

NEW LIFE ON CUE

Running the race with grace

BY JANICE TEO

CHARIOTS of Fire, the 1981 movie about two British athletes at the 1923 Paris Olympics, is a show for the ages. It's more than 40 years old but its impact on me is undiminished, not just because of its iconic theme song or its sublime performances but because it brought to life for me one of the trickiest themes of the Bible – law and grace.

The film tells the true story of two runners as different as night and day: Jewish Cambridge student Harold Abrahams and Scottish missionary Eric Liddell. Abrahams, who battled anti-Semitism throughout his life, is a man with a chip the size of Mount Everest on his shoulder. When asked if he loves running, he replies: "I'm more of an addict. It's a compulsion with me, a weapon... against being Jewish."

His desire to win for personal glory, driven by the discrimination he faces as a Jew, is everything; when he loses a race the shame crushes him completely. "If I can't win I won't run!" he declares.

Contrast that to Liddell's



Eric Liddell wins the 1-mile relay at an International Athletics Meeting in 1924. Photo from Getty Images.

reason for running. In one scene he reassures his sister he hasn't forgotten his calling to be a missionary to China. "I believe God made me for a purpose – for China," he says, "but He also made me fast. And when I run, I feel His pleasure."

When he agonises over whether his running honours God, his father – himself a missionary to China – tells him: "run in God's name. And let the world stand back in wonder."

Abrahams judged himself by his performance and felt a failure; Liddell by the pleasure he gave God and felt empowered.

This sums up for me the difference between what is commonly referred to in Christianity as "living under law" or "living under grace".

The Bible says that today, thanks to Jesus Christ, Christians are no longer "under law but under grace" (Romans 6:14). But what does that mean? What does it look like?

The "law" refers to the demanding moral standard God set with the Ten Commandments.

In and of itself the law is good, but keeping it perfectly is an impossible burden. Many have tried; all but one have failed. Living under law describes a person who thinks he has to earn his salvation by doing good works and never breaking the rules.

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Moses Mutema (right) didn't drink or smoke. His weakness was hanging out in bars playing pool.

"I really enjoyed doing that," says the 29-year-old Zambian man with a chuckle.

Then in 2012 he met a preacher who shared the gospel with him (the good news that Jesus Christ came to Earth to die for our sins) and committed his life to God.

"I used to go to church every Sunday when I was growing up. My parents brought me. But I did not know the Lord very well," he tells Challenge News.

"But when that preacher prayed with me to give my life to God that day, I felt the light of God coming into my heart. That day was June 22, 2012.

"Before that I never used to enjoy being in the house, only going to bars to play pool. My specific sin was not being in God's presence."

Moses' appetites changed completely.

Bars lost their appeal for him; instead he spent his free time at church.

"I loved being in church at all times," he shares.

His change of heart was more than just a fleeting feeling – Moses



was so transformed that he is studying to become a pastor.

Speaking of the change in his life, he says: "The love of God came into my heart – so much of His light. I started loving Jesus more and more.

"Through His Word and prayer,

the Lord led me to a completely new attitude, lifestyle and perspective on life," he adds.

"God is everything to me; I always depend on Him in every situation and I overcome my challenges through prayer to my living God." ●

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BACK PAGE



EYES ON THE PRIZE COCO GAUFF

From lifeless to new life



Sherry-Lee Smit struggled with rejection and self-hatred throughout her childhood. Life was tough for her growing up in Pretoria, with her family losing their home a few times due to her father's drug addiction.

"I didn't have a lot of consistency or security," the now 20-year-old tells Challenge News.

"As a result of my dad not being present for most of my life, I shut down totally. I was numb to any emotion other than the fake happiness I showed to the outside world."

As a teenager, Sherry developed an eating disorder and struggled with anxiety.

"I was slowly losing strength and the will to live. I wanted to quit school because life had just got too much for me and I was basically going through it alone. I pushed away anyone who got a little too close to my heart because I thought it would be easier to hurt them before they got the chance to hurt me."

She didn't have relationships with her parents or sisters, unable to forgive anyone who had hurt her and turned her into a "lifeless being".

After she finished high school, Sherry was at rock bottom.

"I just couldn't handle this life anymore," she recalls. "I wanted to give up but something in me stopped it."

She had grown up attending church but due the hurt she had faced in life she couldn't comprehend a loving God.

● Turn to page 2

Ask Y: Peter Meadows answers your questions about God

QUESTION: I'M AN ATHEIST – WHAT DO YOU SAY TO THAT?



THANKS for even asking what I think. And for giving me the opportunity to ask you a few questions myself.

So you are an atheist – a word taken from the Greek and which roughly translates as 'no God'. And you are not alone. There is no shortage of highly intelligent people who have the same conviction.

Which brings me to my first question if I may. Out of all the vast knowledge existing in the universe, how much of it do you personally possess? What do you reckon - five percent, one percent, perhaps only 0.001 percent? Or even less?

One thing seems sure. However much you know can only be the merest fraction of all there is to be known. Which leads me to another question. Is it remotely possible for God to exist somewhere in that vast area of knowledge that is not yet yours?

Let me put it another way, is there a spider in your room right now? I assume you can't see one, hear one, or smell one. But despite all that, who would be so bold as to say, with absolute certainty, 'This room has no spider'? Because there might just be one outside the limited knowledge they have.

In the same way could, just possibly, God exist beyond your present understanding, knowledge, and experience? What you don't

know is vastly bigger than what you do know – and isn't it just possible God could be there too?

If you are honest to say 'yes' then you are not actually an atheist at all but an agnostic – a word that comes from the Greek and simply means 'not knowing'. And it's a highly respectable name for anyone to have. There is nothing wrong with saying 'I don't know' – unless you are a man driving and needing directions.

So here's my final question – what kind of agnostic are you? I ask because there are two kinds. There's the ornery agnostic who says, 'Not only do I not know if there is a God, neither do you or anyone. And nor will you know, now or for ever.' It's a kind of open mouth and closed mind approach.

In contrast, the ordinary agnostic says 'I don't know – but I'm open to knowing, should the right information come my way.' If that's you then keep asking the questions – and reading this column month by month – to see what clues there might be.

Peter Meadows is the co-author with Joseph Steinberg of *The Book of Y* the basis for the eight week Y Course that explores life's biggest questions.

If you have a Y Question relating to issues of faith and God Peter or Joseph will do their best to answer it. Send your question to: challenge@veritecm.com Subject: Y Course. We hope to publish their responses in future edition.

Rising to the Challenge

BY JANICE TEO

Abdul Hadji learned the hard way about fair-weather friends.

The gang of "street brothers" he had bonded with from the time he was 16 and considered to be his family deserted him when he went to jail at 23 for crimes including grievous bodily harm and drug dealing.

When he came out of prison two years later, he found himself alone, a drug addict with nowhere to go and no-one he could count on.

Abdul didn't start out on the wrong side of the tracks. Moving to Western Australia from Somalia with his mother when he was two, he tells *Challenge News* he had "a great childhood, even though my father was never in the picture". He did his primary education at the Australian Islamic College. When he was 12, his mother sent her increasingly rebellious son to Egypt for three years to be further immersed in Muslim studies and culture.

"I was a good Muslim boy. I prayed five times a day and learned my Koran. I had a lot of freedom, but my life there was quite disciplined because I had family friends who looked after me."

He returned to Western Australia in 2010. Tragedy struck the following year when his mother, who was pregnant and planning to get married, died suddenly. Her baby died too.

Abdul was 16. Heartbroken, lonely and without any parental supervision, Abdul began hanging out with the wrong crowd – the gang was the closest thing to a family he could find.

"I tried to numb myself with drinks and drugs. Nobody would help because the Muslim community frowned on my behaviour."

Soon he was not only taking drugs but became "a functioning addict" hooked on meth.

"Meth makes you crazy. You lose all your morals, your self-respect. That's what happened to me."

His path became "very dark" as he drifted into more and more crime – drug-dealing, break-ins, robberies and assaults.

His crimes led to several short stints in prison but he faced a much lengthier sentence in 2017 when he was arrested on a charge of grievous bodily harm.

He spent six months in remand while his case was investigated and was very relieved when he was handed a suspended sentence for the crime.

The time he spent in remand taught him one thing – "I realised I didn't have any real friends or family," he



Abdul Hadji

says. "My gang family deserted me. After my arrest and sentencing I knew I needed to change. I honestly thought I would be dead by 30 if I didn't change my life."

However, without the resources or contacts to change his environment, he drifted as a "functioning addict" for the next five years working odd jobs and still dealing drugs.

Then, while getting high at a friend's house one day, he met Ian, a young Christian who dropped in occasionally.

Ian invited Abdul to church and he agreed to go.

"Why did I go? I wanted to go somewhere where there weren't any drug people. I knew I couldn't change if I stayed in the same environment." Abdul began going to church. "The music was awesome, the people were friendly.

There was no judgement. Also, I saw that Ian was always so joyful and at peace. I wanted what he had – and he said all of that came from Jesus." He was, however, still hopelessly hooked on drugs. So when a friend told him about Teen Challenge, the international Christian rehabilitation organisation, he jumped at the chance and enrolled in its residential program in October 2021.

"When I first got here, I wasn't the nicest person," he admits. "I was hostile and disagreeable."

But within six months Abdul changed completely and committed his life to Jesus Christ.

What made the difference? "I was loved as I had never been loved before. The people here loved on me without anything to gain. They just accepted me, even with my bad attitude.

"And I learned about Christ. The biggest thing for me was the concept of grace – of His freely given salvation. Growing up my faith had been very works-based. I had to earn God's favour. But Jesus gives it freely. You just have to accept it.

"I saw that same quality in the people here." Today Abdul is on staff at Teen Challenge. He completed his studies as a support worker and works as a mentor and student leader.

"Jesus has changed everything about me. I no longer carry around all that anger and resentment.

"Today I can think about getting married and having a family one day – it's a miracle that I can actually think of doing that. I used to think I was too far gone to be fixed but that's just not true. God can change your life if you're willing to obey Him and do the work.

"Nothing is wasted in His kingdom. Everything you've been through can be a lesson for other people so they won't have to go through what you did."

Coffee Break CROSSWORD & SUDOKU

ACROSS

- Trickster, scammer
- Microscopic amount
- Slow graceful dance
- Situated atop
- Socialise upwardly
- Quick beginning (6,5)
- Carsick feeling
- Big shiny car, in short
- Electron opposite
- Small sheltered valley
- Engine part (3,5)

DOWN

- Indiana Jones prop
- "Thing" word
- A printing process
- Warren maker
- Olympic water sport
- Small domed sponge cake
- Very inquisitive
- Jacket fastener
- What history repeats
- 'That didn't hurt ___' (1,3)
- Sunday finale
- Ness is one
- Sulk aimlessly

SOLUTIONS PAGE 11



"Can't take my dog? I don't even know HOW to run without my dog."

5									
	8		2		3				
		7			9	8	1	2	
		3			4		7		
	6	9				5	4		
	4		6			9			
3	1	6	9			7			
			8		6		2		
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FROM LIFELESS TO NEW LIFE

• From page 1

However, she decided to attend a Christian gap year programme called Target Life and it was there that she put her faith in Jesus and truly began to follow Him.

"I committed to [read the Bible] and search for the truth and the freedom I've longed for since I was a little girl... I realised that you could either deal with struggles alone or you could deal with them with Jesus by your side, guiding and comforting you.

"On March 4, 2022, I had a vision of Jesus sitting next to me, showing His love for me and for the first time I felt loved. It was so much more than anything I've experienced in my life. From that day I have never doubted that I am a creation of the Most High and He loves me more than I will ever know and understand. And that gives me peace."

Sherry received forgiveness from God when she confessed her sins to him but she says she also experienced other changes. "God saved me from myself – my self-hatred, my negativity and my mindset. I was transformed. Even though I still struggle and find it difficult to trust sometimes, it gives me peace because being perfect is not a requirement to follow Jesus. All I need to do is choose Him and make Him King of my life."

Once she used to be unable to look at herself in the mirror, but now Sherry says, "I can look at myself and

be proud of who I see. I love the person I've become and I can love others around me because the Saviour of the world first loved me."

Sherry says her relationship with her parents has even improved.

"It's not perfect but I can see them as human beings who also struggled so they deserve to be loved and receive grace as well.

"Jesus didn't necessarily change my circumstances but He gave me tools and strength to get through them with Him. He changed my heart to be able to conquer my circumstances. He is my first love, my rock, my strength, my hero. I have never been able to love someone to the fullest, but now I can surely say with all my heart, I love Jesus with all I have.

"I am physically, emotionally and mentally healed. I can walk in forgiveness and freedom because He was painfully and brutally murdered for my wrongdoing. I feel His presence constantly all around me, where I didn't think it could be possible. There can't be enough words to describe what He did for me and I will never be able to thank Him enough for saving me."

Sherry encourages those reading her story that, "God never promised that life would be easy, but doing it with Him makes it so much more worth it. You can't exchange His love, peace and joy for any worldly thing. It's indescribable."

HAMMERING HOME THE TRUTH

He was one of the highest earning music stars of the 1990s, the first rapper ever to have an album go diamond.

He sold 50 million records. According to news sources, at his peak he was worth US\$70 million and was bringing in US\$30 million a year. He won three Grammys and Record of the Year and a string of other prestigious awards.

It's safe to say you couldn't go anywhere in the '90s without hearing *U Can't Touch This* or *2 Legit 2 Quit* or seeing his trademark parachute pants on someone. The song was right - there were very few who could touch MC Hammer.

His lifestyle was as lavish as you might expect - he owned 17 luxury cars, a private jet, two helicopters, 21 race horses and spent an estimated \$US35 million overhauling his California mansion - including, it was reported, a pool in the shape of the pants he immortalized.

The bubble of bounty lasted five years and then, not surprisingly, the money ran out. The entertainer filed for bankruptcy in 1996 with over \$13m in debt. Hammer time indeed.

In a YouTube video with Genesis Music, Hammer, whose real name is Stanley Burrell, talks about his experience with fame and fortune.

"Fame is a double-edged sword and very few people can really deal with fame," he says. "It is very costly; if you're not careful on how

to tame fame then fame will tame you."

This led to his fall from favour in the music industry and the performer faded into obscurity. These events plus the death of his friend and collaborator, the rapper Tupac Shakur, triggered a return to Christianity, the faith of his childhood and he became an ordained minister in the Memphis-based Church of God in Christ.

In 1997, he appeared on the Trinity Broadcasting Network. Referencing the Bible verse, "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here" (2 Corinthians 5:17), he declared: "Tonight we are officially burying the old man. I want to walk sincerely in the newness of life with Christ."

Talking about his comeback to Christ, he told the LA Times: "Being a prodigal son took me away from the relationship I once knew. I just wanted to get back to the place I once had in my relationship with Jesus."

"Whether the bankruptcy played any role in my refocusing, that's great. Hallelujah I hope it did! But the most important part of what occurred to me was missing the love of God in the way that I had known it."

In another interview, he was



MC Hammer at The Richard Rogers Theater in New York City. (Photo by Bruce Glikas/ Bruce Glikas).

quoted as saying: "I had an up-close and personal conversation with God and He spanked me. I deserved it."

Hammer actually committed his life to Christ in 1984. He attended Bible studies and church almost daily, joined street outreach teams and formed a Gospel band called the Holy Ghost Boys.

But this early zeal petered out as commercial success landed. Even though he promised God he would include one praise song on every album, he was sucked into what he calls "some serious junk".

The business became an idol. He told *Charisma* magazine "The 'business' drug takes all your time away from God, from the family."

"You create a utopia around you so you don't have to deal with the reality that you're not in the will of God. You wake up and realise you're a backslider."

He decided to turn back to the Lord but it wasn't easy. In addition to bankruptcy he suffered a serious knee injury and the trauma of his

wife's cancer diagnosis.

However, he says God spoke to him in a dream and said: "You have suffered mentally and physically but if you keep your love for Me you can come out."

Hammer clung on to those words and says God not only brought him through his crisis but also healed both him and his wife.

Describing how he went from millionaire rapper to spreading the gospel, he says on the YouTube video: "One day I woke up and I said 'this is not me - enough is enough'. I knew in my heart that I was no longer a part of the body of Christ."

He told his pastor Willie Harper: "I'm ready for the mission God's given me. I plan on being obedient."

Hammer has gone into evangelism in a big way, devoting time to prison and youth ministries and preaches often. He also featured prominently in 1040: Christianity in the New Asia, a documentary that examines the growth of Christianity in Asia.

In 1997, Hammer was invited to World Gospel '97 in Barbados and spoke at the local jail.

According to the website believer-sportal.com, the organiser said "he preached until his shirt was soaked." Forty-two inmates were saved.

A self-described "Super Geek" he has reinvented himself as a tech investor and consultant.

But the most important thing to the redeemed rapper is his walk with God.

"I want the world to know that all my blessings are coming through Jesus," he says. "God is now a daily presence in my life versus just a convenient one."

"I am honoured that Jesus has taken a wretch like me and said I got some work for you to do."

His famous moniker reflects his new purpose in life. Where MC used to mean Master of Ceremonies, he says it now means "Man of Christ." ●



IN THE DARK ABOUT DEATH?

BY PETER BRAIN

THERE are many humorous graveyard inscriptions. Recently I came across one that said, "Here lies my wife: here let her lie! Now she's at rest, and so am I." Another said, "I told you I was sick."

Humour is one way of handling death, which we all know is anything but funny. There are other ways of coping with death, and all the uncertainty and fear it engenders.

Some say there is nothing after death; what we see is all there is. Others rely on reincarnation as an explanation for death.

Still others trivialise the awfulness of death by saying that death is just a natural part of life. And others, that everyone will go to Heaven or that God will give us a second chance after we die.

It's all fairly confusing, and sad, don't you think? Especially since God would neither have us fearful nor living in the dark about death and eternity.

There are some who would say that the Christian faith is escapism - but what if, as Dr I. Howard Marshall writes, "it is the only ultimate realism"?

Now, to make a claim like that there must be some clear public domain evidence. Wonderfully, there is. Marshall reminds us that "it rests foursquare on the fact that Jesus has defeated death, and anybody who can defeat death can defeat anything."

The coming of Jesus into our world gives us a new way of looking at things.

He offers life eternal to all who trust Him now and will abide by the choice of all who refuse Him with death eternal. There is no reincarnation or second chance. The choice of eternity hangs on the decision we make about Jesus now.

One man said that "at death I shall change my place, but not my company", and another that "death has been described as the old family servant who opens the door to welcome the children home."

For those trusting in Jesus, death holds no more fear than going to sleep at night. And it is all because of Jesus.

We see this confidence in John Newton, who gave us the hymn *Amazing Grace*, when he said to one of his visitors toward the end of his life, "I am like a person going on a journey in a stage coach, who expects its arrival every hour and is frequently looking out of the window for it." And the reason for his confidence was revealed by his friend who heard his final words, "My memory is nearly gone but I remember two things: that I am a great sinner and that Christ is a great Saviour". ●

Running the race with grace

● From page 1

He fears any infraction will cost him his salvation. Only Jesus Christ, the Son of God, perfectly satisfied the requirements of the law. In dying on the cross, He suffered the punishment meant for us so that we could have His righteousness. This then, is grace - the unconditional, unmerited favour, forgiveness and kindness of God bought for us by Jesus' sacrifice. To receive it, all we have to do to be saved now is to accept Him, by faith, as our Lord and Saviour. But does that mean the rule book goes out the window and now there is no requirement for obedience or reverence?

As the apostle Paul says, "Surely not!" (Romans 6:15)

Grace may be free, but it cost Jesus Christ His life; Christians have a responsibility to conduct our lives in a manner worthy of that sacrifice.

Again, Liddell provides the perfect example of the submitted life of the Christian - for all the right reasons. Not out of fear of losing his salvation, but because he lived for a higher purpose.

Upon discovering the heats for his event were to be held on a Sunday and he would have to miss church, the devout Christian flatly refused to run. When pressured by the British Olympic Association and the Prince of Wales to change his mind for King and country, Liddell replies:


"God made countries; God makes kings and the rules by which they govern... those rules say that the Sabbath is His. I, for one, intend to keep it that way." When challenged not to be "impertinent" he retorts: "The impertinence lies, sir, with those who seek to influence a man to deny his beliefs!" Contrast that to Abrahams, whose entire self-worth depended on victory on the track. Talking to a friend just before the race, he says: "I will... look down that (100m) corridor... with 10 lonely seconds to justify my whole existence. But will I?" Liddell's words - "when I run, I feel His pleasure!" - are to me at the heart of the Christian's relationship with Jesus.

We are so happy when we please our earthly parents just because we love them and they love us; how much more magnified is that joy when Christians experience the same delight with their heavenly Father.

As Liddell preaches: "So who am I to say, 'Believe, have faith,' in the face of life's realities?... I have no formula for winning the race. Everyone runs in her own way, or his own way."

"And where does the power come from, to see the race to its end? From within. Jesus said, 'Behold, the Kingdom of God is within you. If with all your hearts, you truly seek Me, you shall ever surely find Me.' If you commit yourself to the love of Christ, then that is how you run a straight race."

I shall not tell you how the movie ends. Suffice it to say that there is a twist worthy of any blockbuster at the end. Give yourselves a treat and watch it sometime.

●  The Eric Liddell 100, a celebration of the iconic Scotsman's life and achievements, is slated to be held in Scotland this year, the centenary of Liddell's historic success at the 1924 Olympic Games in Paris.

I HAVE HOPE AND STRENGTH

DESPITE a difficult childhood, being raised by an alcoholic grandmother, Jestina Jonasi was a mostly well-behaved child.

"I could steal items such as milk and sugar," she admits. As an adult she struggled with anger and unforgiveness.

Jestina married and had two children. She was a dressmaker and travelled from Zimbabwe to South Africa to sell her clothing. She tells Challenge News that one night she had a dream about a hymn. "The song drove me to go to church," she recalls.

"I attended an all-night prayer event. I decided to become a Christian because I felt that my life was incomplete without Jesus. I prayed that I wanted Jesus to rule my life and I asked God to forgive my sins." That was 36 years ago and Jestina, now 62, still attends the same church.

"When I became a Christian my life changed for the better," Jestina attests. "I felt a burden lift. I made a lot of friends as I fellowshiped with others... God has become my hope and strength. Whenever I feel low or have a challenge, I always turn to God."

"My children have done great as I dedicated them to God and Jesus. I overcome challenges by being prayerful. I would like other people to know that the best part of life is to rejoice in Jesus. Christian life is superb. You will have peace of mind if you turn to Jesus in times of need." ●



Jestina Jonasi

God's man for me!

I WAS VISITING South Africa with a team of Christians from Australia. Our visit saw us enter several prisons, telling the prisoners that Jesus Christ was reaching out to them so that they might believe in Him, Jesus, as the One who would forgive their sins if they entrusted their lives to Him.

Our team was accompanied inside each prison by people who had, prior to our visit, already become Christians, and were desiring that their fellow inmates might also trust in Jesus.

In one particular prison our team had arrived at a time of day when the prisoners were permitted to gather on a sports oval. The oval was surrounded by a tall wall, on which were placed several guard towers. The enclosed area had several marked out soccer pitches; games were already in play when we arrived. There were also exercise and open areas larger than the soccer pitches for the prisoners to mingle, walk, chat, and just perhaps be away from their cell blocks for a time. There was much shouting and noise from soccer games.

The entry to this large area was through a narrow gate, allowing one person through at a time. As our team of visitors and prison Christians gathered together on the edge of the oval, Thabo, the leader of the prisoners, spoke directly to me, telling me go forward [to hand out Challenge Good News Paper]. I asked him, "how far should I go away from our main group, even to the far end?" He said "Yes, and God will go with you".

I handed out newspapers, greeting men, shaking hands, looking into their faces for a brief second. The papers were going like hotcakes as I continued walking among the groups of men.

Then I felt someone brush my side. He quickly assured me that Thabo had directed him to stay with me.

This was such a simple but powerful lesson for me. Thabo had cared enough about me that he had provided a "guardian angel of sorts" to look after me as I walked here and there in a very unfamiliar place. It spoke to me very deeply of the power of God to change a person's heart to care about others.

God was caring for me at that moment. That's something I never want to forget!

— BOB



PAUL & SILAS IN PRISON!

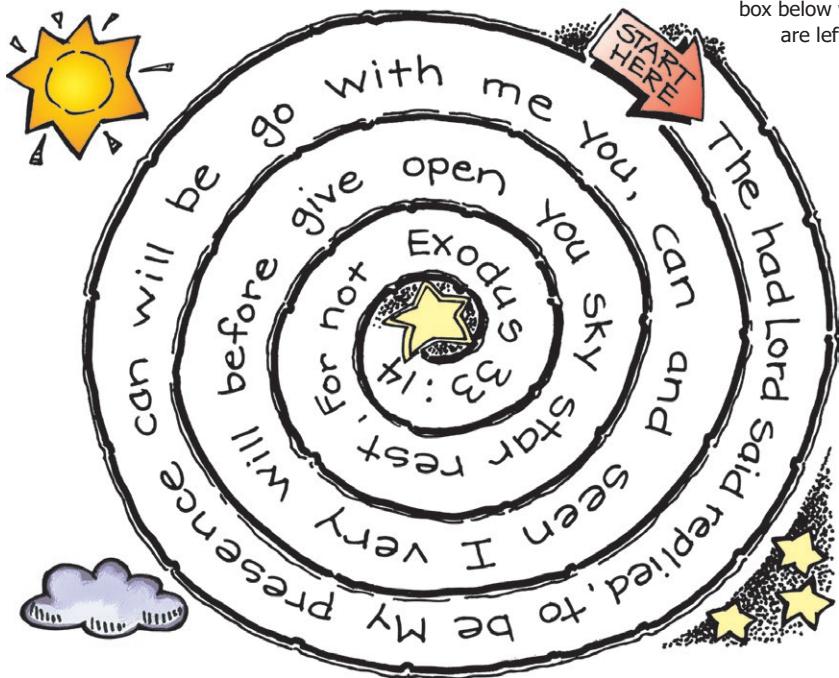
FOR YOU TO COLOR

SPIRAL OF THE WORD

Go around the circle, crossing out the words in the box below with a bright crayon. The words that are left will show you a special Bible verse.

WORDS TO CROSS OUT

HAD	SAID
TO BE	CAN
BE	ME
CAN	SEEN
VERY	BEFORE
OPEN	SKY
STAR	FOR NOT



Did You Know?

1. When Peter was imprisoned by King Herod for preaching about Jesus, God sent his angel who set Peter free and led him out of the prison to safety.

2. When Paul and Silas were imprisoned in Philippi for preaching about Jesus, God sent an earthquake which set them free, but instead of escaping, they told the jailer about Jesus. Falling on his knees, the jailer asked, "What must I do to be saved?" and that night he and his whole household gave their hearts to Jesus.

3. John Bunyan wrote his famous story, *Pilgrim's Progress*, while he was in prison for preaching about Jesus. When he was first married John could neither read nor write. After his wife taught him how, John eventually wrote 59 books, many of them while he was in prison, to help people come to know God and live for Him.



SPOT 12 DIFFERENCES



FAMOUS PRISONERS

This puzzle tells of some famous prisoners and what happened to them. See if you can find them and fill in the squares on the prison wall.

ANGEL
DANIEL
DEN
DREAM

JAILER
JOHN
JOHN
JOSEPH

LIONS
PAUL
PETER
SILAS

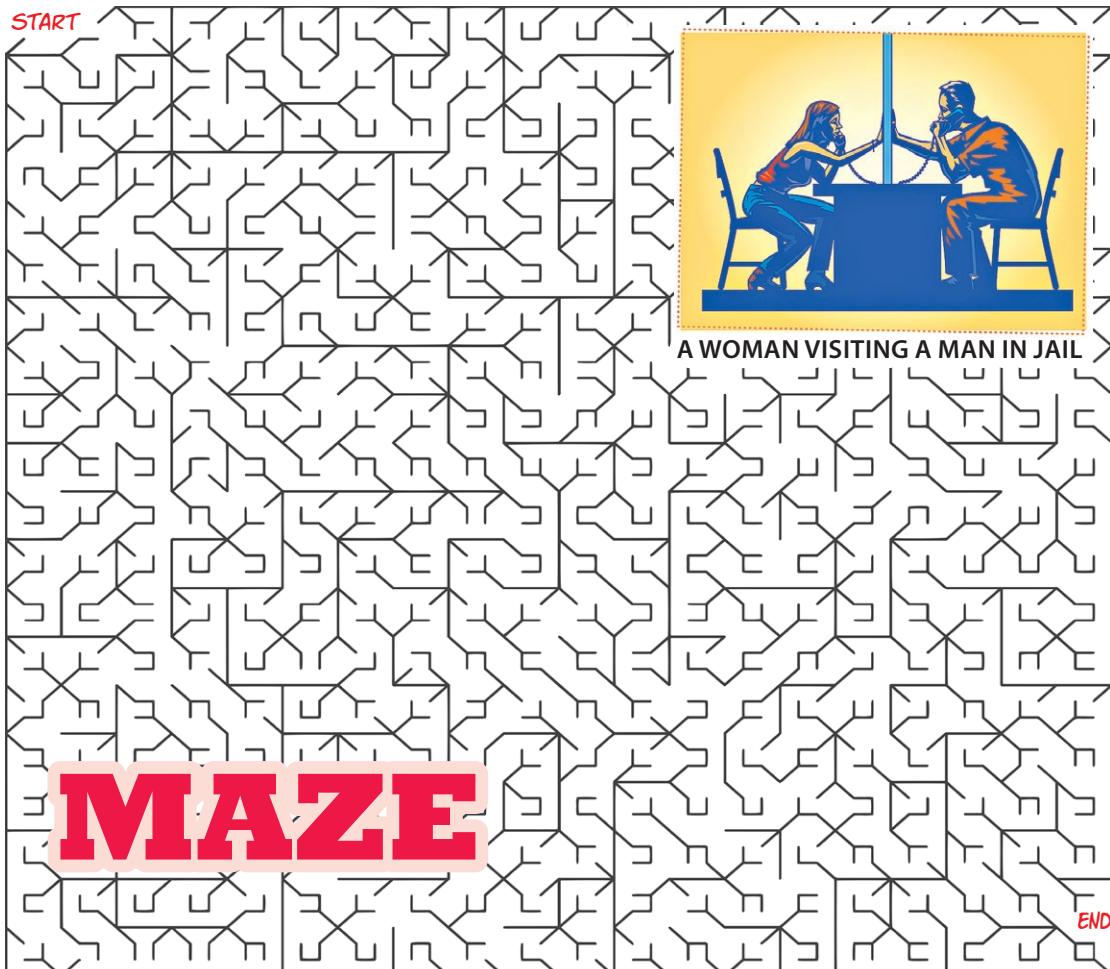
ACROSS

- Who was thrown into the lions den?
- Who was set free from prison by an angel?
- Who was falsely imprisoned in Egypt?
- Peter was taken from prison by an
- Daniel was thrown into the lions ...
- Who sang in prison with Paul?

DOWN

- God gave Joseph the interpretation of Pharaoh's
- Daniel was thrown into the
- King Herod put the Baptist in prison
- The
- Bunyan wrote *Pilgrim's Progress* in prison.
- and Silas prayed and sang hymns to God in prison.

START

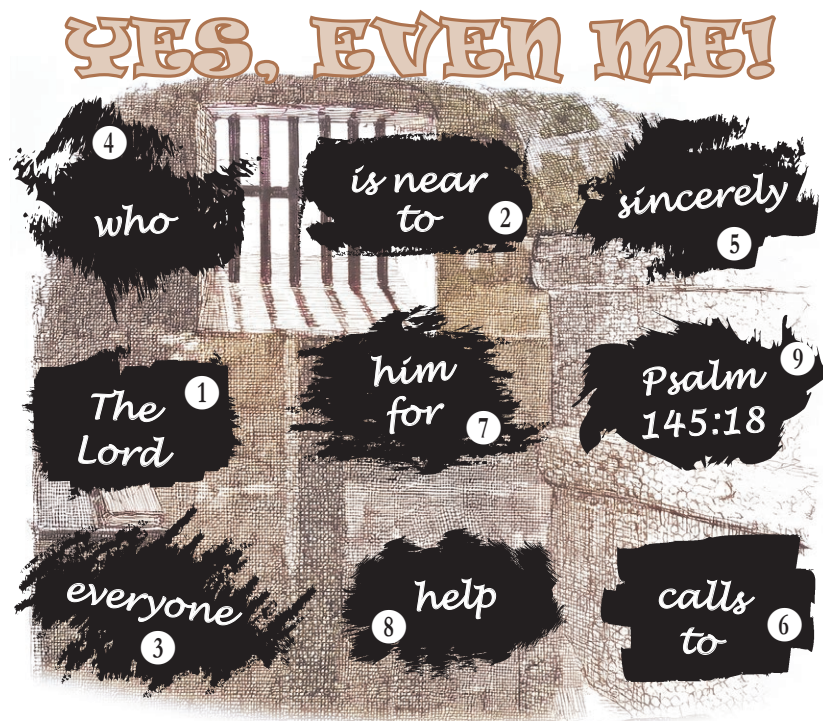


A WOMAN VISITING A MAN IN JAIL

MAZE

END

YES, EVEN ME!



4 who

is near to 2

sincerely 5

The Lord 1

him for 7

Psalms 145:18 9

everyone 3

help 8

calls to 6

The Lord himself goes before you and will be with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged. Deuteronomy 31:8

FALLEN VERSE

N								C		
S										
			T							
			G			.				
R	M					8	:	3	9	

F R O T F R H G E L A V E
 R O P A N N O 8 C U S
 N E O A I A E D O N
 S O M H T S T 3 9
 M G

The letters are jumbled directly beneath the box they are to go in. Place the obvious letters first, then the remainder. Cross them out as you go. Christians in prison would certainly be encouraged by this Bible verse!

LETTER SKIP

Though in jail for their beliefs, Paul and Silas told others about Jesus Christ.

To find out what they told their jailer, start at the ➤ and write a letter on every other blank. Then go to the ▶ and again write a letter on every other blank.

➤ B L E E N H L R J S S N Y U I L E A E
 ▶ E I V I T E O D E U A D O W L B S V D

Acts 16:31

A BIBLE VERSE FOR EVERY DAY

FOLLOW THE DAILY LIGHT

YOUR WORD IS
 A LAMP FOR MY
 FEET AND A LIGHT
 FOR MY JOURNEY.
 PSALM 119:105

CHAPTER & VERSE: QUESTION AND ANSWERS FROM THE VERSES GIVEN

1	Isaiah 40:28	Who is God?
2	John 4:24	Is God a human?
3	Isaiah 66:1&2	Where is God?
4	Rev. 21:5&6	How long has God existed?
5	Isaiah 46:9	Is there more than one God?
6	1 John 3:20	Is there anything He doesn't know?
7	Isaiah 40:26	Where can we see His power?
8	Genesis 2:7	What did He breathe into people?
9	Psalms 139:1-4	Does God know everything about us?
10	Psalms 139:9&10	Does God always know where we are?
11	Psalms 139:5	Is God and His power always with us?
12	Isaiah 46:10	Does God know the future?
13	Psalms 145:1-3	Why should God be praised?
14	1 John 4:8	What word describes God?
15	Matthew 6:9	How is God's name to be treated?
16	Isaiah 43:13	What can't anyone escape from?
17	Matthew 28:19	God is 1 God but 3 Persons: name them
18	John 14:9	Who is God the Father like?
19	1 John 4:14	What is the special work of Jesus the Son?
20	John 16:12-14	What is the work of God the Holy Spirit?
21	John 1:11&12	Who may be God's children?
22	Ephesians 1:4&5	When did God choose us to be His?
23	John 1:1-4	Through Whom did God make all things?
24	John 1:14	What did the Word become?
25	John 1:14	Whose Son is He?
26	John 14:6	Who is the way?
27	Acts 4:12	Is Jesus the only one who can save us?
28	Ephesians 2:8&9	Can our own efforts save us?
29	Ephesians 2:8&9	Our salvation is Who's gift?
30	Romans 8:39	What can separate us from God's love?

Prison words SEARCH

LEFT OVER LETTERS WILL COMPLETE A BIBLE VERSE

T N O I T N E T E D Y O U S W
 N I N C A R C E R A T E I E D
 E S C H A I N S I L L V N P
 M F N M C B E F R D A I U C E
 N F S O A O E E E S T O I U T
 R U H N E N N T D P P E P S E
 E C A S E G A F A M D + R T R
 T D C T + I N C I J + P I O +
 N N K O N + S U L N + A S D +
 I A L C + + R + D E E U O Y +
 + H E K D N A M E R S L N + +
 + + S S + + B + R E L I A J +

- BARS
- CAPTIVE
- CHAINS
- CONFINE
- CUSTODY
- DETAIN
- DETENTION
- DUNGEON
- HANDCUFFS
- IMPOUND
- INCARCERATE
- INTERNMENT
- JAILER
- MANACLES
- PAUL
- PETER
- PRISON
- REMAND
- SHACKLES
- SILAS
- STOCKS

If the Son sets you free, _____
 _____ John 8:36

Afrikaans translation

Van Godsdienste tot verhouding

“Om in ‘n motorhuis gebore te word, maak nie van jou ‘n kar nie, net so min as om in ‘n Christen familie gebore te word, van jou ‘n Christen sal maak.”

Die pastoor se woorde het Cathrine Jack tot in haar diepste geskok. Sy het in ‘n godsdienstige gesin in Chegutu, Zimbabwe grootgeword, en sy het deur al die mosies gegaan soos voorgeskryf word deur die denominasie, om as ‘n Christen beskou te word. Was dit nie genoeg nie?

Ses jaar vroeër, in 1982, het Cathrine verlief geraak en getrou met ‘n aantreklike jong man. Hy was ‘n wedergebore Christen (iemand wat van hulle sondes bekeer is, en hulle tot Christus wend vir hulle redding.) “Hy het my gevra of ek Jesus as my persoonlike Here en Verlosser aan-geneem het, en ek het vir hom verduidelik dat ek in ‘n godsdienstige gesin gebore is, ek het niks in die lewe verkeerd gedoen nie, ek was ‘n baie nederige en gehoorsame meisie, en dit kwalifiseer my om ‘n kind van God te wees,” verduidelik sy.

“**Gebed is ‘n wapen of gereedskap waarop ek gedurende beproewings staatmaak.**”

“My man het God se plan van verlossing met my gedeel. (God het Jesus aarde toe gestuur om vir ons sondes aan die kruis te sterf).

“Dit het nie vir my sin gemaak nie, aangesien ek myself as ‘n Christen beskou het as gevolg van die inwydingssakramente waardeur ek as kind gegaan het. Ten spyte van hulle verskille het Cathrine saam

met haar man kerk begin bywoon.

Toe in 1988 het hulle ‘n herlewingsbyeenkoms bygewoon.

“By daardie byeenkoms het die besoekende pastoor oor die woord van verlossing gepreek. Hy het die vraag gevra of ‘n kind wat in ‘n motorhuis gebore word, beteken dat hy/sy ‘n kar is? Daar het ek besef dat om in ‘n Christen gesin gebore te word, kwalifiseer nie ‘n persoon om ‘n Christen te wees nie.

‘n Bekerings - uitnodiging is aan die einde van die diens gemaak, (‘n uitnodiging van die pastoor om Jesus te volg.) Ek het my vorentoe gehaas en Jesus as my persoonlike Verlosser aanvaar.”

Cathrine onthou dat die Bybelers Johannes 3:16 gedeel, wat sê: “God het die wêreld so lief gehad dat Hy Sy enigste Seun gegee het, sodat dié wat in Hom glo, nie verlore sal gaan nie maar die ewige lewe sal hê. Want God het Sy Seun in die wêreld gestuur, nie om die wêreld te veroordeel nie, maar dat die wêreld deur Hom gered kan word. Hy wat in Hom glo, word nie veroordeel nie ; maar hy wat nie glo nie, is alreeds veroordeel omdat hy nie geglo het in die Naam van die eniggebore Seun van God nie.”

Sy het ‘n gebed gebid, soortgelyk aan die gebed wat op bladsy 7 is, en haar lewe aan die Here toegewy.

“Dit was die draaipunt in my lewe. Van toe af tot nou toe het ek God gevolg.”

Cathrine het meer van God geleer deur die Bybel te lees en geestelike konferensies, Sondag kerkdienste, en selgroepe by te woon. “Tans is ek ingeskryf by ‘n plaaslike Bybelskool om ‘n beter begrip van die Bybel te kry,”deel sy. “Net om te weet dat ek ‘n kind van God is, dat Christus vir aan die kruis gesterf het, troos my.”

Nou 58, en die vrou van ‘n pastoor, ‘n inwoner van Chinhoyi, kan sy sien dat baie mense by kerke aansluit om verkeerde redes, soos om ‘n vriend of vriendin te volg, of deur ouers geforseer te word, of vir ‘n begrafnisvereniging.

Sy moedig sulke mense aan om werklik Jesus te volg en verwys na Romeine 6:23 : “Die loon wat die sonde gee, is die dood; die genadelewe wat God gee, is die ewige lewe in Christus Jesus ons Here.”

“Jesus Christus is die weg , die waarheid en die lewe vir die mensdom. Wanneer ek deur moeilike tye gaan, beskerm en vertroos Hy my altyd. Hy gee my krag om voort te gaan. Gebed is ‘n wapen waarop ek staat maak gedurende beproewings. Jesus Christus – God homself – was deur die duivel versoek, maar Hy het deur gebed en vas oorwin, so om Jesus te volg is my enigste hoop om uitdagings te oorkom.”

English translation

From religion to relationship

“Being born in a garage doesn’t make you a car, just like being born into a Christian family doesn’t make you a Christian.”

The pastor’s words shocked Cathrine Jack to the core. She was raised by a religious family in Chegutu, Zimbabwe and had undergone all the procedures required by the denomination to be considered a Christian. Wasn’t that enough?

Six years earlier, in 1982, Cathrine had fallen in love with and married a handsome young man who was a born again Christian [someone who has repented of their sins and turned to Christ for their salvation].

“He asked me whether I had accepted Jesus Christ as my personal Lord and Saviour and I explained to him that I was born in a religious family, I had not done anything wrong in life, I was a very humble and obedient girl so that qualified me to be a child of God,” she explains. “My husband shared with me God’s plan of redemption

[sending Jesus to earth to die for our sins on the cross]. To me it did not make any sense since I considered myself a Christian through [the initiation sacraments I completed as a child].”

Despite their differences, Cathrine started attending church with her husband.

Then in 1988, they attended a revival meeting.

“At that meeting the guest pastor preached the word of salvation. He gave an example that if a child is born in a garage, does it mean he/she is a car? From that point I realised that being born in a Christian family does not qualify one to be a Christian. An altar call [an invitation from the pastor to follow Jesus] was made at the end of the service. I rushed to the front and accepted Jesus Christ as my personal Saviour.”

Cathrine remembers John 3:16-18 was shared, which says: “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. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through Him. Whoever believes in Him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because they have not believed in the name of God’s one and only Son.”

She prayed a prayer similar to the one on page 7, dedicating her life to God.

“That was the turning point in my life. Since that time I have been following God.”

Cathrine learned more about God by reading her Bible, attending spiritual conferences, Sunday services and home groups.

“Right now I am enrolled at a local theological college to get more understanding of the Bible,” she shares. “Just knowing that I am a child of God, that Christ died for me on the cross comforts me.”

Now 58 and a pastor’s wife living in Chinhoyi, she can see that many people join churches for the wrong reasons such as following a friend, being forced by parents/guardians or for a burial society. She encourages those people to truly follow Jesus and refers to Romans 6:23: “For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

“Jesus Christ is the way, the truth and the life for mankind. When I go through difficult times He always protects and comforts me. He gives me strength to soldier on. Prayer is a weapon or tool I depend on during trials and tribulation. Jesus Christ – God Himself – was tried by the devil but He conquered through prayer and fasting so taking a leaf from Jesus Christ’s life is my only hope to overcome challenges.”



Zulu translation

Ukusuka enkolweni kuya ebuhlotsheeni

“Ukuzalelwa egarage akukwenzi imoto, kufana nokuzalelwa emndenini okholwayo kungakwenzi ikholwa.”

Lawomazwi kamfundisi amnyakazisa u Cathrine Jack ekujuleni. Wakhuliswa umndeni okholwayo e Chegutu, kwelaseZimbabwe wayenza yonke imigomo yebandla yokuthi abe umKristu. Kwakwanele na?

Emnyakeni eyisithupha edlule, ngo1982, uCathrine waqoma ibhungu ashada nalo futhi lingumKristu (umuntu ozelwe kabusha ophendukile ezonweni zakhe wanikela impilo yakhe ku Kristu).

“Langibuza lelibhungu ukuthi ngimamukele uJesu Kristu njengeNkosi noMsindisi wempilo yami ngathi ngiphuma ekhaya elikhulwayo, angekenzi isiphambuko emolweni yami, ngiyintombazane ezithobile futhi elalelayo lokho kungenza ngibe umKristu.” Esichazela.”

Umyeni wami wangichazela ngohlelo lukaNkulunkulu lokuhlengwa (Lokuthumela uJesu emhlabeni ukuzofela izono zethu esphambanweni). Kumina akungiphanga ngqondo ngoba ngangazazi ngingumKristu (ngezifundo zesakramente azenza esakhula).”

Noma babengaboni ngaso linye, uCathrine waqala ukuhamba nomyeni wakhe esontweni labo. Ngonyaka ka 1988, kwabakhona imvuselelo abaya kuyona.”

Kulezonkonzo umfundisi owayemeyiwe washumayela izwi lensindiso, wenza isibonelo sokuthi uma umtwana ezalelwa egarage lokho kumenza imoto na?

Kwahlwa kimina ukuthi ukuzalelwa ekhaya lamaKristu akukwenzi umKristu.

Isimemo (senziwa umfundisi uma eqeda ukushumayela sokulandela uJesu) wasenza ngaphuthuma ngaya phambili ukuyokwamukela uJesu Kristu njengomsindisi wempilo yami.”

Uyakhumbula uCathrine ukuthi bavula uJohane 3:16-18.”

Ngokuba uNkulunkulu walithanda izwe kangaka waze wanikela ngeNdodana yakhe ezelwe yodwa ukuba yilowo nalowo okholwa iYona angabhubhi kepha abe nokuphila okuphakade. UNkulunkulu akayithumelanga iNdodana yakhe ukuba yahlulele izwe kepha ukuba izwe lisindiswe ngayo.

Okholwa iYona akayikulahlwa, kepha ongakhulwa iYona usehliliwe ngoba engakhulwa egameni leNdodana kaNkulunkulu.” Wathandaza umthandazo ofana nalona osekhasini 7, ukuze amukele iNdodana kaNkulunkulu.

“Kwaba ushintsho empilweni yami. Kusuka ngalelola ngisamlandela uNkulunkulu.”

UCathrine wafunda ngoNkulunkulu ngokufunda ibhayibheli, ngokuya kumaconference, nangokukhonzisa nasenkonzweni zasemakhaya. “Manje usebhalise eskoleni sebhayibheli ukuyofunda kabanzi ngebhayibheli,” esitshela.”Ukwazi ukuthi ngingumKristu nokuthi uJesu wangifela esphambanweni kuyangiduduzela.”

Useneminyaka ewu58 manje ushade nomfundisi uyababona abantu bengena emasontweni ngezizathu ezingaphusile njengokulandela umngani, kwenziswa abazali nomasngwabisansane.

Ukhuthaza labobantu ukumlandela ngempela uJesu esinika kwabaseRoma 6:23 “Umvuzo wesono ungukufa, kepha isipho sikaNkulunkulu singukuphila okuphakade ngoKristu uJesu iNkosi yethu.”

“UJesu uyindlela , neqiniso, nokuphila kwabantu. Uma ngihamba ekhaya ekhathini ezinzima uyangivikela futhi uyangiduduzela. Unginikezela amandla okoqhubeka. Umkhuleko uyisikhali engincika kuso ngesikhathi sobunzima. UJesu Kristu onguNkulunkulu isibili walingwa usathane kepha wanqoba ngomthandazo nokuzila , ngokufunda kuYena ngiba nethemba lokunqoba.”

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Professor affirms Genesis is history

BY JONATHAN SAFARTI, CMI

Like many others in America, going to church was just a routine activity for Dr Stephen Schrader.

It wasn't until a close friend confronted him with the Bible verse 1 John 5:12: "Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life" that in his words, "the lights came on instantly".

He says he confessed his sin and unbelief and the need for Jesus Christ to be his Saviour from sin. "I have had a strong desire to live for Him and know His word ever since being saved."

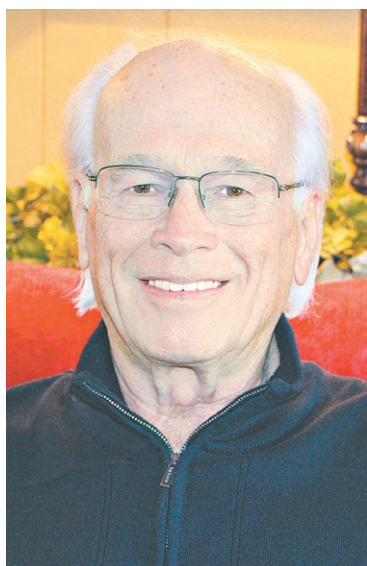
The erudite doctor is a staunch defender of Biblical creation.

He studied under Dr John C Whitcomb Jr, co-author of the famous *The Genesis Flood* (1961).

His subjects included archaeology and languages of the ancient Near East, and in particular, the study of words that only occur once in the text (hapax legomena).

Dr Schrader points out, "The 39 books of the Old Testament are important to master because they provide the foundation for accurately interpreting the New Testament text."

He says he is convinced the crea-



Dr Stephen R Schrader

tion account is a genuine historical narrative.

"A poetic account would show parallelism, while Genesis is full of a certain verb type called the 'waw consecutive' that makes it clear that it was written as a historical account," he says.

"It is interesting that the waw consecutive appears 55 times in just 34 verses in Genesis 1:1-2:3. The use of this verbal form is therefore significant and consistent with the narrative material found in the rest

of the book of Genesis."

Many think the meaning of 'day' is hard to understand but Dr Schrader argues that "the pattern was set by God's testimony in Exodus 20:11: 'For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day.'"

He further points out that Genesis 1 is clear enough even without that: "Yom (day) is modified in Genesis 1:1-2:3 by a numerical qualifier, so each day must be a literal day.

When yom appears with a numerical qualifier in the Old Testament, it is never used in a figurative sense.

"I love how the phrase 'evening and morning' ends days one to six and ties each successive day together, but it is not repeated at the end of the seventh day as God had finished his work of creation in six days and rested on the seventh day to set a pattern for mankind."

Sceptics often mock the first 11 chapters of Genesis, which detail creation, the fall, the flood and the confusion of languages at Babel. And some in the church think that these are side issues.

Why is a proper understanding of Genesis important?

"The most important thing," Dr Schrader says "is the Sovereign God, who created the whole world in six literal consecutive 24-hour days by just speaking his Word, who John reveals to be our Jesus Christ (John 1:1-3).

"And no human being was present. So all men have had to take His written word concerning His awesomeness in creating this world. Man did not evolve but was directly and super-naturally created by God on day six.

"Genesis refutes the concept of evolution and tells us that the earth is a relatively recent creation, and



Dr Stephen R Schrader with his family.

that man is not the result of millions of years of evolution. Genesis also reveals that God saw that everything He had created in the six days was 'exceedingly good'. There was no physical or spiritual death up to this point.

"Then there was the literal temptation by Satan to destroy man's innocence.

"Adam and Eve ate and disobeyed God's clear command not to eat of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

"There was a literal judgement scene in Genesis 3:8-19 in which God interrogated Adam (3:9-12) and then Eve (3:16) and pronounced judgement upon Satan (3:14-15) before Eve (3:16) and

Adam (3:17-19)."

This event, Dr Schrader adds, was the origin of death and suffering. "All views that try to marry millions of years with the Bible always place human and animal death before sin.

"In chapters 6-9 God destroys the whole world by a global flood. So things have not always been the same ('since the beginning of creation') as the scoffers during the last days assert (2 Peter 3:4-7).

"Things have only been the same since the end of the flood, as Genesis 8:21-22 reveals."

Dr Schrader points out that even though God pronounced judgement, He also promised a Redeemer:

"In Genesis 3:15, God gave the promise of the Messiah, Jesus Christ, the seed of the woman Eve, who would ultimately defeat Satan at the cross through His death and resurrection.

"The contrast between the 'first man, Adam' and 'the last Adam' (Jesus Christ) is conveyed in 1 Corinthians 15:45-49 providing the contrast between 'earthly' and 'heavenly' in origin.

"Earlier, Paul had explained that the whole reason for Jesus coming to die physically for our sins, then rise physically from the dead, comes from the fact that our ancestor Adam sinned and brought physical death into the world (1 Corinthians 15:21-22).

"The long-age views put physical death of both humans and animals before Adam's sin. But then if death is not related to sin, how could Jesus's death pay for our sin?"

DR STEPHEN R SCHRADER has served as Old Testament Department Chair and Professor of Hebrew and Old Testament, Baptist Bible Graduate School, Springfield, Missouri, since 1995. He earned both M.Div and Th.M specialising in Old Testament and Hebrew from Grace Theological Seminary, Winona Lake, Indiana.

HOW DO I BECOME A CHRISTIAN?

Anyone can gain the eternal life offered through Jesus Christ

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

OUR PROBLEM: **Separation from God**
"Everyone has sinned. Nobody is good enough because God's standards are perfect" (Romans 3:23) **ADMIT**

GOD'S REMEDY / SOLUTION: **Jesus died on the cross**
"God demonstrates His own love for us in this; while we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8) **BELIEVE**

OUR RESPONSE: **Trust Jesus by receiving Him**
"To all who received Him, to those who believed in His name, He gave the right to become children of God" (John 1:12) **COMMIT**

Here is an example of how you can pray.

Dear Father in Heaven. I come to you now because I want to be saved. Please, forgive me of my sins. I believe that you sent your Son Jesus Christ to die for me and that you have raised him from the dead. I now ask Jesus Christ to come into my life as my Saviour and Lord. Take control of my life. Please make me the person You created me to be. In Jesus Christ's name. Amen

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

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. Reach out to the ministry that distributed this paper (see back page) and/or find a Bible-teaching church to attend.

AS A NEXT STEP: Please send me: Bible Some 'starting off' literature Information on a helpful church

I have prayed the prayer [ABOVE]

* Please tick and write clearly *

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Address _____

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OR sachallengenews@gmail.com

Out of South Africa enquiries are referred onto someone in their own country

“Genesis refutes the concept of evolution.”

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, serials and kids' shows - Good. app		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 - 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		Manga Messiah app Christian comic with free games app, illustrated in Japanese-style art	

YMI (meant to be read as "Why am I?") Christian news outlet for young adults with various content, devotionals and resources. **ymi.today**

More inspiring faith stories - **back issues of Challenge News** at **challengenews.online**



Coco Gauff plays a backhand against Jaqueline Cristian of Romania during the Internazionali BNL D'Italia 2024 at Foro Italico on May 11, 2024 in Rome, Italy. (Photo by Mike Hewitt/Getty Images)



EYES ON THE PRIZE

Coco Gauff was the first US tennis player to clinch a spot for the women's singles in the 2024 Paris Olympics, according to the WDSU News. It's the start of making her Olympic dreams come true after seeing them dashed in 2021, when she qualified for the Olympics the first time.

At just 17, she had made the Olympic team for Tokyo but had to withdraw five days later when she caught COVID.

Olympics.com reports that Coco hopes to win several medals in Paris this year.

"One of the goals I wrote down on my vision thing, vision note, in my phone, was to win a medal in the Olympics," Coco told reports after defeating Anna Karolína Schmiedlová in the opening round at the Australian Open in Melbourne.

"I'll be completely honest; I don't really care what event it is in. I feel like gold, silver, or bronze, whatever medal it is, is one of those things; it doesn't matter.

"Well, it does matter. Obviously, I want to win in singles. I feel like I would appreciate it just as much, whether it was in singles or doubles.

"It's not the same to me as a Slam, I guess, in a way. I just put 'I want a

medal at any of the events.'" Coco first picked up a tennis racket when she was six.

She had just seen Serena Williams winning the Australian Open and wanted to follow in her footsteps.

It was 2009 and marked the start of a remarkable career.

At 14, Coco won the prestigious Orange Bowl under-18 singles championship, the youngest player to win in 15 years.

In June 2023, that early promise was fulfilled when Coco won the US Open singles – her first Grand Slam title. She was 19, the youngest American to win a US Open since Serena Williams in 1999.

The win would grant her world

No. 3 in the rankings. Already a standout talent, what makes the 19-year-old even more distinctive is her Christian faith.

After her US Open win against Belarusian Aryna Sabalenka, she dropped to her knees, clasped her hands together and stayed like that for about 10 seconds.

When asked what she was doing by the *Today* show, she replied: "I was just saying thank You to God."

In an interview with *New York Times*, Coco, who has been a Christian since she was eight and sings in the church choir, said she and her father pray together before every match.

They don't pray that she will win, but rather, "it's an expression of thanks to God and of dependence on Him. We pray that my opponent and I stay safe."

An *ESPN* commentator who saw Coco on her knees after winning the US Open asked: "We saw you say a prayer, get on your knees, you have a lot of faith... how important has that been on this journey for you?"

"You know, it's been so important," Coco replied.

"I don't pray for results. I just ask that I get the strength to give it my all and whatever

happens, happens," she added. "I'm so blessed in this life. So I'm so thankful for this moment. I don't have any words for it, to be honest."

When she won the Cincinnati Open – the youngest player ever to do so – Coco said: "I'd like to thank my Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

"I spent a lot of nights alone crying trying to figure it out. I still have a lot to figure out, but I thank Him for covering me."

Her social media pages are also filled with prayers and acknowledgements of her faith.

At the end of the 2022 season she posted: "2022 season is officially over and definitely one I'll never forget. Thank you God for strengthening me at my lowest and highest

points this season." Her faith has also helped her chart a steady course through the pressures that come with being a tennis star on the tough professional circuit.

She told *Stylist* magazine: "My faith helps me stay focused on my goals and what I want to achieve."

The American's faith has also helped her stay grounded and humble. In an interview with *Because of Them We Can*, she mentioned that her faith helps her remember where she came from and stay true to herself.

"I try to stay humble and remember that I'm just a girl from Florida who loves to play tennis," she said. "My faith helps me stay grounded and remember what's important." •



Coco Gauff during Kids Day on Day One of the Internazionali BNL D'Italia at Foro Italico on May 6, 2024 in Rome, Italy (Photo by Robert Prange/Getty Images)

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