

NOT 'GOOD' ENOUGH

In primary school one day, Jean-Jacques Hamba, or JJ, was sitting at his desk staring blankly at the paper in front of him. He had received a bad mark on his test and was feeling very upset. His friend, who was sitting next to him, started making fun of him. Furious, JJ grabbed his friend's head and smashed it into the wall.

"I've always had a short temper," he admits. "But this was a cruel act which I have never forgotten."

JJ would also steal his parent's money to buy food for himself and friends at school.

Still, JJ tried very hard to be good – most of the time.

"I grew up in a Christian home. My mama and papa taught me and my siblings Bible stories and worship hymns. I lived a decent life and tried to conform to our home principles and Sunday school teachings. This forged the lifestyle that I adopted for my life – thinking that I would attract the attention of God by being good."

Even though JJ would outwardly live a good moral lifestyle, his heart was not in the right place.

"I did not understand the meaning of salvation [being saved from the consequences of my sins by Jesus' death on the cross]," he says. "I thought that being a good boy was the way to be saved and that when I grew up, I would suddenly change into God's servant."

As a teenager, JJ got involved in some dodgy things.

"My moral restrictions, however,



Jean-Jacques Hamba and his wife.

could not allow me total involvement because I felt my life would be used as a report card before God one day."

Throughout his life, JJ recalls hearing a still, small voice that would call out to him.

"The inner voice would challenge me to give my life to God," he says. "But I didn't see the sense in giving

my life to Jesus, I didn't even bother too. 'Sinners are the ones that need Jesus!' I continually thought.

"I was striving in my own strength to shun evil but I felt a gap, a void. Nothing made sense to me! I did not understand that it is faith and grace [the undeserved kindness of God] through Christ Jesus that gives us the strength to keep going on the

path of righteousness, and it is not something we gain by merit."

When JJ was 16 he woke up one morning after a terrifying nightmare and found himself paralyzed on one side. It took him over a year to recover from the partial paralysis, a year in which he had a lot of time to ponder where he was at spiritually.

"Jesus heard the cries of my hungry heart," he believes. "In the quest for healing from my paralysis, I met with an elder of my church. He prayed for me and taught me about the saving grace of Jesus Christ."

Little by little JJ's eyes were opened to the truth that no matter how hard he tried, he could not earn his own way into Heaven. He had to overcome his pride and stubbornness in order to accept that someone else (Jesus) had already made the way.

"It was finally in October 2005 that I decided to respond to that inner voice," he says.

JJ attended a Bible teaching event for new believers at his church. He learnt about baptism [being immersed in water as a symbol of dying to your old self]. But he still didn't understand that you had to be a Christian in order to get baptized.

"After the training, I feigned to have turned to Jesus so I could get baptized," he says.

"It was only the following year, in 2006, without the help of any man, that God alone called me to turn to Him. I confessed to God that I

wanted to seriously believe in His Son, Jesus Christ."

And so, after many years of striving and searching, JJ gave his life to Jesus and found peace.

"My life was restored to me in a way that only God can do."

His outlook on life has been forever changed by his new-found faith. "I became empowered to live my life, not for me, but for Christ. He has provided me with things that even money cannot buy," - like joy and the assurance of an eternal home in Heaven.

"No one can do this life without Jesus," he remarks. "All of us, including myself, are sinners in so many ways. We cannot come to God except by Jesus Christ. He died for our sins so we can be saved. Being a Christian is not always easy but if we would like to share in His glory we must also be willing to share in His suffering."

JJ is now happily married and in his early thirties.

He urges others, "Give your life to Jesus! Don't wait until you are at a nasty corner of your life, don't wait until you are called to God the harder way, and don't procrastinate! God is calling you with that still, small voice. Believe!"

CHALLENGING OTHERS WITH CHALLENGE



Apostle Omogate (right) gave his life to Jesus as a teenager and now tells anybody he can what a wonderful Saviour Jesus is. Here he is using Challenge News to share the Good News.

Infinite variety and you

BY JODY BENNETT

ONE of the wonderful things I love about God is that He is a God of infinite creativity and variety.

Look at the world He has made; all the thousands of zebras, giraffe and tigers, and not one of them has the same markings as any other. Think of all the human beings who have ever lived, and not one of us has the same fingerprints or iris design. Even every single one of billions and billions of snowflakes or stars is unique! Look at leaves. There are so many varieties of shapes and sizes and variations of colour in them. And yet they are all distinct in their species so that we can know an oak leaf from a fig leaf or a palm leaf anywhere. Did you know that there are 26 different

species of flea on one stoat?!

(Incidentally I think this is a good argument for creation over evolution, since the forces of nature, had they been able to create one working design for a creature, would have replicated it like clones, and not had any reason to individualise each one.)

In this paper you will read the stories of people who have come to know Jesus personally and you may think that coming to Christ means that God will take away your individuality and make you boring. That all Christians dress the same, or act the same. But God doesn't make cookie-cutter Christians – Christians come in as many varieties as grains of sand.

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WHEN YOU JUST CAN'T
 JESSICA LONG

DELIVERED FROM HIS ADDICTIONS

There is an old story of a man who watched a boy on a beach throwing marooned star fish back into the water. The man said to the boy “There are so many star fish, what you are doing is not going to make any difference.” Throwing in another creature, the boy replied, “It will make a difference for this one.”

The lesson is that we can all make a small difference in the world and, who knows, maybe even a big difference in at least one other life.

