

EX BEAUTY QUEEN'S BODY ISSUES

In 2008, Kirsten Haglund put on the sash and bore the crown that made her that year's Miss America. She had won the United States' national competition for beauty

Beauty in our culture is synonymous with a very particular body type. "You need to be thin," a voice will whisper in the minds of nearly all women and girls at some point in their lives.

Kirsten first heard the voice when she was 12 years old, studying one summer at a competitive ballet school and noticing she was no longer the thinnest one around—or the best.

"I realized: I don't look like any of these girls," Miss America 2008 tells the website *I Am Second*. "Maybe I'm not thin enough. Maybe I'm not good enough to be a professional dancer."

"I would let myself eat fried food and I would have dessert and cookies, but those very serious girls, they didn't eat that same food. For the first time I thought maybe I should be dieting. Isn't that what every fashion magazine says?"

Kirsten remembers throwing her lunch in the trashcan the first time, remembers the illusion of power it gave her.

So began a three-year battle with anorexia.

"I started blacklisting foods," she says. "Carbs are supposed to be

bad so maybe I shouldn't eat any carbs. Fats are supposed to be bad so maybe I shouldn't eat any fats."

"I just started making all these rules for myself."

"All ballet is is rules. Point your leg, straighten your knee, be in line, be on the count— and do it all while you're smiling. My life just became following the rules of my eating disorder."

By 15, Kirsten says, she was a shell of her former self.

"As long as you stick with me, you can have everything you want," her anorexia told her. "You'll be beautiful. You'll be light as a feather. You'll be exquisite. You'll be gorgeous."

But Kirsten didn't see it. "My thighs, my butt, my stomach; my face, my cheeks. All I saw was failure. I still wasn't there yet. I still wasn't anorexic enough," she says.

"[Anorexia is] about food, and it's about losing weight and creating the body you want. But it's about so much more than that. It is... slavery."

Kirsten refused treatment. She decided she would put on just

enough weight to get a tick of approval from her treatment team, then go back to being anorexic.

But no matter how much she tried to fool herself and others that she was in control, that she was only doing what she needed to do to achieve her dancing dreams, she realized she could not fool God.

She had given her life to Jesus Christ in second grade, Kirsten recalls. But she did not really know who Christ was. So when she became consumed with the fear of being fat and her dream of becoming a ballerina, it easily took the number one spot in her life.

She knew God saw the front she put on for people and saw the Kirsten that was still dissatisfied, upset, anxious, and afraid. She couldn't half get better — Jesus wanted everything.

Not until she nearly passed out from overexertion did Kirsten understand she did not have control; did she understand this could really kill her. Then she decided to get better.

"I realized I wanted to eat pizza again and I wanted to eat birthday



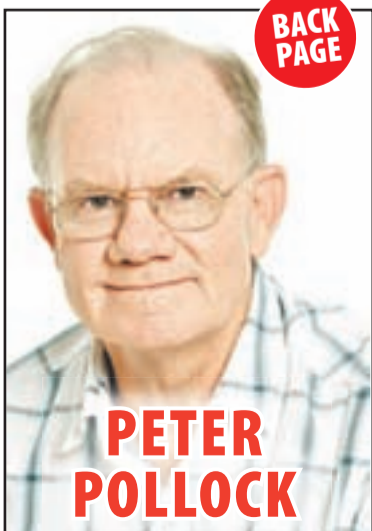
Former Miss America, Kirsten Haglund, attends the 'Little Miss Perfect' screening at DGA Theater in New York in 2016. Photo Cindy Ord/Getty Images.

cake and I wanted to travel the world and I wanted to fall in love and I wanted to learn another language and I wanted to help other people," she says.

"What if there's more to life? What if I can do other things?"

Kirsten says she found comfort in the Psalms, in the Bible.

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No one is guaranteed tomorrow

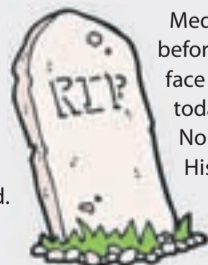
DR. JIM DENISON

YOU likely won't die from a North Korean missile or an unsafe airplane today. But tomorrow is promised to no one.

A truck bombing near the Afghan presidential palace killed at least eighty people recently. A young woman who survived last year's Orlando nightclub massacre died in a highway car crash a few weeks ago. A four-year-old girl fell into a Utah river on Memorial Day and drowned. Her mother and a bystander who jumped into the river to save the girl also drowned.

We are all one day closer to eternity than ever before. That is why "now is the day of salvation" (2 Corinthians 6:2).

This *Time* headline caught my eye: "Extreme Ways Man Has Tried to Cheat Death." Among them:



Cleopatra supposedly bathed in donkey's milk. Romans drank blood from gladiators. An alchemist claimed that medicine from a monkey's brain would lengthen life up to five hundred years. A future Nobel laureate promoted drinking sour milk.

Medical science is more advanced than ever before, but it is still true: the only safe way to face tomorrow is to be ready to meet God today. Consider Panama's General Manuel Noriega, who died recently at the age of 83. His 1990 conversion to Christianity while in prison made headlines. Recently, *The Washington Post* ran an article on his faith. Despite its skeptical tone, it reported Noriega's testimony: "I received

Jesus Christ as my Saviour the 15th May of 1990 at 11 a.m."

Noriega later told my friend Luis Palau, "I've found a new commander in chief: Jesus Christ."

He pointed to the Bible in his prison cell and said, "There's the book that tells me what his will is for my life. It has changed me."

For a species that is so afraid of death, you would think more of us would be more inclined to follow Noriega's example. But our culture suffers from opposing deceptions: we're so self-righteous that we don't think we need Jesus to save us, or we're so guilt-ridden that we don't think He can.

In *Break Open the Sky: Saving our Faith from a Culture of Fear*, Stephan Bauman writes: "Accepting that we are loved for no other reason than the God of the universe loves us—it's in his very being and nature to do so—is the hardest thing you and I will ever do. Grace (undeserved love of God) is nonreciprocal."

However uncertain tomorrow seems, this fact is still true today: you cannot make Jesus love you any more than He does right now. Or any less. ●

Ex beauty queen's body issues

From page 1

"I found the words to be my words and it wasn't an answer, it wasn't like I opened up and it was like here is how you release your perfectionism, but it just brought comfort to my soul and it made me realize that I wasn't in it alone. Jesus was reaching down into the pit and saying, 'I've got you, I'm here with you, I love you, I love you so much that I died for you'.

"When you're in bondage to an eating disorder your life is constantly consumed with meeting certain standards, following certain rules, and punishing yourself so that you'll be good enough.

"But through my relationship with Christ and understanding my identity as a child of God I realized that love and acceptance was a free gift I could never earn; that grace was given to me by God, and there was nothing I could ever do, and no failure or brokenness that I could ever have, that could keep Him from loving me."

After winning Miss America 2008, Kirsten used her platform to travel and speak on body-image issues and eating disorders. She continues to do so today through the Kirsten Haglund Foundation.



Finding love and freedom

Toni was only 11 weeks pregnant when the father of her baby left her.

Lost, broken and abandoned, Toni Kinghorn now faced the huge responsibility of raising a child alone. How could she possibly manage when she had no one to turn to for help?

"The life I was living was a hopeless dead end going nowhere," Toni says, "I was broken and had lost everything and everyone in my life. I was alone."

This was not the first time Toni had been left feeling depressed and confused by the way others treated her.

"I did not have an easy life as a child," Toni says, "Both my parents were alcoholics and I was in children's homes quite often ... When I was growing up, being in and out of various homes was normal for me."

As a young child, Toni also suffered from child abuse and negligence.

"There was some form of child abuse at some stage but I cannot remember much," Toni shares. "My mum also suffered

with anorexia and used to underfeed me. My dad died when I was young."

All this added multiple scars to Toni's heart and as she grew up, she attempted to forget her painful reality by taking drugs, and became involved in casual relationships as a way to gain the love she had never experienced at home.

During this tough time though, Toni never went to church or even thought about God and spiritual things. "I used to mock people going to church," she admits.

But God was watching over Toni, as evidenced by her life being spared on two specific occasions.

