

TRUTH AND TRAGEDY



Anne Heche, the most famous of Nancy's children, who tragically died following a car accident August 12, 2022. This photo was taken in Los Angeles in December 2021.

BY JODY BENNETT

The recent death of actress Anne Heche following a car crash is yet another blow to her mother, 85-year-old Nancy Heche, who has endured a life filled with disappointments and tragedy, and yet has found a hope to carry her through it all.

Four out of five of Nancy's children have died, and she has lost her husband twice – once to homosexuality and then to death by AIDS.

In 1983, after a year of ill health during which the doctors never told her what was actually wrong with Donald, Nancy was finally told, as he lay on his death bed, that her husband had AIDS.

"I realise I have been lied to my entire married life," Nancy writes of her feelings at the time in her 2006 memoir *The Truth Comes Out*.

"Betrayed. Deceived. Abandoned. ... I hate him. I absolutely hate him... I've lost my past as well as my future. He has destroyed our lives – ruined them slowly and secretly, year after year."

Don had led a double life, teaching Bible studies, playing the church organ, directing the church choir and even living with his family for a time in an Amish commune; all the while having sex with thousands of men on the side during his long absences "for work".

He and Nancy had been married for 25 years and they had five children together – one of whom they lost in infancy. Theirs had been a marriage lived in the insecurity of Don's addictions and inability to stick to any job – "My family always lived on the edge – the edge of financial security, of job security, health security, marriage security ... [where] checks bounce, cars get repossessed, [and] electricity gets turned off," Nancy writes.

Don died in the March of that year and months later, in November, the couple's only son Nathan, aged 18, was killed in a car crash, just before his final school exams.

Then, in 1987, Anne, Nancy's youngest daughter came out as Ellen DeGeneres' gay lover, which Nancy considered another betrayal, not only of Anne's Christian upbringing, but of all the suffering the family had already endured as a result of Don's homosexuality.

In 2006, Nancy's eldest daughter Susan died at 49 of brain cancer, and now Anne, aged 53, has died too, leaving jewellery designer Abigail (56) as the couple's only surviving child.

Through all of these events, Nancy has wrestled with her faith in a loving God, moving from a strict, cult-like understanding of how He wanted her to live, through promiscuity and brokenness to a realisation that she couldn't change others but had to change herself in order to love as Jesus does, and be grateful to God in every circumstance – not for the circumstance but in it.

Nancy and her twin sister grew up going to church, although their family were not Christians and their father was involved in many extra-marital affairs, causing Nancy to later write: "Feelings of loss and shame are stored in my bones."

Don and Nancy met in church youth group as 16-year-olds. They were a fun, popular couple who loved dancing and were voted "most likely to suc-



Nancy Heche

ceed" in the school popularity contest.

They married in 1956, had their first child, Susan, the following year, and then met Jesus in a personal way in 1959, becoming born-again, and getting baptised into fundamentalist Christianity. But it was only through her new friend Gerry that Nancy heard about meeting the person of Jesus. "Although I had given my life to religion, I had never surrendered to Jesus. But that's who Gerry talked about. It wasn't about religion ... this definitely required further investigation."

And so Nancy and Don joined a new church and developed a relationship with "the 'Lord', different from the more formal 'God' of my religious phase." They made great friends, read their Bibles, went door knocking and shared pot lucks. "Now I knew what abundant life was all about," Nancy enthuses of this phase of her journey.

Don, however, dropped out of med school and began his pattern of moving from job to job, unable to settle and support his family well financially.

In the wake of baby Cynthia's death, the couple's faith got side-tracked by strict doctrines that led them to leave their loving church and join a commune. Nancy says "all of this religiosity served as a bright disguise" for the lie that Don began to live, and the "don't ask, don't think about it" attitude that Nancy assumed, while trying to be the 'perfect' wife, mother and Christian.

Disillusionment eventually set in and the family left the commune and strict rules behind but with each of Don's new jobs and each household move, the lies multiplied and the couple grew further apart.

Eventually, they were living separately, and Nancy fell into sexual sin herself, sleeping around with many, often married, men and lying to her children, just as her husband had done to her.

"Please know that I'm so sorry I left a legacy of sexual sin for my children," she writes. "I deeply regret the decisions I made years ago. But my brokenness today helps me know that sometimes there are reasons for doing what we do."

After the deaths of Donald and Nathan, Nancy continued in her destructive lifestyle, and her daughter Abigail turned to drugs, exotic dancing, and prostitution to try to numb her pain. Anne, in her turn, said that she couldn't feel attracted to men because that is how her father would have felt about them.

Five years later, still attending church throughout, Nancy was finally able to confess her adulteries to her pastor and break free of her sin.

"I had chosen a lot of substitutes for God's never-failing love. No one measured up, of course. ... It took almost seven years for me to discover the difference and close that big heavy door to the darkest side of my life and run to my True Love [God]."

Regarding those living homosexually, "God has taken me on a journey from fear and anger to love and respect for them," Nancy writes. "I have been morphed, transformed during the last 20 years. I have been given a different heart ... of love and respect – not agreement, not compromise, but love and respect. That judging, condemning, disdainful attitude is over for me. God has judged me and I have been found wanting."

Nancy's experiences made her empathetic in her later career as a pastoral counsellor, in which she held a doctorate degree, and as a motivational speaker.

Despite all she has been through, Nancy writes: "Mercy is kindness in excess of what might be expected ... God treats me kindly and compassionately in spite of my sin, in excess of what I deserve. I've been given so much mercy."



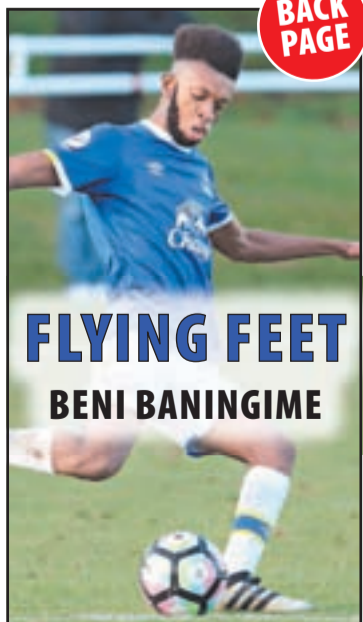
Nancy and Donald Heche with children, Susan, Nathan, Abigail and baby Anne.

Fun for Kids

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BACK PAGE



FLYING FEET
BENI BANINGIME

Is there salvation for a psychopath?



David Wood

BY IRELAND DANIEL (ABRIDGED)

Wanting to “unleash” himself from society’s norms, David Wood decided to flout rules in the biggest and worst way, by murdering someone. Not just anyone. He developed a plan to murder his own father.

“Some people don’t want to live like cattle,” David explains on his Acts 17 Apologetics YouTube channel. “Some people don’t want to follow this pattern that we are all expected to mindlessly follow. Some would rather bash a man’s head in, or shoot up a theatre, or walk down their school hallway stabbing people. Why shouldn’t they? Because it’s wrong? Because of your grandma? Or do people have intrinsic value? Human beings were (to me) nothing but machines for propagating DNA.”

From childhood, David had psychopathic tendencies. He was further influenced by a violent home life, an atheistic moral vacuum and the destructive philosophy of nihilism (the belief that life is meaningless). It was this poisonous mixture that created the monster he became.

As a boy, when his dog died, David’s

mother cried, but he felt nothing. *Crying isn’t going to change the fact that it’s dead so why are you crying?* he thought.

Years later, when his friend died, David again felt nothing. When his mother got beaten up by a boyfriend, he felt nothing.

David became a habitual rule breaker. He broke into homes, ran from police, and trampled people’s gardens. For David, morality was, at best, a “useful fiction”.

“My atheist worldview was ... you could kill 1,000 people, or you could spend your entire life helping people. It doesn’t make any real difference. You might as well just do whatever you feel like doing with the time you’ve got.”

David adopted the Nietzschean self-concept of an *ubermenscha* (superhuman), arrogantly believing he was “Humanity 2.0”.

Later diagnosed with antisocial personality disorder, David felt no remorse, no guilt, no sense of right and wrong. His determination to live “unleashed” knew no bounds.

On the night he planned to murder his father, 18-year-old David sat trying to think of one thing wrong his dad had done to him. He couldn’t think of a thing. He attacked him anyway with a ball-peen hammer. His goal was to kill him, but he failed.

“My dad had brain damage, but he survived the attack.”

David was arrested and sentenced to 10 years in prison for “malicious wounding”.

In jail, he met a Christian named Randy whom he mocked. In order to refute him, David began to read the Bible.

On the 11th day of a 42-day fast to beat Randy’s 40-day fast, David fell and hit his head. Prison staff thought he was trying to starve himself to death, and they moved him to monitored isolation.

But a funny thing happened in the lonely cell where he read the Bible voraciously.

“I hadn’t eaten for days, and I read Jesus saying, *I am the Bread of Life. He who comes to me will never go hungry*,” he remembers. “I was obsessed with liberating myself from a society that has me trapped in a cell, and I read, *If the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed*.”

The power of the Word confounded him. “It’s kind of creepy when a book talks to you,” he says.

Three ideas destabilised David’s worldview: First: intelligent design. “The basic living cell is unimaginably more complicated than some bricks stacked on a wall and they didn’t get there by themselves,” he explains.

“Secondly, it didn’t make sense that the disciples went willingly to their martyrdom to defend a lie, if self-promotion were the motive for inventing the resurrection story.

“Third, I started worrying that Jesus might actually be better than me,” he says. “I had two beliefs that just didn’t go together. On the one hand, I believed that human beings were just meaningless lumps of cells and everything was pointless. At the same time, I believed I was the best, most important person in the entire world. How is it possible to be the ‘best, most important’ ‘worthless lump of cells?’” he asked.

For there to be a best person, there had to be a standard of good established by an outside source, like God. If so, he realised, he wasn’t the best; Jesus was.

David dropped to his knees in that cell in 1996. Following a prayer found in a prison Bible study, the psychopath finally acknowledged he was a sinner who needed a Saviour.

“If You can do anything with me, You’re welcome to it,” he prayed. “When I sat up from that prayer, the entire world looked different, like everything was a different colour. For the first time in a lot of years, I didn’t want to hurt anyone.”

The lifetime brawl against God was over. For the first time, David felt peace – a restful peace that has lasted to this day.

After five years behind bars, he was released in 2000. Now 46, David has a doctorate in philosophy and runs Acts 17 Apologetics channel. He and his wife Marie have five children.

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Meditation never gave me peace

I grew up not believing in God. I had a troubled youth and I struggled with eating disorders, depression and drugs. By the time I was 21, I was a heroin addict. At 22, I realised I was going to die if I didn’t do something, so I went to the Buttery for seven months.

It’s a drug rehab centre near Byron Bay. While I was there, they introduced the 12-step Narcotics Anonymous program. Basically you admit you’re insane and that you do terrible things. You seek a higher power because you realise you can’t fix yourself.

It was the mid 80’s in Byron Bay – a very New Age, hippie culture – so, initially, my search for a higher power began there. I had a deep-seated prejudice against Christianity. I came from a left-leaning, intellectual, atheistic background and saw Christians as the cause of, or complicit, in the problems in the world – as hypocrites and racists.

I remember that a Christian at the Buttery tried to tell me about Jesus dying on the cross for our sins, and it all seemed like mumbo jumbo – a weird ritual. Buddhism seemed way cooler.

So I pursued meditation and tried to ‘find’ myself. I joined political movements, including a stint with communists in the Philippines. But over time, I began to see that political movements didn’t seem to change things. And truthfully, I couldn’t even change myself. By then, I’d been meditating for four years and hadn’t felt a moment’s peace.

So I played my last card. I ran away. Perhaps travel could fill the hole inside me. I went to China to see if communism really did work, and I travelled to the area near the Li River. One day, I was sitting on a mountain peak, overlooking the most beautiful natural vista... and I realised I felt dead inside.

This really worried me, so I decided to go to an Ashram in India. I travelled to Shanghai and found a boat leaving for Hong Kong. I suddenly had a really strong feeling that I needed to be on that boat. I got the last cabin. But when I got inside, there was someone else sitting in my cabin. Her name was Laura. She was an underground missionary to China.

I asked her why she was a missionary. She said that God had put His love in her heart for the Chinese people. I stared at her and then asked, “Do you feel that God is with you all the time?”

She thought for a moment, and then replied, “Yes.”

I found myself crying. I realised, in that moment, that she had what I wanted. I asked her what all this business about Jesus dying on the cross was, and she asked me,

“What do you think is the worst thing people could do to each other?” “Paedophilia.”

“And do you think paedophiles should be punished?”

I replied that I did, and she then explained that Jesus died as a way of dealing with all the deep injustices and wrongs in the world. It was God’s perfect combination of justice and mercy... the only way that the world could be made right.

For the first time, it made logical sense to me. She lent me the Gospel of John. I read it that night but it seemed like dry bones to me, so I gave it back to her. Then, on the last night on the boat, I stood on the deck by myself. I was in turmoil. Jesus’ death made sense to me, but I just couldn’t muster up the faith to believe in God. So I said, “Look Jesus, I don’t believe in you, but if you do exist, please reveal yourself to me.”

I suddenly felt at peace. The next day I went looking for a Bible and read it in my rat-infested backpackers in Hong Kong that night. I stopped at John 13. “*A new command I give you: love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another.*” (v.34)

It was at that moment that God revealed himself to me as the God of love. It was a deep inward experience. I was completely overwhelmed by his presence and love. It was as if I’d come home. It was absolutely beautiful.

It’s now been 31 years since that night in Hong Kong. The next day I met up with Laura again and she led me in a prayer where I asked Jesus into my life. In the last 31 years, God has completely changed my life. I’m no longer an addict. I went from being a high school drop-out to getting a PhD. I am learning, more and more, how to be free in Christ and how to delight in him. It just gets better all the time.

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Kristi’s story is part of Eternity’s Faith Stories series, compiled by Naomi Reed.



Kristi

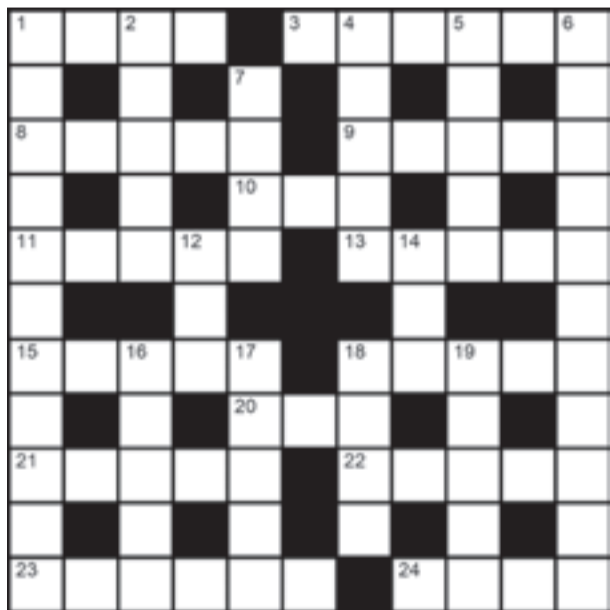
Coffee Break CROSSWORD & SUDOKU

ACROSS

1. Adorable
3. Disease due to lack of vitamin C
8. Lower opposite
9. Message in Outlook
10. In biology, eggs
11. Irritating to skin
13. Saying on a coat of arms
15. All worked up
18. Group values
20. To trouble, annoy
21. Spitting ---, exact likeness
22. Ice house
23. Fourscore and 10
24. Widely shared online image

DOWN

1. Christ’s execution
2. Theme or issue
4. Rich milk part
5. Baked meat

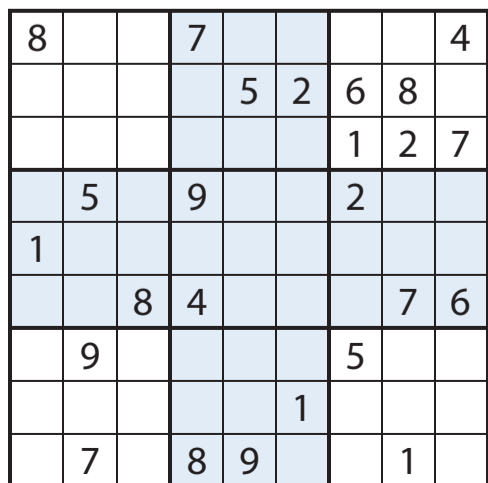


6. Oldest U.S. national park
7. Helen of ___
12. Head cover
14. Month X
16. From the top!
17. Occurrence, a happening
18. Off-ramp
19. Cut evenly in two

SOLUTIONS PAGE 11



“Now tell me about your good idea.”



