



SEASON OF SUCCESS

SYDNEY McLAUGHLIN

Fun for Kids

Pages 5,6,7



Photographer **Matty Poon** had a flashbulb moment that changed the focus of his life. See his story on page 3.

DON'T KILL THE BABY!

One of Cameron Casteel's earliest memories is of his father beating up his mother. He recalls his father being handcuffed and taken away. Cameron experienced abandonment, imprisonment, abuse, and homelessness before he had even finished high school. Then, when his girlfriend became pregnant, Cameron saw only one solution. How could he be a father when he'd never had one himself?

Sharing his story on his YouTube channel, Cameron says he didn't know how to process the emotions that came with his traumatic childhood experiences and began to rebel against his mother and the law.

"At a very young age I'd already broken into several schools, I'd been in tons of fights, I had stolen from several stores, and I'd stolen from people," Cameron admits. "People would always say, 'Oh you're just like your dad.' That kind of made me proud a little bit, I hate to say, because my dad was my hero."

Then a close family friend took his own life. Cameron was confused and hurt. "I realised that there was an escape from the pain that I was enduring," Cameron says.

At 13 years old, Cameron decided to kill himself. One day he was on his way home to take an overdose of pills and a

neighbour saw him and asked him what he was doing.

"I don't know why I told her the truth, but I did." The neighbour was a Christian and prayed for him and told him about Jesus. Cameron decided not to kill himself at that time but the thoughts did not go away. Then his father was released from prison. He got married and had a child – Cameron's half-sister.

"He would tell me all the time, 'If you don't help me sell these drugs then your sister is going to go without diapers and food.'"

So at 14 years old, Cameron helped his father sell drugs and it wasn't long before he ended up in a juvenile detention centre.

Cameron found a Bible in the prison library and read that

Jesus loved him and wanted to be his Father. But he resented the words he read.

"I didn't want a dad. I didn't want someone to love me, because all I knew at this point was that it brought pain."

After Cameron's release from the juvenile correction centre, he lived with his aunt and uncle while he was on probation. But when that ended, he moved back in with his dad, who was unable to look after him and

eventually kicked him out.

Feeling as though he had burned his bridges with other family members, Cameron found himself homeless and begging at stores for food that was going to be thrown away.

Then Cameron met a girl at school, Presleigh, and it was love at first sight. By the end of the year, Presleigh was pregnant.

"I wasn't ready to be a dad," Cameron admits. "I'd never had a dad and so I told her, 'Let's have an abortion.'" Presleigh didn't want an abortion and the pair fought about it for days. Eventually she booked an abortion in a different state.

Curious to know about the abortion process, Cameron looked at some videos online. He came across a song called *Give me a Voice* by Dillon Chase. The first line of the song: 'I thought this was a womb not a tomb,' brought tears to Cameron's eyes. He felt as if his unborn daughter was speaking those words to him. He called Presleigh and begged her not to go through with the abortion. To his relief, she told him she had already decided not to.

When Cameron's daughter was born he remembers holding her in his arms and looking into her eyes for the first time.

"I said, 'You'll be the child that I never was and I'll be the father that I never had. I'll never let you

go and if it comes down to it, I'm gonna die for you.' And it was in that same moment that I felt God talk to me and say, 'Cameron, you can be the child you never were. I am the Father that you never had. I never left you. I have never forsaken you. And Cameron, when it came down to it, I did die for you.'

"I lifted my hands in that moment and I surrendered everything I had to King Jesus. I couldn't run anymore. Everything that I had experienced in my life trying to fill this eternal gap I tried to fill it with temporary things and it just never seemed to work. God revealed to me His love – the love of the Father – through me becoming a father."

As Cameron looks back at his story he now sees that Jesus was there all along.

"He was always in my corner and He was always saying, 'Come here, I love you. I'm the Dad you need.'"

Not long after this, Presleigh also gave her life to Jesus and the couple married. Cameron now shares the good news of Jesus in prisons with Dillon Chase.

"I encourage you today to follow Jesus," Cameron tells others. "I don't know your situation. I don't know what you're going through but I do know that you're in such great dire need that Jesus abandoned the throne of heaven to come down and die in your place. And to me that's a God worth living for."



Cameron Casteel with his wife Presleigh (left) and his daughter Isabel (above).

Katie's incredible kindness

BY ALLIE SCRIBNER

Katie Davis was a Tennessee high school homecoming queen and class president headed to nursing school, but instead she became a mum to 13 needy girls in Africa.

Katie adopted them after being confronted with their dire circumstances and poverty, during a short-term mission trip to an orphanage in Uganda.

Katie had been raised in a Christian home and had learned about Jesus and His sacrifice on the cross from an early age, which inspired her own love for the vulnerable.

"Around the age of 12 or 13, I began to delve into the truths of Scripture," she writes in her first book, *Kisses from Katie* (2011).

"As I read and learned more and more of what Jesus said, I liked the lifestyle I saw around me less and less. I began to realise that God wanted more from me, and I wanted more of Him. He began to grow in me a desire to live intentionally, and different from anyone I had ever known."

On a mission trip after finishing school in 2008, she was moved to compassion by the conditions she observed first-hand in Uganda. Believing she could make a difference, she decided to put off college for one year and stay to teach kindergarten in the Christian-run orphanage.

During her time there, a terrible rainstorm caused a mud house to collapse, burying several children.



Benji and Katie with some of their adopted girls, and their two sons.

Leaders scurried to rescue the kids buried under the remains of the earthen house. Fortunately, none were seriously hurt and all recovered in a local hospital.

After being rescued, Agnas, 9, whose parents both died of AIDS, sadly asked if she could live with Katie forever.

Looking into the pleading brown eyes, Katie could not say no.

That was the beginning. Katie didn't immediately embrace her

destiny. To please her parents, she returned to the United States to get her nursing degree but soon dropped out as she found herself longing for the people of Uganda.

She returned to Africa as a full-time missionary.

As she worked with the children, she felt a bond growing in her heart. Under Ugandan law, she had to be 25 to adopt, but she could initially be granted custodial care.

"My first instinct [was] not, 'Oh, a baby—let me adopt it!' Because I think, best-case scenario, they're raised in Uganda by Ugandans... But knowing there [was] nowhere else for them to go, I [didn't] find myself

capable of sending them away," Katie explains.

When she was old enough, Katie began adopting orphans — 13 of them! All the girls had either lost parents to AIDS or were abused or abandoned.

"I feel like she's really my mother because she shows me love," says Prissy, one of the girls. "I feel like, yes, this is my mom."

Katie married fellow Tennessean missionary, Benji Majors, in 2015 and they now have two biological sons.

She has set up Amazima (Truth) Ministries International to underwrite two schools and medical and

vocational outreach, as well as scholarships that help hundreds of children attend school. It also runs the Masese Feeding Program serving over 1200 meals each week day.

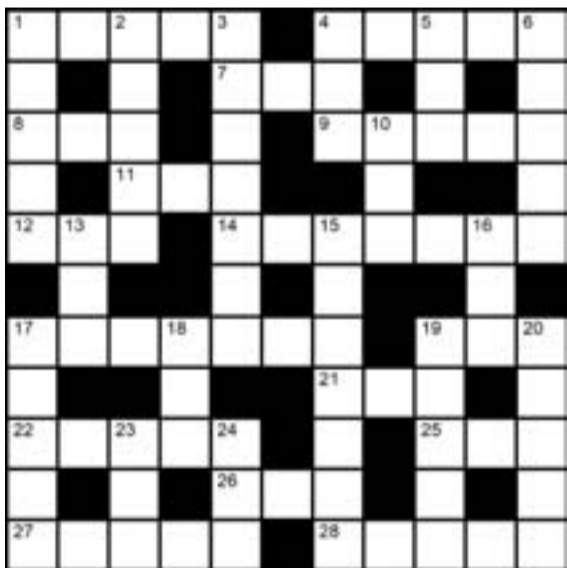
Katie believes her choices are the result of divine providence: "God just designed me this way because He already knew that this is what the plan was for my life, even though I didn't know."

Katie has written a second book about her life *Daring to Hope: Finding God's Goodness in the Broken and Beautiful* (2017), and is currently working on a third. Her blog site is can be found at katiemajors.blog.

Coffee Break CROSSWORD & SUDOKU

ACROSS

- 1 Nail's cousin!
- 4 ___ and puffs
- 7 Christ the Redeemer site
- 8 Be achy and weak
- 9 Perpendicular, vertical
- 11 Australian bird
- 12 Get it wrong
- 14 Sea in Israel
- 17 Thick pureed drink
- 19 Long ___ (in the past)
- 21 Cereal grain
- 22 Tower of London birds
- 25 A month (abb)
- 26 A lyric poem
- 27 French painter
- 28 Ancient souvenir



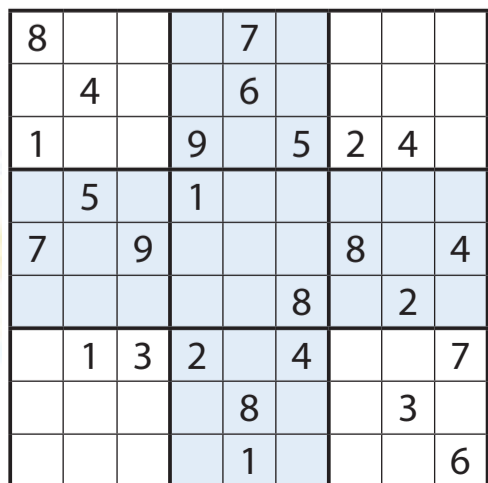
DOWN

- 1 Plant support
- 2 King or queen
- 3 Metal beaten into shape
- 4 A jump on one foot
- 5 Winter bug
- 6 Curved cavalry weapon
- 10 Floral necklace
- 13 Canyon feature
- 15 Short stop in a journey
- 16 Bird-to-be
- 17 Play guitar strings
- 18 Metal in rocks
- 19 Coral-ring island
- 20 Eye-linked
- 23 Delivery vehicle
- 24 Ropy sounding negative!

SOLUTIONS PAGE 11



"They squared the wagons. Are they allowed to do that?"



THE SISYPHUS NIGHTMARE

BY JOHN UPCHURCH (AMENDED)

I USED to have nightmares about King Sisyphus—not the wake-up-in-a-sweat dreams of childhood, but more the kind of gut-punching thoughts that plague the daytime. Those are worse because you don't wake up.

But I'm getting ahead of myself. First, let's talk about who this king was. According to Greek mythology, King Sisyphus made a name for himself by inviting potential rivals to stay at his palace and then killing them off to boost his own influence. He had enough wit to stay ahead of the game for many years—until he got caught.

His punishment for all his misdeeds, according to the story, was to push a heavy rock up a hill for eternity. He heaved and puffed and shoved and moved the massive boulder inch by inch up the slope. Then, just as the top came in sight — no matter what the wily king did — the boulder slipped from his grasp and rolled right back down the hill. Sighing, Sisyphus plodded after it and started all over. Heave, puff, roll, sigh. Heave, puff, roll, sigh.

During my younger days, when I fooled myself into thinking the universe had no Creator, that's how I envisioned my life: a useless toiling toward a goal that didn't exist. I pressed forward... toward nothing. I strived... for nothing. I aimed... at nothing. All I knew was the effort. There could be no ultimate goal. My rock went up; my rock came down. As I said, it was a waking nightmare.

After God took the rock of my own efforts and smashed it with the sledgehammer of His grace (undeserved love), I somehow imagined Christianity would be easier. I envisioned taking up this cross He spoke of and skipping

through daisies toward the celestial city. I assumed the narrow path went straight to the gates without the least resistance.

What can I say? I was naïve.

My real awakening came from studying the history of the church. After the resurrection of Christ, there's one theme you don't find in Acts and the letters of the New Testament: You don't find an easy-go-lucky jaunt up the hill for the followers of Christ. You find Stephen being stoned to death, and Peter being saved from prison at the last minute. You find Paul heading from one city that hates him to another that loathes him—with associated beatings, whippings, and shipwrecks. You find James telling people that persecution is a good thing because of the endurance it produces.

When John tells us about the future of the world, he doesn't describe fields of flowers and smiley faces. Let's summarise his vision: pain, death, more death, and then, when nearly all hope has been sucked from the world, Jesus.

"Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 5:10, ESV). This is a statement Jesus made to His disciples in

His famous Sermon on the Mount. You'll notice the statement isn't conditional. He didn't say if we're persecuted; instead, He said "those who are persecuted" (check out Matthew 5:11 for more).

So to those who say Christianity is for the weak, think again. Christians might be weak in political power or small in number, but if you want to follow Jesus you will have to be strong in resolve and determined in outlook.

This is made possible because Christians know that the struggle is not pointless, like Sisyphus'. It has eternal meaning. And they know they are not alone, because God has promised to be with His children even until the end of the age.



I blamed myself for my dad's drug death



Adelle Howells

When Adelle Howells was 12 years old, she realised her family was different to other families. Her parents were drug addicts, she had spent time in foster care and she already had a criminal record. As time went on, Adelle became a drug user herself. One night tragedy struck her home and she carried guilt with her for nine years until she found forgiveness and a love she'd never experienced before.

In an interview on the Kirkholt Community Church YouTube channel, Adelle shares that one day, when she was 11, she had left her house in order to escape the constant violence in her home. She ran into a boy from her class and they got into a disagreement and ended up fighting.

"I got arrested and charged with aggravated bodily harm," she admits. "I was only 11 years old and already had got myself a criminal record."

Then when she was in high school, she recalls a time she was called out of class by a teacher to speak to someone from social services.

The woman told Adelle that her mother was going to flee her violent relationship and she could choose to stay at her school and go into care or leave with her mum.

"There was no way I was gonna go into care again. I'd been there before and I didn't like it. So I chose to go with my mum and we moved into a hostel."

There was another reason Adelle wanted to move away with her mum. She was being sexually abused by someone close to her.

"I didn't think anyone would believe me so I just blocked it out ... It makes you feel dirty. It makes you feel like you're not worthy."

After they moved into the hostel, Adelle started taking drugs and sleeping around. "I lost all respect for my body," she shares. "I didn't think that there was anything worth saving because it had already been taken."

At the age of 14, Adelle found out she was pregnant. Her home life was very difficult as her mum was taking drugs and they didn't get along. So after her baby was born Adelle left home and stayed on a friend's couch. At 16 she got the keys to a flat of her own and the next year she met a boy and he moved in.

"I thought that we could have a little family together,"

she recalls. "Things were alright in the beginning but then he started to get control and I couldn't go anywhere without telling him where I was going. He started to get violent and I realised then that I was now following in my mum's footsteps."

Adelle found herself back at the same hostel she'd stayed in with her mum when she was escaping a violent relationship.

"I didn't want to bring my son up in that environment and I didn't want to follow in [my mother's] footsteps," she says, so she managed to get her own place again and her dad even started coming around. It had been nine years since she had seen him.

"I used to think he was coming to spend time with me but he wasn't – whenever he was there my mum was there and they'd disappear off upstairs to take drugs together. They were taking heroin together. One night when

my dad came to stay with me and my mum wasn't there he asked me to go and score him some drugs."

At the time Adelle was taking amphetamines. She hadn't slept for two nights so had planned to just go to bed but her dad kept asking her to go. Eventually she gave in and got the drugs for her dad. But after he took them, he started to get a headache. Adelle gave him some painkillers and left him to get some sleep.

"I went to bed and I got up the next morning with my four-year-old son and I walked into the living room where my dad was sleeping and I found my dad dead."

Adelle's father had died from a brain haemorrhage caused by the drugs he took that night.

"I blamed myself – if I'd just kept saying no and just gone to bed, my dad would still be here and I wouldn't be living with this guilt."

The guilt continued to follow Adelle for nine years. Then she found out about a conference for people affected by drug addiction called Fixed, which was to be held at a church. Initially apprehensive, she was surprised by the welcoming atmosphere of the modern church. As she listened to the speakers, Adelle felt it was as if God was speaking directly to her.

At the end of the day, the final speaker took to the stage. "He spoke about Jesus and how He died on the cross for all our faults, flaws and failures and that no matter what we've done we could be forgiven," Adelle shares in the documentary *Adelle: A Redemption*.

Adelle went to the front of the church and received prayer. That was the day she decided to receive Jesus' forgiveness and follow Him.

"It was just an amazing feeling and I knew that I'd been forgiven. I knew that I was accepted by Jesus. I knew that my life was about to change."

Adelle began attending church and later worked with the trust that organised the Fixed conference and spoke in schools, prisons and churches about how God had transformed her life and filled her with His love.



FINDING FOCUS

BY JANICE TEO

Professional photographer Matty Poon remembers the day his life fell into perfect focus.

It happened during a meeting with his photography team. Matty was standing at the back of the room, lost in his own thoughts, when the speaker told the team to always bring their best to their work, to never settle for being mediocre. Those words changed his life.

Let's zoom in on some details. Up to that day about two years ago, Matty was leading a happy if slightly double life.

A fourth-generation Chinese Australian, Matty grew up in the suburbs of Perth in Western Australia.

In 2013 he met Illiona. Of all the girls to fall in love with, Matty fell for one who was a fervent Christian, something he most definitely was not. Quite the opposite in fact.

He had some unpleasant experiences with Christians while he was growing up – so unpleasant he swore off having anything to do with the faith. "I thought 'if this is Christianity I don't want anything to do with it or with God'," he says.

Ironically, the course of true love, in Matty's case, ran straight to church. "Her faith was central in her life and I felt it was important for our relationship that I supported her faith so I followed her to services," he explains. "But I was determined never to become a Christian."

They married six months after they met. In 2019, six years and two children later, Matty was still attending church with Illiona – but no closer to becoming a Christian.

"Illiona was of course praying for me, and she asked me often about becoming a Christian. The pastor who married us told me 'Jesus had a plan for you and when the time comes, it will come'.

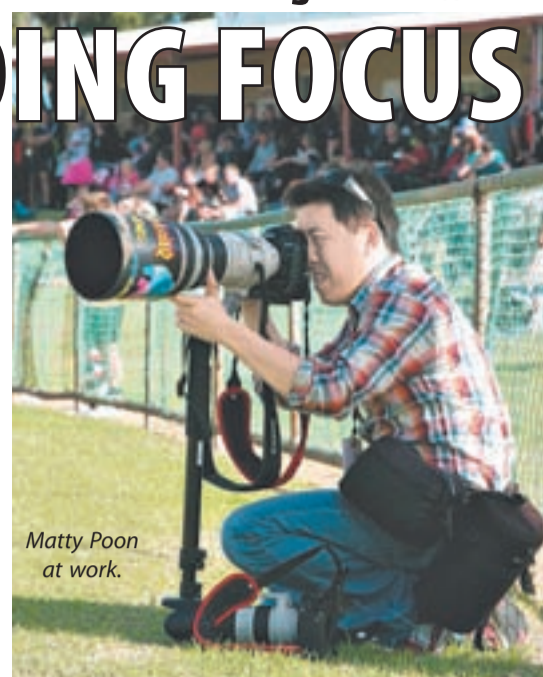
"I guess that's the seed that was planted in me."

In the meantime, Matty was happy to join the church's photography team though he made it clear he was helping the church and not serving God. After all, he reasoned, "I didn't believe in God at that time, so why would I serve Him?"

Heaven must not have received the memo, because that day at the meeting – six years after joining the team – Matty had a life-changing experience. You might say everything just 'clicked'.

"I was standing at the back, of course, just dreaming when the speaker challenged the team to bring their best to God at all times and not just when we were rostered on."

This simple statement went off like a flashbulb in Matty's eyes. You see, when he joined the photography team, Illiona had given him strict orders not to "rock up with your full photography gear on and scare everyone else" as she felt it might intimidate his team-mates.



Matty Poon at work.

So Matty simply cruised. "But the moment the speaker said to give our best to God, I felt this huge, overwhelming presence that I knew straight away was God," he remembers. "I couldn't breathe, I had goosebumps, my mind was spinning, my heart started pumping like crazy. Even now I cry when I talk about it."

He pauses to compose himself. "Then I heard this voice in my heart telling me 'Matty, put the same faith that I've put in you to serve in my house (as a non-Christian) back in me, and I will show you what life with Me is all about.'"

Yet Matty still resisted. "Maybe it was because my life was good. I wasn't in an 'oh God my life is so bad, come and save me' situation."

It wasn't until he was involved in a road incident the following month, in September 2019, that Matty says he finally realised God had His hand on him.

"Honestly I thought it was game over for me and that I'd never see my wife and kids again. I should have died but miraculously I didn't. That's what finally got me over the line and I became a Christian."

Matty's life changed radically after that. Without realising it or with any effort on his part, he stopped swearing. He began serving with new vigour in church – and had a new attitude to match.

"It's safe to say until then I had an ego to be fed, trying to be the best press photographer and win awards. And at the time it did feel awesome but upon reflection, I now wonder what all

that was for.

"When you're serving at church there's none of that. No awards, no bylines; it's 100 percent for Jesus. The extremely small part I play is the hope that someday someone will see one of my photos and think 'hey I'd love to check that church out' or even 'I'd like to get to know who Jesus is.'"

"From the moment I surrendered to Christ my life has gone from strength to strength," he declares. "My relationship with Illiona has become so much deeper because our shared faith has taken it into a different dimension."

"Now I can pray with her, I can bless her, I can pray for my children. It's just so different with God. He really has put eternity into my heart."

"I used to want to control everything about my life but now, while I still have goals and dreams, I have given them to Him to do as He pleases."

I SHOULD HAVE DIED BUT MIRACULOUSLY I DIDN'T.



For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. – john 1:17 niv

YOUTH TRUTH

Choices matter

BY GREG LAURIE

I REMEMBER

being told as a child to brush my teeth. "Be careful," the adults said, "always brush your teeth."

I thought, "What do they know?" Well, after a lot of trips to the dentist in later years, I realised that I should have paid attention to what they were saying. Here's another piece of advice that adults give to children: "Wear sunscreen. Don't go out there and get burned. You'll destroy your skin."

But kids think, "What do they know?" And then one day they wake up as adults and find themselves under a dermatologist's care. They realise that the adults were actually right.

If you're young, it's important to understand that you're making decisions now that will affect you for the rest of your life.

Now let's take that principle into the spiritual world. You're making decisions today that will affect you later in life. Someone who's older and is currently facing the consequences of their earlier choices will tell you that's true.

Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego were three young Jewish teenagers who took a principled stand when they were carried away captive to Babylon. They were brought into the king's court to be trained and schooled in the ways of the Babylonians. This gave them an opportunity to eat some amazing food, but along with their friend Daniel, they refused to eat the food from the king's table.

We don't know the reason for this, but it seemed to be a principled stand they were making on the basis of their commitment to God. And He honoured them for their commitment. Then later when the king erected a golden image and told everyone to worship it, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego refused to bow down.

They got the courage to do what they did because of the principled stand they made earlier. Choices really do matter.



What decisions are you making today that will affect you later in life?

Rapper faces a fork in the road

As a teenager, British rapper, author and broadcaster Guvna B was the kid on the fringe of his group of friends. The kid who thought he was a gangster but was really too scared to participate in anything.

In a Premier On Demand YouTube video, Guvna, whose real name is Isaac Borquaye, said he grew up in a council housing estate in London and fell into the wrong crowd as a teenager.

"I was always really cheeky, but never really naughty," Guvna recalls. "I'd get in loads of trouble at school, just for silly stuff like getting into silly fights or calling people names... I used to hang around with some quite naughty people, and they would always do naughty stuff, but I'd be too scared to do it. And then after it was done, I'd be like, 'Did you see me? I was there!'"

Guvna's parents had emigrated from Ghana before he was born. His family didn't have much money and his mother worked two jobs.

"She'd come home and look after us and cook for us and then go out again to work and I just saw how much of a struggle it was for her," he says.

In an interview with HTB Church, he says, "I guess as a first generation Brit there was a lot of pressure on me to not waste the effort my parents had put in to getting us here and bringing us up."

The family had attended church since before Guvna was born but as a teenager he had to be dragged there and didn't really understand Christianity.

His youth leader at church caught wind of Guvna's behaviour and told him he had to choose between the gangster life or Christianity. He warned him of the dangers of life in a gang.

"Those things were happening to some of the people that I knew on the estate, so I knew that if I carried on I could potentially get into that kind



Guvna B collects his award for Best Gospel Act during the 2010 Mobo Awards, at the Echo Arena, Monarchs Quay, Albert Dock, Liverpool. (Photo by Yui Mok/PA Images via Getty Images) **INSET:** Guvna B with his wife in London, England in 2013. (Photo by Ben A. Pruchnie/Getty Images)



of trouble," he says.

Then his youth leader told him about the alternative of a life serving Jesus.

"He told me about the true meaning of Christianity and what Jesus did for me," Guvna recalls.

It was that conversation that led Guvna to becoming a Christian.

About a month after Guvna became a Christian he saw the power of prayer in action.

He said he and a group of friends were playing football at school in the rain.

"Out of nowhere, a massive lightning bolt struck the middle of the playground and every single one of us fell to the floor," Guvna recounts. "So I was in a daze for about 15 or 20 seconds. I kind of staggered to my feet and saw another friend over the other side of the playground get to his feet. In the distance I saw a good friend of mine, Izzy, lying face down in the middle of the playground."

He and his friends ran to Izzy's side and saw there were holes throughout his school uniform and Izzy himself was pitch black.

"That's when we realised he had been struck by lightning," he explains. "It hit his body, and then hit the ground."

Their teacher tried to resuscitate Izzy without success, so they called an ambulance.

Guvna watched on in horror as the paramedics pumped Izzy's chest with a defibrillator in the playground.

"They couldn't get him breathing either so he had to go to hospital and be put on a life support machine, because he couldn't breathe himself," he recalls.

Guvna prayed to God to heal his friend.

"My friends were obviously struggling with it as well because it was just like a big shock," Guvna remembers. "So I think my faith actually helped them at that stage because no one really had a lot of faith, back then. So I'd pray with them. Eventually he came back to life and started breathing again. It was a proper miracle. The doctors couldn't explain it, his family couldn't explain it, but it happened."

Guvna says there had been other situations throughout his life that didn't always have a happy ending.

"But I just know that having faith is like a light at the end of the tunnel for me and it makes me a stronger person," Guvna attests.

He relied on that strength in 2017, when his father passed

away suddenly. "He had cancer, but he didn't know that he had it," Guvna said in an interview with HTB Church. "And so when he started to show severe symptoms he went into hospital and four days later, he was gone... It really knocked us and hit us heavily, and it just spiralled me into this painful grief, and painful self-exploration."

"That grief also dug up memories from the past of when I had lost friends to youth violence, and I had not really dealt with those emotions properly. It also subconsciously prepared me for the two friends that I'd go on to lose shortly after."

Guvna says growing up on the council estate, there wasn't much time for emotion and he had learnt to deal with the unpredictability of life in a toxic way.

His song *Cast my Cares* was borne out of this grief.

"That song was just me crying out for help and saying, 'God I don't really understand what's going on and I just need your help. I need to cast my cares on you.'"

Guvna has released 10 albums and written two books, *Unpopular Culture* and *Unspoken: Toxic Masculinity and How I Faced the Man Within the Man*.

Guvna, now 32, lives in London with his wife and their son.

Contact Challenge!

Do you have a story to tell, a tricky question to ask or want to let us know how *Challenge* has impacted you? Email harriet@challengenews.org



Let PSSM introduce you to God through FREE Bible lessons! pssm.com.au

Complete your details below and PSSM will send you your first lesson or visit our website for online lessons!

Name _____
 DOB / / Male Female
 Street _____ Suburb _____
 State _____ Postcode _____
 Parent/Guardian Signature (if under 18 years)

Delivery Address:
 PSSM Mailbox Club
 PO Box 357
 Morayfield 4506
 Queensland

We are looking forward to hearing from you!
 0483 326 522
info@pssm.com.au
pssm.com.au



YOUTH TRUTH

Weird dreams changed my life

A series of dreams led Roxanne Morgan to move across the world and ultimately change the trajectory of her life forever.

Roxanne grew up in England and says she was a “wild child” during her teenage years.

“I was just in the wrong crowd,” she admits in a video she shared on her YouTube channel. “I was doing drugs and partying all the time and getting into fights.”

One night while she was sleeping, she felt like someone came to her in a dream and told her to move to America.

Roxanne moved to Los Angeles, where she attended acting school. Her teachers were encouraging and told her she could make it in the acting world.

“But I made bad choices for myself,” Roxanne says. “Instead of going on auditions, instead of focusing on perfecting my craft, I ended up partying and getting back into drugs.”

When she finished acting school, Roxanne went back to England, where she fell into a deep depression.

When her family decided to go to America on holiday, Roxanne jumped at the chance to return but decided on this occasion to make the move permanent. She met Jesse, who would later become her husband, and they started living together in a hotel on Hollywood Boulevard.

“There was a Bible next to the bed and he started reading it to me at night,” Roxanne remembers.

She said as Jesse was reading the Bible, something inside her began to shift.

“I went to bed one night and I had another dream that I was supposed to get baptised,” Roxanne says.

“I didn’t know what being baptised meant so I ran off to this little church in Beverly Hills. I went in and walked up to the preacher and I said, ‘I don’t know why I’m asking you this but I feel like I’m supposed to get baptised.’”

After attending a few services at the church, the preacher baptised Roxanne [immersed her in water as a symbol of death of her old life].

“I came out of the water and I felt nothing,” she recalls. “I continued to go to church but I wasn’t changed in any way.”

A few days later Roxanne met a girl in her gym who showed Roxanne a video that she said changed her life forever. The video was a YouTube clip called Paul Washer’s Shocking Youth Message, where she heard the Gospel that Jesus died for her sins, for the first time.

“I was so taken aback by the things that this guy was saying,” she says.

“He was telling me that I was a sinner and that I’d been sinning



Roxanne Morgan

before God all my life. All of these things that I’d done and all my sins started coming to my mind.”

Roxanne says it was like her eyes opened and life made sense to her.

“I understood what life was about,” she recalls. “(God) was watching me, He was with me, He loved me, and He wanted to forgive me for all of these things.”

That night Roxanne had a surreal experience.

“I laid in my bed and it felt like God ripped the roof off of our tiny little apartment and this love started falling from heaven,” she remembers.

“This love began to fall into my soul and into my heart and I heard this voice saying to me, ‘I love you, I have always loved you – you are My daughter and I am your Father.’”

The next morning she told her future husband, “Something happened to me, I’m not the same, I am completely different.”

She says it felt like she had been born again and washed clean.

Roxanne went to church with the friend who showed her the video.

“I just knew in my heart that Jesus was Lord, that the Bible is true, that Jesus died for my sins, that He loved me and had been pursuing me my whole life and that God loves me so much,” she says.

“He loves us so much that He sent His own Son to die in the place of my sins and die in the place of your sins so that you wouldn’t have to suffer the punishment for your own sins.”

Roxanne encourages people to seek God by reading the Bible and praying.

“(God) has seen you through your pain, through your struggles. He’s seen you through the drugs. He’s seen you through the depression and the anxiety and all of the things that you are going through, and He says, ‘Come to me all of you who are weary and heavy laden and then I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you for My yoke is easy and My burden is light.’”

Roxanne is now married to Jesse and they have three children. •

I found a way out of the haze of drugs

At 19 years old, Jordan Orick was in rehab for the third time. His drug of choice was more – more weed, more meth, more cocaine, more pills, more alcohol. But it was never enough, until he found the more his heart needed, and he never used drugs again.

Jordan shares his story in a video on his YouTube channel.

He says he was only eight years old when he first used drugs and alcohol. He describes using drugs for the first time as feeling instant gratification.

“I think I was instantly an addict.”

When he was 16 Jordan was caught with drugs at his high school. The police arrested him and he was taken to juvenile detention that day. Not long after, he went to rehab for the first time and while he was there, he decided he would try to change.

“After I completed the program and left rehab, I actually did stay clean and sober for eight months,” he recalls. “I was very determined to stay sober and not use anything. Of course I made no changes to my life in any other way whatsoever.”

Jordan had the same friends and was in the same environments as he was before he went to rehab. But he convinced himself he could stay sober anyway. It wasn’t long before he succumbed to temptation and started using again. Initially, it felt incredible.

“Once I had to have drugs and alcohol every day just to function and to get out of bed and go about my daily life, that’s when it stopped being fun,” he admits. “I got to where I couldn’t get high enough anymore. Nothing could really numb the emptiness on the inside of me.”

At 18 years old, Jordan started shooting up drugs. He said he felt depressed, tormented, confused, empty and dead on the inside.

“I just had no answers for life,” he says. “Drugs had always been my only answer.”

One day Jordan had been partying and drinking all day with friends but hadn’t shot up drugs all day.

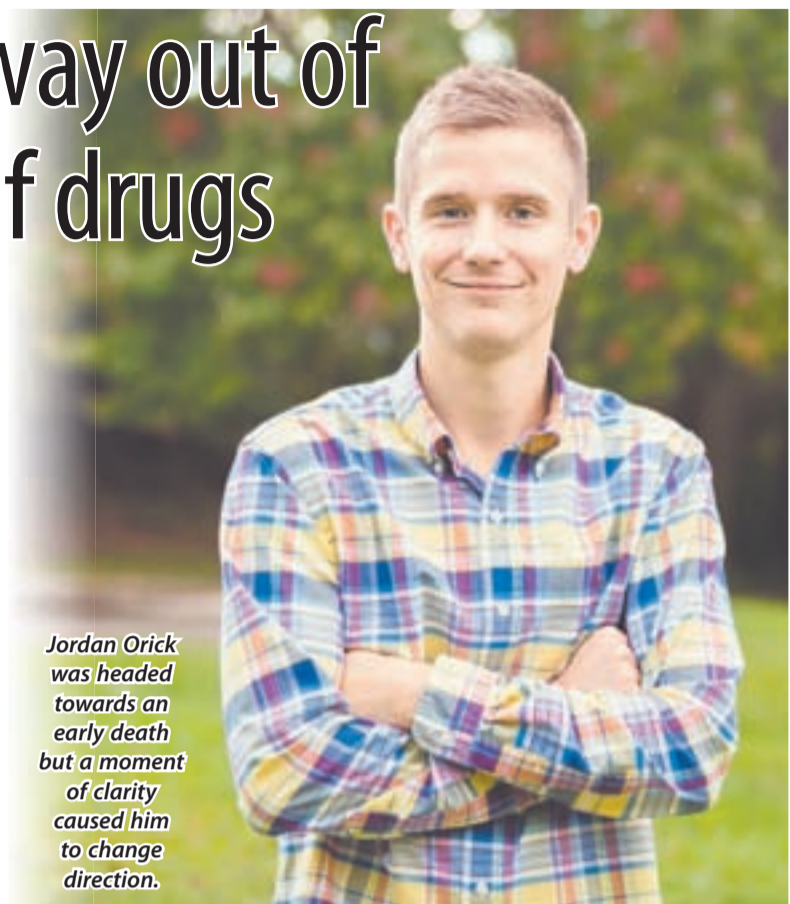
“The withdrawals were starting to hit me and close in on me and I was essentially having to deal with a moment of sobriety,” he remembers. “I was face to face with just how terrible my life was and just how deep the emptiness on the inside of me was.”

It was about 2am and he walked outside his house. Jordan had always had an awareness of God, and he decided to pray.

“I said, ‘Lord, I want to stop putting needles in my arm, but I can’t. But if You will help me, I will.’ About two weeks later, that prayer was answered.”

He was partying with friends when police arrived and broke up the party. Jordan found himself in rehab for the third time. One night he was laying on his bed, suffering from drug withdrawals.

“As I’m laying there, the Lord just starts dealing with my heart,” Jordan explains. “And normally I could hide



Jordan Orick was headed towards an early death but a moment of clarity caused him to change direction.

from Him or kind of push Him to the backburner of my mind by getting high, but I couldn’t run and hide and get high anymore.”

Jordan reflected on his life and realised if he continued the way he was going, he was headed towards his death.

“Somehow in that moment of clarity, I called on the Lord,” Jordan recalls. “I said, ‘Jesus, if You will forgive me of all the dirt that I’ve done, I will accept You as my Saviour.’ And as soon as I said those words, to my absolute and utter surprise His tangible presence swept into the room... The Bible talks about the peace of God that passes understanding – it was the peace of God that filled that room.”

Jordan said Jesus then healed him of his withdrawal symptoms.

“I felt the presence of the Lord start at the bottom my feet, my legs and come all the way up through my body,” he attests. “That healing presence went all the way through my body and I was completely and instantly healed of every single one of the withdrawal symptoms... I started thinking, this is it – the thing that I thought I found years and years ago in drugs. The thing that I thought would fulfil and satisfy and bring contentment and life and wholeness on the inside of me.”

After his conversion experience, Jordan said he had to learn how to think differently. He still had the desire to get high and he didn’t want to feel that way anymore. He spoke to his dad about it, who told him, “Jordan, you are completely free from addiction, you just don’t know it.” Jordan set about renewing

his mind, as it says in Romans 12:2, “Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.”

“I would say, ‘Jesus, You said that who You set free is free indeed. Lord, You set me free. I know I met You and You set me free from addiction,’” Jordan remembers. “I just took God at His Word. And I would just walk the floor and pray, declare and confess God’s Word [quote the Bible] as living truth.”

One night, Jordan was praying and worshipping the Lord and he felt God’s presence fill the room. He felt God speak to his heart, “The second you were saved, sin became dead to you.”

From that moment Jordan no longer struggled with addiction.

“I am absolutely free,” he declares. “And it’s not because I’m special. It’s because Jesus is special ... It’s not that I was deserving, it’s not that I was worthy, it’s not that I was good. I was the total opposite of anything that was good, but it’s all because of how good He is, how worthy He is, how able He is.”

Jordan is now a husband and father and a pastor of a church. •



Jordan with his wife Kara.

EVOLUTION FAILS BEFORE SELECTION CAN EVEN START

NATURAL SELECTION is fine, but the theory of evolution collapses long before natural selection can even get started, says biochemist Sy Garte, PhD, on *Capturing Christianity*. It collapses at the molecular level. Simply put, there's no scientific basis for how complex, sophisticated molecules – called polymers – could have spontaneously generated to provide even the most primitive cells the building blocks necessary to start the evolutionary process.

The field of study searching for an explanation of how these molecules first developed is called abiogenesis, and its failure to account for "chemical evolution" is something of a secret in science.

"People who say that we're almost there are just wrong," Sy says on a YouTube video. "People who are not working in the field, many of them, will say, 'Oh, yeah, we're getting there. We've made a lot of progress.' But the people who are actually the leaders in the field and know the details say... not a lot of progress has been made – in fact very little progress. And the number of problems just keep expanding."



Sy Garte

"The general scientific idea is that life began through what's called 'chemical evolution' and chemical evolution is very different from biological evolution because there's no natural selection and there's no replication or there's no mutations," Sy explains. "Chemical evolution is when you take chemicals, you put them together and they either react or they somehow are able to do things only on the basis of chemistry, without any mutation, without any replication, and without any natural selection — and that's pretty hard to do."

"Nothing in the universe self-replicates accurately other than living cells," Sy explains. "No chemical self-replicates, no machine self-replicates, crystals don't self-replicate, even DNA doesn't self-replicate."

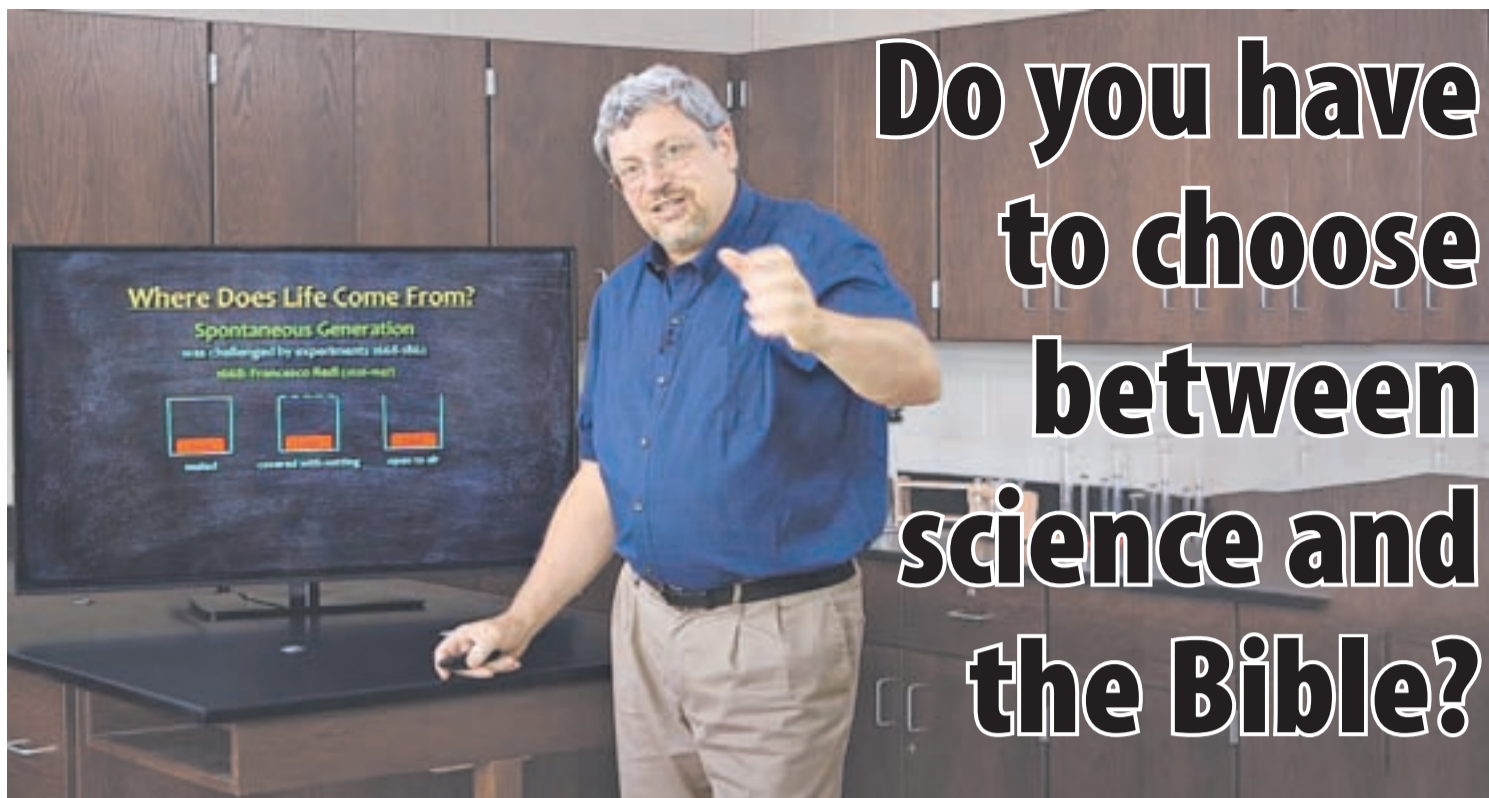
Indeed, chemicals do not produce offspring! "But a living cell can make copies of itself that are 99.9999% accurate," he adds. "That's astonishing. How does that happen? It involves a tremendous number of really complex things, including the genetic code, including ribosomes, and DNA replication, and protein synthesis – things that are just too complicated to describe without slides or without a semester of biology or chemistry or whatever."

Evolution is also a poor explainer of what makes humans different than animals.

"There are other parts of biology that are incredibly suggestive of something way beyond anything we can understand, including consciousness, human behaviour," Sy says. "The idea that Darwinian evolution by natural selection explains why we have morality or why we're creative or why we love music, that's just nonsense. That's not even scientific. What makes us human? What does it mean to be in the image of God? Human beings are not just animals who are smart."

Sy's father was a chemist, and both his parents were communists and militant atheists. However, Sy's biological studies eventually led him to Christian faith. "Science and Christian faith are absolutely NOT in conflict," he says. "I understand that people growing up in faith occasionally will lose it for various reasons. But one of those reasons should never be science, because science is not anti-Christian. Science is not atheistic. Christianity was instrumental in the foundation of science."

"In the beginning of science all the original scientists were Christians. There are still many, many scientists who are Christians, despite the current atmosphere which is somewhat hostile to Christianity."



Do you have to choose between science and the Bible?

Dr Kurt Wise is director of origins research at Bryan College in Dayton, Tennessee. He holds a BA with honours in geophysical sciences from the University of Chicago and an MA and PhD in geology from Harvard University.

Kurt has been passionate about science ever since he was a young boy growing up in Rochelle, Illinois.

"While others considered being firemen and astronauts, I was dreaming of getting a Ph.D. from Harvard University and teaching at a big university," he says in the book, *In Six Days* (edited by Dr John Ashton).

As he progressed through his local primary school he longed for the day he'd be able to participate in the science fair.

"My whole life was focused on that science fair," he recalls at the *Is Genesis History* conference in 2017.

As the event drew closer, Kurt thought about what he would focus his project on. It had to be something that could incorporate his many hobbies and collections including taxidermy and fossils. Finally, he settled on evolution.

"I went into the school library and took out every book that they had on evolution and read both of those then went into the big city of Rochelle, to the Rochelle Library – monstrous library that it was – and took out all the books there and read both of those!"

Without the assistance of the internet, Kurt read books and encyclopaedias about his chosen topic and then designed his display.

"Dad helped me design a stair step thing, where starting at the base, you're starting at the beginning of Earth's history, and you step up through time so that the last step is the present. The length of the run and each step is proportional to the length of that geologic period ... I had fossils representing each one of those periods."

Kurt's display was large so the school allowed him and his dad to set up it up the night before.

The next day, he looked over his display and realised he had a problem – that he couldn't reconcile his display with the creation account in the Bible.

Kurt had been a Christian since his Sunday School teacher explained the gospel and led him in a prayer of committing his life to Jesus when he was nine.

"My salvation came a few days after I decided to commit suicide. My salvation saved me spiritually and physically."

His faith was important to him, but so was science. He found a Bible and read the account of creation in Genesis chapter 1.

He realised everything he had learned in school about the age of the earth and the process of evolution was not in line with the Bible and he couldn't "make them fit."

But then he had an epiphany.

"What if the days in Genesis were millions of years long? If we made them millions of years long, that would accommodate most of the problems here. In my mind, it was an amazing solution. If you had a list of 100 problems, it took out 95 of them. But there were those nagging problems that it didn't quite get rid of."

Kurt says he shelved the issue in his brain and told himself it was fine and didn't matter.

But when he was about 15 he couldn't take it anymore and wanted to resolve it, once and for all.

He took a Bible and a pair of scissors and got to work.

"The question before me was, if evolution was true, how much of the Bible would I have to cut out? And so I opened up the Bible to the first page. And I read down through the Bible when I found a verse that I would have to throw out if evolution were true, I would cut it out with my

scissors."

As he got towards the end, he started to worry.

"Evolution as I understood it was true because it was what I was taught in science. It is what is in all the textbooks. It must be true. But it's a part of science and science was everything I loved. So on the one hand you've got science, everything I love, everything of value. If I wasn't able to do science, I was able to do nothing of any value. I had no value at all. And then there was the Bible.

"The question was, is evolution true or is the Bible true? If the Bible is true, and evolution is not, everything I loved is gone. I didn't want make that decision between the two."

But when he was finished with his now "holey" Bible, knew he had to answer question: there enough in the Bible to hold itself together?

He picked up the Bible and squeezed it between his fingers.

IF EVOLUTION WAS TRUE, HOW MUCH OF THE BIBLE WOULD I HAVE TO CUT OUT?



GET ANSWERS FOR YOUR FAMILY

Young people struggle to find purpose in life, believing that 'science' has made God irrelevant. CREATION MAGAZINE provides answers for your family.



- Affirms the complete reliability of the Bible
- Refutes evolution with real-world evidence
- Helps Christians share and defend their faith

Subscribe at CREATION.COM/MAG

BUILDING BETTER RELATIONSHIPS

WHEN OUR FEAR TURNS TO ANGER

BY ROB FURLONG

“Be angry, yet do not sin...” So wrote Paul the Apostle as he gave great practical advice on living out our relationships with one another.

Many years ago, a friend read this out to a group of us while also making an honest admission that he found this piece of advice “incredibly difficult to live out!” He was simply echoing what we all felt – it’s so easy to quote this statement, but extremely hard to follow!

Difficult or not, we all know from our own personal experience that anger can lead us to do and say things which are harmful and destructive.

What is it then that drives our anger, causing us to lash out at others?

Psychologists and counselors will tell you it’s fear.

One author describes the relationship between fear and anger in this way:

“Fear of the unknown is akin to the

fear of loss. When we don’t understand something, we fear that it will in some way rob us of things we hold important. For example, suppose that a strange man calls up wanting to talk to your wife and he refuses to explain why or identify himself. This unknown typically generates fear in your mind. You’ll think of the worst possible scenario that is based on the possible loss of your wife or her affections to a strange man.

This will lead to anger. The reaction of this husband’s anger is based on his fear of loss. Because he fears the loss of his wife in some capacity – physically, emotionally, or even that of not being good enough for her – he will react in anger.”

The same author goes on to say: “Few people know how to deal with fear. Our internal defences are not well equipped to deal with fear. It can paralyse you. It can rob you of the ability to think. It can create fear upon fear. For most people, the only effective means of combating fear is with anger.

“Anger provides us with a weapon to use against the source of our fears. We hope to destroy, in some way, the basis of our fears and therefore be freed from our fears. In effect, we combat a strong, negative emotion with another strong and often negative emotion – anger. This is a very dangerous combination.

“I’ve learned that angry people have many fears. They feel, in some way, vulnerable to others. Their defence is to lash out in anger. This does succeed in keeping people at arm’s length, true, but it destroys nearly every meaningful relationship as well.”

Reflecting on the above, I think of Darth Vader!

As young Anakin Skywalker, he is presented to the wise old Jedi, Yoda, who detects “much fear” simmering away in the young man’s heart and he warns him against this. But it goes unheeded; Anakin succumbs to his fear, venting it through his anger, and the monstrous Darth Vader is born, leaving behind him a wake of pain, hurt, cruelty and the murder of innocents.

As Yoda says, “Fear leads to anger. Anger leads to hate. Hate leads to suffering.”



ANGER LEADS TO HATE. HATE LEADS TO SUFFERING.
— YODA

Although fictional, it is a powerful illustration of how fear fuels anger, which then leads to destructive behaviour – sin.

Are you caught in a cycle of anger that expresses itself in such things as hurtful comments, unforgiveness and revenge?

Then it is time for you to confront your fears.

Ask yourself, “What am I afraid of?”

Is it losing your spouse, being overlooked for a promotion, being rejected by others, having your carefully hidden flaws exposed or having your point of view challenged?

All of these, and countless others, have the capacity to lead us into angry, sinful, behaviour.

Take the time now, to think about your fears, and where required, seek out a good counselor who can help you process them.

“Be angry, yet do not sin...”

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	

Satan hates you

BY JODY BENNETT

IN a world where almost every week I think things are getting more and more bizarre, The Satanic Temple of Idaho has posted on Facebook at the end of a longer message “Just know that Satan loves you for you!”

This strikes me as an utterly mind-blowing statement. I understand that many people in the world don’t believe in God, and even some of those that do, don’t believe in the antithesis of God – the devil. But I would have thought that surely those of us who believed in Satan were at least all agreed as to his character! And I would have assumed that people turned to Satanism out of a desire for power, certainly not out of a desire for love and acceptance.

If someone was out looking for a god to love them, why on earth would they choose Satan?! Where do they get their information about Satan from? The Christian Bible is the only source I know.

On the one hand you have Jesus, who demonstrated His love by walking among us, healing and doing kind deeds, and then dying on the cross to pay our sin-debt to God; on the other you have Satan who ... what? Brought all the trouble into the world by tempting Eve and causing The Fall. What loving act of Satan do Satanists use to prove his great love for humanity?

The truth is Satan absolutely hates us. He is the enemy of God the Father and all He stands for, Satan CAN’T love because God IS love. The Bible calls him the old serpent and the father of lies. Satan is bent on humanity’s destruction. He is trying to deceive as many people as possible to spend eternity in damnation with him in the place that God created specifically to punish him and his evil angels. He hates that God loves us and offers us forgiveness for our sin. He hates playing second fiddle to God and wants to be worshipped as god.

That statement on the post might have had a slightly different meaning in its context, which was as part of a post about a gay pride march. Maybe it was meant to mean that Satan loves what you are doing and never expects you to change your sexual behaviour or sinful inclinations. However, that is a lie too. Satan loves sin because it destroys us. He encourages people to sin and to get deeper and deeper into sin until they are enslaved and destroyed by their sin. Whatever your sexual appetites are, he will warp and change and pervert them, to become more animal lust and less emotional fulfilment. If Satan approves of some behaviour, you can know it is because it leads to death.

Don’t believe the lie that Satan will leave you as you are. God will accept you as you are and then raise you up to be holy and pure and clean, as He is. Satan will accept you as you are and then drag you down into the depths of depravity with him. Sin will always take you further and cost you more than you imagined. God’s path will make you the best human being and ‘a little lower than the angels’, Satan’s will make you little better than a beast.

Don’t be fooled, Satan does not love you, he hates your guts. He is the enemy of God and all His good creation – which includes you.



Inset: Sydney McLaughlin of the United States smiles with the gold medal after the Women's 400m Hurdles Final at the Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games in Japan, on August 4, 2021. (Photo by Li Yibo/Xinhua via Getty Images)

Sydney McLaughlin of the United States in action in the Women's 400m Hurdles Semi Final two during the Tokyo 2020 Summer Olympic Games on August 2nd, 2021 in Tokyo, Japan. (Photo by Tim Clayton/Corbis via Getty Images)

SEASON OF SUCCESS

US track star Sydney McLaughlin (now 22) is an American hurdler and sprinter who won gold in the 400-metre hurdles and the 4x400-metre relay at the 2020 Tokyo Olympic Games (held in 2021).

She also holds the current world record, (which she shaved a further .8 seconds off at the recent World Athletics Championships) and Olympic record for the 400-meter hurdles.

Although Sydney tries to limit her social media use because she finds it a distraction from her goals, in August 2021, she wrote a lengthy Instagram post glorifying God.

"Let me start off by saying, what an honour it is to be able to represent not only my country, but also the kingdom of God," she wrote. "What I have in Christ is far greater than what I have or don't have in life. I pray my journey may be a clear depiction of submission and obedience to God. Even when it doesn't make sense, even when it doesn't seem possible. He will make a way out of no way. Not for my own gratification, but for His glory.

"I have never seen God fail in my life. In anyone's life for that matter. Just because I may not win every race, or receive every one of my heart's desires, does not mean God had failed. His will is PERFECT. And He has prepared me for a moment such as this. That I may use the gifts He has given me to point all the attention back to Him.

"2x Olympian, Olympic Champion, World Record Holder.

"Thank. You. God."

2020-21 was a very big year for the athlete; along with her medals, she won herself a diamond ring too, when she got engaged to NFL player Andre Levine Jr. and – even more important and life-changing than those events – Sydney also got baptised (immersed in water) as a declaration of her decision to commit her life to following Jesus Christ.

In November 2020, she posted a video of herself getting baptised in the ocean at a beach in LA, and said, "For 21 years I was running from the greatest gift I could ever receive. And by His grace, I have been saved. I no longer live, but Christ in me. My past has been made clean because of my Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ."

Sydney explains to Movieguide what brought her to this decision: "I grew up in a Christian household. I went to church every Sunday. My parents raised us on biblical principles, and for a long time, I always knew that God existed and I knew that He definitely played a big role in my life, but there was no relationship.

"Honestly, I didn't even understand the importance or the purpose of Jesus and how all that played out. So it was a lot more of religious right and wrong, [rather than] true relationship and connection and intimacy," she explains.

"But I didn't think there was any freedom in [surrendering to Jesus]. And I was afraid that in doing that I would be handing over my individuality and my identity. So I kind of put that off and just walked in the world

and lived a very secular life and it never fulfilled me. It never sustained me and I could vividly hear God in a couple of instances ask, 'Are you done? Are you ready to give your life over to Me? Are you ready to let me have control?' And I would literally tell Him 'no'.

"God can't force you to love Him. So I kept walking that road. I got to a point where I was just very depressed and desperately searching for some sort of purpose because a lot of it was wrapped up in track. A lot of it was wrapped up in relationships, and none of those things ever worked out or sustained me."

However, once COVID hit, Sydney was forced to spend more time by herself and she started to listen to sermons and read her Bible "... things I didn't normally do on a daily basis," she admits.

"I had people from my church ... do Bible studies with me and even Andre inviting me to the NFL Bible study, and I got into community with people who I truly saw living in that freedom and in that joy that Jesus brings. Over time, I was able to build my own relationship with Jesus.

"Andre is like one of the best things that ever happened to me," she says. "Beyond being such an amazing friend, he's such a great man of God. He's helped me in my walk and has always constantly encouraged me in that. And it's been such an amazing thing just to have him as an example of what it means to live a life like Jesus. And truly, that's what attracts me to him the most."

Sydney says that Colossians chap-

ter three in the Bible stood out to her and opened her eyes to how to live for God. The chapter begins: "Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory."

"Being able to live a life that's led by God, and understanding His love for me that sustains me more than anything secular in this world, has given me a new perspective on everything. And I know that it's a constant journey, but definitely one of the best decisions I've ever made in my life," Sydney affirms.

"God's love for you will never change regardless of how you per-

form or don't perform," she adds. "At the end of the day, as long as I'm giving 100 percent of what I have to Him, the rest doesn't matter. I thought I was a track athlete. I thought I was a social media influencer ... but now I've understood that first and foremost, I'm a child of God. Track is not who I am, it's just what I do. It's the opportunity He's given me to bring all of the glory back to Him.

"Christ has cleansed me and washed me and made me clean. There's just so much beauty in that and the grace, the immeasurable amount of grace that He showed me that I do not deserve.

"It's just been amazing to just sit in the simplicity of God's love. It's been very enjoyable just to feel that and then, as an overflow of the love that I've received, be able to share that with others around me." •

DISTRIBUTED BY: