

Challenge

THE GOOD NEWS PAPER

No. 399

"MY BODY IS MINE, AND WORTH MORE THAN THEIR MONEY"

NOT FOR THE CAMERAS

Aussie actress Anna McGahan explains why she doesn't do nude scenes anymore

It's hard to make it in Hollywood. In a dog-eats-dog world where bodies are currency it is not uncommon for an actor or actress to have to sell theirs for a role, laying it bare before a camera crew and, more broadly, anyone with a television.

When she started in her role as 1920s prostitute Nellie Cameron in *Underbelly: Razor*, Australian actress Anna McGahan perceived it as "artistic expression".

She was distraught when she realised many perceived it as a pornographic act.

"I was naïve," she wrote on her blog.

"And in my naivety, I was not able to protect myself from an industry that did not consider itself responsible for me, or how my body was experienced and understood by a public audience.

"I had been told that I was brave. I had been told that the lighting was very beautiful. I had been told that it was tasteful. I had also been told that if I wanted to work as an actress, I had to be prepared to get my breasts out."

It comes with the territory, many would say, and few actors would do what she did next: refuse to do any more nude scenes, disqualifying herself from dozens of roles.

She explains why.

"As a female actor, I have continually had to assert the forgotten truth that my body is mine."

"I now say no to nudity for many reasons," Anna told *Eternity News*. "One of the reasons is the thought that I could be perpetuating a culture that teaches young men in particular to view women in that way, and encouraging the pornography culture. I actively want to encourage the positive, enriching, holistic understanding of who women are.

"Another reason is an ongoing conversation between me and Jesus about it, about my own body, about my own purity."

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Dr Blake cast members: Frank Carlyle (Rodger Corser), Jean Beazley (Nadine Garner), Craig McLachlan (Dr Blake), Anna McGahan (Rose Anderson).

Queen of drag no more

For ten years Ramon Pedro lived as a transvestite and drag queen before a near death experience revealed his true identity

"I SAW myself as a transvestite and I remember why I felt like a waste every time I took my mask of make-up off my face... because it was not the real me," Ramon shared with Marcus Augusto Macedo from the Voz da Bahia website.

The 27-year-old Brazilian explains how he carried the scars of sexual abuse as a child and used drugs to numb the pain of his past.

"I mixed different drugs and had one foot in the grave. I started with marijuana and then cocaine and then LSD," he admits.

"A chasm was opened in me. I wanted nothing else but to be wasted. I was literally the slave of drugs and I lived for it."

Then a drug overdose led to a

cardiopulmonary attack and Ramon shares how, as he was dying, God revealed Himself.

After a miraculous recovery Ramon started reading the Bible to discover what it all meant.

He says he identified with the Apostle Paul, who turned from persecuting Christians to serving their God when Jesus revealed Himself to him on the Road to Emmaus.

"I was like Paul: I didn't like Christians, I didn't believe in anything and when I had the experience with God, I began to believe in everything that I knew nothing about before," Ramon says.

"I read the first chapter of the epistle to the Romans and the masks began to come off as I read those words."



Ramon as he looked in the past (left) and as he looks now. Photo taken from Facebook.

Ramon remembers having mixed feelings, especially when he read in Romans chapter 1 verses 26 and 27 that homosexuality was wrong in God's eyes.

Then, while at a rave party, things clicked into place and he knew what he needed to do.

"I prayed to the Lord with all my heart," Ramon recalls. "I did as

Isaiah chapter 58 says by proclaiming the name of the Lord out loud and saying, 'God, if You, Lord, exist, then enter right away into my life and change my story! I regret being who I am now... I feel weak and I can't go on like this by myself! If the Lord exists, may He Himself talk to me in this place!'"

● Turn to page 2

BACK PAGE

Sport

JOHN BOSTOCK

THERE IS MORE

Good news for heart trouble

BY ALAN BAILEY

WHEN LIFE SEEMS A BIT MUNDANE, a bit ordinary, think about what is going on inside your body. One of the many things we take for granted is that wonderful pump, the heart. We don't even feel its action most of the time but it is working away day and night keeping us alive.



It is amazingly efficient. Its job is to keep a river of life flowing through our blood vessels. There is no provision for a shut-down for repairs, or for a monthly service; it must keep pumping, hour by hour day by day and year by year. Muscles expand and contract, valves open and shut, all prompted by nerve impulses.

Sure, many folk have problems with disorders and diseases. This doesn't reflect on the design and efficiency of the healthy organ. Very often it reflects on the way we treat our bodies.

THE OTHER HEART

There is another wonder within us, also called the heart. In our culture we know what is meant by reference to the heart when talking of feelings, decisions and affections. To say "I felt deep in my heart that she was right" is easily understood. We talk about loving with all our heart. Some decisions seem to be made in the heart rather than in the head.

We all realise that we are not referring to the faithful pump when we speak in this way. We are thinking about the core of our being, the

place where we hold counsel, where deepest feelings lie buried in a world of personal privacy. It is the seat of personality, the sum of all that is important to us as human beings.

THE HEALTH QUESTION

This heart is also subject to fault. Even disease. Yes, capable of much that we may see as good, but alas, capable of everything awful under the sun. As Jesus said "Out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, and slander." Elsewhere we read "The heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked; who can know it?"

CHANGE OF HEART

Since Christian Barnard pioneered heart transplant surgery, countless people have benefitted by heart operations. Is it possible that changes can be made to the other heart we have talked about? Yes, radical changes can be made. The Bible says "If anyone is in Christ, they are a new creature; the old has passed away; the new has come."

An in-depth encounter with Christ makes changes in us. We will never be the same again. Obviously, there are many vestiges of the old person still there that often surface. But the heart is different. Outlooks alter and new qualities appear. A Christian is working on the problem of increasing the virtue, decreasing the vice. Or, if you like, living in the power of the risen Christ.

Two healthy hearts add up to one large blessing.

NOT FOR THE CAMERAS

From page 1

Anna did not grow up in church. "I was familiar with the term of God," she tells a church audience on Easter Sunday in 2015, "and I was very against the name of Jesus."

But she says she had a loved and respected Christian friend who intrigued her.

Although she thought going to church might make her "lose everything", she accepted her friend's invitation to attend a service.

"I lied to everyone and told them I was just going to mock it," she says.

"I couldn't come out with the truth, and I couldn't understand it either. I thought, 'Why do these people believe this? It's not cool, so why would you do it?'"

When she walked in, she recalls, her hands felt like they were on fire. A feeling hit her and though she didn't know what it was she knew it was pure and good and could be trusted.

Mystified, fascinated, drawn in, she continued going. But she was also terrified.

"I didn't want to be in a cult," Anna says. "I didn't want to be 'born again'. I didn't want to be a Jesus freak. I resisted."

"And it got to this point where I just needed to know for myself." At a hotel, in the drawer where she knew it would be – because they always are – was a Gideon Bible, and she began reading.

"It pulled me," she says, "I couldn't walk away. I wanted to, so much, but I felt so drawn..."

"Over the few weeks I read the four gospels [the Bible's books of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John] my life completely changed."

