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A CHRISTMAS TO REMEMBER

On Christmas Eve 1996 American Elliott Osowitt was given perhaps the greatest gift of his life – he was kicked out of home by his cancer-riddled wife.

“She came to the door crying, hairless and sick-looking from the chemotherapy treatment, and told me, ‘I know where you’ve been, who you’ve been with and what you’ve been doing. I can’t take it anymore. You’re no good for this family. Go away. We’re better off without you,’” Elliott remembers sadly.

Elliott and Polly were married when he was 19 and they had two daughters together. He was not a good husband or father. He was a heavy drug user and, although he was never physically abusive, was a very angry man.

“I was always yelling and swearing and ranting and raving. Putting down my wife and putting down my children,” he admits.

Then Polly developed breast cancer and had to undergo radical surgery and chemotherapy. At the same time their daughter, who had already been in trouble with the law



Elliott Osowitt spent many years as an angry addict before finding a Gideon's Bible in his hotel room.

on more than a dozen occasions, got arrested again for fraud and jailed for three years, leaving Elliott and his wife to raise her two children.

To get away from these overwhelming problems, Elliott quit his job as a medical assistant and became a tour director for a British company.

He travelled a great deal of the time with a company that he called “Heathen Tours.” The purpose of these tours was to provide any and every sort of “pleasure” the clientele could afford. He, too, participated in the immoral acts he offered to

his clients.

“I got paid to take drugs and drink with people all over the world,” Elliott says. “What a great job for an addict! But it got crazy and out of hand.”

He barrelled along this path until he found himself homeless that fateful day in the middle of what should have been the most wonderful time of the year.

Elliott booked into a motel intending to shoot and kill himself. While in the room, he noticed an open Gideon Bible

on top of the television. It made him so angry he cursed God and knocked the Bible off the television.

He tried to kick it under the bed, but the bedframe was solid and the Bible could not go under. It fell open to John 14:27, which says: “Peace I leave with you, my peace I give to you: not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your heart be troubled neither let it be afraid.”

“I was 47 years old and I wept for the first time in my adult life,” Elliott shares.

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Breakthrough for the broken

Stubborn, bitter, broken and angry – that’s how Nina Mhlanga describes what she was like in her younger days.

“I went through a lot of pain when I was a child and even as an adult,” Nina, 30, tells *Challenge News*.

“As a result I really wanted revenge on the people who hurt me.”

It bothered her a great deal that she could not shake off these feelings even though she had become a Christian when she was 12.

“I grew up in a Christian home. We attended church service every week. I joined the choir. I had such a passion for God I also joined the Scripture Union at school.”

Even so, Nina says she never really understood what it meant to fully commit her life to Christ.

“I served God while I was broken and still wanted revenge. I never had peace and joy in my heart.”

However, it was this very discouragement that led her to pursue the promise of Psalm 16:11: “In thy Presence is fullness of joy.”

She approached her pastor, who led her to pray and recommit her life to God.

That made all the difference. “I accepted Christ when I was 12 but I became a transformed Christian



Nina Mhlanga

two years ago,” says Nina.

“That was when I discovered I had been living a life full of unforgiveness and brokenness. I went through Biblical counselling and that really changed my life.

“It helped me to forgive everyone who caused me pain.”

Since her breakthrough three years ago, Nina says she has become a “true Christian” and is “living happy and free”.

In fact one of her greatest delights is helping others experience the same joy.

“There is peace and joy in Christ when we forgive. I am no longer a victim of bitterness. Because God healed my heart, mind and soul I am also no longer a victim of depression. Instead I have victory through Jesus Christ.

“God is my strength, my salvation and my hope.”

Nina, who is now a missionary (someone who tells people about the good news about Jesus), realises that the missing part of the puzzle in her life was accepting she had a problem in the first place.

“I accepted that I really needed help because I was so tired of being bitter.

“The Lord came through for me. I was in bondage to unforgiveness for 15 years but when I opened myself up to God and the Bible He made my life brand new.”

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Fun for Kids
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ASKING THE RIGHT QUESTION

BY JOHN HUTCHINSON

DURING A CHRISTMAS concert, Australian singer Delta Goodrem called to a crowd of cheering fans, “Do you believe in Christmas?”

The response was rapturous, but I struggled with her question. What is Christmas? It seems to be anything people want to make of it.

The question should’ve been, “Do you believe in Christ?” It’s the all-important question. To believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God and that He came into the world to save us from our sins and give us eternal life is a life and death issue. The correct answer can be life-changing and impact us for eternity.

The Bible says in John 3:16-19: “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 He has not believed in the name of God’s one and only Son.”

Jesus said to his friends, “I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in Me will never die.” (John 11:25-26) It’s vital to believe in Jesus for He said, “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.” (John 14:6)

He also said, “I came that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly.” (John 10:10)

As a young person I believed in Jesus as my Lord and Saviour. It was the best thing I ever did.

The Bible says: “If you confess with your mouth, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved.” (Romans 10:9)

The right question is, do you believe in Jesus? ●

Ask Y: Peter Meadows answers your questions about God

QUESTION: CAN'T I JUST FIGURE GOD OUT FOR MYSELF?



SOUNDS PRETTY EASY doesn't it? To use a bit of brain power and a smattering of commonsense to work out who or what God is, what He's up to and what He wants from us?

But if that was possible we wouldn't need Christmas.

Okay, I know that sounds strange but hang in with me for a moment. First, let me give you a few reasons why figuring out God ourselves is always going to be like trying to push a cloud of smoke up a hill.

First, have you ever been to the dentist for a check-up hoping they would find nothing wrong – even if potential disaster was lurking somewhere beneath the enamel?

I know I have – being more interested in my own self-interest than finding what was true.

In the same way there's a bias when we start asking ourselves God-questions.

We try to limit our discoveries to things which fit our comfort zones, mesh with our timetables and accommodate our priorities.

And God may not be like that at all.

And what about the limit to our knowledge? Humankind has yet to even find a cure for the common cold.

So how can we possibly believe we know enough to discover what the Creator of everything is like?

More than that, there's also a limit

to our reasoning power. A toddler asks "Why?" and "How?" and "Why?" again... and again. The parent has the answers and would love to be able to give them, but doesn't because the child's intellectual ability does not stretch far enough to cope.

That's how it is when exploring the God-agenda. Our brain power does not match the task. So are we stranded in this vast universe with no way of knowing its Maker? That's how it would be – but for the event we celebrate at Christmas. The often sentimental 'baby in a manger' stuff is actually the story of God opening up the conversation with us, coming down to our level to give us the answers we need.

It's like what would have to happen if my goldfish were ever to come to know what I think of him. I'd have to become like him and enter his fishy little world. And at the event we call Christmas, that is what God did Himself. He came into our world as a Man, to let us have the answers to our questions about Him. That's why Jesus is worth listening to!

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.

The tale of the Pharisee

Neil Shenvi is a research scientist at North Carolina's Duke University in the Department of Chemistry.

Neil did his PhD in theoretical chemistry and his thesis focused on quantum computation. He shares his story:

"I grew up in Delaware, USA. I loved philosophy, loved arguing philosophy, and most of all, loved being right. I would have called myself Christian, if anyone had asked, but I thought that all religions were essentially the same.

"I had read the Bible when I was in fifth grade. I led a fairly moral life. In fact, I built my life on doing the right thing, on being a virtuous, moral person. Throughout this time, I believed in God, I said grace before meals, and I prayed every night.

"My prayers went roughly as follows: 'Dear God, thank You for all that You have given me. I have many talents, and I thank You that I realise what a blessing they are. I am generally a good person, and even though I'm not perfect, I thank You that You recognise my goodness and love me. Lord, I hope that You'll forgive me for my sins, whatever they may be. And I hope that tomorrow I'll try to be an even better person. Amen.'

"I had also read Luke 18:9, and knew that pride was bad. So occasionally, I would add something like 'God, I know I am not as good as I could be. I know I look down on other people because I am better than them, but I shouldn't.'

"But my heart was essentially saying: 'God, I know this is how I'm supposed to pray, with humility and all that, but between You and me, we both know that I'm basically a good person. And what tops it all off is that I'm so humble.'

"My senior year of college, I met Christina and fell in love with her. I found her faith at once interesting and inconvenient... To show my willingness to compromise, I decided to go to church with her. And that was my fatal mistake.

"At our church in Berkeley, I heard the Gospel for the first time: Jesus saves. In retrospect, I think that one defence against Christianity to which I always appealed was that Christianity could not possibly be maintained by thoughtful, intelligent people, at least not people so thoughtful and intelligent as myself. But at this church, my escape was closed off.

"Our pastor had a PhD from Oxford. My quantum physics professor sang in the choir. Here were people indisputably my intellectual superiors who believed that Jesus was Lord, and had died for their sins.

"And all at once, I was forced to actually consider the message of Christianity on its own merits. I didn't like it. I can recall the night when the claims of Christianity finally sank in. For the first time, I considered what the consequences would be if Christianity were true – historically, objectively true. What if God were the God of the

Bible? What if Jesus was who He said He was?

"I knew that the word 'gospel' was Greek for 'good news', but I remember weeping and telling Christina that this was the most horrible news I had ever heard. What about all the people who had never heard of Jesus? What about people who had died before Jesus was born? What about devout followers of other religions?

"But for once, I finally stopped to consider whether Christianity was true in spite of all my questions. And I think I prayed something like: 'God, if this is true, tell me, and I will believe.'

"Of course, I didn't obtain answers for my questions immediately. And I still grapple with many of those same questions. But I think that was the point when I decided to put my trust in God, and over many subsequent months, He led me to Jesus. Jesus says to us: none of you can be his own saviour. You are all sinners. You're all suffering, you're all dying inside.

"The gospel was fire and water to me. It saw through all of my attempts at self-justification, which

is what all of the competition and virtue was. Throughout the Bible, Jesus' message is that God loves us, not because we are good, but because He is good. Jesus came to save not the righteous, but sinners. He gives us the verdict that we are all longing to hear: that we are loved, that our lives are worth something; worth so much, in fact, that God gave up the treasure of His heart to save us. What we couldn't earn despite our best efforts, God freely gives. Knowing Jesus has made a tremendous difference in my life. Now I can obey God out of love and gratitude, not out of fear of punishment or desire for reward. I hope that the rest of my life will be spent learning to depend entirely on God's grace."

This is an abridged article; the full article can be found at jamesbishopblog.com



Neil Shenvi. Photos from Facebook/Neil Shenvi – Apologetics.

“God loves us, not because we are good, but because He is good.”

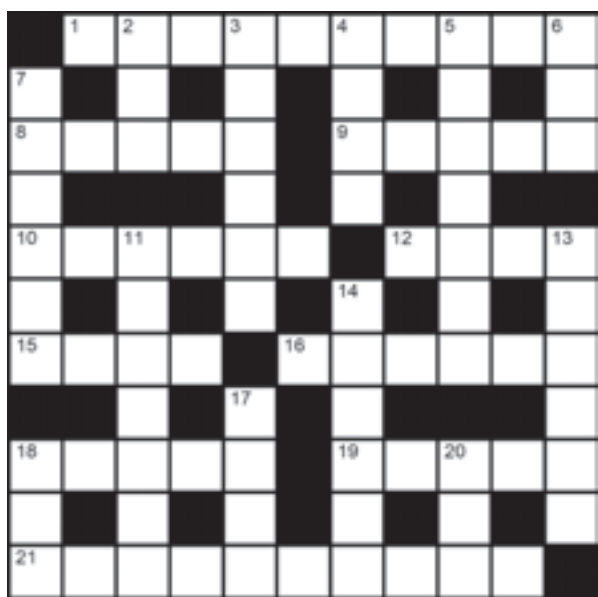
Coffee Break CROSSWORD & SUDOKU

ACROSS

- 1 Changed business from public to private ownership
- 8 Athletics venue
- 9 French city
- 10 Course component
- 12 Freckle's place
- 15 Harp ancestor
- 16 In short supply
- 18 Fossil preserver, at times
- 19 Entire quantity
- 21 Non-deciduous trees

DOWN

- 2 Regret deeply
- 3 Capable of survival
- 4 Freeway fare
- 5 Variety of pool
- 6 MS ____
- 7 Type of warm-blooded animal



- 11 Long-lasting
- 12 Crop cutting tool
- 13 Compass pointer
- 14 A steep rugged rock
- 17 Terrific tennis serve
- 18 Tuna fish container

SOLUTIONS PAGE 7



"I was sure I heard someone knocking on the door."

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8	5	2		7					
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			7	9	8				
				5		9	3	7	
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A Christmas to remember

● From page 1

His father had beaten it into him that "men don't cry" but he knows now that men who do not cry explode. Elliott shut the Bible and called Polly to say goodbye. Polly asked him to at least call her pastor, which he did. Though it was Christmas Eve, this pastor came and spent time with Elliott. He spent the next three days in the motel reading that Gideon Bible. On Sunday, he attended church with his wife where he knelt and asked Jesus to forgive him, free him of his addictions and help him to live right.

"The minute I asked Him, He forgave me," Elliott marvels. "My sins were cast away as far as the east is from the west. They were cast into the deepest part of the ocean." The God Elliott surrendered his life to during Christmas 1996 was nothing like what he thought He would be.

"To me, God was a rule-making Darth Vader out there in outer space somewhere," he revealed in a talk on Livestream in 2013.

Elliott grew up in Los Angeles California in a strict Jewish home. He had no real knowledge of Jesus Christ and was not even permitted to speak His name.

His father was a "heavy hitter" dad, one with whom he had no relationship. At 17, Elliott escaped the violence at home for a different kind of violence in Vietnam. Over three years, the army turned Elliott from a non-drinking, non-smoking good boy into a drug addict and alcoholic womaniser.

Marriage – and even Polly's illness – did nothing to change him as he careened down the path to what could have been a violent and untimely end.

Had it not been for Polly's actions that night before Christmas he may well have killed himself. But, as he found out after he gave his life to Christ – "God is awesome to forgive – wives are another story," he says ruefully.

After his conversion, Elliott stayed with his dying mother for a while and contacted an organisation called Jews for Jesus, which helped him to learn more about how his new faith was compatible with and had its roots in his Jewish background. After his mother's funeral, Elliott returned home and he and Polly worked on their marriage.

He then got a job with a Christian touring company, which put him in contact with Christians from all persuasions and allowed him to encourage others with his story. Polly fully recovered from cancer and worked two jobs so Elliott could complete Bible school. Elliott became a pastor in 2000. Today both his daughters are happily married, raising his grandchildren.

"My family is proof that God does miracles even today!" Elliott says with a beaming smile.

Freed from my anxiety



Gené Joubert

Gené Joubert had heard about God her whole life. Born and raised in Ladysmith in KwaZulu-Natal, she attended church with her family and read the Bible but she viewed God as an angry God, waiting for her to slip up and do something bad.

“I knew of God but I never knew Him,” she recalls. “I only followed His rules and I didn’t see Him as loving. He was always distant, I only went to Him if I needed something.”

Gené describes herself at this time as, “really legalistic, following the Bible as a rule book, judging people and I didn’t fully understand the love of God.”

Despite trying to keep God’s rules, she says she struggled a lot with sexual immorality, unforgiveness, pride and jealousy.

“I always knew I wanted a more intimate relationship with God,” she shares. Then in 2021, a friend invited her to a new church.

“[It] told me more about having intimacy with God, seeing Him as a Father who is loving and caring, not angry.”

It was then that Gené said she fully committed her life to God, received His forgiveness and understood Jesus’ sacrifice on the cross had washed her clean from sin.

“When I saw how it is in a real relationship with Him, He came and met me. He freed me from heavy anxiety and misery and He adopted me.

“The moment I realised I wanted to fully commit to the Lord was when I felt His presence in a tangible way. When the people at church prayed for me to be free from my anxiety I literally felt it release me and God was there holding me.”

Since committing her life to God, Gené says she now sees His blessings, love and grace (God’s unmerited favour) a lot more than before.