Finding a faith of love, not just rules



BY HEDIEH MIRAHMADI

Hedieh Mirahmadi's secular family left Iran to live the American dream. In law school, Hedieh became a Muslim Sufi, because she wanted to find God and escape some destructive habits.

"I was a devout, practicing Muslim for over 20 years. My entire professional career both inside the U.S. government and in the private sector was built around my faith and how to defeat Islamic terrorism. I maintained a rigorous prayer schedule, kept the strict Islamic dress code, and fasted regularly. But no matter what I did, I never felt that my sins were forgiven or that I would go to Heaven," she shares on her website Resurrect Ministry.

Hedieh visited 37 countries in the course of her studies and eventually worked for five US administrations in their efforts to guard against terrorism and identify radicalised individuals.

However, her relationship with Islam unravelled when, while working for the FBI, she decided to stop wearing a head covering and was told by Islamic scholars that she would hang by her hair in hellfire for it. Initially it wasn't about leaving Islam for anything else, but simply leaving Islam.

Hedieh then went through a series of professional and personal turmoils and describes herself as a "mess" during this time, and without a relationship with God, who had been her anchor for 25 years. She was crying and praying to a deity she no longer felt she knew.

Then, while flipping through social media, Hedieh started listening to a pastor on YouTube whose words were answering her questions and helping her to solve all her problems. Initially she thought Jesus, the prophet taught about in Islam, was helping her, which was fine. Then she started to get really confused about who God was as more conflicts arose between Islamic teaching and what she was learning from the Christian pastor.

One day she bowed down in the Islamic prayer position and asked God to reveal Himself to her and, she explains on the Andy Falco Show: "I heard the audible voice of Jesus Christ say, 'Hedieh, it's me.'" That was the defining moment for her in her conversion to Christianity.

Hedieh feels her mission is to let Muslim people know that they don't have to wonder about salvation anymore or guess whether God loves them, and they don't have to work to be right with Him. Salvation is a free gift of God, available through faith in Jesus Christ.

She wrote in *The Christian Post*:

I believe the real power of Christianity lies in the reality of the Trinity – God the Loving Father, His only begotten Son Jesus Christ,



Hedieh Mirahmadi in her former days.

and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit.

God is Love. In over 20 years of being a devout Muslim, I never heard God referred to as being love or commanding us to love others. Islam teaches that God is merciful and kind, but the word love is never mentioned. A Muslim cannot rely on him to console them in times of trouble, and God is mainly there to judge people. Quite frankly, it was incredibly depressing since I could never maintain the countless set of rules and laws that demanded strict obedience.

Compare that to the Bible, where God describes Himself as not just loving but love's very definition.

"And so we know and rely on the love God has for us. God is love. Whoever lives in love, lives in God, and God in them." (1 John 4:16)

Being loved unconditionally and learning to love others the same way has brought me extraordinary joy.

Jesus is God in the form of flesh. In Islam, you never really know if your good deeds are enough to enter God's Heaven. On the Day of Judgement, God will decide if you were "good enough" and that terrified me. It was very unsettling to live every day, wondering whether I would spend eternity in hellfire.

Then I learned in the Bible that God would guarantee a place in His eternal Heaven if I put my trust in Christ as God in the flesh. I needed to accept that Jesus was God wrapped in flesh, who came to Earth and died on the cross, then rose again from the grave to pay for my sins.

The Divinity of Jesus is the most significant point of contention between Islam and Christianity.

Receiving the Holy Spirit makes Christianity so different from any other religion. In Islam, it says God is closer to you than the veins on your neck, but he will not speak directly to you. In fact, it claims it is not befitting of God to do so. There is no intermediary between the Muslim and God, but prayer is a one-way communication. As a Muslim, I had no way of knowing whether He ever heard me or even accepted my prayers and pleas of sorrow for my sin.

Conversely, when we accept Christ as our Lord and Saviour, God dwells within the believer in the form of the Holy Spirit who speaks directly to us, continually.

Learning and experiencing the Holy Spirit's guidance within me, is how I know that I am in a relationship with the one TRUE God.

As a Christian, Hedieh dedicates herself full-time to Resurrect Ministry, an online resource that harnesses the power of the Internet to make salvation through Christ available to people of all nations, and to her daily podcast LivingFearlessDevotional.com.

Knight of wonder



Sir Cliff Richard poses backstage after signing copies of his new DVD '60th Anniversary Concert' at HMV Manchester in November 2018 in Manchester, England. (Photo by Shirlaine Forrest/WireImage)

Sir Cliff Richard burst onto the music scene with *Move It* in 1958, after which he was referred to as Britain's answer to Elvis Presley. Born Harry Webb, he changed his name as it was suggested that "Cliff" referred to "cliff face", which suggested "rock". And, alongside his backing group, The Shadows, he began to quickly dominate the rock'n'roll scene.

But despite his immediate success, Sir Cliff says he experienced a sense of "incompleteness".

In his book *Mine to Share*, which was published in 1984, he writes, "The girls screamed, hits came regularly, accountants were employed to cope with the income, but, despite all that, it didn't add up to satisfaction. When I went home and took off the public 'mask', which I guess we all wear some of the time, I still had to live with the real me. And, although I don't suppose I was any worse – any better come to that – than the next bloke, I knew that success, fans and money were no compensation for being restless deep within myself."

He says it took him a couple of years to discover the reason for this restlessness – sin.

"It's a condition we inherit, it spoils our life and our relationships and, most disastrous of all, it separates us from God," he writes.

"There's no purpose in comparing our sin with someone else's and reckoning we're 'not so bad', because in God's sight there are no degrees... The Apostle Paul tells us that *'all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God'* (Romans 3:23)."

He goes on to say the problem is that our selfishness and disobedience cannot mix with God's perfection.

"Like light and darkness, the two can't mix. Quite separate and totally irreconcilable, except for one amazing, marvelous fact – God loves me and wants me in His family. Again, it took a long while before the truth dawned, and literally for years I kept up a barrage of questions and argument. Looking back, I'm grateful that there were those around me who could not only answer, but who were able to put God's love into practice."

He refers to John 3:16, which says, *"For 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."*

"This was God's way of loving us without excusing us," he explains. "His law had been broken and it was impossible for God to turn a blind eye but, instead of imposing a penalty on us law-

breakers, Jesus died, *'the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God'* (1 Peter 3:18). That's why the cross is so central to the Christian faith."

Sir Cliff says he knew his life wasn't right and he wanted to change.

"I [laid] on my bed one night in the mid-sixties and prayed very simply that Jesus would come into the life of Cliff Richard and save it and rule over it."

He says following that, "there were no dramas, no flashing lights or booming voices – just a quiet sense of peace and hint of excitement."

In 1966 Sir Cliff publicly declared his faith in Jesus Christ during a Billy Graham rally. Many of his fans worried this meant the end of his career as a pop star. There was speculation he would change careers and become involved in religious work, but he continued his music and film career, while being outspoken about his faith.

Sir Cliff says the peace and excitement he felt as a new Christian has only deepened over the years.

"Being a Christian isn't obeying a code of ethics, although discipline and obedience are certainly involved," Sir Cliff explains. "It isn't dependent upon our resources of will power and it's certainly nothing to do with notching up so many church attendances. Christianity is a

commitment to Jesus; it's about knowing Him as a living, personal and intimate friend and about serving Him as our Lord and God."

But that commitment doesn't guarantee an easy life, free of problems and trials.

"Christian commitment always had been and still is costly," he shares. But his assurance to those who do take that step into a relationship with Jesus is that, "now there are two of you – a marvelous, potential-loaded partnership of you and Jesus. And, while He won't steer you around life's problems, He'll certainly guide and hold you through them."

Now 81 years old, Sir Cliff's career has spanned 60 years and he has released 47 studio albums as well as a range of other live albums, soundtracks and compilation albums. Sir Cliff is the second highest selling British male solo artist in the world (after Sir Elton John). He also has 12 film credits to his name, as well as a number of roles in television and theatre.

In 1980 Sir Cliff was awarded Officer of the Order of the British Empire by Queen Elizabeth II for his services to music and charity. He was also the first rock star to be appointed a Knight Bachelor.

In 2020 he released a new autobiography called *The Dreamer*. •

WHEN I ... TOOK OFF THE PUBLIC 'MASK', ... I STILL HAD TO LIVE WITH THE REAL ME.



HOPE AFTER YEARS OF DEPRESSION



After years of struggling with depression, Steph Petrou now feels like a brand new person with hope like she has never experienced before.

Though born Jewish, the 33-year-old north Londoner had been christened as a baby in a Greek Orthodox church (her family are from Cyprus), but had no religious background. “We never went to church – my mum is agnostic and my dad’s an adamant atheist.

“Then, back in 2013, a friend, in his twenties, nearly died. He was attacked and beaten very badly with a scaffolding pole, and we were told it was unlikely he would survive. So I looked up to the sky and said my first prayer, asking that God would allow him to live.

“And He did (thank You Jesus) though I didn’t actually see it as answered prayer at the time. I did, however, think it pretty rude of me not to acknowledge a God whom I seemed to hope was there for me when I was desperate.

“So I decided to look into it by reading the Jewish, Christian and Islamic texts to figure out what I believed. I must say I only got part-way through the Old Testament (far too many lists of names for me) and halfway through the Quran (though it became very clear to me that it wasn’t the same god the Old and New Testaments talked about), but came to the conclusion that I liked Jesus, who I thought was pretty cool. But that was it.

“It wasn’t until a few months later, when I experienced a particularly bad episode of depression that I woke up one day and decided I wanted to go to church. I was living with my boyfriend at the time, who had grown up in a Catholic church, and so we went along to that church. We arrived too late for mass, but I found myself sitting in front of a huge statue sobbing – and it was at that point I knew I needed Jesus.

“I started going to different churches to see what they were like. At one, I sat in the back row for the evening service so I could make a quick exit as soon as it ended. But a lovely lady called Catherine approached me. She could see I was overwhelmed and invited me for coffee the following week, when she explained the gospel to me and I said a prayer asking Jesus to come into my life (in the middle of a busy coffee shop)!

“I didn’t really understand what that meant at the time, but I felt like I was ready, and as Catherine began to disciple (mentor) me in the weeks that followed, the Lord helped me to understand in greater depth what that decision meant.

“I also found out that Catherine and a small group from the church had been reaching out in the local area and had been led to pray particularly for my street, which they had visited and leafletted, prompting me to visit that particular church.

“The Lord has been so kind and faithful. I felt him changing me in small ways like not wanting to tell ‘white lies’ or swear, and later He was so kind in breaking my addiction to nicotine (I had smoked since I was 16).

“I honestly feel like a completely new creation. He has given me an amazing sense of hope that I’d never experienced before. I’d struggled with depression for many years, also since I was 16, and the hope that Jesus gave me was like nothing I’d ever experienced before.”

“[My church] just loved and encouraged me the whole time.

“God has been so good and provided me with a community of believers who have been so hospitable and Christ-like in the way they have welcomed and encouraged me in my faith.

“For the past two years, I have lived in Manchester where I am also part of another wonderful church, where I feel so at home. I’m currently working for a university as a Student Well-being Officer, where my role involves supporting disabled students and those struggling with their mental health.

“But I am seriously considering being a missionary, perhaps in South America, so I can share the beauty and wonder of the Lord Jesus who has made such a difference to my life. And He can do the same for you too!”

The Bible says: “...If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!” (2 Corinthians 5:17)

Serving the least



BY MARK ELLIS (ABRIDGED)

Don Foster once owned the largest appraisal company in Las Vegas. In 2000, he felt God’s leading to sell everything, give away his worldly goods to the poor, and follow Him.

As a teenager, Don was addicted to drugs and alcohol and found himself on the verge of committing suicide. On his knees, he made a promise: If he saw someone step in front of a bus, he would push that person out of the way and take their place. That’s when he heard a voice say, “You don’t have to die for anyone. I died for everyone.” It was Don’s first encounter with Jesus, and it completely transformed his life.

Soon after, Don felt that God was calling him to missions, though it would be 15 years before he would obey. By then a successful businessman, he was listening one Sunday morning to a sermon on television. It was Dr. Charles Stanley who explained that many get called to the mission field, but they marry, have kids, take on a mortgage, and never go. Don wrestled with this but finally began the painful process of surrender.

Over the next seven years, he sold everything he owned, including his business. The last thing he gave up was his memory foam mattress.

Three years later, in 2007, he found himself serving in Mozambique. While doing significant work to reach out to some of the poorest people in the world, the Lord challenged Don to “go lower still”.

That led him to the Pygmies of the eastern Democratic Republic of Congo, a war zone in 2011, at the time he moved there.

“Jesus said, ‘Whatever you have done to the least of these My brethren you have done to Me.’ The Greek word for ‘least’ is literally ‘shortest,’” Don explains on Facebook.

Pygmies are the shortest people on earth, with Mbuti Pygmies averaging four and a half feet tall. Their average annual income is approximately \$90; their average life expectancy is 24 years old; and their median IQ is 54. Their literacy rate is only 5%.

“The short and difficult lives of Pygmies are more often ended by health complications due to malnutrition/anaemia, parasites, malaria, respiratory infections, typhoid and other diseases easily preventable with clean water, food, sanita-

tion and simple medicines,” Don explains.

They have often faced discrimination from neighbouring tribal groups. “Some of the Bantu consider the pygmies are animals. They killed and ate pygmies and sold their meat in the marketplaces.”

Don met his Russian wife, Jenya, in Mozambique in 2010 and they married in 2013. Together, they care directly for 34 Mbuti Pygmy children and indirectly for many more.

They also pay school fees for almost 1000 Pygmy children in remote villages, preach in the prisons and feed prisoners, and share the gospel [good news of Jesus] using solar-powered audio Bibles.

They are directors of a ministry called Love Your Neighbour, Africa. The couple ministers in Beni, located in north eastern DR Congo, on the edge of the Ituri Forest.

The Mbuti Pygmies lived in the rainforest for at least a thousand years, but are among those displaced by rebels, logging/deforestation, agriculture, and development.

As their traditional food sources disappeared, they were relegated to eat rats, frogs and small fish found in the mud.

In 2014 and 2016 over 500 people died in a series of attacks on Beni and its surrounding area that have been attributed to Ugandan Islamist rebels.

The area has also suffered over 200 cases of Ebola and is not far from the epicentre of the 2018–19 Kivu Ebola outbreak.

“Many Mbuti Pygmies have never been to school and their children also have little hope of even a few years of education. Many more thousands



Don and Jenya Foster.

Top: The Fosters with members of the Mbuti Pygmy tribe they serve in the DRC.

would attend school if only they had a uniform and school fees (\$30 per year),” Don says.

The traditional Mbuti Pygmy hut has a dirt floor and is constructed in a day or two by the women with banana leaves and palm fronds over thin sticks rising to about five feet tall. “These huts do not protect from rain and cold, much less insects (e.g. mosquitoes) and animals carrying disease (e.g. malaria).”

“A big part of our ministry is to take care of sick pygmies,” Don says. “They can’t stand to stay in a hospital, because of discrimination. Most can’t count from one to 10, so they can’t take pills correctly.”

About a year after Don and Jenya married, rebels attacked a neighbouring village and killed 20 people. However, the couple still believe the safest place to be is at the centre of God’s will.

“I wouldn’t want to be anywhere else just because it’s safe,” Don says. “I think that would be dying.”

“I want the spiritual DNA of Jesus Christ,” Don declares, and serving the poorest of the poor is definitely a reflection of His Lord’s self-sacrificing attitude.

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



Don with an adult pygmy and two children between two of the traditional banana leaf homes of the pygmies.

YOUTH TRUTH

Louie rides the highs and lows

BY MARK ELLIS (ABRIDGED)

Louie Cortese started racing motocross when he was only three. After a season of great financial blessing for his family, it was all wiped away in the Great Recession, and they were forced to re-examine the things they held dear.

Louie's family lived in Coral Springs, Florida when he started racing. After riding at one of the local tracks for a while, his parents built their own track. They bought 20 acres in Groveland, Florida, where they created a supercross and motocross track, along with a large home and a warehouse to hold all their possessions.

"I was blessed with the opportunity to be home-schooled and spent pretty much every single day with my dad. We were going to the track and riding at home every day," Louie told God Reports.

Louie's father had started an Italian restaurant and the family began to attend a

church in the same complex.

"That's when I was first introduced to the stories of the Bible," he recalls.

Due to the success of the restaurant, his family was wealthy.

"We had every worldly toy that you could ever think of. When I was three years old, my dad put me on a dirt bike. And he ended up having this bright idea that we should pursue motocross."

In 2008 the economy crashed and it had a devastating impact on many businesses – especially restaurants.

"My family lost everything. In one year's time, we lost our home; we lost our business. My dad was diagnosed with cancer; we lost my grandfather to leukaemia. And I was in the hospital with one of the worst injuries of my entire motocross career... I felt a lot of pressure on myself. I thought if I rode a bit better, and won that race, maybe this wouldn't have happened... There was a tormenting, condemning voice that came to me in the middle



Motocross racer Louie Cortese. INSET: Louie in action.



of the night, saying: 'It's all your fault. You should end your life right now.'

Louie cried in his room when he heard his parents argue.

"I watched my family crumble."

In Louie's accident, he broke every rib on one side and ruptured his spleen. A splenectomy (removal of the spleen) was advised, which could cause a diminished immune response, along with an increased probability for pneumonia and heart disease.

On the night before the surgery, his mother and a friend prayed fervently for healing.

The next morning the surgeon shocked them when he said it appeared as if the spleen had mysteriously been sewed back together. There was no bleeding, and the surgery would not be necessary. Louie knew it was a miracle!

In the midst of the financial hardship, an unexpected outcome emerged. Forced to down-size their home, their familial bonds deepened.

"We all got really close together," he recounts. "And I watched my parents get happier and their marriage improved."

The family continued to pursue their interest in motocross.

"We called ourselves Christians, but we were never riding motocross for the Lord. God wasn't the centre of that. But God is so faithful that He taught us so much through that time."

After graduating from high school, Louie began working to help support his family, but he didn't really like the job.

One day "I looked at my life and I just broke down. I said, 'God, if you're even real, I don't know, I don't under-

stand these spiritual things, I pray that you just open the door for my life."

The next day, he got an email from Monster Energy. It was a contract to join their Athlete Program.

God had answered his prayer so quickly! To Louie, it was the biggest deal in the world – and it came after he opened his life to God.

"That was the first time I stepped out and said, 'Lord, I'm desperate, I'm at rock bottom, I don't know if you're there, but I need to know that You are.'"

After surrendering his heart to Jesus Christ, receiving new life in Christ – and a new contract – Louie wanted to tell the world about his newfound faith.

"I put God first on my Instagram. I wanted people to know I'm a Christian now, because God has revealed Himself to me."

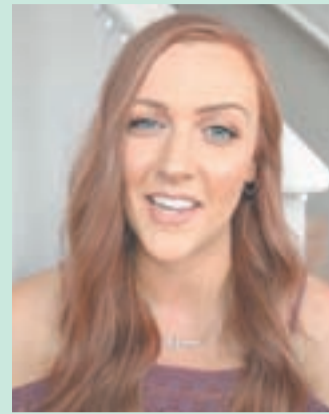
Two weeks later, Stunt Dudes invited Louie to join them.

"They go all over the world to spread the gospel by doing Christian BMX shows. I am so grateful and so blessed that my life changed, just like a light switch – immediate – from that time I recognised the Lord. The Lord just grabbed a hold of me and said, 'This is what you're going to do. And this is how you're going to do it.' When I tell about my faith, I say I'm a storyteller for Christ. My life story is to match the testimony of Jesus and I get the opportunity to use what God has done in my life as a tool to share the gospel."

The article first appeared at godreports.com and is used with kind permission

My last resort was my lifeline

After a rough breakup rocked Kendra Christine to her core, she sat in her car and contemplated her next move. She could run away or she could take her own life. Somehow she found her way home that night and discovered she had a third option.



Kendra Christine

Sharing her story on her YouTube channel, Kendra said it was her senior year of high school and had been in a relationship with her boyfriend for six months before they broke up. She was devastated.

"When I got out of that relationship I didn't feel like I was the same person," Kendra remembers. "I didn't know who I was. I didn't have friends anymore I wasn't close with my family anymore. I was just very confused. I was very lost."

She and her ex-boyfriend tried to remain friends but Kendra admits they were both immature. After a horrible argument, Kendra says she started to spiral into depression. She had been out with some friends and was on her way home when she started thinking about running away or even ending her life. "I remember thinking that no one would miss me," Kendra admits.

One day she went for a walk in the woods opposite her house. "I found this picnic bench and I just sat there and I was looking around at the trees," she recalls. "I was just hurting so much. I remember praying, 'God if You are real, I need You.'"

Kendra had grown up going to church every Sunday and had made a commitment of her life to Jesus as a seven-year-old on a Bible camp when she was invited to 'accept Jesus into her heart'. "That was a big phrase back then – people would share that the Gospel was just 'accepting Jesus into your heart'. So I 'accepted Jesus into my heart', I got to go up on stage, I got to get a free Bible and everybody was so happy and clapped for you. And I did the same thing the next year. I clearly didn't understand what that meant, but I got another free Bible and I got to go up on stage again."

Kendra said there was no change in her life and in high school she was no different to any other teenager.

"I was doing a lot of things that the other kids did," she admits. "I said I was a Christian. I still did all the 'church things'. I looked like a Christian, but there was no change on the inside."

So when she hit rock bottom after her relationship ended, her faith came under trial.

"I remember [saying], 'God, I have tried everything else. And all that's left is You. I have tried everything to bring me happiness and joy. Now I'm going to try You because if You don't work, then this life is not worth living.' God was my last resort. That shows where I was at. I was not saved."

Kendra cried out to God and put her life in His hands. She prayed for His guidance and for Him to bring Christian friends into her life.

"That summer was probably one of the best summers of my life. I had friends that loved Jesus and loved to talk about Jesus. I actually wanted to read my Bible. For the first time I felt joy. And as my relationship with God grew, I just started to understand more and more of what I had always heard in church. None of it actually made sense until I was saved. And then it was like a light bulb went off and like the gospel (good news of Jesus) finally made sense and sin finally made sense. That's why I was so down and depressed, because I was full of sin and I was living for sin. And I was rejecting the gospel and still calling myself a Christian. I learned what God did for me – that God went to the cross in human flesh. Jesus went to the cross because of me and because of my sin and He took the punishment that I deserved. He willingly went because He loved me."

As Kendra began to understand these truths, her love for God grew. "God truly saved me from the pit, the darkest pit I could have been in," she attests. "He didn't leave me there, He met me there... My life is so different [now]. My strength comes from the Lord, my joy comes from the Lord and I truly feel like God gave me a new heart, with new desires. Now I hate my sin and I love my Saviour. I'm a totally different person. I am a new creation, because that's what happens when you've been born again."

FOR THE FIRST TIME I FELT JOY



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YOUTH TRUTH

I WAS A TEEN WITCH

When Sarah Anne Sumpolec was a teenager, her father handed her an old green book and explained it was part of her ancestral history. It was a book about witchcraft and Sarah excitedly read and learned as much as she could.

“Pursuing witchcraft became this bond with my dad that I had never had before,” she explains in a video on her YouTube channel.

As she continued deeper into her witchcraft journey, Sarah says things began to get “very dark”.

“My dad got involved in an affair and began using drugs,” she recalls. “My interactions with him were when he was high and it became a very scary time with him. At the same time things took a darker turn with the witchcraft as well. I started seeing things that were scarier and I kept trying to fix things with my dad through witchcraft to bring peace back to my house [but] nothing was working.”

One night, while her dad was high on drugs, he took a metal rod and destroyed his bathroom while hallucinating that things were coming out of the walls.

“My mum took my younger sister to be somewhere safe but left me there with my dad. He had loaded guns with him because he was afraid of these intruders that he was hallucinating. He came into the room and he pointed a shotgun at my head because he didn’t know who I was and it was at that moment that the relationship with my dad that I had built [was] lost. I didn’t trust him. I was scared of him.”

Sarah delved deeper into the New Age, searching for hope and peace.

“I collected crystals, conducted séances, and built an altar in my room to worship the god and goddess I had chosen. I read incantations, used tarot, cast spells and took on a brand new identity. I was a witch, and proud of it,” Sarah writes in an article for CBN.

But life only got darker for Sarah. “I heard a voice tell me... ‘To change your life you have to die.’ I definitely believed that and felt like suicide was the answer and that I needed to die.”

Sarah attempted to take her life, but was unsuccessful.

“I think that failure was as hard on me as everything else – I couldn’t even do that right,” she shares.

But Sarah did manage to find a scrap of hope. She heard someone talking about going away to college and that everything would be new and different.