She started to pray to God, tiny, soft prayers of "Are you there? And if you are I'm sorry because I haven't addressed you until this point," and she saw God move.

She experienced healing. "One morning I woke up and looked at my body and said, 'It's beautiful'. I haven't had an issue with my eating disorder of eight years since."

She also experienced a freeing sensation of ownership and love over herself, her body, and her sexuality.

That is why she no longer does nude scenes. "My body is mine," she says, "and worth more than their money. I do not want to beg for an opportunity to be used."



Anna McGahan. (Photo Frederick M. Brown/Getty Images)

It is also why she no longer takes drugs, or swears: "the words feel strange in my mouth".

When she told her family and friends she now believed in God she explains they rejected her, mocked her, and told her this was just another phase.

So for a while, she did lose a lot. But she finally understood why so many people choose to follow God even when it was hard: it was worth it.

"Over the last three years I have transformed completely in His grace [undeserved kindness]," Anna says.

"I know that He sees me and He knows me."

"My heart is so full from what He has called me to do."

Anna is currently playing Rose in the latest season of *The Doctor Blake Mysteries*, Elspeth in the feature film *Spirit of the Game* due for release in October, and Alice Lawson in an upcoming thriller *Project Eden: Vol.I.*

Drag queen no more

From page 1

The moment he shouted these words he says they penetrated his heart and he felt the supernatural power of God set him free from his old life.

"You will know the truth and the truth will set you free," Ramon explains, quoting from Jesus' words in John chapter 8 verse 32.

"The same God who changed my life can change yours"

While covered in tattoos that remind him of his past life, Ramon says he is glad God has forgiven him and offered him a second chance at life.

"God never created homosexuals and so no ex-homosexuals either," he says boldly.

"For those who think they are

Two years later, he has a new heart and mission to share his story and help others who are struggling with homosexuality, pornography and drug addictions.

"I have a principle: love people rather than things," he shares now.

born a murderer, thief, adulterer, or homosexual: there is a possibility to be born again and that's through Jesus Christ."

While some might not agree with Ramon, he is not afraid to share the truth of God's Word on the topic in a loving way.

"I'm against hatred and spreading it. I'm all for love. Don't wait until you



Ramon and his wife Raiane in a photo from Facebook

suffer before accepting Jesus. You can have the feeling of being happy with everything that you do in life— maybe you never dealt with drugs or the things I've dealt with. But I want to tell you one thing: the same God who changed my life can change yours. He is the same yesterday, today, and forever."

Today Ramon preaches this message and runs ministry programmes in his hometown of Salvador in Brazil. He is happily married to his wife Raiane.

PART-TIME JOURNALIST NEEDED!

Are you an experienced Christian journalist with a heart for sharing the Gospel with people? If so, consider applying to be a part-time journalist at Challenge, part of the team in our Perth office, 2 days a week.

For more information about this position please contact our Global Operations Director, John Palandri.

Office phone: (08) 9453 3311
Email: john@challengenews.org

Crossword

ACROSS

- Canyon effect
- Of Middle Ages
- Long, swelling waves
- Type of bear or explorer
- Not amateur
- Put two and two together
- Poke fun at
- Half plus half
- In spite of
- Food sample
- Russian revolution month
- They check accounts
- Birds in barns

DOWN

- Half of EU
- Conversation starter
- Old printing measures
- Upgrades
- Pyroclastic flow source
- Italian money of old
- Relocation
- Eligible for Mensa
- Determine dimensions
- Donned clothing
- Pasta shape
- Sicilian mountain
- My, to a monarch

SOLUTION PAGE 11

Sudoku

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

Puzzle Level: Medium

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

SOLUTION PAGE 11

share your story

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

Finding the 'love song in the rubble of my life'

University professor, feminist and lesbian activist on issues of morality and justice, and follower of the likes of Freud, Hegel, Marx, and Darwin; Rosaria Champagne Butterfield resented Christians and their condescending, judgmental ways.

"Stupid. Pointless. Menacing. That's what I thought of Christians and their god Jesus, who in paintings looked as powerful as a Breck Shampoo commercial model," Rosaria shares.

"The word Jesus stuck in my throat like an elephant tusk; no matter how hard I choked, I couldn't hack it out."

From a postmodern lesbian professor Rosaria became the wife of a pastor and a home-schooling mother, who frequently speaks in universities and churches about her experience.

"I fought with everything I had [against Christianity]," she says.

"I did not want this.

"I did not ask for this.

"I counted the costs. And I did not like the math on the other side of the

equal sign."

But she was confronted with a truth she found herself unable to deny, despite her best efforts.

Rosaria began reading the Bible for her research into religion and Christian politics and their attitudes towards homosexuals.

In 1997 she wrote her first article attacking the "unholy trinity" of Jesus, Republican politics, and patriarchy, published in the local newspaper.

In response to the piece she received a letter from church pastor Ken Smith which, she says, was not the hate mail of the kind she usually received and had come to expect, but rather surprisingly "kind and inquiring".

"Ken's letter punctured the integrity of my research project without him knowing it," she says.

"I didn't know how to respond to it, so I threw it away. Later that night, I fished it out of the recycling bin and put it back on my desk."

When Ken's letter invited her to get together for dinner, Rosaria accepted, in the name of research. They unexpectedly became friends.

"When we ate together, Ken prayed

in a way I had never heard before," Rosaria says. "His prayers were intimate. Vulnerable. He repented of his sin in front of me. He thanked God for all things.

"Ken's God was holy and firm, yet full of mercy. And because Ken and [his wife] Floy did not invite me to church, I knew it was safe to be friends."

Rosaria continued to read the Bible, "the way a glutton devours food".

"What if it is true?" she began to ask herself. "What if Jesus is a real and risen Lord? What if we are all in trouble?"

"The Bible got to be bigger inside me than I. It overflowed into my world. I fought against it with all my might.

"One Sunday morning I rose from the bed of my lesbian lover, and an hour later sat in a pew at the Syracuse Reformed Presbyterian Church. Conspicuous with my butch haircut, I reminded myself that I came to meet God, not fit in.

"The image that came in like waves, of me and everyone I loved suffering in hell, vomited into my consciousness and gripped me in its teeth."

Then one day, she says, she came to Jesus. She says it as if it were an inevitability, the most natural of



"Those who professed the name of Jesus commanded both my pity and my wrath," Rosaria Butterfield says. Until she became one.

occurrences.

"Jesus triumphed," she describes. "And I was a broken mess.

"I did not want to lose everything that I loved. But the voice of God sang a sanguine love song in the rubble of my world. I weakly believed that if Jesus could conquer death, he could make right my world."

Years later, married with children, Rosaria says she does not consider herself an "ex-gay", nor does she think Christians should identify themselves as "gay Christians".

She has criticised ideas that the "primary goal of Christianity is to resolve homosexuality through heterosexuality, thus failing to see that repentance and victory over sin are

God's gifts, and failing to remember that sons and daughters of the King can be full members of Christ's body and still struggle with sexual temptation".

God's love does not exclude anyone, ever. All are welcome into His house, into His arms, exactly as they are right now.

"If you came to me and said 'I am really struggling with this issue, and I don't know who to believe — is sexuality fixed, is it fluid, is it a sin, is it a grace — I don't know what to do,'" Rosaria concludes, "I would say, 'Look. You cannot ask yourself these hard questions in the spotlight. You need to get in the church.

"That is the safest place. Have the courage to go before the Lord himself and take the hand of a godly pastor who is not going to hurt you and not going to shame you and is not going to betray you."

'ALARM BELLS' SOUNDED WARNING

ESPN sports journalist Philip Murphy grew up attending church and "trying to be good" but realised he had been spiritually asleep when three "alarm bells" went off in his life and woke him up to the truth about God.

Philip admitted on website Unashamed Athletes.com: "I didn't know why I was doing the church thing. In fact, I never even asked myself that question. I just went because that's what I did."

But as he got older the gap between what he proclaimed on a Sunday, and how he lived the rest of the week grew wider and wider.

During this time, between the ages of 17 and 19, Phil felt three distinct moments of conscience and clarity that he describes as "God setting off my spiritual alarm clock".

Twice he ignored these promptings to change the trajectory of his life.

The first time was in the early morning hours after his prom night when he snapped to awareness from substance abuse, standing outside his car, severely underdressed, not remembering how he had got there. Philip knew then that his life was on a dangerous path.

The next was a year later when his long-distance girlfriend came to visit him shortly after having a baby (not



Philip Murphy says God's pursuit of him has not relented

his) and asked him to hold the child while she showered. Looking into the baby's eyes, Philip suddenly realised his philandering and selfishness were affecting more than just himself and the girl he was dating.

The following year, Philip thought he had sorted his life out. He was in a committed relationship, he had his first full-time sports writing job, and he was making gains in the gym. He still didn't know what a relationship with God looked like, but he thought he did.

"I attended church weekly and thought spiritually distant morality was somehow sufficient," he says.

Then his stable life began to collapse.

His relationship ended badly, his

employer let him go, and a bout of unrelenting flu kept him from working out for months.

Philip was in emotional and physical misery — "at least as much as a 19-year-old, upper-middle-class college student would understand 'misery'," he adds wryly. He realised he needed something else in his life.

"I felt compelled to meet with a leader in my church. He insisted on turning that time into a formal confession of sin rather than the general counsel I was seeking," Philip remembers.

That hour proved future-altering because during it Philip received his first Bible. He began by reading the book of Philipians.

"After finishing Philipians, my appetite for God's Word was voracious. I felt a hunger to read more,

pray regularly and obey convictions of my new heart."

Over the course of the next few months, Philip made sense of what was happening to him. His desires were shifting.

Then, it was inexplicable, but now he knows that it was the Holy Spirit working to bring him back into a right relationship to God through Jesus Christ.

"Without the power of God who controls all things, church-going is a lame hobby. But standing under God's influence and leaning into Him as the all-knowing God, a relationship developed, providing a lens through which I saw the world and my purpose in it categorically differently," Philip proclaims.

That was more than eight years ago.

"Since then, God's pursuit of me has not relented — despite my pursuit of Him being horribly inconsistent. He's been faithful when I haven't been.

"My final testimony won't be written until I take my last breath. But I know my eternity is secure, a truth that has been an anchor through storms far more serious than [those of my youth].

"In fact, I'm walking in the darkest season of my life right now. And I can say without hesitation, 'Christ is sufficient,'" he declares.

For Philip, having hope beyond this life is far more freeing than anything this world can provide.

I was in emotional and physical misery

nudge

Running late

BY KARL FAASE

LATENESS seems to be endemic in our society.

Apparently 70 percent of people regularly use SMS their friends to

tell them they will be late.

This is now so common that some

phones have a template in their memory

so you only have to fill in the

blanks. "I am late,"

it begins. "I will be there at..."

I heard of someone recently who planned to sort out a relationship with his brother that had been strained for years. Tragically his brother died suddenly and now he is racked with remorse for the loss of his brother and that so much was left unsaid.

We all think we can 'do it later'.

You may not have the time you think you have. I encourage you not to run late in the area of relationships. Work them out now, both with those you love and with God.

You won't be given a second chance.

THE UNLIKELY MESSAGE BEHIND ONE OF AMERICA'S HIPPEST FASHION BRANDS

PUTTING ON THE FEAR OF GOD

Jerry Lorenzo's fashion label encapsulates the word "cool". Worn by celebrities like Kanye West, Justin Bieber, Kendall Jenner and Gigi Hadid, and described as "a teenager's dream back to school wardrobe (that others can love too)", the pieces perfectly marry comfort and style.

One would not expect the man behind one of LA's hottest menswear brands to be a father with no formal fashion training and no reservations when it comes to talking about Jesus.

Jerry started the label, called Fear of God, back in 2012 when he was working as a manager for professional athletes and noticed a gap in the menswear market.

"What makes Fear of God cool is that it taps into the nostalgia guys ... have for the '80s and '90s," explained GQ style writer Jake Woolf. "He's taking the touchstones of that era—stonewashed denim, plaid, slightly looser fits, awesome rock band tees—and setting them against a 2016 backdrop where streetwear, high-fashion, and 'middle America' all have collided."

But it is about more than "coolness".

"I wanted to do something that also left you with a greater purpose or inspired you some other way besides clothes," Jerry says.

"Growing up, God and Christianity had always seemed kinda light ... you knew your church friends were never really as cool as the cool kids at school," he tells Christianity Today.

But he read the devotional *My Utmost For His Highest*, which was "talking about dark clouds surrounding the kingdom of God, and I saw



Jerry Lorenzo sees God as 'this really cool character.'



the fear of God as reverence for this figure who was so layered and deep that He seems so dark to us. For the first time, I saw God as this really cool character."

"This fear of God is not one that

cripples you, it's simply a fear of not knowing, and thus going out to find the answers. God is all knowing, but He is greater than any obstacle in your way, and He is on your side," Lorenzo told GQ.

"Even in times that are beyond your understanding, there's a peace in knowing there is a God that is bigger and more

all-knowing than not only you, but anyone."

Who I am is identified in Whose I am

In the past, Jerry has been familiar with coolness in the more traditional sense of the word—the one that involved alcohol and partying and the club scene.

But he says after "coming to the end of himself" he moved away from the party lifestyle and the alcohol and instead focused

on his relationship with God, which allowed him to be more open about his faith.

"I love God so much that I don't want to do things that hurt my relationship with Him anymore," he says. "Yes, those are things that I did, but who I am is identified in Whose I am, not who I was."

He says "whose" because Jerry considers himself a child of God, and credits Him for the brand's success—which is why he hopes to glorify Him through it in return.

"If God's given you a gift, you want to do whatever you can to honour Him through that," he says, "and I guess I have this gift [for] fashion."

"I don't take 400,000 kids following me on Instagram for granted. This platform is huge now, so I have to represent for Who I know put me here, and why He put me here," Jerry said.

"The bigger Fear of God gets, the more I realise that it's God's—and that this could be any platform," he said. "It doesn't have to be clothing. It could be anything. This is just a platform for Him to get glory."

"I could never imagine myself starting a clothing line and not having it built on this foundation," he adds. "At the end of the day, these are just fabrics. If you really wanna know what the fear of God is about, it's a power that can change your life."

To Jerry, this is what true coolness means: "If you love God and you put other people before you, that's beyond cool. Cool doesn't compare to that. What I'm doing with Fear of God is trying to show people that you can do what you're passionate about and love God. Whether it's cool to people or not isn't really relevant." •

Through the lens with no filter

BY CAITLIN O'SHEA

WHEN Brandon Stanton lost his job as a bonds trader, he decided to take portraits of strangers on the streets of New York City. What began as a hobby soon grew into a worldwide social phenomenon known as Humans of New York (HONY), chronicling the lives of strangers and sharing them with the world.

With more than nine million followers on Facebook and a New York Times bestseller, Stanton has created a vibrant blog and sense of community within his work as he incorporates photographs and snippets of conversations with his subjects.

When approaching strangers on the street, Stanton often asks, "What is your biggest regret?", provoking answers that are profoundly personal.

Recently Stanton partnered with the United Nations in a 50-day trip to help promote the UN's eight Millennium Development Goals that include eradicating extreme hunger and poverty and achieving universal primary education.

Photos on the Facebook page and HONY website are heartbreaking. One photo-



"Anonymous lady" by Brandon Stanton.

graph is from Petra, Jordan, of a father and young son with the caption: "He lived with his mother in Gaza when he was very young. One night, I talked to him on the phone before bedtime, and he told me he was wearing three pairs of pants to bed. I said, 'Three pairs of pants? Why aren't you in your pyjamas?' He told me: 'Because I want my body to hold together if a bomb falls on me.'"

The true beauty of HONY is found in the comments section under each photograph connecting strangers across continents. One comment reads: "In just a few days these photographs have done more

to humanise the Middle East than 40 years of US media coverage."

Stanton arrived in Erbil, Iraq, just before ISIS militants had taken Mosul Dam and Sinjar Mountain and many of his photographs feature Yazidi refugees fleeing towards refugee camps.

"What's struck me the most is how much a humanitarian tragedy is magnified when you break it into individual stories," Stanton told ABCNews America.

Sharing everyday people's lives, without prejudice or judgement, no matter where they come from or what they believe, is what makes HONY such a wonderful project.

Likewise can be said for our individual stories. Through God's eyes, every story matters. •

Article courtesy of WarCry Magazine

Anonymous lady

"I grew up, like, savage. My stepfather abused me starting at the age of four. My mother threw me out when I was fourteen.

I became addicted to drugs. I fell in love with a drug dealer and we had a daughter. He hit me but I had nowhere else to go.

I tried to get away from everything when I turned nineteen. I thought: 'I'm leaving Puerto Rico and I'm going to change.'

But on the plane to New York, the guy next to me was a heroin user. And he convinced me to try it. And things got worse in New York. It was even harder because I was alone.

I ended up on the street. I was jumping from house to house. I was doing what I had to do to survive, you know. The government took my children away.

I was lost for so many years but I'm a new person now. I'm sober and I'm working and I'm going to church. But I struggle a lot. I have all these emotions and I don't know where they come from. It's like I can't control them. And when I'm with other people, I feel less.

My past always comes back to me. I say to myself: 'Who do you think you are? You've done so many bad things. And you don't even know how to talk right.'

I can never get away from the things that I've done. But Jesus forgives me, you know? He knows that I'm a sinner person and He still loves me. My past does not matter to Him. He is changing my thinking. He is helping me start new. Without Him, I would have nothing to hang onto." •

UNRELENTING FORGIVENESS

“Nothing can harness your appreciation of grace like having rejected it for years and then realising it’s still there,” says ex-fighter Dave Jensen

BY ANNE LIM OF *ETERNITY NEWS*

Dave Jensen wakes up in the Robertson Barracks Army base one morning in 2009 with a hangover and a day to waste. He opens a laptop gifted to him by his twin sister, intending to look at pornography, but instead clicks on a YouTube clip that pops up as “recommended for you”.

It is a sermon by John Piper called “Don’t waste your life”. His sister must have used the laptop to watch it.

Five hours and five sermons later, Dave is looking in the mirror saying, “What am I doing?” The answer is, he is doing everything he has ever wanted to do. The problem, he realises now, is that none of it means anything.

This isn’t the first time Dave has heard the gospel. As a child in one of Sydney’s most prominent Christian families he says he must have heard it a hundred— a million— times before.

And it wasn’t that he didn’t believe in God. He did. He tells *Eternity News*, “[Before then], if Jesus had walked into my room with holes in his hands and said ‘I am Jesus Christ the Messiah, I have died for your sins, I am true and I am real, I have come back from the dead so that you might live, and follow me,’ I would have said ‘Jesus, thanks but no thanks. I do believe you but I want to

follow myself. I want to do my own thing’.”

‘His own thing’ was lying, partying, and having sex with girls, which resulted in an unplanned pregnancy at 20 years old, which resulted in a marriage, which resulted in a university deferral and an army sign-up.

‘His own thing’ was a divorce; drinking and fighting as much if not more than the army culture demands; violence and womanising, and hangover upon hangover.

“I started to get into a lot of pub fights and a lot of almost culturally acceptable casual violence,” he tells *Eternity*. “I was the biggest womaniser and the worst part of it, looking back, was I was proud of it.”

Until that morning, where he was met head-on with the purposelessness of his life and behavior.

“When I turned around and confronted what I’d done, I saw that without the love of God I was completely and utterly stuffed,” Dave says.

“I was gone. Not only was my life a waste but I was going to go to hell.”

He called up the army chaplain and confessed what he’d become — “a whoring, womanising piece of work”. The chaplain agreed with him and advised him to pray, express genuine sorrow for his sin, and ask the Lord for forgiveness for his sins (the things he had done wrong).

“Pray until you know that He has answered”



Dave Jensen says he realised “not only was my life a waste but I was going to hell”.

“I said, ‘I have prayed,’” Dave recalls. “I’ve asked God to become a Christian and He has never answered. How do I know He is going to answer?”

“He said, ‘Well, pray until you know that He has answered.’”

That night ‘Big Dave’ fell asleep in tears next to his bed after having cried out to God for forgiveness. When he woke up, he said there was “no lightning, no thunder [...] but the greatest sense of being loved and forgiven. There was a genuine feeling of release that God had set me free.”

After 28 years, having

grown up hearing of Jesus and the Bible every day, Dave finally understood what it meant for him.

“Nothing can harness your appreciation of grace (God’s undeserved love) like having rejected it for years and then realising it’s still there,” he says.

Dave continued to have his struggles; but he did it with a new awareness of his sin and a resolve to change, and gradually he let God show him what it meant to live with Christ as his King— sacrifice, selflessness and putting God first.

And out of Dave’s relation-

ship with God came a sense of purpose in the form of a calling to share what God had done for him with others.

“I realised how desperately I wanted to tell people,” he says. “I feel I’ve got to tell people about this. This is what I want to do: live with Christ as my King. Still sinning hourly but not unrepentantly, really trying hard to obey God in everything.”

Dave left the army for a job as a youth minister in Paramatta where he, his second wife and their two children live.

“I discovered that ministry

is what I really want to do,” he says.

He has given up drinking. “I still struggle daily, and daily I am reminded of God’s grace.”

“In the end it is amazing that God has used my evil and my sin from the past in order to speak to people from a similar background.

“I love God more now than I have ever before and, God willing, despite my ups and downs, that will keep growing.”

First published in *Eternity News*. For good news stories visit eternitynews.com.au.

Falling into God’s arms

Some people have to reach rock bottom before they start “searching for God”, but Maggie Clark tells how she literally fell into the arms of Jesus as a girl before she even knew there was a God to look for.

It happened in 1949, when Maggie was in her teens at a Presbyterian girls boarding school. They had a fire drill that required the girls to slide down a fire pole from the third storey of the dormitories. Maggie was terrified of heights and when the prefect pushed her over the window ledge, she plummeted to the ground landing with a thud.

But from Maggie’s perspective it was very different.

“As I went over the ledge I just simply let go and still vividly remember feeling a firmness under my dangling feet, then a warm comforting feeling enfolded me, like being tucked up in soft velvet or a puffy armchair, and I felt safe and protected. So, I just snuggled in and enjoyed the great view of everything around me as I wafted slowly down. I saw the other girls in their tidy rows down on the tennis court.

“Amazingly, I could see everything for miles and miles right into my parents sitting room, 35 miles away, as they sat by the open fire.

“I didn’t pass out or faint because I was wide awake the whole time and could see every wonderful thing so clearly. I was then very softly and tenderly set down on the ground.”

While everyone was screaming and panic had broken out around her, to Maggie “it seemed like a lovely, long time



Maggie Clark “fell” in love with Jesus as a girl

spent with [Jesus]”.

And Maggie was, miraculously, physically fine - no broken bones, no bruises, no shock, no aches or pains, no cuts anywhere at all.

That fall is the moment that Maggie credits with meeting and recognising her Lord for the first time, but she realises now that twice before He had intervened, through others, to save her life.

Maggie was born premature, weighing just one kilogram, and was only kept alive through the God-inspired efforts of one Matron Johnson. She bathed Maggie in oil, wrapped her in cotton wool, fed her with an eye-dropper and carried her around everywhere in the crook of her arm, held upright in a pint-sized enamel jug!

Three months later when Maggie was back home but failing to thrive, all her relatives were gathered and crying around her when her Scottish grandad, having

had enough of nothing being done, grabbed an eye-dropper and his hip-flask and squirted neat whiskey down her throat!

“There was utter silence and horror - or so my Dad said,” Maggie recounts. “Apparently I gasped and spluttered and coughed up a lump of something. Then I yelled the place down!” Then with a laugh she adds, “So perhaps I can truthfully say that in the beginning I was anointed with oil and filled with the spirit!”

Maggie’s experience of the comfort and presence of God confirmed what she already knew about the saving grace (undeserved love of God), God offered her through Jesus’ death on the cross, which she had learnt about in Sunday School and from her father. Later she went to a Christian rally and a Billy Graham Crusade, which reinforced her understanding of and commitment to Christ.

But ever since her fall, Maggie says “Jesus has been with me as He promised He would”, and that presence has helped her to overcome her natural impatience and flaring temper.

Her favourite verse is Matthew chapter 28 verse 20 where Jesus tells his disciples: “And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”

Now at 81, Maggie can look back on a life spent praising God by singing in church, musical show choirs, theatre companies and, latterly, with country gospel club the *Good News Band*.

She finishes her story with characteristic wry humour, “Try working for God - His retirement plan is out of this world!”



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Laser physicist has new mission

Dr David Stone has five university degrees up his sleeve, but he shares why he left academia and 'the best job in the world' to pursue a surprising passion

It is not every day you meet a man with such an impressive list of credentials and a passion for electromagnetics, laser physics, and engineering design.

Dr David Stone served 20 years on research assignments for the United States Air Force and acted as Chairman for the Department of Electrical and Computer Engineering at Michigan Technological University.

And why did he choose his special field?

"Laser devices and the propagation of laser beams are wonderful applications of electromagnetic theory," David told Creation.com.

"I had the best job that exists on this planet—I was a tenured professor doing exactly the type of research and teaching that I loved best."

Yet with much more still to give at age 50, David got his family's finances together and left the profession for good.

It was time to pursue something that had been in the making since his teenage years.

While he had been a church-goer from a young age, David remembers it took many years to understand what it meant to be a true Christian.

"I trusted that some combination of canned prayers, active service and avoidance of 'big' sins would earn me a berth in heaven. I didn't realise that all sins are 'big' enough to earn hell" (see James 2:10), he told evolutioncrisis.org.uk in his online testimony.

There were two forces working against him: his dad was a skeptic who "took delight in pointing out inconsistencies in church teaching", and he was surrounded with

the culture of evolutionism.

"Everything I was exposed to in literature and the media that touched the subject of origins was evolutionary," David says.

"I didn't know then that I'd been sold a 'story', but that all the scientific evidence pointed overwhelmingly to biblical creation, as recorded in Genesis."

It did not help that a senior church leader was unable to answer his stock of questions when he worked up the courage to ask at age 13.

"That unsatisfying meeting confirmed my decision to be an atheist. Who needed God?" he recalls.

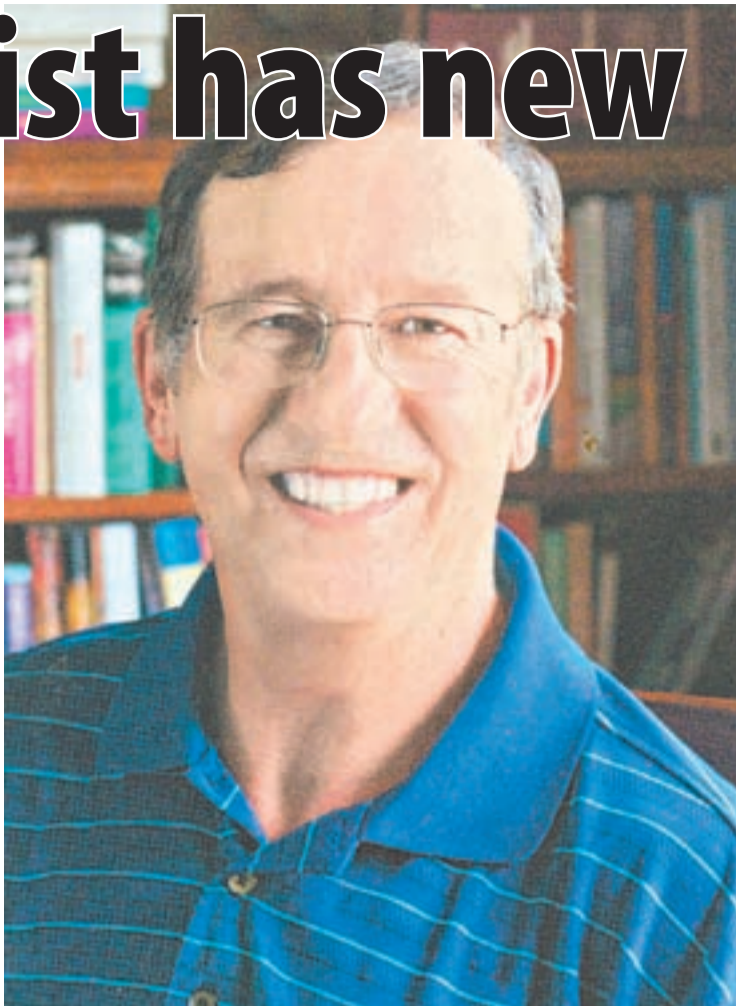
"I was a miserable atheist for the next three years. What point is there to life if we are just animals and death means the end of it all? At the depths of my depression, though, God had mercy on me and sent me a friend who was a Christian."

This friend embraced David and answered his arrogant questions with kindness and he began to notice a love of Jesus in his life and a purpose lacking in his.

"It took me about four months to realise that the Bible is absolutely true – scientifically, logically, historically, prophetically... and above all, personally," David shares.

At that point it became clear to David that he had done wrong things in his life that had offended God and he was in need of a Saviour.

"It's not enough to 'know' the truth. I had to repent (turn away from wrongdoing), trusting Jesus



Dr David Stone believes true science is perfectly consistent with the Bible.

Christ as Lord and Saviour ... I was born again (spiritually) and haven't been the same since."

At first he was not sure how to reconcile evolution with his new faith but began to study the subject over the next few years and realised there were many fatal weaknesses in arguments for evolution.

"Finally I concluded that true science is perfectly consistent with the Bible. I could accept the truth of Genesis – most notably a six-day creation and a literal worldwide flood – without compromise," he shares.

David also denies any conflict between his faith and his scientific work.

"My work in statistical physics and engineering design connects with the question of the origin of the nano-machines of life," he begins.

"I'll state categorically that it is impossible for any protein, not to mention the larger structures inside the cell or the cell itself, to arise by undirected chemical processes."

He points out the painstaking process required to design even simple functioning electrical systems and explains that even his brightest engineering students learnt this lesson the hard way.

"Anyone proposing a design approach equivalent to mutations, natural selection, and infinite time would be laughed at," he says.

He finds further evidence against evolution in his own area of speciality.

"Laser technology is the designed application of God's physical laws. A powerful, narrowband, high energy pulsed laser doesn't happen by chance. How much more the nano-technology of life? Evolution is an anti-scientific fable intended to avoid accountability to God."

David also compiled a list of reasons for believing that science is not the enemy of the Bible, which can be found on his page at evolutioncrisis.org.uk.

Today David, along with his wife Bonnie, has dedicated his time to church planting and sharing this urgent message: "The Lord is coming back. What are you doing with your life?"

A high energy pulsed laser doesn't happen by chance

Keeping faith in the afterlife

BY RICK LEWERS

Author Wayne Dye, in his book *Your Sacred Self*, shared a thought-provoking parable about two babies talking about an afterlife beyond their mother's womb.

"Do you believe in life after delivery?" one baby asks.

"There has to be something after delivery," the other replied. "Maybe we are here to prepare ourselves for what we will be later."

The first baby mockingly asks if the other believes in "the mother".

"She is all around us," the second baby says. "We are surrounded by her."

"Well I don't see her, so it is only logical that she doesn't exist," the first baby says. To which the second replied, "Sometimes, when you're in silence and you focus and you really listen, you can perceive her

presence, and you can hear her loving voice, calling down from above."



After delivery we can know the truth, our problem then is what's after death. Personally, in life after delivery I believe in God. I am thankful for the rule of Jesus Christ, His offer of forgiveness and in His resurrection. I am thankful for the promise of my own.

A blind boy flying his kite knows the kite is there because he can feel the tug of the string on his finger.

I may not see God or have experienced life beyond the grave but I can feel the tug of eternal life on my soul. And after a weekend with all my children, I am thankful to know that Jesus Christ makes it possible for us to enjoy each other forever and that death doesn't end family.

What do you believe and what are the implications of such belief beyond your death?

Believe it or not

BY CREATION MINISTRIES INTERNATIONAL

Passions rage over Giant's Causeway Centre

TWELVE years after the tourist interpretive centre burnt down at Giant's Causeway in Northern Ireland, a new state-of-the-art facility opened in July 2012 (see www.creation.com/giants-causeway-visitor-centre-opens), amid a flurry of controversy.

A few seconds of audio caused uproar because it briefly mentioned that, for creationists, the debate about the age of the earth is still ongoing.



So intense was the outcry from atheists and secularists that the Trust announced a review of the exhibit, even though they had consulted widely in the centre's planning.

Now, a new 20-second segment replaces the original recording, to make it clear that the National Trust endorses only the 'scientific' explanation for Causeway's formation. This is misleading because age is really a matter of history, and evolutionists have a faulty view of the earth's past.

Nevertheless, the audio still says that not everyone agrees, and that some people believe the earth was formed only thousands of years ago.

Such an emotionally-charged outburst against just a few seconds of audio demonstrates that the age of the earth is not a side issue. For many, to question the millions of years brings the Creator God of the Bible too close for comfort.

Trust amends Causeway centre 'Creationist' exhibit, BBC, 3 October 2012.

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2 Timothy 3:16

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Twins Maria and Lucy Aylmer

All one people

BY JONATHAN O'BRIEN

SISTERS Lucy and Maria Aylmer from the UK are stunning evidence that we are all closely related. Maria is 'black' and Lucy is 'white', yet they are twins born to their part-Jamaican mother and white father. This outcome matches what we would expect from Biblical history.

The Bible says we are all the descendants of the first two people who lived, Adam and Eve, whom God created and placed in the Garden of Eden. Following the global Flood, when God sent a judgement on the earth, only Noah, his wife, three sons, and their wives survived. Their early descendants didn't learn their lesson, and disobeyed God's command to fill the earth. Instead they congregated at Babel and built a high tower (see Genesis 10:25). So God confused the languages, forcing them to spread out (Genesis 11). This dispersal led to the different nations tabulated in Genesis 10. The minor genetic differences called 'racial' were the result of the genetic isolation of these different people groups for centuries.



Maria and Lucy as children

However, Charles Darwin didn't believe the history of man as told in the Bible. Darwin saw man as a group of 'races', each of which had evolved separately over vast, untold ages. He believed our original ancestor was an as-yet unidentified 'ape-like' animal – and that some of the 'races' of man are more evolved than others. So racism greatly increased in the West after the general acceptance of Darwin's theory. He missed seeing the prejudice in his own belief that the white English people, of which he was one, conveniently happened to be among those most evolved.

But the Bible tells us we are all one people. A plain reading of Scripture also tells us that the world is really only about 6,000 years old ... not 4.6 billion years old. All people, regardless of skin tone, background, or country of birth, are closely related 'brothers and sisters'. We are literally sons and daughters of Adam and Eve – made in the image of God – via Noah, who could be called a 'second Adam'. And as Lucy rightly says, "my family is beautiful".

Article courtesy of Creation.com. See their website for more information.

Stepping out for the poor

Orphanage founder Bernie Scanlon personally identifies with the kids at his orphanage and this encourages him to do extraordinary acts of kindness

Earlier this year Bernie enthusiastically set out to walk 1,000kms from Rio in Brazil to Machu Pitchi in Peru to raise much needed funds for his organisation *The Home of Hope and Dreams*.

He knows the absence of love from a biological parent leads to hopelessness of the kind that led him to attempt suicide as a young man.

When Bernie was five his father abandoned his family and as affection and encouragement was not available from his mother he found a father figure in his football team coach.

This coach moved away when he was 12, Bernie recalls, and almost immediately "the reality of not having a Dad hit home, leaving me feeling lost, rebellious, angry, insecure and depressed".

Seven years later he tried to kill himself three different ways over 24 hours.

"I felt unable to cope with the sense of alienation, loneliness, purposelessness, depression and guilt," Bernie explains.

He ultimately decided he was not "meant to go" and went to Sydney to "find some answers to the meaning of life".

On the inner city streets, he was inspired by the songs of people with robes and shaven heads and later visited their temple.

He was so fascinated by the mysticism there he enthusiastically began an isolated lifestyle of devoted celibacy: rising at 4 am after six hours of sleep on a hard floor, cold showers, consuming only vegetables, reading selected scriptures, and persuading potential followers.

"Every waking moment", he says, "was given to be pure and free from sin committed in this life and previous ones."

But there was no assurance he was getting anywhere with the divine, or that his life was changing for the better.

After two years he returned to normal life and through a friend he heard about the good news of Jesus Christ, who claimed to be God in the flesh and sacrificed His life so that imperfect man can be right with God.

This made sense to Bernie, but he initially thought Jesus would make him sinless.



Some of the orphans at The Home of Hope and Dreams orphanage.



Bernie Scanlon says that in his failings and struggles he didn't sense God rejecting him.

After surrendering his life to Jesus, Bernie recalls quickly realising "I still had a sinful human nature that was far from perfect. Yet in my failings and struggles I didn't sense God reject me."

"As I read the Bible I also realised I needed and wanted the fellowship of other Christians and joined a church where I found acceptance, love and a God who forgave sin."

He travelled in India, which he "loved despite bouts of malaria", before embarking on an Operation Mobilisation ship in England that ministered practical and spiritual help and the Christian message to people in developing countries.

After nine months on board he returned to Adelaide and joined an inner-city church that helped the poor and needy.

He then befriended and became engaged to his next-door neigh-

bour Gail, whom he loved "like no-one else".

15.

I endured years of wandering until God rescued me

"I knew I had to get my life right with the Lord, so I returned to Adelaide and the same church, and slowly my life became more consistent with the life of a believer in Jesus, but not without many failures."

Now Bernie is walking across South America to raise support for the previously hopeless kids at his orphanage.

As he battled loneliness, wet weather and lack of roadside footpaths, Bernie said, "If I am going to finish this for the kids, it will definitely be in the Lord's strength. It is a great time to commune with Him and know that He is with me."

"On day five I was exhausted and asked God if I had taken on too much this time. Suddenly my strength was renewed for another day!"

"I thank God for His amazing grace and mercy."

Who's pulling the strings?

BY COLIN LANE

THE large oval across the road from my house is a great place for flying kites – or it should be. Kite-flying is a skill I have never been able to master (one among many, I might add). I have trouble launching the kite into the air and even more trouble getting it to stay there. For me, flying a kite involves lots of running, winding, more running, more winding and, eventually, lost temper and a trudge home.

So, I admire good kite-flyers and love to sit and watch them manoeuvre their kites through the air, catching the wind and dipping and diving on air currents. Kites come in different shapes, sizes and designs, but in the hands of someone with skill, they take off, hovering and flying with graceful ease.

While I was watching a kite recently, I thought of it as a metaphor for life. One minute we can be soaring – flying through life with the wind in our sails. Success, great relationships, or a sense of peace – whatever it is, we seem to be up there, with life going great.

But it doesn't take much for it all to come crashing down to earth. Whether sits sickness or loss, harsh words or just a run of misfortune, we can come crashing down. Then, once we've hit the bottom, we have to pick ourselves up and start all over again, aiming to once again catch

the breeze and rise.

This was certainly the pattern of my life. I'd be cruising along until I did something stupid, made a bad choice, or just suffered some misfortune – and I'd be brought back to earth with a painful thud.

Then I placed my life in the hands of a skilled 'kite-flyer' – God. With God pulling the strings, I've had fewer crashes. I feel as if my life is propped up by a divine wind that keeps me flying. Sure, I take a dip and a dive occasionally, but something pulls me back up without having to endure a painful crash.

This summer, as you see kites flying in the air, think about who's pulling the strings of your life. Is it you? If so, do you keep falling and crashing?

Let go; give your life over to God and, with your life in the hands of a skilled kite-controller, you'll fly higher than you ever have before.



Article Courtesy of WarCry Magazine

Building Better Marriages

RECONCILIATION STARTS WITH YOU

BY ROB FURLONG

IN NOVEMBER, 1990 I was standing in Pearl Harbour listening to an elderly, retired United States navy man tell his story about the day the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbour.

I had joined a free, guided tour around the harbour and the scene of the United States' entry into World War Two.

Our guide was around 19 years of age at the time of the attack and as he retold his story the day I was there, he also spoke of the anger and rage he felt as he fired round after round into the sky at enemy planes.

Then he said something that caught my attention.

"Folks", he asked kindly, "Have you ever felt like you are out of the will of God?"

Given the silence of the rest of the group around me, he obviously had their attention as well!

He went on to explain that in that very moment of anger, death and destruction, he knew he was out of the will of God!

Quite a statement from an elderly man to a group of tourists.

He then told us how he had signed up to the navy despite the fact he knew God had called him to be a preacher.

So, upon the conclusion of the War, having been discharged from the Navy, he obeyed God and became a Presbyterian minister for the rest of his life.

Then came the punchline to his story.

He went on to tell how one of the Japanese pilots bombing Pearl Harbour also became a committed Chris-

tian and minister after the war.

Decades later, the two former enemies met with the Japanese pastor preaching in the old navy man's church in Hawaii!

As he brought his story to its conclusion, he held up a photograph of the two men, once alienated by culture, hatred and ideology, now embracing each other and reconciled before the Cross that stood in the church.

Every one of us is living in a world divided bitterly along racial, political and ideological lines.

News services bring us reports every day of nations at war with each other or the latest violent protest over an unpopular decision.

And we read of relational breakdowns in marriages and families that all too often end with murder or suicide as the only "solution".

Russian author, Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, once commented:

"If only it were all so simple! If only there were evil people somewhere insidiously committing evil deeds, and it were necessary only to separate them from the rest of us and destroy them. But the line dividing good and evil cuts through

the heart of every human being."

When a marriage breaks down, it is all too easy to blame the other person, thinking he or she needs to change.

But as Solzhenitsyn points out, "good and evil" courses through the heart of every human being.

Blaming the other person will not reconcile us.

Ignoring or trying to change the past will not reconcile us.

Mere words will not reconcile us. But Jesus will.

That is the point of the Cross. There a dying thief finds reconciliation and peace with God.

There a man, Peter, who denies his Lord, finds reconciliation.

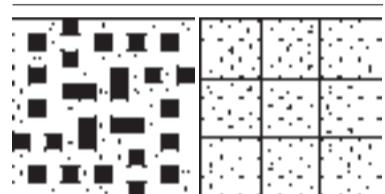
And there I have found peace and reconciliation - with my sin, my past, with people and with God. I still struggle a lot and I don't always love people as well as I should.

But I know this: reconciliation begins with me, reaching out to people who at times both annoy and drive me crazy but with the sincere hope that perhaps they will see Jesus in me and be reconciled to Him.

Is your marriage in trouble?

My prayer for you is that you will ask Jesus to bring His peace to your hungry and wounded soul.

Then take the first step yourself to reconcile with your husband or wife.



How can I become a Christian?

Anyone can gain the eternal life offered though Jesus Christ

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

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

Here is an example of how you can pray.

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

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

AS A NEXT STEP :

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

WHEN we walk our sausage dog Carrie in the nearby park in the afternoon I am struck not only by the wide variety of different types of dogs that people own, but by the different relationships they seem to have with them.

Some dogs are so nervous and untrusting it is clear they have been abused some time in their past - though usually not by the kind person walking them now. They cower and shy away from any attempt at contact and seem afraid of their own shadow.

Some dogs are very well disciplined and heel or sit on command like a police dog, but they are unfriendly to others and seem to have a master-servant relationship with their owners, well aware of who the boss is and of the consequences of not obeying.

Then there are dogs that are pulling on the leash, struggling to get away, that can only be controlled by manipulation or force. Their relationship with their master is a constant power-struggle.

Finally, I see dogs like Carrie who are so devoted to their masters that they don't even need a leash, they follow obediently. They may wander off a bit for a smell here or there but they come as soon as they are called and they are anxious to keep their master in sight.

It struck me that those relationships mirror people's relationships with God.

Some people are so afraid of God striking them down as soon as they put a foot wrong, usually because of some poor example or teaching they've had in the past. The whole concept of God scares them and they are sure He is out to get them.

Others try to obey all the rules and do all the right things but their relationship with God is not one of love but of duty. God is their master, not their Dad or friend.

Some people say they are Christians but will try to get away with as much as they can when they think no one is looking and their desires constantly rail against the restrictions they feel God imposes.

The relationship true Christianity teaches is that God is a loving father who we can trust and wants the best for us. He is someone we can follow with confidence and be so devoted to that we never want to lose sight of Him; in whose lap we can curl up and find peace.

If you doubt that this is really possible, the Bible makes it clear: "For those who are led by the Spirit of God are the children of God. The Spirit you received does not make you slaves, so that you live in fear again; rather, the Spirit you received brought about your adoption to sonship. And by him we cry, 'Abba [Aramaic for Daddy], Father. The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children.'" (Romans 8:14-16).





The home and away strips of Racing Club de Lens



THERE IS MORE TO IT THAN BEING A BETTER PLAYER



What happens when you fail at the thing that makes you, you?

BY JOANNA DELALANDE

“As a child I knew the colours red and yellow, sang et or, (blood and gold), were more significant than other colours in that they represented the RC Lens soccer team of the cold, grey town in the north of France where I was born.

“For years my dad has followed the team, offering us occasional updates at the dinner table of how they were tracking.”

Last July, the team signed English midfielder John Bostock to play in Ligue 2.

John made his professional debut for Crystal Palace at 15, becoming the youngest player in the club’s history; then signed for Tottenham in 2008 and Royal Antwerp after he moved to Belgium in 2013.

But there’s more to the 25-year-old than a knack with a soccer ball. Today, he tells his story.

“In my life football was always number one, from a very young age,” he begins.

“My mother tells me stories of when I was two years old and I would take other kids’ footballs. I think sometimes you choose your passion, and sometimes your passion chooses you.”

John’s career started at five years old when his stepfather took

him to the games. Before long he was receiving contract offers from the likes of Barcelona, Real Madrid, Arsenal, and Manchester United, but ultimately chose to play for Tottenham in London.

But, as often happens, the joy of innocently kicking a ball around slowly faded with the growth of John’s success, when nothing short of the very best was no longer acceptable.

He remembers, he says, how sometimes an average play on a Saturday game meant his stepfather wouldn’t talk to him for four or five days.

“This was my father’s way of punishing me to make me become a better player, but for me it meant if I didn’t play well, I was a failure,” he says.

“I put all my value and my identity in how I played.”

Painful days of silent treatment aside, John had a great relationship with his stepfather. He was only two months old when his father left, and saw the man that entered their life soon after as a loving and admirable father figure.

His older sister, Tara, struggled to feel the same way. “She had relationships with guys, went to parties, drank,” John explains.

“And one day when I was 15 years old, I just saw a different person in her.



John Bostock in Leuven, Belgium. (Photo by Getty Images)

“I asked her, ‘What’s happened to you?’ She said, ‘John, I’m a Christian now. I’m living for Jesus’.

“And I laughed. I said, ‘What do you mean, Jesus?’”

For all his amusement John couldn’t deny something had changed in her, and it interested him. So when she invited him to church, even though he says it was “the last place he wanted to go on a Sunday”, he went.

The pastor preached the gospel of Jesus Christ, and though it was nearly 10 years ago John remembers all of it.

“The bad news is, we’ve all sinned,” he says.

“No one had to convince me that I was a sinner. My relationships with girls, the things I watched, pornography, lies, stealing; even just my thoughts.

“We are all sinners. And there’s

only one way to be forgiven and to be made right with God and that’s through Jesus Christ, and [the pastor] shared about what Jesus had done on the cross. All of my sin, all the bad things I’d ever done, He took the punishment for me.

“I just started crying. I was in tears,” John continues.

“Everything it seemed that a young player would want, I had. I had a girlfriend at the time. I was in the newspaper and going to school. Life was good.

“But when I heard the gospel, nothing else really mattered to me because if this was true, if this story was true in the Bible, I needed it.

“And so I gave my life to Jesus that day. I prayed, very simply, ‘Lord forgive me for my sin. I give my life to You, and from this day forward, I want to live for You.’

“And that was the beginning of my journey as a Christian. I have a relationship with Jesus now, and that’s changed my whole life. It’s been an amazing journey and God has been with me every single step.”

An amazing journey it might be,

LENS, FRANCE - JULY 22, 2016: John Bostock (left) in the RC Lens away strip takes on Jeff Reine-Adelaide of Arsenal during a pre season friendly. (Photo Stuart MacFarlane/ Arsenal FC via Getty Images)

but John clarifies it was not an easy one. During his time at Tottenham his game started to suffer, and his confidence took a hit.

“Sometimes when you become a Christian you think, God is going to bless me. Life is going to be easy,” he says.

“Well, I experienced something very different.

“My football, my identity, the thing that made me John Bostock, it was like it wasn’t working anymore. I couldn’t play.

“[God] told me, ‘John, football can’t satisfy you. Money can’t satisfy you. Women can’t satisfy you. Even if you win *Ballon D’Or* it won’t make you happy. It’s a great achievement, but inside you have something that can only be satisfied by Jesus Christ.’

“God really humbled me, and He taught me a lesson: it’s not about me, really. It’s about Him.”

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