

# AGAINST ALL ODDS

**INTERNET**  
**Chuck Norris jokes**





BY CAITLIN CHODAKOWSKY

When people think of actor and martial arts legend Chuck Norris they think, “tough”, “invincible”, and “the epitome of manhood”. Such descriptions are included among the various memes circulating the Internet:

*“Chuck Norris once heard that nothing can kill him, so he tracked down nothing and killed it.”*

*“Chuck Norris counted to infinity. Twice.”*

With these and so many other humorous ‘facts’ along this vein, many would not believe Chuck grew up as an extremely shy, non-athletic boy in poor rural Oklahoma with an alcoholic father who abandoned the family.

His heroes were Old West cowboy film stars such as Roy Rogers, Gene Autry, and Hopalong Cassidy.

“Growing up, not having a father around, you have to create your own image of a father, and that became the image of a father that I would like to have had,” Chuck told CBN.com.

Little did he know that in time he would become a six-time undefeated World Middleweight Karate Champion, star as the hero in more than 23 films and write and produce his own hit television series Walker, Texas Ranger.

Chuck’s inspiration came when he



Chuck Norris and wife Gena O'Kelley arrive at a movie premier with their 11-year-old twins, Danilee (left) and Dakota, in Hollywood, California in 2012. (Photo: Steve Granitz/Getty Image)

was exposed to martial arts in Korea while serving in the Air Force.

“(I) was just completely taken with the physical ability of the martial artists and making my black belt,” Chuck recalls.

Within eight years he achieved world recognition and holds the

distinction of being the first man in the Western hemisphere to receive an eighth degree black belt grand master in Tae Kwon Do.

After winning the world karate championships he opened a successful chain of karate schools and Hollywood soon took note, casting

him in his first feature film.

Soon Chuck was a box office success. He had money, fame and influence but deep down he was miserable.

He recalls his mother was always a solid rock for the family and never gave up on her children, despite the challenges they faced growing up.

“She influenced me spiritually and instilled in me a sense of responsibility that carried over in my later adult life. She always told me ‘God has plans for you,’ and I didn’t know what she meant at the time. I think I do now,” he told bpnews.net.

“I gave my life to the Lord at 12. I was baptized at 12. Then it grew stronger. And then I got to go to a crusade for Billy Graham, (but) unfortunately a lot of times in the entertainment industry, sometimes you lose sight of what’s really important in your life. I lost a marriage because of it.”

The faith that he had growing up took a backseat to the life of fame and success he was now living.

Every now and again the death of a loved one was enough to remind him that he had drifted away from God but it was soon forgotten with his drive to succeed in the entertainment industry.

“Finally, my best friend said, ‘You have got to get your act together. You are really not a happy guy. There’s a woman I want you to meet. I’m going to invite her to Dallas,’” Chuck told CBN.com.

This woman, Gena, later became Chuck’s second wife and together they eventually found their way back to living with Jesus as Lord over their lives.

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## Dream that changed everything

**Amanda Lodge grew up with an intense feeling of rejection. Not only was she adopted, but her adoptive mother died when she was young. After a series of children’s homes she became pregnant herself and was forced to give up her own baby for adoption. What followed were years of domestic violence that left Amanda disillusioned and hurting so much.**

I LOOKED in the mirror. Who was I? Who did I belong to? Who did I look like? There was no answer. At the tender age of 15, in the midst of my anger about the betrayal I felt from everyone who had known I had been adopted, a wall of steel was built around my heart.

Left in a nursery at birth, I suppose I should have been grateful that at three years old a family had finally wanted me. I lived with my adoptive parents and my new brother until I was 10, when my adoptive mother died of cancer.

I would say there were more storms and thunder than laughter and sunshine in my early life, but I accepted that



Amanda Lodge now knows what it means to be loved, after years of abuse.

it was my lot. Spending the remainder of my adolescent years in three different children’s homes was unsettling, but I got used to moving around.

By the age of 16 I was pregnant myself, and was moved from my adoptive father’s house to a mother and baby home. A social worker persuaded me to have my son adopted because I had no family to support me, but I’ve regretted it ever since.

And then I was placed in another children’s home. I had moved seven times by the time I was 18 and another 19 times since then.

My journey as an adult took me to places where I wanted immediate answers, and God was a big zero in my life. Where was He when I needed help and support? Where was He when I was assaulted? Where was He when I was going through years of domestic violence, having lived in several refuges?

● Turn to page 2

BACK PAGE

BEYOND THE DREAM

# Dream changed everything

• From page 1

“Great God you are,” I thought sarcastically.

I began to see a clairvoyant to try to find answers for my life. I was living in constant fear of my partner, and I could not see how I could ever escape. But the answers from the clairvoyant instilled even more fear. “Leave your house, he is going to kill you,” she said.

“Then one night I had a dream. In the dream I heard a voice that sounded calm and authoritative but loving at the same time. The voice said: “In my hand I have this meat which is a lamb; you can give it to me, your God, or give it to the devil”. In the dream, I gave it to God. When I woke up I could not understand why I would give it to God.

That morning I moved to a different refuge again. When I got there I threw out all my astrology and occult books and questioned God. I said: “If you are real, give me that house across the road”. God did! And apparently it was almost impossible to get a house in the place I asked for.

After moving in, I found that God provided everything I asked for. It was so amazing to realise there was a God and that He cared for me that I broke down in tears on my kitchen floor.

He continued to speak to me in



Amanda Lodge

dreams. He told me He had knitted me together in my mother’s womb for a purpose. I was not here on this earth for nothing – I had a purpose and God’s purpose was for my good, because He loves me. He drew me to Him by His love and coloured in my dark clouds with lovely rainbows.

Amanda went on to find her birth mother and, more recently, her birth father. Today she works as a qualified counselor and mental health nurse, her painful early life having given her the empathy to assist others in their struggles.

# AGAINST ALL ODDS

• From page 1 In his book *Against All Odds*, Chuck openly shares how they lived together before they were married, something he says they knew was sin.

It was a concerned pastor that led them to turn away from this sin and it served as the turning point in their lives and relationship.

“We did things that were definitely wrong. When you have the Holy Spirit reigning inside of you, you can’t run. You cannot run,” Gena shares.

“I didn’t want to hide things in this book. There are a lot of things in the book, a lot of mistakes I made in my life that come out,” Chuck adds.

The couple are able to candidly share their story publicly knowing that God has forgiven them both and they have turned away from the things they know are wrong in God’s eyes.

God has also helped them through many tough circumstances, including the difficult birth of their twins.

“I had earned millions of dollars over my lifetime,” Chuck writes in his book. “I’d been a friend to several presidents, yet all the money in my bank account couldn’t help me now.... There was only one person to whom I could turn.”

It was Jesus Christ. The one who had been there throughout Chuck’s life.

“It’s amazing because people come up to me and say, ‘Chuck, you’re the luckiest guy in the world to be a world karate champion and a movie and TV star.’ When they say this to me, I kind of smile because luck had nothing to do with it; God had everything to do with it.”



Actor Chuck Norris in Hollywood, California in 2012. (Photo by Jon Kopaloff/FilmMagic)

## A priceless treasure

BY ALAN BAILEY

**THE** way some people treat life these days you would not think it was worth much. In a number of countries around the world the individual does not count—it is the ideology of the regime that seems to be all-important. So executions are common, thousands are slain in war, and an alarming number of people are ending their lives by their own hands.

Countries that pride themselves on being progressive, boasting that they have left a cruel and uncivilised past behind them, nevertheless think it is fine to kill unborn children and old people who are not well.

### HOW DEPRESSING IS THAT?

Constantly we hear of people battling with depression. They have anti-life feelings, feelings of despair and doubts about whether life is worth living.

Is it possible that these feelings have come about because a lax attitude toward the value of life is rubbing off on people everywhere? If lives are easily snuffed out, if children can be captured and used as slaves, if HIV/AIDS kills countless victims who receive no help, then, what is a life worth? There is a strong temptation to think a human life is no more valuable than that of a fly or a frog.

### ANY ANSWERS? ANY HOPE?

We are quite wrong to think one human life hasn’t much value. On good authority we can say that every single one of us, young or old,

is a treasure beyond price. Here are some reasons.

1. The Son of God, Jesus, said, *Are not five sparrows sold for two coins? Yet not one of them is forgotten by God. Indeed, the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Don’t be afraid, you are worth more than many sparrows* (Luke 12:6,7). The whole mission of Jesus declares

to us that we are each worth a great deal in his sight. We should never undervalue anyone, no matter who they are or what their background is.

2. God made us. We are not the product of blind chance.

We are meant to be here. God gave us consciousness, moral awareness and personality, all of which sets us apart.

3. God bought us. Jesus would never have come to give His life to be our Saviour if we were worthless clay, fit only to be swept out of sight. Christ asked while He was here: *What good will it be for a man if he gains the whole world yet forfeits his soul? Or what can a man give in exchange for his soul?* Compared to the whole world or to anything we may possess, our life is of much greater value.

### HOLD ON TO IT!

Don’t let anyone take this truth away. All those doubts about oneself and our obvious sinfulness have a solution. The Lord Jesus met our greatest need by dying in our place and rising again. For those who trust in Him, life is well worth living and the future is secured. Heaven will be more glorious than we can imagine. Find the way and take it.



## Lightroom, the ability to lighten the darkness

**MY** wife is a talented photographer. Jane imports her digital photos onto her computer and a program called Lightroom. It’s amazing what you can do to digital photos with this program.

There have been times when I have looked at a photo, there are large dark sections with no discernible image.

Jane can use the program to lighten the photo and the darkness is transformed into the detail that had always been there but can’t be seen.

So much of life is like that. In the dark times everything seems black and there’s nothing good to be found. Yet the detail is all there you just need something to give you the ability to see it.

Faith in God does this for us. Time and again when the world seems black, His Spirit lightens the darkness and lifts our spirit.

### share your story

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

## Crossword

<p><b>ACROSS</b></p> <p>1 The R of RAF</p> <p>4 Kind of ray</p> <p>7 AWOL soldiers</p>	<p>8 Lose traction</p> <p>10 Throw out</p> <p>13 Hooded snake</p> <p>14 He saves the day</p>	<p>17 Highest peak in the Alps (4,5)</p> <p>19 Grimace of pain</p> <p>20 Popular copier</p>	<p><b>DOWN</b></p> <p>1 Something hot in the salad</p> <p>2 “I agree”</p> <p>3 Harp’s cousin</p> <p>4 2004 Olympics host nation</p> <p>5 Understand wrongly</p> <p>6 Part of the foot</p> <p>9 Gruelling triathlon event (4,3)</p> <p>11 A citrus fruit</p> <p>12 Spinal bone</p> <p>15 Hot pot</p> <p>16 Wild goat</p> <p>18 Balloon filler</p>
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**SOLUTION PAGE 11**

## Sudoku

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

Puzzle Level: Medium

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

**SOLUTION PAGE 11**

# Ex Hezbollah soldier finds answers

**"M**uslims – we think of them as some crazy people that drop bombs and blow themselves up and that's just what the world thinks of them .... But my goal is to help people understand that Muslims are anything but that," says former Hezbollah soldier Afshin Javid on Youtube.

Afshin was a fervent Muslim who joined the militant terrorist group as a young teen but came to realise that the path he was on was the wrong one.

"My grandfather was a Muslim leader," Afshin admits, "and my father was part of the movement of the Revolution of the Islamic Republic in Iran. I was the one that was most devout."

"I didn't think that just praying and fasting was enough so I joined Hezbollah. I served in that army for three years."

Never before had Afshin questioned what he believed in ... until he was arrested and jailed in Malaysia for carrying illegal passports.

"[In prison] I would just meditate on the verses of the Koran," Afshin recalls, "But once, as I was doing that, I felt a fear filling my heart. I could literally feel the presence of a spirit. This spirit immediately made me feel like my life was in danger. So I started to rebuke it in the name of Allah and I cried out in my own native language and said, 'God, help me!'"

"The moment I said that ... I heard a voice which replied, 'In the Name of Jesus'. The words that came out of my mouth next, sounded, without thinking, 'Jesus, if you are true – show me yourself.' Before I was finished with the sentence that spirit had run away."

"That is, basically, how my story began. It is not my story of conversion but the beginning of my confusion."

This confusion came about because although Jesus is considered as a holy prophet in Islam, He is not someone Muslims pray to or call upon.

In the weeks that followed, Afshin's confusion grew.

"I had lots of questions in my head," he admits, "How could Jesus help me? How could Jesus' Name have chased the spirit away? So I asked, and prayed, and fasted that He would show me what way He would like me to follow Him."

"Two weeks passed and I had no answer," he says, "and when I didn't get any answer or get any signs, I was really upset. In our mind, we [Muslims] are different, we are very passionate people, we pour our hearts out, and we would give our lives up for someone we love."

"And because I had given up everything and I had not heard an answer, it made me very angry."

"So in rage, I yelled at God and said, 'You do not exist!'"

As a Muslim, denouncing Allah is an unforgivable sin.

"Suddenly I felt the whole room fill with the holy presence of God," Afshin continues soberly, "It is as if time has stopped! You know things about God without Him ever saying anything to you. The first thing I knew about Him was His Holiness. I knew that I was unholy. I knew I had sins in my life and He was just and He must judge me. Because of His justice, I deserved death – in spite of all the good things I've done in my



**Afshin Javid with Israeli army members, who used to be his enemies.**

life. All this was going simultaneously through my heart when, right at that moment, I felt a touch on my left shoulder.

"I heard a voice that said, 'I forgive you.' I did not understand how that could be possible! So I replied, 'Who are you that forgives me?' And the voice answered, 'I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life.' I'd never heard those words before so I asked, 'What

is Your Name?' He told me, 'Jesus Christ, the Living God.'

"I fell onto the floor and just wept."

After this, Afshin eagerly shared with his fellow prisoners what had happened to him. Some mocked, others followed him to faith.

But Afshin knew that he needed more than his story so he prayed earnestly for a Bible. The answer came through a fellow prisoner.

"He reached from his bag and handed me a book," Afshin relates, "I looked at it. There was nothing written on the cover but I knew it was what I'd asked for. I ran back to my room, thanked God, and kissed it. But when I opened it, it was in a language I couldn't read. So I thought, 'Well – thank You for the Bible, but You've sent me the wrong language – I cannot read this.'"

Afshin says that he felt the Lord speaking to him, telling him to read.

"As I looked upon the page, the words came alive and I could read and understand."

The Bible was written in English, a language he did not know then but one he preaches in today.

Afshin has never shied away from sharing the Gospel, although, on a few occasions, it has nearly cost him his life.

"I pray and God answers," he proclaims, "My heart is for Muslims. My ministry is more than just sharing my story, it is encouraging others to share theirs."

"We need to share our testimonies [personal stories about meeting Jesus]! If a Muslim person is in your life, it is not because they need to hear my testimony. They need to hear your story. They should look at your life and say, 'I want the same relationship with God as you have.'"