The first time, when she tried to commit suicide from the 13th floor of a building at an hour when no one should have been awake. "I was really out of it," Toni recalls, "and yet I was saved by someone."

The second time when she had an epileptic fit in the middle of a busy road.

"I was broken and had lost everything"

"A doctor in a nearby car attended to me. God was already there," she admits.

When Toni fell pregnant and ended up in a home for unmarried mothers, she still felt insecure and unsure of herself.

"I first heard about Jesus through social workers at the home," she shares. "It was there while I was in church one Sunday that I felt prompted to stand up for the altar call. I was the only one and was pretty nervous.

"I gave my life to Jesus that day because I felt the prompting of the Holy Spirit of God within me.

"From then on, God was dealing with my heart about forgiveness. I found it so hard, but He put the right people in my path, both in the home and beyond.

"And slowly, but surely, I learnt to forgive.

"It wasn't an easy road," Toni admits, "because, as a new Christian I was pulled back into worldly situations ... It was very hard at the beginning but circumstances began to change. The Holy Spirit started working in my life and convicting me."

Now, there is peace and security in Toni's life.

"God has healed me of all addictions and desires," she says joyfully. "I have been free from promiscuity for 11 years and clean from drugs for 10 years. I have no desire to go back to my former lifestyle.

God has changed me completely since I became a Christian. He has restored all that I lost.



Toni Kinghorn, free of drugs for a decade.

"I now work at my church. I have a family. I have a wonderful supportive husband and two lovely little girls. I have relationships with my other kids. My life has been given back to me through Jesus.

"Pray, pray, pray," Toni urges those in similar circumstances.

"You get to a point where there is nowhere else to turn but if you look to Jesus, you can't go wrong! He will answer you at your point of brokenness and need.

"I take one day at a time, I give everything to God. I make sure He is the central point of my focus in everything I do. I have learnt to rely on Him and trust Him fully."

A verse from the Bible that is very special to Toni is Jeremiah chapter 29 verse 11, which says: "For I know the plans that I have for you, says the Lord, plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you a hope and a future."

Crossword

ACROSS	9 US farm	18 Weedkiller	DOWN
1 Coagulate	10 All square	20 Inundated	1 Stopper
3 Tailed 'star'	14 Ivory source	21 Autocrat until 1917	2 Parentless children
8 Common plastic	15 Trunk with a chest		4 Pledge

SOLUTION PAGE 11

Sudoku

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

Puzzle Level: Medium

	1							
				8	4	9	1	
3	5	9						
7			8	3				
		5				1		
				1	6			9
						9	4	3
2	8	3	4					
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SOLUTION PAGE 11

Marrying yourself

ON a rooftop in Brooklyn, Erika Anderson put on a vintage-style white wedding dress, stood before a circle of her closest friends, and committed herself — to herself. She married herself.

Sasha Cagen, married herself when she turned 40. She says "I vowed to trust myself, to see myself as beautiful, to accept my imperfections and the imperfections of others."

It is good that people are so comfortable with who they are and that they want to commit to marry themselves. Yet this really defeats the purpose of marriage.

The beginning of the Bible we hear God say to Adam, "It is not good for anyone to be alone". That is the purpose of marriage. Not to feel better about yourself but to share life, the good and the bad with another person. It is the design God has for all of us.

share your story

Do you have a story about how you came to know Jesus, that may encourage others? Send your testimony, with a colour photograph, for consideration to jodyb@challengenews.org

Facing up to failure

JODY BENNETT

IN the last issue Challenge led with the Christian testimony of actor Chris Pratt. The same month, just after we went to press, the story broke that Chris and his wife, Anna Farris are splitting up. Rumour has it Jennifer Lawrence may be involved. While it is a credit to the pair that their spilt does not seem to be acrimonious, and they haven't actually said they are divorcing yet, it is disappointing news.

Disappointing because as soon as someone "comes out" as a Christian, people expect perfection and are intolerant of any moral failure on their part.

However, as I heard expressed recently, if we expect to find sick people in a hospital, we should expect to find broken people in a church — it is a place where those who have acknowledged their own failures and their need for a higher power, are able to go to find forgiveness and healing. Church is not a place for perfect people and anyone who has had anything to do with Christians will admit that most of them are far from it.

So then, what is the good of faith? Well, it may not make us perfect (this side of eternity) to become followers of Jesus, but it certainly makes us better than we would be relying on our own resources. Many people CAN testify how turning their lives over to God has set them free from addictions, restored relationships, mended marriages and broken chains of the past. However, for most people these things do not happen instantly and each Christian is on a journey called sanctification that is taking us towards perfection and will continue our whole lives.

For those outside the church the failure of Christians to live up to their doctrines should be a powerful reminder that it is not Christians who should be idolised and worshipped, no matter how saintly or successful they may seem, but it is their God who should be worshipped ... because the God of the Bible is indeed perfect, unchanging, completely reliable, absolutely trustworthy and morally incorruptible.

FROM CRIMINAL AND DRUG ADDICT TO LIFE COACH

A walking miracle

Five years ago, Paul Bramble was a physical and mental wreck. After 30 years of drug abuse and 20 years as a career criminal, including four years on the run from police, he had hit rock bottom.

He was homeless and living in men's shelters; his convictions for armed robbery under numerous aliases covered three pages, while his psychiatric and medical history would make your hair stand on end. He walked with a walking stick and was on eight medications to cope with everything from Hepatitis C to bipolar disorder. He was seriously considering ending it all with a drug overdose.

Today, Paul radiates joy and goodwill. The only pill he takes is a thyroid medication – he is cured of Hepatitis C and has thrown away his walking stick. He is not only free of pain; he plays touch footy and cricket. He is a respected member of the community, mentoring young Aboriginal offenders through Tribal Warrior, a programme that involves boxing and maritime training. He also acts as chaplain for the Redfern All Blacks,

an Aboriginal rugby league team. To cap it all off, last December, he sailed with the first all-indigenous crew in the Sydney to Hobart yacht race.

"At 52 my life has never been better," says Paul, who is not Aboriginal but jokes that he has a black heart. "It's a phenomenal story. It's one of grace and redemption and transformation."

You may wonder what caused this turnaround. It was not being "saved" because Paul first called on the name of the Lord at age 12 at a holiday sailing camp. Over his life, he reckons he has gone forward at 47 altar calls and "every one of them was heartfelt, every one

of them I would have rivers of tears coming down by face, uncontrollably sobbing and remorse".

But each time, within a day, a week or a month, he would relapse and start using drugs again. "I would get pulled down, the biggest temptations would come in my life and I didn't know how to resist," he says.

Paul's world turned upside down at the age of four when his father suddenly left. He then lost his mother too when he was adopted by a "super-

strict" God-fearing couple who lived north of Sydney.

"You weren't able to ask any questions, and I was always getting smacked for asking why about things," he recalls. "There was stability in the house but the love, the secret ingredient that we all need, was a little bit lacking."

Paul started dabbling in drugs at about age 15 and a year later he moved on to heroin, which started the merry-go-round of robberies, jail, rehab and relapse.

"I've been to about 20 rehabs but there wasn't really a heart change so when I got out within a week I'd bust again," he admits.

In the mid-80s his fiancée was killed in a car accident and he had to go to the morgue and identify her. After that he suffered post-traumatic stress disorder and "one day my whole body and mind broke down. "Once you become mentally sick and physically sick and spiritually sick, it escalates."



Paul Bramble finds it incredible how God has redeemed so many traumatic events from his life.

A year or so after his fiancée died, Paul started "looking for love in all the wrong areas" going from one bad relationship to another. Then his partner got pregnant and six months after she gave birth to a son they separated, which precipitated another emotional crisis.

"Knowing what it was like for me not to have my dad ... here I was, that pattern was repeating. I was hurting so I went to church."

One day, after a supervised visit with his son at church, Paul sat on the steps outside and started crying.

"I felt like a train had hit me. You have no idea of the trauma inside and the anguish inside the whole situation. In that moment, a very light, audible voice said to me 'That's how

I feel when you're not walking with me.' That was the first time I heard God telling me how much He loved me. When I wasn't in relationship with Him and talking to Him, the pain and anguish that I was feeling that day was what He felt."

Despite this significant moment, Paul spent another 20 years wrestling with and yelling at God. "I felt that God was a million miles away sometimes. I felt his love and grace was insufficient for me," he said.

What finally broke the pattern was realising from the little glimpses of God throughout his life, how much better life would be if he could put those times together.

"I was actually feeling suicidal and I'd been homeless for a couple of years and been in men's shelters. I had just got housed and I felt like I was in a big coffin," Paul recalls. "I was getting on towards 50 and I thought 'what has my life become?' and seriously feeling suicidal.

"It was then that I actually cried out to God from my very essence. Unlike some of the other times in the past – there was no agenda. It was like 'God, I'm sick of running, I'm sick of being disobedient; I'm just going to surrender ... Take me and I will do whatever it takes.'"

Within weeks of that total surrender, Paul was attending church regularly, was off his medications, did not need his walking stick and felt joyful and at peace. That was five years ago.

His involvement with the community programme Tribal Warrior has given Paul a sense of belonging and sense of value and worth. He has also begun to study at a Bible college.

"For most of my life it was about me and this programme taught me that it's not about you; it's about others. I realised I had something to give to others; I had life experiences to share with the young kids.

"Then I realised that the more you contribute and serve, the more you get back anyway. If you give out of the goodness of your heart, God blesses you in other ways. Doors open."

Paul finds it incredible how God has been able to redeem so many traumatic events from his life. "Eighteen months ago I had a holiday in Queensland and I went past the roadside where my fiancée was killed in a car accident and for once there wasn't that anguish or that pain in there, so that was remarkable. And there are many instances of that where God has taken me full circle and all the bad, ugly, messy hurtful memories are now joyful and positive." •

This article first appeared in Eternity News.

Learning you are truly loved

Jennifer King had never felt valued and didn't believe anyone could really love her.

"I was a confused, bitter, and angry young woman," Jennifer admits, "For many years I believed my purpose in life was to be consistently knocked down so that others would get the free ride – the life of joy and happiness.

"I had been sexually abused by my eldest brother over a period of about 10 years beginning when I was 4 or 5 years old. Initially, he was navigating his way through puberty and I was the person he experimented with, later I was just an easy target.

"Finally, at the age of 14 I was able to tell him to leave me alone!"

This, however, was not the only heartache that Jennifer had to deal with.

"At 15 I was involved in a car accident where I ran over and killed a little girl," Jennifer confesses sadly.

"By 16, my parents sold the farm that we lived on and we moved to the city. I left school on a whim and got a job. I now had the means and opportunity to commence my underage drinking and partying lifestyle. I became a very promiscuous, hard, and heartless young woman. I had little respect for authority and none for myself."

At 18, Jennifer committed herself to a psychiatric ward because of her deep depression.

"They were willing to assist me in dealing with the fall out of my car accident but were unwilling to even discuss the abuse I had endured at the hands of my brother. This was a taboo subject in those days.

"My anger simply grew and my self-destructive behaviours increased. I realised my life was a mess and I had to make some changes. So I went and joined the army. I fitted right in with the booze



culture the armed services had at that time.

"I sought direction from mediums and tarot card readers. They told me I would find the man of my dreams and have a happy marriage.

"Fifteen months later I was pregnant and as was the norm in those days, I got married. This was not a wise decision. Predictably, the tarot cards had got the message very, very wrong."

Jennifer's marriage was an abusive disaster. She felt like she was failing as a mother and had very few friends. She now realised that the few times she had been to church had been times of peace.

"I felt God was real and He was out there somewhere," Jennifer explains, "I just didn't think He would want to have anything to do with a person like me. From time to time I called out 'Why me?' I know I wallowed in self-pity. What I should have been calling out was 'God help me!'"

During a visit to her family, Jennifer's younger brother asked her to accompany him to church. There, Jennifer was confronted with some hard

questions about herself, her life, and where she was placed in her relationship with Jesus.

"I was led to say the sinner's prayer, in doing so I was guided to ask Christ to forgive me of my many sins, to ask Him to become the Lord of my life and to be my Saviour."

Jennifer returned home and began attending church. She "tried very hard to be a good person" but because her understanding of God was a mental assent to the truth of God rather than embracing a love-relationship with Him, she found herself 10 months later drifting from church and stopped spending time reading her Bible.

She admits that a major factor in this falling away was that she still; "could not comprehend how God could possibly accept a sinner who was as defiled as me," and her life continued to be very difficult.

When Jennifer's marriage collapsed completely, she began a new relationship, moved interstate, divorced, and quickly remarried. "I had once again found a controlling and abusive person to share my life with. This marriage also failed," she confesses.

Then Jennifer began attending a new church where her pastor encouraged her to examine each of her life experiences and to lift them individually to Christ.

"It was during this meeting that I finally came to understand that Jesus loves me!" Jennifer exclaims, "My knowledge of Him finally moved from my head to my heart. I was now in a position to commence a heartfelt relationship with Him.

"Jesus has been with me every step of the way and He will never, ever leave me. I am confident that my sins have been forgiven, my chains have been broken, I have been set free and that Jesus Christ really does love and accept me. I have value as a child of God.

"I know I have been healed of the scars I carried forward from my abusive childhood and marriages. I have been restored from the brokenness of the past. I am not alone, Christ goes before me and He will never leave me!" •

THE BIKE OF LIFE RIDING PILLION

BY MARK CALLAGHAN

AH, THE FREEDOM and daring of youth. On a balmy summer's day in the early 70's I crossed Sydney Harbour to visit my brother in North Sydney. He was a professional rider, and we decided to ride back across the Bridge on his Honda 4, a much more interesting way to return home than the red rattler electric train on offer.

Now I had ridden and been pillion passenger on bikes enough to know what to expect, but it had been a few years. We took off and cruised briskly along the Bridge in very light traffic – the wind in our hair, the sun at our backs, sports exhaust crackling – a perfect Saturday afternoon ride.

At the Southern end is the corkscrew exit that takes you off the Bridge and round and up above Circular Quay on to the Cahill Expressway. Entering that tightest of bends, bike laid right over, foot-pegs showering sparks behind us, we roared into the tunnel.



Riding pillion. File photo

As I lifted my head I realised that I was looking up at the wheel nuts of a semi-trailer on the inside lane. My knee-jerk response was to sit bolt upright or jump off – but the only chance of survival as a pillion is to totally trust the rider's judgement and ability, and continue to lean into corners with him – two riding as one.

The fresh sea air above the Quay was a welcome relief – my confidence had paid off. My brother's ability to ride may have been extreme but was safe. We could have motored sedately around those bends, but what a thrill we would have missed!

Life has been described as a journey – a pilgrimage. Sometimes it seems as if we are stuck in traffic, making our way slowly from day to day. Other times life takes us into unexpected twists and turns, and challenges and trials arise, threatening to over-take us – then the ride becomes exhilarating.

Faith is just like a bike ride. Faith is much more than just 'believing'. It's that all-encompassing trust that is the only option to survive the ride of life. Christian faith rests in Jesus Christ – on his character – his unblemished riding record – and his ability to complete the journey that he started. He is able to take you and me – whoever has this trusting faith – with him.

That same temptation to take control and sit up or jump off can arise, but we need to stay close to Jesus, following his every move, leaning into the corners with him, and letting him choose the route and do the riding. It's safer and much more exciting that way.

The Apostle Paul wrote that he was "confident of this very thing, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus". Jesus did not call us to fall or to fail. The journey will have difficulties, but He will bring us safely to our destination.

That's my confidence in this world in which there is often little to trust – my ride of faith for over thirty years. ●

The girl in the picture

EMILY THOMES

Recently I came across the photo on the left and did a double take. The girl in that photo, with her hollow eyes and hopeless heart, no longer bears any resemblance to me. She was dead in her sin (Eph. 2:1). (To be clear, I am not saying everyone who looks like the girl on the left is dead in sin, or that everyone who looks like the girl on the right is not. Spiritual reality runs far deeper.)

I was always the type to push boundaries. Even as a child, I never really had a moderate pace. I tried everything once but most things at least twice for my own curiosity. Growing up in a small town, there wasn't much to do, and I acted out often. In high school, I met my need for attention by constantly "going against the grain," but in a way that maintained my popularity. I partied, slept around, and by 15 I came out as a lesbian to some friends.

