

# TAKING THE GAMBLE

**A secret life. Lies and risk. A marriage on the rocks and creditors hounding him at every turn. Suicide was looming as a very real option for Dusty McLemore.**

It began harmlessly enough. Dusty used to watch people playing poker when he was a young man. However the innocent recreation soon turned into all-out gambling binges.

"At the time I never knew what the term gambling meant," says Dusty, "nor was I aware that my gambling addiction would drag my life into the pit of despair."

In high school, Dusty fed his highly competitive nature by getting involved with sport. "I hated to lose and my competitive spirit served as the catalyst fuelling my desire for gambling," he acknowledges.

"I loved winning money, but soon I just loved simply winning, as it gave me an extreme adrenalin rush."

At college, his habit escalated to another level as he got involved with professional bookies.

His first bet with a bookie saw him win big, fanning the flame even more. Soon he was betting ever larger sums of money and gambled daily. It wasn't long before Dusty hit a losing streak and needed to take out a loan to pay off his debt.

Life became more complicated when he married his 16-year-



Dusty and Patsy McLemore and (right) with their children and grandchildren.



old girlfriend Patsy. "She was aware of my gambling habit," says Dusty, "but she had no idea how much money I was betting. Still, our marriage went well for a few years despite my worsening habit."

"I had a good job which paid well, but I almost lost it because I gambled on company time. My wife started to become more aware of the extent of my problem, but I assured her that all was under control," he reveals.

"My life had now become a vicious cycle of winning and losing and as a consequence we were living week to week with our future on the line."

"My addiction had become so bad I would gamble on anything from horse racing to boxing," he admits.

"I knew I was totally addicted but I was not willing to admit it to anyone. My wife realised my situation and begged me to stop, even threatening to leave me, but the pull to gamble was just too strong."

Patsy later discovered how Dusty had hidden his gambling debt by juggling funds between different bank accounts.

"By now my debt was so bad I was getting threatening phone calls from my bookies and letters from my creditors. I kept thinking I could settle the debt by winning back the money like I had done so many times before."

In the end, it was Patsy who paved the way to Dusty's rescue – in desperation she went back to church,

recommitting herself to her childhood faith. Both her and Dusty had been raised in church but had not been back since their wedding.

"After a few weeks," says Dusty, "Patsy came home and told me she had become a Christian by giving her life over to Jesus. I could see that her life had changed. She had peace and I noticed she stopped nagging me about my gambling."

Dusty admits that he thought he would see Patsy go back to her old ways but she didn't.

"I could see what she had was real and genuine. Meanwhile everything came to a head in October 1979 as our home had become a pressure cooker."

Dusty was under enormous stress to pay his bookies.

"My heart sank as I saw my last bet on a football game lose. I almost kicked in the television! I remember going outside and staring at the night sky wondering what I was going to do," says Dusty. "Thoughts of suicide ran through my mind. Gambling had destroyed my life."

"I began to think of Patsy's new-found faith in Jesus and the peace she had."

"Around 3am I got down on my knees and began to weep. All I can remember saying was 'God save me! God save me!' I repeated it over and over again."

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**BACK PAGE**

**FAITH IN THE FACE OF LOSS**

**BLAKE BIVENS**

## HOW DO YOU GET TO HEAVEN?

A TEACHER asked the children in her Sunday School class: "If I sold my house and my car, had a big garage sale and gave all my money to the church, would that get me into heaven?"

"NO!" the children all answered.

"If I cleaned the church every day, mowed the yard, and kept everything neat and tidy, would that get me into heaven?"

Again, the answer was, "NO!"

"Well, then, if I was kind to animals and gave candy to all the children, and loved my husband, would that get me into heaven?" she asked them again.



Again, they all answered, "NO!"

"Well, then how can I get into heaven?"

A five-year-old boy shouted out, "YOU GOTTA BE DEAD!"

Of course the little boy was quite right. Heaven is a place for those that have departed this life. But there is no guarantee that simply dying will earn you a place in God's kingdom.

We do know there is somewhere to go after we die. We have the promise of God that there is a permanent dwelling place. Jesus said, "Do not let your hearts be troubled. You believe in God; believe

also in me. My Father's house has many rooms; if that were not so, would I have told you that I am going there to prepare a place for you?" (John 14:1,2 NIV).

The question that has plagued the ages is, "How

do I get into Heaven?" What qualifies me entrance to God's eternal kingdom?

Some people believe they have to obey the Ten Commandments for their entire lives to qualify for Heaven.

Some people believe they must observe certain rites and rituals in order to go to Heaven.

Some people believe there is no way we can know for sure whether or not we will go to Heaven.

None of these views are correct. The Bible is very clear on how a person can qualify for Heaven.

Let me answer you with basic answers straight from God's Word.

- The first thing we need to realize that Jesus is the only way.

The Apostle Peter said, "There is salvation in no one else! God has given no other name under heaven by which we must be saved," (Acts 4:12)

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# HOW DO YOU GET TO HEAVEN?

• From page 1

And Jesus Himself claimed, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one can come to the Father except through me." (John 14.6).

• Secondly we cannot qualify for Heaven through our own efforts.

"For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God— not by works, so that no one can boast." (Ephesians 2.8,9 NIV). So it is not a matter of how good you are or how many good deeds you have done in your life.

• Thirdly we have to realize that we are all sinners in need of salvation.

"For all have sinned and come short of the glory of God." (Romans 3.23). Even the very best of us fall far short of being fit for God's kingdom.

• Fourthly we need to make a conscious decision to accept God's free gift of salvation, "But to all who believed Him and accepted Him, He gave the right to become children of God." (John 1.12 NLT).

Then you can be sure that you are a child of God and can have the assurance of getting into Heaven.

The Apostle John wrote, "I have written this to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, so that you may know you have eternal life." (1 John 5.13).



*Dear God,  
I admit I am a sinner and need your forgiveness: I believe that Jesus Christ died in my place paying the penalty for my sins. I am willing right now to turn from my sin and accept Jesus Christ as my personal Saviour and Lord. I commit myself to you and ask you to send the Holy Spirit into my life, to fill me and take control, and to help me become the person you want me to be. Thank you Father for loving me. In Jesus' name. Amen.*

# Facing the dreaded day

BY MURRAY CAMPBELL

**JULIE** Power, writing for the *Sydney Morning Herald* ("Even in a pandemic, most people shun talk about death and dying," August 11), has highlighted how Australians are "reluctant to think about death or make plans for how they want to go".

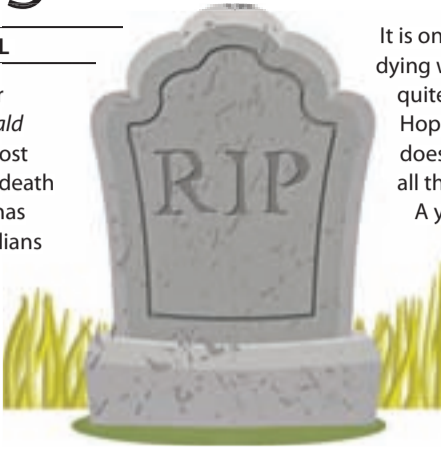
According to a recent survey conducted among 1,100 people in NSW, 70 percent of Australians prefer to avoid addressing the issue of death.

Power suggests that "the deaths of older Australians alone and isolated from friends and families during the pandemic highlights the need to talk about what constitutes a good death."

I agree, we need to talk. We appreciate that such conversations are difficult at the best of times. Who among us is keen to discuss our final days and to make decisions about funerals? Contemplating death is altogether horrible, even more when we are considering people we know and love. Death is, to quote the Bible, "the last enemy".

Unlike most cultures for much of history, we have managed to sanitise death with our modern medicines, clean white sheets and closed doors. We have successfully delayed death through vast improvements in medicine and technology, with greater standards of living, by educating people about health, and through legislating thousands of laws guarding public and workplace safety. Despite all this, we cannot account for the unexpected accident, a natural disaster, or the coming of a pandemic.