Afshin has also written a book called, 'Easy as Drinking Water.' It is a Persian saying which he says pertains to the forgiveness he felt from Jesus that day in his jail cell. He says that there are so many others out there that are thirsty for that kind of forgiveness and hope.

"[They] are crying out because they are thirsty! They are thirsty for life! And Jesus is the Living Water. [Christians] are the bearers, out of us shall pour out the Living Water. But if we are afraid of them, we won't go close enough. Should I be the rock in their desert and should Jesus flow out of me, their thirst will be satisfied. •

## SURPRISE FOR SOLDIER IN AFGHANISTAN

BY IAN WHITE

**A**s a captain in the British Army, Rachael Phillips wandered into church in a remote patrol base in Afghanistan – and had the surprise of her life.

Rachael had decided God wasn't for her. He was like the sheets of wallpaper sometimes found lining old chests of drawers: curious, but irrelevant to her modern generation.

"Christians were nice people," Rachael says. "They were constant. They were part of the fabric of my country. But let's face it – they were a bit odd. I couldn't help but feel a sense of smugness when I heard Christians talk of their belief in God, because I knew something they didn't: I knew it was irrational to believe in God."

"My attitude towards religion could be summed up as intense apathy, so you can imagine my surprise when, on my second operational tour of Afghanistan, I found myself walking towards a makeshift church where a service was being held by a visiting padre."

An extraordinary decision for Rachael, but then it hadn't been an ordinary day.

"The things I'd seen and had to do weighed heavily on me. As a Pashto-speaking female, trained to be a team medic, I'd been required to help treat civilian casualties who'd turned up at our base looking for help."

"That evening I stood at the back of the cold metal church feeling like somewhat of a hypocrite."

But the next 20 minutes changed the course of Rachael's life forever.

"Padre Robin Richardson told me about a God who loved me deeply and without condition," she remembers. "A forgiving, understanding God who loved me even more than my own parents did, and even despite my failings. I didn't have to shoulder



**Rachael Phillips says all her life she has been drawn to people in need.**

the responsibility for the things I'd seen and done or for those I'd failed to do.

"Tears streamed down my face and were wiped away in embarrassment."

Rachael confided in the padre afterwards that she "might actually believe in God" and went on to complete a course exploring the Christian faith, before making a full commitment to Christ back home.

Sensing a "call" to ordained ministry, she realised "the reason God had packed so much into my first 29 years was because he was preparing me for a very challenging role".

"All my life I've been drawn to people in need, from my work in Malawi as a teenager to my work in Sri Lanka following the 2004 Boxing Day tsunami, to the particular roles I've undertaken in the army," she says.

Rachael left full-time army service last year and is doing a theology degree part-time.

The 30-year-old is now working at a church in a role designed to encourage a culture of generous giving.

"My job is to work with villagers in places like Bosnia and Afghanistan, learning about their culture and social dynamics, explaining what role the army played in the area."

"It is similar to the work I plan on doing next, learning about the needs and dynamics of the community and explaining how giving generously is part of our Christian faith."

Royal Engineer-trained Rachael is certainly happier working with people than with equipment, but that is where the comfort ends.

"To say my life has been turned upside down would be quite the understatement!" she says.

She believes in the sentiment of the words of a well-known hymn: "Lord of all hopefulness, Lord of all joy" – but adds her own line: "Lord of massive surprises".

"My life is so very different now, yet in a strange way I've never felt more secure," Rachael concludes. "There's something wonderfully liberating about giving up your own choices and just following Christ. I don't feel the same pressure to make the right decisions based on meticulous planning, calculations, and pragmatism."

"I'm just saying, 'Let's see what God wants'." •

## Misplaced anger resolved

**FORMER** gardener, newsagent manager and milk delivery man John Goodway was once angry at someone he did not even know existed but now says he had it all wrong.

"Having spent most of my life not knowing or caring about God, I was shocked when one day I realised that for seven years I had been angry at a God I claimed not to believe in," John says.

"If there is a God, I wondered how He could allow some of the awful injustices in our world ... babies dying, disabled people, criminals getting away with murder, etc.



John Goodway

"But how could I be angry about that if I didn't believe there was someone to be angry at?"

This shocking fact got John's attention. He decided to read the Bible a lady named Avril had given him.

"I read that actually this God cared about me, even though I denied His very existence. I could not work for His love; I just had to accept it! And in a powerful

way, this changed my life completely."

He contacted Avril for more information and subsequently visited her church. "She helped me see how God was truly there. I gave my life to Jesus, and was baptised in January 1997."

After this John says God dramatically changed his life.

He explains this change by quoting from the Bible: "All of us once lived... gratifying the cravings of our [selfish] flesh and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature deserving of [God's] wrath. But because of His great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved" (Ephesians chapter 2, verses 3-5).

John continues: "The following April, I married the woman who had given me the Bible – Avril. We have been together for 17 years!"

Not long after John gave up his milk business and began theological studies.

"Studying Christian ministry blessed me so much that I knew I wanted to be an evangelist (telling people about Jesus)."

After asking God to guide him, John joined a national Christian mission in England.

"I have been a full-timer with them to this day. I love sharing the good news of Jesus because he changed my life so much. Considering my lack of education, it's amazing how God has used me to teach and preach to so many."

This article first appeared in Good News. Used with kind permission.

# Famous actor rejects atheism

BY SCOTT GILLIS

"I grew up in a family where we never went to church and God was not spoken of – He was never part of the conversation," says Kirk Cameron, an American actor best known for his role as teen Mike Seaver in *Growing Pains*.

"Science was one of my favourite subjects," he adds. "I loved cosmology, biology, anthropology..."

Like most people, Kirk was taught that evolution was an immutable scientific fact.

"My science teacher had a very charismatic, dynamic personality," he says. "And he would laugh at the idea that there was some mystical voodoo power in the sky ... we were simply evolved and science knew how it all happened."

"We were taught there were people far more intelligent than we were, as eighth, ninth, and 10th grade students, who understood these things and God was just a fairytale – so that's what I believed."

Most young people want to be seen as rational, and Kirk was no different. "I wanted to be counted among the intellectuals, and those who reasoned through things based on evidence and facts," he explains.

As is the case with the majority of those who are taught evolution is the only rational scientific paradigm, any reasonable consideration of a divine Creator was logically excluded.

Kirk quipped, "I believed God was part of a different trinity: the other two were Santa Claus and the Easter Bunny."

He had a few friends in school that believed in God, had some friendly debates with them, and went to church once or twice. Despite this, Kirk said, "I had some significant hurdles to overcome, and they were primarily rooted in my evolutionary atheistic beliefs. Like, we evolved, didn't we? Scientists have proven that."

So how would an upcoming celebrity and self-described atheist come to know Christ?

At 17 years old, Kirk found himself right in the middle of the phenomenal success

of *Growing Pains*. He described one of the main reasons he didn't believe in God: "It was the appeal of doing what I wanted. I was a celebrity. I had money, insane popularity, nobody said 'no' to me, it was always, 'yes, sir'. So it didn't make sense to consider a higher authority over me."

But even though he rejected God, he still had questions. "I was crushed in the middle of a very adult world and asking a lot of adult-sized questions, like, 'What happens when you die?' and 'What's the meaning of life? Is it to make as much money and have as much fun as you can?' I was beating most people in those last two categories and yet I sensed there had got to be something more meaningful than all that."

God had never even been a consideration, Kirk recalls, until high school, when he met someone who took him to church. There, Kirk heard a message that was very new to him.

