

BEATING ABUSE

Feeling exposed and vulnerable, teenaged Jac Marino turned to the occult to give her power.



Jac Marino

Sexual abuse that started when Jac Marino was just a young child left her feeling powerless. As she grew older she became fascinated with hidden knowledge that would give her a sense of control, which led her to be initiated into the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn and practicing ritual magic in a Freemason lodge.

But instead of finding power and enlightenment, darkness followed Jac.

The perpetrator of the abuse was not an immediate family member but it was someone close to them, she told Alisa Childers in a video on her YouTube channel.

"It led to a lot of confusion, pain and guilt," she shares.

When she was five and in the wake of her parents' separation due to her father's drug and alcohol addictions, Jac started seeing entities which were like lights in the sky that she couldn't explain.

"I felt very connected to these entities and I had felt very isolated in the secrecy of the abuse," she recalls. "I didn't tell anyone what was happening but I believed that these entities knew me and understood me and I had this deep familiarity with them. When I learned about UFOs, I thought that must be what this was, which led to me having a fascination for aliens."

When she was seven, the person who had been abusing her was caught abusing another child.

"I was terrified that I was going to be found out for what had been happening and I just told myself that if I never thought about it again then I could rewrite my life," she explains. "As long as I believed it enough, as long as I never thought about the abuse again, I could actually believe it had never happened."

But then she saw another entity. "I saw a dark entity telling me to follow his path," she shares. "I knew it was wrong but I told myself that I would go back to doing the right thing later but for now I was going to follow this path. I started to forsake the very small amount that I knew of the true Jesus for this rebellion."

Jac heard about Jesus when her family attended church before her parents' separation and considered herself a Christian from a young age, even though she didn't have a deep understanding of what that meant. As she grew older, she developed an eating disorder and began self-harming.

"I was just putting on a happy face ... I tried to keep everything under

wraps but inside I was in so much torment. I was dying for some kind of relief and peace from the anguish I felt inside. I was searching for some kind of control over my reality ... I didn't want to obey the Bible - I wanted to do things my way."

In high school Jac began using drugs and alcohol, despite witnessing their destructive power in her father's life.

"I was desperate to forget what had happened, to have peace and to just be able to escape my psychological pain," she admits.

Jac also started investigating the occult, the New Age and the law of attraction, in the hopes that she could gain power and control over her life as well as discover the identity of the entities that appeared to her as a child. As time went on, her search led her to the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn. She had to go to a Freemason Lodge to be initiated into the order.

"It was very dark but I was so excited because I believed that I needed to go into the darkness to shine the light of knowledge in it

in order to gain power. I became a member and I would go regularly to practice magic and invoke deities."

Jac excelled in the Order and was moving up quickly. But as she did, she noticed she didn't feel more enlightened or powerful.

• Turn to page 2

OUT OF THE FOG OF GROG

Although he was employed and worked hard, Peter Walker, a descendant of the Bunjalung Indigenous Australian tribe, was never able to get ahead financially because of his alcohol addiction. The Bundjalung people are the original custodians of the northern coastal areas of New South Wales, located approximately 500 kilometres northeast of Sydney.



Raised in a Christian family, Peter drifted away from God at a young age and became a slave to the grog, jeopardising his employment and his marriage, until he recommitted his life to Christ at age 30.

"I couldn't give up alcohol on my own, I didn't have the willpower. Then one day, God spoke to me. I allowed Him to come into my life. I wept. God healed me. Ever since then, I've seen the change. The Holy Spirit touched me so I'm ever grateful for His mercy," shares Peter on the website 40stories.com.au.

"God's Word in Romans 3:23, says that 'all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God'. Only His grace, God's grace, that He gives us, brings us into fellowship with Him. Regardless of the sin or addiction that we have, God still loves us. That's the tremendous reality," Peter says. "The world has a lot of hurting people because Satan is trying to convince them that they are worthless, but the wonderful message of the cross of Jesus Christ is that God has a plan for us, we are special to Him."

"I believe in Australia and believe God wants us to maintain the peace we have in this country. 2 Chronicles 7 verse 14 is very dear to me, where God says 'If my people who are called by my name will humble themselves and pray, and seek my face, then I will hear from heaven and answer their prayer and heal their land'."

"Transformation has to take place in our nation, by the renewing of our minds, in accordance with Romans 12:1-2. It has to happen, especially with the Indigenous people. We need to see ourselves as no longer slaves or rejects in society, but as accepted and the beloved."

"The key to transformation is prayer."

Peter has been involved in Christian ministry for the past 37 years now and was a pastor with the Redfern Indigenous Church for 10 years. He is the founder of Australian Indigenous Christian Ministries Ltd., which licenses and ordains men and women into ministry, conducts leadership training seminars and workshops, evangelism, church management, family counselling and drugs and alcohol awareness counselling skills. He is also the founder of Praise Corroborree and the National Synergy of Prayer Network. Peter and his wife Maria have been married for 49 years and have four daughters.

I WAS DYING FOR SOME KIND OF RELIEF AND PEACE



Fun for Kids

Pages 5,6,7



BACK PAGE

MOTOX CHAMP
RONNIE FAISST

What's so great about heaven?

BY JODY BENNETT

WHEN someone says "heaven", what do you think of?

Wings, harps and clouds? Doing your favourite thing all day? A bland place with lots of singing?

Many people define heaven by the things that make them feel happy and fulfilled on Earth, but what if I were to tell you that in heaven there is no sex, no marriage, no Wi-fi, no computer games, no Netflix, no sport and probably no sleep. Would you still want to go?

The Bible actually tells us very little about heaven. But when Jesus was told about a woman who had had seven husbands and asked whose wife she would be in heaven, He made it clear that in the afterlife there is no marriage or sex. *"When the dead rise, they will neither marry nor be given in marriage; they will be like the angels in heaven."* (Mark 12:25)

In the glimpses the Apostle John had of heaven, as recorded in the biblical book of Revelation, it was a place of worship – with crowds standing around the throne of God singing praises and bowing before Him.

So, if heaven is not a place where we get to do whatever we want, or gratify all the desires we have on earth, why is it somewhere we would want to go?

Well, the people who want to go to heaven want to be there for one reason only. One thing makes heaven, heaven and the absence of that one thing makes hell the most awful, fearful place it is. That one thing is Jesus.



The people who want to go to heaven want to be there because Jesus is there. He is the embodiment of love, mercy, kindness, goodness and truth. All our deepest longings are fulfilled in Him and therefore the yearning of those who know Him, who call themselves Christians, is to be where He is.

That is why there is so much worship in heaven. Not because it is forced, like some sort of long boring church service, but because everyone there is so overcome by God's goodness and so grateful that He has extended that goodness to them, that they cannot but praise Him endlessly.

The Bible makes two other important points about the afterlife that are also relevant.

Hell is no party

Firstly, our desires and lusts will not be fulfilled in hell either. Hell is no endless debauched party. Jesus

describes it as a blazing furnace, where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth. (Matthew 13:42) It is a place of torment, devoid of any of the goodness, light, purity or happiness that we may know on earth.

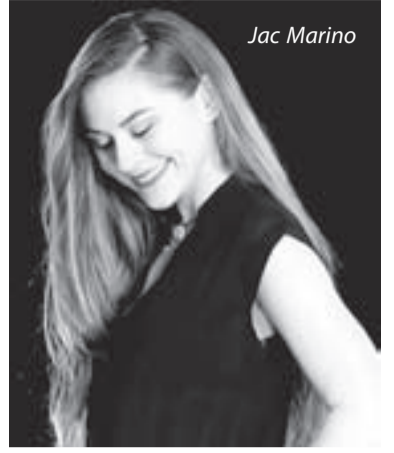
Heaven is not the end

Secondly, heaven is not the final destination of those who trust in Jesus for their salvation. John tells us in Revelation 21: *"Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. I saw the Holy City, the New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, 'Look! God's dwelling place is now among the people, and He will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away."* (verses 1-4)

Ultimately, there will be a new Earth and Revelation gives us only a few clues as to what it will be like but for those who know and love Jesus only one fact is important – He will be there and we will never be apart from Him again.

Beating abuse

• From page 1



Jac Marino

"The peace that it had promised just wasn't coming and I was darker than ever before when I was supposed to be gaining all of this power ... I was spending hours a day doing rituals and meditations and spells and I was supposed to be transmuting into this higher person – this more transcended more evolved person – and yet I was just wicked and my addictions were worse than they'd ever been. I had no control over myself at all."

One day, while Jac was driving, she heard a Christian sermon on the radio.

"I was like what? This is Christianity? I had thought Christianity was so old and dumb and not enlightened but this was such rich truth that I was floored."

Jac had started reading religious texts and thought she may as well read some of the Bible.