Even when we evade such tragedy, our bodies have been in motion since birth, taking the road of gradual deterioration and decline.



It is one thing to have discussions about dying well, as Julie Power is urging, but it is quite another to die with or without hope. Hope doesn't evade death, and neither does it remove painful grief, but it makes all the difference in the world.

A young mum whom I knew, died from ovarian cancer on August 1. She grew up with an atheistic worldview, but when confronted with cancer and receiving a poor prognosis, she began asking questions and searching for hope. Suffering didn't reinforce her atheism, it led her to seek out God.

In learning about the person and work of Jesus Christ, she didn't feel repulsed or angry at God for her cancer. Rather, her life was transformed by the beauty and warmth of Jesus.

This wasn't Christianity offering her a placebo in the face of death, but her becoming convinced about the reality, goodness, and certainty of the Christian Gospel.

"He will swallow up death forever. The Sovereign Lord will wipe away the tears from all faces" (Isaiah 25:8).

There is never a good time to talk about death. Conversations about funeral arrangements and taking care of those who remain behind are important. These are difficult discussions we need to have with close family members; not because death is imminent for most of us, but because we do not know when the hour will come.

As a pastor of a church, it is my great privilege to spend time with people who are facing their final days on the earth and to sit with grieving families in their homes and to stand with them at the graveside. The question of hope is rarely left alone as people grapple with the reality of the grave.

On one occasion Jesus arrived at the home of His friend Lazarus, who had died some four days earlier. Visiting the tomb of His friend, we read the shortest sentence in the entire Bible: "Jesus wept."

Mingled with grief, Jesus also spoke confidently of hope, not only for Lazarus but for all who look to Him – "I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die; and whoever lives by believing in me will never die. Do you believe this?"

Murray Campbell is a follower of Jesus Christ, a husband, a father, pastor of Mentone Baptist Church (in suburban Melbourne) and blogs at MurrayCampbell.net.



# Taking the gamble

• From page 1

"I immediately experienced the Spirit of God (His invisible presence) come into my life. It was like an enormous weight had been lifted off my shoulders. I knew for the first time I was saved from my sin," says Dusty.

"Suddenly I felt the loving arms of my dear wife around my neck and we embraced as we wept together. Our tears were tears of joy as we realised that God had changed our lives."

Dusty never gambled again. He confided in his father, who helped him secure a bank loan to settle his debt.

Today Dusty is the pastor of a church in Huntsville Alabama, whose membership has grown from 32 members in 1992 to over a thousand today.

"I am living proof of what God can do when we call out to Him," says Dusty. "So whatever your vice, whatever your addiction, or whatever your sin, my God will deliver you if you will trust Him and call upon His name."

And that is a sure bet.

## Crossword

### ACROSS

- 1 "If I do \_\_\_\_\_ myself" (3-2)
- 5 Slope; incline
- 9 From the 1930's
- 10 Jaded
- 12 Bird-to-be
- 13 List in a book
- 14 Association of South-East Asian Nations (inits)
- 15 Every newborn
- gets one
- 16 Non-Jew (sl)
- 18 Overlook
- 20 Carrying dishes
- 22 Monopoly income
- 23 Cat's favourite seat
- 24 TV studio sign (2,3)
- 25 Coarse woollens
- 26 Tranquil rural scene
- 27 Home planet

### DOWN

- 2 Concert site
- 3 Unrestrained shopping trip
- 4 Kind of antelope
- 5 Clammy, perspiring
- 6 Falls behind
- 7 South American country
- 8 Womb companion
- 10 Subtle eye signal
- 11 Royal Navy HQ
- 16 Preachers preach it
- 17 Stalin's empire (inits)
- 18 High-IQ group
- 19 Time on the job
- 20 Metered vehicle
- 21 Ship's small boat
- 22 Went by bike, e.g.

SOLUTION PAGE 8

## Sudoku

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

Puzzle Level: Medium

6 3 8  
4 2 9  
7 5 1

SOLUTION PAGE 8

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

One thing this pandemic has proven is how much we wish to rage against the dying light, to fight and resist it with all our might. Death is not a friend, it is an enemy to struggle against.

# Christianity could be debunked by history

BY JODY BENNETT

**WHEN** I was a teenager, I was asked by a magazine doing an article comparing religions what was the difference between my religion – Christianity - and other world religions.

At the time I knew the central difference was that in other religions you are required to 'earn' heaven by doing good works or performing certain rituals, but that in Protestant Christianity entrance into heaven was bought for us by the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, and given as a gift (grace) to those who believe (have faith). (Catholicism, although claiming to believe this, in practice makes salvation depend upon rituals like baptism, confession, penance and communion.)

Good works for a Christian are a way of saying 'thank you', not 'please'.

It is also clear that no other religion has a figure like Jesus Christ, who claimed to be God Himself, living a sinless life and rising from the dead. No one else on earth has had the audacity to say, "I and the Father are one" (John 10:30). Or "If you had known me, you would have known my Father. And from now on you do know Him and have seen Him." (John 14:7).

But recently it was pointed out to me that Christianity is also unique in that it is the only religion that could be debunked by archaeology or history.

In the words of Richard E. Simmons, in his new book

*Reflections on the Existence of God:*

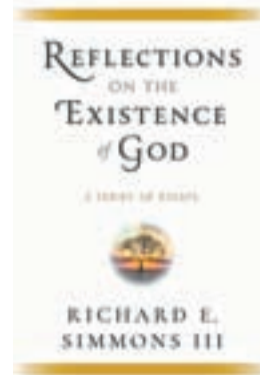
"Christianity is the only world religion where spiritual truth depends on the veracity of clearly defined and discoverable historical events. ... If these are demolished it is nothing."

And, as Simmons details, many people have set out to debunk Christianity by disproving some historical claim of Scripture, like the existence of Jesus, the resurrection, or the historicity of the book of Acts. And yet time and time again, the would-be debunkers have been forced to admit that, as far as they can prove, it is all true. History, archaeology and geography all back up the Bible.

Simmons' book, which is a series of short essays, enumerates 56 arguments, including historicity, for why Christianity is based on more than just blind faith, and how it makes sense of existence, evil, morality, beauty, happiness, death, sexuality, love and our world in a way that no other religion does.

But as Simmons warns in the first few pages: You should only go looking for the truth if you are prepared to follow where it leads. Many people roundly denounce Christianity without ever researching its claims because, if it is true, and there is a Creator God, they will then have to choose whether to worship or defy Him.

Either God exists or He doesn't. There is no third option. And if He does, who is He? If you are ready to follow the truth where it leads, the very well researched and clearly written *Reflections on the Existence of God: a series of essays* by Richard E. Simmons III is available online.



# Pole dancer finds choices taste of 'burnt toast'

BY MICHAEL ASHCRAFT

At 10, Veronyka Sanchez dressed like a boy and wanted to be a gangster. Then her father got radically saved and she started attending church.

"My family gang-bangs," she said on a video posted by the Long Beach Door Church. "That's just the life I came from. I come from generations and generations of gangsters. When you come from the lifestyle that I come from, there are strongholds in your life."

But after tasting church life, she decided to follow her secular friends and leave the church.

"I was going to church but I was also living a double life, drinking and going to parties," she said. I never had a real one-on-one relationship with God. When I was 17 and I got my first real taste of the world, I decided, "This is awesome. I love it," and, "Freedom!" and I got pregnant. I just kind of went downhill from there."



Veronyka left home and

lived house to house during the pregnancy and after giving birth. Then when her baby turned one, Veronyka turned to do what she thought was the only career available to her.

"I started pole dancing," she says. "I was in a really hard place, and I felt very alone. I felt like I needed to get money fast. Everything that I ever knew was unravelling so quickly, so I started dancing. Little did I know that I was going to go down a really dark rabbit hole once I opened that door."

For three years, she made good money "dancing." She got her own place and her own car and lived in San Bernardino.

"I got involved with some people who definitely took advantage of me and manipulated me," she says. "As dark as that environment was, I could have gone deeper. It scared me to a point where I thought, 'Am I going to go fully into what I'm doing or am I going to stop all of this and turn back to God?'"

"I was so far away from God that I didn't feel Him anymore," she adds. "It scared me to see the place I was in and the dark things I was doing. I wasn't happy. I was making a lot of money. I had everything that looked good on the outside but on the inside I wanted to die. I hated my life."

Veronyka started making small steps towards God. She attended Sunday service once every two weeks. "That created a ripple effect to bring me back to God," she says. "I'm really grateful that God found me in that really dark place."

After committing to Sunday and Wednesday services, she began praying and listening to sermons daily. "I just wanted to hear from Him every day," she recalled. "I told God to tell me something, and He did. God is so personal."

On New Year's Day, she decided to break 100% with sin. She decided to move back to Long Beach to her original church.

"Materialistically, I don't have anything right now," says Veronyka, now 22. "But on the inside I'm leaping for joy. I'd rather have God than materialistic things and not have Him."

"I ran to the world, and the world used and abused me. I've tasted and seen how good God is. That's why I choose to serve Him, and I will always choose Him over the world. I've tasted the world, and I've tasted God, and there's no comparison. The world tastes like burnt toast. God tastes like fresh fruit from the tree."

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

# New movie tells story of singer's tragic loss

College student Jeremy Camp was on stage when he first laid eyes on Melissa Henning. "I looked up and there she was singing with her hands raised in the air. [I could tell] that there was something different about her," he recalls.

Sparks flew between the two and they started dating. Then, months later, devastating news hit. Melissa had been diagnosed with ovarian cancer.

"I remember walking into the hospital," Jeremy says. "She had just found out she had cancer and she was smiling. I was like, 'Why is she smiling?' Then, Melissa said, 'I am doing okay, because I have been thinking, if I were to die from this cancer and just one life comes to know Jesus through it, it will all be worth it.'"

Later, Jeremy went back to his car and wept. The strong and unshaken faith Melissa had in God rocked him to his core and changed his whole perspective.

It was not like Jeremy did not know about God. He had given his life to Jesus as a young boy. He had been raised in a Christian home. His father was a preacher and later, Jeremy himself would become an ordained minister. He had a passion for sharing the Gospel [story of Jesus saving us from our sins].

Jeremy also had a love for music. He played the guitar and sang and would lead worship services. It was during one of these sessions, in 1999, that Jeremy first saw Melissa.

They had only been together for a few weeks when they broke

it off. "I was devastated because I thought she was 'the one,'" Jeremy says. He told her he loved her. Melissa replied, "I don't feel the same way."

Months went by and Jeremy started to think that things between them were over for good. Then he got a phone call saying Melissa was in the hospital.

Her words of faith in the hospital had an enormous impact on the singer. "That, to me, is the crux of the story, of who she was and what she would say. You can tell that she had a comfort and a peace from God in her heart. She had such a love for Jesus."

Later Melissa told Jeremy that she loved him too. Their romance was rekindled, Melissa went into remission and a month later, on October 21, 2000, they were married. However, during the couple's honeymoon to Hawaii, she started having bad stomach pains.

Heart-breaking news awaited them on their return. The cancer was back. There was nothing the doctors could do. It was all over her body. She had months, maybe weeks, to live.

Their promising future together was gone in a blink. However, the couple drew strength and peace from God. "I was willing to walk through the fire," Jeremy remembers. "It's not because I'm some great



Jeremy Camp (left) at the premiere of "I Still Believe", a movie about his life, in which K.J. Apa (right) plays Jeremy. Pictured at ArLight Hollywood on March 7, 2020 in California. (Photo by Matt Winkelmeyer/Getty Images)

awesome guy. No, I think it was just a God thing. He gave me the strength."

When Melissa heard the news, all she wanted to do was to sing worship songs to Jesus. "He is worthy to be praised no matter what we are going through," Jeremy says.

A few months later, on February 5, 21-year-old Melissa went to be with her Maker.

Jeremy shares, "I was on my knees and I remember her sister saying, 'She is with Jesus now.' A grief fell over me that I can't describe."

Jeremy had so many questions for God. "Do you really hear me, God? Do you really care about every situation? God, are you near?"

God answered Jeremy with the prompt to pick up his guitar. Through the pain, the grief, and the darkness that Jeremy felt, he went on to write his most famous song, *I Still Believe*, in about ten minutes.

The best-known lines from the song are, "I still believe in Your faithfulness. I still believe in Your truth. I still believe in Your Holy Word. Even when I don't see, I still believe."

"Everyone goes through pain," Jeremy says. "Pain is universal. For me, I experienced that pain. What got me through it was my relationship with Jesus."

In 2011, Jeremy released a memoir called *I Still Believe*. Recently, the movie of the couple's tragic love-story was

released in theatres.

Of the movie Jeremy says: "I hope to show that in times like that you run to Jesus cos He's the only source of hope and life. It doesn't mean things won't be hard but then, He never said you would never go through trials. He said He would be with us through the trials."

In a beautiful twist, when Jeremy met his second wife Adrienne Liesching, in 2002, he learnt that she had become a Christian as a result of Melissa's story.

Today, they have three children and minister to people who have never heard of Jesus, honouring Melissa's legacy and her wish for people to be touched by God through her death.

Jeremy's music has topped the Billboard charts and sold more than five million albums worldwide. Four of his albums have gone gold and he has been nominated for three American Music Awards as well as a Grammy Award.

"My encouragement [to Christians in hard times is]... do not lose heart, because our affliction is just momentary and what God is preparing for us, what He has in store for us, it will blow us away," Jeremy smiles. "Imagine ... no more tears, no more sorrow, no more pain. One day, we will forever be with Jesus."



Jeremy Camp, his second wife Adrienne and their children arrive at the premiere of his movie at ArLight Hollywood on March 7, 2020 in Hollywood, California. (Photo by Steve Granitz/WireImage)

If you are not a Christian but would like that hope and comfort, see the "How can I become a Christian?" section on page 11.

# Encountering miracles in the way

Life as a travelling salesman isn't all it's cracked up to be. Sure there are balmy nights and days spent driving along Australia's beautiful outback, sharing rabbit stew with generous truckies you meet along the way.

But don't let the brochures fool you. There are also flat tyres and broken springs and getting stuck in the mud. There's also the loneliness of being away from family.

Laurie Hannah knows all about it. The former watchmaker is 86 now but still clearly remembers his years delivering watch parts and supplies around Australia.

He was in his 20s then, married with three young children. "I always had a burning desire to see the Australian bush and outback," he told *Challenge News*. "When my friend offered me the job in 1956 delivering tools and watch parts around Australia, my wife Val had no objections."

Little did Laurie know what awaited him. "It was a dream come true," he reminisced. "I travelled to Sydney from Melbourne where we lived and then to Cairns then back to Townsville, seeing the wonders of God's creation."

Ah, God. Laurie said he was not a Christian but had a strong belief in God "probably because of my mother, who was a strong believer," he said.

"I knew enough to never bargain with God, but I did pray that if He would get me to Port Augusta I would go to church. Miracle of miracles that is what He did for me and I kept my side of the bargain. Even today I can feel the peace He gave me that day."

But God wanted to mean more to Laurie than just his personal GPS app.

Laurie and Val agreed that he would call her every Tuesday, a schedule he stuck to faithfully. So one Tuesday when he couldn't get through he became worried. "I decided to head back home," Laurie said.

On the way, his Holden broke down. Limping its way into a mechanic's shop, Laurie got the car fixed but discovered that he didn't have any money to pay for it and had to leave it at the shop.

"I had resigned myself to spending the next few days in that town until I could collect my salary from the post office," he said. Suddenly he felt prompted to go to the post office to check and lo and behold was told that his pay had just come in.

"I wasn't a real Christian then, but I do believe that was God's grace (undeserved kindness) to me that day," Laurie said. "As you can imagine I headed home as fast as I could."

When he got home he found there'd been yet another miracle.

His 18-month-old daughter Judy had fallen into a dam and had stopped breathing by the time Val got her out. The doctor was called but a neighbour began resuscitation in the meantime. When the doctor finally arrived it had been more than six minutes since Judy stopped breathing and he told Val what no mother ever wants to hear - it was

pointless to keep trying. Judy could not be saved.

That didn't stop Val's neighbour, who continued with CPR until a minute later the toddler coughed up the stone that had been blocking her windpipe.

"What a miracle it was that God gave us a neighbour who refused to give up," Laurie said, beaming.

Yet all this was still not enough for Laurie to make that final commitment to God. While he did attend church, it was more "to keep up my end of that old bargain. I didn't have a real relationship with Him."



Laurie and Val Hannah.

Six months later, all that changed. "I had been to church and on the way home the Lord told me to stop the car and get out," he recalled. "With such a clear word how could I not obey?"

"This is what He told me when He got me out of the car; that I was saved because His Son Jesus Christ paid the penalty for my sins on the cross. In the wonder of that moment I remembered John 1:12 - 'as many as received Him have become His children.'

"It's now been 63 years and I have never questioned His promise. I have failed Him by often going my own way, but He always in patient love, brought me back to Himself."

In May 2011 doctors found a triple aneurysm in Laurie. He had an operation to remove it. Soon after, Val became quite ill and by the end of July she was diagnosed with terminal cancer.

"The Lord took her home in October and that was the beginning of the eight hardest years of my life," said Laurie sadly. "We had been together for 62 years. In my loneliness I have learned that God through Christ is everything we need."

"I recently read the story of King Josiah in the Bible, of how God led Him to clean up the Lord's house from all that was going on there, such as idol worship and the neglect of the worship of God."

"Josiah was learning something that we all need to learn. And that is that idols can take many forms. Anything that takes the place of the worship of God is an idol. We all need to look at our lives and make sure that nothing at all keeps us from worshiping God alone."

And that is what drives Laurie today. •

# I was out to kill Billy Graham

BY CECE HANG'ANDU

George Palmer and his boys, armed with concealed zip guns, didn't go to the Billy Graham crusade to hear him preach. They went to kill him. Palmer had hated God ever since he lost his father to a heart attack at age seven.

"I was just so angry with God," he testifies on a Billy Graham Evangelistic Association video on YouTube.

George Palmer's father died in Western Australia after planting 100 cherry trees. He had a heart attack and was rushed to the hospital, but doctors couldn't save him.

"I'll never forget when I was told that my dad had died, I just couldn't handle that," George remembers. "I remember going up to the top paddock, and I screamed at God: 'I hate you. I hate you with all my heart. I will never love you.'"

The anger grew in his heart. He was a troublemaker in school and in the neighbourhood. People knew him by his bad reputation and this reinforced his growing bitterness.

"I was always told I would amount to nothing. If you hear that continually, that's what you believe; that you're worthless, you're useless."

In his youth, he led a violent gang that harmed many others and clashed with rivals. "I had a vile temper," he says.

One day, after beating their rivals in a street fight, George and his nine associates captured the rival

gang leader and, subduing him, drove a car over his hand backwards and forwards, crushing every bone in his hand.

"It's all I ever thought of, hurting people," he says.

That's when he and his boys heard that Billy Graham was coming in 1959 to preach across Australia. They hated Christianity and God. "Billy Graham stood for something I detested," George says. "It was something that drove me day by day."

They planned to attend the crusade in Melbourne, determined to kill the internationally famous evangelist.

"I made up 10 zip guns, so each member had one of those," he says. "I said to the guys, 'Come on. We're going on the green. We spaced ourselves so that we could see each other around where Billy Graham was preaching."

"We decided that ... during the appeal, we would kill Billy Graham."

They clutched their homemade guns and eyed each other as the message prolonged. The appeal would inevitably come, a chance for people to leave their seats in the stadium and come to the front and accept Jesus.

As they waited tensely through the message, George looked at the

masses of people cramming the cricket stadium. It seemed strange to him that so many people would want to hear the Word of God.

"What the dickens are all these people doing here?" he wondered. Then a voice spoke to him. *What are you doing here, George?*

## “WHAT THE DICKENS ARE ALL THESE PEOPLE DOING HERE?”



He turned around. There was no one there. This unnerved George.

"Ok, I know this is You, God," he said in his head. "You took my dad. You hurt me so much. Why should I love you? Why should I care about you?"

God spoke to him once more: *George, I didn't take your dad to hurt you. I would never hurt you.*

George hadn't cried since he was seven years old. He began blubbering.

As the appeal came, George set his zip gun down on the grass and ran to the front to accept Jesus.

"Nine out of the 10 of us got converted that night. We were all a blubbing mess."

Since 1967, George has worked with the Salvation Army.

"God took this person who hated Him with every part of his being, and God loved him. It's amazing how God can take a situation like we were in and change a life completely. I thank Him every day for that." •

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

# The hardest thing to do

BY RICK LEWERS

WHAT'S the hardest thing you have ever had to do?

My guess is that the answers could include things like caring for a sick loved one, or the burden of burying someone precious to you, or keeping the farm through the worst of droughts.

These are hard things that you do because of love or because you care, which makes the hard things, good things.

But what if the hardest thing you ever had to do was something you had no love or energy for?

Forgiveness can be like that, and there is a lot in this world for which we can think hatred is an easier option - hatred of others and sometimes even hatred of self.

One only needs to think of the abuser, the domestically violent, the marriage cheat, a stolen inheritance, bullying parents, or drunken carnage to realise how great the challenges of forgiveness can be.

Interestingly, it takes a lot less to build resentment, bitterness and hatred than it does to exercise forgiveness.

Broken promises, cruel words, and gossip can be enough to hatch plans for vengeance.

And what of those things we can't forgive ourselves for?

You can experiment with things that make shame an unhelpful travelling companion. You can pursue choices that scar you for life for which there seems to be no way to deal with the guilt.

Our world offers us sufficient evidence that sin destroys community and that resentments, bitterness and hatred keep it destroyed.

Thus the necessity of reintroducing the real Jesus Christ into our lives and communities.



If you are looking for Jesus Christ to top up your bank account, ensure you get the best job, find your perfect match and give you a problem-free existence, you will be sadly disappointed.

However, if you are looking for Jesus Christ to relieve the burden of your own sin and foolishness, to set you on a better path, to help you to make wiser choices, to offer you strength to forgive others, and to heal the community, then you have come to

the right Person.

What is the hardest thing God has ever had to do? He had to pay for our sin to restore us into right relationship with Himself.

He created us and we ignored Him. He handed us his wisdom and we rejected it.

He revealed Himself to us in Jesus Christ and we scoffed at Him. He sent His only Son to save us and we crucified Him. He offered us His kindness and we ridiculed Him.

He promised us life to the full and we chose an empty life because of our sins, struggling to receive or offer forgiveness; finding our resentments, bitterness and hatreds more valuable than love.

Now there's a catalogue for the production of hate if ever I heard one, but to God it is the catalogue of human need. Forgiveness required of God that He cross lines of hostility, redirect His anger, satisfy His justice through His only Son who paid the price in full for us all, and suffer in the offer of a forgiveness we did not deserve.

That forgiveness understood and received has been the catalyst for people to hold together in community.

The striking thing about God's forgiveness is that nothing is unforgiveable, other than the rejection of that forgiveness. •

# TEENTALK

# Queer childhood for a pastor



**JESUS WAS DIFFERENT FROM MOST OF THE PEOPLE HOLDING UP SIGNS ON STREET CORNERS**



Caleb's wife and his mother.

California and has written the book *Messy Grace: How a Pastor with Gay Parents Learned to Love Others without Sacrificing Conviction*.

When his mom called, saying her partner Vera was dying of cancer, Caleb flew out to be with her. Of course, he prayed for the opportunity to present the Gospel to her, but Vera wound up rejecting the message of salvation by faith and grace after a few days.

"Caleb, I think you're weak," she told him. "People who rely on Jesus are weak."

In 2010, Caleb and his wife moved to Texas to pastor.

Within a year, both Caleb's mother and father — separately of each other — moved to Texas and began attending the church.

In 2013, he left to pastor Discovery Church in Simi Valley, CA, but two weeks before taking that assignment, Caleb witnessed both his parents go up to the altar to receive Jesus. They still struggle with temptation but believe in Jesus and try to go to church, despite Christians occasionally judging them.

"How do all these things go together? I don't know," Caleb says. "Part of living in the tension of grace and truth is that it's not your job to resolve it. We've got to embrace the tension of grace and truth and love 'messy' people. We've got to create a culture where you can belong before you believe."

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

BY MICHAEL ASHCRAFT

The ugliest thing Caleb Kaltenbach saw through a childhood of being taken to gay pride marches and wild parties was.... Christians holding up signs saying "God hates you." "I don't want to have anything to do with that," he said at the time.

When Caleb was only two years old, both his mom and dad divorced and "came out of the closet at the same time," he says on an Outreach video. "I was raised by two lesbians and a gay man."

His dad was professor of philosophy, law and rhetoric at the University of Missouri, Columbia, while his mom was a professor of English at the University of Missouri in Kansas City.

"My whole life I was in the gay and lesbian community," he says. "My parents didn't want to get baby sitters, so they basically took me to parties when I was 4, 5, 6 years old. I went to camp outs, clubs and gay pride parades."

At the end of a gay pride parade, he was met by Christians with placards that said "God hates you" and "Turn or burn."

They were spraying water and urine on everybody.

Caleb, who was a young and impressionable 9-year-old, turned to Mom and asked why they were doing this.

"Well, Caleb, they're Christians," she replied. "And Christians hate gay people. Christians don't like people who are different from them."

"I don't want to have anything to do with that," he replied.

His next memory was when he was a teen, accompanying Mom to her parties. His custom was to find a room to play video games, Duck Hunt or Kung Fu (in the days of primitive video games — Atari, etc).

Louis, a well-built 30-year-old, befriended him at these parties.

Years later at the doctor, Caleb saw Louis, who had been emaciated and had strange markings on his forehead. Caleb asked what was wrong.

"Caleb, I have AIDS, and I'm getting ready to die," Louis responded.

Visiting him "a shell of the man he used to be" in the hospital just days before Louis died, Caleb witnessed a "horrifying sight." As Louis shivered uncontrollably cold under nine blankets, his family watched unfeelingly from across the room.

"Plastered against the wall with their big ol' KJV Bibles out and looking like they expected a firing squad to come at them" was the compassionless immediate family. When he asked for water, they made sure to give him some without touching him.

"Why are they acting like that?" he asked his mom.

"Well, Caleb, they're Christians," she responded. "And Christians hate gay people. Christians don't like people who are different from them."

"I don't want to have anything to do with that," Caleb said again.

He went up to Louis, gave him a hug and a kiss and said good-bye.

By the time he got to high school, Caleb had a lively hatred for Christians.

Nevertheless, he went to a Bible study and persevered long enough to discover a radically different picture of Christ than the image projected by Christians when he was growing up.

"Jesus was different from most of the people holding up signs on street corners," he remembers. "Jesus didn't approve of sin but he rolled up his sleeves and got involved in the life of people."

He got saved and went home and told his parents. They grounded him.

Not long after, through studying the Word of God, he realized that sex was the exclusive domain of the married couple, man and woman. So he informed his parents. They kicked him out.

He lived with other people. Caleb attended Bible college in Kansas. He preached in a church of 20 people in a town of 50.

He invited his mom, and she came.

"I was so excited to live out the tension of grace and truth," he says.

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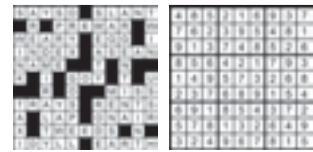
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**QUOTES FROM CALEB'S TWITTER FEED :**

- Allowing difficult people to remain in your life can make you more like Jesus. (Matthew 5:38-48)
- HATE—in any form—makes our society worse.
- God's LOVE is for everyone and that includes anyone ... even the anyones we don't like.
- If Jesus doesn't hate you, He won't hate them... and that means He doesn't agree with you hating anyone.
- The same God who calls us to boldly share Jesus also empowers us to relentlessly love anyone. We must do both.
- Don't be so in love with the world as it is that you don't try to change it for what it could be.

## Ponder

### Opting for optimism

**THERE** was an article in the *Washington Post* recently titled, "Why Some People Are More Optimistic than Others—and Why It Matters." The article cites studies indicating that people who are more optimistic are less likely to have heart attacks or strokes and are less likely to die from cardiovascular-related issues.

The reason: optimistic people tend to engage in healthier behaviors such as eating fruits and vegetables, exercising regularly, and not smoking. Optimism has also been linked to happy romantic relationships, fewer sick days, lower levels of pain, and a reduced likelihood of becoming cognitively impaired.

In addition, optimistic people tend to work harder, expect to retire later, and save more money.

So, here's the question: How can we become more optimistic?

One answer is to hope for things to change. The rain will pass if we just wait long enough, all bad things eventually come to an end.

A better answer is to be the change we want to see in the world. If you see a need – go and meet it. Make a difference, sign the petition, volunteer, donate or reach out.

You will begin to see the world you want to see. You will be optimistic about tomorrow, because you are building it today.

As leadership expert Peter Drucker noted, "You cannot predict the future, but you can create it."

But there's more to the story than trying harder to do more. The greatest source of optimism lies not in confidence in our self-reliant ability to create the future but in belief in an all-powerful God who has the future firmly in His hands.

He has told us in the Bible that if we trust in Him it is a very, very good future, far surpassing anything we could ask for or imagine.

"No eye has seen, no ear has heard and no one's heart has imagined all the things that God has prepared for those who love Him." (1 Corinthians 2:9)

If you are feeling bleak and hopeless, why not turn now to the God who has promised to make all things new and is able to fill you with abiding joy? See how on page 11.

# The first, most deadly virus

**WE** are all aware of the Coronavirus crisis and the continual warnings from the authorities that we take the threat seriously, using every precaution to prevent its spread. Looking back through history, we discover there have been many past viruses and plagues.

The earliest and most serious virus ever known to have affected the human race, is the virus of sin. The Bible records in Genesis that in the Garden of Eden, mankind disobeyed God by eating of the forbidden fruit. "Through one man (Adam), sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned" (Romans 5:12).

In this, we learn that the virus of sin is a 'pandemic' and every person born into the human race is infected. We also understand that it leads to certain death, which none can avoid.

"It is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment" (Hebrews 9:27).

Like other viruses, many chose to blame others for the sin in their lives: where I was born, a difficult upbringing, complex circumstances of life, my associations – are just a few of the many reasons offered in order to divert responsibility.

We must accept that to blame others does nothing to deal with my condition as a sinner, and certainly cannot eliminate the consequences of death and judgment.

As of yet, there's no known cure for Covid-19. But joyfully, the Bible informs us there IS a cure for the virus of sin – one that frees us from its dominating power in this life and grants God's complete forgiveness for eternity. The remedy? It's found at the cross of Jesus Christ.

Two thousand years ago, Jesus, the eternal Son of God, entered into this world to provide forgiveness and freedom for guilty sinners. Upon the cross, He suffered in the place of a guilty world. "He Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree" (1 Peter 2:24). The Bible simply states, "Christ died for our sins... He was buried, and He rose again on the third day..." (1 Corinthians 15:3-4).

God was prepared to give His Son, in order that sin could be justly dealt with and we could be offered deliverance from the virus of sin for eternity.

How do I receive such an offer? In simple faith, acknowledge your true condition before God as a sinner, and in repentance turn to Him, accepting Jesus Christ as your Lord and Saviour (Romans 10:9). Only in Christ will

you find true peace, satisfaction and eternal life (Romans 5:1).

Just as quarantine is the answer to contain Coronavirus, God says likewise about sin. Those who refuse to accept Christ and die in their sins, must be quarantined for eternity! The Bible describes this as hell, a fearful, yet fully justified place for sinners in the sight of a Holy God.

Sin is utterly dreadful and has ruined this world. It must be dealt with, and sinners will be held accountable for their actions. "Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the Lord, and He will have mercy on him; and to our God, for He will abundantly pardon" (Isaiah 55:7).

May you be wise in this moment and take the opportunity God is giving you to be cleansed from the virus of sin forever.

This article first appeared in *The Highway Evangelist*.

## Laugh

I just picked up my social distance support animal.



**IF 2020 WAS A MATH PROBLEM**  
If you are going down a river at 3KPH and your canoe loses a wheel, how much pancake mix would you need to re-shingle your roof?

How long will it take school kids to figure out that faking sick for one day = a 14 day holiday?

## Be kind



*"Charles Krohn, a professor of English at the University of St. Thomas for 50+ years is, at 91-years-old, embracing virtual teaching like a BOSS!" boasted his daughter, Chelsea on Instagram. "Listening to and watching him teach Homer's The Odyssey is a true gift. He's been teaching it for decades, and yet he has the passion and excitement for the text as though it's the first time. These kids have no idea how lucky they are."*

## Be creative

**Susie** Levache of Kent, England, is a master of home improvement, but it wasn't until the novel coronavirus pandemic began that she realized her daughter was just as talented!

During the lockdown in the U.K., Susie's daughter, Bea, succumbed to quarantine-induced boredom. So mum asked the 12-year-old to measure up for some paneling. "I then showed her how to use the workbench and a handsaw and before I knew it, she had completed the paneling in my office alone," said Susie.

"She now uses the handsaw, spirit level, electric drill, sander, and tile cutter confidently," Susie said. "She even had a go at stenciling and her next project is to renovate her brother's room using some carpentry skills."

Over the next 10 days, Bea worked her magic on several rooms, including the terrace, as her mom supervised. Because they already had a stash of tools, paint, and old furniture to repurpose at home, they only spent between \$100 and \$150 on extra items!



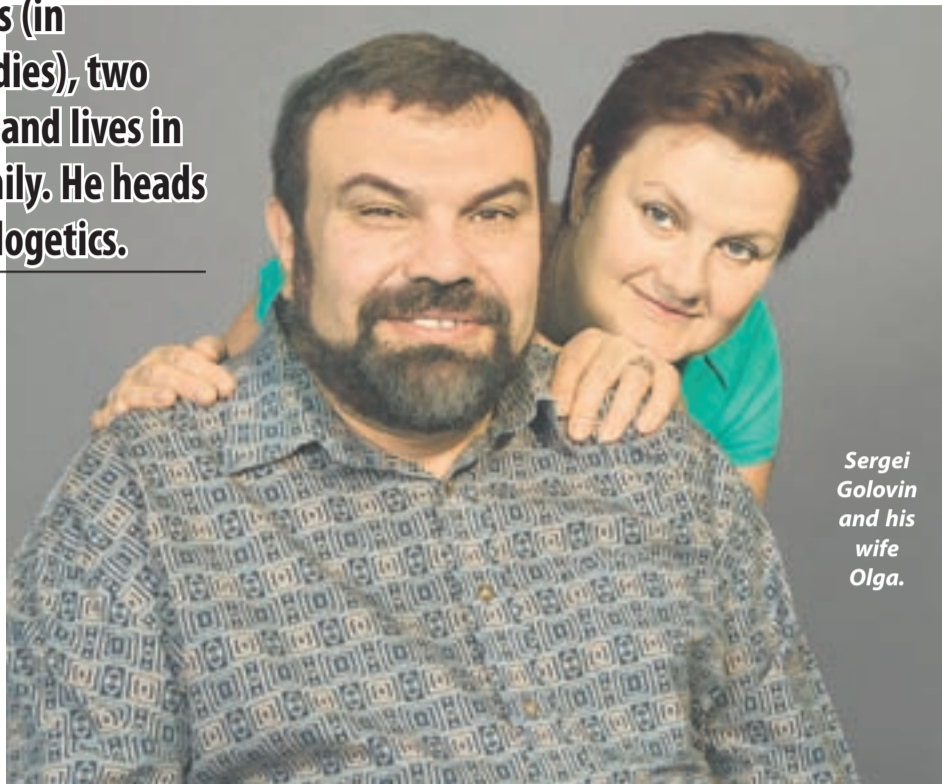
*Bea hard at it doing some creative paint work.*

## I am



# Data versus dogma

**Sergei Golovin has three Masters degrees (in geophysics, education, and religious studies), two doctorates (in philosophy, and ministry) and lives in the Crimea region, Ukraine, with his family. He heads the Christian Center for Science and Apologetics.**



Sergei Golovin and his wife Olga.

If you're a scientist in the Soviet Union, there is one sure way to make life difficult for yourself: believe and teach creation, not evolution.

That was what soviet geophysicist Sergei Golovin did and it cost him his PhD.

Generations of communist 'atheology' have trained people not to search for a logical answer. The logical contradictions in communist ideology were carefully explained away as just the 'dialectics of history'. So even if they see contradictions in parts of evolution theory, many still just accept it.

Sergei did not start out believing in Creationism, which is the Biblical account of how the world was formed. Like many in his country, he grew up believing absolutely in Darwin's theory of evolution.

The lauded geophysicist worked in many areas — geophysics, laser optics and information theory — and said he started to notice atheism did not fit with any of them.

"I started looking for another ideological foundation," he said.

"While studying the Earth as part of solar system physics, I started to see design everywhere. It made me discouraged with atheism."

This discouragement was no mild unhappiness. It threatened to undermine everything Sergei had grown up believing and had built his career upon.

"Evolution was the 'scientific foundation' the communists used to promote their humanistic ideology and attack Christianity," he explained.

"I only came to the Bible later; I had been indoctrinated to think that only old women and crazy people believed in God," he laughed. "We

had a lot of anti-religious communist propaganda.

"Even though many have suffered much under communism, they still think science has proven they are products of time and chance. Having heard no alternative to evolution, life has even less purpose or meaning than under communism.

"One person told me: 'In my area of science I don't see any proof of evolution but since everybody believes in it, it must be true'."

Once he accepted creation as the explanation for how the world was formed, Sergei knew he had to share his transformed world view.

"I wanted other people to see this wonderful truth, and so I started to tell students about Creation, but this was soon forbidden," he told Creation Ministries International. Undaunted, Sergei held underground meetings with students, professors and colleagues.

"As a geophysicist, no data, no evidence I knew of, contradicted the Bible, only the interpretations put on it. So you either believe in millions of years or 'six days' — and the interpretation based on the Bible is sounder. If you accept the Bible's truth, there's no room for you to think that it's only partly true."

Defying the threat by the authori-

ties that he would be barred from continuing with his PhD, Sergei continued to share his discoveries and ultimately left the university. By this time he had completed his thesis and had several patented inventions in geophysics and laser optics.

Sergei's path from avowed atheist to committed creationist began when he was given a Bible in the remote northern town of Spitzbergen. Finding himself 1000km from the North Pole with nothing else to do, he started reading it.

To his amazement, he found that everything he knew from personal experience and from science, fit with what he read in the book of Genesis.

"This was the only book that told the truth about all 'earthly things' which I could put to the test," he said. "And of course, if I accepted Genesis then I had to accept the rest. From Genesis I found out why the Gospel is so important, and why Jesus Christ had to come and sacrifice His life. So through science I came to the Bible, through the Bible I came to Christ."

In 1991, he founded the Christian Center for Science and Apologetics to sow the gospel in former Soviet-bloc countries, using creation materials.

"In Ukraine, we now have 1.3 divorces for every new marriage, and about two abortions for every child born, plus a lot of abandoned street kids," he said. "Our ministry is also involved in missions to street kids and orphanages, but this is fighting the symptoms; to fight the disease itself we have to change the general worldview, to restore the foundations of society and the family. When people believe they are nothing more than evolved animals, they tend to behave accordingly, and to act increasingly less human."

Sergei said people commonly told him that they became solid Christians once they knew belief in Christ did not contradict science.

Among the materials Sergei uses is a video series titled *Science and the Bible*. A man who had for years

## AS A GEOPHYSICIST, NO EVIDENCE I KNEW OF, CONTRADICTED THE BIBLE



### Dar and Winny By Richard Gunther



## Believe It or Not

BY CREATION MINISTRIES INTERNATIONAL

### Beauty and kindness defy evolution

**WRITING** for *The Federalist*, Glenn T. Stanton notes the "extravagant beauty" in nature that defies evolutionary explanation. His article describes in detail the contradictory ways Charles Darwin and other evolutionists have tried to explain beauty that does not seem to serve any evolutionary purpose.

Yale University's Richard Prum's theory is captured in his simple phrase 'beauty happens'. The bottom line is that naturalistic evolutionists have no compelling explanation for what Stanton calls their "most persistent problem."



The same can be said of humans who perform deeds of sacrificial kindness and care. If evolutionary theory is right in claiming that survival optimization is our basic drive, then why is this person taking such risks? If survival of the species is the explanation, then why isn't everyone doing the same?

Here's the biblical response: when we care for others simply because we care for them, we express a vestige of the divine image in which we are created.

God loves us because "God is love" (1 John 4:8). He loves us because it is his very nature to love, not because we have done or can do anything to deserve his love. When we love through service that is not earned and comes at great personal cost, we act as creatures who reflect the nature of God, our Creator.

Another version of this article first appeared in *Creation* magazine and the story is used with kind permission.

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# BUILDING BETTER RELATIONSHIPS

## More strategies for dealing with anxiety

BY ROB FURLONG

Last month we began looking at ways of dealing with anxiety or helping support someone through it. Let's consider some more helpful principles:

**Music:** It has been shown repeatedly that music has the power to alter the patterns of our brains as well as enhancing our ability to experience rest, serenity and peace.

During one particularly difficult time in my life I found myself returning to many of the old hymns I had sung in worship services at church as a young man. Listening to them just before going to sleep at night became a great source of comfort and helped me to cope with the panic attacks I was experiencing at the time.

A piece of advice – select the music you listen to carefully. I would suggest that full on “head-banging rock and roll” is not likely to decrease your stress levels but rather, increase them!

**Rest:** Christian psychologist, Arch Hart has written extensively on the importance of regular rest as

an important means of dealing with anxiety. (I recommend reading his books: *The anxiety cure* and *Adrenaline and stress*.) As he succinctly states, “we live our lives at a high octane pace but our bodies are built for camel pace.”

In other words, we need regular times where we take a break from our work and super-charged lives. This is an extremely counter-cultural concept but incredibly needed in today's world.

It has become my practice to take what I call a weekly Sabbath where I spend 24 hours away from my work – I do not read my emails or deal with work related issues unless it is an absolute emergency. I also try to take regular holidays and I am grateful to Karen who keeps me accountable with this!

I am beginning to try and incorporate “mini-Sabbaths” into my day as well. For example, not looking at Facebook first thing in the morning, disciplining my exposure to social media and even turning the news off from time to time. I find it to be an excellent way to disconnect from the

constant flow of information we are bombarded with and it also gives my mind a much needed rest.

Sitting quietly on the bench at the front of our house for 30 minutes from time to time, just watching the world go by, is also becoming a source of healing and refreshment for me.

**Cultivate the habit of realistic optimism:** There is no doubt that a positive or optimistic outlook assists us in coping with the worries and cares of life. But this does not mean that you deny reality. Genuine optimism is not afraid of the truth – it embraces it – and it is also able to rest in another great truth: that God really does “work all things for the good of those who love Him and are the called according to His purpose.” (Romans 8:28).

Arch Hart says that “once we appreciate life for what it really is, we discover a new thrill in being alive.”

Through personal experience I have discovered the above principles, diligently applied by me and with God's help, to be life changing, especially in

recent times.

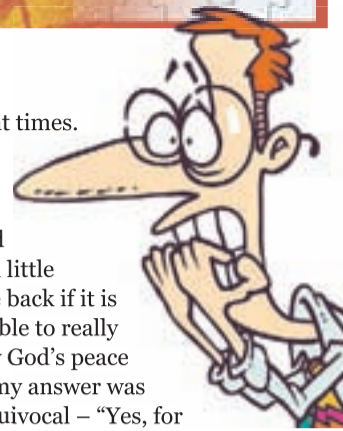
In fact, I was asked just a little while back if it is possible to really know God's peace and my answer was unequivocal – “Yes, for I have found it to be true in my own life.”

This is where faith comes in.

Arch Hart has said: “Faith (in God) will seek the right solution. Faith is our helper and healer because it puts us and keeps us in touch with God.”

When we diligently apply the principles God gives us, with faith in Him, He will do what He has promised to do!

My sincere prayer for all of you reading this is that as you apply these principles in your own life, you will come to know the help and healing of God and above all, His peace, which starts with surrendering your life fully to Him.



## Lessons from a sausage dog (Part 7)

BY JODY BENNETT

THE other day my husband was cutting up beef to make jerky and Carrie, our little sausage dog, was dancing around the kitchen begging for scraps.

She must have been very confused when we wouldn't give her any. She knows we often give her scraps, she could tell from the smell that these would taste good and she was begging in her most adorable way. So why were no delicacies falling to the floor?



Because we know something Carrie doesn't know.

We know that she is allergic to beef and if we give her any she will come up in a nasty rash on her belly and scratch like mad, keeping herself and us awake at night. Eventually I will have to give her cortisone, which is not good for her liver, and too much will shorten her lifespan considerably.

It made me consider ... I have the same dilemma with God sometimes. I want something I'm sure is good, I know He loves me and gives me good things, I am asking repeatedly, as He has instructed, but He keeps refusing.

Carrie can't understand what could possibly be wrong with giving her beef but she has to trust that if we don't do it there must be a good reason for it. And her begging, sulking or acting up is not going to change our decision.

Even if we tried to explain it to her, there is no way she could understand.

In the same way, I have to trust God that if His answer to my prayer is “no”, there will be a very good reason for that, even if I never get an answer to my “why?”.

Just as our reasoning is more complicated and intelligent than Carrie's, so God says in Isaiah 55:9 “As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.”

Humbling, isn't it? May we demonstrate towards God, the same dog-like faith that Carrie has towards me; judging our Master's actions in light of a character we know to be good and loving, rather than judging our master's character by seemingly “unkind” actions we don't understand ... and probably don't even have the capacity to understand!

## How can I become a Christian?

Anyone can gain the eternal life offered though Jesus Christ

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

**OUR PROBLEM:** Separation from God  
“Everyone has sinned. Nobody is good enough because God's standards are perfect” (Romans 3:23)

ADMIT

**GOD'S REMEDY / SOLUTION:** Jesus died on the cross  
“God demonstrates His own love for us in this; while we were still sinners, Christ died for us” (Romans 5:8)

BELIEVE

**OUR RESPONSE:** Trust Jesus by receiving Him  
“To all who received Him, to those who believed in His name, He gave the right to become children of God” (John 1:12)

COMMIT

Here is an example of how you can pray.

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

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

AS A NEXT STEP:

If you prayed the above prayer, tick this box



I have prayed this prayer.

Please send me:

- Bible
- Some 'starting off' literature
- Information on a helpful church

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



I would like to think about this.

Please send me:

- More information as I am inquiring about being a Christian.
- I have a problem (see attached letter)

\* Please tick and write clearly \*

Name \_\_\_\_\_

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## Lemon tree lessons

BY JANICE TEO

I HAVE a lemon tree at home. To all who know it, it is a superstar. First of all, it is of the Meyer variety, which I understand is the Wonder Woman of the lemon tree world - strong, beautiful and able to cheat death at every turn (a necessary quality because until my mother-in-law came to live with us, I had to take care of it).

Secondly, for all its star quality, it is no diva. Some plants require more attention than an octopus going through a clingy phase; my lemon tree on the other hand is happy with regular watering and the occasional squirt of fertiliser.

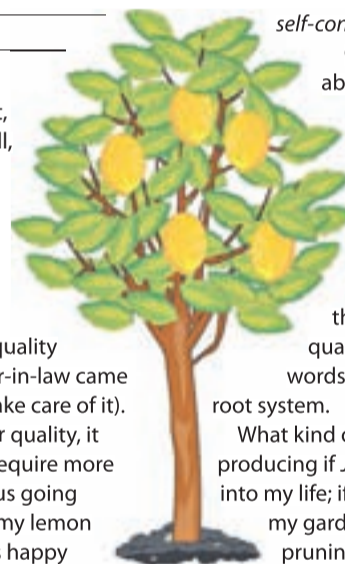
There was one time when it had scale (scale are tiny, sap-sucking insects) and my heart stopped thinking we had lost it, but my mother-in-law, armed with lemon oil - kryptonite to scale - smothered the life out of the bugs we already had as well as all their future generations.

I can't even claim any credit for planting it. It was already in the garden when we bought the house 15 years ago. In all that time it has never faltered, fruiting twice, sometimes even three times a year. Its fruit never varies in quality - always juicy, luscious and unblemished. It is so bountiful that the question is never 'will we have enough?' but 'what do we do with all the excess?'

One evening I was struck by the thought that my lemon tree was the perfect metaphor for some aspects of what it means to be a Christian.

The Bible draws many parallels between the life of the Christian and life in the garden. In John 15, Jesus says: “I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit”. In verse 16 He says: “I chose you and appointed you so that you might go and bear fruit—fruit that will last.”

And in Galatians 5: 22-23, the apostle Paul writes: “The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and



self-control.”

Good fruit symbolises abundance, plenty, health and harvest; it means your plant is in the right environment and has all the nourishment it needs. Bad fruit or worse, barrenness, mean the exact opposite. The quality of your fruit in other words, is a reflection of your root system.

What kind of fruit would I be producing if Jesus had not come into my life; if Jesus hadn't been my gardener, tending to me, pruning me, nourishing me?

I shudder to think. My root system would surely not be as healthy as it is and it is all thanks to the love of God and His transforming work in my life.

I've been a Christian for more than 40 years. That does not make me perfect though, as I have had moments when the scale of sin has infested my life because I have disobeyed God. So I required copious amounts of Holy Spirit lemon oil to get me back on track. Thankfully the soil and environment I grew up in have been immensely helpful in keeping me faithful in my walk with God.

So I asked myself: Have I been bearing good fruit? Am I strong, steady and happy to give of my own harvest to others? Am I also a low-maintenance 'plant', more concerned with blessing others than my own comfort? I pray that is the case.

I also think about the time we almost gave up our lemon tree for dead, but my mother-in-law refused to give up. Today it is flourishing thanks to the fact that someone cared enough to nurse it through the storm. In God's family too, nobody is a lost cause. Whether you need lemon oil or pruning, the Master Gardener has the skill to restore your life. He did that with me, He can do it with you. My lemon tree and I are living proof that anything can grow and blossom in the hands of the One who nurtures us all.



# Faith in the face of loss

**Challenge  
SPORT**



Blake Bivens pitching for the Bowling Green Hot Rods in 2016 and (right) with his wife Emily and son, Cullen. **INSET:** Matthew Bernard, the killer.



Australian Baseball League pitcher and Perth Heat import Blake Bivens entered the toughest storm of his life in August 2019 when he found out that three of the most important people in his life had been killed by his brother-in-law.

Blake, who joined Perth Heat for the 2019-20 Australian Baseball League season, recently sat down with Travis Gore, a pastor from Virginia, to talk about it as part of the pastor's sermon series titled "Storms."

The 24-year-old was waiting to board a plane home to Virginia when he checked his social media and learned the horrifying news that his wife Emily, 14-month old son Cullen, and mother-in-law Joan Bernard, had been found dead in a southern Virginia town. Matthew Thomas Bernard, Emily's 19-year-old brother, was charged with the triple homicide.

"I think the greatest comfort for me has been knowing without a shadow of a doubt where my family is," said Blake, who has attended church since childhood. "I know they are in the arms of Jesus. They are waiting for me to be there with them. Knowing that in our hearts has been the greatest comfort to us. It's been amazing how the Lord has helped and gave us peace through everything."

In his interview with Travis, Blake said that he learned of the tragedy through a Facebook headline while at an airport. "I immediately began to scream," he recalled.

He said the hardest part was after he

returned home and walked into his son's bedroom and realized he was never going to see him again in this life.

"That was the worst moment of my life," Blake said. "Nothing ever will come close to feeling the way I felt that day at that moment. Then again, I know I will see him again one day and it won't be long."

Shortly after his loss, Blake read John 16:33. In the verse, Jesus states: "I have told you these things, so that in Me you may have peace. In this world, you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world."

"When I read 'take heart for I have overcome the world,' it completely flipped the switch in my heart," Blake

told the pastor. "I knew from that moment on, this was not going to beat me. I just knew God was with me. I was going to live in victory for the rest of my life and I was going to use this as a testimony to show that what He has done for me, He can also do for others."

Travis asked Blake to explain how he came to have such courage and conviction.

"It all begins with being blessed enough to be raised in a Christian home," Blake answered. "Having grandmothers that prayed over you since the day you were born and continue to look out for you even from Heaven. I think that is the main reason, to be honest."

"I have told myself that I don't even believe this faith is me," he said. "I [wonder] at times how I can have this faith. It's got to be something He has given me. It's not me, but

it's Him. I ask myself the same questions: how can you continue to have faith like this? I just believe that it's the heritage of those people who have prayed for me for years. I believe that it doesn't matter what plans I make, God's purpose is going to be done no matter what."

Travis believes it is more than that: "It's Jesus that lives in you."

Travis asked Blake to share some things he's learned as he continues to live out the pain more than eight months later.

"One of the things I have learned from all this is that whenever we feel like there is no one that really understands or nobody that can comprehend the pain, the frustration and lack of understanding that I have, if we can just take a step back and understand that there is Someone who does," Blake said.

"God understands every bit. He understands every tear. He understands every sleepless night."

Blake admitted that he was depressed for a while as he was "constantly searching for answers" as to why his family was now gone.

Then he remembered the suffering God had to endure watching Jesus die on the cross.

"I think people need to understand that it doesn't matter the pain that

they feel. It doesn't matter the situation. God understands. He knows your heart and if you continue to seek after Him, He will reveal Himself to you in a way you never imagined."



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