By the time I was a young adult, I fully embraced the LGBT label. I cut my hair short, wore boy clothes, and used men's bathrooms and dressing rooms. I enjoyed the thrill of doing and being what was outside the norm – trying harder drugs, exploring even more taboo sexual acts, and getting a couple of regrettable tattoos.

By 22, I had settled down a little. Shock value, though still something I enjoyed, was a lower priority. While still smoking weed and having sex with women, I maintained an outward appearance of morality. I considered myself a good person; I worked full-time, loved my friends, and usually balanced my budget. Family relationships were improving, and I was finally attempting to lead a relatively respectable life.

SURPRISED BY ATTRIBUTES

In March 2014, a group of co-workers started a Bible study and invited me to join. Because my aunt was part of the group, I agreed to participate. I actually considered myself a Christian at that point, though I had no desire



Emily Thomes fully embraced the LGBT lifestyle (on the left) until she was confronted with some verses in the Bible.

to read God's Word, let alone conform my life to His will. I told myself that at the first mention of my "lifestyle" I'd quit the study, and I felt pretty confident that moment would come.

The book we studied was on the attributes of God. For the first time I was confronted by the justice, holiness, and sovereignty of God. The more I read and understood, the bigger God became and the smaller I felt. I knew what the Bible said about homosexuality and other things, but I hadn't cared before. I had little understanding of the God I was sinning against.

This study was slowly shifting my perspective. I would catch myself, just before falling asleep, questioning who I was and why I made these choices. I asked myself, "Am I sure that gay behaviour is as much of my identity as my gender or my race?" But I'd wake up and laugh and say, "Of course you can embrace your homosexuality—that's who

you are!"

Two weeks later, a friend (also a lesbian) waited for me at my apartment after work to smoke marijuana and hang out as usual. After we smoked, I asked her, "What if they're right?" She knew I was

doing the study and understood immediately what I meant and said, "I don't want to talk about it." I pushed further. "We have to. If this is true, we need to talk now and not later." She left soon after, so I picked up my book and read.

That evening, I read a chapter describing a "salad bar religion," where you pick and choose parts of different religions, combine them into one, and call that your belief system. The book made clear that such an approach isn't following Jesus at all; that's following yourself and calling it some other name. I realized I was doing just that. I believed the parts of the Bible that suited me but rejected the parts that didn't. His Word wasn't my guide or a light to my path; I merely claimed Chris-

"Am I sure that gay behaviour is as much of my identity as my gender or my race?"

tianity because I had grown up with it and prayed occasionally. **'SUCH WERE SOME OF YOU'**

This realization was like being struck by lightning. I searched for verses on homosexuality and found 1 Corinthians 6:9–10 which reads; "Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners will inherit the kingdom of God."

I'd read these and other verses like them before. I'd argued against them to those who opposed me, but suddenly I could no longer argue. It was clear. I was in the "will not enter the kingdom of God" lineup. I was lost, wretched, and blatantly opposed to Him. But the next verse said, "And such were some of you" (1 Cor. 6:11).

Clearly, the Lord could save me. He'd extended his hand to me, the worst of sinners (1 Tim. 1:15). I grasped His hand by faith, and I felt overwhelmingly awful and grateful. Although I'd ignored Him and lived foolishly, He showed me mercy when I deserved nothing but justice.

My whole life changed that day. Homosexual practice and drug use were my most obvious sins, but there are many others He revealed and—continues to reveal—to me. I still battle same-sex attraction, pride, anger, and a slew of sins, but I trust He'll complete the work He's begun (Phil. 1:6). He's also allowed me to be a wife, and one day, Lord willing, a mother. Two months ago—on the two-year anniversary of my conversion—I married the most Christlike man I've ever known.

The Lord has been so gracious to me. I'm grateful that He opened my eyes and saved me from the temporal and eternal consequences of my sins. He takes the worst of the worst and redeems them for his glory.

Hallelujah! What a Saviour! ●

This article first appeared on the website www.thegospelcoalition.org

He said: 'I am the Life'

BY SUSIE KEARLEY

IF a religious leader or celebrity stood up today and said, "I am the Life", you would probably think they were mad or madly egotistical. You would probably also wonder what on earth they were going on about. The media would have a heyday, and comedians would enjoy poking fun at them.

So why do Christians take Jesus' words so seriously, when he said this? And what did he mean?

Whatever your religion, most people believe that Jesus was sane, good, and truthful, so it is worth finding out what He really meant.

His declaration that "I am the Life" was a huge revelation about Himself because He meant, "I am eternal, the life that you have come from me and I can give you eternal life."

That's huge! Basically, He was claiming to be God, and as such, he had the ability to grant everlasting life. The rest of Jesus' teaching and the rest of the books of the Bible also affirm this.

Jesus said that the prophecies of the older books of the Bible were about Him, coming to earth as God's Son.

Jesus proved His divinity by His miracles and by the ultimate miracle – coming back to life three days after being crucified – which He prophesied would happen.

And His offer is not only about eternal life later in heaven, but real life in the here and now.

Jesus said: "I have come that they may have ΖΩΗ (said zoé) [life], and have a full, abundant zoé [life]."

The Greek word zoé means God's never-ending life, which Jesus said He grants and guarantees to anyone the moment they surrender themselves to Him.

Another indication that Jesus was not mad or lying is that millions of people have found this to be true in their own lives.

If you put your trust in Him, you receive this spiritual life – a life knowing God's presence and love and a guaranteed rescue from His perfect justice at the end of time.

What Jesus said comes true today! ●



Norris' son forges his own path

What was it like to be the son of the martial artist who inspired jokes like, "Chuck Norris can cut through a hot knife... with butter"?

According to Mike Norris, it was awesome. "There were a lot of perks to being Chuck Norris' son," he says. "I had front-row seats to see what I believe is our modern-day John Wayne coming to fruition.

"My father started as a karate instructor. Every weekend we would pile into the station wagon. He and I would go to demonstrations at malls, schools; everywhere.

"And then to see him transform into Chuck Norris, the movie star – right there before my eyes – to reflect back on it, it's such an amazing blessing. It was great!"

An actor himself, Mike has acted in more than two-dozen films. He starred in the 1986 drama film *Born American* and the 1991 action film *Delta Force 3: The Killing Game*. He is also a screenwriter and director.

Mike learned a lot from his father. One of the main lessons Chuck Norris instilled into his son, however, was to do with God and Christianity.

"I became a believer as a child and was very aware of my faith early on," Mike told CBN.

"Now, did I stray? Absolutely. My late teens, my early twenties, I was a Christian but I was out there in the world not living as I should have.

Mike says the turning point in his life was when he met his wife Valerie at 21. He says he had seen a lot of dysfunction

in marriages and did not want his to turn out like so many others in the movie business.

"We were standing in that church and I meant it when I said in front of everybody – also in front of God – that I was marrying my wife for life," he says.

"I realized I had been a party boy, and that wasn't going to work with being married.

"So at that point, right there in the church, I said to myself, 'Mike, get your act together. Be a man. Be a Godly man, be a Godly husband'.

"So that's really when everything started to change for me in a drastic way."

"Nobody's perfect," he continues. "I'm not perfect but I'm very aware – more so now than I've ever been – of how my faith plays a part in my daily life."

Mike says it is very important for him now

to bring his faith into the stories he tells whether through acting, writing, or directing – or all three.

He both directed and starred in the 2009 Christian film *Birdie & Bogey*. And in 2012 he wrote, directed, and starred in fantasy film *I Am... Gabriel*.

"After I was done working on Walker, Texas Ranger with my dad, it was the only thing I wanted to do – to do faith-based films," Mike says.

"So that's all I've done. You know, I think everybody has



Mike Norris says he loves acting but finds directing is a great way to express his creativity.

a voice and I think everybody wants their voice to be heard in some way. No matter what it is. And this is my voice, telling these stories. Every one of these stories, there's a little piece of me in it."

Mike says, while he loved and continues to love acting, he finds directing a great way to express his creativity.

"[Directing] is like a spiritual thing to me. I'm really not in control when I'm directing. I'm just praying that everything goes right," he says.

"I go in every morning prayerfully and I just say, 'God, this is your day. Let me be a vessel for you and let everything go good today.'"

Mike acknowledges the dif-

ficulty of creating Christian movies in Hollywood where you no longer find many series or movies that clearly depict traditional concepts of good and evil. But he says there is a way to make those films work.

"I think [the Hollywood system] is doing everything they can to push the Christian community down. I try to surround myself with as many Christians as I can.

"On a movie, not everybody is going to be a Christian but they know the movie we're making and we go in every morning before breakfast and have a prayer session.

"I invite anybody who wants to come. If they don't, no harm done at all. We do our day. Maybe somebody can see something that piques their interest."

Mike's more recent roles have been in 2016 as director and actor in *AmeriGeddon* and acting in *Saving the Tin Man* (2017).

He hopes to continue to share his message and his faith through the stories he tells, and do so successfully. But even if things don't turn out like he wants, Mike knows he will be okay.

"By the grace of God I have three children I know I will be with for eternity, as well as my lovely wife," he says.

"So, I've won no matter what else happens."

Truth: something we can learn from TV drama?

BY CAITLIN CHODAKOWSKY

I CAN'T help but cringe when a TV series or movie character lies about something important or holds back significant information from a loved one. We can all quickly guess it will cause conflict at some point in the story when the truth finally comes out...and it always does.

The characters say things like "it's for the best" or "the truth will only hurt them", and holding back the truth seems easily justified at the time.

I find myself yelling at the TV screen "just tell them the truth!" as if it will make a difference to the show somehow.

The outcomes of hiding the truth are often messy, breaking up relationships or creating a ripple effect of bad consequences.

Our own lives don't have to play out like a soap opera or drama film.



It seems easier to figure out the right thing to do

when we know these characters are inevitably going to have to face the music but much harder when it comes to ourselves.

Little white lies and mere omission of certain information seems harmless at the time or even something for the better but have you ever considered the long-term consequences of these things?

You only have to look at your favourite TV drama or film to know it never ends well.

The unknown author of the quote "The truth may hurt a little while but a lie hurts forever" had an interesting point.

And even before the truth is exposed, it will continue to haunt and hurt you until it is. Nothing comes of lying but pain.

Jesus also cared about the truth and boldly told people that if they wanted to be one of His followers, and reap the benefits of this, they would need to obey Him and His Word.

With this He shared these famous words: "And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free (John 8:31-32)".

Jesus also claimed to be *The Truth* (see John 14:6).

It is not only important for us to tell the truth but to know *The Truth*. Avoid the TV drama. Truth is ultimately freedom. •

EULOGY FOR COMMON SENSE

BY RICK LEWERS

COMMON SENSE is not always common. I was amused when someone sent me an obituary. It seems to have been sourced from *The London Times*:

"Today we mourn the passing of a beloved old friend, Common Sense, who has been with us for many years. No one knows for sure how old he was, since his birth records were long ago lost in bureaucratic red tape.

"He will be remembered as having cultivated such valuable lessons as: 'Knowing when to come in out of the rain', 'Why the early bird gets the worm', 'Life isn't always fair', and 'maybe it was my fault'.

"Common Sense lived by simple, sound financial policies (don't spend more than you can earn) and reliable strategies (adults, not children, are in charge). His health began to deteriorate rapidly when well-intentioned but overbearing regulations were set in place.

"Reports of a six-year-old boy charged with sexual harassment for kissing a classmate; teens suspended from school for using mouthwash after lunch; and a teacher fired for reprimanding an unruly student, only worsened his condition.

"Common Sense lost ground when parents attacked teachers for doing the job that they themselves had failed to do in disciplining

their unruly children. It declined even further when schools were required to get parental consent to administer sun lotion or an aspirin to a student; but could not inform parents when a student became pregnant and wanted to have an abortion.

"Common Sense lost the will to live as the churches became businesses; and criminals received better treatment than their victims.

Common Sense took a beating when you couldn't defend yourself from a burglar in your own home and the burglar could sue you for assault.

"Common Sense finally gave up the will to live, after a woman failed to realise that a steaming cup of coffee was hot.

She spilled a little in her lap, and was promptly awarded a huge settlement.

"Common Sense was preceded in death by: his parents, Truth and Trust; his wife, Discretion; his daughter, Responsibility; and by his son, Reason. He is survived by his five stepbrothers: I Know My Rights; I Want It Now; Someone Else Is To Blame; I'm A Victim; and Pay me for Doing Nothing.

"Not many attended his funeral because so few realised he was gone."

I pray that some of us might have the will to live for the resurrection of Common Sense.

Common Sense is really just wisdom. The Bible says, "The fear of God is the beginning of wisdom." Perhaps a little fear of God would do us all some good. •





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Doc sees design in body's carefully balanced system

Creation Ministry International's Lita Cosner interviewed Dr Lainna Callentine who has a Masters in Education and an MD from the Illinois School of Medicine. She has been married for 22 years, and is a home school mum with three children.



Lainna Callentine

Lainna Callentine grew up as part of a large family of eight. As the fifth of six children, Lainna always wanted to learn, and found educational opportunities even before going to school.

"My favourite activity in the summer months was to go down streams, turn over rocks, and look at all the critters. I also loved looking at my father's old medical textbooks. Even at five, before I could read, I would look at all the pictures. My family was worried it would give me nightmares, but it just fuelled my curiosity."

Though she had a good upbringing, her parents were not churchgoing people. However, at one point, her parents would drop the children off at a local church to expose them to religion and to supplement their education. At six years of age, she prayed to receive Christ as her Saviour, and at college she was baptized in water as an outward expression of her inner commitment.

When Lainna entered college, she was enthusiastic, being new in the faith. However, her faith and her scientific studies were very compartmentalized, so she did not see a conflict at the time with believing in evolution. "It wasn't an issue to me, I just believed what I was told. I didn't care—God was God; if He wanted to create in six days or six billion years, it didn't matter."

FROM EDUCATION, TO MEDICINE, TO HOME SCHOOLING

Lainna's passion was for medicine, but after college, she wasn't sure if she could be a doctor. She loved children and teaching, and pursued a Masters in Education which allowed her to teach in the public school system.

However, she still felt compelled to pursue medicine and paediatrics.

"I had wanted to be a doctor since I was four. I was very sick with asthma, and I spent a lot of time in the hospital. I was fascinated by how the doctors helped me to feel better, and I wanted to do that, too."

She feels that her medical and educational training really complement each other and help to teach and empower people.

However, her medical training took her in an unexpected direction.

"Medicine had taken a lot out of me. I had been pregnant every year during my residency, and the long hours meant that I lost time with my family. Once I earned my degrees, I felt God was calling me to go home."

SEEKING ANSWERS

Lainna says she has only 'converted' to biblical creation in the last five years. She felt that if she was writing a home schooling curriculum, she needed to know where she stood on these issues. She started asking genuine questions about creation, but unfortunately the responses she received were less than encouraging. "I was met with a lot of prejudice from young-earth creationists. I had just never thought about this issue, and people were criticizing me, even questioning whether I was really a Christian!"

These negative experiences could have turned Lainna into an avid evolutionist, but instead, she turned to Scripture. "I was intellectually dissatisfied with what I had found so

far, but God promises, 'If you seek, you will find.' All wisdom comes from God, so I started really studying what I had been told, looking in the Bible, and at all the research and literature."

Lainna found creation information, including information from CMI, which Lainna praised as being hardcore, in-depth research that was instrumental in equipping her as a creationist.

WONDERFUL DESIGN IN THE HUMAN BODY

When asked for an evidence of creation from the field of medicine, she said, "As a doctor, the goal is to protect life and honour it. But dealing with sick and dying children in the Intensive Care Unit, often we are helpless as human beings to deal with the complexities of the body, and often we are just putting our finger in the dyke. I've come to appreciate the complexity of the body, because of the magnitude of what we have to do when someone is critically ill to try to balance the systems—and healthy bodies do it on their own."

God has clearly designed the human body as an intricately balanced system, which could not have evolved.

TEACHING CHILDREN

With her various experiences as a public school teacher and a home school mum, and informed by her Masters in Education degree, Lainna has a unique perspective.

She notes that a lot of home schoolers are really uncomfortable with high school science in particular, and she saw a need that she was equipped to fill.

"I began offering classes with children in home school co-ops, and was invited to my first home school convention about seven years ago to speak and do hands-on science. And it just grew from there, until it became another full-time job!"

She felt called to write a series of science books to help Christian home schooling parents. The first book in the series, *The Electrifying Nervous System*, and the second, *The Breathtaking Respiratory System*, are available through CMI's bookstore, as well as through other retailers.

Lainna encourages Christian parents, "Don't just expose your children to the creationist world view,

but help them to understand the evolutionist's world view, too. If we want to witness to others, we have to defend our faith and to do that we need to know the other side of the argument—otherwise it is hard to share the Gospel [the good news about Jesus's life, death and resurrection]."

For instance, when Lainna teaches biology, she uses a creationist biology book, but then also supplements with a secular book, so her children can understand how secular science interweaves evolution throughout their whole world view.

"When they understand how pervasive it is, and how indoctrinated people are, they can understand where the other side is coming from."

SCIENCE SHOWS GOD'S GLORY

Lainna said, "Sometimes in Christian circles people are afraid of science, and feel there's a conflict between science and Scripture. But the more you keep peering into it, the more God's glory is revealed. With our finite knowledge, the more you understand, the more you realize that you don't understand. And only our wonderful Creator could explain this complexity."

Believe it or not

BY CREATION MINISTRIES INTERNATIONAL

Dino prints resemble "blobs with toes"

UNIVERSITY of Alaska researchers have found thousands of dinosaur footprints fossilized in the rocks along the banks of the Yukon River, Alaska.



Preserved in strata classified as Cretaceous, the dino prints were described as "natural casts" formed after the creatures stepped in mud, and sand then filled in their footprints. The resulting fossils were described as looking like "blobs with toes".

It's clear that the prints were preserved in most unusual conditions. There could not have been much time between the animal stepping in the mud and the sand filling in the depression, otherwise the print would have eroded away. And the thickness of the strata indicates that the water level was rising, therefore allowing for more sediment to be deposited on top.

Thus footprints like this are classic evidence for the inundatory stage of Noah's Flood, specifically the period as the waters were approaching their peak. (Another example: Thousands of footprints found in China, *Creation* 33(2):47, 2010; creation.com/dino-panic.) These provide an amazing glimpse of the attempts of the animals to escape the rising waters of Noah's Flood. Given the animals were still alive at the time they left these footprints, the waters had not yet completely covered the earth. But once the earth was entirely inundated, all land-dwelling, air-breathing animals perished.

Thousands of dino tracks found along Alaska's Yukon River, livescience.com, 25 September 2013.

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The greatest thing is love

Marriages need daily refuel of love, says reconciled couple

What defines a Christian? Is it how much they go to church, how many Bible verses they have memorised or how “good” they are morally? The Bible says that it is their love for others that will set Christians apart as followers of God.

Weyman and Susan Howard grew up in church but never learnt how to receive God’s love or how to share it with others, and as a result their lives were busy and religious, filled with good intentions but with no power to overcome life’s great troubles or their own selfishness.

Then, in the midst of their pain and brokenness, at a time where everything had fallen apart and they were facing divorce, Jesus challenged them to follow Him. They felt Jesus was saying to them in a still, small voice, “If you will follow me and my guidance of love, I will do what you can’t do.”

They chose to receive God’s unfailing love and, in obedience to Him, to love each other with that same love, which empowered them to confront their broken and sinful lives, and discover the miraculous power of Christ to heal and restore them.

“Each day our pain, our disappointment, our unhealed hurt, our wounding; those are the things that want to author the stories of our



“Saying, ‘I’m empty of love for my spouse, I need a new spouse’ is like saying when your car runs out of fuel, ‘Oh, I need a new car’. Is that what you do?” Weyman Howard, together with his wife Susan, challenges.

lives,” Susan says.

“But Jesus challenged us to let His love write our stories. Miraculous life came not through magic but through the practice of receiving and giving God’s unfailing love.”

Love gave them the courage to face adultery, betrayal, sexual abuse, pornography and even the rejection of the church. When no one stood beside them with a word of hope, the Heavenly Father tenderly met them and called them to Himself.

Through their experiences, Weyman and Susan founded and created a seminar called LoveWorks and wrote a course called InnerRevelation >OuterRevolution, which teach others that the primary goal of Christianity is to love God and to love others.

Why Love? Jesus said: “A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.” (John chapter 13 verse 34-35).

“Love is not an option,” Weyman

explains. “Love is not based on our feelings. We are commanded to love. God wants the living reality of His presence and love flowing through us.”

But you have to receive that love in order to give it, he continues.

“Saying, ‘I’m empty of love for my spouse, I need a new spouse’ is like saying when your car runs out of fuel, ‘Oh, I need a new car’. Is that what you do?” he challenges.

“You will get empty of love over and over again. It doesn’t mean anything is wrong with you, it just means you need to go and be filled up again. And the only source of love is God. Jesus shows us the pattern ‘As I love you, go and love one another.’ Where do we go? Back to Jesus. He is the source of the love we need.

“Too often in a relationship we are going to an individual, trying to get filled up by them and they’re not cooperating. They are not able to give us what we need,” he says.

Susan posted recently on Facebook that “The Kingdom of God is not about fearful living or hateful living, it is about bringing the love of God into the darkness so that Christ shines brightly! ... Teach [your families] to stand with confidence, with peace, with compassion and mercy, offering love because that is what Christ has done for us and then He commanded that we follow Him.”

Weyman and Susan have four children and now travel the world teaching the lessons about the incredible, undeserved love of God for each person, and the purpose and value they can find in knowing Him.

See their blogs at

<https://www.facebook.com/loveworksonline/>

A different kind of care could help the dying

BY REVEREND CHRIS BRENNAN

THE question of “assisted dying” is again on the agenda, and our state member has asked our opinion before a Bill goes to Parliament.

As a person considered by many as personifying the religious, some will have decided my opinion is unworthy, perhaps assuming I have not thought about the issue from other perspectives, or not experienced it first hand, or that I can contribute nothing unbiased to the discussion. I would challenge all three assumptions.



Most reasonable people would acknowledge my day-to-day experience gives me more exposure to this issue, but on a more personal level, I have observed the impact of ongoing chronic pain on a loved one. Over the last few years I watched my Dad decline due to prostate and skin cancer before he died in March last year.

My lack up to this point is that I have thankfully not been the one considering assisted dying as an option.

Have we missed one crucial aspect - what drives the perception of assisted dying as a positive option? In my experience, the most common reasons people give for wanting to end their own lives are: pain, a loss of dignity, being a burden to others and of having no value.

We know that medically, at least in the majority of palliative cases, we can manage pain so long as medications are carefully administered and adequately monitored. If the experience of pain is the principle driving factor in the positive case for assisted dying, then it must be rejected in most situations.

The final three reasons are much more difficult to confront because they entail a different kind of suffering. Would a person seek to end their life if they had dignity? If they had value? And if they felt no guilt about the impact their palliative situation had on others? I would be bold enough as to suggest very few indeed would consider it.

All of those feelings come from the outside. We convey feelings of dignity (or not) to those we interact with. We convey feelings of value, and it can be us who allow someone to feel that we are burdened, inconvenienced, and discomforted by their situation.

What if we showed people our love by how we spent our time and money? What if we changed the narrative so caring for others became more important than our convenience? What if we became comfortable even in the midst of a suffering person’s discomfort?

Could it be that in the vast majority of cases assisted dying could be seen as a vastly inferior alternative to an outworking of self-giving, value-building, care?

nudge

WITH KARL FAASE

Post truth world

IN 2016 the *Oxford Dictionary* announced the word of the year was “post truth”.

Post-truth is; relating to or denoting circumstances in which objective facts are less influential in shaping public opinion, than appeals to emotion and personal belief.

This word has been around since 1992 but its use over 2016 had exploded 2000%. This was fuelled by social media and a general distrust of the establishment. We choose to believe our friends opinions than politicians press releases.

The danger is that we start to believe facts and information that suit our worldview rather than objective realities.

Many think that people of faith, Christians, are choosing a reality that suits them and ignoring the facts. That is an easy charge to make but history tells us it’s a hard position to sustain.

Whatever your worldview – look for the facts.



That which connects us all

BY JODY BENNETT

RECENTLY I watched the movie *Collateral Beauty*, starring Will Smith as a man dealing with the death of his young daughter. Two years have elapsed and Smith’s character Howard Inlet is still not coping very well, his marriage is over and he is reduced to writing hate mail to Time, Death and Love.

As Howard explains right at the beginning of the movie, “Now these three things connect every single human being on earth. We long for love. We wish we had more time. And we fear death.”

His three neglected best friends, who are also his worried business associates, decide to intervene by hiring actors to play the three concepts, in order to try to jolt Howard out of his depression.

Keira Knightly, who plays Love, says at one point “I’m love and I’m the fabric of life... Love is the reason for everything. I’m the why. Don’t try to live without me.”

Jacob Latimore’s character tells Howard, “I’m Time. You wrote to me because you need me. I’m a gift and you’re wasting it.”

And Death, who turns out to be an elderly white woman - Helen Mirren - argues, “Death is so much more vital than time. Death gives time its value.” And later “Nothing’s ever really dead if you look at it right.”

The movie was very thought provoking and got me



Helen Mirren, Keira Knightly and Jacob Latimore, play Death, Love and Time respectively.

thinking about what I would say to these entities if I could address them. Then I realised that, as a Christian, I can and do address Love every single day because God is Love – He is indeed the “why”, and the “reason for everything”.

And knowing God, who is Love, makes sense of Death, which has been overcome and defeated by Jesus’ rising from the dead. That supernatural act means that my loved

ones truly aren’t “really dead” if they have died believing in Christ, because their spirits and souls go on to live eternally in a reality as real as our own. Death is no longer an end to fear but a portal, an adventure and a release from the pain and tragedy of this life.

Knowing God also makes sense of Time, as a temporary construct which we have to live within

in this world, but which God is outside of and in control of. He determines my beginning and my end, my times are in His hands as Psalm 31:15 says. Time is indeed a gift, but not a treadmill that tires us out and makes increasing demands on us, but a bunch of fragrant flowers that we can enjoy and share with others.

So, if you, as Howard says “long for love, wish you had more time and fear death”, God, Love Himself, is right there, longing for you and waiting for you to turn to Him. He will make your time purposeful and fulfilling, and replace your fear of death with a longing for eternity. As happens in the movie, you may just find that reality is surprisingly different from what you first believed.



Building Better Marriages

THE MEANING OF MARRIAGE

BY ROB FURLONG

IN *Through the Looking Glass*, Lewis Carroll describes a conversation between Alice and Humpty Dumpty on the topic of words and their meaning. It goes like this:

"I don't know what you mean by 'glory,'" Alice said.

Humpty Dumpty smiled contemptuously. "Of course you don't--- till I tell you. I meant 'there's a nice knock-down argument for you!'"

"But glory' doesn't mean 'a nice knock-down argument,'" Alice objected.

"When I use a word," Humpty Dumpty said, in rather a scornful tone, "it means just what I choose it to mean---neither more nor less."

"The question is," said Alice, "whether you can make words mean so many different things."

"The question is," said Humpty Dumpty, "Which is to be master--- that's all."

One of the points being made by Humpty Dumpty is that the person who controls what words mean is also the person who controls the conversation.

I have been thinking a lot about "marriage" lately and what the word means.

Marriage has been defined as, "The social institution under which a man and woman live as husband and wife by legal or religious commitments."

Dig a little deeper and you discover that our English word comes down to us via Latin and French and it has given rise to a number of humorous quotes on marriage such as marry in haste and repent at leisure and never marry for money, but marry where money is!

Based on the above, it would be easy to conclude that marriage is simply a contract, with possibly a few religious rites thrown in and depending on the person you marry, it could be a glad or sad experience!

God describes marriage as

something far grander!

First, He paints us a picture of marriage being grounded in friendship and companionship.

"It is not good for man to be alone!" He declares, and so He creates Eve as the perfect counterpart for man in their journey through life together.

What is clear here is that it is God Who brings men and women together - It is He Who provides Eve for Adam.

I am deeply thankful for the hand of God in my life as He led me to my wife Karen. As a young man I remember well a church leader praying for God's provision for me of the woman He had prepared to be my wife. Less than two months later Karen walked into my life, a brand new Christian and I have never doubted that she was God's answer to my prayer.

Marriage has a different meaning altogether when God is in it!

God also gives us an inspiring portrait of marriage as the foundational pillar of any successful society.

Through Moses, God speaks of the importance of Dad and Mum raising their children in His ways and the direct flow on this has for society - the community that is built around God's principles "will live long and be successful."

It is a portrait that specifically highlights the crucial role that fathers play in raising their children.

I read recently of a study that has found that there is a direct connection



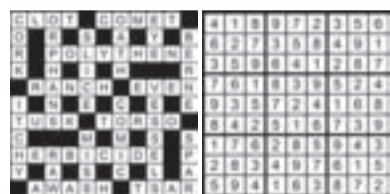
between a child's physiological development and the absence of a father.

In other words, remove Dad from the scene and a child's physical development is negatively affected.

So when I reflect on God's vision for marriage I discover that the word means so much more than a mere "social institution" between "a man and a woman", consisting of legal and religious requirements.

God's vision for marriage is that it both undergirds and transforms our society and it is a vision that I think we need to re-capture.

It is a divinely inspired vision that lifts marriage out of the mire of what we think it is and instead, is grounded in a conversation which God began in the first place!



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.

"Lord Jesus, I need You now. Please forgive me for my sins. I open the door of my life and receive You as my Saviour and Lord. Thankyou for loving me so much that You died on the cross for me. Take control of my life. Make me the person You created me to be. 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 _____

Address _____

Phone _____

Age and occupation (it helps) _____

Challenge Literature Fellowship
PO Box 978, Cloverdale WA 6985

Fax (08) 9453 3006 or email
info@challengenews.org

All overseas enquiries are referred onto someone in their own country

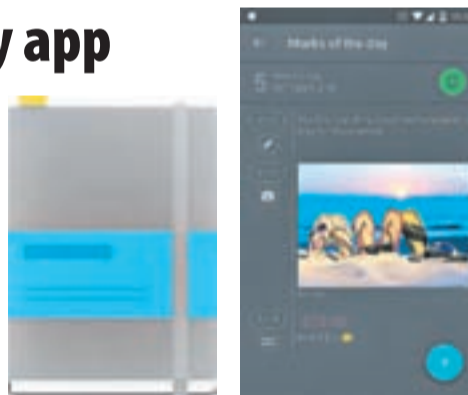
There's an APP for that ...

Universal diary app

UNIVERSAL Diary app is a bit like an old-school Filofax that people used to keep everything in the 1980s. It is a journal, budget book, to do list, photo album, alarm clock and sketch book all in one, with every entry (which the app calls marks) neatly ordered according to date and easily accessible.

For each day you can rate the day with a smiley face, take a photo that encapsulates your day, write an entry, add a free-hand drawing and choose a shape.

Marking the day by a circle, square or star could be used, for instance, by a chronic pain sufferer to indicate days when the symptoms are bad. Then, at a glance, you could see how many days a month you were in pain and if there is a pattern to it. Or you could use the shapes to indicate days you or



your partner worked FIFO, or nights you slept well or days you stuck to your diet or exercised etc.

You can also use the app to keep track of your finances each day and set a reminder, complete with alarm, for a task to do.

One feature I particularly like is a spot to record your good ideas - great for those sparks of inspiration you get at 3am.

You can also put a hashtag before an entry to "tag" it so that you can easily find it later or associate it with similar entries.

The app is free in the Google Play and iTunes stores, but if you upgrade to the ad-free full version for \$3.59, you get the added extras of being able to set a password to keep all your info safe; data backup and restore (using Google Drive or an SD card) in case you change or reset your device; the ability to change various features like the background appearance and the currency, and you can set the app to remind you to make your "marks".

