isolation. His temperature soared so high he ran the risk of permanent brain damage.

For days he continued to deteriorate. "My nerve endings became so inflamed that even a single hair drifting across my skin sent shock waves of fire rippling through my body," he says.

At 34, Nasir had already earned his first million dollars, but he wasn't prepared to handle his own mortality. "In facing death I felt nothing but weakness and outright terror. I didn't have the slightest idea what might await me on the other side. I had been raised as a devout Muslim and I had been taught that Allah was a god who did not heal sickness. I thought that my only hope was in medicine."

As Nasir slipped close to death, he became listless and unresponsive. Doctors delivered the bad news to his business partner. "In a few hours he'll be dead," they informed him. "If by some miracle he lives he'll be blind in his right eye, deaf in his right ear, paralysed on his right side and severely brain damaged."

"I suddenly felt like a drowning man going down for the third time," Nasir says. "Gathering what little strength I still had I was barely able to whisper, 'God if you are real do not let me die.'"

Miraculous encounter

Then in the middle of the night, he awoke suddenly to find a man standing at the foot of his bed. "I was shocked because rays of light emanated from him. I was unable to see His face. It was too bright to look at it without hurting my eyes."

Nasir somehow "just knew" this was Jesus Christ. He felt no fear, only profound serenity in the presence of the one called the Prince of Peace. Although he couldn't speak, he wondered why Jesus would come to a Muslim when everyone else had left him to die.

He didn't hear an audible voice from Jesus, but these words came into his mind: *I am the God of the Christians. I am the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.*

"That is all He told me. As suddenly as He had appeared and woke me up, He disappeared."

The next morning Nasir's doctors were astonished. "The blisters have stopped growing! We don't know why but your shingles have gone into remission," they exclaimed.

The following day, still in severe pain and covered with blisters, Nasir was discharged from the hospital with a suitcase full of drugs. "Don't leave your home," they cautioned. "It will be months before your blisters disappear and when they do, you will be left with severe scarring. The pain that you are experiencing can last for years."

"However I wasn't concerned about my appearance because I couldn't stop thinking about Jesus'

appearance. I was certain that His presence in my hospital room had stopped the shingles virus."

Nasir still wondered: "Is Jesus the Son of God as Christians claim or is He just a prophet as Muslims are taught?"

His first night home he continued to suffer.

"In spite of my medication, the pain and itching was so horrible I almost had to tie my hands to a chair to keep from scratching myself to death." Mercifully, he drifted into a deep sleep.

The next morning he woke up early and turned on the television. "While flipping through the channels I froze when I saw the following words on the screen: 'Is Jesus the Son of God?' I watched captivated as two men spent the entire program discussing this topic and in the process, answering all of my questions."

Before the program ended, one of the men led the audience in a prayer. "My body was aflame with pain but I knelt on my living room floor anyway." As tears streamed down his face, Nasir repeated the prayer and invited Jesus into his heart.

In spite of his doctor's orders to stay inside, he then went out and bought a Bible.

He read the books of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John.

Then started in Genesis and read through the entire Bible during his sleepless nights.

His Christian business partner brought Nasir books and teaching tapes, which further explained the gospel to him. He prayed and asked God to make him look like he had before the shingles.

A few days later, Nasir awakened to find his pillow covered with blisters that had fallen off his face. "I crawled out of bed and stepped into the shower. What started on my pillow was finished in the shower.

"Every blister fell off my body!" he exclaims. "Instead of being covered with patches of white and scar tissue, my skin turned red. It then slowly healed, returning to its pre-shingles condition. I actually looked like I did before I became ill, except for the scars that I still have on my chest.

"My healing was totally miraculous, swift and complete. I never suffered from lingering pain or in fact any other complication."

Jesus showed up in a hospital room of a dying Muslim and brought healing. "But that wasn't the greatest miracle that He performed," Nasir notes. "The transformation that occurred in my heart was even more dramatic than the one that occurred in my body."

