

HIGH LIFE FALLS FLAT

BY JANICE TEO

There's gambling. And then there was the Peter Ong kind of gambling. There's drinking. And then there was the Peter Ong kind of drinking. There's debauchery. Let's just say Peter turned that into an art form too.

Peter was a journalist in Singapore in the 70s and 80s—the old-school kind, never without a cigarette hanging from the side of his mouth, a glass of whisky in one hand and poker cards in the other.

His excesses knew no bounds. Poker bets regularly hit \$500 a card. Yes there were nights when he won big, but there were also nights he would lose up to \$5000. The big losses gave him sleepless nights, but he would comfort himself by thinking he could make it all back—maybe double - next Saturday. Tucked into his blanket of denial, he rolled over and went back to sleep.

Peter, who now lives in Sydney and works as a media consultant, fills in the details.

“One Christmas Eve we gambled from 7pm until 9 the next morning. Every poker session was accompanied by bottles and bottles of Johnnie Walker Black.

“I was a drunkard. I used to joke that my best friend was someone named Johnnie. Most nights of the week, I would haunt the pubs and drink myself silly. I could drink many folks under the table.

“I smoked heavily too. Thirty sticks a day was normal for more



Left: Peter Ong with his mother, who faithfully prayed for him for many years.



Right: Peter in his partying days with actress Angela Yu Chien.

than 15 years. I tried to stop smoking many times. And I succeeded many, many times. But alas the longest stretch was for one week.”

To this impressive list of vices, add womanising. “Yup, I did that too,” he admits, wincing at the memory. “Never mind that I had a son and a

daughter. One day my wife finally had enough, and who can blame her? We got into a massive fight and she finally divorced me.”

By 1977 Peter was alone and miserable. He picks up the story: “I rented a small apartment. For years my space was 13 steps from the front

door to the kitchen and 13 steps out. The kids came once a week but not to stay because there wasn't room.

“Work was all I had. The office was just a short walk down the street. I worked the very early morning shift, starting at 4am. Then it was lunch and after that, straight home to sleep

for a couple of hours and then spend the rest of the night doing nothing.”

Even Johnnie Walker did little to lessen the pain. If anything the bottle just made Peter feel 10 times worse.

One day he hailed a taxi to go home after work. Instead the words that he muttered to the driver were: “Bible House.”

“I had no idea why I wanted to go there, but for some reason, it seemed the right place to go,” he marvels.

He bought a copy of the Good News Bible and that night, in his little apartment, he began reading the New Testament. And read. And read.

“I could not stop,” he says. “I ended up in tears and I knelt down on my knees and prayed, ‘Oh God, if You are truly out there, please save me. I am a miserable sinner just as you said in the Bible. I need you.’”

Something changed. A weight lifted and one morning about six months later as he was walking to work, he put a cigarette to his mouth, and brought his lighter to the tip. “Just as I was about to light it, I took it out of my lips and threw it into the drain. The rest of the cigarettes followed.

“That was in 1982 and it was the last day I smoked.”

Other things began to change without any effort on Peter's part. “I stopped using expletives,” he laughs. “I used to use a string of four-letter words in every sentence, so much so that women didn't dare speak to me.”

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Honouring our dads PAGE 9



Fun for Kids

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FACING OUR GREATEST UNKNOWN

BY JIM DENISON

IT is human nature to downplay threats we cannot control. For example, we say of those who die that they “departed” or “passed on.” But euphemisms cannot change the reality they describe.

As of this morning, 188 people have died in massive flooding in Europe. The death toll in the Surfside, Florida, condominium collapse stands at 97. At least two people were killed and several others were wounded by shootings at three locations in Tucson, Arizona, yesterday afternoon. And the global death



toll from the coronavirus pandemic stands at 4,089,175 at this writing.

Martin Luther said, “Every man must do two things alone: he must do his own believing and his own dying.” Let's see how the first helps us with the second.

Why people fear death

It's human nature to fear the unknown. The dread we feel that keeps us from venturing into a cave where a predator is waiting is a God-given response that may save our lives.

Even when our lives are not at risk, we understandably fear what we cannot predict. From going into an exam to beginning a new job or moving to a new city, we are naturally

apprehensive of the future.

Death, of course, is the greatest unknown. Secular people do not believe anyone has ever come back from the other side, so they have no empirical way to know what happens when we die. Do we simply cease to exist? Are we reincarnated? Do we spend eternity in heaven? In hell?

However, our post-Christian society has devised a solution. Postmodernism has taught us that our reality is the reality. Truth is “our truth.” Therefore, if we don't believe there is an afterlife, we don't need to be concerned with an afterlife. The man who declared to me “I don't believe in hell” was convinced that his opinion settled the matter.

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BACK PAGE



GOLD STANDARD

TATJANA SCHOENMAKER

Hope despite spinal injury

BY JANICE TEO

It was a bright summer's day in February 1990 that Shane O'Connor, then 32, went for a picnic and a swim with friends at the beautiful Serpentine Falls in Western Australia.

The group made the most of the lake in the heat and swimming and diving. Shane, a senior technician with Panasonic, was in line for a promotion. At lunchtime, life was good and he hadn't a care in the world. By 5pm, he would never walk again.

It happened in an instant. Just once more, Shane had thought to himself as he plunged into the water before breaking for lunch. He never saw the rock and collided with it head first. The impact severed his spine and turned Shane into a quadriplegic.

You might think that this tragedy would have made him bitter, angry or resentful but nothing could be further from the truth.

"Yes of course I went through really dark times through the years," said the 65-year-old who lives at a special residential facility in Perth with others in similar physical circumstances. "But I have no shortage of hope because I know this is not the end of the story for me. I am not going to be this way forever."

There is no chance the damage to his spine can be reversed, so this sounds like wishful thinking at best, delusion at worst. But Shane is not a delusional man.

About 40 years ago, he made the decision to become a Christian and it



Shane O'Connor enjoying the sunshine at his care home.

is his faith that has seen him through the worst of times.

"Yes of course what happened to me was very painful and difficult," he admitted. "But I looked at it as part of my walk. I walk where the Lord takes me and He sustains me and reassures me there is a life of wholeness waiting for me in heaven when I die. It would be easy to fall into depression, but you can't let your mind go there."

Shane O'Connor had grown up

feeling well acquainted with the devil. At least that's how he saw it.

"I went my own way for years," he said. "I started taking cannabis at 16 and moved on to heroin, LSD, barbiturates, mushrooms. My life was very dark. I got involved with witchcraft, tarot cards and fortune telling. My whole life was darkness and oppression."

Shane's family were practicing Catholics. And somehow it had been communicated to him that being a good believer meant he had to spend life feeling ashamed and guilty for his wrongdoings. "I never felt good enough," he told *Challenge News*. "All I felt was condemned because I was evil. It was endless suffering."

"I had grown up in a religious home. I said all the prayers but they were just empty words and practices to me. I'd been brought up with all the different gods around me like Buddha and Krishna. They were all the same in my house and I began

feeling that Jesus and God were actually the devil because I had no peace. It was torment for me because I felt there was no escaping hell."

Ironically, it was his fear of hell that ultimately led him to freedom. He was living in Melbourne and struggling with depression when he said he tried to imagine what God was really like. "I thought to myself - 'if there really is a God, I'd like Him to be like that fella Jesus'," he said.

His desire for the truth became more intense and culminated in this stunning moment of clarity: "I decided that if being a Christian meant I had to wear a grey suit forever, eat boring food and never have relations with another woman for 60 years, that was still better than going to hell for all eternity," he said. In his defense, this was in the 60s and the 70s, decades in which grey suits were pretty much the ultimate crime against fashion.

He walked into a church in Melbourne where the pastor asked the troubled young man how he could help him. They ended up praying together and Shane committed his life to Jesus Christ.

"In that moment I experienced more relief than I ever believed could have existed," he said. "It felt like a gushing river inside me. Suddenly every shameful moment of my life was gone, buried by His work on the cross where He died for our sins. I only felt His love and it was the greatest, sweetest pleasure."

Vera Hing is a volunteer caregiver who visits Shane once a month. "We often think we're going to cheer him up but we always end up being encouraged by Shane instead," she laughed. "The word of God comes forth so fluently from his lips bringing encouragement to many of us."

Shane said he shares his faith with his fellow residents, not by Bible-bashing but by sharing his hope and joy.

"Before I knew Jesus life was a living hell, but when I met the Lord it was all turned around. My body may not work, but my spirit can be free." ●

Thanks for Challenge!



YESTERDAY evening I was called by a family member whose father had passed away. At the burial there had been some heated discussions revealing unresolved issues within the family. By the grace of God, I brought some *Challenge* papers with me and used them to counsel the family members. They started to forgive each other. There was great joy and reconciliation in this family, and this is how God is using *Challenge Good News* papers to minister love, reconciliation and forgiveness to people.

- Nigel Bowers, South Africa via Whatsapp (edited for clarity)

THANK you for the magazine *Challenge, The Good News Paper*.

I shed so many tears reading the stories of Andrew Collins and Jameel McGee, *The Dirty Cop*; the forgiveness of Brandt Jean for former policewoman Amber Guyger; and the inspired story of baseball player Blake Bivens.

Thank you for your strength, your struggle and your champion courage to put this awesome magazine out for us brothers in prisons, jails and CM [closed management].

Thank you, Harry Nattis, Hardee Correctional Institution, Florida, USA

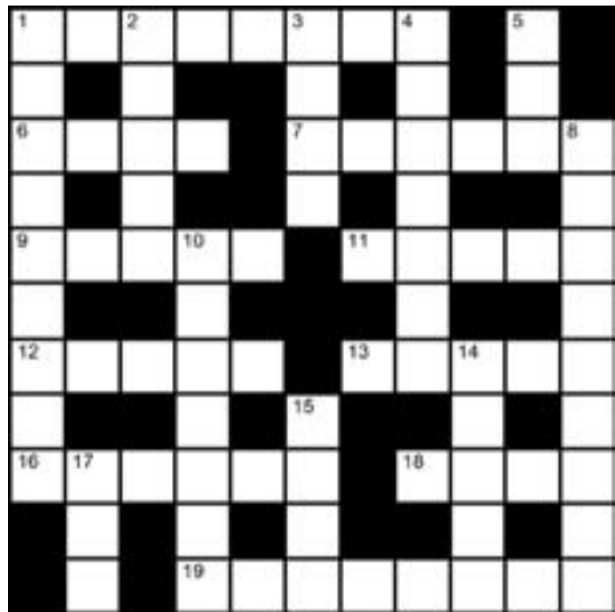
Has Challenge impacted your life? Please tell us how at jodyb@challengenews.org

Coffee Break

CROSSWORD & SUDOKU

ACROSS

- 1 Skiing and shooting event
- 6 Nile bird
- 7 Little lizards
- 9 Diving word
- 11 Internet box
- 12 Australian gemstone
- 13 Musician with puffy cheeks
- 16 Book before Job in Bible
- 18 Shake up
- 19 Disease-causing agent



DOWN

- 1 Old name for sulphur
- 2 French farewell
- 3 Glasgow gal
- 4 Kenyan city
- 5 Acorn-bearer

- 8 Good ____ (helpful stranger)
- 10 US hotel porter
- 14 Spike, barb
- 15 Gait faster than a walk
- 17 U-boat, basically

[SOLUTIONS PAGE 11](#)



"I know we're living under a park bench. Do you know the roof leaks?"

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

HIGH LIFE FALLS FLAT



Peter, with his wife Judith

● From page 1

The office was even more surprised than Peter was. "They all knew something had happened to me," he chuckles. "But they didn't know what."

"That Saturday, my friends asked if I was going to join them for poker as usual. I said, 'No I can't gamble any more. I have become a Christian.'"

They continued to pester him - after they managed to lift their jaws from the floor - but he turned them down every time. One disgruntled buddy grumbled: "Peter used to be such a lot of fun. Now he is so boring, always talking about God." Soon he earned the nickname Reverend Ong.

"I've often wondered what made me tell the taxi driver to go to Bible House," muses Peter, who is now 71, has five children and seven grandchildren.

"By any human reckoning, I would have been the last person ever to become a Christian. People who knew me then would have said 'Who? Peter Ong? No way! IMPOSSIBLE!' in one breath."

"But having studied Scripture, I know it was by God's providence which works in mysterious ways beyond our comprehension. It was no accident that I bought the Bible. Nothing happens by chance with God."

"I am thankful that the God who made the heavens and the earth saw fit to call a wretched sinner such as I, to Himself."

"As it says in John 6:44 - no man can come to the Lord Jesus Christ on his own strength unless the Father has drawn him."

Understanding Who, not why brings peace



Lyss Forrestral and her son Eli.

BY AINSLEY GAEBLER

Lyssa Forrestral has known brokenness and abuse in both her childhood and marital relationship, and yet the friendly 28-year-old has come through the dark times to a place of peace and joy.

Speaking to *Challenge News* as she sits on the floor with her three-year-old son Eli, Lyss, as she prefers to be called, describes her growing up years as dysfunctional - full of turmoil, addiction and physical harm.

"My mum had a relationship with drugs and a very short fuse," she remembers. "There was a lot of screaming, excessive physical and verbal punishment and harm."

Her parents were separated. "Whenever I would visit my dad, I would dread going home to mum's in fear of what I was going home to. At my dad's there were hardly any rules and so much freedom. It was like night and day."

Being the second eldest child, Lyss felt it was her responsibility to protect her younger siblings. The memories bring tears to her eyes.

"There were times when I would step in and say, 'Stop hitting them, hit me instead,'" she recalls.

Grief is a tunnel, not a cave. As surely as there was a beginning, there is an end. You will emerge in a new place, but you will always know it is the place God brought you. - Janet Denison

"How do I happen to believe in God? Writing novels, I got into the habit of looking for plots. After a while, I began to suspect that my own life had a plot. And after a while more, I began to suspect that life itself has a plot." - Frederick Buechner, *The Alphabet of Grace*

Have courage for the great sorrows of life and patience for the small ones. And when you have finished your daily task, go to sleep in peace. God is awake. - Victor Hugo

In the midst of this, she often attended church and heard about Jesus and what He had done for her on the cross. "Through my teens up until a young adult I lived the 'good Christian life'," she says. "I know I only made it through because Jesus helped, but I never fully surrendered my life to Him."

"There was emptiness in my life. I idolised marriage and family. It was the deepest desire of my heart and I thought that was what I needed to satisfy me."

When she was 21 she met a man in church. "He was a new believer, from a different country," she explains. "He was 32 and I felt he was quite cultured and mature. He treated me like a princess and I fell head over heels in love with him." They were married nine months later.

It was only when her father went to live with the couple that the rose-coloured glasses Lyss wore started to disintegrate. "My dad told me he thought my husband was abusing me but I said to him 'Don't be so ridiculous. I would know if he was.'"

"Then I read through a list of documented abusive behaviours and realised my husband ticked every box except for physical abuse. All I could do was cry."

The next four months were chaos as the relationship collapsed despite her best efforts. "I was still going to church and, through prayer, clinging to the hope that we could save our marriage," she says. "But we were constantly at each other's throats. He refused to take any responsibility."

An internal battle was also raging in Lyss. She wanted to honor her marriage vows but ultimately felt it necessary to end the toxic situation.

The next several months were taken up with court cases, threatening phone calls, acute anxiety and uncertainty. "I was really angry with God," she admits.

"I thought - 'You should have protected me, God. You failed me.' I really hit rock bottom. But when you know God and you've grown up with Him all your life, as I had, you just can't live a peaceful life away from Him."

Eventually, Lyss's anger against God gave way to her need for Him. Alone in her bedroom one night, she broke down.

"I finally surrendered fully to God," she explains. "I told Him I was so sorry and asked for His forgiveness. He showed me I had to take responsibility and stop blaming everyone else. I was making decisions out of my brokenness."

A massive shift occurred. "Before, God didn't feel close to me," she confesses. "He was just this huge God out there. But now this huge God sat right next to me. I'd never felt that way before. Jesus is gracious, forgiving, merciful and gentle. He will take you at your worst. There is no dark place you can go that He won't meet you at."

As she yielded to God, her life started to come together again. Working through her issues with a professional Christian counsellor, Lyss found the courage to allow God to touch and heal her. She has forgiven her parents and ex-husband and rejoices that she "lives in such freedom now. I feel an incredible amount of peace."

She has also trusted God to take care of her son. "God told me, 'You cannot go with Eli everywhere but I can'," she shares.

"Over the last few years, I've really experienced that walking in faith doesn't get any easier. You're always stepping out into deeper water. But it does get easier to trust God."

"I always used to ask God, 'Why?, why?, why?,' and the one thing that He's always brought back to me is this - 'You don't need to know why, you just need to trust.'"

"My life hasn't been easy, but I've learned that God truly is ever faithful if we will just surrender and trust Him." •

Whatever happened to the napalm girl?

Those old enough to remember the picture will never forget it. The image was one of the most defining of the Vietnam War.

It showed a nine-year-old girl running naked and screaming down a road. It was June 8, 1972. The girl was nine, her name was Kim Phuc Phan Thi and her back was on fire from the napalm bomb that had just vaporised her entire village.

The sticky substance adhered to Kim's skin and burned her flesh. The pain was excruciating.

"I was on fire, badly in need of help," she recounts, in her book *Fire Road*. "Years later I would learn that this was no ordinary fire."

"Too hot, too hot!" she screamed as she ran down the dirt road. A BBC reporter tried to put the fire out using water from his canteen but because napalm feeds off anything containing oxygen, she caught fire all over again.

Her horrific injuries caused her years of debilitating pain, dreadful scars and left her with skin like leather. She would need 16 operations and numerous other treatments even decades later.

But equally tortuous were the mental wounds. "I went through so much of a nightmare," Kim said in an interview with PRI, an American public radio organisation.

"I was so scared. And I thought with this scar on my body, 'When I'm grown up, I'll never have a boyfriend'. I never thought anybody would marry me."

"That was in my thoughts all day and it was not easy. In the beginning, I was so disabled. My neck, my arm, my hands. It was so ugly."

"I had so many questions: 'Why me? Why am I still alive? What is the purpose for my life?' My life was so dark. No hope, no joy, no future."

"Those bombs have brought me immeasurable pain. The emotional and spiritual pain was even harder to endure."

She turned to her childhood religion of Cao Dai (pronounced 'cow-die') hoping for peace and answers. "But as one prayer after another went unanswered, it became clear that either those gods were nonexistent or they did not care to lend a hand," she said.

She was in anguish of the soul. It was around this time she met a cousin. His name was Anh and he was a pastor. She riddled him with questions, finally asking him the one that broke his heart:

"Anh, what about the napalm attack? Where was your 'God' when I was left for dead? Why did He not spare me from years of pain?"

He looked at the tears in her eyes. "I think



Above: Dr Kim Phuc Phan Thi at a concert in her honour in Philadelphia, PA, on December 7, 2019.

Below: The book Kim has written about her life.



you must go to church," he said.

One Saturday night, in pain both in body and in soul, she sobbed and cried out: "God! Where are you? If you will give me a friend, just one person who knows You and who can help me know You, then I will agree not to take my life."

She gave God 24 hours to answer her.

The next morning she went to church and saw a woman sitting alone. Kim approached her. "Good morning," the woman said. "I am Thuy. Have you come to worship today?"

The two women became close friends and studied the Bible together. Then Kim attended a Christmas Eve service in 1982. The pastor's sermon was like honey to Kim.

"This Christmas is not about the gifts we carefully wrap and give to each other as much as it is about one Gift in particular, who was wrapped in human flesh and given from God to us," he said. "The Gift is Jesus."

At the pastor's invitation to accept Jesus as her Lord and Savior, Kim eagerly responded and woke up on Christmas morning a newly minted Christian.

Today Kim lives in Canada with her husband and two children. She established the Kim Foundation International and dedicates herself to helping children who are victims of war or underprivileged.

In *Fire Road*, Kim tells the emotional story of meeting the American officer who coordinated the napalm attack. Plummer, who had since become a pastor, asked for her forgiveness.

"The moment I met Rev. Plummer, I saw him cry," Kim says. "He was sorry. He meant it. We became best friends. God has healed the scars in my heart...how dark and bitter and angry and hateful I was. Now Jesus fills my heart with love and compassion."

"After accepting Jesus as my Saviour, I experienced the kind of healing that can only come from God. I was finally at peace."

"Nearly half a century has passed since I ran down that road in Vietnam. I will never forget the horrors of that day. But I realise there is nothing greater or more powerful than the love of our blessed Saviour."

"My faith in Jesus has enabled me to forgive those who have hurt and scarred me. It has enabled me to pray for my enemies rather than curse them. And it has enabled me not just to tolerate them but truly to love them."

"Looking back at the past five decades, I realise those bombs that brought so much suffering also brought great healing."

"Those bombs led me to Christ." •

An unorthodox way to find God!

When Nicos Kaloyirou was 10 years old, the Turks invaded his homeland of Cyprus, causing his family to have to flee their home and live in a tent in a refugee camp for two years. Later he, his parents and brother and sister were sponsored by his great aunt to come to Australia. Nicos was then 12, and able to speak very little English.

However, he quickly caught on and loved to read - especially *Tintin* comics, archaeology and history books at the library and his mother's Greek women's magazines.

In those magazines he read articles by American evangelist Spiros Zodhiates who wrote about Jesus and shared the gospel [the good news story about how Jesus is the answer to our sin problem]. In Cyprus, Nicos had been sent to Sunday school in the Greek Orthodox Church and learnt the Lord's Prayer by heart in Greek, but this idea of needing "salvation" was new.

"As I look back, I believe God was always pursuing me and over time drawing me to Himself," Nicos told his church, in a message posted on Youtube. The Bible says it is the goodness of God that leads us to repentance (turning away from our sin) and that was Nicos' experience. Little by little, God drew him closer.

When he was about 13, a Greek neighbour handed him a little comic book, without saying anything about it. It was a *Chick Tract* called "This was your life". Nicos simply took it to his room, read it through and prayed the sinner's prayer at the back of the booklet.

There was no fanfare or bright lights but Nicos testifies, "I felt such overwhelming peace and warmth which convinced me that Jesus was real and had answered my prayer and had forgiven my sins. I felt a tremendous amount of love and peace being poured into my heart at that time.

"However, I didn't tell anyone about my experience and I gradually forgot about it."

The tract had said to follow up the prayer of salvation by telling someone, finding a good church to attend regularly and reading the Bible daily, none of which Nicos did. Not surprisingly the little spark of his faith failed to 'catch' in his life at the time.

In high school he was taught the theory of evolution, which dismisses the Bible's account of the origins of the world as superstitious myth. These ideas further eroded the young man's faith.

While at university Nicos suffered a bilateral lung collapse and ended up in hospital. Awaiting surgery, he was visited by a stranger who offered to pray for him. Once more Nicos felt strengthened by the tangible presence of God.

He also found Thomas a Kempis's *The Imitation of Christ* and reading the gospels in his mother's Greek New

Testament very instructive and comforting. On becoming an Australian citizen, Nicos received his first English Bible, signed by the Lord Mayor of Unley.

Reading the Bible in English, Nicos began to think about God as Creator and to doubt the evolutionary theory he had been taught in high school. Then he read a book called *The Neck of the Giraffe or Where Darwin went wrong* by Francis Hitching, and this book referred him to a book called *The Genesis Flood* by Whitcomb and Morris, which Nicos devoured. This book gave him a whole new perspective on geology and The Flood, reassuring him that the geological evidence did indeed match up with the Biblical account of creation.

In his second year of law studies, at age 20, Nicos went to a Creation presentation by the Navigators group where he learnt more and made a Christian friend who invited him to do a course introducing the basics of Christianity. Following this course, Nicos knew he wanted to commit completely to following Jesus and make Him his Lord and Saviour.

However, Nicos' family were not too pleased with his decision and felt he had betrayed Greek Orthodoxy and them.

"As a result I ran away from God for a while and blamed Jesus for coming into my life and taking it over! I blamed Him for turning things upside down and leading me into conflict with my family. I wanted Him

to leave me alone! But thank God, Jesus refused to go away."

God orchestrated Nicos' circumstances in such a way that he became very convicted of his sin of backsliding, and he repented and rededicated himself to Christ.

One of Nicos' favourite verses from the Bible is Psalm 119:67 "I used to wander off until you disciplined me; but now I closely follow your word." (NLT)

After university, Nicos was baptised [immersed in water as a symbol of dying to one's old self and rising again as a new creation].

"The Christian life is not easy, it is a battle," he admits. "But the victory is already won by the Captain of our Salvation, Jesus Christ."

When he heard a talk by Major Ian Thomas and read his book *The Saving Life of Christ*, Nicos realised that he wasn't to rely on feelings of being saved but had to rely on the fact of what Jesus did on the cross. His salvation was accomplished and real, regardless of whether he felt it or not. He realised that true Christianity is to be in dynamic fellowship with the living God, not follow a set of rules or have a series of emotional experiences.



Nicos Kaloyirou



I WANTED HIM TO LEAVE ME ALONE! BUT THANK GOD, JESUS REFUSED TO GO AWAY.



Christian singer/songwriter Michael W. Smith and his wife Debbie Smith.

Famous musician that nearly wasn't

Michael W Smith had a desire to become a recording artist from a young age, but a drug overdose and a nervous breakdown could have put an end to his dreams early on in his career.

In a video shared on the website *I Am Second*, Michael says he dropped out of college and moved to Nashville to pursue a career in music.

He started playing at late-night bars and was drawn into the drug scene.

"It's almost like your compass sort of just disappears and you enter this whole other world and you don't really realise what's going down, and then all of a sudden it's too late," he says.

"I knew where I belonged. I just couldn't get out of the mess that I was in."

In an interview with *Risen* magazine, Michael says it was deception that led him to make bad choices that nearly cost him his life.

"I was stupid," he says. "I thought I could play with fire and not get burned. Being young and immature, it almost cost me my life."

"Thank God for a praying mom and dad that never gave up on me. I'm convinced that it was their prayers that saved me."

Although he was raised in a Christian family and says as a child he clearly understood the Gospel [the good news about Jesus Christ], he

had walked away from his childhood faith.

Michael says he abused drugs for four years and almost died from an overdose.

Afterwards, he prayed for God to do something to "get his attention".

This was followed by a period of depression and he experienced what he called a nervous breakdown.

"The God of the universe came and laid on that floor with me as I convulsed, cried, and wept for three hours straight," Michael explains.

At this point he rededicated his life to serving Jesus and hasn't been the same since.

Not long after this, he began working as a songwriter and landed his own record deal.

Michael W. Smith is now one of the world's most successful Christian recording artists, with 18 million albums sold and three Grammys among his many awards.

He has been referred to as the cornerstone of Christian music.

"I never could have orchestrated any of this," Michael says. "God is faithful."

He credits his relationship with Jesus as the reason for his peace and hope, rather than his achievements.

"All that stuff dissipates," he says. "It doesn't last. The greatest peace that I have is I know who I am. I'm a son of the High King of the Universe. My identity crisis is solved."

FACING OUR GREATEST UNKNOWN

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This is illogical in the extreme, of course. Denying that cancer exists doesn't keep me from getting cancer.

Even more, it is a scheme of Satan, humanity's archenemy. He wants nothing more than to delude us into thinking we don't need what Jesus came to give. We are unlikely to repent of our sins (turn from wrongdoing) and seek forgiveness if we don't think we need to repent of our sins or seek forgiveness. We would not turn to Christ as our Lord if we do not need a Lord. If we can be our own god (Genesis 3:5), we'll try to be our own god.



If we see eternity as only a "possibility," we will assuredly not be ready when we experience it as a reality.

A second deception is convincing Christians that lost people are not truly lost.

Christians may agree theologically that lost people need Jesus. But if they are not taking the risk to share Christ with those who don't believe yet, their actions betray their supposed convictions.

True Christians are so certain that their lost neighbours, friends, and family members need Jesus to avoid hell and go to heaven that they are willing

to share God's love with them.

Many think that sharing the gospel is "imposing" Christian beliefs on others. Postmodern secularists have convinced many Christians that tolerance is the highest value, that telling people they risk eternity separated from God in hell is intolerant and bigoted.

In fact, it is just the opposite. Sharing God's love in Christ offers others the greatest gift they could ever receive. It is giving people the only key that opens the door to heaven. It is sharing the cure for spiritual cancer with people who are dying of the disease whether they know it or not.

If you are not certain that you have made Jesus your Savior and Lord, please turn to Him today. (For a guide as to how to do that, see the "How do I become a Christian?" box on page 11.)

I embraced Buddhism like Jim Carrey until ...

BY ANGELOS KYRIAKIDES

When I was a teenager exploring various religions someone once asked me, "What happens when we die?" I was fresh into Buddhism and Hinduism at the time and said, "When I die, I will become part of that tree." I believed, like all good Eastern mystics, that humanity's ultimate goal was to dissolve into 'the everything' of the universe.



Angelos Kyriakides

This popular doctrine is called Monism.

It means that everything — birds, trees, rocks and people — is ultimately one thing. Buddhism and most forms of Hinduism emphasize this oneness, although Buddhists typically believe the oneness to be emptiness, while Hindus think it is God.

A Dive Into Monism

Currently, Jim Carrey is one of Monism's most famous advocates. In a recent interview with Canadian radio host Tom Power, Carrey couldn't help but push the gospel of Buddha by claiming that all human individuality is false.

He's seen a kind of transformation after wrestling with depression and using art as a creative outlet. And the notion that reality is an illusion appears to be a form of

therapy for him as well.

First, I believe that Carrey has had a sincere transformation. Being broken by mental stress has the tendency to empty a person of worldly concerns. This was my experience as well. After living through drug abuse, criminal activities and other stresses, I found myself in hospital with only one concern: survival. That sort of experience does something to someone.

I believe I experienced God during that time in a preparatory way. I had never

been in church, never read the Bible, but I prayed. I knew that during my time of extreme brokenness, I was being humbled and put in a better place. I came out of hospital a radically different person and told people I had found God. The problem was, I didn't know who God was. All I knew was that my previous life was filled with sin and that brokenness made Him more real.

A Search for God

In my search for knowledge I encountered a myriad of spiritual delicacies. I devoured doctrines from all faiths and ate them like candy — every faith except one, that is. I started going to church after my visit to the hospital, but immediately found myself critical of the biblical God.

"Hell can't be real," I thought, and, "Why did Jesus have to die for our sins?" Questions ranging from science to sexuality plagued my thinking.

But there was something different about the Christian faith, something I couldn't find anywhere else, and that was Jesus. His character displayed the kind of goodness that couldn't have been of human origin. His divinity shown in the gospels didn't seem legendary, but more like a real life account of the miraculous.

The supernatural quality of prophecies forming one giant story stretching across thousands of years was also new. Either God wrote this book, I thought, or it must be one giant conspiracy. I dug for that conspiracy and couldn't find any sign of it. After almost a year of research and patience from fellow church members, the reality of Jesus broke through.

It was like stepping into the Matrix and seeing behind the curtain of spiritual counterfeits. What I thought I knew about God before was swamped by revelations far beyond my previous philosophies. The reality of God, in Christ, was more real and beautiful than anything I'd ever encountered before.

Monism and Eastern Logic
So I believe I understand where Carrey is coming from. It's amazing to see him become a more thoughtful, creative person. Nevertheless, the philosophy he clings to is self-defeating. He summarizes his beliefs by using the Buddhist maxim, "there are no two things." But taking that maxim seriously means diving into a mess of incoherence.

During the interview itself, Carrey's message contradicted itself countless times. When asked who the real Jim was, Carrey iterated that there was no real Jim, his identity was only an "idea," or "abstract construction." Despite this, he continually spoke about himself and others as if they were real. He said that his art pieces were "vestiges" of his personality, and that he tries to reflect his own character in movies. How can he be an illusion in one breath, and have



Jim Carrey

parts of his character reflected in art and movies? The kind of philosophy espoused by Carrey can sound appealing, but is opposed to reality.

Christian Self Denial

The Bible does advocate a kind of death to self, but it also speaks of a new birth of which Buddha knew nothing. Jesus taught that when left to our own efforts, we are incapable of pleasing God. Selfish pursuits and pride taint all humanity's inner nature. To enter God's family, Jesus taught, we need to be reborn through His Spirit and adopted into God's family (John 3:3).

The Bible says humanity was created in God's image (Genesis 1:26), although (unlike Eastern teaching) we are distinct from Him. When those who've put their faith in Jesus die, they will be present with God, not merging into oblivion, but remaining in our unique though perfected personalities (2 Corinthians 5:8).

Speaking of God's adopted children, the book of Revelation has this to say: "They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. "He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away" (Revelation 21:3-4).

Many theologians see other religions as "stepping stones" on their way to finding fulfillment in Jesus. My hope is that if Jim keeps searching for spiritual truth, and takes a look at Jesus of Nazareth, he'll find the true healing and grace he seeks. In the meantime, I pray for him to keep looking with an open heart.

Article source: stream.org

Lies we believe

BY JODY BENNETT

EXPECTATIONS

are one of the most difficult things to deal with in life. We all have expectations of how a situation will turn out, of how people will react to us, of what our lives will be like. As a young person, sometimes we can believe messages from the media or even our parents that are false and that give us unrealistic expectations that can set us up for disappointment and failure.



For instance, schools giving everyone awards and parents giving all their children the same things, might lead a young person to believe that **life is meant to be fair**. That if you are good and obey the rules you will get good things and that if people are horrible to you, karma will 'get them'. Or that if someone else has something, you deserve it too.

However, the truth is that life is far from fair. Good people can suffer horrible things, sometimes completely randomly, and bad people can get away with it. Every life is different and we never have exactly what someone else does.

The Bible does not promise that life is fair, that good people will be spared pain or that we all get our fair share. The Bible does promise that God is just. In the end, all evil will be paid for. Hell awaits those whose bad deeds are not paid for (atoned or covered up) by the blood of Jesus. Wrong will be righted, justice will be done and the those who live for God will be gloriously rewarded.

"You just have to be true to yourself", and its close cousin "Put yourself first, you deserve the best" are two more of society's lies. If you believe them then you will follow every instinct of your heart without regard for how you are hurting others or disobeying God's laws. "Yourself" is not some pre-made thing set in stone, "yourself" is something you develop over a whole lifetime, one decision and one choice at a time.

The more you give into selfish prompts of your inner being, ignoring your conscience and disregarding others, the more self-focussed and angry you will become. However, the more you choose to practice kindness and goodness even when you don't want to, the better and happier person you will become.

If you believe you deserve the best you will never be grateful for what you do have. Contentment doesn't come with lots of stuff or 'the best', it comes with thankfulness.

An old favourite of parents is the lie **"You can be whatever you want to be"**. Sorry to break it to you but no, you can't really. We each only have certain abilities and certain intelligence and try as we might we can't be an astronaut or a brain surgeon or an Olympic athlete unless God has gifted us that way. A much better goal to pursue is to find out who God made you to be, because people who find that, find true purpose, success, and satisfaction.

"Work is boring, live for the weekend". Contrary to this old saw, work can be intensely satisfying and meaningful. Sure, there may be parts of any job that are a drag but work is what we were created for.

The Bible tells us that the very first humans were to look after the garden they were put in — work came before sin and the curse God put on the world. The difference between a good job and a boring job has less to do with the job than your attitude towards it.

Lastly, there is a dangerous lie about that **"You can do it, just stay strong"**. Sometimes you can't do it in your own strength and ability. Sometimes you get overwhelmed. God allows this so that you will see how much you need Him and others.

We are not designed to function independently but in relationships. When you feel it is all too much, the answer is not to 'tough it out', the answer is to ask for help — most importantly in prayer to God but also by being vulnerable with others.

In the Old Testament book called Ecclesiastes a very rich guy tries everything the world has to offer to achieve happiness. After deciding it is all like trying to catch smoke, he ends his search by saying: *The last and final word is this: Fear God. Do what He tells you. And that's it. Eventually God will bring everything that we do out into the open and judge it according to its hidden intent, whether it's good or evil.* (Eccle 12:13-14, The Message Bible)



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Get your dad what he really wants this Father's Day by turning off the lights when you leave the room.

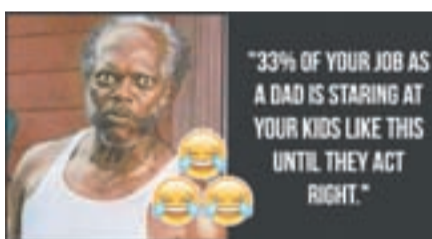


Man: If I have a daughter I'm never playing dress up.
Dads of daughters ...



A group of young New York dads who had been forced to squat down to change their kids nappies on their knees, due to lack of baby change facilities, started a #SquatForChange movement resulting in a new law being passed in 2019, making changing tables required in every men's public restroom in the city.

Luca Trapanese – a 41-year-old single man from Italy – adopted Alba when she was 13 days old. The little girl has Down's Syndrome and was given up for adoption by her mother and rejected as a newborn by 20 families because of her condition. But fortunately, Luca turned up and Alba's life changed forever. Ever since Luca was 14, he had been working and volunteering for organizations focused on children with special needs.



A LETTER FROM DAD

BY JANICE TEO

I HADN'T spoken to my father for three years when his birthday card arrived. My parents got divorced when I was 17, and the ensuing emotional fallout had strained my relationship with my dad to the point where I had even stopped sending him Christmas cards.

Being angry and hurt, it was much easier to sweep things under the carpet than deal with what I was sure would be an unpleasant reckoning.

When he was posted overseas for work, adding physical distance to the emotional chasm between us, I let things slide even more. I had a wonderful career and was about to get engaged - there was plenty to distract me from the fact that a vital relationship in my life had fallen by the wayside.

My father did reach out to me occasionally but I stayed aloof - it was good insulation against the cold of rejection. So I didn't call, barely wrote. Ah, the luxury of seeing the world in black and white.

Adding insult to injury was the fact that I am Asian, and for an Asian child to disrespect her father this way is almost the unforgivable sin. My

treatment of my father was in truth terribly unfair.

He was a wonderful parent - generous, devoted and sacrificial. The divorce did upend things in a way few other upheavals can, but both parents did their best to shield my sister and I and never let their issues spill over to us.

Which is why the card was such a surprise; I thought my father had written me off, and honestly, who could blame him?

Yet here it was, a simple birthday card with a single sentence underlined: 'You are my daughter and I will always love you'. I believe he poured his whole heart into the perfectly straight black lines he drew under those words.

I couldn't believe he reached out to me. Not only is he Asian, he was also an Army officer who was a strict disciplinarian, famously unsympathetic to any kind of insubordination. For a man of such standing, of that generation, to stoop and make the first move, was to my mind astonishing.

Immediately I bought a card in return and did some fancy underlining of my own. Two days later, I received a long letter from him

in which he talked about his own pain and distress during the divorce and apologised for hurting me.

I still remember my first words: "I'm so...happy," I told my fiancé and sobbed so hard he became genuinely concerned. But I was okay - it was just three years of unforgiveness being washed away.

I hadn't realised till that very moment how much I longed for reconciliation and how much I had missed my father's strong, faithful, Godly presence in my life. Today, 40 years later, our relationship has never been stronger or more loving - just because my father took the first step and reached out to his wayward, stubborn child.

There is a spiritual parallel to this. Mankind has a heavenly Father from whom we were all once estranged, kept apart from Him by sin.

God too has reached out to us. He too has written us a letter - the Bible has often been called God's love letter to humanity - in which He proclaims His love for us.

Finally, He sent His son Jesus Christ to Earth to die for us, to pay the price for mankind's sin.

God has done everything to open the door to reconciliation. All that's left for us to do is receive His words with joy. Will you respond to your loving Father?



Calum Neff managed to break the world record time for completing a half marathon with a stroller. His 11-month-old daughter, Holland, crossed the Katy, Texas, finish line just a little ahead of her father, who clocked in at 1 hour, 11 minutes, and 27 seconds.



Dad: We are NOT getting a cat. Also Dad...



DAD

Muscle Man flexes his faith

BY LUCIEN TUINSTR

As an expert in muscle physiology, a branch of myology, much of Dutch Professor Hans Degens' life has been filled with fascinating research that has taken him and his family to many countries.

An avid researcher

Hans has an M.Sc. in biology from the Agricultural University Wageningen, the Netherlands, specializing in population, organismal, cell and molecular biology. Currently, he lectures at the Manchester Metropolitan University (UK) as Professor¹ of Muscle Physiology.

Hans has been a prolific writer, with more than 200 papers published in well-known scientific journals.²

Some of his academic interests include age-related changes in skeletal muscle morphology and function, as well as the effects of hypoxia (not enough oxygen) on muscles. He is married with two adult children.

He says, "Muscle is a remarkable tissue that not only is able to generate force, but it shortens at the same time, both prerequisites for movement. This movement is extremely well controlled, not only by varying the number of muscle cells that are activated for a certain movement, but also by the ability to fine-tune the force that each individual muscle cell develops."

He went on to illuminate this by way of a striking analogy:

"The threading of a needle requires



Professor Hans Degens at work.

fine control, while sledge-hammering a wall for demolition requires much force, but little control. The integration of the neural control of muscle activity occurs without you even thinking about it. This neuromuscular integration, and the subsequent relaxation of muscle ready for the next contraction, is striking. This is something I consider a strong indication of design of the whole system."³

It is beyond the capability of today's engineers to create a robotic arm able to wield great force one moment, then exhibit extremely fine dexterity the next, without altering hardware and/or software.⁴

Early life and formative years

Hans did not come from a Christian family. At age 14, when his father became a Christian, they started going to church together.

"Mine was not a dramatic conversion," Hans explains, "but rather a conscious awareness that there is more to life than what our physical senses tell us. I realized that the Bible has a clear message that we can only be reconciled with God through the atoning sacrifice and resurrection of Jesus."

Hans has been a committed member of a local church ever since, and continuously seeks to develop his walk with Jesus. He occasionally preaches in his church.

A creative thinker

Aside from Hans' substantial contributions to the understanding of human physiology, he actively and enthusiastically engages in creationist thinking and writing.⁵ Hans says that a discussion of physiology also involves ageing:

"The fascinating thing is that organisms seem to be built for survival and not death. A common observation is that if organisms live in a safe environment, for instance without predators, the average life span increases dramatically, albeit at the expense of reproduction. This led to the rather speculative thesis in one of my papers that if the environment is so safe that no accidental death can occur, and damage to cells from things like cosmic radiation and pollutants is limited, we may live eternally.

"Such would only be present in a situation like Paradise, because no matter how safe we make our envi-

ronment in this present world we still will have a chance of dying from an accident.

"This is part of what occurred at the Fall (Genesis 1-3), where the risk of accidental death increased enormously. But the environment also became less friendly, inducing a higher rate of damage to our cells than our ability to repair it."

The possibility of halting ageing and achieving biological 'immortality' is intriguing. There are examples of 'eternally living animals' in the natural world; that is, they have not been genetically altered. And it's not just single cells. There are apparently seven species known to science that appear not to age at all.⁶

Despite now living in a fallen universe with bodies that deteriorate, Christians are promised new eternal bodies (2 Corinthians 5:1-5) in the New Heavens and New Earth (e.g. Revelation 21:1).

References and notes

1. In the British system, this indicates the highest academic rank of university teacher.
2. For a list of his published articles, see creation.com/degens.
3. See Catchpoole, D., *Fingertip control*, *Creation* 31(2):31, 2009; creation.com/fingertip-control.
4. See Catchpoole, D., *The Potter's Hands*, *Creation* 38(1):56, January 2016; creation.com/potters-hands.
5. A paper he coauthored showed in a model that mutation protection prevents macro evolution. DeJong, W. and Degens, H., *The Evolutionary dynamics of digital and nucleotide codes: A mutation protection perspective*, *Open Evolution* J.5:1-4, 2011.
6. Species with negligible senescence, AnAge: The Animal Ageing and Longevity Database, genomics.senescence.info; accessed 17 Dec 2019.

EVOLUTION OF MY BELIEFS ABOUT ORIGINS

After being taught about the theory of evolution in her science class at school, Jessica Jenkins didn't think to question it.

A self-proclaimed atheist, she was convinced the world appeared from nothing millions of years ago.

But when she started chatting to the man who would later become her husband, she started to doubt whether what she was taught was true.

Sharing her story in a YouTube video, Jessica says before meeting her husband, she had been living the party lifestyle.

"I was partying and doing drugs and all the things that I guess a typical young person would do," Jessica admits.

In December 2014 she met the man who would later become her husband. He was a Christian but she thought that if they didn't talk about their differing beliefs, they should be able to date and it wouldn't be an issue.

She said as their feelings for each other grew, her husband knew in the back of his mind he couldn't be with her.

"He couldn't get married to me, which is what he wanted and what he was praying for... he knew he couldn't marry me if I was an unbeliever," Jessica says.

She said her husband started reading passages from the Bible to her every day.



Jessica Jenkins prayed for the first time in a traffic jam.

"We would have long conversations about this and go back and forth," she remembers. "There were a couple times that he read Scripture to me and I actually laughed at him... I just couldn't wrap my mind around the stories that I was hearing in the Bible, that they could be reality. It just didn't match up with my worldview and therefore I thought it just was silly, like a fairy tale."

One night they spent hours studying the theory of evolution.

"When he presented certain things to me, it really made me question what I had believed for so long," Jessica shares.

"I argued my point with him, but after we got off the phone and then several days later I was still thinking about it and questioning everything that I had been told. How did

we come to be as humans? When in the history of mankind have we ever observed with our own eyes a species turning into a different species? It's impossible."

One day Jessica was stuck in traffic on her way home from work and she decided to ask God to reveal Himself to her.

"This was the first time in my life that I had ever really prayed to God," she explains.

"I felt a little silly at first because I had believed for so long that there was no God, so I almost felt like I was talking to myself. But there was something inside me that was urging me to pray, which was very strange for me. So I started talking to God and I basically just said, 'God if You're there, if You're real, I want to know the truth, I want to know You, know if You really are my Creator. I want to know You, I want to know who You are and why I'm here and what is my purpose?'"

Jessica prayed for God to soften her heart so she could know the truth.

"That is literally what God did for me," she says.

That was the day Jessica gave her life to Jesus.

"God came and got me and He shook me awake," she explains. "I thought I was fine living my life the way I was living it. I looked at myself as a good person because my standard of goodness was very low. Like most of us, I compared myself to other people. I said, 'I've never gone to jail, I've never murdered somebody ... I put myself above other people that have done those things and so it was just a distorted view of goodness. But God allowed me to see myself for what I really was – a sinner.'"

Jessica also realised her beliefs

about evolution were wrong.

"God has given us a beautiful creation," she says now. "He has shown us Himself in all of nature and here I was thinking that all of this came from nothing – just an explosion one day."

Jessica says that since becoming a Christian her life hasn't always been easy, but she is thankful that she now knows the truth.

"I am thankful that I have received salvation – that I get to look forward to spending eternity with my God."

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BUILDING BETTER RELATIONSHIPS

When you're in a spot of bother

BY ROB FURLONG

Do you remember the story of Winnie-the-Pooh visiting his good friend Rabbit one day and following a wonderful afternoon tea, (where Pooh clearly ate too much) he became firmly wedged in the hole that served as Rabbit's front door? What followed was a highly amusing – and insightful – conversation between the two of them:

"Rabbit wanted to go for a walk too, and finding the front door full, he went out by the back door, and came round to Pooh, and looked at him.

'Hallo, are you stuck?' he asked.
'N-no,' said Pooh carelessly. 'Just resting and thinking and humming to myself.'

'The fact is,' said Rabbit, 'you're stuck.'

'It all comes,' said Pooh crossly, 'of not having front doors big enough.'

'It all comes,' said Rabbit sternly, 'of eating too much. I thought at the time,' said Rabbit, 'only I didn't like to say anything,' said Rabbit, 'that one of us is eating too much,' said Rabbit, 'and I knew it wasn't me,' he said."

It's pretty clear these two need a crucial conversation but as we noted last month, barriers pop up which often prevent us from engaging in them!

What are some of the barriers to crucial conversations?

Inappropriately expressed anger

Anger can be both aggressive and passive. Aggressive anger is obvious to us. A person may yell, become abusive, be threatening and in some cases, use physical force to express their anger.

Passive anger, on the other hand, can lead a person to become sarcastic, shut down emotionally, sulk or make

obscure comments which are intended to make a point but are not expressed honestly.

