

Challenge

THE GOOD NEWS PAPER

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Philippines Edition

Finding true beauty

Rica Peralejo-Bonifacio was everyone's sweetheart. Rica started in showbiz when she was only 12 and later was cast in a successful teen-oriented show. She also acted in commercials, concerts, and movies. "Back then, all I really wanted was to sing and perform. When I finished grade school, my family asked me if I wanted to continue regular schooling; since I had a health condition then and I was already enjoying showbiz, I opted for homeschooling, until I lost interest in it and stopped. I never experienced being in a regular high school."

As she approached adulthood and with no definite plans for her life and career, Rica listened to people who suggested she change her image. She was promised superstardom. "It sounded good to me, so I agreed. I started out as wholesome, and then I stumbled to being a sexy figure, which brought me a lot of attention. Everywhere I went, people knew me. People looked at me; men desired me. Success followed me."

Rica confesses that she starred in movies she is ashamed of. These are movies that she wouldn't dare let her children watch.

On top of her successful career as a sexy actress, she also became heavily involved in drugs, alcohol, smoking, and toxic relationships.

Rica thought what was happening to her was right because of the huge amount of money she was earning.

"I was just trying to make it feel right, because what else could I do? This was the source of my money, identity, and my confidence at that time. Since I was the breadwinner of the family, I kept going; but deep down inside, I knew there was something wrong. Until one day, at 25, I realized all I thought of was work. I didn't have anything else to look



Rica now values her family far above fame. Left and above with her sons Philip and Manu and husband Joseph.

forward to in my life."

In the late 2000s, Rica surprised everyone when she turned away from the limelight and embraced a life of faith. Rica believes that godly people can sense who is broken, and she thinks a lot of her friends knew all along what she was going through. They were very persistent in inviting her to go to Bible studies and church.

At first, she thought it was corny. She thought she could just pray by herself instead of going to church.

Then one Sunday, God opened Rica's heart. One of her actor friends invited her to attend a protestant church service. Being born and raised a Catholic, the whole thing was new for Rica.

During the service, the preacher

told the biblical story of the woman with the issue of blood and it spoke powerfully to her. "The bleeding woman had been bleeding for 12 years, and when I counted, it was already 12 years that I had been in the sexy industry and so lost. From then on, it was as if the walls came down and I started to listen more to my Christian friends and read the Bible. Because of the Holy Spirit, I understood what it said, and it automatically led me to fall in love with God."

Eager to live a normal life, Rica went back to college at 26 years old. She eventually finished her Bachelor's Degree in Creative Writing at a prestigious university in Manila.

She says, "As long as you come to God sorry and willing to change, you will still get that which He has prepared for you."

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ARE YOU READY FOR WHAT HAPPENS NEXT?

BY GREG LAURIE

DEATH is something we all think about almost every day — some more than others. We should think deeply about death, but more importantly, the afterlife.

In older times, people commonly wrote a Latin phrase on the top of documents: "Memento Mori." It means "Think of death."

The phrase sounds morbid on the surface, but it's not. It served as a reminder to be aware that life ends, eternity is close and there is an afterlife.

I am not an expert on the afterlife, but I am a student, not only because I am a Christian and a pastor, but also because my son, Christopher, died in 2008. I have thought deeply about what happens

when we leave this life and enter the next one. Here is what has brought endless comfort to me: There is a Heaven, and Jesus has made a way for us all to go there.

Jesus said, "I am the resurrection and the life. Anyone who believes in Me will live, even after dying" (John 11:25).

My son believed in Jesus as I do. He is now in Heaven.

For the Christian, the moment we take our last breath on earth, we take our next breath in Heaven. Because Jesus died on the cross for my sins and rose again, I have hope for the afterlife. And I know that I will see my son again.

King David, who also lost a son too soon, wrote, "I will go to him, but he will not return to me" (2 Sam.

12:23).

My son is not just a part of my past; he is also a part of my future. Jesus promised me that.

It is not a bad thing to think about these things deeply. Renowned author and theologian C.S. Lewis said, "A continual looking forward to the eternal world is not . . . a form of escapism or wishful thinking, but one of the things a Christian is meant to do."

Think about death, eternity, and the afterlife. But think on it with the knowledge that death is not the end. There is an afterlife, but you need to be ready for it. Heaven is a prepared place for prepared people.

Jesus said, "I go to prepare a place for you, that where I am, you may be also" (John 14.2).

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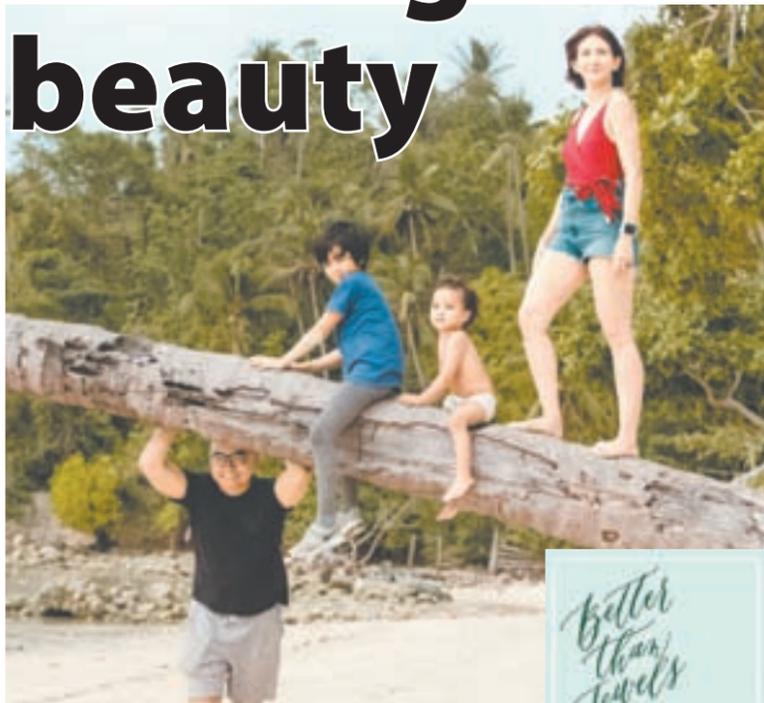
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HUBERT DAVIS

Finding true beauty



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“The restoration of your relationship with God is more than enough to make up for what happened when you were not living under His direction and love.”

In 2010, Rica married Christian pastor Joseph Bonifacio who helped her further strengthen her faith, they now have two sons, Philip and Manu. Rica gave up showbiz after more than two decades to focus on her family. Now an influential online figure, with over 394K subscribers to her YouTube channel, Rica is also a public speaker on the topics of family, career, faith, and womanhood. She has written and published a devotional entitled, *Better Than Jewels*.

On her blog site, Rica, now 41, shares, “For in the midst of my troubles, I must say I also found the unparalleled experience of knowing the joy of salvation, the promise of daily mercies, and the relentless pursuit of He who continues to tell me: “You are not determined by your yesterday. Today is another day to come closer to the victorious and glorious end I have reserved for you. My eyes saw your unformed substance; in My book are written, every one of them, the days that were formed for you, when as yet there were none of them.” (From Psalm 139)

Coffee Break

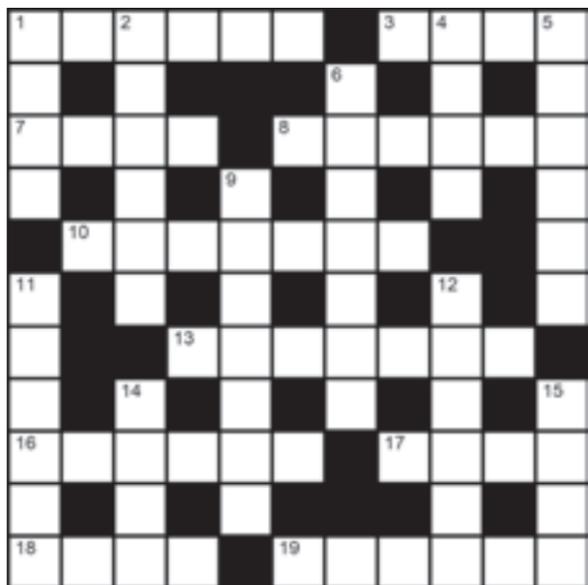
CROSSWORD & SUDOKU

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And then it occurred to him: the world needed yet another book on leadership.

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Biyayang Sukli, Takot Napawi

Simula pagkabata ay palakaibigan at may malasakit na sa kapwa si Lydia Balatucan; isang ina na tubong Marintoc, sa munisipyo ng Mobo, sa isla ng Masbate. Hirap man sa buhay ay maayos s'yang pinalaki ng kanyang mga magulang. Magsasaka ang kanyang ama at maybahay naman ang kanyang ina. Katuwang si Lydia ng kanyang ina sa pag-asikaso ng kanilang bahay at pag-alaga ng mga kapatid. Habang lumalaki, unti-unti ring lumilina sa isip ni Lydia na gusto n'yang makatulong sa kapwa, ngunit hindi pa n'ya alam noon sa paanong paraan.

Si Lydia ay nagpakasal noong 1991 sa isang mangingisda. Sanay man sa kahirapan, mas matinding pagsubok ang dinanas ni Lydia noong s'ya ay nagkaroon nang sariling pamilya. Dahil kapos sa buhay, sari-saring klase ng trabaho ang pinasukan n'ya upang makakain silang mag-anak. Nagtinda s'ya ng kakanin at tumatanggap ng labada. May mga panahon na hindi na lang kakain si Lydia upang makakain ang kanyang mga anak. Naranasan n'yang magluto ng kamote o kamoteng kahoy, gigisahin, at lalagyan ng sabaw upang ipakain sa pamilya. “All-in’ na kumbaga; wala nang kanin, sabay-sabay na sa isang putahe, pantawid-gutom lang ng aking pamilya.” Ang kanya namang asawa na isang mangingisda ay hindi rin regular ang kita. Umabot din sa punto na walang huling isda ang kanyang asawa kaya’t napagpasyahan n'yang sumubok na kumuha ng graba at buhangin na hinuhukay sa ilog at ibebenta ito sa mga mallilit na mga negosyante. Mabigat na trabaho para sa isang babaeng katulad n'ya, ngunit ginawa n'ya alang-alang sa kanyang mga anak. Bukod sa kakulangan sa pagkain, hindi rin maayos ang kanilang tinitirahan. Tumutulo ang bubong ng kanilang bahay kapag umuulan dahil butas-butang na ito at yari lamang sa dahon ng niyog.

Gaya ng karamihan ng pamilyang Pilipino, lumaking Katoliko si Lydia. “Basta nagsisimba lamang ako at laging may pangyamba kung ano ang mangyayari sa mundo at kinabukasan ko.”

Noong 1994, ay may mga bumibisita sa kanilang bahay upang mag Bible study; doon n'ya unang narinig ang salita ng Panginoon. “Akala ko noon na ako ay ligtas na dahil alam kong may Diyos at lagi akong nagdarasal sa kanya. Ngunit ang salita ng Panginoon sa Mateo 7:21 ang nagpau-nawa sa akin; ‘Hindi ang bawat isa na nagsasabi sa akin: Panginoon, Panginoon, ay makapapasok sa paghahari ng langit, kundi ang gumagawa ng kalooban ng aking Ama na nasa langit.’ “Napagtanto ko na ang aking pananalig ay hindi sapat, kailangan kong malaman ang katotohanan, kaya’t nakapagdesisyon ako na lumapit sa presenya ng Panginoon at malaman pa lalo ang kaniyang mga salita.”

Isang araw, nagkaroon ng malubhang sakit ang isa n'yang kapatid na inihabilin sa kanya ng kanyang ina na noon ay nagpunta ng Maynila. “Sobrang awa ang aking nadama sa aking kapatid, sa aking mga anak, at sa aking sarili. Lubos ang aking pagtanggap dahil wala akong magawa dahil sa kahirapan ng aming buhay. Habang ako ay umiiyak, ay may narinig akong tinig na nagsasabi na “sumigaw ka na hindi totoo ang Diyos dahil kung totoo ito, hindi n'yo dapat dinaranas ang mga ito.” Ngunit hindi nagpatalo sa tinig na kanyang narinig si Lydia at sa halip ay lumuhod at nanalangin s'ya sa Diyos. “Binanggit ko ang kanyang kabutihan at kaluwalhatian at sumigaw ako na sadyang napakabuti mo Panginoon kahit kailan hindi mo kami iniwan at pinabayaan.” Kinabukasan, may taong naghanap sa kanyang asawa at inalok ito ng trabaho, at sa biyaya ng Panginoon ay gumaling rin ang kanyang kapatid na hindi na nila kinailangan pang dalhin sa ospital. “Noong akala kong walang wala na kami, hindi kami pinabayaan

ng Panginoon,” saad ni Lydia.

Sa kabila ng kanilang kahirapan, patuloy s'yang nagpapahayag ng salita ng Diyos sa iba't ibang barangay sa kanilang munisipalidad at kahit sa malalayong bayan ng Masbate. “Basta may-roong pagkakatona, wala akong pinipiling tao o lugar na bahaginan ng salita ng Diyos. Dahil dito, naranasan kong murahin, pagbantaan, at insultuhin ng aking mga nakakasalamuha. Ngunit hindi ako tumigil sa aking gawain. Dahil naniniwala ako na kapag uunahin ko lang ang magpagamit sa Diyos, gagawin Niya kung ano ang nararapat para sa akin. Sabi nga sa Mateo 6:33, “Ngunit hanapin muna ninyo ang paghahari ng Diyos at ang kaniyang katuwiran, at ang lahat ng mga bagay na ito ay idaragdag sa inyo.”

Tinatanong pa rin ni Lydia ang Panginoon kung hanggang kailan ang kahirapan na kanilang naranas. Hindi naging madali ang proseso ng kaganapan ng kapahayagan ng Espiritu Santo, ngunit unti-unti ay nakita ni Lydia ang pagkilos ng Diyos sa kanilang buhay. Nagkaroon ng mas maayos na trabaho at regular na kita ang kanyang asawa sa tulong ng isang kamag-anak. “Naranasan ng aming pamilya ang kapangyarihan ng Panginoon lalo na sa kanyang pagpapagaling sa aking mga kapamilya na may mga karamdaman at pagbigay n'ya sa amin ng mga probisyon at biyaya.”

Mula sa pagkuha at pagtambak ng graba at buhangin, nabigyan si Lydia ng pagkakataon na subukin ang pulitika at magsilbi sa kanyang mga ka-barangay. Naging Barangay Treasurer muna s'ya sa kanilang barangay at noong 2016, si Lydia ay nanalo bilang isang kagawad. Bagamat noong una ay nag-aalinlangan pa si Lydia dahil sa kulang nga sila sa pera upang tumakbo sa pulitika, ang mga tao na mismo ang nagbigay sa kanya ng lakas ng loob at tanggapin ang hamon. “Muli na namang pinatunayan sa akin ng Diyos kung paano S'ya nagbibigay ng pabor sa mga taong nagtitiwala sa Kanya.”

Nananatiling kagawad si Lydia sa kasalukuyan at may mas maayos na pamumuhay at tirahan na sila ngayon. Nakapag-aral at nakapagtapos ang kanyang mga anak. Malayong malayo sa kinagisanan nyang buhay. Ang mga agam-agam at takot ay nawala na simula nang s'ya ay naging mananampalataya. “Hindi ko alam dati ang patutunguhan ko pagdating sa paghuhukom ng Diyos, puno ako ng takot sa puso. May mga pagkakataon na ako ay nagkwestyon sa Kanya, ngunit sinuklian N'ya ito ng napakadaming biyaya na sa kabila ng aking pagkakasala at pagkukulang ay hindi N'ya ako hinayaang magdusa. “Sapagkat sinabi ng Diyos na hindi ko kayo iiwan ni pababayaan man” kaya’t malakas ang loob ko na sabihin na ang Panginoon ang tumutulong sa akin at hinding-hindi na ako matatakot pa.”

➔ This story in English on PAGE 4



Lydia Balatucan

Are you ready for what comes next?

• From page 1

Only those who are prepared to die are genuinely ready to live. Last year, famous Filipinos like former president Benigno “Noynoy” Aquino III, singer Claire Dela Fuente, entertainment writer Ricky Lo, and folk rock icon Heber Bartolome all passed away. They are now in the afterlife. And one day, you will be too. You decide in this life where you will spend the afterlife. Choose well.

Greg Laurie is an American pastor, evangelist, best-selling author and movie producer.

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ATIN ASIA

(ATIN is Filipino/Tagalog for “ours”)



Why ATIN exists:

- to share the Gospel of Jesus Christ
- to assist the disadvantaged and vulnerable with food parcels and aide
- to distribute Bibles

What the logo means:

The logo represents a person between a cross and a heart, representing faith in Jesus combined with service to others out of love. The font represents bamboo, symbolising strength, flexibility, endurance and grace.

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Life of the party felt dead inside

Making people laugh is what he does best. It even provided him with free food when he was living on the streets. Gifted with an innate sense of humour, Jobert Austria is always the life of the party.

Jobert was adopted when he was a baby; his real mother could no longer take care of him since his father was sick and he had many older siblings. His mother thought that he would have a better life in another family. "I was the youngest in my adopted family and I was such a clown and a rascal. My parents would often be called to school because of my misbehavior. Ever since I was a little boy, I've always craved attention. I depended so



Jobert Austria

much on my parents that I lived with them until I was around 30 years old!"

Jobert became drug-dependent at such an early age; he was in and out of jail for using drugs and getting into street brawls. Being a mama's boy, his mother would always bail him out. When he was 19, Jobert became a father, but his relationship with this girlfriend did not last.

When his adopted parents died, Jobert decided to leave home so his siblings wouldn't think of him as a burden. He went to a friend and saw an old jeepney parked on the street. He asked his friend if he could live there. Jobert recounts, "I had to be dead drunk so when I fell asleep, I

won't feel the mosquito bites." Jobert's son eventually came to live with his father in their makeshift home.

During a strong typhoon in 2009, Jobert and his son had to climb onto the roof of a nearby chapel for safety as the flood water rose. From the rooftop, he saw the jeepney, their "house" along with their few belongings, submerged in water. Jobert thought his life was over and was ready to die. "When the rain stopped, I was very angry at God, I cursed Him. I was crying and I asked Him to just kill me. I asked Him so many questions like 'Why are You doing this to me? Do You not pity me? Are You really God?'"

With nowhere to go, Jobert was back on the streets and used his comedic skills to get store owners to give him free food. Then a friend suggested he record his profanity-laden antics and upload his video onto YouTube. It was an instant hit online and a TV network signed Jobert up to star in their programs. Jobert enjoyed success in his new world with regular shows, a house, a car, and lots of women. "I became so arrogant about my success. I felt I had everything and I was again heavily into drugs," he confesses.

Jobert says he considered himself a Christian at the time but his faith was not solid. "During a church service, God talked to me and asked me, 'What if I took your life? Would you be experiencing this success?' But my heart was still full of pride, and I continued doing drugs."

In 2014, because of depression and high on drugs, Jobert attempted to jump from his hotel room. It was a good thing his friends were able to rescue him. "I had just separated from my partner and I had not slept for a week because of drugs. I was hearing voices telling me that people were going to kill me," he explained.

Jobert went to a rehabilitation facility after his attempted suicide and got clean and went back to work. But in 2020, due to the lockdown, all activities stopped and he lost his job.

Jobert followed his partner to Canada, lived a normal life, and found the Lord again. "One early morning, I saw my partner having a conversation in front of her laptop. I overheard that she was having a Bible study. I felt ashamed of myself because I was the one who was supposedly a Christian and should be encouraging her." From then on, he began reading the Bible again, having quiet times, and devotions. Jobert finally offered his life back to the Lord, this time though, he was much bolder: "I told Him that I do not want to go back to being an artist again, I want to follow His plans for me."

During the first quarter of 2021, Jobert went back to the Philippines to share his testimony with churches and online. Jobert also ordered his team to take down old, offensive videos of him that were on YouTube. On Mother's Day, he visited his biological mother after more than 30 years and made peace with her before he flew back to Canada for his wedding.

"What I learned from the short period of time that I became really serious with God, is that if you'll ask me if I am willing to die now because of my faith, I will say yes. Before my joy was being in showbiz, but now my joy is in my faith. My desire now as a person is that when I die, I would like to hear the Lord say to me, 'Well done, good and faithful servant.'" •



Doctor addicted to 40 pills a day, finds a bigger high

BY MICHAEL ASHCRAFT

Dr. Louis Ortenzio derived satisfaction from serving his patients in Clarksburg, West Virginia. Maybe, he got too much satisfaction because he was working 16-hour days.

"I felt like I had to perform at such a high level, be 10 feet tall, bulletproof and faster than a speeding locomotive and trying to make your patients happy," he says on a CBN video. "I did take good care of people, I really cared about them and they knew that I cared."

Ironically, caring for others made him neglect his family and himself.

"My wife certainly never saw me. The children hardly knew who I was," he says.

What drove him to unreasonable exertions?

"At my core I didn't love myself," he says. "I needed everyone else to love me to make me feel adequate."

Inevitably, the life he built in the idyllic mountain town from 1982 onward began to crumble under the strain.

His wife took the kids, separated from him and moved to Pittsburgh. It was supposed to provoke a change in him and bring about a reconciliation. Instead, they divorced.

Lou didn't know what to do, so he did the only thing he had ever done. He kept working beyond overtime.

One night working late hours, he felt an excruciating headache. Over the counter meds did nothing to alleviate the pain, so he reached for something stronger: Vicodin.

"It gave me this tremendous relief of pain and suffering, but also gave me this sense of euphoria that I could do anything and that just grew and grew and grew," he says.

Vicodin is a potent pain reliever used commonly for people after surgery. It belongs to the class of drugs known as opioids, which have plunged America into a drug addiction crisis.

Being a doctor, Lou felt like he could keep it under control but eventually it turned into unmitigated addiction. He was a doctor, so he prescribed it for himself.

"You think you're superman, and you think you can do that and control it," he says.

A decade later, Lou was downing 40 pills a day.

His sterling job performance began to slip.

"There was pressure coming in from everywhere," he says. "I'd failed as a husband. I'd failed as a father; my practice wasn't going well. And I realized that I could not stop using medication. I couldn't stop using the opiates. I was stuck."

He had first reached for Vicodin to help him out of a pinch. Now what would help him out of the Vicodin?

One night in the fall of 2002, Lou decided to take his life. He saw no escape, so he planned to close the garage behind his parked car, leave the engine running and wait for the carbon monoxide to make him drift off in a bliss sleep that would kill him.

For some strange reason, it didn't work.

Not even suicide worked. In despair, he cried out to God.

"God, I really don't know or understand," he prayed.



Dr. Louis Ortenzio realised he need to know how to be forgiven for the mess he had made of his life and the people he had hurt.

"God, take me out of this mess. I can't do this anymore. You've got to do something."

At work the next day, they saved a crash victim in ICU. Then a friend, Nurse Donetta, saved him.

He was an emotional wreck and she was serene. He asked her where she derived her peace, and she said, "Jesus." Donetta invited Lou to church.

After attending church for a few Sundays, Lou realized, "I had messed up terribly and I needed to be forgiven. I asked Donetta, 'How can I be forgiven,' and she said, 'You just get forgiven by just asking.'"

Again, Lou cried out to God.

"You've got to take over in my life because I sure can't do it on my own," he prayed. "I sure can't run this thing. I'm running it into the ground. I'm running myself into the ground. I'm going to be dead."

After a few weeks, he accepted Jesus, not in church but with a patient. He confided that he still had not accepted the Lord into his heart.

The patient responded, "Well let's do that right now. Get down on your knees. I'll get down with you and we'll pray."

That was it. In an instant, God

transformed Lou.

"I got up off the floor, feeling like really legitimately 10 feet tall and bulletproof, but only with Jesus, only with that power," Lou remembers.

Lou realized the wrong question was "What Would Jesus Do?" The right question was "What had Jesus done?" he says.

In 2004, Lou remarried his first wife, Donetta (not the nurse of the same name).

He had lost his medical license for the fraudulent prescriptions. He was eligible to apply for reinstatement, but instead he felt called to continue performing the community service he started as a punishment for prescription fraud. He was helping people recover from drug addiction.

"I was able to take that community service and turn that into ministry to extend all this to help someone else," he says.

Today, Lou serves as executive director of the Clarksburg Mission, helping those who need shelter, food and hope in Jesus.

"It doesn't make any sense how my life ended up like this," Lou says. "It only makes sense in the kingdom of God." •

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

RAIN OF GOD'S GRACE

A Joyful'toon by Mike Waters



They do not say to themselves, 'Let us fear the LORD our God, who gives autumn and spring rains in season, who assures us of the regular weeks of harvest.' Your wrongdoings have kept these away, your sins have deprived you of good.

—JEREMIAH 5:24-25 NIV

INILIGTAS MULA SA KARAHASAN



Maaaring hindi natin nauunawaan ang lahat, ngunit ang Diyos ay laging tapat sa Kanyang

Isang karaniwang middle-class na pamilya ang mga Campos; ang mga magulang ay may matatag at maayos na mga trabaho at may tatlong magagaling at puno ng kalingang mga anak. Larawan ng isang perpektong pamilya na maaaring nakakainggit sa iba. Ngunit ito ay malayo sa perpekto.

Si Gabriel Campos ang panganay sa tatlong magkakapatid. Si Gab, ang pinaka-naapektuhan dahil sa kanyang naranasan at nakita n'ya mismo ang maraming hamon at mapait na katotohanang ng kanilang pamilya.

Paggunita ni Gab, "Kahit sa murang edad, nakita ko kung paano nahirapan ang aking ina, pisikal at emosyonal. Ang aking ama ay isang lasenggo at babaero. Naalala ko kung paano sinasaktan ng aking ama ang aking ina lalo na kapag ang aking ama ay lasing. Minsan nakita ko ang aking nanay na nakahandusay sa kusina na umiiyak at may hawak na lubid. Alam ko na kung ano ang nasa isip ng aking ina. Kinamuhian ko ang aking ama simula noong araw na iyon. Sinabi ko sa sarili ko na hindang-hindi ako magiging katulad niya."

Dahil sa marahas na kapaligiran sa kanilang tahanan, naging mainitin ang ulo ni Gab at laging nakikipag-away noong siya ay estudyante pa. Lumala ito nang nawalan ng trabaho ang kanyang mga magulang at bumagsak ang kanilang kabuhayan. "Noong high school ako, nakipag-away ako sa tatlong lalaki mula sa ibang klase. Nagkam-pihan ang magkaka-grupo at humantong ito sa matinding awayan. Dalawa sa mga kaibigan ko ang ipinadala sa ospital at nagkaroon ako ng mga pasa sa buong katawan. Napakayabang ko noong mga oras na iyon. Akala ko kailangan kong lumaban para patunayan na hindi ako mahina. Hindi ko namalayan na unti-unti na akong nagiging katulad ng taong pinakaayaw ko, ang aking ama — puno ng poot, marahas, makasarili, at naliligaw ng landas."

Noong nasa ika-4 na baitang si Gab, siya at ang kanyang mga kapatid ay inanyayahan na lumahok sa Sunday school sa isang simbahan na hindi kalayuan sa kanilang bahay. Nagsimula silang makinig sa mga kuwento sa Bibliya, nakipaglaro sa ibang mga bata, at lalo silang nasiyahan dahil sa libreng meryenda na kinakain nila. Nagpatuloy ito hanggang high school. Noong nagkaroon sila ng isang group Bible study, napagtanto ni Gab na siya ay namumuhay nang malayo sa buhay na nilayon ng Diyos na isabuhay niya. Nagpasalamat siya sa isang kapitbahay, si "Kuya Narding," na nag-alok na magdaos ng pag-aaral ng Bibliya sa kanilang bahay kung saan una niyang narinig ang tungkol sa mga salita ng Panginoon. "Hindi pa ako noon nagpasya na ganap na sundin si Hesus at magkaroon

ng personal na relasyon sa Kanya hanggang noong ako ay nasa high school na. Doon ko nakita kung paano binago ng Panginoon ang puso ng aking ama. Noong una, ayaw ko pang maniwala na naging bagong tao ang aking ama pagkatapos ng lahat ng sakit at pagkasira na idinulot niya sa aming pamilya. Ngunit nakita ko mismo kung paano siya binago ng Diyos; na sa kalaunan ay humantong sa aking ina na isuko ang kanyang sarili kay Kristo, pagkatapos ay ang aking sarili, at ang aking dalawang kapatid. Noong Abril 9, 2007, tinanggap ni Gab si Hesuskristo sa kanyang puso bilang kanyang Panginoon at Tagapagligtas.

Mula nang ibinigay nila ang kanilang buhay kay Kristo, marami na ang nagbago. Nakita niya kung paano gumalaw ang Diyos sa buhay ng kanyang ama. Ang ama ni Gab ay isa nang pastor ngayon sa kanilang bayan sa Tanay, Rizal, at naglilingkod sa Panginoon at sa kanilang komunidad sa loob ng 14 na taon. Ang kanilang ina ay isang maybahay na tapat na tumutulong sa kanyang asawa sa kanilang gawain sa simbahan. Ang ina ni Gab ang pinakamasaya sa pagbuhos ng mga pagpapalang ibinigay sa kanila ng Diyos. Si Gab ay isang guro sa isang paaralan na naglilingkod sa mga katutubong Ati sa Aklan at aktibong nagpapadaloy ng Music and Men's Ministry sa kanilang lokal na simbahan; habang ang dalawa pa niyang kapatid ay mga propesyonal na at tumutulong sa kanilang mga magulang sa kanilang simbahan at pamumuhay. Ginawang kongkretong istraktura ng mga magkakapatid ang luma at sira-sirang bahay na naging piping saksi sa kanilang mga naging hamon sa buhay. Si Gab at ang kanyang mga kapatid ay nagtulong-tulong upang mabigyan ang kanilang mga magulang ng simple ngunit disentang bahay. Isang lamang ito sa simbolo ng pagmamahal at katapatan ng Diyos sa kanilang pamilya.

"Natuto ang pamilya ko na magtiwala sa Diyos. Natuto kaming makuntento noong kami ay salat at magpasalamat sa pabahon ng sagana. Natutunan ko na kailangan nating magtiwala sa Kanyang proseso dahil inihahanda Niya ako para sa isang mas maayos na buhay. Natuto akong maging tapat habang naghihintay ng sagot ng Diyos sa aking mga panalangin. Katulad ng sinabi ni Paul sa Filipos 3:14 'Ako ay nagpatuloy patungo sa layunin upang matamo ang gantimpala na kung saan tinawag ako ng Diyos sa langit kay Kristo Hesus.' Ipagpatuloy lang natin ang ating paglalakbay kasama ang Panginoon, mahirap man at minsan parang mali lahat. Maaaring hindi natin nauunawaan ang lahat ngunit ang Diyos ay laging tapat sa Kanyang mga pangako kung patuloy lamang tayong hahawak sa Kanya."

Blessings instead of fear



Lydia Balatucan has seen the good provision of God for her family.

Lydia Balatucan has been friendly and caring since she was a child. Lydia is a native of Marintoc, in the municipality of Mobo, on the island of Masbate. Her father is a farmer and her mother is a housewife. As she grew older, it gradually became clear in Lydia's mind that she wanted to help others - but she didn't know how.

Lydia married a fisherman in 1991. Although accustomed to poverty, Lydia went through a more severe ordeal when she had a family of her own. She took various jobs so that she could feed her family. She sold rice cakes and took in laundry. There were times when Lydia would not eat, so that her children could.

Her husband didn't earn a regular income either. It got to the point where her husband was not catching any fish, so Lydia decided to dig up river gravel and sell it to small traders. It was a heavy load for a woman like her, but she did it for the sake of her children.

Aside from the lack of food, their shelter was also not sufficient. The roof of their house leaked when it rained because it is made of dried coconut leaves.

Like most Filipino families, Lydia grew up Catholic, attending church but without it affecting the rest of her life. "I just go to church, and always worry about what will happen to the world and my future." In 1994, a group of people came to their home for a Bible study and Lydia first heard the Word of the Lord.

"I used to think I was saved because I knew there was a God and I always prayed to Him. But the Bible in Matthew 7:21 made me understand; 'Not everyone that said unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven, but he that does the will of my Father which is in heaven.' I realized that my faith was not enough, I needed to know the truth, so I decided to come into the presence of the Lord [at church] and learn more about His Word [the Bible]."

One day, one of Lydia's siblings fell seriously ill and Lydia had to nurse him, as her mother was in Manila.

"I felt so sorry for my brother, my children, and myself. I cried a lot because I felt helpless in our situation. As I was crying, I heard a voice say, 'God is not real because if He is true you shouldn't be experiencing this kind of life.' But Lydia did not fret; instead, she prayed. The next day, a friend came and offered Lydia's

husband a job, and by the grace of God, her brother was healed. "When I thought we were down and out, the Lord didn't leave us," Lydia declares.

Despite their poverty, Lydia continues to proclaim the Word of God in villages in their municipality and even in the remote towns of Masbate.

"As long as I have the opportunity, I will share God's message with every person and in any place. As a result, I've experienced ridicule, threats, and insults from people I encountered; but I won't stop. Because I believe that if I just put God first, He will do what is right for me. Matthew 6:33 says, 'But seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you.'"

Lydia still asks the Lord when their hardship will end. The process has not been easy, but slowly she has seen the work of God in their lives. "Our family has experienced the power of the Lord especially in healing my family members and providing us provisions and blessings."

From extracting and piling gravel and sand, Lydia was given the opportunity to enter politics and serve her fellow villagers. She first became the village treasurer and, in 2016, Lydia won a seat as a councilor.

"God has once again proved to me how He favors those who trust in Him."

Today, Lydia remains a councilor and her husband has a better job. Her children were able to study and finish school. They now have a decent house to live in. Doubts and fears have disappeared since she became a believer.

"My heart was full of fear. There have been times when I have questioned God, but He has given me so much grace that despite my guilt and shortcomings, He has not allowed me to suffer. Because God said 'I will never leave you nor forsake you', I have the courage to say that the Lord is my Helper and I will never be afraid again."

GOD ... FAVORS THOSE WHO TRUST HIM



His father attacked him with a machete

It's one thing to want to try something new as a teenager. It's quite another when that new thing makes your father hurl a machete at you.

This is exactly what happened to 15-year-old Singaporean Isaiah Fadzlin. Fortunately, his brother-in-law pulled him to safety as the blade whizzed past his ear.

The reason for his father's fury? Isaiah had just asked him for permission to convert from his birth religion of Islam to Christianity.

Isaiah's decision to convert came out of the blue. He had gone with a friend to church one Sunday and felt like a total misfit during the service.

"I didn't understand," the now-41-year-old tells *Challenge News*. "A man came up and started shouting and speaking - now I know it's called preaching," he grins.

The pastor ended the service by saying there was a "river" in the auditorium.

Astonished, Isaiah looked for this "river". Seeing nothing, he said to himself 'how can these people believe this preacher?'

Suddenly he says he felt "a strong Presence and incredible peace. I couldn't see anything but the atmosphere around me was so thick. I somehow knew it was the presence of God and I have not looked back

since."

Isaiah gave his life to Jesus the following Sunday.

Being 15 and under-aged, he needed his father's permission to change his faith. That was what drove his dad into his machete-swinging rage.

His father sent Isaiah to a fundamentalist Muslim boarding school in Indonesia for several months, hoping he would return to Islam. But Isaiah's new faith was unquenchable. In fact, he sneaked out to get a Bible from a local church, reports Singapore website mustsharenews.

The punishments grew more intense when Isaiah returned to Singapore. His father beat him. Once, he tore some pages from his Bible and forced Isaiah to eat them.

"At 16 I really wanted to give up my faith," Isaiah admits. "But the moment I said those words [a vision of] the Lord walked into my room. He showed me His nail-pierced



Right: Isaiah Fadzlin (preaching) and (left) with his wife Carol.



David, the friend who brought him to church that first time, never became a Christian himself. He had only been going to church to meet girls.

When Isaiah asked if David would commit his life to Christ, he replied: "No

need to do it now. I'll wait till I'm older." Two years later, David was diagnosed with leukemia and lived only six more months.

That event in particular fuels Isaiah's evangelical zeal. "When David died, I realised there is no time like the present to commit your life to Christ," he says.

"That is the reason why I am so very intentional in reaching out. James 4:14 says life is like a mist and that we don't even know what will happen tomorrow, so don't wait - you may not have as much time as you think."

Today Isaiah is the executive pastor of a church in Singapore and regularly preaches overseas.

"My story shows God's faithfulness. I never understood His promises to me at the beginning but now after 20 years of ministry, I am preaching to thousands around the world. I feel so very humbled.

"I am proof it can be done if you are willing to pay the price, which is nothing compared to what Jesus paid for us," he says emphatically.

Miraculously, Isaiah has reconciled with many members of his family. He prays for the day he and his father may also be reconciled.

hands and said 'Son, I know the pain you are going through'.

"I broke down and repented immediately. I said: 'Lord, if you went through that, I can continue'."

Isaiah tearfully asked God why his life was so difficult. "And then God told me I would preach to the nations. I didn't understand, but I knew there and then my life would never be about anything else than preaching the word of God," he says.

Isaiah persevered in his faith against tremendous odds. When he was 17, his father found yet another Bible. Grabbing his son, he held a sharp object against his neck. "My dad told me to renounce Christianity or he would decapitate me."

In his heart, Isaiah prepared to die and said what he thought would be his last prayer.

Thankfully his father did not carry out his threat — but shouted at his son that he would be sent back to Indonesia — for years this time, not months.

The next morning, penniless and

without any personal belongings, Isaiah ran away from home. He spent the next two years drifting from one friend's home to another and working at fast-food outlets.

When he was 20, Isaiah was actually invited to move back home by his stepmother, to whom he had sent a heartfelt Mother's Day card. Two years later, his

father gave him an ultimatum — give up Christianity or leave home within three days. Isaiah packed his bags.

He gave his father one last hug and left home hearing these words: "The moment you step outside that door, you are no longer my son." Isaiah has not seen his father since. "I miss him," he says simply.

But he bears no grudge. "I still love and honour my father. I understand why he did what he did."

Ironically, as far as Isaiah knows,

'LORD, IF YOU WENT THROUGH [THE CROSS], I CAN CONTINUE'



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. Roman 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 challenge@atin-asia.com
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:

I have prayed this prayer. Please send me: A Bible portion Some 'starting off' literature Information on a helpful church

* Please tick and write clearly *

Name _____ Phone _____

Address _____

Email address _____

ATIN (Asia), Inc., P.O. Box 31, Masbate City, Masbate 5400 Philippines.
Email: challenge@atin-asia.com Facebook: facebook.com/ATINasiainc
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	

The Good Shepherd

(John 10:11-18)

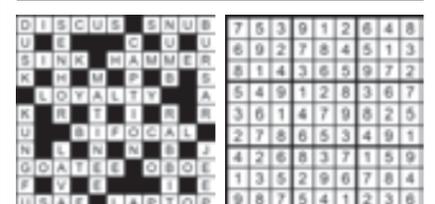
Good Shepherd, find me,
Lost and lonely,
And far, far away.
I'm a prodigal son,
I'm on the run,
Messed up and astray.

Good Shepherd, free me,
Sad and sickly,
Entangled by sin.
Rescue and save,
For I only crave,
Your mercy within.

Good Shepherd, feed me,
Guide and lead me,
To Your still stream.
Let me be fed
By the One who bled
And died to redeem.

Good Shepherd, fill me,
Tend and thrill me
With Your love and care.
Restore my soul
And make me whole;
Lord, this is my prayer.

Craig Siggins December 2021





Head coach Hubert Davis of the North Carolina Tar Heels reacts to a play against the Kansas Jayhawks during the second half of the 2022 NCAA Men's Basketball Tournament National Championship game at Caesars Superdome on April 04, 2022 in New Orleans, Louisiana. (Photo by Jamie Schwaberow/NCAA Photos via Getty Images)

Below: Hubert Davis speaks at a press conference introducing him as the new men's head basketball coach at the University of North Carolina at Dean E. Smith Center on April 6, 2021 in Chapel Hill, North Carolina. (Photo by Jeffrey Camarati/Getty Images)



Best seat on the bus

Hubert Davis was installed as head coach of the North Carolina University men's basketball team in April 2021.

He remembers the first time he realised just how big a deal it was to be in that position. It was when he sat in the front seat of the team bus - the spot reserved for the head coach.

UNC is no ordinary basketball college. Its most famous player is the legendary Michael Jordan. It has won five NCAA Championships and is number three on the Division I all-time wins list.

Speaking to ESPN about his moment of truth, Hubert said: "I was like 'Wow, this is different."

"Out of all the stuff — the practices, the press conferences, the media — all that hadn't affected me. I hadn't had a moment of thinking that I'm the head coach for the University of North Carolina, except when I sat at the front of the bus."

So where does Hubert get his strength to carry the weight of expectations? During a Sports Spectrum podcast he revealed his source — Jesus Christ.

"This is where I felt like Christ

wanted me and my family to go," Hubert said. "Wherever He wants us to go, I'm following Him. I'm not going any other direction. ... This is not a job, it feels like a mission field, a ministry opportunity."

"I'm here to serve, and shed light on, and be an example for Christ."

At the press conference announcing him as head coach last April, he said: "The most important thing to me is my faith. My foundation is firmly in my relationship with Jesus."

It wasn't always this way with the former New York Knicks player. In fact, it was just the opposite.

Hubert ignored God growing up even though his mother, a fervent Christian, begged him to go to church. "I wasn't interested," he admits. "My mom used to say 'Jesus has a plan for you, plans for a hope and a future, plans not to harm you, plans to prosper you' (Jeremiah 29:11).

"But I didn't understand."

Two days before he began his junior year of high school his mother died. Hubert was 16. "I developed tremendous hate towards

God. I didn't understand why He would take away my mom.

"She didn't get to see me play here, she didn't get to see me drafted, she didn't get to see me play in the NBA, she didn't meet my wife, she wasn't at our wedding, and she hasn't been with my kids."

Hubert did, however, attend church while at high school — because his basketball coach insisted.

"He encouraged me to go to church and slowly I started to understand what my mom was talking about.

"I started to understand the sacrifice that Jesus has made for me and how much He loves me; two days before my junior year of college I became a Christian — and then instead of being upset that Jesus took away the most beautiful person in my life — my mom — I'm thankful every

day that He gave me the best mom that I could ever have."

Today even after all the success he has enjoyed as a player and now being appointed head coach of one of the most successful college basketball teams, Hubert remains firmly grounded in Christ and not his own prestige.

He brings his faith to training sessions as well, recently sharing a Bible verse — Proverbs 4:25, "Look straight ahead, ignore all sideshow distractions" — with his players during practice.

The passage goes on to say: *Watch your step, and the road will stretch out smooth before you. Look neither right nor left; leave evil in the dust.*

Very good advice indeed for anyone in the game of life. •



Head coach Hubert Davis of the North Carolina Tar Heels celebrates with the regional final trophy after defeating the St. Peter's Peacocks, 69-49, in the Elite Eight round game of the 2022 NCAA Men's Basketball Tournament at Wells Fargo Center on March 27, 2022 in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. (Photo by Tim Nwachukwu/Getty Images)

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