“I held onto that little morsel of hope that maybe things will change when I get to college.”

She was right. When Sarah arrived at college, she considered herself a witch and believed it to be a core of who she was. But her two roommates couldn’t



Sarah Anne Sumpolec pursued witchcraft from an early age.

be more different – they were Christians.

“They were like aliens to me!” Sarah recalls. “They actually owned Bibles and read them.”

Her roommates attended InterVarsity (a Christian campus ministry) Bible studies and invited Sarah to join them.

“I was going off to find parties and they were like, ‘Come to Bible study with us.’ I was like, ‘I don’t think so.’”

But Sarah couldn’t deny her roommates had a peace she had never experienced.

“I was intrigued by their faith and began to eavesdrop on their Bible studies,” she admits. “And it wasn’t long before I accepted their weekly invitation to the Friday night InterVarsity meeting.”

Thirty years on, Sarah can easily recall the message she heard that night, which was about altars and worship. As a witch, she was very familiar with altars but this was different.

“I suddenly realised this is the truth that I’ve been looking for all these years, because at the core I really did want to know the truth and I thought I had found it. Suddenly that light came on and I realised that I had been looking in the wrong

direction and that truth was finally illuminated.” That night, Sarah surrendered her life to Jesus.

“I went out and I kneeled in this big open space and I said to God, ‘If You really love me and all of that is really true, then I’ll be Yours.’”

That night was the start of a new life for Sarah.

“Over those years of college I learned what it was to really follow Christ. I had no support

from my family – my mum and dad were actually pretty angry about my choices and my mum said terrible things to me and my dad threatened to disown me.”

Sarah joined a Christian home fellowship group that she credits with helping her learn more about God and Christianity.

“Jesus does take us as we are – messy and broken – but we are not supposed to stay messy and broken... God wants to heal us and transform us,” Sarah explains.

“He doesn’t want to just come in and redecorate and make things prettier on the outside. He wants to transform us – it’s a complete remodel. Thankfully He doesn’t do it all at one time, He does it as we can handle it and as we move towards Him. That fellowship group got me on that journey of what that looks like and that journey continues 30 years later... God can transform lives. He can take anything no matter how

dark your world was or is, He’s the answer every time.”

Sarah is now married with three daughters and lives in Virginia. She writes fiction and non-fiction books for teens and blogs at www.sarahan-sumpolec.com.

One of Sarah’s fiction books, *Chasing the Spotlight*.



Rehab client now CEO

BY RYAN ZEPEDA



Josh Torbich

Growing up, excess weight made Josh Torbich self-conscious. When friends introduced him to alcohol at age 13, the euphoria blanked out his feelings of inadequacy and a poor self-image.

“That inferiority complex seemed to slip away. I started to feel confident,” Josh says on a 700 Club video.

“I set myself up to see the drink as the solution to fix the way that I felt. Man, it was like the most immediate

and effective solution that I ever had seen to fix that feeling that I had... My life circled around, ‘where’s the party at?’ I started to become the go-to guy for alcohol and I felt like that was somebody that everyone was attracted to, that could quickly move in and out of popularity circles.”

Because he was big, he could buy alcohol with a fake ID. But he was living a double life. His parents were Christians who took him to church. In his junior year of high school, the liquor wasn’t enough. Josh turned to painkillers, and their potency gave him an additional boost of self-confidence.

Of course, the gateway substance led to even more: during his senior year, he had become a full-blown heroin addict.

“The first time that I shot up heroin and the rush came over me, it was like going back to when I was 13 years old,” Josh says. “It was new, it was exciting, and it was something that once again made me feel great.”

After high school, while his friends went to jobs and college, Josh stayed at home with his parents and abused drugs.

“I felt so miserable. I felt so worthless,” he admits. “I remember sitting there looking at my life and what it had become, and that thought and that feeling came over me that said, ‘This is the way your life is. This is the way that your life is gonna be.’”

Josh got two DUIs and had one overdose incident. “I hadn’t accomplished anything or done anything with meaning or purpose and had just become okay with being a loser,” he admits. When he turned 23, Josh’s parents

orchestrated an intervention and got him to enrol in the Brunswick Christian Rehab center.

At first, the rules seemed overbearing. “How am I ever going to have any fun in here?” he asked himself on the first day.

But the required church attendance, coupled with the therapy sessions, did soften his heart, and one Sunday, Josh went up to the altar to receive Jesus as his Saviour and Lord.

“Slowly my perspective started to shift that maybe there is a place out there for me to where I can find something that has purpose and meaning, something that I would be able to wrap my arms around,” he recalls. “And maybe Jesus is the way to get to that.”

Today, Josh is CEO of the same rehab program, and under his leadership, the program has grown and prospered. “I believe that He didn’t want me to go through all of those things that I went through. But since I did, and I turned my life over to Him, He’s perfectly capable of using every single thing that I went through and that happened to me for His purpose,” Josh says.

“I don’t just get the grace of Jesus Christ in my life, I don’t just get the forgiveness. I get the abundant life that He’s promised to give to me today. Today you can find purpose, and you can find that purpose through the process of surrendering to Christ.”

Adopted as you are, as His child

BY GREG LAURIE

GROWING up, I didn’t know my biological father. But my mother married a man named Oscar Laurie, who adopted me formally. He treated me as a father should treat a son. He disciplined me when I went astray. He did the best that he could in helping me to be a good boy. But tragically my mom left him, and I didn’t see him for the rest of my childhood.

However, I did have the privilege of reconnecting with him as a young adult, after I became a Christian and a pastor. I also had the privilege of leading him to the Lord.

Just as Oscar Laurie adopted me,

God has adopted you, if you have put your faith in Christ. The Bible says, “For all who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God” (Romans 8:14 NLT).

Are you a child of God? That comes through believing in Jesus Christ. He can pardon you of every sin you have ever committed. Maybe you’re thinking, “I’ve messed up and made mistakes. I have sinned.”

You don’t have to be controlled by your past. And you don’t have to be crippled by it, either. You can put it behind you. You can become a new person in Jesus Christ.

This is your moment to come into a relationship with the God who loves you. He loves you so much that He

sent His only Son Jesus Christ to come to this earth, die on the cross for your sin, and rise from the dead. Now He stands at the door of your life and knocks. And if you hear His voice and open the door, He will come in.

Are you worn out and exhausted? Are you filled with sadness and depression? There is hope. But this hope is not in religion or in rules and regulations. It is hope in Jesus Christ coming to live inside of you.

“The first step to being happy is being grateful, so focus on counting your blessings, not your burdens. Regularly writing down all you are grateful for doesn’t only make you feel good, it can improve overall well-being.”
– Dr Michael Mol

Why did God create cancer? - He didn't!

In an article by Jonathan Sarfati for creation.com, Philip Bell says he remembers first learning about evolution in school when he was about 10 — but he didn't believe it at all.

Philip grew up in a Christian home, the son of a minister, and can't recall a time he didn't believe in God. His beliefs in creation continued as he entered high school.

"In fact, I endured the mocking of my peers in the dormitory of my boarding school and defended a literal Adam and Eve when I was around 15," he recalls.

But Philip was missing something. He didn't have any apologetic arguments to back up what he believed. When he was studying advanced level biology (for which he was top student of his year), a respected teacher, who passed on to Philip her love for the subject, also taught the evolutionary parts of the syllabus:

"I particularly remember being impacted by the evidence of comparative anatomy and the pentadactyl limb: the similarity of the bones of the five digits and limb in different animals. I readily swallowed the homology idea that the human arm, dog leg, bat wing, and dolphin flipper had all sprung from a common ancestral animal. I was a theistic evolutionist (believer that God created using evolution) of sorts by the age of 18."

When Philip began studying biology and geology at the University of Wales (Swansea), he was "a true believer in evolution", albeit with God as the 'overseer' of the process.

Philip's faith had struggled at times as a teenager, but something changed for him during his first year of university.

"I gained a real assurance that, in dying on the cross, Christ had paid for my sins in full and that my salvation was solely due to the grace (undeserved love) of God. From then on, I knew that any good I might accomplish, far from making me right with God, was simply my reasonable and grateful response to my merciful Saviour."

But as he learnt more about the advanced science he was studying, holes started to form in Philip's belief system.

"Particularly my lectures on the supposed origin of life (chemical evolution), the evolution of flight in insects, and the evolution of cetaceans (whales, porpoises, and dolphins). The lecturers confidently affirmed these things as matters of factual history, but the sheer paucity of actual evidence shocked me. Cracks in my worldview rapidly began opening up and spreading."

When he read the creation account in Genesis, Philip was struck with the knowledge that it had been written as factual history.



Philip Bell (inset) and with his family on holiday.

"I didn't know of the existence of a single creationist book, video or organisation — and there was no World Wide Web at that time to consult for easy answers," Philip explains. "But of one thing I was sure, the account in Genesis and the account of evolution could not both be right. I had reached a genuine crunch point as far as my faith was concerned; a sort of spiritual crisis. But to cut a long story short, God graciously enabled me to step out in faith that His Word was true history in Genesis. And far from this crippling my interest in the natural sciences, my fascination for God's world increased all the more."

Although creationists have a bad rap within the scientific community, Philip worked for nine years making discoveries in the fight against cancer and publishing many papers in secular medical journals — as an avid creationist.

People have questioned why God created cancer — but Philip retorts that He didn't!

"Instead, the Bible is emphatic that everything He made was physically and morally perfect. That is what Genesis 1:31 is telling us loud and clear. But after Adam's sin in Genesis 3, God pronounced judgement on man and the whole creation (Romans 8:19–23). Of course, cancer and its ill effects are just one aspect of the much bigger issues of 'the problem of evil' and the prevalence of death, presenting Christians with some of their biggest challenges to faith."

This could not be the view of theistic evolutionists (who believe God worked through evolution), however.

"If, as theistic evolutionists insist, this world evolved, God is wholly responsible for the genetic defects that lead to the dreadful misery associated with cancer — in which case, the best we can say in His favour is that He is indifferent to suffering, or worse still, a cruel ogre. Because he would effectively have created cancer, even if over millions of years."

"That's why I devoted two whole chapters of my recent book *Evolution and the Christian Faith* to providing comprehensive answers to these



questions."

Trying to mix evolution and the Bible only leads to more denial of biblical truth, as Philip explains:

"[If] God's authorised biography of origins (Genesis 1–11) is denied:

- ♦ God's character and attributes are impugned;
- ♦ the words of Christ (where He affirmed Genesis as history) have to be set aside;
- ♦ it magnifies the 'problem of evil' rather than solving it;
- ♦ man's status as God's image-bearer is confused;
- ♦ the doctrine of original sin is abandoned;
- ♦ the Bible's description of death as a consequence of sin is obscured;
- ♦ the gospel's very foundations are undermined;
- ♦ confidence in the future restoration of this fallen and cursed world is weakened;
- ♦ and the mission of the Church is diminished."

Philip, who lives with his family in the United Kingdom, has worked full time in creation ministry since 2001 and is the CEO of Creation Ministries International (UK/Europe). •

Philip Bell B.Sc. (Hons.), PGCE, MRSB is a scientist and teacher who has previously made discoveries in the fight against cancer at a hospital-based research unit. He has co-written papers for secular medical journals, some of which are still cited today.

Believe it or not

BY CREATION MINISTRIES INTERNATIONAL

Sharp-eyed whale sharks

WHALE sharks, the largest fish in the world, have a unique specialisation. Marine biologists from Japan's Okinawa Churashima Research Center have discovered that their eyes are carpeted with thousands of tiny teeth!

Whale sharks' eyes protrude from either side of their heads and do not have eyelids, leaving them susceptible to exposure and injury. The tiny teeth on their eyes, called "eye denticles" function as protective armour from the elements.

Using detailed 3D images, underwater ultrasound and special X-rays, the scientists, who published their research in PLOS One recently, also found the eye denticles are clustered in rings around each iris and that there could be more than 3000 on a single eyeball.

Additionally, they identified four different, specialised shapes.

Described by researchers as a "novel mechanism of eye protection", this feature has inevitably been downplayed by many scientists as not being evidence of creative design.

They attribute it instead to "adaptations" and offer evolutionary just-so stories, claiming tumors called teratomas can explain how teeth can change their location of growth.

Teratomas are serious, often malignant abnormalities which arise in the embryo stage of development and affect the way cells differentiate and specialise. This is why they contain different tissue types, which in humans can include teeth and hair.

However, to accurately form the teeth around the iris obviously requires sophisticated genetic programming and machinery. To try and explain it by way of tumors is sheer evolutionary speculation. Tumors are by definition disorganised tissue, which the eye denticles most certainly are not.

It has long been assumed that whale sharks have poor eyesight and relied on their sense of smell to find their food.

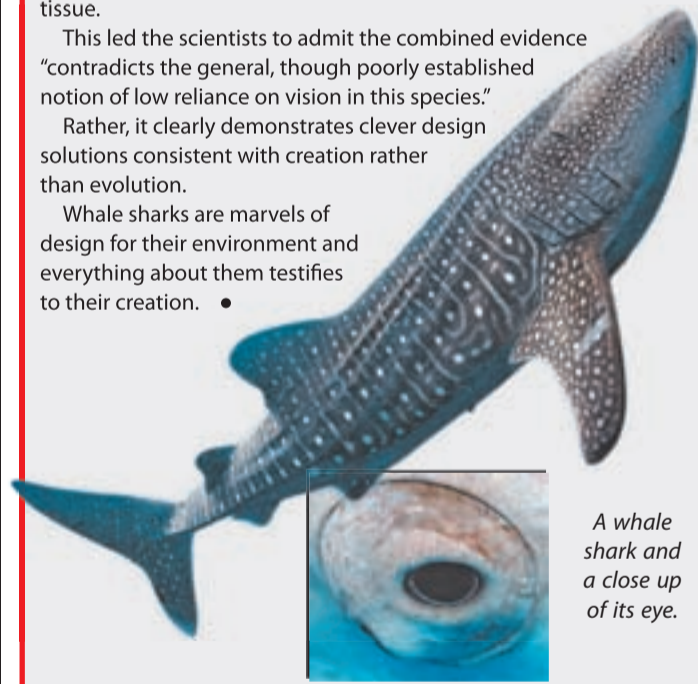
To test this assumption, researchers filming eye movements in whale sharks observed that they were able to closely follow divers who were swimming alongside them.

The researchers also captured the fish's uncanny ability to swivel their eyeballs and retract them into their eye sockets to protect them (to as deep as 50 per cent of the eyeballs' diameter). Despite this, they are still able to see through a small gap in the connective tissue.

This led the scientists to admit the combined evidence "contradicts the general, though poorly established notion of low reliance on vision in this species."

Rather, it clearly demonstrates clever design solutions consistent with creation rather than evolution.

Whale sharks are marvels of design for their environment and everything about them testifies to their creation. •



A whale shark and a close up of its eye.

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BUILDING BETTER RELATIONSHIPS

COMMUNICATION KILLERS

BY ROB FURLONG

AUTHOR Tim La Haye once wrote: "As long as two people can keep the lines of communication open and freely express their feelings, differences can be resolved."

We have been exploring anger this year and the negative effect it has on relationships when expressed poorly or inappropriately; this month I want to talk about the way in which negative anger kills communication between people and what we can do about it.

There are three, basic communication killers.

Explosion. We have all experienced this one. You raise an issue with someone, and they immediately explode in a tirade of angry words and emotion. Explosion is a defense mechanism, and the message is loud and clear: "Stay away from me; my failure is being exposed at this moment and I do not wish to discuss this with you!"

People who explode succeed in keeping others at an arm's distance

and over many years, real communication is destroyed because those around them opt for false peace as a way of keeping the exploder happy.

Tears. While not as volatile as exploding, tears are just as effective at killing communication. You know the drill. You raise an issue and then you are suddenly blindsided by the other person because they have burst into tears!

It usually goes something like this: "You have really hurt me with what you have said. You have accused me of... (you haven't!)... and I don't like the way you're looking at me!" (Hurt person then erupts in tears.)

I'm not saying all tears are wrong, but when people make this their habitual response, there is a problem. People avoid raising issues for fear of hurting the person with the inevitable result of choking open communication to death.

Silence. You know you have done something wrong, and the other person is angry with you for one simple reason – they are not talking to you!

Explosions and tears shut down communication.
Stock photo: iclipart



I had plenty of experience with this growing up because my Dad would go for several days without talking to me or my brothers for something we had either done or failed to do.

It was excruciating. We all knew he was angry, but we didn't know what he was angry about – we had to figure it out and then apologise. Only then would communication be restored.

Angry silence is devastating to communication and a dreadfully immature way to try and make a point to another person.

Think about it. Isn't it far better to simply say to the other person, "I didn't appreciate ... I would prefer you did ..." instead of freezing them out with the "Cone of Silence?"

Explosion, tears, and silence do not keep the lines of communication open, and they most certainly do not encourage people to freely express their feelings.

As a result, problems, issues, and differences are never resolved.

How can we change this?

Pray first. Ask God to prepare the hearts of everyone involved in the conversation.

Plan the right time. Ask the other person for permission to have the conversation and agree on a time when you will not be distracted by other concerns.

Speak the truth in love. Don't shy away from telling the truth, but do it in a gracious, sensitive, and non-accusatory way.

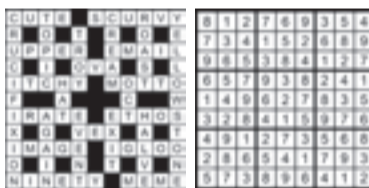
Don't lose your temper. (See "explosion" above!) Remember the wisdom of Solomon, "A gentle answer turns away wrath" and "He who is slow to anger is better than the mighty, and he who rules his spirit (better) than he who captures a city."

Allow for reaction time. Give the other person time to take in what you have said and allow them to respond to it. Hopefully it won't be with explosion, tears, or silence! (This is another reason to pray before the conversation.)

Commit the problem to God.

Pray about it together and seek His solution.

Say goodbye to angry responses and open the door to healthy communication!



Want to explore more?

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

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

HOW DO I BECOME A CHRISTIAN?

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

What now?

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

AS A NEXT STEP : Please send me: Bible Some 'starting off' literature Information on a helpful church

I have prayed this prayer.

** Please tick and write clearly **

Name _____ Phone _____

Address _____

Email address _____

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

All overseas enquiries are referred onto someone in their own country

Barry Magee, the fleet-footed Kiwi



● **From page 12**

Barry admits that his Christian walk was patchy for the better part of the next decade but says "yet God never abandoned or left me".

At 25, realising he needed more consistency in his walk with God he decided to attend a Billy Graham crusade in Auckland.

"As I listened to Billy speak about John 3:16 (*for God so loved the whole world that He gave His only begotten Son, so that whosoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life*) I realised that Christ died for BARRY, not just for the whole world, and that night the love of God fell on me.

"I gave my total life to Christ. I said 'Lord here I am, use me as You will'."

Barry says he was a different man, a different athlete from that time on. "I walked forward at the crusade and gave my life totally to God."

Sadly his first marriage ended after 30 years, leaving Barry "traumatised to the utmost."

Eventually thanks to the ministry of friends, he recovered from this blow, and went on to marry his second wife Heather. They travel the world sharing testimonies of God's grace.

Today Barry is 88 and still fervently preaching the good news of salvation.

"I believe there is nothing in this world that we can depend or rely on except God. I have no medals that will take me into the Kingdom of Heaven.

"Only faith in the death burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ can do that. Christ is the greatest prize of all."

FAITH BEFORE FOOTBALL

**Challenge
SPORT**



Beni Baningime of Everton during the Premier League 2 match between Sunderland and Everton at the Hetton Centre on January 8, 2017 in Sunderland, England. (Photo by Ian Horrocks/Getty Images)

Soccer player Beni Baningime grew up in Lemba, a town in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, where conflict was never far away.

Asked in a BBC interview what others would see if they knew him then he says: “You’d see joy. There’d be music and dancing and lots of kids playing football.

“These kids – and I was one of them – would be aware of the dangers not far away. Fighting, civil unrest, political stuff. Not the sound of gunshots exactly, but the noise of rioting. We could hear that and it wasn’t nice.

“It was by the grace of God that it didn’t come too close to where we were, but even as youngsters we knew it was out there.”

Faith in God is the foundation of the 28-year-old’s life. Not football.

“I don’t know if you believe in God or if you don’t, but for me, God is bigger than football. He’s bigger than life. He is everything to me,” he says.

Beni’s journey to faith was triggered by a sense of emptiness in his younger days.

“I just didn’t like the way I was living. I was broken as a person until a few years ago really. I didn’t have my identity. I’m talking about girls and all these different things that people tell you to do. It wasn’t me.

“I’d go to a nightclub and look around and I was like, ‘What am I doing here?’

“I’m not judging anybody who enjoys that life, but it wasn’t the life I wanted. I was looking for something more. I found true happiness in God.”

The talented 24-year-old, who plays for the Scottish club Heart of Midlothian, says

he always has his nose buried in the Bible.

“I feel God is always with me and guiding me on the right path. I come into training and I pray, before I play a game I pray.”

It is this deep relationship with Christ that saw him through a particularly tough time in the 20/21 season when he damaged his cruciate ligament and underwent surgery.

“The Bible says ‘You will keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on You.’ The whole time I had peace.

“That’s why you can’t put your joy in football because injuries and rejection can happen. I had to learn it the hard way. I had to learn that God is the only One who is going to stick by you when the whole of football has forgotten who you were.”

While Beni has thankfully not experienced any racism in the game, he says he already has an idea of how to deal with it should it happen.

“The way I would handle it is the way Jesus would have handled it – love the person and hopefully they can change. ‘I’m not your enemy, I don’t know who has polluted your mind but I am not your enemy.’

“Some black people I know, because they have seen such oppression, they say, ‘I don’t like white people.’ They want me to have that same mentality. I say, ‘No,

I try to love everyone.”

Beni moved to the UK with his parents when he was eight. His raw talent was soon spotted by Everton FC, which enrolled him in their youth programme when he was nine.

He made his debut in a League Cup game in 2017, followed by a Premier League match.

His focus is absolute but balanced. “When I’m on the pitch I’m in a war, I work as hard as I can, but as soon as I’m away, I forget about it. That’s how I live my life.

“Football is not everything to me. If it was everything in my life then it wouldn’t work.”

Even being named Man of the Match doesn’t change Beni’s philosophy. “When I got that I went home, spent time with God and my family. And if I’d had the worst game, I’d have done the exact same.”

He also guards his privacy. “I’m not big on social media. I’m a religious person and that came from my parents.

“At the end of my career, I want to sit down and say to myself, ‘Beni, you put everything into that. You couldn’t have tried any harder.’ I’ll have peace of mind, no matter what happens.”

Barry Magee, the fleet-footed Kiwi

Barry Magee remembers being decidedly average in his early years, in the 1950s. The New Zealander was scrawny; one of the smallest and youngest in his class, he reveals he “used to take a fair hammering from the bullies”.

He loved running though, and used to win the 100-yard hurdles but even then, he says ruefully, it was “only because the other runners eliminated themselves”.

Timid and lacking in confidence, Barry may have withdrawn from sport altogether if not for his father, who was a keen sportsman and encouraged his son not to give up.

But even his supportive father could probably never have predicted the heights to which the lad from Auckland would rise to.

Eventually, Barry joined the Wesley Harrier running club. There the captain spotted a talent for distance running in the youngster and introduced him to New Zealand’s legendary coach Arthur Lydiard.

Three years later, after countless hours pounding the pavements (up

to 160 kilometres a week), Barry won the first of what would be many state and national titles. It didn’t end there.

In 1960, this skinny, picked-on boy from Auckland qualified to run the marathon in the 1960 Rome

Olympics.

Fears of the heat of the Italian summer persuaded race officials to start the gruelling 42-kilometre event at 5.30pm – and by the time Barry crossed the finish line two hours and 17 minutes later, he was running by torchlight in pitch darkness.

“Where am I?” he asked one of his supporters when he stopped running. “It’s okay Barry you’re at the finish line,” they told the runner, thinking he was delirious from the effort. “No, no,” Barry replied. “What position did I finish in?”

The 26-year-old finished third, winning Olympic bronze. More achievements followed – the World Games 10,000m gold medal, and a record-breaking 5,000m run in Los Angeles.

“There were many great days of glory and fame – national and international victories from a boy who was a complete nobody!” Barry exclaims.



Barry Magee

When asked what changed him from being that “nobody” into an athletic champion, Barry doesn’t say it was his training or his talent. Instead, he gives all the glory to God.

“It all started at a Bible camp,” he recounts.

“I was 14 when I said ‘yes’ to God. It was after a sermon on Revelation

3:20 (*Behold I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door I will come in to him and eat with him and he with Me.*)

“I opened the door and asked Christ into my heart and I have never been the same again.”

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