“I strive to please Him more because I know He saved me from the dark hole of misery I was stuck in and I believe that what He has for me is so much more than what I could ever imagine.

“I started to trust God more, knowing that He will handle the situation and that I shouldn’t try to figure things out on my own. He gave me community and people who love me. My perspective on how the world works has changed. I always believed you should follow the laid out plan society gives you but God has a unique path for everyone and it’s exciting.” Gené says the best thing about being a Christian is the feeling of security and hope, which carries her through everything.

“With the community God has provided me with, I am frequently reminded of how good He is and that we are not made for isolation – in every problem I face I am never alone,” she attests.

Her favourite Bible verses are John 1:5: “The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it” and Psalm 25:5: “Guide me in Your truth and teach me, for You are God my Saviour, and my hope is in You all day long.”

New life with no regrets

As a young man, Ayoro B. Dominique (known as Dominique) was a heavy drinker, a liar, angry and an idol worshipper. Where he grew up in Burkina Faso, they traditionally worshipped rivers, mountains, stones or anything else really, he tells *Challenge News*.

In primary school Dominique first heard about Jesus when he found a piece of paper on which someone had written, “Jesus is coming very soon.” He wondered who this Jesus was.

In 1991, when he was 17, he started to attend church but it wasn’t until the following year, on March 14th 1992, that Dominique prayed to God asking Him to forgive his sins and rule his life. That is when Jesus became his Saviour and Lord.

He says, “I’m no longer an idol worshipper. My life changed completely. Now I’m a servant of God.”

However, his parents were not pleased with their son’s decision and Dominique was rejected by them and chased out of home. His friends abandoned him and he had to find new people to call family.

Twenty-seven years after that decision however, Dominique has no regrets and urges others: “Jesus Christ is the way, the life and the truth. He is the Sav-

our of all mankind. If you open your heart, He will enter into your heart.”

He quotes John 3:16 from the Bible as one of his favourite Bible verses, “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.”

Dominique is now a pastor and married. •



Ayoro B. Dominique

“Love without truth is sentimentality; it supports and affirms us but keeps us in denial about our flaws. Truth without love is harshness; it gives us information but in such a way that we cannot really hear it. God’s saving love in Christ, however, is marked by both radical truthfulness about who we are and yet also radical, unconditional commitment to us.” – Timothy Keller

An awe-inspiring view!



A formula for life

BY JOHN HUTCHINSON

THE living of life requires some thought. Our days rush past and they cannot be relived. Many, of course, start from disadvantage. I remember a 14-year-old, just out of a remand centre, who came to work with me. We were cleaning out a sheep dip – not my favourite job.

I was passing up buckets of foul sludge when I heard him mumble, “Do you know what my problem is?” I asked, “What is your problem?” He said, “I’ve got nothing to live for. I’m bored stiff and if there was a tablet which would end my life I’d take it.” That’s not how it should be! There’s so much to live for, even in difficult circumstances.

In a shop once, I noticed the words on a plaque: “Live simply. Laugh often. Love much.” Later I saw something similar: “Live simply. Love generously. Care deeply. Speak kindly.” That’s good but we need to think deeper. Let me share a formula which will enrich us with meaning and purpose and help us in our day-to-day experience of living:

Live in awe

Be a ‘wow person.’ Marvel at wonders. Meditate on the spectacular. Think about the phenomenal. It’s like a spiritual inhalant. Be like the poet Roger McKnight who wrote in his poem *Some Chordal Notes*: “In awe of everything, I sing and marvel more.”

Wonders are everywhere and begging for us to be amazed. For me, the precision of a sunrise is breath-taking. Sometimes as daylight appears I say, “23 hours, 56 minutes and four seconds.” How phenomenal – every 23 hours, 56 minutes and four seconds, this enormous weight of matter spins like a giant top at 160kmph so precisely it’s measured in thousandths of a second! What about its orbit of the sun? In a year Earth travels 940 million km and 365.24 days. What about the air we inhale? It is just the right amount of oxygen and other elements – and with a thin layer of ozone guarding us from harmful rays. What about Earth’s terrain – its mountains and plains, fiords and glaciers, rivers, oceans and lakes? The more we travel the more we have to think we live on Planet Spectacular.

I listen a lot to the birds. I love the notes of the wattle jacks, the soft whistle of the thrush and the laugh of the kookaburra.

What beauty we see in the flowers and plants – the wonder of bees and the taste of honey! What about the oceans and islands and all the myriads of fish and sea creatures. We live in a world of miracles and wonders. While we can marvel at all these phenomenal things, we need to realize that once it wasn’t there. Science and the Bible tell us that at one time it didn’t exist. Today it does! The Bible says in Ecclesiastes 5:7, “Therefore stand in awe of God.”

Live in appreciation

Thankful people are happy people. It can be hard when things are against us, but look for something to be grateful for.

Thank God for the gift of life. I thank Him a lot for my eyes. What a spectacular faculty is sight. I grew up near a boy who was born with little sight which gradually left him. It made me appreciate my vision.

But he was always cheerful and happy, and grateful for the lovely dog which led him wherever he wanted to go. He even travelled overseas with the aid of his labrador. The Bible says in Psalm 92:1, “It is a good thing to give thanks unto the Lord.” Yes, it’s a very good thing and also to thank others for all they do and mean to us. Perhaps the best way to express gratitude is sharing and giving. As Jesus once said, “It is more blessed to give than to receive.” (Acts 20:35) The Bible says in 2 Corinthians 9:15: “Thanks be to God for His indescribable gift!” How we need to thank God for Jesus our Savior – God’s great gift to the world.

Live in anticipation

Looking forward to good things puts spark into living. It may be a holiday, a special celebration, the birth of a baby, the footy finals or a visit from friends or even getting out of the hospital.

Anticipate good things in each day. Be optimistic about what might happen. Be expectant! Anticipation, however, needs extensions. The Bible says in 1 Corinthians 15:19, “If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are to be pitied more than all men.”

I’ve attended funerals which disappoint. They refer to a life lived and what has been achieved with no hint of hope. One day a 98-year-old, just one day before he died, lustily sang the hymn *How Great Thou Art*. What wonderful words of anticipation did he sing in the last verse:

“When Christ shall come, with shout of acclamation, and take me home, what joy shall fill my heart. Then I shall bow, in humble adoration, and then proclaim: ‘My God, how great Thou art!’”

The Bible says in 1 Corinthians 2:9: “Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, neither has it entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love Him.” Jesus conquered death and through His resurrection is able to assure believers of eternal life beyond the grave.

Adding anticipation to awe and appreciation is a great way to live. •

English translation

HOPE IN THE DARKNESS

For a long time, Patricia Londo saw the world as black or white, bad or good. There was nothing in between.

“Unfortunately for me, my childhood was black.” Patricia, now 28, tells *Challenge News*.

Patricia’s childhood was thrown into darkness when she was eight and her parents, whom she adored, divorced.

Adding to the confusion of an already difficult time was the fact that her father was a pastor and her mother a devoted Christian.

“I couldn’t understand why God allowed them to divorce,” Patricia (or Tricia, as she prefers to be called) shares. “I wanted so much to stay with my father but God allowed a beautiful family to break apart.

“However through all this I saw my mum pray every day, read the Bible, confess her love for Him. Although we lost everything, her love for God never changed. She loved God with all her heart.” Not so for the young Tricia.

“I left God when they got divorced. I blamed Him for their mistakes.”

After the break-up, Tricia’s mother would go out each day to work, leaving Tricia to take care of her brother and sister. “At a tender age I threw my childhood out the window and put on my mother’s shoes to take care of my siblings,” she recalls. Her world became even darker

in 2012 when her mother was diagnosed with stage 3 cervical cancer.

“This made everything so hard and scary, especially since she was all we had,” says Tricia. “But even then her love for God never changed.”

Unfortunately, neither did Patricia’s anger against God.

“I went from church to church to ask Him three questions – why do You hate us so much, why do You allow divorce and why don’t You show Yourself when people call upon You?”

“From 2006 when my father left to 2015 I was looking for God. I carried so much bitterness, anger, pain and fear in my heart every day.

“I lived the life of a victim. I felt like the whole world was against me and whatever I did was not enough. I felt so unloved and that this was God’s fault.”

The first ray of light broke through in 2015, when Patricia accepted an invitation from a friend to visit her church.

“I was standing at the door when I felt a warmth. I can’t explain it up to now but I immediately fell down onto my knees. I began crying and confessing how much I loved Him.

“From that day I knew something changed in me. My guilt left me. I felt so much peace and joy. I felt young again and I felt loved.

“Even though my natural father never came back to me, I felt different. From that day I joined my

mother in prayers.”

That encounter happened nine years ago. Today Patricia is married and pastors a church.

Drawing on her painful past, Patricia preaches a message of hope during dark times.

“In the place where you have lost everything, God is everything.

“The love of Jesus is outstanding – it covers all. It’s more than the love of parents. His love endures forever. Only He stays with you forever because He says He will never leave us or forsake us.

“The love of Jesus does not look at your weakness or your strengths. He loves us as we are with all our filthiness and shortcomings.”

On a much brighter note, Patricia says her mother was miraculously healed of the cancer. Her father, who died last year, re-committed his life to God and her entire family has come to the Lord. •



Zulu translation

Ithemba ebumnyameni

Esikhathini eside, Patricia Londo wayebuka umhlaba njengokuhle nokubi, okumnyama nokumhlophe kungekho okuphakathi nendawo. “Ngeshwa kimina, ukukhula kwami kwakumnyama.” UPatricia oseminyaka ewu 28, etshela abendaba ze-Challenge. Ukukhula kukaPatricia kwambozwa ifu elimnyama eneminyaka eyishigalombili lapho abazali bakhe, ayebakhonzile, behlukana.

Okwangezelela ekudidekeni kwakhe ukuthi ubaba wakhe ungumfundisi nomama wakhe uyikholwa elinikele.

“Ngangingaqondi ukuthi kungani uNkulunkulu abavumele bahlukane,” kusho uPatricia (noma u Tricia njengoba ethanda ukubizwa) esitshela. “Ngangifuna ukuhlala nobaba wami kodwa uNkulunkulu wahlukanisa umndeni omuhle.”

“Kodwa kukho konke lokhu ngabona umama efunda iZwi , ethandaza, emtshela njalo ukuthi uyamthanda. Noma salahlekelwa yikho konke uthando lwakhe kuNkulunkulu, aluzange lushintshe, wayemthanda uNkulunkulu ngenhliziyo yakhe yonke. Kwakungenjalo ngentombazane u Tricia.

“Ngamshiya uNkulunkulu mabehlukana, ngamsola ngama-phutha abo.”

Emva kokuhlukana umama ka Tricia, wayehamba njalo ukuyosebenza, eshiya u Tricia nomfowabo nodadewabo.

“Ngashiya ubuntwana bami ngadlala indima kamama yokunakekela abantwana bakithi,” ekhumbula.

Kwaba mnyama kakhulu ngonyaka ka 2012 makutholakala ukuthi umama wabo usezingeni lesithathu enomdlavuza wesibelethe. Lokhu kwenza yonke into ibe nzima futhi yethuse, ikakhulukazi ngoba wayeyikho konke ababenakho.”

Kusho uTricia. “ kwakunjalo uthando lwakhe lwalungajiki kuNkulunkulu.” Kanjalo nentukuthelo kaPatricia kuNkulunkulu.

Wayengena ephuma emasontweni ukumbuzo imibuzo emithathu-kungani usizonde kangaka, kungani uvumela ukwehlukana futhi ungasabeli uma abantu bekubiza?

“Kusukela ngo 2006 kuya ku 2015 ngangifuna uNkulunkulu. Ngangigcwele ulunya, intukuthelo, nobuhlungu kanye nokwesaba enhlizweni yami.”

“Ngangiphila njengohluliwe. Ngangibona ngathi umhlaba wonke umelene nami kwakungekho okuhle engangingakwenza. Ngangizizwa ngingathandwa futhi konke lokhu kwakuyiphutha likaNkulunkulu.”

Inhlasi yokuqala yethemba yavela ngo 2015, umngani emumema ebandleni labo, uPatricia wavuma.

“Ngangime ngasemnyango uma ngizwa ukufudumala. Angikwazi nokukuchaza kuze kube imanje ngaguqa ngamadolo ngavuma ukuthi ngiyamthanda ngenyembezi.

“Kusuka ngalelola ngazi ukuthi kukhona okushintshile kimi. Ukuzisola kwangishiya. Ngaba nokuthula nokwenama. Ngazizwa ngimusha futhi ngithandwa.

“Noma ubaba engabuyelanga kithi, ngazizwa ngihlukile. Kusukela ngalelola ngaqala ukuthandaza nomama.”

Lokho kwenzakala eminyakeni ewu 9 edlule, kusukela ngalesosikhathi uPatricia useshadile futhi ungumfundisi webandla.

Ebheka emuva enhlungwini zakhe, uPatricia ushumayela umyalezo wethemba ezikhathini ezinzima.

“Lapho ulahlekelwe ikhokonke, uThixo uyikhokonke.

“Uthando lukaJesu luyamangaza lwembathisa konke. Lungaphezu kothando lwabazali. Lumi ingunaphakade ngoba uYena yedwa othi angeke akulahle futhi angeke akushiye.

“Uthando lukaJesu alubuki ubuthakathaka bethu noma amandla ethu. Usithanda nokungahlanzeki kwethu.”

Okujabulisayo ukuthi umamakhe waphiliswa kumdlavuza. Ubabawakhe oshone ngonyaka odlule esebuyele kuJehova kanye nomndeni wakhe. •

Afrikaans translation

Hoop in die Donker

Vir lank het Patricia Londo die wêreld as swart of wit, sleg of goed beskou. Daar was niks tussen in nie.

“Ongelukig vir my, was my kinderdae swart,” vertel Patricia (28), vir *Challenge News*.

Patricia se kinderdae was in donkerde gehul vandat sy agt jaar oud was, toe haar ouers, vir wie sy baie lief was, geskei het.

Om by te dra tot die verwarring van hierdie moeilike periode, was die feit dat haar pa ‘n pastoor was, en haar ma ‘n toegewyde Christen.

“Ek kon nie verstaan hoekom God hulle kon toelaat om te skei nie,” deel Patricia (of Tricia, soos sy verkies om genoem te word) “Ek wou so graag by my pa bly, maar God het toegelaat dat ‘n pragtige gesin uitmekaar skeur.

“Maar deur alles het ek my ma elke dag sien bid, Bybel lees, en haar liefde aan Hom bely. Alhoewel ons alles verloor het, het haar liefde vir God nooit verander nie. Sy het God liefgehad met haar hele hart.”

Maar dit was nie die geval vir die jong Tricia nie.

“Ek het God verlaat toe hulle geskei is. Ek het Hom vir hulle foute blameer.”

Na die egskeding het Tricia se ma elke dag uitgegaan om te werk, en Tricia gelos om haar

broer en suster te versorg.

“Op ‘n teer ouderdom het ek my kinderdae by die venster uit gegooi en my ma se skoen vol gestaan om vir my broer en suster te sorg,” onthou sy.

Haar wêreld het nog meer verdonker in 2012 toe haar ma met derde graadse servikale kanker gediagnoseer was.

“Dit het alles nog moeiliker en meer skrikwekkend gemaak, veral omdat sy al was wat ons gehad het,” sê Tricia.

“Maar selfs dit het haar liefde vir God nie verander nie.”

Ongelukig, het Patricia se woede teenoor God ook nie verander nie.

“Ek het van kerk na kerk gegaan om drie vroe aan Hom te stel – hoekom haat Jy ons so baie , hoekom laat Jy egskeding toe en hoekom wys Jy Jouself nie wanneer mense Jou aanroep nie?”

“Vanaf 2006, toe my Pa ons verlaat het, tot 2015 het ek na God gesoek. Ek het soveel bitterheid, woede, pyn en vrees daagliks in my hart saamgedra.

Ek het die lewe van ‘n slagoffer geleef.

Ek het gevoel asof die hele wêreld teen my is, en wat ek ookal doen, was net nie goed genoeg nie.

Ek het so ongeliefd gevoel en dit was alles God se skuld”

Die eerste deurbraak was in 2015, toe Patricia ‘n uitnodiging van ‘n vriendin aanvaar, om hulle kerk by te woon. •

“ I felt so much peace and joy. ”

“ ”

“ Ngezwa okukhulu ukuthula nentokozi. ”

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Victim no more

South African Zander Hoffman, 20, struggled through his childhood. He was bullied mercilessly for being skinny and weak; the taunts and insults hurt him deeply.

He always felt like an outsider, unworthy and looked down upon. Those feelings of rejection scarred him and followed him into his teenage years.

"My childhood was rough," he tells *Challenge News*. "I didn't know who to ask for help. I became very jealous

of people who had things I wanted but couldn't own."

Adding to his emotional struggles were the choices he made to lie and harbour unforgiveness, both of which piled guilt on top of him.

He remembered his parents telling him about Jesus Christ when he was a boy. "My parents taught me that Jesus died on the cross to pay for everyone's sins, every generation's sins. I wanted to be God's little soldier that He could use to help others. But when I was older and was bullied I wondered if He really existed at all."

Nevertheless Zander continued attending church and finally, six years ago, surrendered his life to Christ during a service.

Today, he carries with him the reassuring knowledge that he is never alone.

"No matter how I feel, I know Jesus is always there, always listening to me and supporting me. I believe He gave me challenges in my life to help me, to teach me and change me into a better person, friend and Christian.

"The best part about being a Christian is knowing that there is at least one person who loves you no matter what you are or what you did.

"The hardest part is trusting God through the dark times but I know He was with me during my darkest times and gave me hope and strength even though all the odds were against me. "I want to say that God will always stay by your side."



Zander Hoffman

NEVER THE SAME AGAIN

BY FAY FOSTER

IT STARTED AS just another ho-hum night at work for the shepherds around Bethlehem.

Taking care of sheep was a 24-hours-a-day job, so the shepherds lived out in the open with their sheep. They made, or found, 'folds' in which to keep the sheep at night. A fold could be a cave, a circle of stones with some branches or thorns for a roof, or a basic shed.

Each day, the shepherds led their flocks out of the fold to find

pasture, then at night, once all the sheep were counted back into the fold, they would lie across the door of the fold to protect their flock.

Thieves, wolves, lions and bears were constant dangers.

It is very likely that the shepherds took turns to sleep.

Shepherding was considered an unskilled job, and shepherds were on the lowest levels of society.

How amazing then is this account from Luke chapter 2, verses 8-14, of the night when Jesus was born:

"And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, 'Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. Today in the town of David, a Saviour has been born to you; He is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger.'

"Suddenly a great company of the heavenly hosts appeared with the angel, praising God and saying, 'Glory



STOCK PHOTO

the Lord has told us about" (verse 16). We don't know how long it took the shepherds to walk to Bethlehem, or how they managed to find the right building. Luke just tells us that they, "found Mary and Joseph and the baby, who was lying in the manger".

And once they had seen the baby for themselves, they couldn't stop talking about what had happened. Everyone who heard them was amazed at what the shepherds said to them (verses 17-18).

The shepherds returned to their flocks, but they would never be the same again. They had seen and heard things that filled them with a new kind of faith. As they walked back to the fields, they glorified and praised God for all the things they had heard and seen, which were just as they had been told.

When we decide to act on the good news we have heard, God provides such great evidence of His truth that we are overwhelmed with the reality and the goodness of it all. And we will never be the same again.

This article was first published in *Salvos Magazine* and is used with kind permission.

to God in the highest heaven, and on Earth peace to those on whom His favour rests."

Sometimes God does things quietly. But on this occasion, this holy night, He announced the birth of His Son Jesus with a sky full of angels, with singing and light and prophecies.

The second chapter of Luke's gospel, verse 15, tells us that after the angels had made their stunning announcement, they returned to heaven, leaving the shepherds in the fields. Having witnessed this spectacular direct-from-heaven announcement, the shepherds were clearly expected to do something about it!

“ How could they NOT respond on such an amazing night? ”

Why else would the angel tell them they would know they had the right baby when they saw Him wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger?

And how could they NOT respond on such an amazing night?

So the shepherds said to one another, "Let's go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which

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 *

Name _____ Phone _____

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

Want to explore more?

Here are some free, helpful, Christian online resources

Online Bible - Olive Tree app (we recommend that you start with an easy-to-read version like the ESV)		Audio Bible - Bible.is app, or Youversion Bible app	
Christian radio stations - CBN radio app and Trans World Radio		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	

nudge
WITH KARL FAASE

The insight of the wise men

ONE OF THE most intriguing elements of the first Christmas to me is the story of the wise men. Here is a group of eastern astrologers who notice a new star and get onto their camels to travel who knows how far to worship a king they have never heard of.

Stranger still is that when they get to the palace of Herod, the Jewish teachers of the day knew where Jesus was to be born but did not go.

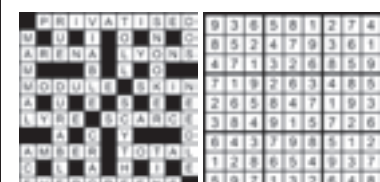
Yet these foreign intellectuals head off to meet and worship Jesus.

These men are smart enough to read the signs of the day and see the evidence of God at work. What about today?

With the eyes of faith, I believe you can see God at work everywhere. From the beauty of creation, to the birth of children, to the wonder of our universe, through to the acts of grace and kindness by people who could only be motivated by the Spirit of God.

God is at work in our world. Can I encourage you to look more closely for the hand of God in your life?

The evidence is there, you just have to be ready to see it.





Sydney McLaughlin-Levrone of Team USA celebrates her gold medal and new World Record in the Women's 400m Hurdles Final of the Olympic Games Paris 2024. (Photo by Julian Finney/Getty Images).



Tsige Duguma of Ethiopia. (Photo by Sam Mellish/Getty Images)

OLYMPIC FAITH

The limelight shone bright on the medallists of the Paris Olympics.

For one particular group of athletes though, that glory rightfully belonged to Someone else – it belonged to Jesus Christ. And that's where they directed it.

Using songs, Instagram and even sign language, they declared their thanks and faith to God.

Sydney McLaughlin-Levrone, USA – 400m hurdles gold

Four-time Olympic gold medalist, world champion and world record holder – American hurdler Sydney McLaughlin-Levrone wears many crowns.

But the one that means the most to the 25-year-old has nothing to do with her athletic accomplishments. “The title that means the most to me,” she says, “is daughter of God.”

She shares her faith story in her autobiography *Far Beyond Gold: Running from Fear to Faith*.

At the post-race press conference after winning the gold, she said: “I credit all that I do to God... I have a platform and I want to use it to glorify Him.

“Whenever I step on the track it's always the prayer of, ‘God, let me be the vessel in which You're glorified... regardless of what happens, He's going to get the praise through me. That's why I do what I do.’”

Sydney wrote in an article on the Guideposts website that she had been raised in the church, but she didn't really know God.

“I'd been avoiding Him because I had this idea of Him as a harsh taskmaster who'd demand that I give up what I enjoyed, including running, to serve Him. Even so, my soul must have been yearning for him, because I found myself thinking, ‘The only way I'm going to heal from this is with God.’ So I started

going to church again.”

Her personal life changed when she met former NFL player Andre Levrone Jr. They were married in 2022 and she credits him with helping her to fully embrace her faith.

She disclosed in her book that it was with his help that she realised “my life wasn't about me. It was about showing the world God's power, wisdom, kindness, love, and forgiveness.

“Win, lose, or draw, it's an opportunity to glorify Him, and my value is already secure in Christ.”



Australian high jumper Nicola Olyslagers reads her Bible and writes in a journal during a competition. (Photo by David Ramos/Getty Images).

Nicola Olyslagers, Australia – high jump silver

Few people understand having a higher calling than Australian Olympic high jumper Nicola Olyslagers.

At 1.86 metres, the 27-year-old not only stands tall in regular life, but also in her sport. At the Paris Olympics in June, she won the silver medal and in doing so became the first Australian field athlete ever to win a medal at consecutive Olympics, having bagged a silver at the 2020 Games in Tokyo.

She sets the bar high for the other – greater – purpose in her life: living for Jesus Christ.

Nicola became a Christian in her teens. In her last year of primary school she went to a new school and

remembers being nervous about her new surroundings.

But she worried for nothing. “When I walked in I was immediately met by this overwhelming, non-judging love from the students and teachers,” she recalls.

“It was a love that left me with questions and envious of how they were able to show that sort of love. They all said they loved because Jesus loved them... it changed my entire life. It was the first time I came into full realisation of the Gospel [story of Jesus saving us from our sins] and the reality of God.

“I committed my life to Jesus.” Her Instagram profile is peppered with Bible verses and prayers. After winning the silver, she posted: “Praise be to God my Rock! He is my strength and song!!”

Gabriel Medina, Brazil – surfing gold

Brazilian surfer Gabriel Medina was told to remove an image of Jesus from his surfboard as he was in breach of the Olympic Charter, which prohibits political and religious manifestations.

It didn't stop him from winning the gold medal with a score of 9.9 – the highest ever in Olympic surfing history.

The picture of him surfacing from the wave – with a hidden message – has gone viral. It shows him and his surfboard seemingly levitating as he points his index finger to the sky – a gesture well known to Brazilian evangelicals as praising and thanking God.

Gabriel's post-victory Instagram post bears this out: he quoted this verse from the book of Philippians – “I can do all this through Him who gives me strength.” (Philippians 4: 13)

Noah Lyles, USA – track and field 100m gold, 200m bronze

As he lined up for the men's 100m final, USA's Noah Lyles could be seen mouthing the words: “Thank you, God. Thank you, God.”

After winning gold, the sprinter



Brazil's Gabriel Medina during the 5th heat of the men's surfing round 3, of the Paris 2024 Olympic Games. (Photo Jerome Brouillet / AFP) via Getty Images)

told Premier Christian Radio that he had to find his “own journey with God”. “I thank God every day for getting me through each and every round. Healthy, mentally and physically”, he added.

In a victory interview with BBC Sport, the 27-year-old was asked what his final thought was before the race. He said with a grin: “Thank you, God”.

Team Fiji

Team Fiji delighted the athletes by singing worship songs in the Olympic village regularly. Aus-

tralian water polo player Matilda Kearns shared the moving scenes on Instagram.

“Having the best seat in the Village being next to the Oceania building,” she wrote in a post. “Still not sick of it!”

Tsige Duguma, Ethiopia – track and field 800m silver

Ethiopian track and field athlete Tsige Duguma won silver in the 800m. The words “Jesus is Lord” were written on the back of her race bib – fitting words to end this wrap-up. ●

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