



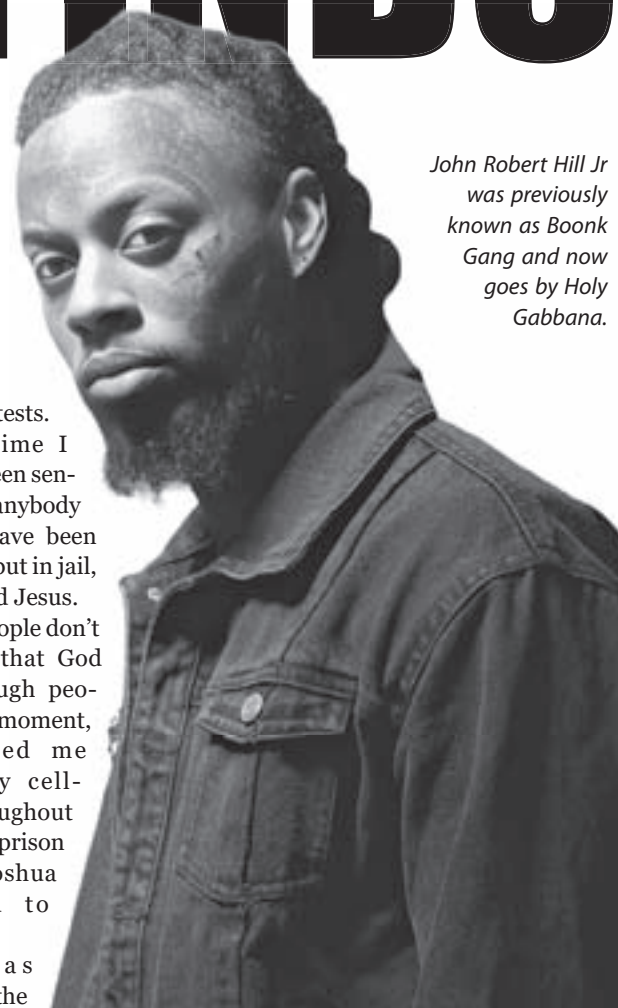
Challenge

THE GOOD NEWS PAPER

Prison Edition

GANGSTER FINDS A NEW LIFE

John Robert Hill Jr was previously known as Boonk Gang and now goes by Holy Gabbana.



At the age of 20, John Robert Hill Jr, previously known as Boonk Gang, had more than 5 million followers on Instagram. But in 2018, he found himself in prison, where his life took a dramatic turn.

John grew up as the oldest of seven children. His biological father was in and out of prison, so he was raised by his mother and stepfather. But when he was 14, his stepfather passed away from cancer.

“At the age of 14, I believe that’s a pivotal time for a young man to be in need of a father. I was learning about what it means to be a man and still trying to find my identity,” he says in a God Behind Bars podcast.

His stepfather had been the only role model he had and the loss impacted him deeply.

“My mom would beat me to the

point where it was it was abuse. I wasn’t allowed to emote, I wasn’t allowed to express myself.

“After my stepdad died, she stopped providing for us so I started stealing from the stores.”

Before he graduated from high school, John got kicked out of his home.

“So since a young age, I’ve been navigating through life and providing for myself. When I got famous, I had a lot of anger, bitterness and brokenness inside of me.”

His popularity grew when he started posting videos of himself committing crimes on Instagram.

Sharing in a video with Marcus Rogers, he recalls, “I realised that being a fool gained more attention... [it] gains attention quicker than being positive and wise.

“But I knew that I that’s not who I was, that’s not who I wanted to be.” But fame came with a price. He

turned to drugs to cope with the pressure of fame.

“I didn’t blow up with a team. I didn’t blow up with a manager. I blew up from the streets,” he says.

“I popped my first pill and it knocked me out. I’m like, ‘Dang it’s a marvellous feeling.’ It was like I was a junkie because that’s all that was on my mind, just pills.”

The addiction was so bad that John was in and out of the hospital multiple times due to overdosing. Even then, he kept going back to the drugs.

In 2018, John was sent to prison on charges of a hit-and-run, three gun charges and possession of narcotics. That was where he met his cellmate, Joshua.

Joshua asked him if he believed in Jesus.

“For that man to ask me if I believed in Jesus, that lets me know that God was always thinking about

me,” John attests.

“At any time I could have been sentenced and anybody else could have been my cellmate but in jail, I encountered Jesus.

“A lot of people don’t understand that God speaks through people. In that moment, God reached me through my cellmate.” Throughout their time in prison together, Joshua ministered to John.

“He was showing me the love of God, he became a real brother.”

One night, John decided to sing worship songs.

“I’m like, ‘Jesus loves you, for He died on the cross for our sins. He’s always with you from beginning to the end.’

“I’m singing. Then I lay down bundled up in my cover and I started crying.

“I was alleviated of the sadness that I was feeling and a presence came over me. This something hovered over me and stripped my sadness away and filled me with joy and made me happy.

“I’ve experienced what it’s like to be high and I’ve experienced hallucinations.

“This though, I’ve never experienced this before.”

John woke Joshua up to tell him what had happened. His cellmate then told him that he had an encounter with the Holy Spirit [the unseen presence of God].

Even then, John’s life hadn’t changed.

“When I got out of jail, I was still thugging it and I was still pursuing the things of the world,” he admits.

It was only later when he saw his friend get shot and survive the near-death experience that John decided to give his life to Jesus.

“Jesus is real. I tell people, ‘You may not be thinking about Jesus but He is thinking about you.’”

John now goes by the name Holy Gabbana, a reflection of his transformation. He understands that his past experiences have now been redeemed by God to reach out to others who can relate to him.

“Now that I am a man of faith and I am walking out the Gospel, I’m not dependent on drugs anymore. I’m familiar with God and His love so I know the void that was within me could only be filled by Jesus.”

John now preaches the Gospel in prisons, juvenile detention centres, schools, and colleges.

Magic or miracles?

Magician and skeptic André Kole was challenged to investigate the validity of the miracles of Jesus Christ. Would he debunk Jesus’ miracles or become convinced they were literally “acts of God”?



André Kole

André Kole (1936-2022) was seven when he was inspired to become a magician after seeing an illusionist’s performance. By the age of 20, he was performing his Table of Death trick on national television.

He went on to invent more than 1000 illusions including the Squeeze Box and the Head Mover, which has been performed by David Copperfield. Throughout his career, André performed in 80 countries on five continents. He was named Inventor of the Decade by the International Magicians Society and was awarded by The Academy of Magical Arts in Hollywood.

He was also known for governments commissioning him to investigate “miracle workers” who were duping people out of their money with fraudulent miracle cures. He never failed to work out how these fraudsters were tricking people.

At the time he was challenged to investigate the

miracles of Jesus Christ, André was a skeptic and believed Jesus was probably most successful magician who had ever lived. He acknowledged that if he was wrong and the miracles of Jesus were real, then God was real.

He wrote in his essay, *Jesus: Magician or God?* “A miracle has been defined as an ‘act of God’. It is something that only God can do. Anyone can claim to be God and quite a few have; however, only God can do what only God can do. Mohammed, Buddha, Confucius, Zoroaster or any other founders of the world’s great religions never claimed to be God. None of them ever claimed to be able to perform miracle. In all of human history, Jesus was unique.

• Turn to page 2

BACK PAGE



RISING STAR
CJ STROUD

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.

Because 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.

From drug addiction to hope

BY JASMINE, EX-PRISONER

Rosie* freezes as she hears my parents' drunken footsteps on the path. I can see the panic in our babysitter's eyes. Silently, she wraps her arms around me and my little brother – she's holding us so tightly like she will never let go. I feel safe in her arms, but I know any second that feeling will vanish. The front door slams shut as my mum and dad move into the house. Just the sight of them stumbling around scares me. Rosie stands up and shields my brother and me as my parents start to bicker. Terrified, I hug my brother close to me and we try to make ourselves as small as possible, hiding behind Rosie's slight frame. It won't be long now until my dad starts beating up my mum.



STOCK PHOTO

Evenings like this were common in my childhood. Our babysitter, Rosie, would regularly act as a boundary, trying to shield me and my brother from witnessing our father's violence.

I was six when my mother passed away. We're still not sure what it was that killed her – the drugs, the abuse, or some kind of disease? Either way, it wasn't a natural death.

From that time on, I became like a mother to my four-year-old brother, and my dad directed his anger and aggression our way. I would try to protect my little brother, but there's only so much a six-year-old can do to stop a fully grown man.

Most afternoons after school were spent at the local pub. Kids had to leave by 10pm, so Dad would hide us under the table to sleep, hoping no one would realise we were there. There was no one in my family I could turn to for help or protection. With mum gone, I was at the mercy of not just my dad but also of my cousin and uncle, both of whom abused me.

I hated my life. I felt so alone, so confused. I often wished my dad had died, not my mum.

It will come as no surprise that by the time I was 13, I was smoking weed, drinking, and even selling cigarettes to my schoolmates.

When I was 14, my dad moved four hours away with my brother but let me stay. I had nowhere to sleep and nowhere to live, but for a moment, it felt like freedom! I wasn't under my dad's roof anymore, but I was couch-surfing and only intermittently attending school. I fell

pregnant at 16, and after my daughter was born, I was drinking and smoking weed every day. By the time I was 19, I was out clubbing every night and became addicted to ecstasy, speed, and cocaine, and I began selling drugs to fund my addiction.

A few years later, I was using and selling methamphetamine, and at 27 years old, I was charged with \$500,000 worth of drug trafficking, possession of illegal arms, and car theft. They said if I plead guilty, the charge would be reduced to trafficking \$50,000. But the judge refused the deal of a suspended sentence

and put me on board-ordered parole, where I had to serve extra time while I applied for parole. I was on remand for 18 months.

Walking into prison didn't feel real. I was brought in very late at night, and they didn't have a cell for me. I was given a cold meal and placed in the Detention Unit. It was cold and lonely, and it felt surreal.

I felt a lot of guilt and shame at that time, but I also felt alive and free! I knew I would spend my time on the inside wisely, but I never thought it would be a Godly experience. I spent some time in the 'care bears' unit, where I was under observation for self-harming.

While I was there, I had visits from a few different chaplains. Talking with Debbie was the first time in my life that anyone had really listened to my story; it was the first time anyone had even cared enough to ask me those questions. I could see that she was genuinely interested, and I began to trust her.

Each chaplain I encountered shared their faith so genuinely, in their own unique ways. I don't recall Audrey carrying a Bible or telling us to study scriptures. It was more about the way she loved us. God's love poured out of her so generously that it was hard not to be impacted.

I gave my life to Christ in 2020. His love genuinely changed my life. I have been clean from all drugs since 2016. I now own my own cleaning business and have a ministry with my family where we help others to get back on track. My daughter turns 18 this year, and I'm in the process of adopting a baby. I'm part of a wonderful church family. My life is completely new – it's a miracle!

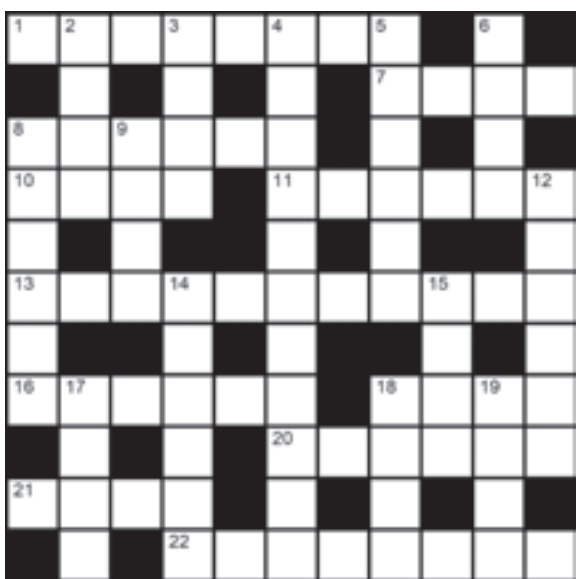
Things are not always easy, and I'm not perfect. But God is, and He is the reason I'm here today.

*Name has been changed

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

Coffee Break CROSSWORD & SUDOKU

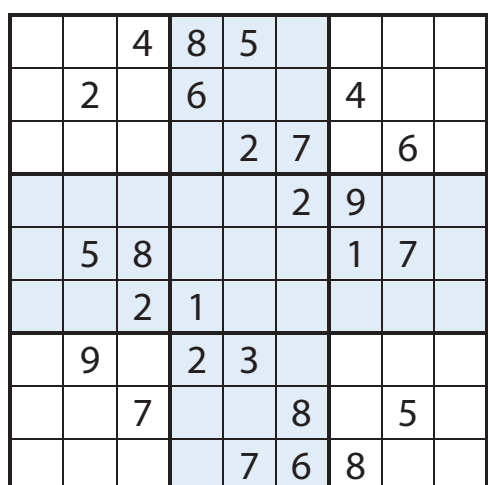
- ACROSS**
- 1 Letters A to Z
 - 7 Train track
 - 8 Quiz show answers, often
 - 10 Walk in water
 - 11 Carsick feeling
 - 13 Defoliant used in Vietnam war (5,6)
 - 16 Part of a plant
 - 18 Dry; barren
 - 20 Siberian plain
 - 21 Fasten with ties
 - 22 Military or police rank
- DOWN**
- 2 Old Italian money
 - 3 Possess
 - 4 Accountant (informal) (4,7)
 - 5 Shock, ordeal
 - 6 Bee home
 - 8 Changes slightly
 - 9 Hanging out doing nothing
 - 12 To-do list
 - 14 Desert rovers
 - 15 Geekish sort
 - 17 Future branch
 - 18 Youngest Brontë
 - 19 Wrinkle remover



[SOLUTIONS PAGE 7](#)



"Good thing we didn't sell the dog sled."



Magic or miracles?

• From page 1

"He could instantly heal every known sickness and disease of every person who came to Him. He could raise the dead. He could take a small boy's lunch and multiply it to feed over 5,000 people. He could say to a raging storm, 'Peace, be still' and the storm would instantly stop."

The Bible reports Jesus performed these incredible miracles, however non-religious historians also documented Jesus' miracles.

First-century historian Josephus Flavius, wrote about Jesus in his Jewish Antiquities. "...we learn that Jesus was a wise man who did surprising feats."

The Jewish Talmud said Jesus "worked miracles, but these miracles are attributed to sorcery and not to God."

When it came to André investigating Jesus' miracle of walking on water, he had personal experience of trying to do the same thing for a television special for the BBC and the Discovery Channel. The producers didn't want him to do it in a tank of water, but on an open lake, just like Jesus did.

The gospel writers, Matthew, Mark and John all give the account of when Jesus walked on the Sea of Galilee. Here is Matthew's account:

"But when the disciples saw him walking on the sea, they were terrified, and said, 'It is a ghost!' and they cried out in fear. But immediately Jesus spoke to them, saying, 'Take heart; it is I. Do not be afraid.'

And when they got into the boat, the wind ceased.

And those in the boat worshiped him, saying, 'Truly you are the Son of God.'

André said it took him several months and thousands of dollars to develop the techniques that allowed him to fool people into thinking he was walking on water. It also required three diesel trucks to carry all the necessary equipment for this illusion, which were not available 2,000 years ago.

At the end of his investigation, André concluded that Jesus could not have been performing magic and, "For anyone to even suggest that Jesus could have been a magician is to demonstrate an absolute, complete, total ignorance of the subject of magic."

He also said, "As a magician I deal with many illusions in my business, but in my own experience I discovered that God is no illusion; rather He is a reality, and that Jesus Christ truly is the 'magic ingredient' Who really makes life worth living!"

After his discovery, André used his talent as an illusionist "not just to entertain people but to share my deep personal faith in Christ... Over the years thousands have prayed to receive Christ through this outreach."

If Jesus' miracles were no illusion but "acts of God", it stands to reason that He is God. André said Jesus' "miracle of all miracles was His own resurrection." After living a sinless life, Jesus died on the cross for mankind's sins and then rose from the dead three days later. If you believe this and would like to make a commitment to follow Him, please see the box on page 11 entitled, **How do I Become a Christian?**

Joel. Photo: youtube.com/@RockCityCreative



I found my purpose

BY LIYAT BELAY

For taking a man's life, Joel has served 16 of his 38-year sentence so far at London Correctional Institution in Ohio.

"Even though I did grow up in a very strong Christian home, I fell away from God," Joel says on a Rock City Creative YouTube video. By age 18, he had two kids and a serious drug addiction. His crimes on the street led to committing a homicide, for which he is in jail.

For one filled with hate, Islam was very appealing, he says.

"I converted to Islam," he says. "I was a Muslim for 10 years. I was a member of the Nation of Islam."

He remained involved in gang life inside the prison and wound up in the Supermax at the Ohio State Penitentiary.

Once in solitary, he was battling his emotions. "For years I struggled with suicide. At this moment I was ready to do it," he confesses.

"I had written a suicide note. I was done with life. I was tired of feeling the pain. At that moment, I don't know why, but the name of Jesus kept coming into my head. It kept coming in my head and I tried to push it out."

Since he couldn't push the name of Jesus out of his head, he asked God for a sign.

Immediately, a corrections officer knocked on his door and asked if he wanted recreation – something that never happens, he says, when you're in solitary confinement.

"I opened my mouth to say, 'no' but 'yes' came out," he recounts.

In the recreation area, there was a TV broadcasting the pastor from Rock City Church preaching.

"There's somebody listen-

ing right now who's struggling," Pastor Chad said on the broadcast. "And God is telling you to come and rest."

Joel was hit as if by a lightning bolt. "That was the confirmation," he says.

"Right then and there, I received Jesus, and when I received Jesus, I received a new family. It's a family of guys who love me like I haven't been loved ever.

"Even when I was in the gang life, even when I was Muslim, I have never been loved by a group of guys like these guys."

Today, Joel is one of the leaders in the prison evangelizing and discipling men. He's no longer depressed about being locked up. Instead, he asks God daily to fulfill his purpose of serving the Lord and making an impact in the lives of men.

"When it came to speaking to Christians, I couldn't stand it because I was taught through Islam to hate this," Joel says.

"Being able to identify God's grace and to see God's mercy and to see God's love unfold in my life... it's the greatest feeling I ever felt."

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

THE REASON FOR MY HOPE



"I became a Christian because I saw that life without God is dead... There is nothing I can do without God at my side." Nyameko Mzamo, Devon Correctional Centre

"There is only one secure foundation: a genuine, deep relationship with Jesus Christ, which will carry you through any and all turmoil. No matter what storms are raging all around, you'll stand firm if you stand on His love."
– Charles Stanley

FROM SUICIDE WATCH TO MESSENGER OF HOPE

BY MORGAN RIVERA

After a failed bank robbery and a high-speed chase that ended with his capture, Brian decided he would take his life to avoid going back to prison. When his suicide attempt failed, he found himself alone with God in a suicide-watch cell at the county jail.

"I was totally broken," Brian says of that day in 2015. "I asked Jesus if He loves me like He says. I opened my heart, and that little abused boy that had been locked inside came out.

"Jesus scooped him up and said, 'I love you, I always have, and I always will.' I invited Jesus into my heart."

After growing up in an abusive home, Brian's view of God was twisted by the painful things he had endured as a child. No loving God would have allowed him to be abused as he had, he reasoned. If God was love, why didn't He protect him? By age 12, Brian had turned to drug and alcohol abuse to escape his pain. His adulthood was littered with stints in jail and prison.

Once Brian encountered God and experienced salvation in his jail cell, he found his heart breaking for those suffering as he once did.

He discovered a

deep desire to share his newly found hope with others within the prison walls. He believes prison is his mission field, and he's ready to share the Gospel [the good news about Jesus dying for our sins] with anyone who will listen.

"[God] has allowed me to witness to men who have gone through the same things I have," Brian shares.

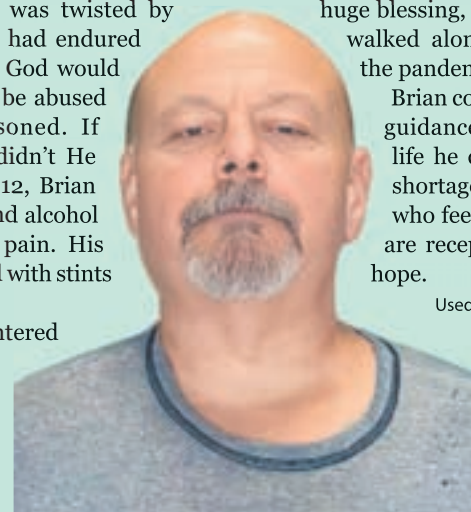
"I am free for the first time in my life – this isn't a prison but my mission field. The harvest is right, but the workers are few! Just like the demon-possessed man in the tombs, Jesus told him to 'go back and tell what the Lord has done for you.'"

After enrolling at Crossroads in 2016, Brian cruised through the first two tiers of courses. He said the ministry has been a huge blessing, and his mentor, Karen, walked alongside him throughout the pandemic.

Brian continues to ask for God's guidance in discerning whose life he can touch. He finds no shortage of people behind bars who feel lost and forgotten and are receptive to his message of hope.

Used with kind permission of Crossroad Prison Ministries (CPM).

CPM instructors from churches across the world guide students in their walks with Christ through correspondence Bible studies and letters of encouragement. For more information, visit cpministries.org.



Brian now brings a message of hope.

World Hope Ministries Mzansi
"Making known Jesus - The Hope of the world"




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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>

ALL OUR COURSES ARE QUALITY ASSURED AND OUTCOMES BASED

HOPE MAKES ALIVE

I HEREBY APPLY TO ENROL WITH WORLD HOPE MINISTRIES TO COMPLETE THE SPIRITUAL PROGRAMME FOR PRISONS

NAME _____ PRISON NUMBER _____

PRISON _____ SECTION _____ CELL _____

Post to: PO Box 96176, Brixton 2019

Gangster becomes new sort of leader

BY RODNEY J BRYLEY

Being raised in a broken home, with a single mother who couldn't read or write, soon I went to the streets for guidance, searching for a place to belong.

At 13 years old I joined a gang – and not just any gang. I joined a popular gang known for criminal enterprise violence and sin (wrong-doing against God). I almost immediately began breaking the law, selling drugs, carrying guns, robbing and stealing from people.

I became a heartless person, bitter about growing up fatherless, poor and alone. I didn't care about who I'd hurt, what I did wrong. And I only had love for the gang. They were my family, only they cared for me.

When I was 14 I had my first and only child – just a baby having a baby. I didn't know what it meant to be a father with responsibilities.

Now that I had a child I had to break the law even more just to care for him. His mother was even younger than I was – 13 – with no real mothering capabilities, for she was only a child.

While growing up in the streets, I soon learned I couldn't rely on anyone but myself. I had no morals, no principles and no values to live by. All I knew was the only person I could count on was myself, the gang and the criminals I surrounded myself with.

At the age of 19 I was sentenced to 50 years in prison. I had more time in prison than I knew what to do with. How was I going to do it all?

I spent all of my 20s and all of my 30s in prison doing 22 years in all before I made parole. By that time I was no longer a young gangster, I was known as "G". I was no longer all about following the gang – I was the leader.

Leading the gang was never a burden I wanted to bear. It not only meant I had to lead but I had to teach. This meant being responsible for encouraging violence, crime and sin. Years after I became leader I grew a conscience, which I believe came from Christ.

I had been raised in a Baptist church. At a very young age my mother had introduced me to Jesus Christ.

I got the impression early on that this Jesus was a very important man, but I had no idea just how important He



Rodney J Bryley

would become in my life.

Now He began to minister to me about what my responsibilities are to the children of the world. I can assure you, it didn't involve promoting violence, drugs, crime and sin.

He told me to remember the things he taught me as a child. So I would recall my mother and how hard she would try to share Jesus with me, even as an adult. Now she would say, "Rodney, God doesn't like ugly." So I would try to do right the wrong way, but I came to understand you can't "right" a wrong. Right is right.

Wrong is wrong.

I would have to make a decision to continue to live wrong or to start doing what's right. I came to the conclusion to follow Christ. So I turned my back on the gang.

It ultimately left my life in danger. I now had to worry about someone trying to take my life for the things I knew that I learned in secrecy, things I participated in. Crimes and codes I lived by – all disavowed. No more drugs. No more crime. No more sin.

I let go of all my past life of being affiliated with a gang and living the life of sin, but I still lacked the trust to allow Jesus control over my life. I still carried weapons, knowing I was a convicted felon. So I prayed to God to help change my heart so I didn't have to carry a gun, thinking someone was trying to kill me for turning my back on the gang. The morning after I prayed to God to change my heart was a Sunday. I had the urge to be among people I knew wouldn't judge me. So I got up and went to church.

I intended to act on my plans to live a life following Christ. Once there I prayed again for God to change my heart: "Please take the guns from me, I give You my life Lord. No matter what happens, I trust in Your will to oversee my life."

Two weeks after, I was pulled over by the police and was placed under arrest for unlawful possession of a firearm. While I sat in jail, the Holy Spirit came and ministered to me.

Christ told me that He's personally answering my prayer and if I wanted a new start then this is my chance, since He has taught me to be responsible for my actions.

Today I am a Christian – loyal to the teachings of Christ Jesus, with aspirations of being a youth minister to teach the children of tomorrow the love of Christ and stand against gangs, crime and sin.

“The only person I could count on was myself.”

What's in your rubbish bin?

BY PETER BRAIN

I'VE HEARD it said that our rubbish bins can tell us a lot about ourselves. So can the rubbish bins of our hearts, which contains the sin in our lives.

The novelist Evelyn Waugh describes that unpopular but persistently real and awful three letter word as "one little, flat, deadly word that covers a lifetime."

A lifetime of rubbish, consistently accumulated, day after day, week after week, month after month, year after year... for a lifetime, mounts up and causes us (and others) much pain, guilt and anxiety. If only there was an efficient rubbish removal system as regularly available as many cities' weekly collection.

The good news is that there is. Do you remember Lonnie Donegan's great old song, *My Old Man's a Dustman*?

For us to benefit from God's rubbish collection, that wonderful removal of our sin through repentance and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, we have to firstly admit that we are men and women of the dust.

Once we see our sinfulness we will be more likely to engage the rubbish removalists.



When Jesus died on the cross He allowed the collective weight of God's righteous judgement to fall upon Him. Here is a very efficient and priceless rubbish disposal.

Priceless in both senses of the word.

No one else could pay the price of our offence to God save the Son of God.

As the old hymn puts it, "There was no other good enough to pay the price of sin; He only could unlock the gate of Heaven and let us in." And priceless in that we need not, and could not afford to, pay for this service.

Once we repent and put our trust in Jesus, God grants us a free pardon. And it is all totally undeserved.

But what sheer delight, what sublime peace, what glorious freedom from guilt this brings. And we don't have to wait each week. This is a daily service, a daily joy and privilege as we come clean with God in confident and humble prayer.

The woman asked the dustman, "Am I too late?" and his answer echoes the loving call of Jesus: "No, just jump up on the cart."

It's never too late to avail ourselves of this mercy but we are wise to recognise that it is never too soon either, since rubbish piled up can so easily contaminate and overwhelm us.