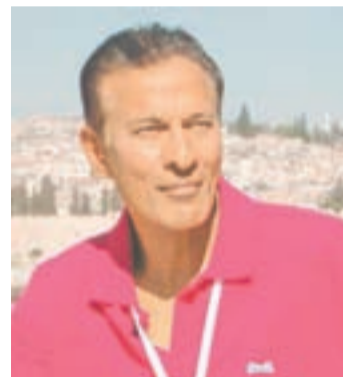
From that day forward, Nasir's passion has been to know and serve the Lord Jesus Christ. •

An international teacher and evangelist, Dr. Siddiki and his wife, Anita, host a television program on TBN, *Winning with Wisdom*. For more information, go to his website at www.wisdomministries.org

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



Dr Nasir Saddiki when ill (above) and now (below).



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Start at the right place

If Genesis is a myth and God didn't tell the truth at the beginning of the Bible, when did He stop lying? Sonia wondered.

My mother was a nominal Christian. She went to church once a week. She basically believed the Bible to be true (although did not read it, nor I suspect had any real understanding of it), and had the Christian 'world view'—no sex before marriage, no drugs etc.

My father was not a Christian, so growing up I did not see how a Christian family's life could be—where the children are taught from the Bible and have family prayer time, etc.

I went once a week to Sunday school and heard Bible stories. I was also confirmed at 13 because it was the thing to do and it made my mother happy.

I attended a 'Christian' school where I was taught evolution as fact in Science. It was also generally accepted that we descended from apemen/cavemen in history. I found it interesting that these Christian teachers had accepted evolution and could still believe the Bible. As far as I was concerned, I thought they were a bunch of hypocrites. It didn't make much sense, since even I, a teenager, could see that evolution and the Creation of the world as written in Genesis could not possibly be the same.

I didn't realise it then, but these teachings, along with the subtle evolutionary teachings from TV documentaries, museum displays, newspapers and magazines such as *National Geographic* (and I'm sure there were many other sources), all played a major influence on my view of the world and how I should live in it.

The message of Jesus made no sense to me because as far as I was concerned 'sinners' were those murderers in jail and I was not one of those.

I realise now that the reason I didn't understand is because I had

no foundation. Sin was whatever I wanted it to be since I had no clear description or definition of it.

The reason I couldn't define sin was because I had been told Genesis was a myth. That the people back in 'those days' were not intelligent enough to understand the creation of the world, so God had to tell them in a way that they would understand.

When I questioned my mother about the days of creation, she told me that they represented millions of years.

Basically what I was being told was that Genesis (particularly the first 11 chapters) was a big fairy story and not historical fact. This was further impacted by the millions of years, cavemen/apemen influences from school and other areas. This led me to believe that the Bible was a big lie. If God couldn't tell the truth from the beginning, then when did He start?

Later on I concluded that people had made God up as a crutch. The reason they needed this crutch is because as far as I could see, this life led nowhere. We are born, we live a short finite time and then we die.

To me it seemed futile and purposeless. So I figured that the Bible was man's way of coping with this dilemma, and God did not exist.

Once I had rejected the Bible and its 'Laws', I became rebellious. This led to smoking, drinking, drugs and worse. The only problem would have been if the police caught me.

Quite frankly I couldn't understand why the law didn't permit all these practises. Surely the law was old and outdated. As long as I didn't hurt anyone else, why shouldn't I do whatever I wanted since it was my own body?

What I didn't realise was that I don't actually own it, God does! Eventually I left my slovenly lifestyle and became career orientated. This was after realising that even though this life was purposeless

I might as well do something with it while I was here.

Also, I saw so much sadness, violence and hopelessness in the people I lived with and hung out with that I realised that I didn't want to be like them in 10 or 20 years' time.

At this stage of my life I did have one or two 'Christian' friends. From my church and school background I did have some knowledge of how a Christian should behave and these friends took Christ's grace for granted. They got drunk on a regular basis, wore revealing clothing etc. They talked the walk but didn't walk the talk!

As I look back, I believe that these friends didn't realise the immensity of assuming the title of 'Christ ones'. Their behaviour made me think all Christians were hypocrites.

When I met Darren, this view was radically changed. At first I didn't know he was a Christian but it became clear after an incident at work. I was walking through part of the laboratory one day and an enthusiastic Bible Basher was talking to someone about Jesus.

Just imagine my scornful, belittling view of this person.

To me it was quite obvious that he didn't have a brain if he subscribed to that rubbish. "Jesus," I said, "What a crock ...". What I didn't realise was that by even talking to this guy I had opened up the door for him to attempt to convert me!

I said to Darren, "This guy is a fruitloop, keep him away from me." Darren replied: "He just has a different perspective on things than you do."

Then Darren started to talk to me about animals, plants, the universe etc. He would share articles from *Creation* magazine and explain how the animal/insect/plant had to have been made by a Creator.

Darren witnessed faithfully to me for about three years before I became a Christian!

Often I would ask a question that he couldn't answer and he would tell me that he would try and find out. Sure enough he would have the answer for me the next day.

The process was interesting in that once I realised that *Creation* could have happened, I then found it easy to accept the entire Gospel message. This did not happen overnight, however, as I was thoroughly indoctrinated with evolutionary ideology and had already rejected the Bible.

Many Christians think the Gospel is only the story of Jesus's death and

Sonia's whole outlook changed when her view of the beginning changed.
Stock photo: depositphotos.com



Believe It or Not

BY CREATION MINISTRIES INTERNATIONAL

Radiocarbon in dino bones ?!

HOW would our view of dinosaurs change if scientists found carbon 14 in their bones?

Carbon-14 is an unstable form of carbon that decays into nitrogen-14 at a measured rate, which forms the basis of carbon-14 dating.

Carbon-14 decays relatively fast, and should not be detectable after a maximum of 90,000 years.

Well, a group of geophysicists claimed to have discovered carbon 14 in dinosaur bones!

Evolution teaches that the last dinosaurs

died out 65 million years ago.

There should not be one atom carbon-14 present in dinosaur bones, if they really are as old as is usually claimed.

After going to great lengths to rule out contamination, the researchers concluded that they had indeed found carbon-14 in dinosaur bone.

These results seriously undermine the theory of long ages of earth history. However, they fit nicely with Biblical history, whereby dinosaurs lived only thousands of years ago, with their fossils forming from animals buried quickly during Noah's Flood.

In 2003 researchers did the same test on 10 coal samples from the University of Pennsylvania, which supposedly ranged in age from 37 million to 318 million years, but were found to each contain about the same amounts of carbon-14. Again, an impossible result if evolution were true.

To find out more, check out the Creation Ministries International website at creation.com.



resurrection and nothing else. But it is far broader; the Gospel begins right in the first chapters of Genesis, as Paul proclaims in 1 Corinthians 15:21-22: "For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead comes also through a man. For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive."

In fact the last reference to the Gospel is in Revelation 14:6-7 where we are instructed to amongst other things "worship Him who made the heavens, the earth, the sea and the springs of water."

If you preach Jesus' death and resurrection alone it is like watching only the climax of a movie. It is an incomplete account. You don't get the whole truth.

The information from Darren destroyed my belief in evolution and allowed me to see, for the first time, the power of the Creator God, as shown in Genesis, which brought me to a commitment in Christ.

What then shocked me was to find the church full of people who claimed to accept the Bible as written but who rejected the Genesis account of Creation! They preferred the views of men who don't know everything, continually make mistakes, and who weren't there, to God's infallible Word.

Twenty years since writing this, Sonia is now a medical doctor. She lives in Australia with her husband.

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TEARS

Evolutionists have claimed that tears are vestigial, which means humans do not need tears, and they are mostly useless. The facts totally contradict this illogical and faulty evolutionary view.

From the creationist point of view, tears are like a miracle. **1.** Every time we blink we cover our eye with water, which prevents it from drying out. **2.** Tears contain oil to reduce evaporation. **3.** Tears contain lysozyme an enzyme that kills germs, which prevents infection and blindness. **4.** Tears remove toxic substances ... so tears are good for our health.

The only creature on Earth that cries, is the human, and it is an important part of relieving emotional stress. It is also interesting to note that Jesus cried, when He saw the unbeliever in the people He had come to save.

Tears, tear ducts, lacrimal glands, chemicals and oils, and all the machinery that operate eye, lids and tear production, are all a witness to the wisdom of God our Creator.



By Richard Gunther

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BUILDING BETTER RELATIONSHIPS

I'M SORRY, DID I ROLL MY EYES OUT LOUD?

BY ROB FURLONG

A favourite meme of mine is one where Robert Downey Jr. (who plays Tony Stark/Iron Man) has his arms crossed, eyes rolling backwards and the caption stating, "The face you make when the person you can't stand is talking!"

For some strange reason, my eldest daughter sent this to me with the not-so-subtle suggestion that this is how I can be at times!

Yes – I confess – I have trouble being present with people in conversation occasionally, and I suspect I am not alone!

How can I (we) be more present with people?

Author of *Emotionally Healthy Relationships*, Peter Scuzzero has

suggested some statements designed to help us discover what kind of listeners we are. How many of the following can you truthfully say "yes" to? (The statements have been adapted from Scuzzero's EHR Course)

1. Close friends would describe me as a responsive listener.
2. When people are upset with me, I can listen to them without being defensive.
3. I listen to people's words as well as their body language and feelings behind their words.
4. I am not primarily interested in judging others or quickly giving them my opinion.
5. I can empathize with people's feelings.
6. I am aware when I am appeasing, ignoring, blaming, or distracting others in my conversations.
7. I am conscious of the impact my family of origin has had upon the way I listen to people.
8. I ask the person to clarify what they mean as I listen, rather than "filling in the blanks" or making assumptions about them.
9. I do not interrupt when the other

person is speaking.
10. I give people my undivided attention when they are talking to me.

Scuzzero goes on to explain: If you said yes to 8-10, you are an outstanding listener; if you said yes to 6-7, you are very good; 4-5, good; 3 or fewer, poor – you are in trouble.

It is not a bad idea either, to have someone close to you rate your listening skills as well – it may provide you with a more accurate picture!

There are a couple of helpful insights that arise from completing a simple exercise like this.

In the first instance, the statements themselves give us valuable clues as to what "being present" looks like.

If you are listening well then you will respond effectively to the other person. You pick up on the emotional cues they are sending, you can affirm their feelings, you are more focused on helping them to process their emotions as opposed to trying to "fix" them.

Instead of trying to defend yourself or deflect the conflict away, you listen and answer the person with grace and without judgement.

The second thing this exercise does is it allows us to see where we need to develop in our listening skills and to ask ourselves questions as to why we struggle being present with people.

"I know I become very defensive with people at times. What is this saying about how conflict was managed in my family of origin?"



Actor Robert Downey Jr. rolling his eyes.

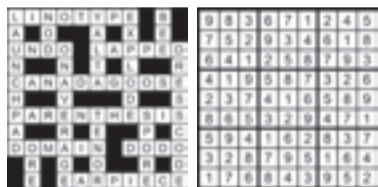
"I find it difficult when people become emotional in a conversation with me. How do I process my own feelings and how can I learn to do this better?"

"More often than not, I am more interested in telling the person my opinion or giving them the solution to their problem. Am I more interested in impressing them with my 'wisdom' or in really listening to them? How do I grow beyond this?"

If doing this little exercise has prompted these, or similar questions, in you, then you are on your way to becoming a better listener!

Of course, you are not going to change overnight, but if you commit to learning and practicing better listening skills, over time you will experience real change.

Next month we will take a closer look at what some of those practical skills are.



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)

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

Here is an example of how you can pray.

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

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

AS A NEXT STEP:

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

Name _____

Address _____

Phone _____

Age and occupation (it helps) _____

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Lessons from a sausage dog (Part 10)

BY JODY BENNETT

AS I was making lunch to bring to work today, Carrie, our sausage dog, sat at my feet in the kitchen wanting a bit of everything. A little square of cheese, a slice of cucumber, a wedge of capsicum, a bit of sausage.

It doesn't matter what I am eating, she wants some. I imagine her thinking, "If it is good enough for my master, it is good enough for me." (This may be, of course, why she is a little overweight!)

Carrie thinks this way about the places I frequent too – the couch, the double bed, the hammock, and the driver's seat in the car! If that is where I am, that is where she wants to be; whatever I am doing she wants to be close by.



If we go to the dog beach or swim in the pool she will only get in the water if I do; if the children ever want to find me they look for Carrie, because she is usually right beside me.

In the famous Bible story in Luke 2 of 12-year-old Jesus wondering away from his family and being found in the temple, He says to his parents, "Why were you searching for me? Didn't you know I had to be in my Father's house?"

In another place Jesus said: "Very truly I tell you, the Son can do nothing by Himself; He can do only what He sees his Father doing, because whatever the Father does the Son also does." (John 5:19)

Jesus, although He Himself is God in human form, lived as an example to us of the relationship we should have with God.

The Apostle Paul told his readers to follow his example as he followed Christ's (1 Corinthians 11:1).

Like Carrie, my motto should be: "If it's good enough for my Master, it's good enough for me. Where my Master is, there I will follow."

If Jesus suffered, it is no surprise that I do too; if Jesus forgave His enemies, so should I; if Jesus approved or disapproved of something, I should too; and whenever people are looking for Jesus, they should be able to find Him through my example.

My life should be lived at the feet of my Master and my gaze focused upwards in adoration, looking to where we go next, listening for His command.

BEING THANKFUL

BY PETER BRAIN

MANY years ago Albert Einstein wrote, 'A hundred times every day I remind myself that my inner and outer life depend upon the labours of other men, living and dead, and that I must exert myself in order to give in the same measure as I have received and am still receiving.'

The gratitude that Einstein practised is what parents have to constantly remind their children to exhibit. I can remember my mum and dad saying, "Don't forget to say 'thank you'". The Sunday school chorus reminded us to be thankful not only to others but to God, the source of all blessings. Do you remember it?

'Count your blessings, name them one by one

Count your blessings, see what God has done

Count your many blessings, name them one by one

And it will surprise you what the Lord has done.'

Thankfulness has many very attractive cousins. Contentment, generosity, respect and trust in God to name a few.

Ingratitude on the other hand spawns many ugly habits in us. These include jealousy, covetousness, bitterness, pride and discontent.

The observation that 'Sickness is catching and health isn't' alerts us to the fact that we need to actively train ourselves and encourage one another to be thankful (both to God and to others). I've never heard a parent saying, 'Remember to be ungrateful!'

Thankfulness practised can transform us, our families, workplaces, community and churches. Dr Arch Hart reports that 'In one university study, people suffering from a painful neuromuscular disorder were instructed to regularly keep a record of things they could be grateful for. A kind word from someone. A gift from a neighbour. The smell of orange blossoms in the spring. Life is full of little things to be grateful for, and the sufferers learned to count their blessings. The results were astonishing. Improving in their pain management, they felt happier and emotionally more stable.'

When God commands us to be thankful, it is not only so that we recognise our dependence on Him but it is for our good. In my own experience it does me good because being actively thankful towards God takes me out of my sinful propensity to feel sorry for myself and at the same time recognise the wonderful provision He has made in giving me the friendship and help of others. I am so grateful to God for His innumerable blessings.

COUNT YOUR BLESSINGS





Darren Moore, Manager of Doncaster Rovers looks on as assistant Jamie Smith gives instructions during the match between Blackburn Rovers and Doncaster Rovers at Ewood Park on January 09, 2021 in Blackburn, England. Behind them are the cardboard cutout 'fans' due to Covid-19 precautions. (Photo by Nathan Stirk/Getty Images)

Insert: Darren Moore playing for Burton Albion in 2011. (Photo by John Walton - PA Images via Getty Images)

FOLLOWER IS GREAT LEADER

Former professional English soccer player Darren Moore has had an illustrious career. From 1992 to 2012, the 1.88m defender was a defensive pillar at several Premier League and Championship clubs, including West Bromwich Albion and Derby County.