Universal Diary is highly rated and is a great way to keep track of your private thoughts, ideas, tasks, photos and finances. Use it as a dream or travel journal, food diary or mood tracker too!

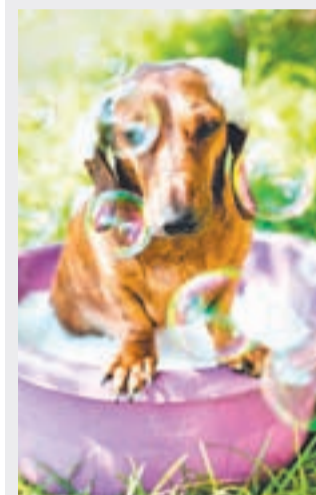
Lessons from a sausage dog (Part 8)

BY JODY BENNETT

IT never ceases to amaze me how our sausage dog is attracted to the most revolting things!

I mash up old vegetable off-cuts for our worm farm and Carrie loves to put her nose in the bucket and get a good few licks of the green, soupy mess.

She also likes bird carcasses that she finds on our walks, cat faeces and any empty food wrappers.



We are often saying, "Yuck, Carrie! Leave that alone, you disgusting dog!"

What we think smells and looks awful, she finds enticing. Sometimes she even takes perfectly clean, fresh bones that we give her and buries them in the garden until they smell really bad before she eats them.

Aren't people just the same? There is something in us attracted to darkness, evil, shameful deeds and dirt.

We often enjoy gossip, horror stories, tales of murder and mayhem, and things that are occult and mysterious.

Look at T-shirt designs, children's toys, movies or even our language - wicked and sick are the modern slang for things we like!

I think God must sometimes look at me, the way I look at my dog and say, "Yuck, Jody, that's filthy! Leave it alone! It will make you sick!"

Sometimes the things we are drawn to must make God sick to His stomach, so to speak, the way the worm food nauseates me.

That is why we need to read the Bible. So that we start to develop spiritual senses to see, smell and taste like God does. So that we will approve of what is holy and righteous, instead of what is tainted by sin. As Romans 12: 2 says, "Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—His good, pleasing and perfect will."

GROWLING LION TAMED

PETER POLLOCK spent the first 55 years of his life involved in South African cricket, whose debt to him is threefold.

As the country's premier fast bowler during the 1960s, the last decade before South Africa's international isolation; and as convener of selectors during the 1990s, he gave an inexperienced team a vision and a pattern that has made the side one of the game's top two teams. He was named Cricketer of the Year in 1965, claiming 116 wickets in the 28 Tests he played, helping South Africa win a number of matches.

Then, perhaps most famously of all, he provided South African cricket with his son, Shaun Pollock, who played 108 Tests and over 300 ODIs for South Africa, captained the side for four years and is widely regarded as one of the finest all-rounders to ever play the game.

But in August 1981 Peter had a life-changing experience that gave him a greater purpose than playing cricket.

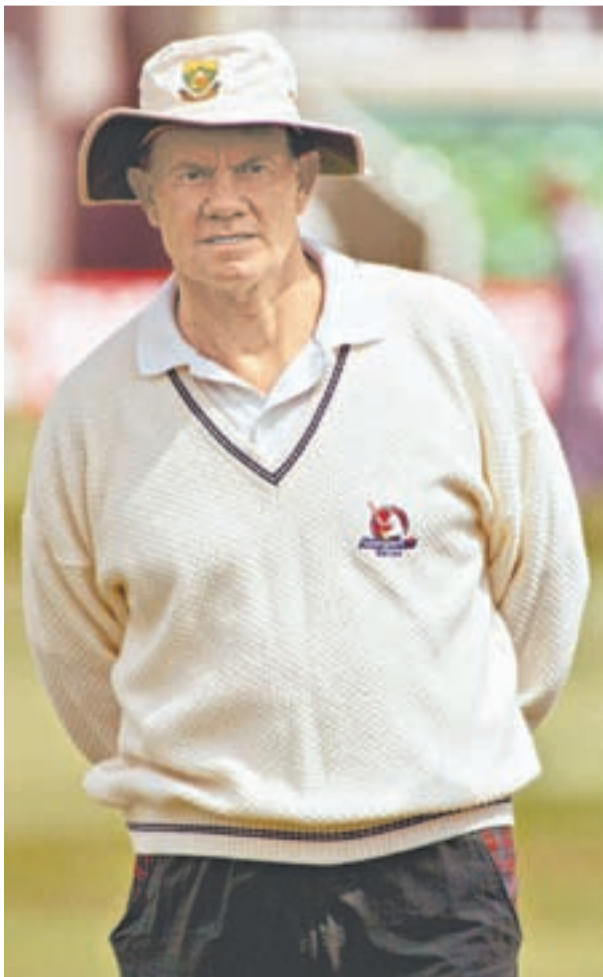
"What had started out to be an ordinary day became the greatest day of my life," he shares on www.changinglives.org.au. "Conversions do not come more suddenly than this and my life was never to be the same again. I was a growling lion who had been changed into a lamb."

It was the day he met Jesus, personally, for the first time, although Peter had grown up in a spiritual home, he was unaware of the claims of the Bible.

"I'd grown up in a religious environment," he admits, "My grandfather was a minister but I left the church life behind as soon as I was old enough to make the decision."

Then in August 1981, Peter found himself in front of TV watching a Christian broadcast that he would normally have turned off immediately.

"My wife, Inez, had become a Christian," Peter shares, "She went off to church and during this time alone things began to happen that turned me from the critic of this 'born again' stuff to becoming increasingly interested in it. As I was watching the debate I began to see my sinfulness and the answer to being set free from it, and how to be forgiven! ... The TV seemed to be speaking just to me!"



1998: Ex South African player and coach Peter Pollock on the pitch during the Fourth Test match against England at Trent Bridge, England. (Photo Lawrence Griffiths/Allsport)



DECEMBER 26, 2003, DURBAN, SOUTH AFRICA: Shaun Pollock (R) and his dad Peter with his 300th Test wicket Trophy during the second test between South Africa and West Indies. (Photo Touchline Photo/Getty Images)

"All of my sins, my pride, my selfishness, my greed – it all came before me like a flood and what I saw was ugly. I'd never seen myself exposed like that and I was shocked to the core."

Later that night, Inez invited Peter

to a friends' house nearby. They, too, were Christians and Peter steeled himself with well-rehearsed anti-Christian arguments. But, to his surprise, he found himself listening to their conversations very intently.

As Peter and Inez were

leaving, the hostess slipped a piece of paper into Peter's hand, saying he might need it later. When Peter got home, he looked at it and realized that it was the words of a prayer to becoming a Christian.

It said: "Lord Jesus I come to you today just as I am. I thank you that you accept me just as I am. I admit that I am a sinner and repent of my sins of the past. Thank you for dying on the cross for my sins and please come into my life and become my Lord and Saviour. I surrender my will to you right now. Thank you for coming into my life and forgiving my sins."

"By this time I had no doubt at all and went and found a quiet spot in the house where I prayed and pleaded with God for forgiveness," Peter remembers.

"I'll never forget this

moment, there were no bells, trumpets or lightning flashes, but there was a distinct awareness of a giant burden being lifted off my shoulders. I sobbed like

"I was a growling lion who had been changed into a lamb"

a baby who had been trying to take on the world on his own, trying to satisfy those self-consuming, never ending goals and yardsticks.

"Before my conversion I had done things my way. I was conditioned to

the world's value system and could not see the forest from the trees, right from wrong, or light from darkness. But those few life-changing moments in my back garden opened my life to the truth that, 'Jesus is the way, the truth and the life', he declares.



1965: Cricketing brothers Graeme (left) and Peter Pollock at The Oval. (Photo Dennis Oulds/Central Press/Getty Images)

Peter choose to leave the field of cricket in 1996 because he felt called to become a minister and help others understand their need for a relationship with God.

"Cricket was always central to our family's existence," Peter recalls, "Dad had played a few games for the Orange Free State. My brother, Graeme and I used to play in our own backyard."

But for Peter, life is now so much more than cricket. He has established himself as an author, broadcaster, columnist, business executive, sports administrator and family man, as well as a travelling extensively to share the joy of knowing Jesus Christ with many people.

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