

I WANTED A BETTER LIFE

BY LOU HAVILAND (ABRIDGED)

Going to prison was considered an initiation into adulthood in the Virginia community Demarcus grew up in. It was expected and accepted.

“A lot of people glorified going to jail,” he says. “It was like a badge of honor, a path of passage. Once you go, you’re solidified.”

An uncle gave 13-year-old Demarcus and his cousins a piece of advice he still hasn’t forgotten: “If you ever go to jail, don’t let anybody punk you. Mind your business.”

His uncle meant that it was important to defend yourself, always stand up for yourself, and not let anyone take advantage of you. Demarcus would put that counsel to use in a matter of years.

Lured by false status

While there wasn’t an abundance of material wealth in Demarcus’ early life, what his family had plenty of was affection and caring for one another. He recalls a childhood of riding his bike and climbing trees.

“It was a loving home,” he says. “They always made sure that I had everything I needed. I was blessed to grow up with a great family.”

Demarcus’ grandparents were very active in their church and brought him along as often as possible. They taught Demarcus to pray and to develop a strong inner life with God. He admits that, while God was drawing near to him, he wasn’t ready to draw near to God.

Even though he was rich in his family’s love and attention, Demarcus coveted what many of the young men in his neighborhood had –

money, cars, jewelry, and most importantly, respect. He wanted to be looked at with admiration in his community, to have money, and to lift his lower-middle-class family economically.

Pulled by an attraction for the streets, Demarcus was determined to be like those young men, ruling the neighborhood by selling drugs.

“The way they walked around, the way they dressed themselves – I wanted that,” he recalls.

“When you come from such a small place, you want to be at the top of the food chain.”

Walking in the wrong path

Demarcus began to have regular and frequent run-ins with law enforcement starting at age 11 when he participated in a burglary with a group of friends. By age 14, Demarcus was selling marijuana

and developing a steady clientele. Soon he moved on to selling crack cocaine and heroin.

The money his “business” brought in was changing how he viewed himself. No longer was he a small fry in the neighborhood.

He was gaining the respect and awe of his peers, and it felt good. “That was the beginning of my lifestyle,” he says. “It began to become a part of my identity, so I began to walk in that path.”

New role models

By 2007, Demarcus could no longer fly under the radar.

After an attempted robbery that had gone bad, he was sentenced to more than 15 years in prison. Serving time was not the celebrated pit stop Demarcus had heard so much about.

He disliked being labeled a criminal and recalled the values and integrity his family had lovingly poured into his life. Being locked up made him face what he had become.

“I hated prison,” he says. “I hated the belief systems that came along with it. My family taught me respect, manners, and things of that nature, but I was a criminal.”

The life he’d been leading was no longer attractive to Demarcus.

He took note of those around him who were flourishing and intentionally choosing to be better individuals. Demarcus was honest with God about his behavior and criminal life. He wanted change and knew it could only begin with God.

“I went to God, and it was one of the first times in my life that I let go and I let God,” he says.

“I was like, ‘I surrender. I submit.’ And it wasn’t because I wanted to go home. That’s when I started reading the Bible.” Daily, he began to build himself up – studying the Bible, exercising, opening up more with family members, and learning as much as he could about running a business to prepare himself for life after release.

Going where the growth is

Demarcus had the opportunity to have a paying job in the prison. But he turned it down because he heard that the first Prison Fellowship Academy was coming. The academy uses targeted curriculum, compassionate coaches, and the power of community to replace participants’ criminal thinking and behaviors with purpose and biblically-based life principles.

Demarcus was in his academy site’s first graduating class.

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This isn’t how it’s supposed to be!

HOW do we explain what we see in this world? Terrorist attacks, sex slavery, racism, world hunger?

What about closer to home? Our parents get divorced. The girl down the street gets abducted. A relative gets cancer. We’re likely to think, “Something isn’t right here. Something is really, really wrong. This isn’t how life’s supposed to be!”

So, WHY do bad things happen?

There is an answer to the WHY question, found in the Bible. But it’s not an answer that most people like to hear: the world is the way it is because it’s the world that we, in a sense, have asked for. What or who could make this world different than the way it is? What or who could guarantee that life is pain-free, for everyone, all the time?

God could. God could accomplish that. But He doesn’t. At least not right now. And we’re angry with Him as a result.

We say, “God can’t be all-powerful and all-loving. If he were, this world wouldn’t be the way it is!” We say this hoping that putting a guilt trip on Him will make Him change the way He’s doing things. But He doesn’t seem to budge. WHY doesn’t He?

God doesn’t change things right now because He’s giving us what we asked for: a world where we get to treat Him as though He is absent and unnecessary. Remember the story of Adam and Eve? They ate the “forbidden fruit.”

That fruit was the idea that they could ignore what God said or gave them, and strike out on life apart from God. For Adam and Eve sort of hoped that they could become like God, without God.

They believed there was something more valuable in existence than God Himself, something more valuable

than having a personal relationship with God. And this world system – with all of its faults – came as a result of the choice they made. Their story is the story of all of us, isn’t it? Who hasn’t said – if not audibly at least in their hearts – “God, I think I can do this without you. I’ll just go this one alone. But thanks for the offer.”

We’ve all tried to make life work without God.

Why do we do that? Probably because we’ve all bought the notion that there’s something more valuable, more important, than God.

For different people its different things, but the mindset is the same: God isn’t what’s most important in life. In fact, I’d just as soon do it without Him altogether.

What is God’s response to that? He allows it.

Many people experience the painful results of others’ or their own choices that run contrary to God’s ways...murder, sexual abuse, greed, lying/fraud, slander,

adultery, kidnapping, etc.

All of these can be explained by people who have refused to give God access and influence over their lives. They are going about their lives as they see fit, and they and others suffer.

What’s God view on all of this? He’s not smug. He’s compassionate, hoping we will turn to Him so that He can bring real life to us. Jesus said, “Come to me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest.” (Matthew 11:28). But not all are willing to go to Him.

But what about when life is unfair, when bad things happen to us? What about those horrible circumstances that hit us in life, caused by someone other than ourselves?

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“A lot of people glorified going to jail. It was like a badge of honour.”



BACK PAGE

I WANTED A BETTER LIFE

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Building positive change

Demarcus has realized the goals he hoped for after prison: He's close to his children, and he's the owner of a successful commercial cleaning business.

"I don't want people to look at me as the dude that just did the time," he says.

"I'm an entrepreneur. I add value to life. I add value to communities. I'm here to help build positive change."

He proved this shortly after his release from prison in 2020 when he played a key role in getting a driver out of her burning car on the highway.

The car was engulfed in flames and appeared to be half of its original size by the time Demarcus reached it.

“**I'm here to help build positive change.**”



Demarcus is now the owner of a successful cleaning company.

Using a fire extinguisher from another driver, he settled the flames long enough for two other bystanders to loosen the motorist's seatbelt and pull her out.

Demarcus was awarded a commendation from the local fire department for his heroism.

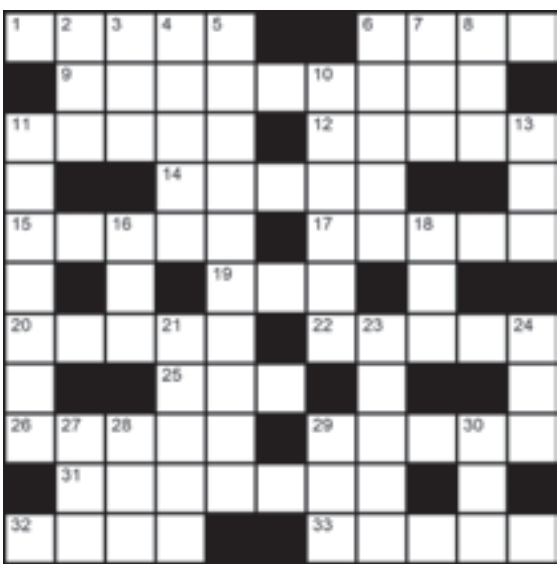
He acknowledges he's not the same man who went to prison in 2007.

After his release, he took the bus daily to his job at a tree service company. He keeps one of those bus tickets in his wallet to remember the progress he's made and God's faithfulness.

The original of this story can be found at www.prisonfellowship.org and it is used with kind permission.

Coffee Break CROSSWORD & SUDOKU

- ACROSS**
- 1 Spitting snake
 - 6 Troubles
 - 9 Field goal attempt (5,4)
 - 11 Room at the top
 - 12 "Come in!"
 - 14 Scattered, as seed
 - 15 Net access provider
 - 17 Parachute material
 - 19 Chum
 - 20 Birth-related
 - 22 Alpine call
 - 25 Blend
 - 26 Kind of duty
 - 29 US bird symbol
 - 31 Professional food provider
 - 32 Just say no
 - 33 Con artist's skill
- DOWN**
- 2 ___ out of (decide not to)
 - 3 Deli sandwich, initials
 - 4 Elevate; lift
 - 5 Criminal's associate
 - 6 Blowing a lot
 - 7 Tenth month
 - 8 Barely make, with "out"



- 10 Intently
- 11 Annual book of data
- 13 Sprint, move fast
- 16 Mark above an "i"
- 18 Young fellow
- 21 Island in "Jaws"
- 23 Egg producer
- 24 *To Kill A Mockingbird* author
- 27 Rink surface
- 28 Delivery vehicle
- 29 Electric fish
- 30 PC linkup

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SOLUTIONS PAGE 7



"There was hissing, and yes ... there was barking."

Out of the darkness

Teddy Hung was the biggest drug dealer in Hong Kong but he found Someone more powerful than himself.



Teddy Hung

Teddy Hung's trade made him very rich and very powerful. It also made him one of the most wanted men in Hong Kong. For Teddy's trade was the triad.

Teddy, who was also known as Hung Hon-ye, was the leader of Hong Kong's notorious 14K gang, the second largest in the world. Teddy's ill-gotten gains came from prostitution, human trafficking, gambling dens and money laundering. Ruthless and untouchable, he went by the nickname 'Black-faced God'.

He joined the gang after dropping out of school at 15.

His father gave these uplifting words of advice to his son: "You must not be greedy and fearful of death. Remember to be loyal and not to betray your brothers otherwise I will kill you first."

Teddy had all the trappings of a warlord – four wives and a string of mistresses, bodyguards and luxury cars. As the biggest drug dealer in Hong Kong, he earned millions of dollars every day.

Even jail didn't stop him. When he was sent to prison for 13 years in the 1990s, he renovated his cell and ran his business from behind bars.

However while he was in prison, Teddy was visited by the chaplain who said to him: "You are very successful and famous around the world. But when you die what will you be remembered for?"

"That question made me think," said Teddy. "I realised the more successful I was, the more lives I spoiled, the more guilty I was. I did not help people; I ruined people instead. I was the demon head."

The obvious solution would have been to shut his business down but how could he do that? Teddy wrestled with this dilemma night and day. Guilt and shame racked him, leading to severe insomnia and depression. In desperation one night, Teddy decided to kill himself.

As he rolled over in his bed, his eyes fell on the Bible his wife had put on his bedside table. She was not a Christian; the Bible was a gift from one of the multitude of pastors who had tried over the years, without any success, to lead Teddy to Jesus Christ.

Teddy, of course, hated the pastors. He would scream at them: "Get out! I am prepared to go to hell!"

"I pointed at the Bible and I said 'Jesus! If you are real, You cure my illness and let me sleep and I will trust You.'" He was asleep before he finished the sentence.

A short time later, he accepted an invitation by those same pastors to a church concert and it was there that the fearsome triad boss bowed his knee to Jesus Christ.

It would have been nice to say everything went smoothly for Teddy after that, but they didn't. In fact, they went terribly wrong.

His gambling dens lost money and Teddy, desperate not to lose this income, said he "applied for two years' leave" from God and established more dens in Thailand.

When they too lost money, Teddy became furious with God. He flung off the cross he wore around his neck and decided to turn his back on Jesus.

"The next few nights, I couldn't sleep a full hour," he shares. "I put on the cross again, and I fell asleep immediately. I freaked out when I woke up. I thought 'this God is formidable!'"

Confused and frightened he asked his pastors "What kind of God is this? When I believe in Him, He causes me to lose all my business; when I don't, He doesn't let me sleep! My pastors said to me, "Taking two years of leave was what you wanted, not what God wanted. Would you let your children go into illegal businesses like you are doing now? He loves you and that is why He wants to lead you out of it."

Yet still the gang leader struggled – he felt a huge responsibility for the men and women who would lose their jobs if he closed his businesses down.

Three years later, still unwilling to obey God, Teddy decided suicide was his only way out.

"I went home to write my will but just when I was done, God spoke to me. Jesus told me that if I killed myself, one of my sons would kill my family. I knew it was His voice and I knew this was true.

"I tore up the will and fell asleep." When he woke up, Teddy knelt down and prayed. For the first time, he called God 'Father God'.

He says God showed him heaven and hell – an experience that left him forever changed.

"The suffering in hell was so much

that it was unbearable; but the joy in heaven was indescribable," Teddy shared. "God said to me 'If you continue in this business, you will only drag everyone down to hell'. Having experienced heaven and hell, I know for sure that I couldn't let them go to hell."

Teddy finally closed all his businesses and enrolled in Bible school.

He went on to found a church tailor-made for gangsters in Hong Kong. Those who commit their lives to Jesus are then given training and the opportunity to buy a legitimate franchise business as an avenue to leave the triad world.

"It is useless to tell them about Jesus but not solve their problem of finding a job outside of the gang," Teddy said.

"When I finally let go, I began to see that He will take control.

"No one can save the triad members from hell except Jesus. And when one member is saved, his whole family will see the change in him and know that this Jesus is real and very powerful. They too will come to God."

Teddy summed up his salvation experience this way: "Don't be afraid to let go of what you have: God wants to take away the bad things to give you the good; and when He gives, it will be a hundredfold."

Teddy Hung died in 2018 of cancer. He was 70 years old.

This isn't how it's supposed to be!

● From page 1

When we are feeling victimised, it's useful to realise that God Himself, in the form of Jesus, endured horrendous treatment from others.

God more than understands what you are going through.

There is nothing in life that could be more painful than what Jesus endured on our behalf, when He was deserted by his friends, ridiculed by those who would not believe in Him, beaten and tortured before His crucifixion, then nailed to a cross, in a shameful public display and then dying of slow suffocation. This was no surprise to Jesus. He was aware of what was coming, foreknowing all the details, all the pain, all the humiliation.

There is no question that there is pain and intense suffering in this world.

Some of it is explained by selfish, hateful actions on the part of others. Some of it defies an explanation in this life. But God offers us Himself. God gives us the knowledge that He has endured also, and is aware of our pain and needs. Jesus said to His disciples, "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid." (John 14:27). There is ample reason to be afraid, troubled, but God can give us His peace, which is greater than the problem before us. And if we will trust Him with our lives, relying on Him, though we encounter difficulties, He will hold us securely.

This article was first published on EveryStudent.com and is used with kind permission

FROM CRIMINAL TO CRIMINOLOGIST

Arthur Bolkas recalls how everything changed for him the day he read a little book in prison.

'Shanghaied' from an open camp back to a maximum-security prison on a drug related charge, it was 1981 and my fifth Christmas since entering prison as a 22-year-old.

As I robotically paced the prison yard, I suddenly thought, "Have you found happiness in your life; real meaning and purpose?" That night in my tiny cell, I thought about hanging myself. Happiness? I needed to find a reason to live.

Raised on welfare in a Greek migrant family, I was a popular student, successful athlete, school captain and dux of my final year. My future looked promising. However, four years into an Arts/Law degree I grasped for fulfilment in a 'jet-set' lifestyle of drug addiction and armed-robberies. Despair, hatred and pornography further twisted me into someone I now feared.

Then I had another, much stranger thought: why not see what the Bible has to say?

What, the Bible? I resented Christians; they were boring and gullible and screwed me up when I was a kid. I rejected the thought, but it came back to me again and again until I asked myself, 'why am I so afraid of the Bible?' It's the most published and influential book in human history, and I've never read it. What have I got to lose?

I was unable to find a Bible in the library. However, that night, I flushed porn mags down the toilet, determined to find something decent to fill my perverted mind during the seventeen hours locked up each day. The next day whilst sorting through my belongings in the prison's dungeon store-room, I discovered a New Testament.

In the sweltering heat of my cell, I began reading the gospel of Matthew. Six hours later, I sat still in the darkness, as I pondered the last words of Jesus that I had read: "Ask and you will receive, seek and you will find, knock and the door will be opened to you" (Luke 11:13). I began to cry uncontrollably from a place deep within that needed purging, and called out to Jesus through my grief for His forgiveness, cleansing and peace.



Arthur and Andie Bolkas know that, underneath all the hurt and masks, prisoners are a lot like everyone else.

"I needed to find a reason to live."

A grinding key in the cell door awoke me. An officer poked his head in. I blinked and said "Good morning sir," then thought, "What's wrong with me, calling a screw sir!" Yet I felt strangely different.

In the chilly morning air, Mad Mike stood sentinel-like in the middle of the yard wearing just a tee-shirt. I approached him, offering coffee and tobacco. Just then my friend Marwan approached. "Hey Arthur, what are you giving him your stuff for?" Staring at me now, he said "What's happened to you? Your eyes, your face is glowing."

Marwan looked around at others, then intently back at me.

"It's just you; only you've got it." He even got me to look into the latrine's dingy stainless steel 'mirror' to see what he could see.

Amused at first, I realized that whatever it was I felt, and was somehow reflected in my face, was related to the previous night.

Discreetly pulling out the little book, and not quite knowing what to say, I said "Yesterday I was reading this." Marwan looked up from the New Testament, "What? Have you found God?"

"God! No, no," I stammered, not yet appreciating that God had in fact found me.

That was 30 years ago. A lot has happened since including a failed marriage, relapse into drug addiction, gradual healing and restoration through surrender to Jesus Christ, and the blessing of my wife Andie and two sons. Demitri and Daniel

Some years later, I met my wife Andie while presenting an information session on volunteering to visit female prisoners.

Some years ago, we formed a prison ministry called Five8 ('my mate' in rhyming prison slang), that brings together volunteers to visit inmates and support them post release. The first inmate we visited, Johnny, is now doing tertiary studies, is drug free and has become a Christian. Joanne is two years out, studying, and is not looking back. Frank successfully completed his first ever parole.

Both Andie and I know that when you scratch the surface of someone who is in prison, they are a lot like everyone else but have many more protective layers. Most people are in jail because they sustained broken hearts in their formative years and never fully recovered, often masking their pain with drugs and other addictions.

Arthur is a criminologist, speaker, actor and writer.

Twentieth-century martyrs Felipe and Mary Barrera wrote, "We discovered that faith is not expecting that the Lord will miraculously give us whatever we ask, or feeling the security that we will not be killed and that everything will turn out as we want. We learned that faith is putting ourselves in His hands, whatever happens, good or bad. He will help us somehow."

My chains are broken!

Thulani Free Hlatshwayo is struggling to make it through his prison sentence. The 44-year-old was convicted of the rape of a minor in 2014 and sentenced to 20 years jail. He maintains he is innocent.

He clings to the one hope he has as he serves his term – his faith in Jesus Christ.

"What I am going through is so painful but in all of this God is my Saviour, my Provider and my Fortress. I know He will never leave or forsake me."

Thulani says he grew up with a God-fearing family. "Every Sunday was a church day. My childhood was absolutely nice and good. In Swaziland the word of God is preached at church, at school and in homes."

But as he grew older he says he struggled with a sense of aimlessness.

"My life was without direction and I also had a bad temper and anger."

In 2001, he made a personal decision to commit his life to Christ because "being a Christian is good because it's God's will."

"I confessed my sins to God and accepted Jesus Christ as my Lord and Saviour. It was the right thing to do. I saw good things happen at home."

Thulani has served nine years of his sentence.

"Being in prison is not nice."

"It is worse to be imprisoned for a crime you did not commit."

However, he says he is, "still walking strong with my Lord."

"The best part of being a Christian is that I am not alone and am not afraid of anything because He will never leave me or forsake me."

"I face many challenges but with God I can overcome. God will help you overcome

every challenge and break every chain."

One of Thulani's favourite Bible verses is Proverbs 3:5,6 "Trust in the Lord with all your heart

and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways submit to Him and He will make your paths straight."



Thulani Free Hlatshwayo

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The World Hope Ministries Spiritual Care Programme consists of the following courses:

<p>BIBLICAL DISCIPLESHIP 1</p> <p>The lessons in this course will help the student engage the scriptures. This course consists of 4 books: Relationship with God, Fellowship with God, Responsibility to God and Accountability to God. Upon completion of all 4 books, one is issued with a bible in a language of his/her choice, and a certificate.</p>	<p>THE JESUS FILM</p> <p>This film which is based on the biography of our Lord Jesus Christ, from birth to His ascension, is screened by a World Hope facilitator as part of our course.</p>
<p>BIBLICAL DISCIPLESHIP 2</p> <p>This course builds on the foundation laid by Discipleship 1 and provides a deeper understanding of the word of God in the Christian walk. This course consists of two books A and B, each 13 lessons. A certificate is awarded upon completion of each of the books.</p>	<p>GODS ANSWER TO AIDS</p> <p>The purpose of this course is to enlighten and educate individuals of how to overcome the scourge of HIV/AIDS, based on what the Word of God says. This course consists of six lessons six weeks, engaging a DVD and a resource workbook. It is taught by a World Hope Ministries facilitator.</p>

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Post to: PO Box 96176, Brixton 2019

I thought I was unforgiveable

“I became a murderer at the age of 12 years old,” Paul Holway writes in the opening of his book, *The Shame Identity*, which recounts his life story.

You would be forgiven for assuming Paul had a wretched childhood, full of tragic circumstances that led up to him taking the life of his sibling, but he describes his life before that fateful day as “normal”.

“I came from a Christian home; two parents, an older brother, a younger sister, and myself,” Paul writes in an article for *truthsaves.org*. “I grew up in the church so I knew all the popular Bible stories and was taught about God.”

But as he grew up, Paul started getting into trouble at school and home.

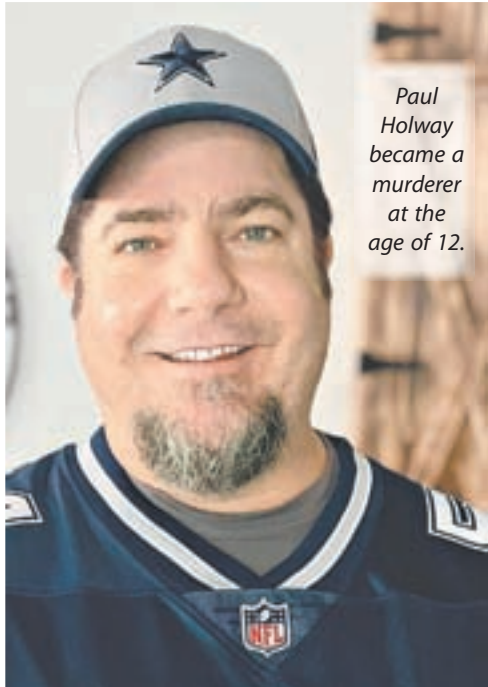
“I started feeling isolated and withdrawn. I felt like nobody loved me and I started to turn all of my emotions inward. Those emotions became anger and hatred.”

He became jealous of his siblings, especially his younger sister, Bethany, who seemed to get more attention and love from their parents.

“I felt like I was being physically abused at home. In reality when looking back now, I was not abused. I was punished by getting spanked ... A fear grew in me and I was more and more withdrawn and that caused me to become suicidal.”

Then Paul started abusing animals.

“On several occasions, it resulted in the death of the animal. Each



Paul Holway became a murderer at the age of 12.

time I killed an animal, my respect for life diminished, until I started to view people as objects instead of living beings.”

Paul writes in his first book, *Life After* that he hated what he was doing, but his anger had total control over him. Then Paul discovered pornographic magazines in his father’s closet. The images on the pages fed his beliefs about people being merely objects. He also started stealing from stores as well as his own friends, family, teachers and fellow students.

“On November 17th 1988, I made a decision that proved to change the direction of my life and the lives of

my family. Through everything that was building up inside me to this point and the trouble I got into at school that day, the only way that came to mind to get out of trouble at home was to shoot my little sister, Bethany. I believed that if I shot her, that everyone would be afraid of me and would not hurt me anymore. That afternoon after school, I shot and killed Bethany. She was eight years old and I was 12.”

Paul was sent to prison for five years – the maximum sentence for a juvenile.

“During those five years, my hate for life and for myself increased,” he

says in *The Shame Identity*. “When I looked in the mirror, what I saw looking back was a monster.”

Paul was released into his parents’ custody at 17, just in time to start his senior year of high school.

“Everyone knew me and what I had done,” Paul explains. “Nothing could be hidden in such a small town.”

Paul fell in with his old friends and started using drugs and alcohol to numb his feelings. After graduating school, he got into trouble and was charged with a felony. Miraculously, he received three years of supervised probation instead of the prison

sentence the district attorney was aiming for.

Paul moved away and got married. At work he met a woman and her husband who were Christians. They invited Paul to attend church with them and he agreed.

“I ended up giving my life to Jesus,” Paul shares. “As I started my new life as a Christian, I struggled big time. I was dealing with a failing marriage and decided to leave; I started drinking again, had sex with an ex-girlfriend while still married and separated, and still battled all the turmoil going on inside from my past. After four months of separation, God brought my wife and I back together as He began to heal our relationship.”

Paul was changing and gaining freedom in certain areas of his life, but believed God couldn’t – or wouldn’t – forgive him for killing Bethany.

“I truly believed that that particular sin was unforgivable,” Paul writes. “Finally, 25 years after shooting and killing Bethany, God brought me to the point where I was ready to give her to Him. Giving Bethany to God meant I had to trust His Word enough to believe that Jesus’ death on the cross was the final sacrifice that paid for all my sins.”

Paul remembers the night he finally let her go as the first time he ever felt and knew complete freedom and forgiveness.

“God has turned a horrible tragedy that was meant to

destroy into something life giving—spiritually life giving. He has restored my relationship with my family. My wife and I just passed our 22nd wedding anniversary and have an almost 17-year-old son.”

Paul volunteers at his local Youth Detention Center, where he speaks into young men’s lives and shares God’s love with them.

“[Jesus] reached down into such an evil darkness and gave me life. He loves me enough that He died for me and I get to share Him with anyone who will listen. I am a child of God and look forward to an eternity with Him!”



Paul and his wife have just passed their 22nd wedding anniversary.

Light of the world

BY JODY BENNETT

WHEN we try to imagine God, so often we think of some sort of superhuman. That, if God exists, He must be like us but stronger, faster and invincible. Maybe like some sort of Father Christmas or Father Time, old, bearded and benevolent. Or like Zeus, angry and vengeful like a warrior. However, the Bible tells us that God is not human. We are made in His image – we are like Him in some aspects – and He revealed Himself to us as the man Jesus, but God the Father is not a man, He is a spirit (John 4:24). In the Bible, God does call Himself a Father and there is mention of His hands and eyes and ears. But the Bible also uses animal imagery to try to describe God, it talks about God’s wings and Jesus is compared to both a lion and a lamb. And God also uses inanimate things to convey information about His attributes, like God being a pillar of fire and the cloud that the Israelites saw in the wilderness.

One of the things the Bible compares God to, is light. 1 John chapter 1 verse 5 reads: “This is the message which we have heard from Him and declare to you, that God is light and in Him is no darkness at all.”

Jesus called Himself “The light of the world” (John 8:12). The book I am reading at the moment by Jeff Rhoades, with the rather long title of *The Bible, Dimensions, and the Spiritual Realm: Are Heaven, Angels, and God Closer Than We Think?* makes some fascinating observations about how the properties of light reveal to us more about God.

• What we can see is just part of the electromagnetic spectrum. Light waves in the form of radio waves, gamma rays, microwaves, ultraviolet, x-ray and infrared waves are around us all the time, even when it is dark. It is just that our eyes can only see a small spectrum of light that is visible light. In much the same way, God is always all around us, but undetectable except within the small bandwidth in which He has revealed Himself to us through nature, the Bible, Jesus Christ, visions and miracles.

• Light is constant and unchanging. Light moves at 186,000 miles per second, and it is not impacted by space or time. God is eternal and never changing. He is not affected by space or time. “For I am the Lord, I do not change”, He says in Malachi 3:6.

• Light is the force that helps atoms stick together. Electromagnetism is a form of light and it binds atoms to other atoms. The Bible describes God as holding all things together. “He [Jesus] existed before anything else, and He holds all creation together” (Colossians 1:17).

• Light reveals things, nothing can hide in the light. In the same way, nothing is hidden from the Lord. In Revelation 2:23 Jesus (who is God) says, “I am the one who searches out the thoughts and intentions of every person.”

• Albert Einstein showed that space and time are linked; the faster a person moves through space, the more time slows down. At the speed of light, time stands still. The Bible describes God as not just LIKE light but that He IS light. Therefore, He is everywhere, and He is able to move at the speed of light. So, that might be one way to explain how different God’s relationship with time is to ours – He is unaffected by it.

• Rhoades writes, “Light has been studied for thousands of years, and scientists have learned much about light and its properties. Light is sometimes matter and sometimes energy. Light behaves strangely when observed. Light is a wave and a particle. However, despite how much scientists have learned, many aspects of light are still a mystery.” In the same way, God is mysterious, our minds cannot truly comprehend Him.

“For My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways My ways,” says the Lord. “For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts” (Isaiah 55:8-9).

That is one of the compelling things about Christianity for me – that God is so “other”, so beyond our little human understanding or ideas. So – in the true meaning of the word – awesome!



Now I have a future

Describing himself as a “criminal with no backbone”, Minora Mavume says he did everything under the influence of drugs.

Speaking to *Challenge News*, the 32-year-old says that until he accepted Jesus Christ, he was “just a drug addict and a thief with no future”.

He had been raised by his grandmother, who he remembers teaching him to be respectful and to conduct himself well.

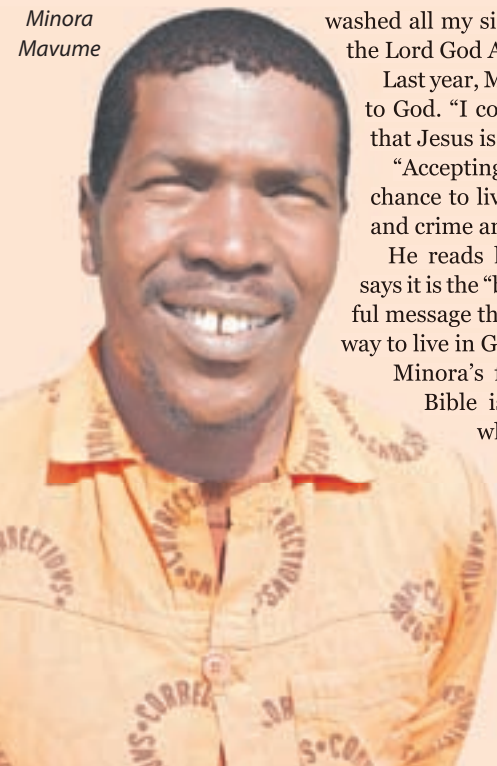
All through school he says his dream was to be “a good breadwinner for my family because we didn’t have much”.

Minora says he had heard about God while growing up but didn’t understand much of what he’d been told.

Later in life he met a street preacher who explained the Gospel (the good news that Jesus Christ came to Earth to die for our sins) to him.

Minora realised that if he didn’t acknowledge Jesus as Saviour and Lord, “God would not dwell in me. I saw that Jesus washed all my sins to bring me closer to the Lord God Almighty.”

Minora Mavume



Last year, Minora committed his life to God. “I confessed with my mouth that Jesus is my Saviour.”

“Accepting Christ has given me the chance to live my life without drugs and crime and to live a normal life.”

He reads his Bible diligently and says it is the “book of life with a powerful message that guides and shows the way to live in God’s hands.”

Minora’s favourite section of the Bible is the book of Genesis, which recounts how God created the Earth and all living things.

He says he would like to share the message that “Jesus loves us all and He doesn’t look at race or colour. He died for all of us – we must repent to God the Almighty.”

Afrikaans translation

'N BOOM WORD AAN SY VRUGTE GEKEN

Vandat hy kan onthou, maak sy lewe nie sin nie, sê Lloyd Kacha. Hy het al die stukke van die legkaart gehad, maar kon hulle nooit laat inpas soos hulle moet nie.

Hierdie verskil was tussen sy gedrag en sy geloof. Lloyd se ouers was pastore, en natuurlik was hy met Bybelse waarhede en gereelde kerk en Sondagskool bywoning grootgemaak.

Lloyd het outomaties aanvaar dat hierdie gewoontes hom ook 'n Christen gemaak het. So hoekom, het hy homself vir baie jare afgeveer, het hy nie 'n Christen lewe gelei nie? In plaas daarvan, vertel hy Challenge News, was hy liewer vir die dinge van die wêreld as die dinge van God. Hy het geen eerbied vir God gehad nie, het "baie verkeerde dinge" gedoen en "het altyd slegte gedagtes" en bese planne gehad wat skande vir sy familie teweeg gebring het. "Ek het wrokke gekoester en gesukkel met onvergewensgesindheid, haat en woede. Dit was vir my duidelik dat ek nie die Gees van God binne in my gehad het nie. Maar dit het my meer verwar. Ek was 'n Christen was ek nie? Ek het tog elke Sondag kerk bygewoon en dit het my die valse oortuiging gegee dat ek wedergebore is, wat glad nie die waarheid was nie."

Maar in 2015, toe Lloyd 14 jaar oud was, het alles vir hom duidelik geword. Hy het 'n jeugkamp bygewoon en het geleer dat hy nie op sy ouers se geloof, of op gereelde kerk bywoning kon staat maak om 'n Christen te wees nie.

Hy het geleer dat dit nodig is om self 'n verbintenis aan Jesus Christus te maak en 'n persoonlike verhouding met Hom te hê.

"Dit was gedurende Bybelstudie. Ons het oor verlossing en hoe ons werklik gered kan word geleer. Ek het uiteindelik verstaan dat ek nie wedergebore as 'n Christen is nie. Daardie dag, op Oktober 31, 2015, het ek finaal my lewe vir Christus gegee, en van daardie dag af het my lewe verander."

"Om in 'n Christen gesin gebore te wees beteken nie dat jy self 'n Christen is nie. Jy word 'n Christen wanneer jy bely dat Jesus die Here en Verlosser is van jou lewe. Jesus is nou in volle beheer van my lewe."

Lloyd se geloof het van daardie dag af floreer, en die twee en twintigjarige volg nou in sy ouers se voetspore – hy studeer tans in Suid Afrika om 'n pastoor te word. Sy boodskap is: 'Jesus is die Weg, die Waarheid en die Lewe. Niemand kom na die Vader toe behalwe deur My nie.' (Johannes 14:6)

"Jesus roep jou," sê Lloyd. "Dit maak nie saak wat jy gedoen het nie, Hy het vir jou en my gesterf sodat ons die ewige lewe kan hê."

"Hy verseker ons in Openbaring 3:20 'Kyk, Ek staan by die deur en Ek klop. As iemand My stem hoor en die deur oopmaak, sal Ek by hom ingaan en saam met hom die feesmaal hou, en hy saam met My."

English translation

Finding the perfect fit

For the longest time, Lloyd Kacha says his life didn't make any sense. He had all the pieces of the puzzle but he could never make them fit the way they should.

The disconnect was between his behaviour and his beliefs.

Lloyd's parents are pastors and so naturally he was raised with Biblical beliefs and regular church and Sunday school classes. Lloyd took it for granted that this automatically made him a Christian too.

So why, he asked himself for many years, didn't he live a Christian life? Instead, he tells Challenge News, he was more in love with the things of the world than the things of God.

He had no reverence for God, did "a lot of wrong things" and "I always had bad thoughts, evil plans to the point of bringing shame to my family."



Lloyd Kacha

"I struggled with resentment, unforgiveness, hatred and anger, which made it clear to me I didn't have the Spirit of God in me. "But that confused me even more. I was a Christian, wasn't I? I was still going to church every Sunday and this gave me the false conviction that I was born again, which wasn't the truth at all."

The penny finally dropped in 2015, when Lloyd was about 14.

He attended a youth camp and learned that he could not depend on his parents' faith or regular church attendance to be a Christian.

He learned that he needed to make a commitment to Jesus Christ and have a personal relationship with Him.

"It was during Bible study. We learned about salvation and how one can truly be saved. I finally understood that I was not born again as a Christian."

"That day, on October 31, 2015, I finally gave my life to Christ and from that time onwards my life has changed."

"To be born in a Christian family does not mean you are a Christian."

"You become a Christian when you yourself confess Jesus as the Lord and Saviour of your life. Jesus is now the controller of my life."

Lloyd's faith has flourished since that time and the 22-year-old is following in his parents' footsteps – he is a student pastor in South Africa.

His message is that Jesus is the Way, the Truth and the Life and that no-one comes to the Father except through Him (John 14:6).

"Jesus is calling you," Lloyd says.

"It doesn't matter what you have done, He died for you and me so we can have eternal life."

"He gives us the assurance in Revelation 3:20: 'Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if anyone hears My voice and opens the door I will come in and eat with him.'"

“He died for you and me so we can have eternal life.”

Are there contradictions in the Bible?

WHILE some claim that the Bible is full of contradictions, this simply isn't true. The number of apparent contradictions is actually remarkably small for a book of the Bible's size and scope. What apparent discrepancies do exist are more of a curiosity than a calamity. They do not touch on any major event or article of faith.

Here is an example of a so-called contradiction. Pilate ordered that a sign be posted on the cross where Jesus hung. Three of the gospels record what was written on that sign: In Matthew: "This is Jesus, the king of the Jews." In Mark: "The king of the Jews." In John: "Jesus of Nazareth, the king of the Jews." The wording is different, hence the apparent contradiction. The remarkable thing, though, is that all three writers describe the same event in such detail – Jesus was crucified. On this, they all agree. They even record that a sign was posted on the cross, and the meaning of the sign is the same in all three accounts!

What about the exact wording? The gospels were originally written in the Greek language, which didn't use a quotation symbol as we do today to indicate a direct quote. The gospel writers were making an indirect quote, which would account for the subtle differences in the passages.

Here is another example of an apparent contradiction. Was Jesus in the tomb for two or three nights before His resurrection? Jesus said, prior to his crucifixion, "For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of a huge fish, so the Son of Man will be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth" (Matthew 12:40). Mark records another statement that Jesus made, "We are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be betrayed to the chief priests and teachers of the law. They will condemn Him to death and will hand Him over to the Gentiles, who will mock Him and spit on Him, flog Him and kill Him. Three days later He will rise" (Mark 10:33,34).

Jesus was killed on Friday and the resurrection was discovered on Sunday. How can that be three days and nights in the tomb? It was a Jewish figure of speech in Jesus' time to count any part of a day or night as a full day and night. So Friday, Saturday, and Sunday would be called three days and three nights in Jesus' culture. We speak in similar ways today – if a person were to say, "I spent all day shopping," we understand that the person didn't mean 24 hours.

This is typical of apparent contradictions in the New Testament. Most are resolved by a closer examination of the text itself or through studying the historical background.

This article was first published on EveryStudent.com and is used with kind permission

Zulu translation

Ngathola okungilingana kahle

sikhathi eside, Impilo yakhe yayingenamqondo ophusile kusho uLloyd Kacha. Wayenakho konke kodwa wayengakwazi ukukuhlanganisa ngendlela efanele.

Lokhu ayekukholwa nokuziphatha kwakhe kwakungahlangani. Abazali baka Lloyd abafundisi okusho ukuthi wakhuliswa ngezifundo zeBhayibheli ekhulela kwa Sunday school

U Lloyd wakuthatha kalula lokho ecabanga ukuthi kumenza umKrestu naye. Kodwa kungani, ehluleka ukuphila Impilo yobuKrestu yonke leminyaka? Empeleni, etshela iChallenge news wayethanda okomhlaba kakhulu.

Wayengamesabi uNkulunkulu, wayehlala enza amaphutha "ehlala enemibango emibi" enezinhlelo ezimbi ezaziletha amahlazo emndenini wakubo.

"Nganginenzondo, ngingathetheleli, ngingolaka, kwakusobala kimi ukuthi anginawo uMoya kaNkulunkulu kimina."

"Kwangidida kakhulu lokho, ngangingumKristu akunjalo? Ngangiya esontweni njalo ngesonto okwaletha ithemba okungesilo lokuthi ngizelwe kabusha, okwakungenjalo."

Kwavuleka amehlo ngo 2015 u Lloyd eneminyaka ewu 14.

Wayesenkonzweni yabasha lapho ezwa khona ukuthi angeke ancika okholweni lwabazali bakhe nokuya njalo esontweni akumenzi umKristu. Wafunda ukuthi udinga ukuzithathela esakhe isinqumo azinikele kuJesusu Kristu abe nobudlelwano naye.

"Kwakuyisikhathi sefundo lapho afunda khona kabanzi ngokusindiswa. Ngagcina ngiqonda kahle ukuthi ngangingazalwanga kabusha njengomKristu."

"Ngalelolanga lika October 31 2015, nganikela

impilo yami kuKristu kusukela ngalelolanga impilo yami yaguquka. Ukuzalelwa emndenini wamaKristu akukwenzi umKristu. Uba umKristu uma wena uvuma uJesusu njengeNkosi noMsindisi wempilo yakho. UJesusu uYena manje obusa impilo yami."

“Wasifela ukuze sibe nokuphila okungunaphakade.”

Ukholo luka Lloyd lwaqhakaza kusukela ngaleso sikhathi lensizwa ena22 ilandela ezinyathelweni zabazali bakhe ufundela ukuba umfundisi eSouth Africa.

Umlayezo wakhe ukuthi uJesusu uyindlela, neqiniso nokuphila akekho oza kuBaba ngaphandle kwakhe Johane 14:6. "UJesusu uyakubiza," kusho uLloyd "akuhluphi ukuthi wenzeni, wasifela mina nawe ukuze sibe nokuphila okuphakade."

"Usinikezela isiqiniseko kuSambulo 3:20 'Bona, ngimi emnyango ngiyangqongqotha; uma umuntu ezwa izwi lami evula umnyango ngizongena ngidle naye.'"

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WORDS FOR THE HEART

STUDIES IN THE GOSPEL OF MARK

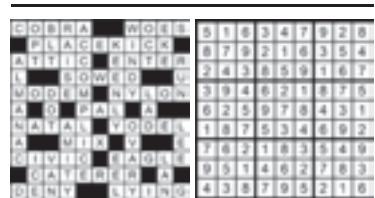
Welcome to this Bible Study. Read slowly what I have written. If you have a Bible, look up the reference verses given, and allow the Holy Spirit to minister to your soul through them. – ALAN BAILEY

Mark 1:21-45

INTRODUCTION

OUR last study was the first one based on Mark's Gospel. We looked at Chapter 1, verses 1 to 20. It is a fast-moving report on what Jesus did from the outset of His ministry. John the Baptist spoke about Him, then we read of His baptism and temptation and the calling of the first disciples. We will go on to find that the narrative moves quickly and shows what a great impact Jesus made wherever He went. A fascinating journey is before us!

Verses 21-22 "They went to Capernaum, and when the Sabbath came, Jesus went into the synagogue and began to teach. The people were amazed at His teaching, because He taught them as one who had authority, not as the teachers of the law."



The Sabbath was the seventh day of the week, and the synagogue was the building in which the Jews met for worship. The people could recognise that Jesus was different from their usual teachers. He had an authority which they lacked. The truth had unusual power that could be felt.

Verses 23-26 "Just then a man in their synagogue who was possessed by an evil spirit cried out 'What do you want with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are – the Holy One of God!' 'Be quiet!' said Jesus sternly. 'Come out of him!' The evil spirit shook the man violently and came out of him with a shriek."

The Bible makes clear that there are demons who are active on earth. They are fallen angels involved with Satan. It seems that they increased in their activity when Jesus was on earth. The man had the demon in his life in such a way that he lacked control over his words and actions.

The spirit understood who Jesus



was and reacted with surprise and concern. In dismissing him, Jesus showed His divine authority, something not seen before by the people.

Verses 27, 28 "The people were all so amazed that they asked each other, 'What is this? A new teaching – and with authority! He even gives orders to evil spirits, and they obey Him.' News about Him spread quickly over the whole region of Galilee."

This was one of the early signs, or miracles, which Jesus did, making it obvious that He was no ordinary man. He said that He had come from God and signs like this confirmed it. No-one before Him had shown this kind of authority.

Verses 29-31 "As soon as they left the synagogue, they went with James and John to the home of Simon and Andrew. Simon's mother-in-law was in bed with a fever, and they told Jesus about her. So, he went to her, took her hand and helped her up. The fever left her, and she began to wait on them."

Another miracle follows straight on after the first. Jesus has power over sickness. It is clear that the healing was not gradual, as it might have been otherwise, but it happened in an instant. The woman was immediately well. We also begin to see that the Lord Jesus was merciful and compassionate, doing good to people.

Verses 32-34 "That evening after sunset the people brought to Jesus all the sick and demon-possessed. The whole town gathered at the door and Jesus healed many who had various diseases. He also drove out many demons, but He would not let the demons speak because they knew who He was."

It didn't take long for word to spread about Jesus and His power to heal. We can imagine excited crowds gathering, not only to see what was happening but to bring sick folk with hope in their hearts of a new beginning. How much good cheer this must have created. People all going their way having experienced a miracle. The evil beings were being stirred and losing their grip.

Verses 35-37 "Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where He prayed. Simon and his companions went to look for Him, and when they found Him, they exclaimed: 'Everyone is looking for you!'"

In the four gospels we are told how Jesus kept continual touch with His Father in heaven. He deliberately found privacy where He could speak with God the Father. In this case, He

with skin and flesh being eaten away. It was regarded as contagious though this was hardly true. People rarely got over it, so their case was sad. This man had faith to believe that Jesus could heal him, so he boldly made his move. People kept strictly apart from lepers, but Jesus reached out and touched him. Such a wonderful connection between pure holiness and deep human need. What a miracle this was! It seemed like the impossible happening.

Verses 43-45 "Jesus sent him away at once with a strong warning: 'See that you don't tell this to anyone. But go, show yourself to the priest and offer the sacrifices that Moses commanded for your cleansing, as a testimony to them.' Instead, he went out and began to talk freely, spreading the news. As a result, Jesus could no longer enter a town openly but stayed outside in lonely places. Yet the people still came to Him from everywhere."

We can see the reason why Jesus didn't want the man to advertise his healing as it brings insistent crowds. It is not that Jesus didn't like crowds, what He didn't like was being overwhelmed with people and their needs to the point where He was unable to choose what He wanted to do.

In other words, crowds had the ability to trap a person and there is no easy way to escape. So going to lonely places or even to hiding places was a necessity. But even so, there were those individual people who searched and found Him. The reference to Moses and sacrifice concerns a ritual of the Old Testament law regarding leprosy.

CONCLUSION

We are beginning to experience the fast pace of Mark's record. But we mustn't allow the speed to make us miss very deep truths. Reading the gospels raises the central question "Who is this man Jesus?"

How do we see Him? Do we believe His words? What are His miracles telling us? And so on. How we answer is of real importance to us as it was to the people of the day. We will continue in chapter two.

How can 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.

AS A NEXT STEP :

If you prayed the above prayer, tick this box



I have prayed this prayer.

Please send me:

- Bible portion
- Some 'starting off' literature
- Information on a helpful church

If you have not prayed the prayer at this stage, tick this box



I would like to think about this.

Please send me:

- Bible portion
- More information as I am inquiring about being a Christian.
- I have a problem (see attached letter)

* Please tick and write clearly *

Name _____

Address _____

Phone _____

Age and occupation (it helps) _____

Send to:
World Hope Ministries,
PO Box 96176, Brixton, 2019

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

ARE WE QUALIFIED?

BY PASTOR MERVYN APPADU

FOR many people, paper qualifications have become all-important. Some even resort to purchasing a degree so they can present themselves with the "right qualifications".

Some have even resorted to fraud and misrepresentation by falsifying certificates and buying forged qualifications. Others get honorary degrees.

Someone who had never been to university once expressed jokingly that he had studied at INOGO University of Hawaii.

He then explained to me that it was his way of expressing "I no go to university" in poor, broken English. It made me wonder if I should put MWQ (My Wife's Qualifications) as one of my credentials!

As I considered the importance of qualifications, I thought about the qualifications that would impress God. Do we need qualifications before we can serve Him?

As the Lord brought my attention to Isaiah 6, I found that His question, "Whom shall I send?" and Isaiah's response, "Here I am, send me", occurred after Isaiah had repented [turned away from his wrongdoing] and God had forgiven him.

I began to realise that whom God forgives, He also asks to serve Him.

The "qualification" God seeks in His servants is a repentant heart. This idea is affirmed in Hebrews 9:14, "How much more shall the blood of Christ, Who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without spot to God, cleanse our conscience from dead works to serve the living God?"

Repentance, forgiveness and readiness are far more important qualifications than paper qualifications.



STANDING TALL

Jonathan Isaac of the Orlando Magic dunks the ball against the Milwaukee Bucks in November 2023 (photo by Rich Storry/Getty Images). INSET: Jonathan Isaac stands as others kneel before the start of a game between the Brooklyn Nets and the Orlando Magic on July 31, 2020 (photo by Ashley Landis - Pool/Getty Images).

Jonathan Isaac began his professional basketball career in 2017 when he was selected sixth overall by the Orlando Magic in the NBA draft but was then plagued by injury which kept him sidelined for three seasons. Despite not playing, the 26-year-old Haitian-American still managed to make headlines when he stood for what he believed in despite pressure around him to conform.

Six months after joining the Magic in 2017 Jonathan was ruled out with a right ankle sprain.

In his second year in the league, he became a starter for the Magic in 64 games, posting career-high averages in points, rebounds, assists, and blocks per game.

In October 2019 he posted 24 points in a 95-104 loss to the Toronto Raptors but in January, he was sidelined after suffering a traumatic knee injury during a 122-101 win over the Washington Wizards.

He played again in August 2020, winning 132-116 over the Sacramento Kings but tore his left anterior cruciate ligament (ACL) during the game.

Despite a successful surgery on it that month, the injury kept him off the court until January 2023.

During his return he recorded 10 points, three rebounds, and two steals in nine minutes in a 113-98 win over the Boston Celtics. During practice the following month, he tore his left adductor muscle and underwent surgery, ending the season for him.

In 2020 Jonathan made headlines when he refused to kneel during the National Anthem or wear a Black Lives Matter t-shirt with the rest of the league following the death of African-American George

Floyd while in police custody. At a press conference, reporters questioned whether he believed black lives mattered.

“Absolutely,” he replied. “I believe that black lives matter. A lot went into my decision and part of it was my thought was that kneeling and wearing a t-shirt doesn’t go hand in hand with supporting black lives... Everything that plagues our nation, that plagues us as a society I think the answer is the gospel [the good news that Jesus came to earth to die on the cross for our sins].”

Jonathan later told Liberty University students, “The heartbeat of what I was trying to do was (share) that I believe that we all fall short of God’s glory, and if any of us are throwing stones at any person or anything, we are throwing stones in a glass house. If we would love each other the way that God loves us, which is in spite of our sins and shortcomings, there could be real change between white and black people, for all people.”

Jonathan has written a book about his decision to stand for what he believes in called *Why I Stand*.

In the book, Jonathan describes being raised in a church-going family in the Bronx. When his parents divorced, Jonathan moved to Florida with his mother.

“Coming from Bronx, New York, a predominantly Black community to Naples, Florida, a predominantly white community, ‘different’ is exactly what I was,” Jonathan writes. “That was the first time that I started to develop a sense of

anxiety and really, self-awareness that I was different from the other kids and I wasn’t fitting in. And so that led me towards basketball and starting to refine my skills there. The girls started to talk to me, the guys wanted me to be on their team. And so that drove me to put every single ounce of time and practice that I could into basketball, into becoming better.”

The hard work paid off and Jonathan was accepted to play at Florida State University on a full scholarship. But his intense fear of failure followed him, manifesting in anxiety attacks. He was prescribed anxiety medication, which helped him to be able to play.

The anxiety continued when he was selected by the Orlando Magic in 2017.

During his rookie season he was invited to a chapel service.

“The chaplain started the message and he quoted Luke 6:46 that says, ‘Why do you call me Lord, Lord, and not do what I say?’” Jonathan remembers. “And the verse hit me like just a ton of bricks. I started to reflect on that verse even in the game, at night-time I’m thinking to myself, that’s me.”

After a season-ending injury, a stranger told him, “I can tell you how to be great.”

“Tell me,” Jonathan replied. The stranger said, “You have to know Jesus.”

“Have to know Jesus? Man, I’m a Christian, I grew up Christian,” Jonathan said but deep down he knew he was missing a personal

“**My life got flipped completely upside down.**”

relationship with Jesus. “I was hell bent on experiencing everything that the NBA had to offer,” Jonathan tells the Christian Post. “I had that kind of cliché Christianity of ‘I go to church from time to time or when times get tough, I pray’, but it wasn’t something that was real or tangible. From that moment on, my life got flipped completely upside down. I really got a sense of God intervening in my life and leading my footsteps and ordering things in order to get my attention.”

“I finally said, ‘Wow, God, you love me for me. I don’t have to work for it. I don’t have to be perfect.’ I was so used to walking around with so much anxiety and trying to plan what I would say, plan what I would do, because I didn’t want anybody to reject me. So it was the first time in my life that I could take a breath and be like, ‘I’m okay. God loves me for me. I don’t have to perform. I don’t have to make a shot.’” Those beliefs were tested in the summer of 2020 when Jonathan chose to

stand for the freedom found only in Christ.

“Any political structure or ideology, doesn’t, in itself, have the necessary tool for salvation,” he explains.” Which is what I ultimately believe is what everybody needs. I look out into the world, I can see that racism is not the only thing that plagues the hearts of men. But I know based on what I’ve experienced, in my life, that the gospel is what changes the hearts of men... I believe that if we can choose to love people the way that God loves us, which is in spite of our faults, in spite of our mistakes, in spite of our sin, and we can choose to forgive people the way that God forgives us and ultimately get back to God in the first place, we can have the real change that everyone is aiming to get to, but is trying to do it by alternative measures.”

Jonathan recently launched an athletic apparel brand dedicated to his Christian faith called UNITUS.

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