When a person consistently responds in one of the above ways every time a crucial conversation is broached, it acts as an immediate barrier by shutting the conversation down completely. In effect, the angry person is saying, "How dare you raise this with me? I do not want to listen to what you have to say!"

Defensiveness
By defensiveness, I am not talking about a person's need to explain why they acted or spoke in a certain way. If you are going to get to the bottom of an issue, then both sides of the story must be told and heard. But you know someone is being defensive when they avoid answering the question and then launch into blaming you or someone else for the problem.

Denial
Denial is the close cousin of defensiveness, and a person is in denial when they either refuse to, or cannot see what is obvious to everyone else. Think of it this way: your friend is complaining constantly about the awful pain in their right foot, and you gently try to point out there is a piece of glass sticking out of it, only to be met with, "Stop trying to fix my problem; I just want you to listen to me!" Denial acts as a "safe" barrier for



many people to avoid facing reality in their lives and hinders crucial conversations.

Hint dropping

This is wonderfully demonstrated in the story about Pooh and Rabbit above! Notice how Rabbit avoids the honest conversation with Pooh. He tells him what he "thought," naming

the problem but not the person responsible, yet at the same time making it perfectly clear he is not the guilty party!

He forfeits the crucial conversation by never honestly talking with Pooh about his over-eating – he just hopes his friend will "get the hint!"

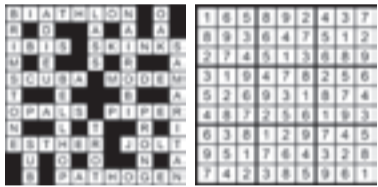
Hint dropping hurts: people catch on you are making a point about them without being told exactly where they have failed you.

And it becomes a barrier because it actively works against open, loving, honest and clear conversation.

Understanding the barriers to crucial conversations is important, but they should not be seen as a permanent deterrent.

It just means we will need a bit more wisdom when we come up against them!

HINT DROPPING HURTS



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

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	

Lessons from a sausage dog (Part 16)

BY JODY BENNETT

OUR sausage dog, Carrie, absolutely hates cats! She has this special mewling growl sound that she makes when she sees them in our front garden. If I let her out the front door, she dashes after them to scare them off our lawn and then sniffs out all the places they have been.

Usually, because she is only a little dog, cats don't take her very seriously. The neighbours' ones run off our property but if Carrie tries to confront them on theirs, they will arch up and hiss, and she generally backs off.



However, Carrie met her match yesterday. While on our walk, she spotted a cat hiding near a car and went for it. The dog didn't take the hissing warning it gave her and when she tried to make it run, the cat pounced instead and dug its claws into her.

Carrie was astonished and yelped in outrage and pain. She quickly ran back to me but wasn't badly hurt – just a scratch or two on her tummy. However, I'm sure she'll think twice before pushing her luck with a cat again!

It made me think of how we can get complacent about dangers and temptations in our lives.

We think we have them under control and that they can do us no harm. However, those addictions we think we've mastered, those negative thoughts we are sure we've overcome or those habits we think we've broken, can so easily turn on us in a moment of weakness and attack in our soft underbelly, where we are most vulnerable.

That is why the Bible admonishes us to "flee from sexual immorality" (1 Corinthians 6:18) and to "have nothing to do with fruitless works of darkness" (Ephesians 5:11) and to continually be on our guard against the Devil, who "prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour" (1 Peter 5:8).

Don't mess with evil, don't try and pick a fight with it – just turn tail and run.

Flee the evil desires of youth and pursue righteousness, faith, love and peace, along with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart.
2 Timothy 2:22

Tatjana Schoenmaker of Team South Africa competes in the Women's 200m Breaststroke Final on day seven of the Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games at Tokyo Aquatics Centre on July 30, 2021 in Tokyo, Japan. (Photo by Al Bello/Getty Images)



BETTER THAN MY PLANS

South African swimmer Tatjana Schoenmaker sealed her place in Olympic history with a scream and tears of pure joy.

The 24-year-old, swimming in her first Olympics, stormed home to win the 200m breaststroke in world record time. She hit the wall in 2 minutes 18.95 seconds, upstaging second-place American Lilly King by almost a full second.

She waited a few seconds to catch her breath, then turned to look at the scoreboard - and screamed in disbelief before bursting into tears. She hadn't only won the gold; she also smashed the eight-year-old world record by almost a full second in the process.

Her victory on July 28 was exceptional for other reasons as well. It signalled the end of a 25-year drought for South African women swimmers but even more remarkably, Tatjana was also the first woman in history to break the 2:19.00 barrier for the event.

It was a fitting finale for the former netball player, who a few days before had been edged out for the 100m breaststroke gold by American Lydia Jacoby in an exciting come-from-behind win.

With the pressure mounting on the 200m final after the 100m race, Tatjana gave the world - or at least her 24,400 Instagram followers - a glimpse into her pre-competition

preparation. She wrote: "Father God, may Your will be done, may Your peace fill us up, may we praise You no matter what the outcome."

"May we be empowered by Your strength to give our all and may we forever be in awe of Your goodness! Thank You for bringing us to this very moment."

Throughout the competition, she wore two swim caps - the green South African one and a white one underneath with the phrase "Soli Deo Gloria," which means "Glory to God alone," on one side and a 'Jesus fish' on the other.

No, the fish does not allude to Tatjana's prowess in the water. It is an ancient Christian symbol associated with the Greek word for fish, Ichthus, which can be translated as "Jesus Christ, Son of God, Savior."

Five years ago, on Sept 12, 2016, the Pretoria resident became a Christian and has found ways to express her faith ever since.

She posted a video of her baptism in 2016 and again on the first anniversary of her conversion with the words: "Today a year ago I made the best decision of my life, by accepting Jesus as my personal Savior, and that I am willing to commit my entire life in humble obedience and service to God (Acts 2:36 - 38)."

She was primed to compete in 2020 but her plans fell by the wayside when Covid-19 hit.

"2020 was supposed to be 'the year'," she wrote on her Instagram page in August 2020.

"The year I would've swum Olympics. The year I had no studies so that I could train just for Olympics. The year I've been training for my whole swimming career."

"But what I realized is that it was the year that I planned and not necessarily God's planned year. We always get so caught up in making our plans and doing it our way but is it in line with God's plan/way?"

"THANK YOU GOD for making me realize that your plans for 2020 is bigger than just my plans and may I trust that you have greater things to come."

According to the swimming website SwimSwam, Tatjana, whose parents describe her as "humble and hardworking", has been working her way up to her moment of Olympic glory.

She set national records in her pet events at the 2019 World University Games and the World Championships. Last year, despite the pandemic, she broke four South African records.

In Tokyo, she was modest as she spoke to the media about her watershed triumph, saying: "It still hasn't really sunk in! I'm excited to also go back home and celebrate this with my family."

"I've exceeded - or rather, God has exceeded - all my expectations."



Gold Medalist Tatjana Schoenmaker of South Africa during the medal ceremony of the 200m Breaststroke final at the 2020 Olympic Games at Tokyo Aquatics Centre on July 30, 2021 in Japan. (Photo by Jean Catuffe/Getty Images)

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