In Botswana in 2011, a woman named Tshego-hatso Tihong made such a difference. She was bold enough to speak to her friend Tihalefang Tsatsi, who is known as Dibata, about the Kingdom of God.

She told Dibata, who at that time was a thief and an alcoholic, that Jesus Christ could free him from his addictions and give him everlasting life, if he just asked. She explained how Jesus Christ was God in the flesh who came down to earth, lived as a sinless man doing good works and miracles, died to pay for our sins on the cross and rose again from the dead, to life everlasting.

“I decided that I must accept this free gift of God,” Dibata remembers. “She prayed for me and I repeated after her. Every word she said, I said. That was nine years ago and it changed my life.”



Tihalefang Tsatsi

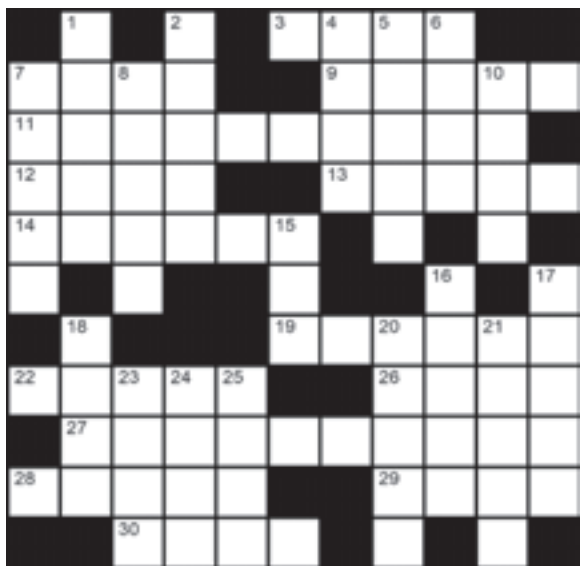
“I gave up smoking and drinking alcohol and I don’t steal anymore. I try to meet regularly with other Christians. It was hard at first to give up my old friends and to have to work for things that I had previously just stolen.

“But Jesus is everything to me now. He is, as John chapter 14 and verse 6 says; ‘... the Way, the Truth and the Life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.’ I am very grateful to be a child of God.

“My favourite Bible verse is Psalm 125:1-2, which says ‘Those who trust in the Lord are like Mount Zion, which cannot be moved, but abides forever. As the mountains surround Jerusalem, so the Lord surrounds His people from this time forth and forever.’”

Coffee Break CROSSWORD & SUDOKU

- ACROSS**
- 3 Go without (meals)
 - 7 Trunk, torso
 - 9 Battery terminal
 - 11 Catastrophic destruction
 - 12 Unload, as stock
 - 13 Exterior
 - 14 Small islands
 - 19 Free (from)
 - 22 Prophet in a fish
 - 26 Wind instrument
 - 27 Miner’s lamp (6,4)
 - 28 Long (for)
 - 29 Lamenting word
 - 30 Like a busybody



- DOWN**
- 1 Aspirations
 - 2 Bike around
 - 4 Fight stopping event
 - 5 Contribution to discussion
 - 6 Stake for a sign
 - 7 Plain, no frills
 - 8 Barbie & Ken
 - 10 Not shallow
 - 15 Hit the slopes
 - 16 Like a hose
 - 17 Precursors of Humvees
 - 18 Flower on valentines
 - 20 Back tooth
 - 21 Bedouin, historically
 - 23 Indian bread
 - 24 Bushy hairdo
 - 25 Coop group

Hindu girl finds answers in Romans



BY MICHAEL ASHCRAFT

Because she was sickly, little Satabdi Banerjee was consecrated to Kali, the revered Hindu goddess who would bring healing.

But when Satabdi got older, she read the Bible to appease her conscience. All was going well until she hit the Book of Romans, which shattered her view that all religions lead to the same godhead.

“If you read the book of Romans with an open heart, you will see God talking to you,” Satabdi says on her own YouTube channel. “I used to look down on Christian missionaries because I thought they did not understand one very simple concept: All the rivers are ending up in the ocean.”

Satabdi Banerjee was born to a Bengali Brahmin family and took pride from her high caste birth and her family’s devotion to the Ramakrishna brand of Hinduism, the belief that no matter what the religion, they all provide salvation.

Her family members prayed hours every day in a dedicated prayer room at their house. They had lots of Hindu idols, decorated them for holidays and invited relatives over for special meals on those holidays.

“We used to celebrate everything — Christmas, the birth of Buddha. But at the same time, we thought it was all the same thing,” she says. “We celebrated everything. We used to do carols and cut cake for Jesus.

“We were so dedicated. I was so dedicated,” she says. “I just had one goal. I wanted to please the gods so that I could meet the gods and be with the gods. I thought I was very close to the gods.”

But she was also painfully aware of the sin in her heart.

“There was this other side of me. I had committed so much sin. Nobody knew my inner heart.”

In 11th grade, Satabdi met a Catholic girl and lied to her that she had read the Bible.

“I started to feel very guilty. Why did I tell this lie? I had this other sin added to my conscience.”

Year by year, the Gideons came through her neighborhood handing out New Testaments, and Satabdi disdained them. But under a burden of guilt, she relented and read her New Testament.

“I never used to want to read it but just to make my words true, I started to read it,” she says.

She made her way through the Gospels — Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. Even her revered Ramakrishna, the founder of the branch of Hinduism she and her family followed, admired the teachings of Christ, so it was no big deal.

She didn’t really understand the book of Acts, but when she hit Romans, the power of the Word hit her. Chapter 1 confronted her — as it confronts anyone — with personal sin.

For the wrath of God is revealed from Heaven against all godlessness and unrighteousness of people who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth, since what can be known about God is evident among them, because God has shown it to them. Rom 1:18-19.

“I thought that’s exactly what our forefathers, the Aryans, taught - that God is invisible. At first they never had idols. But my forefathers then made idols,” she says.

Not only did the Bible confirm her philosophical beliefs derived from Hinduism, but it also named “all the sins you could ever think of,” she says. “The society that I belong to has gone away from God,” she realized. “My forefathers made all of these lies.

“Who gave me the right to say that somebody was a shudra or an untouchable or a dalit? They are not

anything worse than I. They have two eyes and two ears and one nose just like I do — and one brain. It was my own forefathers who made those rules for our benefit, not for everybody’s benefit.”

In the Hindu caste system, the shudras are the working caste, and the dalit are the untouchables. By birth, they are excluded from many privileges in society and are condemned to live life in lowly states doing menial tasks.

“The caste that I was so proud to belong to has gone away from God,” she concluded.

In chapter three of Romans, she was confronted with her personal sin. “I remembered all the dark part of me, the skeletons in the closet that you have and I have.”

Next, Romans dismantled the Hindu system of sacrifice, she says. “If God is holy and just, then He cannot accept the flowers I’m giving, all the money I’m giving, all the food I’m giving. If He is just, how can he just gloss over all of my sin?”

Only the sacrifice of Christ could take away sins, she realized.

“God took on humanity, and He took your place and He took my place,” Satabdi says. “All my sins He took on Himself and He paid the punishment for me. He suffered my consequence. That is love. Only because of love can one sacrifice himself. For no other reason will someone sacrifice himself, only if one is deeply in love.”

None of the other gods and gurus had done what Jesus had done. Vishnu came to destroy, not redeem the wicked. Kali, who was supposed to heal Satabdi, did not come to take her punishment.

“Only Jesus broke the power of death and sin,” she says. “The Giver of Life rose from the dead. Death could not hold Him back.”

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

INFINITE VARIETY AND YOU

From page 1

Actor Stelio Savate on page 7 is a very different sort of Christian to the ex-Hindu on this page, or the para-Olympian on page 8. When we become Christians God doesn’t erase our uniqueness but enhances it, since He is the one who made us unique in the first place! He doesn’t wipe our past out of existence, but reshapes and heals our experiences, the good and the bad, to make us into a beautiful masterpiece reflecting His glory. Each of us has a special aspect of the Creator that we can display to the world through our lives.

Just as there are so many variations in human beings in terms of skin colour, facial features, body shape and hair texture, so there are a beautiful rainbow of differences in the people who follow God.

When I was a teenager I thought that if I gave myself fully to God He would send me as a single missionary

into a poor, remote place. That is what I thought all true God-followers did. What did He do instead? He fulfilled my deep longing for a husband and children and helped me use my natural talents, studies and personal experiences to bring Him glory in ways that also bring me more joy than I could have imagined.

Rest assured that if you turn your life over to God, your individuality will not be erased. You become a new creation in Christ but that new you is still you. God wants all sorts of Christians — intellectual ones and practical ones, dreamers and rule followers, extroverts and introverts, laughers and criers, the impetuous and the fearful, those who like ritual and those who like spontaneity. All people from all backgrounds and histories and abilities, carrying all sorts of burdens and sins, are all invited to find their true selves in relationship with Jesus Christ, who redeems us from our past and gives us a purpose and an eternal future with Him.

SOLUTIONS PAGE 7



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PORN NEARLY DESTROYED ME

Albert Potgieter was 12 when he was introduced to pornography. He was hooked immediately. "From then on I had a continuous battle with this horrible sin," he says. "I fell into it and was trapped by my desires."

Up till then he had been a model child, a respectful son, a good student and absolutely mad about cricket.

His parents were so proud; they had brought their son up in a good and loving home. They nurtured him, took him to church, encouraged his sporting pursuits and bought him expensive gifts.

"Although I didn't always appreciate the home I grew up in, my heart is today filled with gratitude for this gracious blessing," Albert acknowledges.

Church attendance was regular and when young Albert groused about "how boring" it all was, his father would reprimand him sternly. "Honestly, all I enjoyed about church was the last worship song because that meant it was going to be over and I would soon enjoy a lovely lunch!" Albert laughs as he tells his story to *Challenge News*.

It wasn't until he was 10 that another side of Albert began to emerge. He stole money from his mother to buy sweets, then lied to her about what happened to the money. He says he went from an innocent young lad to becoming "very prideful and arrogant among my peers - hurting a lot of hearts in the process".

Then school friends got him involved with pornography.

Things went from bad to worse. He began to use foul language, mock his teachers, bully fellow students, all the while slipping deeper and deeper into lust.

On top of all of this, Albert reveals, "I made cricket my god. I transformed my God-given talent into an idol."

His aim was becoming a professional cricketer for South Africa. "I wanted to succeed for my own glory," he admits. "I wanted to stand in the hall of fame for the world to know my name."

During this time, he says his life was a mess. "I had no relationship with my family. My father was important to me only to give me what I needed to succeed in my sport.

"I was arrogant and unloving. And the fact that I did not live for God - and I knew it - didn't bother me a bit. God had faded out of my mind completely."

He does remember thinking about God one day when he scored 100 runs in a match - "I thanked Him for blessing me in my sport."

As fleeting as that thought was, it caused him to accept his mother's invitation to the Easter convention of the Africa Evangelistic Band that year.

"She used to invite me every year," he remarks. "I never went before but I went along because I wanted to show gratitude to God for blessing me in my sport and for sparing my life when I had a very serious health problem and needed emergency surgery."

As Albert sat in the service "without caring much about what the preacher was saying" he felt sud-



Albert Potgieter today (left) and in his cricketing days (right).



Albert recalls. "I did not know Jesus although I went to church and Sunday school.

denly "it was as if a bucket of ice water was thrown in my face. I suddenly became aware of God's presence.

"In an instant I realised I was lost,"

"I became afraid to die and be lost in hell forever. My heart was beating in my chest. An invitation was extended to all who wanted to receive Jesus as their Lord and

Saviour. I stood up and started walking towards the exit but I suddenly stopped in my tracks, turned around and asked for help from one of the Christian workers.

"Why did I do this? Because I was lost, utterly lost and I knew I would be rightfully cast into the lake of fire for all eternity if I died then. I realised I desperately needed the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ, to forgive me all my horrible sins. I begged him to change me."

Out on the street, she cried to God

BY MIKE MAGRATH

Sandra, a 54-year-old woman, shuffled along the main street of Nigel, a small town on the Eastern outskirts of Johannesburg. She could have been mistaken for a "street lady" but she was not. Her husband had thrown her out of her house.

An anxious woman

I first met Sandra when Dirk, a friend of mine, brought her to the church where I served as pastor on the East Rand.

Sandra, suffering from deep depression, worked as a live-in housekeeper for my friend Dirk. So deep was the depression that even previous shock treatment did little to help.

Sandra told me her story. She came from an upper middle class family and attended a public school. In high school, she had a good number of male admirers due to her exceptionally good looks. With all this, she had eyes for only one boy, Connor. He was older, owned a motorbike, smoked, drank and had a tough guy reputation. Connor dropped out of school and started an apprenticeship as a fitter and turner.

Sandra continued to date him, and near the end of her final year she fell pregnant. She completed school before marrying Connor. Her parents were against their marriage, and Connor banned them from seeing Sandra or the baby boy.

The couple had two daughters after their son, but life at home had become very bad. Connor drank heavily. In his drunken state he would physically and verbally abuse

Sandra. Later he began hitting the children.

Things only got worse

So bad were the beatings that Sandra lost a number of teeth and her nose was badly broken. She was too afraid to lay charges. As soon as the eldest daughter turned 14, she escaped the toxic environment

and went to live with her boyfriend's family. Her younger sister did the same when she was 15 years old. Sandra never asked them to return as she thought this would be a safer option for them, and Connor didn't care.

Their son was in and out of prison and sadly died in a bar fight at the age of 31. After more than 34 years of marriage, Connor started bringing home his girlfriends and Sandra would have to sleep in the spare room.

Enduring abuse, kicked out of society

Sandra had no money or any friends to go to for help. She felt like she had no choice. She was all alone. Connor controlled every aspect of her life, even preventing her from having any contact with their daughters. Her parents were deceased by



this point. Then, one day when Sandra was in her mid-fifties, Connor's girlfriend demanded that Sandra be kicked out of the house. As Connor violently threw her out, she managed to stuff a few items into a shopping bag.

The poor broken woman stumbled along the road with nowhere to go and no-one to call for help.

Sandra had come to know Jesus as a school-girl but had drifted away from Him due to the relationship with Connor. Now she remembered that long-ago faith and cried out to God in desperation, with tears streaming down her face. "God, please help me". And God did.

My friend Dirk, walked past her at that very moment, recognised her from school and, after hearing her story, God told Dirk to take her in as a housekeeper.

When I prayed for Sandra, I asked the Lord what to pray. I kept on getting the thought, "forgiveness". I asked her whether she had forgiven Connor. "I have", she said earnestly, and I believed her.

"Have you forgiven yourself?" I asked Sandra. The floodgates

This happened in April 2014, and in the seven years since the day he knelt and surrendered his life to God, Albert's life has been radically transformed.

"One of the most immediate and drastic changes in me," he reveals, "was no more foul language, thank you."

He also no longer craves sin. "In fact I now hate the sin I once loved," he smiles. "I now want to be obedient to God. Church is no longer boring! In fact I can't get enough of being in God's house with His congregation."

He says he is more loving and helpful towards others and, although he is far from perfect, Albert would not change this life he now has for anything in the world.

He also quit cricket, not because any sport is a sin itself he is quick to point out, but "because for me it was a stumbling block and a hindrance to serving God fully". The 23-year-old is also now a full-time missionary.

"The best part in the Christian life is to be satisfied in the Lord Jesus Christ," he says. "Needing nothing or no one else to give you peace, joy, contentment, love or acceptance. You only have Him and He is more than enough."

Albert's favourite Bible verse is Romans 5:1 - "Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ."

opened. I have never witnessed sobbing like that before. "No, how can I? I should have had courage to leave when that abuse started, to protect my children, but I was too afraid. Now my son is dead, and my daughters are gone..."

"Ask God to forgive you and ask your children as well, as if they were in the room," I told her. She did this. Immediately, I could see a burden had been lifted. Her shaking body relaxed, and I saw what seemed to be a hint of a smile.

Two weeks later, I received a phone call from Sandra. "I phoned to give you some good news," she said brightly. "I got a job today as sales lady in a ladies' boutique!"

Two months later, Sandra had enough money to rent a flat of her own. Her flat was soon furnished - not only from her income, but also gifts from her new church friends. She had a new job, a new home, new friends, a new life. Her faith in the Lord grew and grew.

A happy ending of victory

After six months, a miracle happened - Sandra's oldest daughter happened to walk into her shop! They had a joyful reunion over coffee and the last I heard Sandra was in regular contact with her two daughters and their families.

God loved and looked after this lost, broken child of His; restoring the years that the locusts had eaten. What a reminder that God is always near, waiting for us to call upon His Name. Our God is great, He is faithful, and He is our Redeemer.

MIKE MAGRATH is a retired pastor, who is writing a book called "The Gates of Hell Could Not Prevail", which will include this and other inspiring stories of how God intervenes in people's circumstances. It will be published soon.

Prioriteite en perspektief totaal verander

Afrikaans translation

Elijah Yegon weet vir 'n feit dat hy hopeloos en teen die grond sou wees sonder goddelike ingryping.

Hy vertel dat alles ver van perfek af was, "Ek was kwaad, 'n leuenaar en onvergewingsgesind. Ek het teen baie verslawings in my lewe geveg."

Toe hy terug dink aan sy kinderdae het Elijah gesê: "Ek het nie in 'n godsdienstige huis groot geword nie. My familie het goddeloos gelewe, hulle het selfs hulle eie bier gebrou. My opvoeding was ook nie op datum nie."

Elijah vertel vir Challenge dat een van die hoogtepunte van sy kinderdae was Sondagskool. "Selfs al het ek nie alles verstaan nie, was ek lief daarvoor om te hoor van God wat almal lief het."

Hy was weetgierig oor God en geestelike dinge, en het verlang om die waarheid vir homself uit te vind.

Verskeie jare daarna, het Elijah 'n lewens veranderde kans ontvang. "Die woord van God was deur 'n paar evangeliste gepreek. Hulle preke het my lewe verander. Die teks wat my lewe aangeraak het was Romeine 6:23 'Want die loon van die sonde is die dood, maar die genadegawe van God is die ewige lewe in Christus Jesus, onse Here.'"

Hy het die uitnodiging om 'n nuwe lewe te begin aanvaar. "Ek het besluit om Christus as

my persoonlike saligmaker te aanvaar. Ek wou nie meer vir myself lewe nie. Toe ek Jesus aanvaar het, het alles drasties verander."

"Die grootste verandering in my lewe het gekom toe my karakter getransformeer het. Wat ek het, of wil hê is nie meer 'n prioriteit in my lewe nie. Jesus is my eerste prioriteit."

Elijah erken dat hy verskeie uitdagings in die gesig gestaar het vandat hy sy lewe aan God oorgegee het. "Om 'n Christelike lewe te lei is 'n uitdaging. Daar is baie probleme en versoekings, daarom moet mens volhou."

Elijah se gunsteling Bybel teks is Johannes 3:16 – "Want so lief het God die wêreld gehad, dat Hy sy eniggebore Seun gegee het, sodat elkeen wat in Hom glo, nie verlore mag gaan nie, maar die ewige lewe kan hê."

Vandag is Elijah gelukkig getroud en hy is toegewyd aan sy werk as gevangenis kapelaan. Hy geniet meer as 'n dekade lange verhouding met Jesus.

Hy is passievol om die goeie nuus oor redding met ander om hom te deel. "Ek wil almal vertel dat Jesus die enigste manier is om van sonde gered te word, en die enigste weg om die koninkryk van die hemele binne te gaan. Daar is geen ander weg om die ewige lewe te kan hê nie. Deur Jesus kan ons gered word en vrygemaak word van die straf van sonde. Plaas jou vertrouwe in Sy liefdevolle hande."



English translation

Perspective totally changed

Elijah Yegon knows for a fact that without divine intervention he would have been at rock bottom with no hope.

He says things were far from perfect. "I was angry, lying and unforgiving. I battled many addictions in my life."

Remembering his childhood, Elijah says: "I did not grow up in a religious family. They lived ungodly lives and they even brewed their own local brew. My education was not up to date."

Elijah tells *Challenge* that one of the highlights of his childhood was Sunday school. "Even though I did not understand much I loved to hear about the God who loves all people."

He was always curious about God and spirituality and yearned to know the truth for himself.

Then, several years later, Elijah received a life-changing chance. "The Word of God was being preached by some evangelists. I heard them and it changed my life. The verse that touched me came from Romans 6:23: 'For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.'"

So, he accepted the invitation to start a new life. "I decided to fully accept Christ as my personal Saviour. I didn't want to live for myself anymore. When I accepted Jesus, things changed dramatically."

"The biggest change in my life was that my character has become different. What I have or want is no longer a priority in my life. Jesus is my number one priority."

Elijah admits that he has faced his fair share of challenges since committing his life to God. "To maintain a Christian life is a challenge. One must be persistent, for there are many difficulties and temptations."

Elijah's favourite Bible verse is John 3:16 - "For 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."

Today, Elijah is happily married and committed to his work as a prison chaplain. He has enjoyed a decades-long relationship with Jesus.

He is passionate about sharing the Good News of salvation with others around him. "I want to tell others that Christ is the only way to be saved from sin and the only way to enter the kingdom of heaven. There is no other way we can have eternal life. Through Christ Jesus we can be saved; set free from the power and penalty of sin. Trust your life into His loving hands."

Zulu translation

Ukuguquka kwendlela yokubona ukubaluleka kwezinto

Elijah Yegon wazi ngokungangabazeki ukuthi ngaphandle kosizo oluvela Phezulu ngabe ishabalele impilo yakhe futhi akanathemba.

Isimo sasibucayi. "Nganginolaka, nginamanga futhi ngingathetheleli. Ngangiqilazwa izinto eningi empilweni yami."

Ekukhuleni kwakhe, kusho u Elijah: "Angikhulelanga ekhaya elikhulwayo. Babezigayela bengamazi u Nkulunkulu. Nemfundo yami yayingekho esimweni." U Elijah utshela i Challenge ukuthi wayeyikhonzile i Sunday school ekukhuleni kwakhe. "Noma ngangikaqondi kahle ngangithanda ukuzwa ngo Nkulunkulu othanda abantu bonke."

Wayekukhuthalele ukuzwa ngo NKULUNKULU nomoya wakhe ulangazelela ukwazi iqiniso.

Emva kweminyaka eminingi, u Elijah wathola ithuba elaguqula impilo yakhe. "Izwi likaNkulunkulu lalishumayelwa umvangeli othize. Ngalizwa laguqula impilo yami. Ivesi elangithinta lalivela kwabase Roma 6:23: "Umvuzo wesono ungukufa, kodwa isiphosikaNkulunkulu singukuphila okuphakade ngoKristu uJesu iNkosi yethu."

Wamukela isimemo sokuqala impilo entsha. "Nganquma ukumamukela ngokuphelele uKristu njengoMsindisi wempilo yami. Ngangingasafuni ukuziphilela. Ngathi mgingamukela uJesu, izinto zaguquka kakhulu."

Ushintsho olukhulu lwabonakala esimilweni sami siguquka. Enginakho nengikufunayo akuzange kusabaluleka kangakho empilweni yami. U Jesu wabaluleka ukudlula zonke izinto kimi."

U Elijah uyavuma ukuthi ube nenselela eziningi emva kokuzinikela kuNkulunkulu. Ukuphila impilo yobuKristu kuyinselela. Uyaphikelela, kunobunzima nezilingo ezinkulu."

U Elijah uthanda lelivesi ngokuka-Johane 3:16 "ngokuba uNkulunkulu walithanda izwe kangaka waze wanikela ngeNdodana yakhe ezelwe Yodwa, ukuba yilowo nalowo okholwa iyona angabhubhi kepha abe nokuphila okuphakade."

Namuhla, u Elijah ushadile uzinikele emsebenzini wakhe wokuba i chaplain. Useneminyaka emkhonza uNkulunkulu ngentokozo.

Unentshisakalo yokufafaza indaba ezinhle zensindiso kwabaseduze kwakhe. "Ngifuna ukuthi uKristu iyona yodwa indlela yokuthethelelwa izono neyokungena embusweni wezulu. Ayikho enye indlela esingaba nokuphila okuphakade. NgoKristu singasindiswa, sikhululwe emandleni nasemvuzweni wesono. Beka ithemba lakho ezandleni zakhe zothando."

What's so great about heaven?

BY JODY BENNETT

WHEN someone says "heaven", what do you think of?

Wings, harps and clouds? Doing your favourite thing all day? A bland place with lots of singing?

Many people define heaven by the things that make them feel happy and fulfilled on Earth, but what if I were to tell you that in heaven there is no sex, no marriage, no Wi-fi, no computer games, no Netflix, no sport and probably no sleep. Would you still want to go?

The Bible actually tells us very little about heaven. But when Jesus was told about a woman who had had seven husbands and asked whose she would be in heaven, He made it clear that in the afterlife there is no marriage or sex. "When the dead rise, they will neither marry nor be given in marriage; they will be like the angels in heaven." (Mark 12:25)

In the glimpses the Apostle John had of heaven, as recorded in the biblical book of Revelation, it was a place of worship – with crowds standing around the throne of God singing praises and bowing before Him.

So, if heaven is not a place where we get to do whatever we want, or gratify all the desires we have on earth, why is it somewhere we would want to go?

Well, the people who want to go to heaven want to be there for one reason only. One thing makes heaven, heaven and the absence of that one thing makes hell the most awful, fearful place it is. That one thing is Jesus.

The people who want to go to heaven want to be there because Jesus is there. He is the embodiment of love, mercy, kindness, goodness and truth. All our deepest longings are fulfilled in Him and therefore the yearning of those who know Him, who call themselves

Christians, is to be where He is.

That is why there is so much worship in heaven. Not because it is forced, like some sort of long boring church service, but because everyone there is so overcome by God's goodness and so grateful that He has extended that goodness to them, that they cannot but praise Him endlessly.

The Bible makes two other important points about the afterlife that are also relevant.

Firstly, our desires and lusts will not be fulfilled in hell either. Hell is no endless debauched party. Jesus describes it as a blazing furnace, where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth. (Matthew 13:42) It is a place of torment, devoid of any of the goodness, light, purity or happiness that we may know on earth.

Secondly, heaven is not the final destination of those who trust in Jesus for their salvation. John tells us in Revelation 21: "Then I saw 'a new heaven and a new earth,' for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, 'Look! God's dwelling place is now among the people, and He will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. 'He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death' or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.'" (verses 1-4)

Ultimately, there will be a new Earth and Revelation gives us only a few clues as to what it will be like, but for those who know and love Jesus only one fact is important – He will be there and we will never be apart from Him again.

Prolific SA actor part of best selling series

South African actor Stelio Savante has been called a shape shifter and a polyglot for the diversity of the characters he plays, and the media he works in.

It helps that he has looks that can be easily altered, is a writer and producer, and speaks several languages, including Afrikaans and Greek, in his deep voice.

Stelio played opposite Matt Dillon in 2018's *Running for Grace*, co-starred in the 2019 film *Infidel* with Jim Caviezel (who played Jesus in *The Passion of the Christ*) and recently played Moses in a yet-to-be-released episode of the very popular crowd-funded Bible series *The Chosen*.

Very successful, and married for 29 years, with a daughter, Stelio has not shared much with the world about his private life but he is open and clear about his faith.

Born in Cape Town in 1970, he describes his childhood as "very

painful, tumultuous and violent".

His parents followed the Greek Orthodox religion; although his mother had been brought up Jewish, she converted in order to marry Stelio's dad.

"My parents divorced at a young age. I felt



Stelio Savante
Photo: Getty Images

unworthy, unwanted, irrelevant, and also struggled at school, both with grades and peers. The message of the Gospel and Christ's love and acceptance of me drew me in.

"I gave my life to the Lord in 1984 [at the age of 14] but didn't really understand what the commitment entailed, and I wandered in and out of Christ's will for my life for many years," he confesses.

Stelio's mother had entered into a personal relationship with Jesus after the divorce and his father turned to Jesus Christ some time later, after he lost his business.

After school, Stelio emigrated from South Africa to the United States when he was offered an international tennis scholarship by the University of West Alabama. There he was baptised [immersed in water as a symbol of dying to your old life] in about 1991 and renewed his commitment to live for God. It was here that he was also bitten by the acting bug after performing in some plays. He decided to relocate again to New York City in 1992 to pursue an acting career.

Another drawcard to New York was that Carla, his future wife, whom he had met in Cape Town while on holiday, was living there.

In an interview with *The Christian Post*, Stelio said that his faith gives him discernment in his job.

"I've finally and recently learned the following: 'I know what to do with what I've been given.' And God has also generously navigated the relationships He's given me — teaching me to love other people, listen to them, lift them up, serve God, and serve them, and myself last.

"The journey has been fruitful. It's taken me to all corners of the world, working with sublimely gifted artists and planting spiritual seeds that make God's Kingdom, love and acceptance known."

Stelio often chooses projects that address Christianity in culture, like *Infidel*, which is about a persecuted

Christian in Egypt, and his faith also affects the roles he chooses.

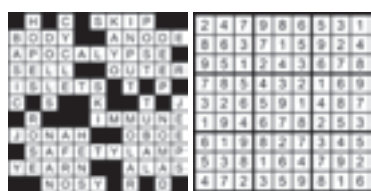
"I chase truth. There is that one common theme my characters have. I commit to making them real — neither perfect nor completely flawed. We all have flaws and redeeming qualities. I lean into that," he explains. "I refuse characters whose sins are either glorified without consequences or ones that seem unrealistically perfect. Perfect people don't exist."

Although he often plays villains who do terrible things, he believes that there is a difference between

roles that glorify or justify violence, and those where the bad guy either finds redemption or is punished. The second are the sort of villains Stelio chooses to play, so quite often his character ends up dying!

His latest projects as a producer include the upcoming football film *Under the Stadium Lights* starring Laurence Fishburne and Milo Gibson (Mel Gibson's son) and the upcoming Sci-Fi film *Destination Marfa* opposite Tony Todd, which releases on August 3.

The Chosen can be viewed free on the app of the same name.



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 info@challengenews.org
2. Use the resources in the green box on this page to find a Bible to read and more information regarding Christianity.
3. Keep praying. Talk to God anywhere, about anything. He is always listening, and you don't need a formula.
4. Find a Bible-teaching church to attend.

AS A NEXT STEP:

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 _____

Send to: cobusbritz@challnews.onmicrosoft.com
Phone 078 887 7030

All overseas enquiries are referred onto someone in their own country

I had a death wish but now I have joy

Nicholas Oballa wanted an education. But, in his words, "life was hard and my parents couldn't manage to afford my education anymore. I thought everybody was against me. I was unforgiving and ungrateful and lived with bitterness."

Nicholas, also known as Nick, tells *Challenge* that he was born into a humble family and that his parents were committed Christians. As hard times came upon them, though, Nick thought he could not deal with life anymore and found himself repeatedly asking God to let him die.

Instead, "in 2006, after I had graduated from primary level and was looking for more schooling, a friend took me to a Christian conference where I heard the message of salvation [the good news about Jesus saving us from our sins]," he says.

While there, he learned that he could not get a free ride to heaven just because his parents believed. He had to take that step of faith on his own.

"I was a church-goer," he affirms,



Nicholas Oballa

"But after listening to that sermon I knew that every knee will bow and every tongue will confess that Jesus is Lord."

So, Nick decided to make his own personal decision and receive Jesus into his life. "The preacher led me in a prayer of forgiveness and I repeated the prayer after him and then he prayed for me," he says of the remarkable experience.

It has been 13 years since Nick met Jesus and since then, his life has changed. "I have the peace of God in my life," he smiles. "When I battled with unforgiveness and bitterness, I read my Bible and found that Jesus is the Prince of peace. I have a love for God and as a result I have a love for other people."

Nick considers every challenge he faces as a lesson to strengthen his faith. "I have grown spiritually over the years," he says. "The hardest part of being a Christian is living in a corrupt world full of temptations. But the best part is to have verses like Philippians 4 and verse 13 to encourage me that I am not alone. The verse says: 'I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.'"

Nick says that his favourite passage from the Bible comes from Psalms 23 which starts: "The LORD is my shepherd, I lack nothing. He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside quiet waters; He refreshes my soul."

"Jesus turns lives around from sorrow to joy!" he exclaims. "When you find Jesus in your life you might not have everything you want, but He gives you peace in your heart. You can live without worries. Just cast your burdens to Him and He will care for you."

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	



Jessica Long of the USA competes in the women's 100m freestyle - S8 final during the Rio 2016 Paralympic Games in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. (Photo Atsushi Tomura/Getty Images)

INSET: Jessica in her prosthetics at The Women's Sports Foundation's 39th Annual Salute To Women In Sports And The Girls They Inspire Awards Gala on October 17, 2018 in New York City. (Photo Michael Loccisano/Getty Images)

SOMETIMES I JUST CAN'T

At 12 years old, Jessica Long swam in her first Paralympics Games.

As she turned her head to breathe, she said to the competitor next to her, "I did not come here to get second." And she didn't. Jessica won her first gold medal that day and went on to compete at four Paralympic games and receive 23 medals (13 of them gold) and more than 60 world championship medals.

As a child growing up with feelings of anger and rejection, Jessica had found her worth in excelling in swimming. She shared her story with the website iamsecond.com.

"When I was born I was put up for adoption by a young 16-year-old Russian girl because, due to a birth defect, she just wasn't able to care for me," Jessica recounts.

Jessica was born with fibular hemimelia, a congenital disorder where part or all of the fibular bone is missing. Jessica and another little boy from Russia were adopted by a couple in America.

"I did have a foot with three toes that they decided to amputate six months after I was adopted so I could be fitted in these little prosthetic legs and learn to walk just like everyone else," Jessica explains. "When I think back on my childhood, I didn't feel adopted. I just know I was angry – angry that I didn't have legs. Maybe that's why my birth mum didn't want me, because I didn't look like a normal person."

Jessica said she felt like she was a burden to her adoptive parents.

"Every time I grew I had to go to surgery to get the bone cut back and that was excruciating," she says. "I don't think I knew what I did wrong to have to keep going back in for surgery. I didn't think I could even cry in front of my parents, because I thought that if I cried that somehow they would send me back to Russia."

Jessica was raised in a Christian family and regularly attended church.

"What I heard a lot of is that God made me this way and God always had a plan for me and God loves me and I didn't like it," Jessica admits. "I knew I didn't want anything to do with this God that made me this way. To top it all off, I was born on a leap year so all of my life the calendar would skip me every four years before I had an actual birthday on February 29 and I think in my head as a little girl that just solidified how I felt about myself – that I was non-existent."

Jessica discovered that she excelled in sports, especially swimming.

"When I first joined the swim team I was 10 years old and I was the only disabled swimmer on the team," she says. "Most people didn't know I was missing my legs until I got out of the pool. I kept going back because honestly I just liked beating these girls with legs and it started to fulfil something in me – just earning love."

Jessica's family found out about

the Paralympic Games and at age 12 she was selected to represent America in the Athens Games, where she won her first Paralympic gold medal.

"I started getting sponsorships and winning awards," Jessica says. "I signed a deal with Nike and was in *Sports Illustrated* and getting commercials and I wanted to be perfect in everything that I did."

One year Jessica had 18 world record breaking performances. She began to find her worth in her success.

"My worth was in swimming, my identity was swimming, but at the same time I was just broken and sad a lot," she recalls. "I developed an eating disorder, I really pulled away from my relationships and my family and I realised that I had no control over my life."

Jessica said she was at a youth group Bible study one night when she realised she couldn't do it alone anymore.

"I got up and I made the walk to the front and I found this woman and I said, 'I want to give God my whole heart for once' and I prayed with her and as soon as I prayed it was the first time in my entire life that I felt enough. And then I was actually a part of God's family... I realised that God was prepping my heart for what was about to come."

Jessica was approached by American broadcast television network NBC about returning to Russia

to meet her birth mother. It was something she had always dreamed about so she agreed to go.

"It hit me all of a sudden as soon as we landed in Russia that maybe my birth family didn't want to see me," Jessica remembers. "I felt really scared - why did I come here, why did I do this?"

Nervous, Jessica took the 18-hour train journey to her birth parents' home. She could hear her birth parents crying as she approached the house.

Their emotional reunion was filmed by NBC for a feature called *Long Way Home: The Jessica Long Story*.

"Something (my birth mum) kept saying was that she couldn't forgive herself for giving me up for adoption and I think if I had not accepted Christ as my Saviour I don't think I would have forgiven her either," Jessica says. "But it was

in that moment that I realised that God has forgiven me my whole life and I forgave my mum."

When Jessica returned to America she said she experienced a heart change but she also had a lot of questions.

"I realised that it's okay to have those questions," she explains. "It's okay to talk to God about it."

"Since accepting Christ as my Saviour I don't have to have it all together. He knows that I don't have it all together and I think it's something I still fight. I still fight that feeling of not being in control and I am constantly reminded every day that I need to give it to God. Every day when I put on these two prosthetic legs that are heavy and they still hurt me... I think it's honestly this really cool beautiful reminder that I can't do it on my own. As determined as I am, I just can't."

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