"I read that you can tell a tree by its fruit (Matthew 7:16) and I didn't really know what that meant, but when I was at the order I just knew that the people, even though I loved them, were just as depraved as me. I was confused that if these people are high up in this secret order and yet they're just as depraved as me, how is this a good thing?"

She also read in the Bible that *"Satan masquerades himself as an angel of light"* (2 Corinthians 11:14).

"This was shocking to me because I had been telling myself this can't be bad if it feels this good. This can't be bad if I'm being enlightened."

As she was thinking about these verses, she remembered the story of the fall of man in Genesis 3.

"The lie is that if you eat from the fruit of the knowledge of good and evil you'll become like God, knowing good and evil. That is the entire premise of the occult. It just floored me that I hadn't even fallen for some new lie. This was the first lie that led to the fall and that's what it was leading to in my life. It wasn't giving me

peace, it wasn't giving me control. I was a drug addict, I was miserable, I had no control even over my life, let alone the universe."

It was then she realised the Bible was true.

One night Jac was walking across her apartment and she suddenly fell to her knees.

"It felt like my soul was being sucked out into just complete absolute darkness and I heard myself scream, 'Jesus Christ save me!' In that moment the peace that I had been searching for all my life hit me, and I knew beyond any doubt that the God of the Bible – the Father, Son and the Holy Spirit – is the only true God, and that I had sinned grievously against Him."

Jac read the Bible hungrily, feeling full instead of empty for the first time.

"I read like crazy and once I finished reading the Bible, I realised I had completely changed on the inside out and that amazed me because I had spent years doing so many works and rituals and things to change anything and have control over anything but nothing worked."

Now it was different – she had hope she would be able to find freedom from her addictions.

"I just kind of locked myself in my little apartment and by God's grace I got sober just clinging to Him in prayer," she shares.

Jac now works as the social media coordinator at her church, where she also serves in leading worship.

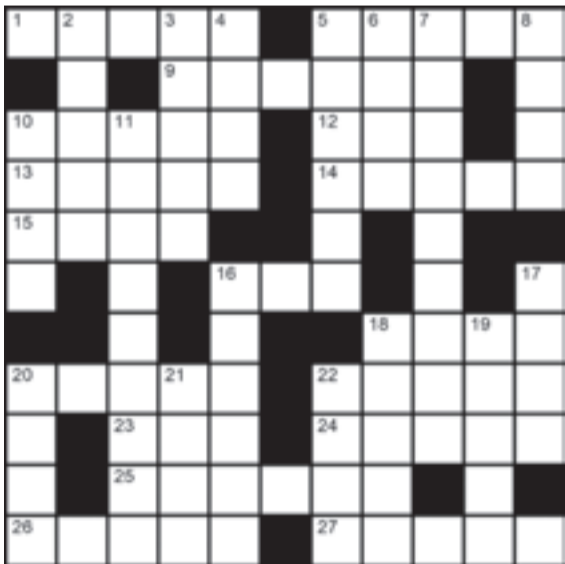
"No matter what deception you're in, no matter what pain you're in, no matter what you're going through – the Bible is true and it is sufficient and we can rely on it as the truth," she attests.

Coffee Break

CROSSWORD & SUDOKU

ACROSS

- 1 Trainee
- 5 Loud car feature
- 9 Quickly assembled building
- 10 Collectible
- 12 Hoover's agency
- 13 Put up, as a statue
- 14 Speck of land in a river
- 15 Meadows
- 16 Place for fitness buffs
- 18 Nip with your teeth
- 20 Tooth edges
- 22 Say "hi"
- 23 Restaurant gratuity
- 24 Airplane's walkway
- 25 Cold old time (3,3)
- 26 Person from around here
- 27 A shaft from a bow



DOWN

- 2 Blue of the sky
- 3 Long stories
- 4 Quick jogging pace
- 5 Certify as true
- 6 Chem class rooms
- 7 Skills
- 8 Dewy fog
- 10 Jailroom
- 11 Sensible, practical
- 16 Religious music
- 17 Local fair
- 18 Bramble
- 19 Phone company
- 20 Hip, groovy
- 21 12-point type size
- 22 Infatuated, doting

God, you better be real!

Bruce Fitzgerald's rough start in life began before he was even born. When his mother was eight months pregnant with him, his father died. The tragedy took a toll on his mother, Bruce explained in a video on the Lumin YouTube channel. At a young age, Bruce started using drugs and getting into trouble with the law.

"I think it was about my fifth or sixth grade year that I started dabbling in drugs and started being introduced to selling drugs," Bruce confesses.

"Eventually that led me to spend a few years inside a juvenile facility. Bruce described a sense of darkness surrounding him at that time. "I felt totally alone. I couldn't trust anybody."

"For me the peace came with the weed," he admits. "The joy came with clubs. The love came with all of the girls that I was running around with but it was all fake."

In 2006 Bruce was sent to prison yet again.

"I wound up getting into a cell with a guy named Brother Harris, he was the prison pastor I guess you

could say," Bruce explains. "Every day he would tell me that I'm gonna get saved. He told me Jesus loves me. The way he talked was totally different from anybody else that I talked to."

Brother Harris lent Bruce a Christian magazine to read.

"From the time I opened it, I could not stop reading it," Bruce recalls. "For the first time ever in my life [I read] the Gospel (the Good News about Jesus). I'd never heard it before. Where had all this been my whole entire life?"

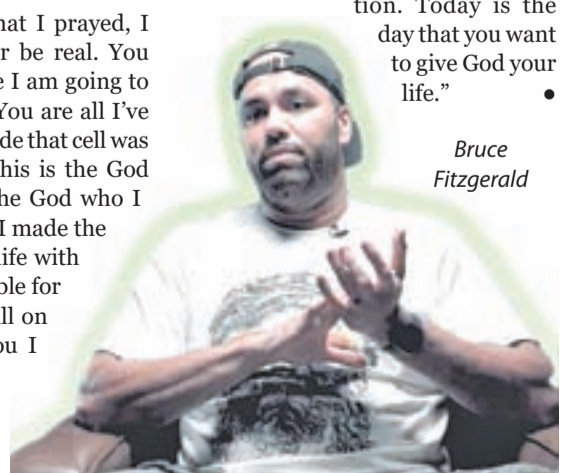
"The first prayer that I prayed, I said, 'God, you better be real. You better be real because I am going to give you everything. You are all I've got.' And that day, inside that cell was when I said, 'Okay, this is the God that I know, this is the God who I want to serve.' When I made the decision to align my life with God, it was a big gamble for me. I was putting it all on the line and I tell you I won!"

Bruce wrote to his sister and said, "I feel happier right

here in prison than I ever did when I was in the street." Bruce says. "It was crazy how much joy and peace that I had when I accepted Jesus in the midst of being in jail."

"Your past does not determine your future," he explains. "It doesn't matter where you're from, it doesn't matter how far you have gone away from God. Today is the day of salvation. Today is the day that you want to give God your life."

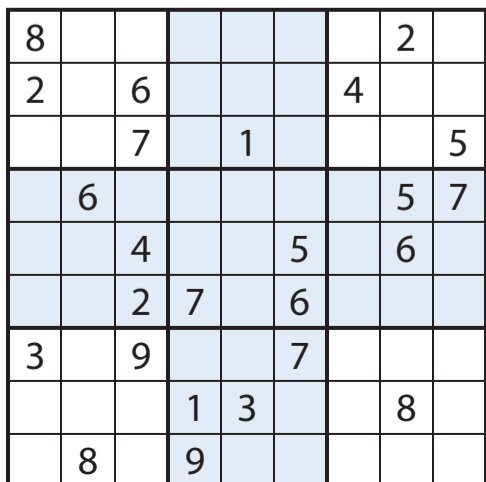
Bruce Fitzgerald



SOLUTIONS PAGE 11



"I hope none of you are feeling stress about this test. It's only 50% of your grade, 60% of your future and 100% of your self-esteem."



LIFE RUINED BY DRUGS BUT RESCUED IN PRISON

BY JANICE TEO

Lying on the hard bed of his cell, Shane Degen was genuinely afraid. The 25-year-old had been found guilty of money laundering, drug production and trafficking and assault for stabbing someone.

It was January 16, 2002 and he was due to be sentenced the next day.

"I knew that I couldn't get away with my crimes," he says. "I mean they have TV shows about people like me. I was as evil and wicked as you can imagine so I knew I wasn't going to talk myself out of this one. I was going to jail for a long time."

Six years before that, Shane had been a boy with a bright future. Intelligent, with a natural eye for detail and design, he was accepted into the University of Queensland to do an engineering degree.

But university opened more than pathways to higher education; it also led Shane into the party lifestyle — and drugs. He tried heroin when he was 18 and was a full-blown addict within six months.

By the time he was 21 his addiction was costing him up to \$3000 a day; to support his habit, he sold drugs and laundered money through a nightclub he co-owned in Queensland.

But his crimes finally caught up with him. In his cell, his stomach tied up in knots, he tried to think of something to say to the magistrate even though he

knew there was no chance of leniency.

What happened next changed his life. He says God spoke to him. "I didn't hear a voice or see any lights but in my heart it was so real. He asked: 'How would you like to be standing before me on Judgement Day?'"

"In that moment, the reality of eternity hit me. What if, all of a sudden, I was standing before the Creator and it's too late...you can't go back and change anything?"

"The fear of the Lord came on me. I didn't want to spend eternity in hell so I surrendered in my heart. I chose to do 'the Christian thing' whatever that looked like. I didn't necessarily want to go to heaven; I just didn't want to go to hell."

Shane had been raised by a deeply devout family. Church life and activities were woven into his childhood and youth and he says he loved God as a child but never made a real commitment.

For the previous 10 years Shane had not given God the time of day, but that day in his cell he gave his life to Him.

"That was the day I met Love," he affirms. "God loved on me and healed me. Shortly after that my addictions melted away."

He was indeed sentenced to time in prison, but he was a changed man. He attended prison church services and is very grateful for organisations such as Prison Fellowship Australia, which Shane says helped him immensely in

those early days of his commitment to God because "my life was a mess".

When he got out of prison, he went to Queensland University of Technology, where he completed a Bachelor of Engineering (Aerospace Avionics). He went to church, met his wife, and was awarded a scholarship to do a PhD in robotics and automation.

Shane worked with Boeing for the next few years. The money was good; he began dreaming about buying land, building an airstrip and buying a plane.

"At that time I loved the Lord but I wasn't living for Him," admits the father of eight. "I didn't want anyone at work to know about my faith. For me, being a Christian just meant not going to the pub. Eternity was not the driving force in my life."

A message at a church meeting in May, 2008, stopped him in his tracks. The speaker challenged the congregation to seek first the Kingdom of God.

Shane remembers that message "catapulted" him into a new direction. "I realised there are untold millions going to hell and I knew I had to reprioritise my life," he explains.

"Up to then I was all about building aeroplanes and drones, but when I stand before God on judgement day I can't bring any of those things with me into heaven. I can only bring people."

Soon after, Shane left the corporate world and went into the mission field. After some years of street evangelism

he began dreaming of bigger things — mass evangelism crusades at stadiums in Australia and around the world.

In 2017 he started Jesus Loves Australia with a vision to see the country transformed by the gospel. On Dec 1, 2018, several thousand people gathered at ANZ Stadium to pray for Australia to turn back to Jesus.

It's not just about numbers for Shane. He also speaks about Jesus to people at Coles, McDonald's, the drive-through, and restaurants.

"In 30 seconds I've seen hundreds of people say they want to know more," he grins.

Now a full-time evangelist, Shane has moved to the United States and leads the Jesus Loves America team. His dream is to see stadiums full of people giving their hearts to God.

"I needed to let the corporate trappings go. I realised all that stuff means nothing. Now I just want to see the love of God transform hearts and families, just as it has done in my life." •



Escaping N. Korea wasn't her only prison break

The emergency bell echoed throughout the prison camp — the signal that a prisoner was about to be executed. Everyone gathered outside. A prison officer stepped forward and called out the name "Soon Ok Lee!" "My heart dropped," the North Korean woman says. "I couldn't understand what I had done to deserve a public execution."

Two officers marched her to the front. She expected to be dead soon — with 18 bullets to the heart — courtesy of the prison firing squad.

Instead, the guards announced: "Soon Ok Lee has faithfully worked for Kim Il Sung, so we decided to reward her work. She will be returned to society."

In truth, she had received a surprise amnesty after serving just over five years of a 13-year sentence. That was in 1992.

Eight years before, Soon Ok had been the successful manager of a supply company in North Korea. However, she was falsely accused of dishonesty in her job, arrested and then imprisoned at the Kaechon concentration camp, where she endured cruel interrogations and torture.

"For three days they did not let me close my eyes," she writes in her book *Eyes of the Tailless Animals: Prison Memoirs of a North Korean Woman* detailing how her captors tried to extract a confession. "They kept beating me and demanding that I answer their questions."

The interrogators told Soon Ok her husband and son would be killed if she did not confess. Little did she know they had already been sent to labour camps. She would never see her husband alive again but she would reconnect with her son.

Her 'trial' was over in 15 minutes. She was sentenced to 13 years, assigned a new identity



North Korean defector, Soon Ok Lee(L) greets students during a Korea Freedom Day rally 28 April 2004, on the West steps of the US Capitol, in Washington, DC. (Photo PAUL J.RICHARDS/AFP via Getty Images)

— number 832 — and told to give up the idea that she was human.

She describes the horrors of Kaechon, where prisoners were barely spared a mouthful of food for each meal so "when we caught a rat we thought it was a fortunate day. We didn't cook it. We just ate it."

Among the atrocities she witnessed were forced abortions, cruel executions and biochemical testing on the prisoners. Miraculously, Soon Ok survived — the only one of 6000 prisoners.

Today, at 74, her body still bears the evidence from the inhumane treatment.

When she entered prison Soon Ok was an atheist and a firm believer in communism but it wasn't long before her belief in the system crumbled. "I felt that this is not a country to live in; it is a human being's hell on earth ... And based on man's miraculous survival [in such circumstances], I could not deny the existence of God," she admits.

Soon Ok noticed that Christian prisoners were subjected to extreme rules and punishments — for instance, they could not look towards the sky because of their belief in heaven.

Once, she watched as several Christian

women attempted to save a friend after she fell into a large tank filled with human excrement. All of them died.

Soon Ok was shocked. Surrounded by prisoners who would rat each other out for extra food, these women made the ultimate sacrifice. "When I saw their love, it raised questions in my mind," she says. "How could they die for someone else? What was it about heaven that was worth the cost?"

On the day she was given back her freedom, Soon Ok looked at the Christians in the front row. Violating prison policy, they lifted their heads to look at her, their eyes glowing with a "heavenly light." She remembers tearfully, "The eyes of all 6000 'tailless animals' stared at me. Their eyes were pleading, 'When you get out of here, be a witness for us.'"

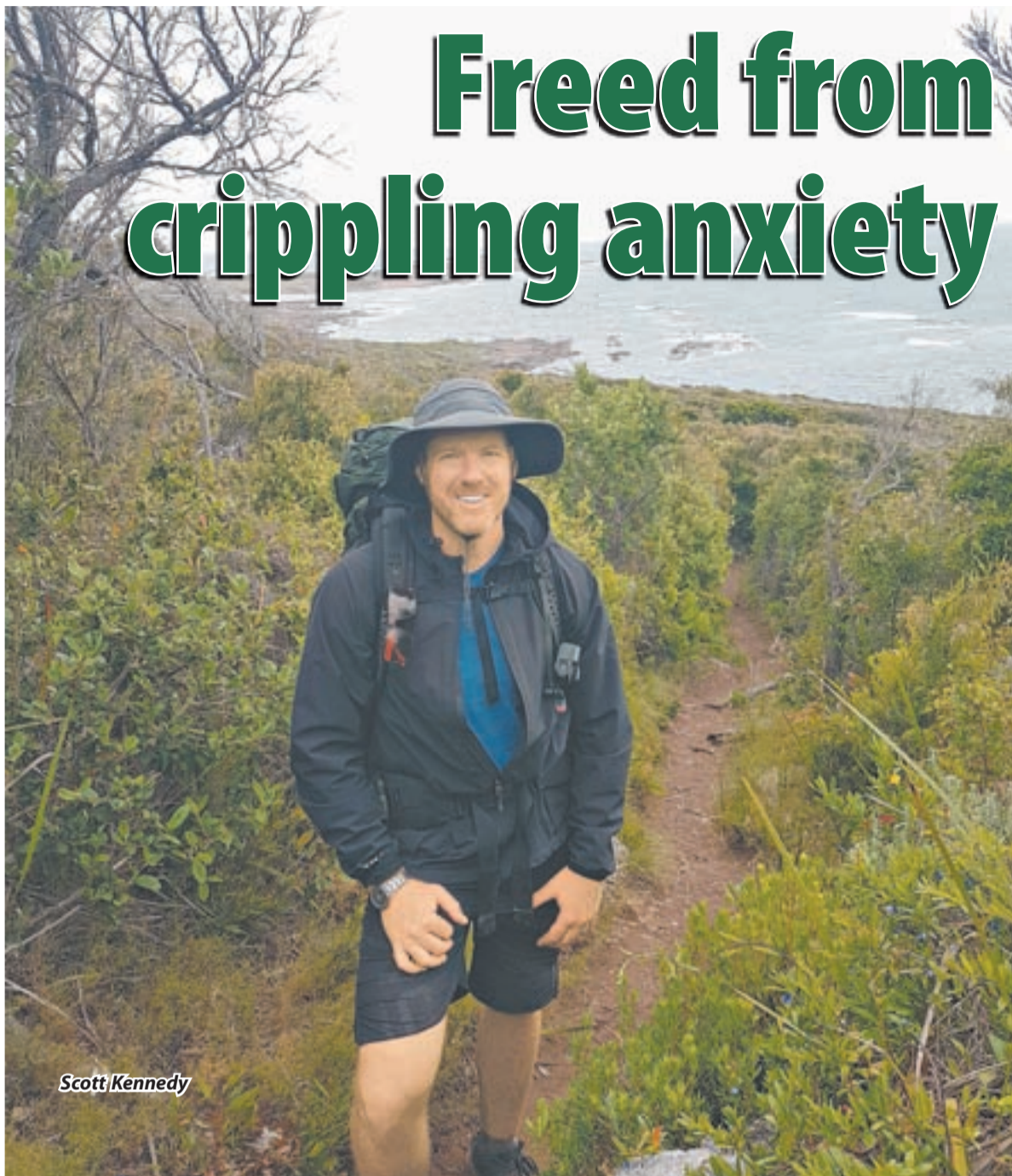
In 1995 Soon Ok and her son escaped to South Korea. An official gave Soon Ok a Bible. "If you want to adjust quickly to living in South Korea by forgetting all your suffering, you should read this book," he said.

Then he sang the hymn "Amazing Grace." Soon Ok recognised it — her mother used to sing it to her. "I realised she had been telling me about the Word of God in a safe way," she says.

Soon Ok had never seen a Bible before but she was curious about God so she read it.

Then, she read the verse John 8:32: "You will know the truth, and the truth will set you free." That's when everything made sense for her. Communism wasn't the answer. It was Jesus. She gave her life to Jesus and became a Christian. Her son soon followed suit.

"I have been healed with the love of God and His comfort," she smiles. "I no longer dream dreadful dreams. I am free." •



Scott Kennedy

Freed from crippling anxiety

Scott Kennedy's life was crippled by anxiety and panic attacks, until he finally listened to his mum's advice.

The 36-year-old grew up in a loving home but there were times of conflict among his family and friends, and the insecurity that created became the breeding ground for deep-seated anxiety.

"I internalised many things from a young age, seeing people fighting, broken relationships, family dynamics," said Scott. "I worried about what would happen each day."

Scott's timidity made him easy fodder for bullies at school. He hoped to excel at sport, but when he could not reach the heights he wanted, he felt even more inferior. "I felt disappointed when I failed," he admitted, "and I eventually turned to alcohol to help me be the person I wanted to be and to be accepted."

"My anxiety made me fearful of how others perceived me and I ended up trying to please everyone and make them happy — except my parents," he told *Challenge News*. "I had a really bad attitude towards my parents because I didn't want to let them into my failures."

"I would drink and smoke marijuana, I would draw graffiti on walls to be noticed. Porn controlled me and I started sleeping around too. Sexual immorality began to control my life because it was a way of knowing I was desired by the opposite sex."

Soon his lifestyle led him to predictable consequences. Scott started to lose his health, both physically and mentally and found himself struggling to stay connected with reality. "Certain treatments helped, but I couldn't sustain them," he said.

His mother, who had become a Christian during his childhood and

had taken him to various churches growing up, tried to speak to him about her faith and how God had helped her, but Scott wouldn't have a bar of it, even though he saw the positive difference it made.

"Because of the changes I saw in her after she became a Christian, I could never really disprove God, but I found it hard to get on board, partially because I feared judgement from others," he admitted.

His life spiralled from one panic attack to another. By February 2015 the attacks were coming weekly. Cold sweats, insomnia, paralysing anxiety. He turned to his doctor and went on medication for six months, after which his health improved to the point he felt he could come off the tablets.

Bad decision. "I assumed I had recovered. I hadn't," he said. His condition returned, more ferocious than before. As the prospect of returning to work after medical leave loomed closer, Scott's nervous system went into overdrive so badly he ended up in hospital.

"The attack was so bad I couldn't walk or talk," he said. "All the years of anxiety and alcohol abuse and stress took their toll. I ran myself into the ground. I sat in the waiting room wondering if I would be trapped in this state for life."

When he was discharged, he was told to take his medication any time he felt a panic attack coming. This instruction in itself sent Scott into another tailspin as he didn't want to be on medication for the rest of his life.

As he sat in his room, the weight of

his situation heavy on his shoulders, the lyrics of a song he was listening to appeared on his TV screen — "Wake up! Save yourself, pick up the pieces, and ask for forgiveness". Suddenly what Scott said could only be described as the presence of God filled the room.

"It was incredible. I started weeping and finally I did what my mother had been telling me to do for years — I prayed to God and asked Him to come into my life and help me," Scott recalled.

"I felt myself breaking free and overwhelmed with grace (the undeserved kindness of God). Everything suddenly changed in an instant."

My burden suddenly lifted. I had never felt that way before. I was in my room for about two to three hours and in that time God really touched my heart and healed me."

Scott said his entire mindset changed after that experience in his bedroom. While traces of the anxiety remain, he says he feels much more encouraged and capable of coping. Most significantly, he has been medication-free for more than two years.

"God and relationships at church have helped me so much," he said. "Church allowed me to be vulnerable and to be loved."

Even better, his relationship with his parents blossomed. "The God thing always kept us slightly apart, but when I accepted Christ, that barrier broke down and now our relationship is closer than it's ever been," he said happily.

Today the civil designer, who lives in Perth, is happily married to Shannon.

EVERYTHING SUDDENLY CHANGED IN AN INSTANT.



Stage 4 cancer diagnosis added life to her days

Dr Agnes Sarthou felt a lump on her right breast that turned out to be an aggressive, fast growing case of Stage 4 breast cancer. By the time it was detected, it had already spread to her bones and several ribs.

"This tragic diagnosis required aggressive medical intervention which included 18 weekly chemo sessions and 30 days of radiation," she said.

In May, 2003, less than a month after her initial diagnosis, Aggie, as she is known, explained that she had to go through a modified radical mastectomy in which the doctors removed a 10.5cm mega-sized malignant tumour.

At first, Aggie was overcome by doubts and questions. She had studied long and hard to become a doctor so she could help others and now she found herself listed as terminal, barely able to help herself.

"I did not understand why I had cancer," she said in an interview with the blog BITS (Butterfly in the Spring). "I had just been given a death sentence. My doctor told me: 'Aggie, I'm a good doctor but only God can heal you.'"

Then, Aggie remembered. She wasn't alone. God was with her.

"God chooses our circumstances but I get to choose my response," the Filipino woman explained with a smile. "And so I said, 'Lord, thank You for reminding me.' There's hope in the Big C, because the Big C is not cancer; the Big C is Christ."

Aggie was not always as grounded in her Christian faith. She met Jesus for the first time at the prestigious University of the Philippines Diliman through another student. "They shared God's love with me and made me understand that He has a wonderful plan for my life. But this could not be realised if I did it my way. I needed to surrender my broken self and surrender my life to Jesus."

Aggie described her younger self as "independent and self-righteous" and after graduating college, she drifted away from her faith.

"I was not able to sustain fellowship with other believers and do my Bible studies," she sighed. "Consequently, my walk with Jesus faltered. Sadly, this was a time when my life didn't glorify our Lord Jesus."

Later, Aggie married Ricky — who was not a Christian. "I almost left my husband. He had a volcanic temper and I had a short fuse. I heard all his curses," she said. "Then, a year-and-a-half later, my husband accepted Jesus as His Lord and Saviour during a Bible study conducted in his office."

Aggie recalled her earlier commitment to Jesus and restored her personal relationship with Him. The changes in both hers and Ricky's lives were nothing short of miraculous.

Ricky went on to become the pastor of a church. He and Aggie went on to have two children and four grandchildren.

"We put Jesus at the centre of our lives and marriage," she said. "It was a complete turnaround for us."

The couple's faith in Jesus was their anchor during the horror diagnosis that rocked their world in 2003. God answered their prayers time and time again — from easing Aggie's pain to providing the expenses for all her medical bills and medications.

"As I faced my mortality, I found great comfort in Jeremiah 29:11-12: *'For I know the plans I have for you,' declares the Lord, 'plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. Then you will call on me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you.'*"

Reading Scripture and praying brought Aggie relief during her suffering. "The stormiest days were my best times with God because those were times I just felt His hand on me giving me a peace and a joy that I can't even explain even at the height of pain."

Another Bible passage that Aggie leaned on was Habakkuk 3:17-18 which talks about rejoicing even through the tough times. "God asked me, 'Will you give me your plans, hopes, fears, career, everything, for My glory?' I said, 'Yes. Please be glorified in my cancer.' That's when surrender came."

Miraculously, Aggie was fully healed of her cancer. She and Ricky founded Life to the Max, a charity that brings comfort and hope through Jesus to those who are afflicted with cancer and other life-threatening illnesses.

"I thank God because cancer gave me the platform to talk about His goodness in my life," she rejoiced. "My cancer story is not about me but about God's goodness."

The Lord blessed Aggie with another 18 years of life before saying "welcome home" earlier this year.

She passed away on April 9, 2021, aged 64.

Friends remember Aggie liked to say, "Stop thinking about adding days to your life, rather, add life to your days because the only ones that really matter are the ones that are with Jesus."

THE BIG C IS NOT CANCER; THE BIG C IS CHRIST



Pastor Ricky and Aggie Sarthou

YOUTH TRUTH

Broken party girl discovers fulfilment

When Breana Cooney arrived at college, she was determined to embrace all it had to offer and live the party lifestyle. But although she was seeking fulfilment, she came up feeling empty.

Sharing her story on her YouTube channel, Breana said she jumped into the college experience and all that it entailed.

“When you’re young and you don’t know who you are, you’re willing to do absolutely whatever it takes to feel like someone important,” Breana says. “You want to do what the cool kids are doing, you want to feel like somebody important... I get to college and I fall into all the things and all the temptations that the typical college experience brings... I lived out and pursued every single stereotype.”

But instead of bringing her joy and self-worth, she felt disappointment, shame and guilt.

“All these things that the world told me was going to satisfy me, all these experiences that you see on TV and in the movies that everyone says this is it – this is college, this is what you live for, this is the life – I was doing it and I was feeling more and more dissatisfied as time went on,” she admits.



Breana Cooney says she now knows she is loved. Credit: YouTube.

Then Breana started having panic attacks.

“I never struggled with anxiety up to this point but it was to the point where it was so hindering and it was so burdensome,” she explains.

She was also struggling with an eating disorder. “Along with falling into temptations that really didn’t align with who I thought I was, and my newfound battle with anxiety, I was also fighting a six, almost seven-year battle with anorexia and disordered eating patterns.”

Breana said she hated who she had become and felt

burdened by regret for the decisions she was making. On the outside, her life looked fun and exciting but inside, the complete opposite was true.

“This was the very first time in all 18 years of my life that I began to recognise and face the magnitude of my brokenness,” she says.

When summer break arrived, Breana went home to her parents’ house.

“I began to sit with myself and sit with my thoughts and really began to reflect on the entire school year. I really

began to recognise that there was something in my heart that was longing for more. I was processing that entire school year and thinking this cannot be the best life that I am living.”

One night while thinking and crying, she was reminded of an experience she had two years previously when a friend took her to church. At the very end of the service there was an invitation for people to give their lives to Jesus or receive prayer.

Breana watched as people walked to the front of the church and seemed to be having amazing experiences.

“I really didn’t understand to the fullest extent what was going on but watching these people so vulnerably walk up to the front and getting prayed for, it was such a sight to see that I began to tear up,” she remembers.

“I began to cry and before I knew it, I was bawling my eyes out uncontrollably.”

When she opened her eyes, she was shocked to see the service had finished and everyone had left the church.

As she looked back at the experience she realised she was experiencing and witnessing God’s love.

“I called out to God and challenged God and I said, ‘God if You are real, I dare You to change my life,’” she says.

When she returned to college, she started making friends with Christians and attending church and Bible study.

“I was going to church consistently. I was hearing the Bible for the first time. I had Christian friends who loved me and were championing me and encouraging me and for the first time. [I thought] this is the more in life that I’ve been looking for. This life is something that fulfils me in a way that my older life could never do... God allowed my mind and my heart to be so transformed that all the desire to do [the former] things just completely faded.”

Breana continued to stay connected to Christian community and attend church and by the end of the school year she accepted Jesus as her Lord and Saviour and decided to be baptised (immersed in

water as a sign of dying to one’s old life) – something she said had a profound impact on her.

“The moment that I was baptised I began to have such a fervent hunger to know Jesus,” she says. She bought a Bible and dedicated the summer to reading and learning about God and developing a personal relationship with Him.

Four years on, Breana said giving her life to Jesus was the best decision ever.

“My mourning turned into joy; my insecurity turned into confidence and worth and identity; my anxiety turned into peace; my brokenness turned into healing; and my bondage turned into freedom. And that is just the beginning of the list.

“I know that I am loved, I know that I am counted worthy and I know that a life with Him is the only life that I want to live. That longing in my heart for more has finally been satisfied in accepting Christ as my Saviour.”

Chasing happiness

BY GREG LAURIE

“If you try to hang on to your life, you will lose it. But if you give up your life for my sake and for the sake of the Good News, you will save it.” — Mark 8:35

We live in a selfie culture. In fact, people have literally died trying to capture the ultimate selfie. We want to look good and project an image of having it all together. We’re a self-obsessed society.

Interestingly, the Bible says that narcissism will be one of the signs of the last days:

“In the last days there will be very difficult times. For people will love only themselves and their money. They will be boastful and proud, scoffing at God, disobedient to their parents, and ungrateful. They will consider nothing sacred” (2 Timothy 3:1–2 NLT).

Isn’t that an accurate description of today? However, selfish people are unhappy people. Studies have confirmed this. We actually get a momentary burst of what we might call temporary happiness when we do something selfish.

One expert pointed out that selfish acts bring us happiness, but only for short periods of time. Then our selfish happiness fades quickly and ultimately drives us to more selfish behaviour.

On the other hand, selfless acts bring happiness. We know this from experience after we do something for someone else.

In contrast to our narcissistic culture, Jesus said, “If you try to hang on to your life, you will lose it. But if you give up your life for My sake and for the sake of the Good News, you will save it” (Mark 8:35 NLT).

Jesus is effectively saying, “If you get your priorities in order and deny yourself instead of loving yourself and being obsessed with yourself, you will find fulfillment in life.”

There’s nothing wrong with wanting to be happy. In fact, Jesus is really telling us how to be happy. But it isn’t by chasing happiness.

So we won’t find happiness by pursuing it. Rather, we’ll find it by putting God first in our lives and following Him.

Visit harvest.org for Greg’s blogs, videos, podcasts and daily devotions.



SHE HATED WHO SHE HAD BECOME



INSECURITY TURNED INTO CONFIDENCE AND WORTH



Who are you following?

The media you consume has an effect on your mood, behaviour, thoughts and speech. It also influences what content is recommended to you, so you could find your feed full of negative, mean, unhelpful posts. Instead, check out these creators to find some great advice and inspiration.

| | |
|--|--|
| <p>YouTube </p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coffee and Bible Time • Melissa Dougherty • BibleProject • Got Questions Ministries • Ronnie and Mel | <p>Instagram </p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • jesuseed • trustgodbro • girlsavedbygrace • sheislovedministry • god-speakss |
| <p>Facebook </p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Student Devos • Fervr • Recklessly Alive • Transformed4More • Boundless.org | <p>TikTok </p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ariel.fitz • 60secondchurch • uhteakuh • _madisonday • joechristianguy |

Please note, *Challenge* may not agree with all content released by these creators. The views and opinions shared in these videos are the creators’ own.



Let PSSM introduce you to God through FREE Bible lessons! pssm.com.au

Complete your details below and PSSM will send you your first lesson or visit our website for online lessons!

Name

DOB / / Male Female

Street Suburb

State Postcode

Parent/Guardian Signature (if under 18 years)

Delivery Address: PSSM Mailbox Club, PO Box 357, Morayfield 4506, Queensland

We are looking forward to hearing from you! 0483 326 522, info@pssm.com.au, pssm.com.au



Contact Challenge!

Do you have a story to tell, a tricky question to ask or want to let us know how *Challenge* has impacted you? Email harriet@challengenews.org

YOUTH TRUTH

Innocent teen jailed for 34 years



BY MARK ELLIS

In 1977, then 17-year-old Gene McGuire found himself at the wrong place at the wrong time. His 24-year-old cousin had come for a visit, and the two went to a tavern in Pennsylvania for some drinks.

Gene was unaware his cousin was wanted by the law.

After a few drinks, they stepped outside and were about to leave. But Gene's cousin went back inside to rob the bar. In the process, he killed the 60-year-old bartender, Isabell Nagy, by stabbing her to death, according to a report by CBN.

The two young men fled and hid in drug houses and motels. But Gene was overcome with guilt and turned himself in to police.

At Gene's trial, the court-appointed lawyer gave him ill-conceived advice to plead guilty to second-degree homicide. Still a teenager and ignorant about the process and proceedings, Gene agreed and was convicted of second-degree murder and sentenced to life in prison without parole.

For the first 10 years of his prison term, Gene fell into the depths of the prison lifestyle, which included violence, drugs, and porn.

In 1986 Chuck Colson's Prison Fellowship held a three-day revival in the prison. Moved by the power of the Gospel and God's Spirit, Gene surrendered his life to Jesus as his Lord and Saviour.

"He began receiving mentorship and counselling from one of the pastors in the program, and they became

Gene McGuire is now a free man. **INSET:** Gene being arrested as a 17 year old.

friends... During his time in prison Gene became a spiritual leader to thousands of inmates," according to CBN. Even though Gene had no legal right to parole under his sentence, he applied to the governor several times through the Board of Pardons.

"It wasn't a legal matter; it was a plea of mercy," he told *The Unseen Story*. Despite many letters of recommendation from supporters and a stellar prison record after coming to Christ, the governor denied his bid a fifth time, after Gene turned 50.

"The wind came out of me and I could barely breathe. But I knew I needed to do one thing — look him in the eye and thank him, which I had learned through a verse in the Bible. Thessalonians 5:18 says, 'Give thanks in all circumstances, for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you.' And so I looked him in the eye and said thank you to everybody and shook their hands."

As Gene walked towards his cell block, God impressed on his heart: *I want you get on your knees and thank me.*

When he re-entered his cell, Gene dropped to his knees and began to sob and thank God for His providing, protecting and promoting him. A few years earlier, a verse in Isaiah 54 seemed to jump off the page at Gene: *'He that bows low will speedily be released, he will not die in a pit, neither will his bread be lacking.'*

Gene prostrated himself on the floor, with his hands at his sides, and the Lord said: 'Lift your hands.'

"When I lifted my hands off the floor, my whole body was resting on the floor. And I just felt that weight on my chest. And He said, 'That's how I want you to live, totally dependent on me. If you support yourself, you have what you have. But if you allow me to support you, I'll give you everything.'"

The Lord impressed on his heart: "Gene, I'm going to release you. But it's not based on your effort, not who you know, and what you've

accomplished."

Peace flooded Gene's heart. God directed him to go back to serving the church in prison and pursuing his daily devotions. Two months later, the US Supreme Court ruled that teens 17 and younger receiving a life sentence with no chance of parole convictions would get a "post-conviction relief" review of their case. His attorney explained his old attorney had lied to him and pled him into an illegal sentence.

On April 3, 2012, Gene walked back into the courtroom, feeling as though something good was going to happen.

The judge asked Gene if he had anything to say. Gene thanked the judge for the opportunity and apologised for his involvement in the crime.

"It was obvious that my cousin committed this crime; I was with him. I apologise for my behaviour; I made some bad decisions in being there."

"I've heard enough," the judge declared. "Gene McGuire has served 34 years, nine months, 15 days of his sentence. Having served [this time] the defendant is released effective this date."

The courtroom exploded with applause and people shouted, "Hallelujah! Praise the Lord!" Suddenly the judge got up and walked off the bench without dismissing the proceeding. The sheriffs unshackled him and Gene was released. Three days later, Gene returned to the courthouse to thank the people involved in his case.

The probation officer explained that the judge didn't want anyone to see him crying, which is why he walked away and didn't close the court. Gene believes heaven invaded the courtroom that day and orchestrated everything.

He harbors no bitterness about the 34 years he spent behind bars.

"No sin against me has been greater than my sin against God," he says. "As freeing and liberating as it was for me to receive and know God's forgiveness in my life, it is every bit as freeing and liberating to forgive and let others go who have hurt me." •

A question of morality

Jordan Monji grew up in a competitive family, in a home where much importance was placed on achievement and being the smartest one in the room. She believed her value came from her performance, so she always felt she had a lot to prove.



Jordan Monji

Sharing her story with The 700 Club, Jordan said she was the daughter of two atheists and, at 11 years old, she too decided there was no God. She started challenging and debating her Christian classmates.

In high school Jordan started questioning where her sense of morality came from. She thought she was a good person, but by whose standard?

"Why is something right or wrong?" Jordan asked. "Why do I believe in human rights? I don't believe in a God so where are these things coming from? I had this kind of epiphany where I said, 'I'm going to wait until college to explore those questions when I can get into a good school'."

Jordan attended Harvard College, where she quickly realised she often wasn't the smartest person in the room anymore.

"It destroys that sense of identity and of worth and it makes you wonder who really am I and what makes me valuable?" she says.

When Jordan made friends with a Christian, her questions about where her sense of morality came from, returned and she noticed fractures in her intellectual framework. She enrolled in a meta-ethics class to learn more about moral thought. In this class she had to read an essay by Christian author and theologian CS Lewis. She was struck by what she read.

"Essentially what CS Lewis says is God is goodness. God is the good and our lives are good when we strive to imitate God," Jordan explains. She decided to re-read the Bible and this time try and understand it, not disprove it. She read with interest what Jesus said about what it means to be good.

"As an atheist I was living life better according to a Christian ethic than a lot of Christians were," she says. "I wasn't sleeping around, I wasn't doing drugs, I wasn't drinking, I was a good student — it was very easy for me to think of myself as a good person."

She said when she looked at Jesus' words she re-evaluated her assessment of herself. She said although she didn't sleep around, she experienced lust. She was arrogant and thought too highly of herself.

"Seeing those things made me realise that I wasn't really a good person, maybe there's some truth here that I haven't figured out yet, maybe I don't know the best way to run my life," she admits.

As Jordan continued to read the Bible, when she came to reading about Jesus' death on the cross, she began to see parallels with CS Lewis' *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*. She realised there was some symbolism in the novel — that Aslan the lion symbolised Jesus and Edmund symbolised humanity as sinners in need of a Saviour.

"It just immediately clicked," she says. "I am Edmund, Jesus is Aslan and he is dying for my sake. Seeing it now with me in the story, which is a totally radically new way of looking at it, realising my own sinfulness in that moment and my own need for healing from that sin made all the difference in how I read it. So I started just crying really thinking about Aslan, but thinking about Jesus through that process. Realising in that moment that (I am) Edmund is to realise, I'm powerless, I need help and I recognised my own incurable need for forgiveness that could only come from Jesus Christ."

But Jordan wanted more evidence, so she researched scientific arguments and world religions, but everything led her back to Jesus.

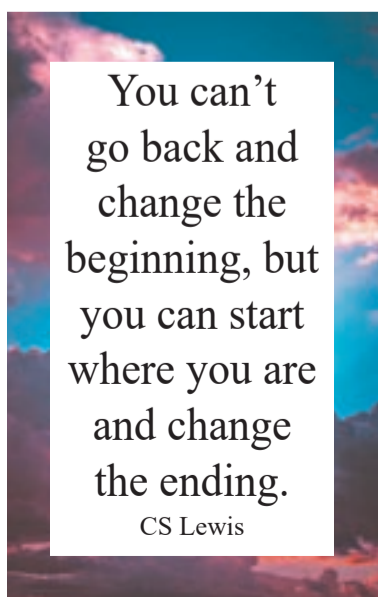
"As I thought about what love really was, I could see how Jesus' death on the cross was the perfect embodiment of that," she explains. "God is love and God is truth, so God is goodness."

She said there was no way she could pursue Christianity half-heartedly — she had to be fully committed and surrendered to the truth.

"One of the things that helped me the most to eliminate my pride was having to admit that I had been wrong all of those years as an atheist," she laughs. Jordan gave her life to Jesus and went on to pursue a doctoral degree at a theological seminary after graduating from Harvard. Despite her achievements, Jordan continues to find her value in Jesus.

"For so long my value had come from the things that I had done, so moving to a framework where, instead, the reason I knew I was valuable was because Christ had died for me, that He loved me regardless of what I would ever do — it's immensely freeing," she says. •

WHAT MAKES ME VALUABLE?



You can't go back and change the beginning, but you can start where you are and change the ending.

CS Lewis

My worldview exploded

At 27, Spike Psarris was an atheist and working as an engineer in the military space program. He discovered one of his co-workers was a young-earth creationist [someone who believes God made the world in six days about 6000 years ago], which started a long discussion about how the earth began and eventually caused Spike to question everything he believed.

In a clip from *The Heavens Declare* documentary series, Spike said that from a young age he immersed himself in science and science fiction.

One member of his family, his aunt, did not share his atheistic beliefs and he would often debate with her about Christianity and the Bible.

"She used to tell me, 'Just trust the Bible, just believe,'" Spike remembers. "I said, 'Well, what about dinosaurs? What about fossils? What about evolution?' She said, 'Don't worry about that – just trust the Bible.' I said, 'I can't just trust the Bible, I can't just check my brain at the door.'"

Spike described himself as an arrogant 12-year-old at the time. He questioned his aunt about why he should trust the Bible over other holy books.

"We butted heads quite a bit but she kept after me and told me about the Gospel," Spike recalls. "The Gospel sounded good actually. I knew I was a sinner and if there was a God then I was certainly in violation of his standards. So I got interested in Christianity and I started to read the Bible."

Spike opened the Bible at the start and read Genesis 1:1: "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth."

"I said, 'Well that's nice [but] I know that the Big Bang is how it all actually happened – maybe that's just poetry,'" he explains.

As he read on, what he read did not match up with his understanding of cosmology and science, and he dismissed it as poetry and fairy tales.

"But this book claims to be the unified Word of God – it can have nothing wrong within it, if that's true," he says. "[I thought] since there is a fairy tale in the beginning then this is not the Word of God and I don't need to worry about it. So I closed the book and went on my way."



Former US military space engineer Spike Psarris

As an adult, Spike's love for science led him to a career in the military space program.

"I got to talking with a co-worker who I found out is not only a Christian but also a creationist," Spike says. "I'd never met an actual creationist before."

Spike began to challenge his co-worker about his beliefs.

"I asked him, 'How can you deny the obvious evidence for evolution and the Big Bang?' He said, 'Well what obvious evidence is that?' I brought out all the usual suspects and radiometric dating and fossils and he shot them all down fairly easily. I'd never heard any of this perspective before."

Then Spike's co-worker asked him how he reconciled the laws of physics with the Big Bang

Theory. "It was almost like a switch went 'click' in the back of my brain and I said, 'Physics and the Big Bang don't work together – there's a violation here,' and I realised I was simultaneously believing two things that contradict each other."

Spike borrowed some books from his co-worker about this new perspective and he re-read some of his own material that he had collected since he was a child. As he revised them, he questioned whether the theories were compatible with fundamental physics.

"The answer was no as it turns out," he admits.

Over the next few months Spike continued to investigate what he had believed his whole life.

"I found out that the foundations were flawed," he shares.

"On the other hand the creationist perspective, which my friend was sharing with me, made a lot of sense and actually fitted well into what we see in the world around us much better."

Spike didn't want it to be true and continued to try to find a dif-

ferent answer. But he came to a crossroads.

"If I accept that everything does point this way then all the dominoes start falling, because if there is a Creator and I am created then I'm responsible to that Creator for my behaviour and He has absolute authority over me," he explains. "Conversely He has no obligation toward me whatsoever. It's a one-way obligation. This Creator hates sin enough to have judged the world in a flood ... I didn't want any of that because it means I fall in the category of a sinner who deserves that kind of judgment."

Spike was in a personal crisis for a while. He knew the truth but he did not want to admit it. It was when he thought back to his discussions with his aunt that things fell into place.

"[I realised] yes, you are created and yes, you're a sinner and yes, you deserve God's wrath but this also means the Gospel message that you heard 15 years ago is true. Yes, you are a sinner but God knows your sin better than you do but loves you despite that; loves you enough to have paid for it by sending His Son; Jesus. I now saw that it was true and became a Christian."

"I became a creationist first and a Christian second. Becoming a creationist is not sufficient to make one a Christian – that's the work of God the Holy Spirit – but creationists are often portrayed as being fundamentalist Bible-thumpers, who only believe creation because the Bible requires them to and if they could see science objectively ... they would see all this evidence for evolution."

"Well, I'm one of many for whom the opposite was true. I became convinced of the evidence [for creation] first and then that removed the stumbling block that was holding me back from acknowledging God."

Spike runs a website, creationastronomy.com, which is dedicated to proclaiming the evidence of creation in the area of astronomy.

I CAN'T JUST CHECK MY BRAIN AT THE DOOR



PHYSICS AND THE BIG BANG DON'T WORK TOGETHER



COMET?

A comet is a ball of dirty ice which orbits the sun, just like the planets orbit the sun.

As the comet travels along, it falls apart. Just like a snowball in the sun, every comet is shrinking and melting away.

Obviously, if we measure the rate at which a comet is shrinking, we can say when it will disappear.

Based on this simple but accurate bit of science, it is clear that most comets we see today cannot be much older than 10,000 years old.

If the solar system was even 50,000 years old, there would not be any comets.

Do you see what this means?

Logically, because we still see comets, the solar system must be very young – just a few thousand years old.

So real science, using real observation, supports what the Bible says about the universe being only about 6000 years old.

by Richard Gunther

7 GOOD REASONS WHY

Observational science has revealed more than seven ways to estimate the age of the Earth. Here are just seven of them, which all support the Bible:

1. Helium escaping from rocks. There should be none left if they were millions of years old.
2. Folded sedimentary layers of rocks, which indicate rapid formation not long ago.
3. The disintegration of the human genome, as errors accumulate in our DNA.
4. Unfossilised, soft tissue and skin from dinosaurs, preserved in sedimentary rocks and clay.
5. Radiocarbon still available in coal and diamonds when there should be none.
6. Spiral galaxies that are still 'wound up' and intact.
7. Deteriorating magnetic field around Earth and other planets, when it should have decayed away long ago.

There are about 100 indicators which point to the Earth and solar system all being young – only a few thousand years, rather than millions.

by Richard Gunther

Believe It or Not

BY CREATION MINISTRIES INTERNATIONAL

Wizard of Oz stored on DNA

DNA has become recognised as a "durable, high-density information storage platform". Research scientist Stephen Jones, who has collaborated with other researchers on a new method of storing information on DNA, said: "This idea takes advantage of what biology has been doing ... for billions of years: storing lots of information in a very small space that lasts a long time".

To test their new method, called HEDGES, the researchers put *The Wizard of Oz*, translated into Esperanto, onto DNA and subjected it to high temperatures and extreme humidity. Despite this leading to some of the DNA being damaged, the information could still be decoded successfully.

The reason that DNA is being used to store information is that it "is about 5 million times more efficient than current storage methods... and DNA doesn't require permanent cooling and hard disks that are prone to mechanical failures".

This is a clear demonstration that the information DNA is able to store is of completely the same nature as messages sent by intelligent human senders. Namely, information which can be read, understood and put into 'action'.

This is what happens in living things, which transmit their DNA information from generation to generation. Like human messages, this inherited information is also subject to damage/decay (mutations). This points to a super-intelligent source that encoded the information in the first place in the ancestors of each kind of living thing and designed the machinery needed for its preprogrammed transmission.

The Bible tells us in Genesis who life's coding creator is.

The fact that DNA can also store information more elegantly, effectively and efficiently than anything man-made so far is further demonstration of God's "eternal power and divine nature" (Romans 1:20).

Press, W.H. and 4 others, HEDGES error-correcting code for DNA storage corrects indels and allows sequence constraints, PNAS, 16 Jul 2020.

UT News, Power of DNA to store information gets an upgrade; news.utexas.edu, 14 Jul 2020.

GET ANSWERS FOR YOUR FAMILY

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



- Affirms the complete reliability of the Bible
- Refutes evolution with real-world evidence
- Helps Christians share and defend their faith

Subscribe at CREATION.COM/MAG

BUILDING BETTER RELATIONSHIPS

Finding perfect meeting of meaning

BY ROB FURLONG

WITH the amazing increase in technological devices over the past 15 years our ability to stay in touch with each other, even in some of the remotest parts of the world, has increased exponentially. I would like to suggest however that our ability to communicate meaningfully with each other has not progressed at the same rate. If anything, it has gone backwards.

On a holiday a few years back (which included a buffet breakfast in beautiful tropical surrounds each morning) Karen and I were amazed at the number of couples sitting across from each other at the breakfast table gazing into their ... iPads! In such a beautiful setting how sad it was to

see people desperately checking their Facebook status rather than connecting with the one they claimed to love forever.

How is it possible that we can live in an era that possesses unprecedented opportunities for communication and yet be so relationally disconnected from each other? Could it be that we have lost the simple art of being able to talk to each other face-to-face?

Communication experts have described the highest form of communication as Peak Communication – the level at which communication between a couple is natural, easy and free; there is even a sense of knowing what the other person is going to say before they say it – this is peak communication!

One author has described it in this way:

Communication is the meeting of meaning.

When your meaning meets my meaning across the bridge of words, tones, acts, and deeds, when

understanding occurs, then we know we have communicated ...

When two persons can share from the very centre of their existence, they experience love in its truest quality.

Open and honest communication is all about sharing yourself, your feelings, and your thoughts with the other person.

It also means that you are prepared to share the negatives with each other. Some people live under the delusion that being open in communication with each other means that you will only ever speak about positive things. But I have benefited enormously from

the courage my wife has shown when she has confronted me about attitudes and behaviours that needed attention in my life.

For example, the time Karen made it clear to me that the way I expressed my anger at times was unacceptable was a watershed moment for me.

I am not proud to admit there were times I would raise my voice, shout and say unkind things when angry. Karen was not rude or nasty in how she approached this, but she made her position clear that I needed to address this area of my life. This was peak communication at its most intense!

Peak communication does not mean sharing every thought that comes into your head either.

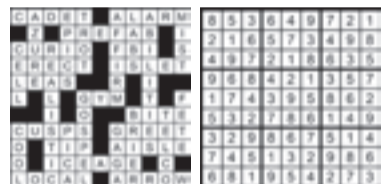
There are some thoughts that are best expressed to God alone and, if need be, an objective person outside the situation. It is an unkind

person indeed who "always speaks my mind" and leaves the recipient to deal with the hurtful

consequences of their verbal tirade. We are called to speak the truth to each other, but we are told to speak it "in love". Sometimes the most loving thing a person can do is to hold their tongue!

Open and free communication between two people is an enriching experience but the pathway there must be walked with care and the following statement sums this journey up superbly:

If you knew me yesterday, please do not think that it is the same person that you are meeting today. I have experienced more of life. I have encountered new depths in those I love, I have suffered and prayed, and I am different ... Approach me, then, with a sense of wonder, study my face and hands and voice for signs of change; for it is certain that I have changed.



Lessons from a sausage dog (Part 18)

BY JODY BENNETT

MY little dog, Carrie, made me very cross this last week. I opened the front door to get the mail and she dashed out, across the road to chase a cat, which isn't a problem, but then she refused to come back when I called her.

I tried to cajole her, to put a stern note in my voice, to shout at her and to ignore her and pretend I was leaving her outside. But none of it helped, the dog was on a mission to find that cat and wasn't interested in me or my commands.

Now, I don't assume from that, that Carrie doesn't love me. I am cynical enough to realise that my dog probably only 'loves' me because I feed her, pat her, scratch her and let her into my warm bed. I don't think animals are capable of love as humans know it, because love involves more than just gravitating towards someone who meets your needs. Love has to do with selflessness and being prepared to put another's needs above your own.

Many people say they love God. The Bible is clear though that the litmus test for whether someone truly does love God, is not what they profess to feel, but whether they obey what God says.

1 John 2: 3-6 says, "Now by this we know that we know Him [Jesus], if we keep His commandments. He who says, 'I know Him', and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him. But whoever keeps His word, truly the love of God is perfected in him. By this we know that we are in Him. He who says he abides in Him ought himself also to walk just as He walked."

1 John 5:3 says, "For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments" and 2 John verse 6 reiterates, "This is love, that we walk according to His commandments."

So, I can't be like my naughty dachshund and claim to love my Owner, yet refuse to turn away from my own pursuits to obey His commands. I need to show my love for my Master by living according to what He says and bringing my life into line with His will.

Wonderfully, God helps us even in this by putting His Holy Spirit within us to empower us to do right.

HOW DO I BECOME A CHRISTIAN?

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Almighty God, Creator of Heaven and Earth,

I acknowledge that I am a sinner. Please forgive me for all the ways I have disobeyed and defied You.

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

What now?

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

AS A NEXT STEP :

I have prayed this prayer. Please send me: Bible Some 'starting off' literature Information on a helpful church

** Please tick and write clearly **

Name _____ Phone _____

Address _____

Email address _____

Challenge Literature Fellowship, PO Box 978, Cloverdale WA 6985
info@challengenews.org

All overseas enquiries are referred onto someone in their own country

Want to explore more?

Here are some **free**, helpful, Christian online resources:

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

Ronnie Faisst in action during the Crusty Demons Nine Lives Tour at the Rod Laver Arena, May 21, 2004 in Melbourne, Australia. (Photo by Robert Cianflone/Getty Images)



MOTOX TURNS MOTO+

Ronnie Faisst grew up racing motocross and has raced professionally since he was 18. But his career soared to new heights when he helped pioneer Freestyle Motocross, a variation of motocross in which riders attempt to impress judges with jumps and stunts.

Ronnie talked about starting the sport in a video on his YouTube channel. He said at age 20 he moved to California where free riding was being birthed. With nothing but \$200 and an old, raggedy van, Ronnie drove across America and found a job in construction with fellow motocross rider Mike Metzger's father. When he wasn't working, he was riding and going on film trips.

"Little did we know, we were actually pioneering and birthing a whole new sport called Freestyle Motocross," Ronnie says.

Ronnie took that sport around America in 1998 on the Vans Warped Tour and his career took off.

"Before I knew it, I was traveling all around the world, tours, film trips, competing against the best riders in the world, sponsorship dollars came in, contracts came in, and I would ride that way for the next 20 years," Ronnie explains.

It was a fast-paced lifestyle on the road travelling with his friends.

"About everywhere we went there were after parties and a wild lifestyle," Ronnie remembers. "And I was just in it to win it... I was known for being the committed guy who trained hard and was always into fitness, but was also known as the guy who got loose and partied a lot and chased all the girls."

One day at home, where he was living with his girlfriend at the time, he saw a snippet of a preacher on television that caught his attention.

"He was talking about fear and I thought, what does this dude know about fear?" Ronnie says. "I deal with this on a daily deal in my sport, so I decided to listen on. I actually liked what he had to say and I decided to watch him the next weekend."

Ronnie started watching the preacher on TV every week for the next year or more. He said he liked that he was really positive, always had a good message about faith and how God just was on our side and God loved us and wanted to bless us.

Despite this, Ronnie's lifestyle continued as it had been.

"I was listening to him and I was being encouraged by what he was saying, but my lifestyle never really shifted," Ronnie admits. "I was still sleeping around and doing whatever I liked and not even feeling guilty about any of it and just thought that

was what everyone was doing."

He said he thought of himself as a good person and that the good outweighed the bad in his life, which meant if he died, he thought he deserved to go to heaven. But when a friend gave him a Bible for Christmas, things began to change for Ronnie.

"When I began to read the Bible for the first time for myself, God really started to speak to me," Ronnie says. "It was like the Word of God was alive, because I couldn't put this book down. I never read books, never even read Motocross magazines, I don't like to read anything and yet I could not stop reading this Book."

He said as he read, verses began to almost jump off the page and challenge him.

"I realised, I say I believe in this faith, but I don't live like I do," Ronnie recalls. "One of the verses that really hit me says, *'What will it profit a man if he gained the whole world but he lost his own soul'* (Mark 8:36). [I was] thinking, I'm living my dream, I've got everything I ever wanted and things are good, yet I might be missing the one thing that matters."

A theme Ronnie kept seeing in the Bible was repentance (turning away from doing wrong things).

"The Bible kept saying repent, and repent simply means to change your direction," Ronnie explains. "If I'm walking this way, if I was to repent that means I would turn from the way I was headed and I'm going to turn and go a different direction, and I never did that."

Ronnie said although he watched the preacher for over a year, it wasn't until he read the Bible that he began

to feel challenged and had a desire to make a change and follow Jesus.

He said he spoke to a Christian friend in the freestyle industry, Nate Adams, and started attending church with him.

"It wasn't long before they gave a message that challenged me and I just knew, it's time to make a real commitment," Ronnie remembers. "I went forward, responded to the altar call, went up to the front, and gave my life to the Lord. And from that day on, I said, man I'm going to be committed to this. I'm going to go for this. And I remember I did a complete 180 turnaround in my life. I was like, I'm done chasing the girls, I'm done living this crazy lifestyle, I'm done with all the partying, all the alcohol, the drugs, all the stuff, I'm done! I'm going to go for Jesus. And that's where my journey began."

Ronnie said actually making the decision to follow Jesus and pray a prayer of salvation in 2006 wasn't the hard part. He said it has been a lot more challenging to actually walk it out and stay faithful to his

commitment to Jesus.

"I had my challenges, I had my weaknesses, my mistakes and my failures along the way, but God remained faithful and He was able to love me right through it," Ronnie explains. "I'm not here today because I was able to do it perfect. I'm still a believer and I'm still following Jesus mainly because I never quit. His love is perfect and He loved me through my weaknesses. Even when I failed Him, He never gave up on me."

Ronnie refers to the change in him since becoming a Christian as a miracle. He said he has been blown away by what God has done in him.

"I experienced something so real that it shifted everything," Ronnie says. "The desires of my heart have changed, the way my mind thinks has changed, the way that I actually choose to live my life has changed."

Ronnie is married to ex-motocross model Mel and together they run an online Christian ministry and YouTube channel called Ronnie and Mel.



Ronnie and his wife Mel.

DISTRIBUTED BY: