

# DETOX FROM DARKNESS

BY JANICE TEO

Living with bikies from the age of 15. Raped at 16. Held at gunpoint at 21. How Sarah Smith lived to see her 22nd birthday is a mystery to her.

"I was selling drugs for the bikies and I stupidly allowed a customer to take some on credit," Sarah tells *Challenge News*, rolling her eyes.

Of course they never paid – and that's how Sarah, drug-addicted and homeless, ended up owing the Hell's Angels \$2000. To teach her a lesson, two gang members drove her to a deserted area and held a gun to each side of her head as they told her she had better pay them back or else.

"I didn't know what to do," Sarah says. "I had left my own toxic home years ago and I felt the gang was like a family."

But The Waltons the Hell's Angels are not. They injected the young girl with her first dose of amphetamines soon after she joined them. "I loved it," Sarah admits. "I was instantly addicted."

With the drugs came unhealthy relationships, addiction, sexual encounters and witchcraft. "Bikies pride themselves on being anti-Christ and satanic," Sarah reveals. "They would cast spells and do tarot card readings. It was dark, very dark."

At 16, she was raped – in front of a group of people – by a woman. Sarah, who lived in Cairns, fled to Darwin after that.

Unfortunately in Darwin she fell into the gang and drugs lifestyle again, culminating in that night in the bush when she was sure she was going to be shot in the head.

"I called an ex-partner and he was so kind he paid my debt off and put me on the bus to Perth to live with some of his relatives."

But Sarah ended up back on drugs and two years later, at 23, she was booted out.

"I really did want to kick the drugs but I had no idea how," she says quietly. "The addiction was still there because I never dealt with the underlying issues of my childhood – the rage, the hatred, the rejection, the self-loathing, the bitterness."

"The drugs just covered all of that. I HATED myself. I felt I was to blame for my parents' divorce and yet I resented them because of the abuse and neglect. I was a mess and very lost."

She started selling drugs again. "And then one day a buyer asked me: 'is this all you've been born for?'" The question was like a thunderbolt between the eyes. That night she



Sarah Smith with her husband and one of her daughters.

repeated it to nobody in particular. "I kind of asked the universe," she remembers. "I mean, I didn't know anyone else would be listening."

"But suddenly I felt this overwhelming love flood my soul. I'd never felt anything like it before. And I kind of heard: 'No this is not

what you were created for'. I was dumbstruck! I thought I'd made a connection with the universe!"

While this experience didn't get Sarah off drugs, it did prod her into going to the Salvation Army, where she met Anne Stokes, a counsellor who was her first encounter with a

truly caring person.

She joined the Salvation Army's detox program – "and that's when I realised this was a spiritual battle going on for my life," she says.

"During detox my body became paralysed but my mind worked and it was VERY scary... things on the wall would manifest demonically towards me. It felt like a tug of war, darkness and light trying to pull me to their side."

It took two tries but Sarah finally made it through the program. In a last-ditch attempt to get her life together, she went to Sydney. At Darling Harbour, she picked up a flyer advertising a free barbecue at a carpark.

"After we finished eating, we went into a huge auditorium – I didn't know it then, but I had landed at [a big well-known Sydney church]!" Sarah says, marvelling at how everything fell into place.

"All I remember was someone asking people to come to the front if they wanted Jesus in their lives. I don't even remember walking ... it was like I floated to the front." That was June 5, 2005. Sarah was 25.

Back in Perth, she enrolled in a Bible college. After stumbling back into drugs again, her college leader recommended she go to Teen Challenge, a Christian residential rehabilitation facility in Western Australia.

It was there that the pieces of Sarah's broken life were finally put back together. "They ministered to me with the love of God there. I finally dealt with everything. It was like 20 years of Christian ministry squashed into a year. It was intense, one of the hardest things I've ever

done but finally, thanks to God, I was healed."

In the eight years since then, Sarah has married and has had two daughters. She works as a disability support worker and runs

a street program at her church that specialises in sharing the love of God with those who don't know Him.

"I truly am, as the Bible says, a new creation, completely healed from the inside out," she beams.

"I'm living the life of abundance Jesus promised in John 10:10. At Teen Challenge I heard God say to me, 'I'm here to protect you, correct you and direct you.' That has been my plumbline ever since." •

**IT FELT LIKE A TUG OF WAR, [BETWEEN] DARKNESS AND LIGHT**



**Facing storms?**  
Find hope on PAGE 9



**Fun for Kids**

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## Jesus loves me - so what?

**MOST** of us have heard the phrase "Jesus loves you". It sounds 'nice', non-judgemental and kind, but what does it actually mean? If God loves everyone, no matter how you behave or what you believe then does it matter how we behave or what we believe?

"Jesus (or God) loves you" is a phrase that does not actually appear in the Bible and, although it is true and seemingly simple to understand, the word "love" has been so diluted and redefined by our culture that saying "Jesus loves you" is often either meaningless to people or misunderstood.

Too often one might think that when Christians say "Jesus loves you" they mean God looks on you with kindly affection like a big daddy in the sky, indulgently



patting you on the head and overlooking any bad behaviour. Or that the phrase means that Jesus loves all your lifestyle choices and endorses all your ideas, clapping from the sidelines and cheering you on like a life-coach.

However, here is an analogy that more accurately portrays what that phrase "Jesus loves you" means.

Imagine a kitten stuck in a sewer pipe underground. It was born down there. It is cold and wet and dirty, and the only light it has seen comes through a pavement grate. It suspects there is more to life than its dark, smelly existence but it has no power to escape.

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**BACK PAGE**

**WINNING DESPITE LOSS**  
**CHARLES FERNANDEZ**

# Jesus loves me - so what?



it doesn't understand - like vet visits and shots - but the kitten

From page 1

Love comes by and sees that kitten, meowing pathetically down there on the other side of the grate. Love is moved with compassion and has the power to rescue the creature, and so Love removes the grate and reaches down into the sewer pipe and offers to help, calling to the kitten in a gentle, kind voice.

Love does not grab the kitten by the scruff of the neck, it holds out its hand and invites the kitten to take that final step to safety.

That is how God loves us. He sees our situation, filthy with sin and trapped in our meaningless lives, and God cared enough to do something to rescue us and He is powerful enough to make a way for that to happen - through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. And then He extends an invitation and we have a choice.

If that kitten takes the final step and walks into Love's hand, then that kitten needs to know two things. One is that everything will change. That kitten will get washed, live somewhere else, do different things and leave behind the life and diet it has always known.

The second thing is that if that kitten takes the hand that is offered, it will belong to its rescuer. Love will own it and, from then on, its life will not be its own. It will not be able to dictate its own path.

Sometimes Love will let it experience things that hurt and that

can always know that everything Love allows is for its good.

What the kitten can't do is thank Love for the hand up and then go and live its life on its own terms. It will end up back in the sewer.

Accepting Jesus as our rescuer, our Saviour, means that we agree to a wholesale makeover so that we are fit to live in His house, and we also agree to Him being our master - our Lord. If we want any part of our old life more than we want the new life He offers us then we need to understand His offer is all or nothing.

Becoming a Christian is not like adding some condiment to your life, like you do to improve or change the flavour of your food. That is a false gospel. Jesus is no add on, no rubber stamp for your lifestyle. Jesus loves you enough to pull you out of the mess that you are in and make all things new. This is exactly what the Bible tells us in 2 Corinthians chapter 5 and verse 17 which says; "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold all things have become new." His rescue offer cost Him everything on the cross, and in return He requires everything of us if we accept it.

Love reached down and made a way out of your sewer, do you trust Love enough to take His hand? •

# Whispering Danny heard the truth loud & clear

BY AMBER VARELA

**B**enign tumours growing on Danny Kobzantsev's larynx require surgery every three months, leaving his voice so weak that it frequently drops off into a whisper - hence his nickname Whispering Danny. He's a popular tattoo artist in Kansas City, Missouri, who uses the opportunity with his captive audience to share more than ink.

Danny came to America from Latvia with his mother in 1975 to seek better options for treatment of his unusual medical condition.

Danny and his mother set up shop in Kansas City. In high school, he was drawn to tattooing. The more ink he got on his arm, the more he realized he wanted to become a tattoo artist.

"I lived a lifestyle that was pretty self-destructive in many ways and I was okay with it," Danny says. "I pretty much had completely abandoned anything pertaining to God, and I just pursued my own interests."

Danny hails from Jewish survivors of the Nazi Holocaust, but when his good friend Shane crashed drunk on his motorcycle and very nearly died, he found himself praying to Jesus for a simple reason:

"It seemed like the thing to do," he says on an I Am Second Youtube video.

Drinking buddy Shane Kampe roared up to Exile Tattoo shop on his motorcycle on September 4, 2001. He was drunk and had no business riding that day, so when Shane tried to drive off, Danny attempted to dissuade him.

"I watched him try to get on his motorcycle and I immediately saw him drop the bike cos he was so drunk," he says. "I begged him, 'Please Shane don't do this.'"

A couple hours later, Danny inexplicably felt compelled to go for a drive. He had nowhere to go but he arrived exactly where God wanted him: at the accident scene of his friend.

"His head was busted wide open," Danny recalls. "He was lying in a pool of dark, dark blood."

Danny bent down next to his buddy, even getting his own face bloody, and whispered, "Shane, you're going to be ok."

It was a lie. From what he surmised from the injuries, there was no hope. Still he tried to encourage his friend "It seemed like the thing to say," Danny says.

Danny stayed in the waiting room while surgeons in ER tried to save Shane. It was hopeless, and Danny overheard someone talk about harvesting his organs for transplant. Shane's mother, meanwhile, pleaded

with God for just one more day of life to be with her son.

"Finally, the doctors came out and they said he's still alive, but he won't be for long," Danny says.

Then a man who Danny didn't recognise came into the waiting room and called all the people to pray for Shane.

The man said, "Gather round; gather round. We're gonna have a prayer circle."

"Oh great God in heaven," the man continued, "We have a situation here at St. Luke's hospital. This young man Shane is so broken that no man on earth can fix him, and his brain has been busted, but, God, we know you can fix him. So won't you please fix him? And by the way we need him fixed before tomorrow morning."

"So I said 'amen' too," Danny remembers. "It seemed like the thing to do."



Danny Kobzantsev recovering in hospital a few years ago.

But then he thought, "Do I even believe in God? Am I just talking to myself? Why would God heal Shane?"

Wondering, he searched Google for the term 'salvation'.

The website asked him if he realised he was a sinner. He had no problem recognising his sin.

He had made no bones about it.

It was 4 am.

There was a prayer of salvation at the end and Danny scanned it to make sure he wouldn't be scammed. It didn't appear to have any bad information, just interesting stuff about Jesus' death on the cross. So Danny prayed it. It seemed harmless. The website said he was forgiven, part of God's family now. That seemed decent. It wasn't so bad.

Danny prayed it a second time, this time more sincerely.

He was meditating on God when he heard a hubbub coming from the doctors.

# Thanks for Challenge!



**THIS** United States Air Force plane carried 50 tons of Hope Boxes™ to Haiti recently. Each parcel included a Creole language edition of *Challenge News*. Over 100,000 pounds of high protein food, clean water supplies and *Challenge* papers were delivered safely and without a problem by a monster C-17 to several organisations helping orphans and vulnerable children. Because the need is so great, A Child's Hope International (ACHI) are working on another shipment of the same size for later this year. Thanks for your support!

- Larry Bergeron, Executive Director, ACHI

**Has Challenge impacted your life? Please tell us how at [jodyb@challengenews.org](mailto:jodyb@challengenews.org)**

"Doctors and nurses running around frantic. The doctors were yelling at the nurses," he says. "Obviously they had the wrong CAT scan or the wrong MRI, they were saying."

Why?

"My friend Shane woke up. It was impossible for this guy to have woken up, but there he was wide awake."

Danny couldn't deny what had happened, even though he initially had a feeling like he was betraying his Jewish heritage. The feelings of guilt were worsened by the fact that his grandparents were Holocaust survivors.

But Jesus was Jewish too.

And the Jewish Messiah Jesus had performed an undeniable miracle.

"The guilt that I felt about betraying my family or my ancestry I've actually completely lost," he says. "A void is filled. There is nothing else like it. It's not just religious stuff. You now have a genuine interaction. You get answered, you get guidance. I cannot deny something that has revealed itself to be true to me."

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## Coffee Break

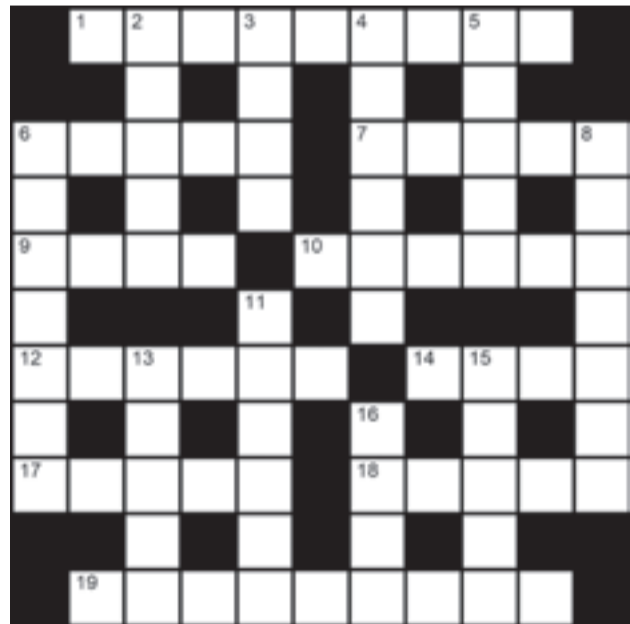
CROSSWORD & SUDOKU

**ACROSS**

- 1 Absolute rulers
- 6 Soup scoop
- 7 Glossy-black bird
- 9 Salt Lake state
- 10 Bright garden bloom
- 12 Enlarge, as pupils
- 14 Just lying around
- 17 Long (for)
- 18 Too closely fitting
- 19 It slows a descent

**DOWN**

- 2 Land of over a billion
- 3 Typical learner driver
- 4 Teeth deposit
- 5 Opponent, competitor
- 6 Washday chore
- 8 Closest
- 11 Verse segment
- 13 Andean animal
- 15 Finger or toe
- 16 Make designs in glass



[SOLUTIONS PAGE 11](#)



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Danny Kobzantsev feeding some goats, in a picture from his Facebook feed.

# Bringing change behind bars



Eddie Frost, 80, has been a prison chaplain in Queensland for six years.

**E**ddie Frost was 74 when he went to prison.

“With all the obvious fortifications and steel gates opened by someone else, you know prison is different,” he said. “Security is a constant reminder but I accepted it as it being what it was.”

Eddie, now 80, was not a prisoner when he walked through the gates of Maryborough Correctional Centre in Queensland five years ago. He was a prison chaplain, a volunteer role he told *Challenge News* has been the most fulfilling of his long and varied life.

The former funeral director said he saw how everything in his life happened for a reason and wanted to share his life story to encourage and inspire others.

“Throughout my life I have always tried to live with a purpose,” said the soft-spoken retiree, who still volunteers at the prison once a week and has no intention of stopping any time soon.

“I guess when you’re staring down the barrel at turning 80 you wonder how long you can go for,” he chuckled during our phone conversation. “But I’ll keep going for as long as I have health and strength.”

Eddie has always liked facing challenges. His first was growing up in a family where much was expected of him.

“I was a product of my family’s world view,” he said. “I grew up on a family farm and it was always intended that I follow in my father’s footsteps. Because of the expectations placed on me, I was unmotivated as a student and was actually a high school dropout. On the farm, I found life suffocating.”

He attended church, but never enjoyed it. “My family was very much a part of the church community. I attended Sunday school and knew of the Scriptures and the church culture but I lived in my own little world of

country music and different interests.”

Even though he heard many sermons, Eddie brushed it all aside, thinking: “I’ll make a decision one day”.

“As a teenager, I would often check out dances and movies,” he said. “I even tried sport. But life was not fulfilling in any way, shape, or form.”

At 19, Eddie received a revelation: “I looked at what I was doing in an attempt to make life fulfilling and it wasn’t working, and then it dawned on me that maybe the Christian life could give me that satisfaction and purpose.”

With this in mind, he went to a convention where he met a girl who asked him how long he had been a Christian. When he couldn’t answer her she issued one of those challenges that Eddie loved to tackle: “Why not now?” she said.

Eddie was floored by that simple question: Indeed, why not now?

“This seemed the right time, so I agreed,” he smiled. “I recognised true satisfaction and purpose of life can only be found in God.”

After giving his life to Jesus via a simple prayer (see page 11), Eddie no longer sought fulfillment in other places. “Internally, I had a joy and a sense of purpose,” he shared.

Later, Eddie would need God more than ever. His father died of a heart attack and he and his mother were left to run a struggling farm. “I knew that if being a Christian meant anything it would be meaningful during this time, which it proved to be,” he recalled.

Then, Eddie got married and had four children. He took charge of the farm and leaned on God through the steep learning curves such as a flood, which destroyed the crops, and a debt that hung heavy over their heads.

Eddie said a verse from the Bible

really spoke to him and his wife during this time: “*Though the fig tree should not blossom...and the fields produce no food...Yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation*” (Habakkuk 3:17-18).

Soon after, Eddie became a lay preacher in his church and community. He left farming and moved to Queensland as a trade’s assistant.

A meeting with a prison chaplain led to him applying to be a volunteer chaplain.

“Prison chaplaincy has been my main service now for almost six years,” he said. “I have a real compassion for these guys and it is such a joy to serve these men.

“I’ve seen what a difference it makes when they realise God loves them and has a purpose for them. Many are overwhelmed that God would forgive them. They don’t see themselves as

worthy and can’t forgive themselves. Experiencing God’s forgiveness is a breakthrough for them.”

Covid-19 restrictions meant Eddie could not visit the prison for 12 weeks between March and June. During that time, he said, some inmates took their own lives.

This reinforced how necessary a chaplain’s role is. “There are often attempted suicides but because they had nobody to talk to during the shutdown those men succeeded in taking their own lives,” he said.

“That said something to us: they missed the contact so much and felt so isolated they lost all hope.”

With such purpose in his life, Eddie said he looks forward to the rest of his life with joyful expectation. “I have experienced God’s help in many circumstances of life and living,” he said. “I know we are in God’s hands and He will bring us comfort.”

## MANY ARE OVERWHELMED THAT GOD WOULD FORGIVE THEM.



# Killer and abuser beaten by love

**B**uth Nhorn of Cambodia killed many, many people, he confesses.

“I laid countless land mines. I built and ran an orphanage for the purpose of raising child soldiers. As a Buddhist, I calculated that I was beyond redemption. What could I possibly do to compensate for what I had done?”

“On 18 March 1970, young Vietnamese guerrillas with black teeth marched me into the forest to join the Khmer Rouge. Because I was opposed to Lon Nol and loyal to Prince Norodom Sihanouk, I stayed. In fact, I became a commander and even continued fighting underground after the overthrow of Pol Pot in 1979. I survived numerous injuries. As you can see, my body bears the scars of battle.”

In 1978 he married Reth. “The following year we escaped to Thailand. In 1987 my wife became ill and for a whole year could not straighten her fingers. A neighbour took her to a church.



Buth Nhorn

“They began praying for my wife and after six months she was healed. Reth became a Christian and even hosted a Bible study in our home.”

In 1991 they returned to Cambodia. “I rejected this foreign religion, Christianity and was cruel to my wife. Yet, the more I abused her, the more she loved me. She returned good for evil. This seemed too good to be true. But, why would she lie to me? I watched my wife carefully. For eight years she prayed for me.

“One day I beat my wife until she was unconscious.

“But still she loved me. I was a drunkard and a killer. My life was a disaster.

“Secretly, I began to read the Bible. I was confident that I would finally expose my wife’s delusion. When I read John chapter three, verse 16, I was overwhelmed by God’s love. I knew I was sinful. I wanted a new life. I too believed.”

John 3:16 says: “*For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish*

*but have everlasting life.*”

For several months Buth questioned every pastor he met. “I needed to know, was I forgiven or not? If we believe, God will forgive us.

“This is what the Bible says. I believe in God’s promise,” he nods.

In Isaiah 1:18-19 for instance, God offers: “*Come now, and let us reason together,*” says the Lord, “*though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall be as wool. If you are willing and obedient, you shall eat the good of the land.*”

No matter what we have done in our past or how many terrible things we have said and done, God will forgive us freely and completely if we simply submit ourselves to Him and ask.

In 1999 Buth became a pastor, telling others all about the wonderful freedom he has found in Jesus.

## I WAS CRUEL TO MY WIFE, YET ... SHE LOVED ME.



## Make friends and live longer

**THE** saying that friends can save your life actually turns out to be true. Studies are now discovering that low social interaction is just as harmful as smoking 15 cigarettes a day.

This is not the finding of an individual academic, but the result of combining 148 different studies of more than 300,000 people. It is consistent across age brackets and both genders.

We are created for relationships and without it we are diminished people. Just as God made us for a relationship with Him, He also created us with the desire for relationships with each other. In Genesis when Cain asked God if he was his brother’s keeper, the answer then and now is “yes”.

Of course our character weaknesses and personal failures mean that relationships are hard work. And right now, social distancing is making friendships particularly difficult.

But we need them, not just to feel good, but for a full and long life. Pray today for the ability to be a good friend, and seek safe ways to connect with your friends even when you can’t see them in person.

# The two sides of abuse

## Victim of abuse finds healing and becomes a lifesaver

**K**ristin Moon, 34, was as desperate as she had ever been. Curled up in a ball in her back room so her five-year-old son Adam couldn't hear or see her, she let the tears flow.

Her marriage was in tatters. "I was in a dysfunctional relationship with what I now know was a narcissist," the disability support worker, now 48, says. "He was very controlling and we fought all the time.

"My ex-husband was also involved in pornography; I felt there were like, 25 people in the bed with us. It affected me to the point where I struggled with sexual immorality too.

"I was a wreck; I was broken. I'd left several times before but I always came back. Finally I reached a point where I said to myself 'if I stay married to this man, I will go insane.'

Then a girlfriend invited her to a church in Perth. Kristin remembers her first service there as being "different".

"My ex-husband was a Catholic and I'd been to church with him before, but this new church was different," she recalls.

"The pastor spoke of us having a real relationship with a risen Jesus Christ, which I'd never heard of before in my husband's church. I always thought God was like a distant star, that if I was really lucky, I might get something good from Him. But now I KNOW He is really a good kind and faithful Father. "This was exactly what I was craving — true love and a healthy relationship. I was already at the end of my rope." At the end of the service, when the pastor asked if anyone in the congregation wanted to commit their lives to Jesus, Kristin didn't hesitate. Her hand shot up.

Kristin, who ultimately got divorced, grew slowly but steadily in her new relationship with God. "It took me a while to understand that I could trust the Lord to fight my battles," she confesses. "There were gaps in the foundations of my faith. Put simply, there were some bits missing!"

In 2009, Kristin was a canteen manager. Looking for a career



Kristin Moon now feels healed and whole.

change, she prayed in earnest for God to help her. Almost immediately, she says she felt God say to her: "You are going to be a lifesaver."

Kristin was stunned. "I knew He wasn't talking about being a lifesaver at a pool; I knew He meant I would be helping to save lives for Christ. That was a watershed moment for me."

That prompting she got has been a guiding star for her faith walk since then. Kristin had a bout with depression and was hospitalised for bi-polar disorder in 2013, but says she has grown much more in her faith.

"I never understood that I didn't have to carry all my pain," she says. "But slowly with the right teaching and loving counsel from church, I now understand that Jesus has taken it all for me on the cross."

She has joined a church and is a member of its street evangelism team. "My life now is all about winning souls for God," says the friendly brunette. "I really am trying to live

up to that calling of being a lifesaver.

"My journey in God has been up and down — information from sermons and Bible studies that have to make their way from your head to your heart, piece by piece, like putting a building together."

Her favourite Bible passage is Psalm 103: 1-5: "Bless the Lord, O my soul; And all that is within me, bless His holy name! Bless the Lord, O my soul, And forget not all His benefits: Who forgives all your iniquities, Who heals all your diseases, Who redeems your life from destruction, Who crowns you with lovingkindness and tender mercies, Who satisfies your mouth with good things, So that your youth is renewed like the eagle's."

Kristin concludes: "I was an obnoxious, rebellious and selfish person, yet God has forgiven me and crowned me with joy. I used to feel so hopeless, but He has brought back my life from the pit." ●

## Perpetrator of abuse gets to the bottom of his behaviour and learns to let go of violence

**I**n 2005, Michael Clark\* had been married to his second wife for a couple of years and was navigating the stress and changes that come with marriage and blending two families. He admits he did not respond well to these challenges.

"I was responding violently to things that were happening in our relationship," Michael admits in an interview with *The Christian Post*. "There were times when my wife would say something really hurtful, I would respond by slapping her, one time I pushed her into a closet and pulled her hair."

At other times he would pound his fist on the table, slam doors and shout at the top of his lungs.

"These things aren't technically considered domestic violence but they're still damaging to a relationship and intimidating to a partner and therefore, not good for a relationship," he explains.

Although violence didn't make him feel any better, he said he responded in this way due to "not having good emotional control in tense situations."

Michael was arrested for domestic violence and jailed twice that year before being mandated to attend an intervention program and given probation. A restraining order prevented him from contacting his wife and step-children.

While he loved his wife and didn't want to hurt her, Michael didn't know how to change.

He knew his actions were affecting the people he loved, his job and his reputation but everything he'd tried in the past hadn't made a difference.

In the intervention program, he was told the reason men hit their partners was due to a 'macho' attitude of entitlement. The solution was to recognise that violence towards women was wrong and to drop their male-superiority beliefs.

But Michael already knew hitting was wrong and he did not think he was superior to women. Many other

men in the class agreed. Michael felt discouraged and frustrated.

Michael began researching the subject by poring over academic textbooks. He also spent time with a counsellor — something that helped him understand his research as well as how past experiences affected him. It also helped him identify underlying emotions and beliefs that caused him to become violent. One of the beliefs he uncovered was that he was not lovable.

Michael reluctantly started going to church as it was the only opportunity to see his wife.

He had attended church occasionally in the past but as he listened to the messages, they were different to what he remembered hearing in church before.

He heard about God's love for him as well as accounts from people whose lives had been transformed.

About a year later, Michael cried out to God. He confessed that he'd made a mess of his life and asked God to help him change.

He said his relationship with Jesus, combined with good counselling, has transformed him.

"Going to church and hearing this message that God loves me, accepting that and believing that changes me," he attests. "I'm far less concerned about what people think, including my partner. I don't have to worry about rejection and abandonment because I know God has always been with me. Understanding how God sees me and accepting my identity as His beloved child really was a game changer in how I thought and also how I could think about those situations."

When he comprehended God's love for him, Michael no longer felt unlovable.

He has written a book called *From Villain to Hero: Encouragement and a map to stop domestic violence or abuse that hurts the ones you love* (see inset) in an aim to help people that are causing harm, to heal and move forward.

"I really started the book while I was in the process of making changes in my life," he tells *The Christian Post*.

"As I progressed and learned things and felt those changes in my life, the book continued to take form."

Michael also started the Ananias Foundation ([ananiasfoundation.org](http://ananiasfoundation.org)) which provides online guidance and encouragement for individuals who want to stop hurting the ones they love.

Apart from Michael's book, the resources offered by the Ananias Foundation are available free of charge.

Michael is now violence-free and has a loving, respectful marriage with his new wife, Lynn. ●



## GROWING STRONG IN BROKEN PLACES

BY NICO BOUGAS

**YESTERDAY** — or some other day — may have been the final day of your divorce, the day you were rejected, or the day you lost or buried a loved one; but as difficult as it seems right now, and as extremely sad as it is, in time it can become a day of new beginnings.

Be gentle with yourself but do begin the grieving process as soon as possible so you will be able to resolve your pain. To do this effectively, there are several valuable qualities that will help you to face the future as uncertain as it may seem right now.

### The Right Attitude

Make sure you have the right attitude. As someone said, "Don't let success go to your head or failure go to your heart."

In truth we learn more from failure than from success. It is down in the valley that we take time to assess our lives and move towards a new level of growth and maturity.

### Know Your Purpose in Life

Be sure you have a clearly defined, deeply embedded purpose in life so that when trials and problems do arise you can get off the floor, dust yourself off and get on with your life.

A spacecraft on route to the moon is off course 90 percent of the time.

It is pulled back by the earth's gravity and is continually drawn to one side or the other by additional forces. But it has a built-in computer that has a singleness of purpose that homes in on the moon. Life is like that. If our eye is on our goal, if we have a singleness of purpose, nothing will stop us getting to where we plan to go.

### Failure is Not a Person

If you have failed in a relationship or experienced some other setback in life, remember failure is an experience, not a person. You are not a failure. You have to learn from your trials. Use them as opportunities from future growth. The person who never made a

mistake never made anything.

### Give God a Chance

If you feel you have failed and been in the wrong, ask God to forgive you, and be sure to forgive yourself. With God's help you can turn your failure into an opportunity to develop a better you.

Where a bone has been broken and heals it becomes the strongest part of the bone. The same goes for those times and places in your life where you have been broken, or failed or fallen. When you bring it to God He can make you strongest in the broken places of your life and bring healing and strength to your life. ●

# Drawn to the occult

After a childhood of bullying and then suffering the loss of his sister, Angelo Nero's search for power led him to make a pact with the devil and he became a Satanist.

But then he caught sight of his reflection in a shop window.

"I looked at my black boots, my black coat and my claw rings," he recalls. "But it was something completely different that worried me. My facial expression. There was nothing that was reflected in this face, no joy, not even anger or hatred... I searched my heart and came across the irrefutable answer. It was all the witch books and the unholy pact that finally corrupted and changed me. It was the stories I had read and the films I had watched that had creepily prepared me for my downfall from childhood."

As a young child growing up in Switzerland, Angelo had a belief in God, and was even bullied for his faith in school. He was ashamed to tell his parents about the bullying but it finally came to light when he was nearly strangled by a classmate after swimming lessons.

So as a teenager Angelo was attracted by the promise of power that he felt as he walked past a New Age shop and saw tarot cards being advertised in the shop window.

"Although I had never held such cards in my hands before, I knew exactly what they were used for," Angelo says. "Even as a child, I saw enough movies and read enough books to know the power inherent in occult practices."

He heard an inner voice warning him not to enter the



Angelo Nero

shop but he felt an attraction to do something he shouldn't do. Fascinated, he entered and after looking at the tarot cards, the sales assistant gave him a deck. Although he wasn't sure if it was okay to use tarot cards as a Christian he took the deck and decided to try them out.

When Angelo was 14, his older sister was diagnosed with lung cancer. He and his family prayed to God for a miracle, but she sadly passed away. He remembers grief, anger and despair raged within him and he started questioning God's goodness.. He wrapped his childhood Bible in a black cloth so he no longer had to see it and took it along with his tarot cards

and some other New Age items to a castle ruin. In a ritual on the castle grounds, Angelo renounced Jesus and made a pact in blood with the devil and demanded his power.

"I made no secret to my family and closest friends that I was no longer a Christian, but I was careful not to reveal myself as a Satanist," Angelo remembers. Continuing to use tarot cards and even casting spells to overthrow churches, Angelo became a witch-master.

But then Angelo caught sight of his reflection and realised he had not gained power but emptiness. He realised it was his greed for power because he no longer wanted to be a victim that had led him to paths he should not have taken. He tried to renounce his pact with the devil but he believed he would never be able to break the chains that bound him to the occult.

"I got to the bottom of my life when I loathed myself and couldn't look myself in the eye," Angelo remembers. "My hatred turned more and more against myself and I was about to jump off a bridge to end my life. That's when I remembered that God is still there. I shouted into the night sky: 'God, if you're here and want to help me and forgive my sins, then do something.'"

He didn't have to wait long. The next day he received a phone call from an old Christian friend from high school. Although they hadn't spoken in years, the friend invited Angelo to go away for a long weekend with his church.

"I thought: do I really want to spend a whole weekend with fanatical Christians?" Angelo says. "Actually not. But I kept thinking: I don't believe in coincidences. Which means that this call took place for a reason."

He agreed and found the group to be welcoming and non-judgemental. The following week, Angelo attended a church service with his friend and felt it was time to decide whether

he wanted to continue to be lost in the dark or start a new life. He chose to give his life to Jesus. His friend and another man prayed for Angelo but when they asked him to

pray, he couldn't.

"It was enormously difficult for me to even speak the name of the Son of God over my lips or to address any words to Him at all... It made me sick, but I tried hard and then the words suddenly flowed, 'Jesus Christ forgive me that I have turned away from You. Forgive me that I have entered into the powers of Satan and have consciously acted against Your will. Break the demonic chains that hold me captive. I know that You have paid for all my transgressions on the cross with Your blood. I thank You that through Your sacrifice I am freed from everything, that You redeemed me from the claws of the devil and paid the toll with your life. I want to give You my life, Jesus Christ. Amen.'"

He says he felt free and alive again.

"Much has changed since I became a Christian," Angelo explains. "I know that Jesus Christ made me completely free that evening in church, but that doesn't mean everything was fine then. I still had a hard time struggling to forgive. But God has worked on me and shaped me over the years and He still does it today. God is working on me every day and sometimes it's easier and sometimes it's harder."

Angelo has written Christian fantasy books and two autobiographies and visits events in the "dark scene" (goths, occultists, Satanists etc) to show them there is a way out.

For more information visit Angelo's website at [www.angelo-nero.ch](http://www.angelo-nero.ch)

# In the dark on death?

BY PETER BRAIN

THERE are many humorous graveyard inscriptions. Recently I came across one that said, "Here lies my wife: here let her lie! Now she's at rest, and so am I." Another said, "I told you I was sick," and another: "Here lies the atheist, all dressed up and no place to go."

Humour is one way of handling death, which we all know is anything but funny. In these days of Covid, one is aware that even the young may face it sooner than expected. There are other ways of coping with death, and all the uncertainty and fear it engenders. Some say there is nothing after death; what we see is all there is. Others rely on reincarnation as an explanation for what happens after death. Still others trivialize the awfulness of death by saying that it is just a natural part of life. And others, that everyone will go to Heaven or that God will give us a second chance after we die.

It's all fairly confusing, and sad, don't you think?

Especially since God would neither have us fearful nor living in the dark about death and eternity.

There are some who would say that the Christian faith is escapism – but what if, as Dr I. Howard Marshall writes, "it is the only ultimate realism"? Now, to make a claim like that there must be some clear public domain evidence. Wonderfully, there is. Marshall reminds us that "it rests foursquare on the fact that Jesus has defeated death, and anybody who can defeat death can defeat anything."

Jesus rose from the grave, as attested to by over 500 eye witnesses, the lack of a body, and the complete turn around of His disciples from heartbroken friends to bold martyrs.

The coming of Jesus into our world gives us a new way of looking at things. He offers life eternal to all who trust Him now and will honor the choice of all who refuse Him with death eternal. There is no reincarnation or second chance.

The choice of eternity hangs on the decision we make about Jesus now. One man said that "at death I shall change my place, but not my company", and another that "death has been described as the old family servant who opens the door to welcome the children home."

For those trusting in Jesus, death holds no more fear than going to sleep at night.

And it is all because of Jesus. We see this confidence in John Newton, who gave us the hymn *Amazing Grace*, when he said to one of his visitors toward the end of his life, "I am like a person going on a journey in a stage coach, who expects its arrival every hour and is frequently looking out of the window for it."

And the reason for his confidence was revealed by his friend who heard his final words, "My memory is nearly gone but I remember two things: that I am a great sinner and that Christ is a great Savior."

The Biblical book of Ecclesiastes says: "No one has power over the spirit to retain the spirit, and no one has power in the day of death." We don't know when, so best we know, where.

## C.S. Lewis on death from 'A Grief Observed'

- "You never know how much you really believe anything until its truth or falsehood becomes a matter of life and death to you."
- "The death of a beloved is an amputation."
- "It is hard to have patience with people who say, 'There is no death' or 'Death doesn't matter'. There is death. And whatever it matters. And whatever happens has consequences, and it and they are irrevocable and irreversible."
- "No one ever told me that grief felt so like fear. I am not afraid, but the sensation is like being afraid."
- "Grief ... gives life a permanently provisional feeling. It doesn't seem worth starting anything. I can't settle down ... Up till this, I always had too little time. Now there is nothing but time."



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# Lessons from an inept sailor

BY JANICE TEO

ONE day in my life stands out with great clarity. Not the good epiphany kind of clarity; more the my-life-flashed-before-me variety. It was the day my husband and I took part in a sailing competition.

Up to then we had been happy casual sailors, satisfied with jaunts along the coast, safely within reach of medical care and proper toilets because no, the back of the boat doesn't count.

Sailing can teach you many lessons, foremost of which is this one: life can throw a storm at you any time, anywhere, without any warning. This is precisely what happened to us.

One minute we were exchanging the usual pleasantries of any seafaring couple – "Stop yelling!" "I'M NOT YELLING!!" – and the next the sky was dark and the waves looked like the ash cloud from Mount Vesuvius.

The boat, which up to then had been bobbing along with absolutely no hope of finishing in the top three, suddenly caught the wind in its sails and decided it would try, *Chariots of Fire* style, to stage a stunning comeback.

In less experienced hands, this would have been a problem. In our less than less experienced hands, it was a disaster. We tossed, we turned, we capsized.

My husband climbed back in with all the dexterity of an Army man used to obstacle courses. I, being of the species *Sailorus Ineptus*, couldn't. The officials in the rescue boat hurtling towards us were laughing so hard I wished they would capsize too.

It was seriously difficult to get back into the boat. It seemed like all the forces of nature were conspiring against me. The lashing rain made it hard to see, the boat was bucking like a bronco on steroids, the current and the waves tossed me about, and the life jacket kept pushing up around my head as though seeking to decapitate me.

Finally getting a firm grip, I pushed down with all the strength I could muster and pulled myself up back into the boat while my husband made sure the madly swinging boom didn't knock me unconscious on my way back in. There's just so much to love about sailing I wonder why fewer and fewer people are taking it up.

You can see why my mortality suddenly loomed large.

Yet in life we sometimes feel overpowered by circumstances, don't we? Sometimes they are situations of our own making – I mean, what on earth made us sign up for the race? And sometimes calamity can strike without you having done a thing to warrant it.

Of course, the storm wasn't half as bad as I've described; it only felt



Christ our Pilot by Warner Sallman

that way. The forces for me were as many as the ones against me – my husband's sure handling of the boat, the rescue officials who pulled alongside when they finally stopped laughing long enough, the fact that the storm in truth was nothing more than heavy rain.

A Christian's life is just as susceptible to upheavals, but there is a difference – we know Christ is always in the boat with us. He is the perfect captain, not only able not only to steer us through high winds and poor visibility but also bring us into safe harbour again.

Reflecting on my experience in the storm that day gave me the chance to think about what my life would be like if I didn't have Christ in the boat with me. It was not a pretty picture – life's high seas seldom are.

That's why I am so grateful I have given control of my boat of life to the Lord Jesus Christ. As the captain of my ship His sure hand has navigated me through many storms. Sometimes the waves and currents take me in the wrong direction and leave me sputtering, but I have always come back to safe harbor. Without Jesus I do wonder what may have become of me otherwise. There is a famous painting, called Christ our Pilot. It shows a young man steering a boat. Jesus stands behind him, one hand on the boy's shoulder the other pointing the way.

What a beautiful illustration of what it means to have Jesus as our master helmsman helping us steer the proper course for our lives. We just need to surrender to His navigation.



## In life's storm? Be encouraged

**FAITH** grows amid storms. Right in the midst where it is fiercest. You may shrink back from the ordeal of a fierce storm of trial... but go in! God is there to meet you in the centre of all your trials, and to whisper His secrets which will make you come forth with a shining face and an indomitable faith that all the demons of hell shall never afterwards cause to waver. - E.A. Kilbourne.

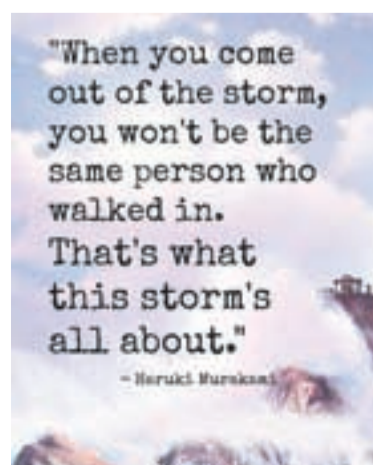
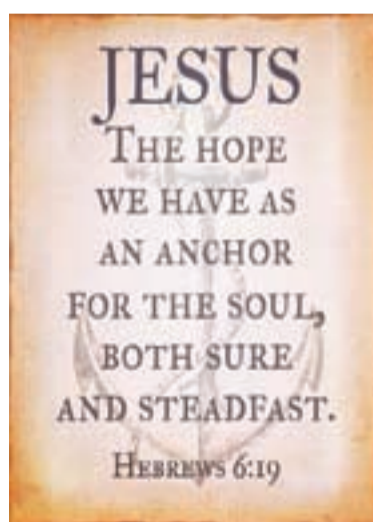
**JESUS** Christ is no security against storms, but He is perfect security in storms. He has never promised you an easy passage, only a safe landing. - *Streams in the Desert*.

*They sailed, they sailed. Then spake the Mate:  
"This mad sea shows its teeth tonight.  
He curls his lip, he lies in wait,  
With lifted teeth, as if to bite!  
Brave Admiral, say but one good word;  
What shall we do when hope is gone?"  
The words leapt like a leaping sword:  
"Sail on! Sail on! Sail on! Sail on!"*  
- from a poem by Joaquin Miller

**IT** will never rain 365 days consecutively. Keep in mind that trouble comes to pass, not to stay. Don't worry! No storm, not even the one in your life, can last forever. - Iyanla Vanzant

I was sure by now  
God, You would have reached down  
And wiped our tears away  
Stepped in and saved the day  
And once again  
I say, "A-men" and it's still rainin'  
But as the thunder rolls  
I barely hear Your whisper through the rain  
"I'm with you"  
And as Your mercy falls  
I'll raise my hands and praise the God  
who gives and takes away  
And I'll praise You in this storm  
And I will lift my hands  
For You are who You are  
No matter where I am  
And every tear I've cried  
You hold in Your hand  
You never left my side  
And though my heart is torn  
I will praise You in this storm

**Casting  
Crowns  
Praise you in  
this storm**



# Sneaker waves

**ANDREW** Machi and his family were vacationing in Northern California, celebrating his 39<sup>th</sup> birthday when he lost his life to a "sneaker wave" (a "king or freak wave" as we call them in Australia).

The family had gone to Luffenholtz Beach where Andrew was fishing off the rocks when a wave came in, sweeping him off the rocks and pulling him out to sea. His wife jumped in to try to help him, but the surf kept pushing her back into the rocks.

Even though help arrived by helicopter within 10 minutes of being called, it was too late for Mr Machi. A coroner told his family that he believed Andrew had hit his head on the rocks and was knocked out.

The very next day, about 400 miles up the coast on Manzanita Beach, a woman was seriously injured when the log she was sitting on was hit and lifted by a "sneaker wave." Rescue personnel described her as being "crushed."

Sneaker waves are deadly, dangerous waves that catch the unwary person off-guard. The surf could be calm with the waves coming up only so far for a good 10 to 20 minutes, and then suddenly, without warning, a wave much larger and stronger than the rest will come crashing in, coming up the beach far higher than the rest. This is where people get caught.

The sneaker wave comes in with a pile of sand, gravel and water that fills a person's clothes and then drags them back out to sea. Then there is the added danger of freezing water temperatures and strong currents, which can kill a person in moments.

This happens to quite a few people, more than you might think! In Australia, rock fishing has been identified as the third highest cause of coastal drowning, following swimming or wading, and boating.

In the USA, the National Weather Service states that, "For much of the West Coast, sneaker waves kill more people than all other weather hazards combined." They go on to say, "Survivors all say the same thing: They thought they were far enough from the surf to be safe. They never saw the wave coming." They go on to warn, "Never turn your back on the ocean."

Countless millions of people are just like those who sit on the beach, not paying attention, an easy prey to the "sneaker wave" of death. They go through life busy with work, pleasure and the pursuit of happiness, never giving a thought that one day the God whom they must face will say, "You fool! This night your soul will be required of you" (Luke 12:20). Why does God use such strong language? Because only a fool would not use the time they had before death to seek and to know God.

Anyone who really wants too can find peace with God. It requires coming to Him His way, and not the way we think is best.

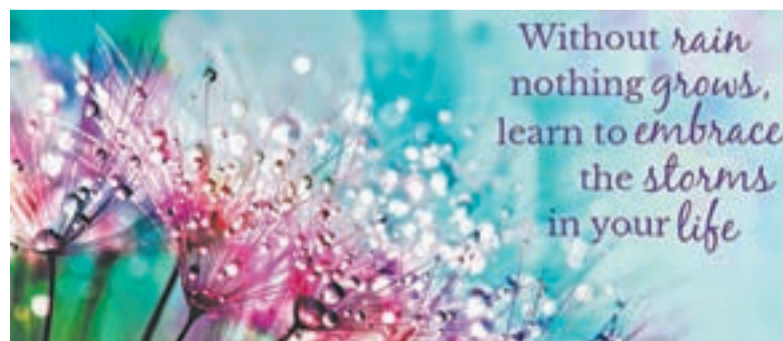
God has given us creation so that we can know there IS a God. He has given us the Bible so that we can know HOW to come to Him for forgiveness of our sins and our eternal salvation. He promises that if we truly, earnestly seek Him, we will find Him. "You will seek Me, and find Me, when you search for Me with all your heart" (Jeremiah 29:13).

Time is short. Our lives pass in the blink of an eye, so to speak. Death will claim each one of us; we just don't know when. If you should die today, are you prepared to meet God?

"...if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus, and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved" (Romans 10:9).

Know for certain that your sins are forgiven and that you have made peace with God today!

This article first appeared in *Highway Evangelist* and is used with kind permission.



## Believe It or Not

### Dating not written in stone

**AUSTRALIAN** geologist Dr Andrew Snelling is on a campaign to expose the false dating in evolutionary circles. He has demonstrated the complete unreliability of modern rock dating methods.

Snelling has discovered rocks that can be dated as both millions of years old and a few hundred days old, depending on which of two methods you use! Yet it's the same rock, formed at the same time, in the same place, and both radioactive dating methods are frequently used in today's geology. This huge inconsistency casts doubt on the whole process.

The evidence Snelling presents could on its own blow apart the theory of evolution, because it shows that the billions of years of Earth history – essential for evolution – may be an illusion.

A typical example of false dating that Snelling highlights is the lava from Mt St Helens, the volcano that erupted in 1980 in south-west Washington.

Samples of these rocks were sent for dating – when they were only 10 years old – to a top laboratory used by geologists in America. When the results came back, they gave dates of millions of years!

Much of Dr Snellings research has focused on the famous Grand Canyon. He sent samples of the Canyon's oldest and youngest rocks to be dated in the best labs, and the dates came back as almost identical! Where did all the millions of years of gradual rock formation in-between go?

He concludes that they simply never existed.

He also reveals that radioactive carbon has been found in almost the entire fossil-bearing geological column. Why is this significant? Because radioactive carbon decays out of existence in less than 250,000 years, so it shouldn't exist in rocks that are hundreds of millions of years old – unless rocks really aren't that old.

–From *The Delusion of Evolution*

# Geologist's journey out of old-earth ideas

**M**ost people who have been through high school geography believe that rock formations and geological layers are proof of the evolutionary timeline, however Dr John Matthews would beg to differ.

Before retirement, and after 16 years of experience in the nuclear power industry, Dr Matthews (B.Sc. mathematics, Ph.D. earth science) held European chartered geologist status<sup>1</sup> because of work in the upstream oil industry on geoscientific issues.

After earning a B.Sc. in mathematics, John became an engineer for the nuclear power industry. He specialised in heat transfer, fluid flow (water, steam, and liquid sodium), and reactor/nuclear physics.

Some years later, the nuclear power program started to wind down. Oil had been found in the North Sea, and the UK was short of ge-engineers who could take advantage of it. John was asked to retrain as a geoscientist. He and a group of trainees were chosen to spearhead a new geotechnical venture because of their familiarity with high-pressure fluid flow.

During John's training, he was introduced to uniformitarian geology (the assumption that the geological formations we see today were created by slow steady changes over long periods of time instead of catastrophic events), which he "absorbed hook, line, and sinker."

Although he had been a Christian since he was 14, and dedicated his life to Christ through a high school Bible class, John did not believe the Biblical creation account described real history.

#### Journey to Biblical creation

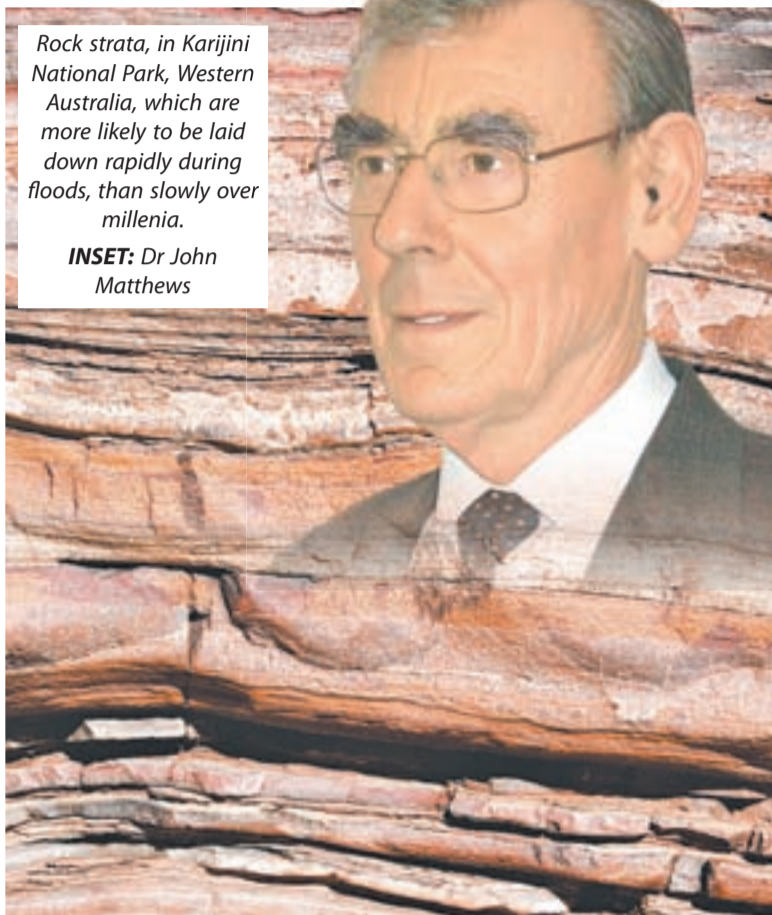
Then John came across DCC Watson's 1975 book *The Great Brain Robbery: Creation or evolution?*<sup>2</sup>. He almost didn't read it—because Watson unapologetically taught that Biblical creation as found in Genesis 1–11 was historical.

Watson's book mentioned the creationist classic *The Genesis Flood* by John Whitcomb and Henry Morris (1961). John bought a copy. He admits it took him nine months to read.

"It wasn't that I was a slow reader—but it was challenging everything I'd ever considered about Genesis and geology," he explains.

This challenge particularly concerned two key concepts, on which he now concludes:

"Massive fossilisation is only possible during catastrophic conditions. Uniformitarianism cannot explain fossilisation. So the fossils are not a



Rock strata, in Karijini National Park, Western Australia, which are more likely to be laid down rapidly during floods, than slowly over millenia.

INSET: Dr John Matthews

record of evolution—but judgment and death.

"The standard geological column creaks with inconsistencies. Having been alerted to this point, I could see confirmatory evidence within the geological maps I was often using. Layers of sediments were labelled with names from the geological column—or described as undifferentiated—often with no evidence to support these names, except occasional continuity in seismic sections."

John testifies that in the process of reading and thinking about this book, he became a convinced six-day creationist. He was confronted with, and accepted, Genesis as real history—not meta-history or myth.

#### Oil is where you find it

Anti-creationists claim at times that when secular geologists find oil it somehow vindicates their uniformitarian approach. However, as John points out, their intermittent successes in finding oil are not determined by the 'millions of years' idea.

He says, "A lot of oil is found by spotting leaks, then seismic surveys are done to look for the special-shaped underground structures that might be the source of that leaking oil. Then you spend millions of dollars drilling wells into those structures, and only then do you know if you have found the actual oil reservoirs. Also, oil is sometimes found in places where standard theories predict it shouldn't be."

John's interest in the biblical origins of oil was renewed when he

politely at his beliefs and occasionally offer a rebuttal.

However, in academia, John was confronted with: "You're out—no questions asked!"<sup>4</sup>

#### Moving onwards and upwards

Since this unpleasant experience, John has been busy. He has published a book<sup>5</sup>, and written for several creationist organizations. The COVID pandemic forced a pause in his creationist geology field trips along the Jurassic Coast. He plans to resume, as well as video, this activity as soon as possible.

John's aim is to proclaim the authority of the Bible as God's Word, and Genesis as historical fact. He encourages people to recognize that Scripture is the basis for the best explanation for geology, rocks and fossils.●

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This article is based on one by Creation Ministries International (CMI) authored by Gavin Cox and is used with kind permission.

**The 6-DAY CANYON**

People who visit Grand Canyon are usually informed that the canyon took millions of years to form, thanks to the slow erosion of the Colorado River, which is about 1½ kilometres down at the bottom.

Without looking at the Canyon, or thinking much, most people accept this evolutionary and deceptive view.

A canyon that did not take millions of years can be seen below Mount Saint Helens. This canyon formed in just a few hours.

Yet another canyon can be seen in Washington. It is called the Burlingame Canyon, and people watched it form. It is 460 metres long, and 36 metres deep.

What started off as a drainage ditch, ended up as a miniature Grand Canyon, complete with its own tiny river, and layering patterns up the sides.

These and other examples show that the idea of canyons being millions of years old, is not based on evidence, but on an assumption.

by Richard Gunther

**EVIDENCE FOR A GLOBAL FLOOD**

- 1 Thick, sedimentary rock layers thousands of kilometres wide and long.
- 2 Huge coal seams stacked on top of one another, being the remains of enormous forests.
- 3 Coal seams with pollen, clay layers, vertical logs, leaves and flowers preserved before decay destroyed them.
- 4 Landforms which appear to have been shaved or stripped off over thousands of kilometres.
- 5 Huge rocks which have been pushed up and abandoned along the edges of wide river channels, which are now just a trickle down the middle.
- 6 Billions of fossils, of land and sea creatures, buried in sedimentary rock all over the planet.

The evidence is all around is, but too many people look at it through the evolution glasses, so they interpret what they see the wrong way.

by Richard Gunther

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# BUILDING BETTER RELATIONSHIPS

## Clarifying questions can combat confusion

BY ROB FURLONG

I HAD to pick up my grandchildren after school recently and being a reliable grandfather, I made sure I was there in plenty of time before the bell rang.

When I arrived, my grandson was outside his classroom door with one of his friends and busily packing his bag in preparation for leaving.

My grandson's friend looked at me and turned to him and asked, "Is that your Grandad?"

"Yes!" answered my grandson.

And as naturally as you please, his friend said, "He doesn't look funny at all!"

Two thoughts immediately went through my mind.

First, I was pleased I didn't look

funny!

Two, my grandson and I need to have a talk!

Throughout this year we have specifically focused on some practical skills to help us grow and develop our relationships with each other and whether it has been trying to break the habit of making assumptions in our conversations with others, being lovingly honest instead of dropping hints or finding the courage to have a difficult conversation with someone, one thing is certain: each skill requires clear communication.

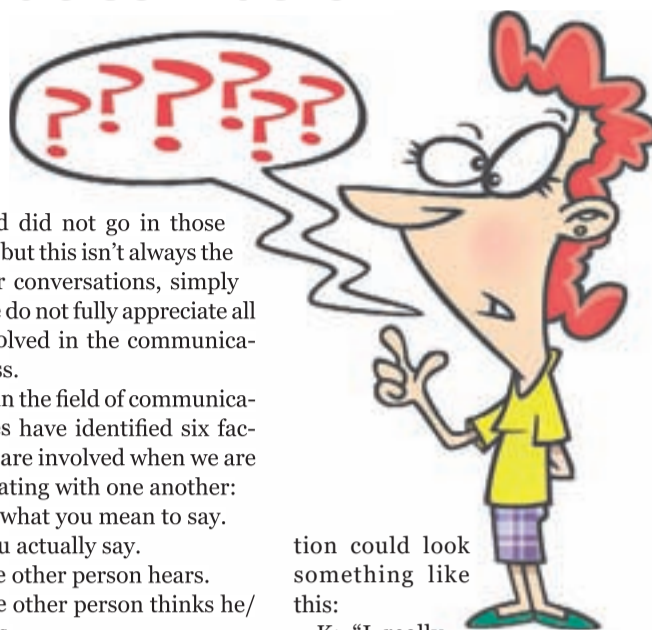
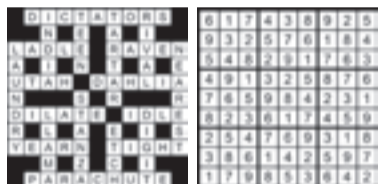
The story I told about my grandson above – which I find hilarious – is an excellent example of how communication can become both confused and problematic.

Based purely on what I heard that afternoon, my mind could have run off in all sorts of directions.

"What has my grandson been saying about me?"

"Okay – I don't look funny – but compared to who or what?!"

"Does my grandson really think I look that bad?"



My mind did not go in those directions, but this isn't always the case in our conversations, simply because we do not fully appreciate all that is involved in the communication process.

Experts in the field of communication studies have identified six factors which are involved when we are communicating with one another:

- There is what you mean to say.
- What you actually say.
- What the other person hears.
- What the other person thinks he/she hears.
- What the other person says about what you said.
- What you think the other person said about what you said.

This can be quite daunting, but if you think about it carefully, these factors are always involved in the conversation process.

Karen could say to me, "I really love it when you put your arms around me and give me a hug!"

I hear her say those actual words but depending on how I am feeling at the time or any past insecurities I may be carrying, I might come out with something like, "But I have been doing that!"

As a result, she may well interpret my words as being defensive and respond by saying, "You don't have to be like that!". Suddenly the conversation is now far removed from its original intent.

But when we understand what is involved in communication, much confusion and misunderstanding can be avoided, and the above conversa-

tion could look something like this:

K: "I really love it when you put your arms around me and give me a hug!"

R: "Oh, why are you saying that?"

K: "Because when you do it makes me feel loved. You did it yesterday and it was really special to me."

R: "Thanks for telling me. I'm glad it meant a lot to you because I wanted you to know how much I love you."

K: "It was very special, and I wanted you to know."

What a completely different conversation and result!

Asking good questions, clarifying what each other is saying and giving more information, defuses much hurt, confusion, and frustration.

Better communication results when we have a good grasp of the basics: asking clarifying questions and giving as much information as possible.

Incidentally, my grandson did this for me. He made it clear he had told his friend I was funny, not that I looked funny!

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

## Lessons from a sausage dog (Part 17)

BY JODY BENNETT

I DON'T think my little dog, Carrie has very good eyesight. The other evening, just as it was getting towards dusk, she started barking and whining at the picture window that looks onto the front yard. It was her "cat whine" and she was desperate to be let out to chase what she thought was a cat out from under the front bushes (she clearly hasn't learnt from the scratches she got last time!).

I looked and saw that it was just a piece of junk mail that had got trapped under the bush, not a cat. I tried to tell her, and then to ignore her, but the dog was insistent that she needed to be let out to deal with the intruder. Eventually I put down my book and got up to let her out – sure enough she rushed under the bushes only to find that the cat was a cat-alogue! She sniffed all around just to make absolutely sure that a feline was not anywhere in the front garden and then conceded to come inside.

"I told you so" isn't very satisfying when said to a dog!

But it did make me think that sometimes I too get a bee in my bonnet about something that I want, or want to do and pray fervently for that thing to happen. I insist that I know what is going on, that my perception of the situation is correct and that nothing is going to change my mind.

I think sometimes, like I did with Carrie, God says "OK, I know you're wrong but go and find out for yourself." He allows us to make the mistake or experience the disappointment because we are being so pig-headed about the issue.

Carrie probably didn't understand me saying that the shape under the bushes wasn't a cat (all she heard was 'cat!') but there are times I have just refused to listen to contradictory advice or warnings from God's Word or His people about something I was stubborn about – and of course I ended up being hurt and wasting effort and time.

There is a verse in the Book of Psalms that I think is one of the scariest in the Bible. It concerns God's dealing with the Israelites in the desert, when they moaned about the food and demanded meat. *"They did not wait for His counsel, but lusted exceedingly in the wilderness"* according to Psalm 106:13-14 so, says verse 15 *"He gave them their request but sent leanness into their soul."*

That terrifies me! The thought that God might give in to my demands that some physical, carnal, temporary request be fulfilled, but at the cost of my spiritual health and my relationship with Him. That is why – realising that I understand God's purposes and plans about as well as my dog understands quantum physics – I now always pray, as Jesus did, "This is what I want ... 'but not my will but Thine be done!"



Guatemala's Charles Fernandez falls off Fluoriet as he competes in the men's individual riding show jumping of the modern pentathlon during the Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games at the Tokyo Stadium in Tokyo on August 7, 2021. (Photo by Pedro PARDO / AFP) (Photo by PEDRO PARDO/AFP via Getty Images)

**INSET:** Charles Fernandez of Team Guatemala celebrates during the Fencing Ranked Round of the Men's Modern Pentathlon at the Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games on August 05, 2021 in Chofu, Japan. (Photo by Leon Neal/Getty Images)



# LOSER IS A WINNER

**O**n August 8, as the 2020 Olympics came to a close, Charles Fernandez, Guatemala's last remaining athlete at the Olympic village carried his country's flag with pride at the closing ceremony.

The 25-year-old modern pentathlete did not win any medals at these Games, but he has a winning attitude – and a higher purpose for his sport.

“The people of Guatemala are the reason I do what I do in sports,” he told *Tokyo 2020*.

“I am an athlete for this country. I don't compete for myself but for the people. When I am on the podium... I just think of the smiles of these people who suffer every day, who work every day to achieve a better life.

“However, sometimes it is hard for them to develop as human beings due to the violence and corruption in the country.”

Charles was born in Dayton, Ohio in the United States to Christian parents, Carlos – who was originally from Guatemala – and Heidi. When he was seven, his parents answered the call to become full-time missionaries in Guatemala and the whole family moved there.

Carlos, himself a modern pentathlete, founded a mission called Welcome to My Father's House. For the past 17 years, this evangelistic ministry that provides education

and medical care as well as sports and construction projects for the Mayan population.

“We help them build churches, houses, schools and community centres,” explains Charles, who has been a Christian from the time he was a child and is passionate about being a role model for the community.

Although he has not been as hands-on since turning professional, his heart is still for the mission field. Once, when he was travelling in Europe, he learned that the Fuego volcano, just 10 miles from his hometown, had erupted. Charles had actually been planning to climb Fuego when he got home that same week.

“We decided to shift our focus from it being a vacation to being a ministry opportunity,” he continued. He and his girlfriend Kristen started a GoFundMe page and raised \$2000, which they used to buy food, water and other essential items which were distributed through Father's House.

“It was definitely a huge blessing to be able to help people who were victims of the volcano in any way we

could,” Charles noted. “These people had literally lost everything.”

He was also one of five athletes recruited by the Olympic Committee in Guatemala last summer to build three houses in one of the villages destroyed by the eruption.

“As a Guatemalan, as a Christian, and as a public figure, I wanted to try to create awareness for the people of Guatemala,” he said. “This is not a process that will heal itself overnight.”

The modern pentathlon is a gruelling one-day endurance competition over five disciplines – fencing, swimming, horse jumping, shooting and running – a skillset that must seem bizarre to anyone who didn't grow up with Tarzan or Erroll Flynn movies.

It is Charles work as a missionary that inspires him in his role as an athlete.

“My aim as an athlete is to bring hope to them, showing them that anything is possible when you work hard. The two ways I support the country are different but thank God they fit together in a very special way. This is the reason and motiva-

tion for what I do at the Olympics.

“I ask God to give me strength every single day. I know for a fact that without the renewal of my strength through my faith and because of God I would not be the athlete that I am today. That is why I do what I do, to be a light of Christ unto the nations in this sport.”

Charles said a personal relationship with Jesus Christ was not something religious but genuine.

“It is not a religious experience. God is not a God who looks for the best of the best, but someone who looks for the broken-hearted in need of a saviour, regardless of your sins and faults.

“My faith in God has always been surrounded by the love and grace

He has shown to His children even though we don't deserve it.

“My purpose in life has been to always reflect the love that Christ gave us and serve others selflessly. Being an example of Christ's love on earth through actions has helped me use the platform that I have to inspire others and be a positive change to my country and the people around me.

“The difference is about how you treat others, how you look at adversity, and how you respond to everything that happens around you. This allows me to live a happy life as an athlete knowing that it is not about what you do inside sport but how are you doing it that matters.”



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