Currently the manager of League One club Doncaster Rovers, he earned three international caps for Jamaica.

Darren, who goes by the nickname Big Dave for his apparent resemblance to a character in a British instant noodle advertisement, is also a member of the management committee of the Professional Footballers' Association.

He had an unusual habit while he was a player at West Bromwich - whenever his team played against Portsmouth Football Club he would drop in on the opposing team players in their changing room.

But it wasn't because he wanted to catch up with old friends - it was to pray with them. Because Darren Moore is also a devout Christian, and there were several players in the Portsmouth team who shared his faith.

Linvoy Primus was a member of the Portsmouth prayer group and remains close to Darren to this day. "There were nine players at Portsmouth who were Christians," Linvoy told the *Express & Star* newspaper. "There was a core who met once a week and prayed together before games in the kit room.

"It wasn't just us, it was open

to whoever wanted to come in. At some point there were up to 20 players with staff as well. Whenever Darren came back with West Brom he would come in and pray. It was a unique thing that happened but it was a place where you could get some peace."

Reflecting on how he became a Christian, Darren says: "When I was young, I went to Sunday school.

"But as my football career started, it was Sundays at 10 o'clock when the team bus would pick me up, so I stopped going to Sunday school and I automatically thought you can't play football and serve God.

"It's only when I met my teammate Wayne Jacobs (Jakes) that I realised how wrong I was, because you can serve the Lord at all times. Jakes really exemplified that.

"We used to travel to Bradford together and he once asked me what my family background was and if it was Christian. I said I was from a Christian family but found it very difficult to attend church and serve the Lord because I was playing football. Wayne was such a wonderful guy and didn't force it."

Instead, he asked Darren to get a devotional booklet out of the glovebox and asked him to read it to him because he was driving. This soon became their regular practice - Darren would read the passage for the

day and then they would discuss it.

"I was getting teaching and doctrine from Wayne right there and then!" Darren grins. "Wayne was a Christian, and I was inspired by his testimony. Our friendship led to the start of my journey in faith."

Darren recalls one day in particular when he was "feeling low and lacking confidence". The reading for that day was 2 Timothy 1:7 - 'For God hath not given us the spirit of fear, but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind'.

"I thought 'my goodness' because I was feeling a bit of fear

that I didn't belong at this level of football, and that scripture spoke right into my heart," Darren smiles. "Everything about it seemed so right to me. Soon I invited God into my life and He has had a big influence on my career."

Darren soon joined a Christians in Sport group. "The leader would read from the Bible, we would discuss it and have a bit of food, too," he says. "We were all at different parts of our careers...in the first team or playing reserves or about to be transferred or injured.

"But when we came together we were all at the same point. God loved us all unconditionally and knew the plans He had for us and wanted to be in our everyday lives. And, of course, the Holy Spirit's there too

dwelling among us. That was really special to me.

"I felt confident and at peace and that's when I gave my life to the Lord. God revealed Himself to me and said He's very much part of my everyday life."

While he was still a player, Darren would thank God for giving him the opportunity to play before every match and, then again after every match, for being able to play and keeping him free from injury.

He says God gave him the confidence he needed to survive the pressures and expectations of professional sport. "I used to beat myself up under the pressures of the game," Darren admits. "They are immense, and God helped me to deal with them."

He shares that his faith gave him

peace because he had Someone to turn to and that he learned not only to give his best but to enjoy himself doing it.

"In March 2003, I suffered a serious knee injury," Darren remembers. "My faith played a big part in helping me to come to terms with it, and although it was a terrible injury I had a peace and sense of joy through it all. My time in physiotherapy was a joyous period. I blessed God for being there for me to lean on. He is always there for me."

Darren, who is also a husband and father of one, displays the character of Jesus, His Lord, in the way he has supported many charities over the years, promotes diversity in his club and has a reputation for being respectful, generous, humble and dedicated.

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