The pastor told Kirk, "There are answers from the Bible. We didn't get here by some accident. You and I were not the unintended result of a process of time and chance that never had us in mind. In fact, we were created by an all-powerful, wise, loving, and just God, and our lives have purpose and meaning. There is a cosmic drama being played out between good and evil, and God wins in the end."

That was a life-changing moment: "The chink in the armour was that there were a lot of smart people who believed in God and were Christian. I found out that creationists have intellect in spades on their side. That opened the door for me to the claim that there is a God."

Kirk began to investigate Christianity and, as a consequence, submitted his life to Christ soon after.



Kirk Cameron says being able to know what and why you believe is critically important.

His experience as a former atheist helps him understand and relate to others who still do not believe.

"Atheists will tell you that evolution really explains everything," he says. He uses analogies to help explain how we can tell there is a Designer, such as, "When you look at a painting, how can you know there is a painter when you can't see him, touch him, feel him, or speak to him? Paintings don't paint themselves."

"When someone says to me, 'Kirk, when did you stop believing in reason and start believing in God?' I will immediately say, 'That's the wrong question.'

"What actually happened was that I blindly believed that nothing created everything, which is illogical. Then I started looking at the facts, and reasoned through them and came to the obvious conclusion that God made all of this'.

"Being able to know what you believe and know why you believe is critically important. And we need to have intellectual integrity, to know we are standing on solid ground."

"Not everybody needs to have all the answers at the tip of their fingers, but we must have a basis of understanding that there are answers."

**"I found out that creationists have intellect in spades on their side"**

## A DEADLY CANCER THAT INFECTS US ALL

**CANCER.** The c-word that causes people to cringe. The death-row diagnosis that everyone dreads.

While the word still lies on the doctor's lips and hangs heavily in the air, the victim already feels its icy fingers begin to strangle their neck. Sometimes it is slow. Sometimes it is fast. Other times it goes into remission, then returns with a vengeance. Whichever way it comes, cancer seems to be a cruel killer, caring not whether the victims it catches are old or young.

While experts around the globe grapple with the physical 'whys' of cancer, gradually answering the many questions we have about our most insidious killer, many people continue to struggle with one often unasked question: "If God really were good, loving, kind, and merciful, why on Earth does He allow cancer?"

And because people can't answer this confusing question, their last

days are sometimes spent harbouring resentment toward a God who could have done something but didn't.

What if God did remove all disease and death from our world? Would the world then become a perfect paradise? Of course not! While murder, abuse, rape, unfaithfulness in marriage, theft, deceit, and greed are still with us, it is impossible for this world to be a wonderful place.

You see, the truth is that disease and death are not the real cause of human suffering. They are the result of a worldwide problem that began in the Garden of Eden when Adam and Eve, our first parents, chose to rebel against God.

As the Bible says: "Wherefore, as by one man sin entered the world,

and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned." (Romans 5:12)

SIN. That is the real 'cancer', the disease that destroys our lives and robs us of the blissful life that God, our Creator, originally intended us to have.

Do you have this disease? Let's check your symptoms by using the divine mirror God has given us. Known as the Ten Commandments, it is the checklist that God Himself will use one day to judge every person who has ever lived. So, let's see how you do.

1. Have you ever lied? Then God sees you as a liar.
2. Have you ever stolen anything, irrespective of its value? Then God sees you as a thief.
3. Have you ever looked at some-

one with lust? Then God sees you as an adulterer at heart.

4. Have you ever hated someone? Then God sees you as a murderer at heart.

5. Have you ever used God's holy name as a swear word? Then God sees you as a blasphemer.

That is only half of the checklist! How did you go? Actually, it does not matter if you identified only one symptom or five, either way the diagnosis would be the same: 'Infected by Sin'.

This would make you a sinner, and since God is so holy and just (always fair in His judgment) you will not be able to enter Heaven in this state. Instead, God must give you the penalty for your sins, or crimes against Him, which is eternity in Hell, a place the Bible calls 'the lake of fire'.

But wait! Did you know there is a cure? Since God is good, loving, kind and merciful, He has made a way for you to escape paying for

your own sins forever in Hell. He did this by sending the Lord Jesus Christ, God's perfect and sinless Son, to die on a cruel Roman cross, where God poured upon Him all the punishment for all sin ever committed, thereby paying the full penalty for your sin.

"But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." Romans 5:8

To obtain the benefit of the cure that God has made available, you must turn away from your life of sin, and trust fully in the work of Christ on the cross to pay for your sins.

You cannot pay for your sin regardless of the amount of good works you think you need to do! Rather humble yourself before God, and pray from the depths of your soul, asking Him to forgive your sin and thanking Him for loving you so much that He would send Jesus to die in your place.



# The suffering surgeon

Kathryn Butler has witnessed her share of suffering.

As a critical care surgeon, Kate recalls one evening where three patients all died on her table within moments of each other: a 22-year-old assault victim whose head had been bashed in with a baseball bat while his four-year-old son looked on; a 15-year-old with a gunshot wound to the heart; and another 15-year-old with a gunshot wound to the head.

One after the other she had to assess their condition and feel her heart sink as she realised they could not be saved.

She could do nothing but weep as she thought about the cruelty of the circumstances that had taken each of their lives, and the family and friends whose hearts had been broken with their deaths.

"I tugged the bloodied gloves from my hands, rushed from the room, and hid my face as I cried," she tells *Christianity Today*.

When that is your job, when your daily reality consists of watching people suffer and die, the idea of a loving God becomes unfathomable.

"How could God allow such evil?" Kathryn remembers asking herself. She had grown up with a basic understanding of Christian traditions, but nothing beyond that. She says she thought Christianity to be synonymous with good behaviour.

In moments such as that night, moments of despair and hopelessness at the state of the world and the prevalence of suffering, Kathryn sometimes tried to pray. But no words came out.

"I felt cut off from God," she says. "I thought the Lord – if He even existed – had abandoned me."

So she fell into agnosticism, convinced nothing was or could be known about the existence or nature of God.

"Doubt led to hopelessness, and hopelessness to despair," Kathryn recalls.

"I dreamed of eternal sleep, of numbness, of annihilation. Thoughts of taking my own life troubled me daily. Only love for my husband, Scottie, brought me home each evening."

Soon after, when Kathryn's husband lost his job, he turned to the church, understood the

Bible for the first time, and accepted Jesus as his Lord and Saviour.

Kathryn sometimes accompanied him to church, but where Scottie would bow his head in

prayer, she "would stare ahead with my thoughts cast outside the church walls, my gaze defiant".

A man she calls Ron, a patient of hers, and his family finally softened that defiant gaze. Ron had suffered cardiac arrest after a hip replacement and was in a vegetative state, needing a mechanical ventilator to breathe, neurologists predicting he would never recover.

Ron's wife and daughters were of a different opinion. They stayed by his side every day and prayed for his healing.

"They could not accept that the boisterous, football-loving, pizza-dough-tossing, belly-laughing man they cherished would never acknowledge them again," Kathryn says.



Above: File photo. Right: Kathryn Butler has seen things she can only describe as 'miracles'.

One day Kathryn walked into Ron's room to his smiling wife.

She told Kathryn, "I was praying and praying last night, and when I woke up, I knew everything would be fine. God told me he's going to be just fine."

"I admired her conviction and her hope, especially as I had neither," Kathryn tells *Christianity Today*.

"Yet her husband's clinical data promised that everything would not be fine."

She remembers finding their unjustified hope and consistent praying heartbreaking.

Until one afternoon, when Ron's wife and daughters told Kathryn he had moved his toe when they had asked.

"I leaned within inches of Ron's ear and called his name. I urged him to move. Nothing. 'I'm so sorry. It was probably just a reflex,' I said."

But Ron's wife insisted. She put a hand on his shoulder and shouted into his ear for him to wiggle his big toe. He did.

"The next day, he turned his head towards them," Kathryn says.

"Then, he blinked to command. In two weeks, he was awake. In three, he sat in a chair."

This incredible recovery was – Kathryn could not deny it – miraculous. No one

could have predicted it, and no one could explain it.

But still she wrestled with God. "How could he bestow such blessing, yet allow such suffering?" she asked.

"Scottie encouraged me to read the Bible," she says.

"The words felt familiar, but with my newly opened heart, the reading unveiled Christ's love in brushstrokes I had never fathomed.

"The agony He suffered for our sake left me breathless. He, too, had endured heartache and had confronted the face of evil. And He bore such affliction – our affliction – for us. He knows suffering.

"The Lord took my despair and fashioned a canvas for His perfect work," Kathryn continues.

"Just as Christ raised Lazarus from the dead in John chapter 11 verses 1-16, so that others might believe, so He redeems suffering – the gunshot wounds, the mourning, the lost jobs, the despondency beside bridge railings – for His glory.

"In His mercy, He descends to buoy us up, and to complete miracles we cannot pretend to comprehend. He pours blessings upon us every day – the jewel tones in autumn, but also the hard nights, and every breath in between."

## Misery to miracle

DEAN Jones started drinking when he was eight years old because that is what his alcoholic parents did.

"I had a pretty tough childhood," Dean shares sadly. "We had to grow and learn without mum and dad showing us much affection or guidance."

By 12 Dean was drinking like an adult and at 14 he started smoking pot as well, eventually ending up in a boys' home for being "an uncontrollable child".

"Not long after this the police became a part of my life, and I was caught driving without a licence and under the influence," Dean remembers.

At 16 a doctor classified him as a chronic alcoholic.

"My life was already a life of misery and things went downhill very suddenly from then on. I just kept doing the wrong thing and I was finally sent to jail at 18 for drunk driving," he says.

"But I just didn't learn – I kept offending and was jailed three or four times over the next 10 years."

For the next 30 years drinking was all that mattered to Dean – along with the lying, stealing and conning people to get money to buy the alcohol he needed.

Then Dean heard about a Salvation Army 10-month residential programme, which he began in January 2016.

He was very scared and sick to begin with but was warmly welcomed.

"After about six weeks I surrendered to the Lord [Jesus], as all my options had run out – it was recovery or death for me."

Now Dean regularly attends two churches and says Christianity is the most important part of his life.

"The Lord became my friend and Saviour and my life went from misery to miracle. Now I love life and other people – and there's no better feeling on earth.

"I would tell anyone who thinks all is lost that it's not over. God has plans for you all. All you have to do is let God help you find out what that plan is."

## Navy sailor gave his life to save his 'kids'

DR. JIM DENISON

Fire Controlman 1st Class Gary Rehm was three months shy of retirement when he died on the USS Fitzgerald 17 June 2017. At thirty-seven, he was by far the oldest of the seven sailors who perished. According to his uncle, Rehm called the other sailors on the ship his "kids". When the ship docked stateside near his Virginia home, he invited those who were far from home to join him on holidays.

When the USS Fitzgerald collided with a container ship, Rehm said, "If my kids die, I'm going to die." By various accounts, he saved at least twenty of them. He then went down to save more and perished with six others.

Jesus said, "Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends" (John 15:13).

The sailors saved by Gary Rehm will spend the rest of their lives knowing that someone loved them enough to give his life for them. Imagine the sense of personal worth and significance such knowledge would bring.

Actually, you can know the feeling per-



Gary Rehm died a hero, saving others.

sonally: "God shows His love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8). Now we have a choice: we can assess ourselves by what we do or by what God has done.

We live in a culture that measures us by our performance. Commenting on the election in the UK, Theresa May was declared a winner, only just, by the media. You probably remember that the Western

Bulldogs were premiers for 2016, which was extra special because they had not won a premiership since 1954. Do you remember the team that lost?

Sociologist Charles Horton Cooley unfortunately spoke for many of us when he stated, "I am not what I think I am. I am not what you think I am. I am what I think you think I am." But there's a better way.

Our Father wants nothing more than He wants an intimate relationship with us. In a *First15* devotional, Craig Denison observed, "If God considers restored relationship with you worth the death of His only and blameless Son, He must place His highest value on total communion with you." This makes me think, "Intimacy with God cost Him everything, so it must be worth everything."

Consider this Puritan prayer: "Thou hast loved me everlastingly, unchangeably, may I love Thee as I am loved; Thou has given Thyself for me, may I give myself to Thee; Thou hast died for me, may I live to Thee, in every moment of my time, in every movement of my mind, in every pulse of my heart." Would you make these words your prayer right now? •



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# Creation scientists

BY JOEL TAY

**D**rs Michael and Shouchin Man are a husband-and-wife scientist couple who not only have exceptional academic credentials, but also head other teams of scientists at their respective world-leading research institutions. These are operated by prominent pharmaceutical and medical device companies in Indiana, USA.

Both Michael and Shouchin grew up in China but moved to the USA for their graduate studies. Although they were taught evolution under the communist education system, both of them are now strong biblical creationists.

## QUESTIONING EVOLUTION

Michael says, "I became skeptical about evolution as a graduate student. I was especially puzzled by the lack of indisputable transitional fossils."

He studied evolutionary biology when he was completing his Masters.

He says this was helpful because: "It opened my eyes to see that evolution is not the factual truth I was so dogmatically taught to believe when I was studying in China. Scientifically, I now regard evolution as an unsubstantiated hypothesis."

After he became a Christian [by trusting in the death of Jesus on the cross to save him from his sins] in 1991, he studied biochemistry as a Ph.D. student. As Michael reflected on what he learnt about the three building blocks of life (DNA, proteins, and polysaccharides), he says: "I realized that it would be impossible for these polymers (molecules composed of many smaller repeated parts) to have evolved simultaneously, and then integrated themselves into self-replicating organisms. This led me to read many books on biochemical evolution, and attend many creation seminars."

Once he saw the design behind DNA, proteins, and polysaccharides, it was only natural for him to be fully

convinced about creation.

Similarly, since Shouchin was never shown another alternative, she grew up believing evolution, even though she never found it to be very convincing. As she says, "The Truth will prevail if one has an open mind."

Having worked as an analytical chemist for more than two decades after obtaining her Ph.D., Shouchin is now a principal scientist. Her role revolves around setting up quality acceptance criteria for drug products, developing and validating various test methods, and calibrating and qualifying analytical instrumentation. This includes the analysis of methods used in testing isotopes.

## SCIENCE OR PSEUDO-SCIENCE?

Her professional background enables her to readily detect pseudo-scientific statements and unsound reasoning. The more she reflected on the subject of origins, the more she became aware of how evolutionists and creationists will often come to completely different conclusions about the same scientific data, because they start with different presuppositions.

She says: "Understanding this strengthened my faith in God's Word. Although I was completely indoctrinated in evolution from an early age, by God's mercy and grace, I was exposed to creation teaching, which made so much more sense to me."

Having been in the same shoes as many of the intellectuals she is now reaching out to, Shouchin understands their objections and knows how to answer them. Both in academia and in her current research role, she has been very open about her Christian faith, and thankfully, unlike many in her position, she has not faced any major persecution. She tries to dig out the presuppositions of those of different opinions. She says:

"When I'm telling someone about Biblical creation I always point out that the difference in our beliefs about life's origins stems from our different starting worldviews."

Michael stresses: "It's important for students not to confuse science with evolution. Both theists and atheists (naturalists) use science to explore and understand



Shouchin and Michael Man are both well-qualified scientists in their fields, and six-day creationists.

the universe; so science is neutral. However, their interpretation of the scientific data often differs drastically because they begin with different presuppositions."

In their current ministry roles, they often explain how, after believing in God, they found that biochemistry, genetics, and molecular biology began to make more sense to them.

They insist on teaching Genesis to seekers and newcomers in their church. Often, they do this by spending two hours just addressing worldviews and questions related to belief in evolution, before finally delving into the Bible.

For Michael and Shouchin, Sola Scriptura (Scripture alone) is the foundation for both the church and for Christian ministry, Jesus Christ is the cornerstone, and the Bible is His testimony. As Shouchin says: "If one can't believe the first three chapters of the Bible, which speak about Creation and the Fall of mankind into sin, why believe the rest of the Bible?"

As scientists they see design and purpose in the universe. Examples of design are all around us—the markings of design in a living cell, the cosmos, and the DNA code. They believe that the evidence better sup-

ports biblical creation.

But they also think that the evolutionary explanation is inadequate and self-defeating when it comes to social, moral and worldview issues; for example, altruism, purpose, and morality. The logical consequences of holding to a consistent naturalistic ideology, such as Nazism (and communism, under which the Mans have lived) has resulted in the bloodiest century (the 20th) the world has ever seen.

In closing, with Shouchin in strong agreement, Michael says: "A strong Gospel-centred foundation for faith is only possible by first interpreting Genesis as plainly written. And we're grateful for the literature published by Creation Ministries International, which we've found especially helpful in our teaching from Genesis." •

## Believe it or not

BY CREATION MINISTRIES INTERNATIONAL

### The 'puzzle' of Saturn's 'youthful appearance'



**DID** you know that Saturn, reputed by evolutionists to be 4.5 billion years old, is "much brighter than expected for a planet of its age" and that this is "a question that has puzzled scientists since the late sixties"?

Hardly surprising if you didn't know of this, because such confessions of evolutionary-age 'puzzles' aren't generally publicized until or unless an evolutionist can come up with a plausible-sounding 'explanation'.

Hence the fanfare heralding a recent paper in *Nature Geoscience* which has attempted to explain the mystery, yet doggedly keeping to the long-age paradigm. That is, evolutionists are steadfastly avoiding any inference that the reason Saturn looks young, is that it is! (Just as the Bible says.)

Here's the University of Exeter's Professor Gilles Chabrier's summary of the 'explanation':

"Scientists have been wondering for years if Saturn was using an additional source of energy to look so bright but instead our calculations show that Saturn appears young because it can't cool down. Instead of heat being transported throughout the planet by large scale (convective) motions, as previously thought, it must be partly transferred by diffusion across different layers of gas inside Saturn. These separate layers effectively insulate the planet and prevent heat from radiating out efficiently. This keeps Saturn warm and bright."

Really? But why should Saturn be so different from the other gas giants?

Such a foolish bias (Psalm 14:1, 53:1, cf. Psalm 19:1) in the face of Saturn's brightness and many more pointers to its youthfulness seems absurd—but the Bible explains that, too (2 Thessalonians 2:10–11).

- Saturn's youthful appearance explained, sciencedaily.com, 30 April 2013.
- Layered convection as the origin of Saturn's luminosity anomaly, *Nature Geoscience* 6(5):347, 2013.

### "It's important for students not to confuse science with evolution"

delving into the Bible.



### THE Weaver

My life is but a weaving  
Between my Lord and me.  
I cannot choose the colours,  
He weaves so steadily.

Oft times He weaves sorrow  
And I in foolish pride,  
Forget He sees the upper,  
And I the underside.

Not till the loom is silent  
And the shuttles cease to fly,  
Will God roll back the canvas  
And explain the reason why.

The dark threads are as needful  
In the Weaver's skillful hand  
As the threads of gold and silver  
In the pattern He has planned.

— B.M. Franklin

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# FATHER'S DAY ... FATHER'S DAY ... FATHER'S DAY ... FATHER'S DAY ... FATHER'S DAY

## The good father

BY CAITLIN CHODAKOWSKY

**LET'S** play a game. I say a word and you respond with the first word that you associate with it ... ready? Provider. Protector. Father.

I don't know about you but for me these words go hand in hand. It is sad to think many people have never known a father who is a provider and protector. Having done volunteer work in a juvenile detention center I know firsthand that most of the boys and girls serving time there do not have a father figure in their lives.

US Department of Health Census statistics confirm this, stating that 75 per cent of all adolescent patients in chemical abuse centers and 85 per cent of all youths in prison come from fatherless homes.



To a lesser extent, some of my closest friends say their deepest hurts, disappointments, and burdens come from something their father has said or done.

I find it hard to relate because my father is my role model, my protector, and my provider.

He has sacrificed many things for his family and never complains when he has had a hard day.

He always tries to help us out with things, whether it be loaning money for me to buy a car, chasing a house burglar down the street or breaking his drill bit trying to help me make a volcano out of a pointy rock.

When the Bible talks about God being a Father, I think of my dad and I know God is good. Unfortunately the idea of a father for some puts people off God. Perhaps they see Him as uncaring, too harsh or strict, distant, angry, unavailable, or never present.

This is why I want to set the record straight. Set aside all your earthly associations to the word 'father' and consider what Scripture says about the character of God the Father.

He is described as a Father to the fatherless and protector of widows and orphans (Psalm 68:5), the Father of mercies and God of all comfort (2 Corinthians 1:3-4), the Father who knows our needs before we ask Him and provides for us (Matthew 6:8, 26) and the Father who gives good gifts to His children (Matthew 7:11).

The Bible says Jesus and the Father God are one (John 14:6,9), so if we know Jesus, we know God the Father.

To illustrate what God the Father is like, Jesus told a story (found in Luke 15:11-31) about a son who demanded his inheritance from his father early. His father had to sell part of the property to give his son what he wanted.

The son abandoned his father and travelled to a distant country to "squander his wealth on wild living" to the point where he had nothing left and was forced to eat with the pigs. Realizing the mess he was in and the mistakes he had made, he did not expect his father to forgive him but knew even if he went back and begged to become his father's servant, he would still be better off than where he was.

Little did he know how his father would react.

"But while he was still a long way off," Jesus describes, "his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him... the father said to his servants, 'Quick! Bring the best robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. Bring the fattened calf and kill it. Let's have a feast and celebrate. For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found' (see verses 20-24)."

It doesn't matter what mistakes you have made in your life, God is like this father Jesus describes waiting to wrap His loving arms around you and welcome you home.

If the word 'father' is not associated with good memories in your life, remember that God is your Heavenly Father. He wants a relationship with you through Jesus. There are no strings attached, just a real, unconditional love that is waiting to heal hurts, bring comfort and protection, forgive past mistakes, and bless you with the greatest gift of all: eternal life with Him in heaven. •

## Finding a new father

**Anna LeBaron, daughter of a violent cult leader, did not know fatherly love – until she met her Heavenly dad.**

**C**harles Manson is an American criminal and the former leader of a 1960s cult. His followers committed nine murders in five weeks in 1969.

In 1971 he was found guilty of conspiracy to commit seven murders. He is currently at Corcoran State Prison, serving the first of his nine concurrent life sentences.

Imagine your father being known as the "Mormon Charles Manson".

Anna LeBaron grew up in a violent, fundamentalist, polygamist cult, she tells Christianity Today – with her father Ervil LeBaron at the top.

In the 1970s and '80s Ervil commanded followers to carry out mob-style hits on his opponents – "hot lead, cold steel one-way tickets to hell".

Anna remembers moving from place to place to flee the authorities, with the FBI and Mexican police raiding their house soon after they had left it.

"We experienced poverty of mind, spirit, and body," Anna says.

"It doesn't take a mathematical genius to realize that one man cannot support 13 wives and over 50 children.

"Everyone, even young children, worked long hours in grueling conditions to ensure we didn't starve. Even so, we regularly scavenged – or outright stole – to meet basic food and clothing needs."

The Mexican police finally tracked Ervil down and he was sentenced to life in prison in Utah.

But Anna was left confused



about who Jesus was, despite having spent her whole life in a religious group that claimed to believe the Bible.

"When anyone in our tight-knit community spoke the name of Jesus or mentioned Christianity," she says, "they did so with contempt and derision."

After her father's imprisonment, one of Anna's brothers took her and other cult members from Denver to Huston, where Anna experienced her "first taste of a stable, non-chaotic life".

It was a year later, while she was still a teenager, that Anna got a call from her mother. Ervil had died in his prison cell, she told Anna, and she was coming to take her back to Denver, back to the cult.

Anna escaped, hiding away in a hotel for three days until her mother gave up looking for her. She then moved in with her sister Lillian, who was married

with six children at the time.

Anna was 13.

Considering it at least a vast improvement from the local public schools, Lillian enrolled Anna in a Christian school. There, for the first time, she learned about who Jesus really was.

"I learned how Jesus, God's Son, was sent to earth to die on the cross for my sin," she says.

"I learned that Jesus lived, was crucified, and was raised from the dead."

At a youth camp Anna got an opportunity to ask Jesus to come into her life and change her.

"That night, God took the broken heart of a 13-year-old girl in his hands, and since then He has been gradually restoring the wholeness that my chaotic childhood smashed to pieces.

"I left the retreat a different person than when I arrived. I didn't understand everything about God or the Bible, but I



Anna LeBaron

had a willing heart and lots of friends around to help me learn what I needed to know."

Since she had not spent a lot of time with her father and the only photos she had of him were newspaper clippings from his arrest, Anna did not mourn for Ervil the way other children might.

Still, his death, and his impact on her life while he was alive, affected her deeply. Anna says she found comfort in learning God was a "father to the fatherless", because she had never experienced a father's closeness or a father's love in all her childhood years.

"My faith has carried me through the dark valleys I've walked on my healing journey," she says.

"It has helped me persevere through intense fear, tragedy, and multiple murders of people I love.

"As a child, I knew myself only as the polygamist's daughter. But when I came to truly know and experience God as my father, He shattered the evil, all-consuming grip my earthly father had on my life.

"I began to find my identity as a daughter of God," Anna adds, "and learned to experience true freedom in and through Jesus Christ alone." •

## CELEBRATING FATHER'S DAY IN PRISON

"**TODAY IS FATHER'S DAY**, an emotional day in a men's prison full of fathers and sons. The message (at church) today was, 'God is our Father and we are all His sons which makes us family,'" writes Jonathan Mooring, an inmate in Plainview, Texas.

"But more compelling than the sermon, was seeing men of all races, places and walks of life – hardened criminals, repeat offenders, gang members, men covered in tattoos, hardened bodies, tough guys - all reaching out to comfort one another.

"We put our arms around each other and tears flowed like water as we prayed for children or fathers we've left to fend for themselves; that we had let down. We prayed for a change of heart and mind.

"As I looked around the room what I saw defied logic.

"I've been in prison eight times since I was 11 years old. I've been locked up or



Prisoners praying together.

on the run so much and for so long that I have lost contact with everyone from the outside world.

"I am the father of four children who want nothing to do with me, a grandfather to a baby girl I have never seen and a son to a father who has long since disowned me.

"I haven't had a visit or a letter in over a year now, but God has again given me such a revelation of His love and power in this service that I want to kick myself for all I've done wrong in my life and for waiting so long to surrender myself to the Lord (Jesus).

"My walk with God started two and a half years ago in solitary confinement. It has had its ups and downs.

"I still have a long way to go in my walk with God. I still fight temptation daily. But I have grown so much since giving my life to the Lord," Jonathan declares.

If this Father's Day is hard for you, let Psalm 68:5-6 encourage you:

"A father of the fatherless, a defender of widows,

Is God in His holy habitation.

God sets the solitary in families;

He brings out those who are bound into prosperity." •

# Building Better Marriages

## BRINGING THE BEST YOU TO YOUR RELATIONSHIPS

BY ROB FURLONG

**BECKY TURNEY** will never forget the day she married Kelly, the man of her dreams.

The two were married recently in Alaska but the day would contain some sadness for Becky because in October 2015 her 19 year old son, Triston was killed in an accidental shooting.

On her wedding day, in honour of Triston, a chair was set aside for him where the family sat with a piece of prose indicating that he would be “watching from heaven”. It was a touching tribute but it paled into insignificance as a result of what happened next!

At the time of Triston’s death, Becky shared on Facebook that her son’s passing “was a tragedy and senseless (but) Triston was an organ

donor and will be able to help someone else’s life...”

Becky had no inkling of what was to come on her wedding day.

Kelly (the groom) flew a young man named Jacob to Alaska to be one of his groomsmen and then stopped the ceremony to introduce him to Becky for the first time.

Why? Jacob had been born with a rare heart condition, had undergone a number of open heart surgeries and by age 19 was in desperate need of a donor so that he could undergo heart transplant surgery.

Becky’s son, Triston, was the donor of Jacob’s life saving heart!

Becky was overcome with emotion, hugged Jacob and was also able to listen to her dead son’s heart, courtesy of a stethoscope and now beating strongly inside Jacob’s chest. One of the photographers for the day later wrote, “...nothing prepares you for the beauty of this moment. Everyone



Jacob and Becky. Photo Facebook

was so moved by this and I had to share this amazing story.”

And this moment happened because a man named Kelly simply loved and cared enough for the woman he was about to marry.

“This is a man at his best!” I thought to myself as I read this story. He showed his bride that he truly cared for her and was prepared to go to great lengths so she would know he was truly concerned for her deepest needs.

We men are capable of truly great moments that demonstrate our courage, passion and love.

And we are equally capable of the worst of moments when we reveal only selfishness, pride and ambition.

King David was just such a man!

As a mere teenager he takes on Goliath when the rest of the Israeli army stands paralysed by fear and intimidation.

“God will give me the victory!” he declares and in a single moment his faith in God inspires a nation to glory as Goliath crashes to the ground.

When he ascends the throne he heals the divisions that exist and makes Israel the most powerful nation in the region.

When he learns of the death of his enemy Saul he is struck with grief and leads the mourners.

This is David at his best – gracious, filled with faith and generous.

But there are low moments – adultery, murder, a divided family and revenge.

This is David at his worst.

But in spite of his weaknesses, his love for God ultimately triumphs and he is remembered as “the man after God’s heart.”

God knows my weaknesses and He knows yours.

He sees our great moments and our not so great moments.

And he also sees our hearts.

What, then, are you bringing to your relationships – to your wife, your children, your colleagues and your friends?

Are they getting the best of you or the worst of you?

Don’t be discouraged by this – God *does* forgive our failures but He also wants us to step up and to bring our best. And the best we can bring Him is “a heart after His heart”. Everything else will flow out of that.

So come on men – we need a few more Davids and Kelly Turneys! •

# Lessons from a sausage dog (Part 7)

BY JODY BENNETT

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

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



Because we know something Carrie doesn’t know.

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

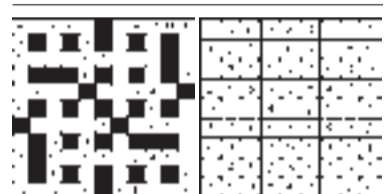
It made me think, I have the same dilemma with God sometimes. I want something I’m sure is good, I know He loves me and gives me good things, I am asking repeatedly, as He has instructed, but He keeps refusing.

Carrie can’t understand what could possibly be wrong with giving her beef but she has to trust that if we don’t do it there must be a good reason for it. And her begging, sulking or acting up is not going to change our decision. Even if we tried to explain it to her, there is no way she could understand.

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

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

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



## How can I become a Christian?

**Anyone can gain the eternal life offered though Jesus Christ**

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

OUR PROBLEM:	<b>Separation from God</b> “Everyone has sinned. Nobody is good enough because God’s standards are perfect” (Romans 3:23)	ADMIT
GOD’S REMEDY / SOLUTION:	<b>Jesus died on the cross</b> “God demonstrates His own love for us in this; while we were still sinners, Christ died for us” (Romans 5:8)	BELIEVE
OUR RESPONSE:	<b>Trust Jesus by receiving Him</b> “To all who received Him, to those who believed in His name, He gave the right to become children of God” (John 1:12)	COMMIT

Here is an example of how you can pray.

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

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

**AS A NEXT STEP :**

<p><b>If you prayed the above prayer, tick this box</b> </p> <p>I have prayed this prayer. <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>Please send me:</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Bible</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Some ‘starting off’ literature</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Information on a helpful church</p>	<p><b>If you have NOT prayed the prayer at this stage, tick this box</b> </p> <p>I would like to think about this. <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>Please send me:</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> More information as I am inquiring about being a Christian.</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> I have a problem (see attached letter)</p>
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\* Please tick and write clearly \*

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

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Age and occupation (it helps) \_\_\_\_\_

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## There’s an APP for that ...



**IF** you are going on a trip or holiday and wanting an app that can be both a travel journal and a way to stay in touch with family and friends back home, then look no further than **journi**.

Journi app allows you to enter photos and notes (of up to 1000 characters each) at any time. It automatically adds date, time and location settings to each entry (which you can edit if needed), allowing you to plot your travels. You can add entries even when you are offline, and the app will automatically update your Journi as soon as you connect to the Internet again.

A neat feature is that you can invite others travelling with you to collaborate on your entries, creating a collection of all your photos and thoughts in one place. Or invite those back home to be followers of your journey, able to react to your posts with emojis, comments or questions. Invites can be sent via Facebook, Messenger, email, Whatsapp or Hangouts.

If you want to keep your travel

dairy completely private, just for your own records, then that is an option too. At least then your photos and observations will be all neatly arranged for you to look back on.

Any photos you take on your camera are displayed at the top of your Journi app, for you to choose to display when you open the app. If you choose more than 10 photos at a time, Journi will organise them into smaller groups based on location or the time they were taken.

Each entry you make can also be tagged with a category icon: worth seeing, nature, travel, accommodation, food and drink, nightlife, culture and art, architecture etc.

And, if you want to choose where to go next or what to do in a spot then check out other people’s public Journi’s and be amazed at what is out there.

The app is available in the Google Play and iTunes stores, free for the basic version and \$11.99/ month for the pro version that allows you to back up your entries to Dropbox or Google Drive.

Instead of boring your friends with 100 holiday photos after the trip, get this app and take them on the Journi with you! •



# Getting life goals straight



Queens Park Rangers' Gavin Peacock battles for the ball against Nottingham Forest's Riccardo Scimeca in 2001. (Photo Steve White/EMPICS via Getty Images)

## Premier League player Gavin Peacock found fulfilling all his dreams still left him unsatisfied.

**F**or professional players, worshipping their chosen sport is almost a prerequisite for success.

Gavin Peacock knew about that from a young age. His father was a professional soccer player for Charlton Athletic from 1962 to 1978 and served as an inspiration, teacher, and role model for Gavin.

The English former professional soccer player recalls how he grew up around the smell of the dressing room, the sweat of the training ground, and the stadium on a Saturday.

"Naturally my childhood was filled with dreams of following in my dad's footsteps," he tells *Christianity Today*.

"I was a kid who intensely wanted to achieve in the classroom and on the field.

"My father taught me the necessary self-control, discipline, and skills to succeed in education and in the professional sports arena."

Never could he have predicted he would one day be giving it all up to move to Canada with his wife and children.

Gavin's success started when, as a 16-year-old, he left school and signed a professional contract with Premier League Queens Park Rangers—his dream.

And yet he says he was not really happy.

"I was an insecure young man in the cutthroat world of professional sport," he says.

"Soccer was my god. If I played well on Saturday I was high, if I

played poorly I was low. My sense of well-being depended entirely on my performance.

"I soon realized that achieving the goal wasn't all it was cracked up to be."

Gavin did not grow up in a Christian home, he explains, and never heard the gospel message (good news about Jesus).

"Sunday school gave way to Sunday soccer. I thought God existed to make me happy and that if I were a good person I'd go to heaven."

His thinking started to change when he was invited to a Bible study and experienced something he did not expect.

"I walked into a room full of young people as the one with money, career, and fame," Gavin recalls.

"I even rolled up in the car I had bought, a 1980s icon, the Ford Escort XR3i. I was the in crowd, and they were not.

"Yet when they spoke about Jesus, they displayed a life and joy that I did not have. They talked about sin as if it had consequence and about God as if they knew Him."

Gavin continued going to the Bible study. He was taught about Jesus, how He was sent to earth to die on the cross and pay the price for the things we would do wrong in our lives. He was taught about how much God loved him and wanted good things for him.

"I realized that my biggest problem wasn't whether I met the disapproval of a 20,000-strong crowd

on Saturday," he says; "my biggest problem was my sin and the disapproval of Almighty God.

"I realized that the biggest obstacle to happiness was that soccer was king instead of Jesus, who provided a perfect righteousness (perfect standing before God) for me.

"My heart still burned for soccer, but it burned for Christ more."

The scrutiny that came after his conversion, Gavin says, was intense. He recalls "thrilling and testing days" filled with highs and lows, cup finals and promotions, defeat and relegation.

"On one level the uncertainty and drama [in professional sport] spur men on to play their best—on another level they cause deep insecurity," he says.

"That used to be me as a young man, but as a Christian I now feared the Lord more than the crowd. Soccer wasn't my idol anymore."

And so at 35 years old, with a chronic knee injury, Gavin was able to retire in peace.

"Giving up a good thing or having it taken away reveals how much you love the Lord," he says.

"Through the pain of our losses He shows us that He is always with us and asks us if He is enough.

"And so it was when I ended my 18-year career in July 2002. It was a privilege to play for QPR, Chelsea, and Newcastle United, but the schoolboy dream was over."

After a brief broadcasting career at the BBC Gavin says he knew he was going to give up his soccer career, for his second dream career, serving God.

In 2008, he left England for

Canada and within weeks he "went from speaking on TV about David Beckham and Cristiano Ronaldo to writing papers at a Bible College".

"Remarkably, I am still here as a pastor at Calvary Grace Church in Calgary and international director for the Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood."

In conclusion, Gavin says: "Turning from sin and trusting in Christ for salvation isn't just a one-time initial event—it is the substance of the Christian life." •



Gavin Peacock in a clip from Youtube. One his latest tweets on Twitter reads "A glimpse of a holy and gracious God from the pulpit will answer a thousand problems in the pew."

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