Inmates at the male section of the Johannesburg Correctional Centre also known as Sun City Prison, South Africa. (Photo by Michele Spatari / AFP) (Photo by MICHELE SPATARI/AFP via Getty Images)

Life in the darkness

We all find ourselves in challenging times and places with different seasons of life, yet of all the challenging places to be found, South African prisons are some of the hardest. Prisoners are living in darkness, with overcrowding, violence and inadequate access to healthcare, with the occupancy rate of prisons at 137.7 percent*.

Although the overcrowding leads to daily physical suffering – worsened by gang-related violence – the emotional and spiritual suffering of the inmates represents another world of darkness. Yet in this darkness, the light of God's word is transforming lives.

Conrad lived in darkness his whole life. "I grew up in a small town in the Eastern Cape Province, where poverty and gangs are rife. I started missing school at a young age and joined a local gang. I was also drinking and taking drugs. Soon, I got involved in crime, breaking into people's houses and stealing. I was involved in a robbery and hijacking which led to my arrest." In prison, Conrad continued walking in darkness.

"I joined a gang and quickly rose through its ranks. We were organising stabbings of prison officials, taking them hostage and organising strikes." When Conrad was transferred to another prison, he contracted tuberculosis and had to be hospitalised.

It was there that the light began to break through the darkness. Conrad received a Bible, donated by Bible Society and distributed through World Hope Ministries, along with access to the Bible Discipleship course. This changed Conrad's life.

"I started doing the course and reading a Bible for the first time and every day. One day, as I was reading my Bible that I received, I recognised things I never saw or knew before. It was in my hospital bed that I gave my life to the Lord." When Conrad returned to the housing section of the prison, he says, "I was a changed man. I started serving God."

Many others have also moved from darkness to light, encountering God through his life-changing and ever-relevant word.

"I was a gangster," says Jay. "I found myself empty, foolish, and with no direction. I regret my old life, even the group I used to hang around with."

The Bible Discipleship lessons were crucial for Jay.

"These lessons gave me direction; reshaped my life. I discovered my life from the Word of God ... Jesus is the Way, the Truth and the Life. The Bible became real in my life and gave me hope in a hopeless situation."

Jay is so thankful for his Bible, and for those who donated it. He says, "You touched my life with the Word of God."

Behki's life turned into a nightmare when he and his best friend were playing with guns.

"I murdered my best friend," he recalls. "I didn't kill him intentionally; it was a mistake. I was living my life the way I liked, telling lies."

Things changed for Behki in prison, when he took the Bible Discipleship lessons. "I started to dwell in the Word of Christ and started to share Christ with other people. The Bible means a lot to me because when I want to connect with God, I always read the Bible, and it helps when I research other Scriptures."

"My life was so empty, I never been happy," says Zenzo.

"There was something that was not there, but I did not know at that time what was short. I became selfish. I did not believe in anything, but only in myself." Zenzo's life was changed by the Bible Discipleship course.

"After I became a child of God, I became happy because of the good news about Christ. Before, I didn't know my purpose in this world but now I know. I know the truth now and I am trying by all means to live by the word of God because it won't make me stumble. Without the word of God, I will be lost. It always reminds me what to do and it comforts and encourages me."

Edson's story is similar to Zenzo's.

"My life before I've received Christ was a mess. I used to live like the world; doing all sorts of bad things."

His life changed because of his encounter with God's word.

"When I started studying the Bible Discipleship lessons, I became a light of the world and a light for everyone around me. I know that God so loved the world and now I have received eternal life. I may suffer, but I suffer for doing what is right... I also have confidence and hope that God will not leave me nor forsake me." Bible Society Australia is working with World Hope Ministries as they advocate for the Bible in the dark places of South Africa's prisons, and especially in the darkness of prisoners' hearts.

"I started to forget the reason I was in prison because of the teachings and knowledge I received from the program; it gave me peace," testifies Mvuzo Jack, who felt God's presence as he attended the program.

"The lessons have revived the Spirit of God in me."

*According to the Department of Correctional Services' 2020/21 Annual Report.

English translation

Touched by compassion to a bleeding woman

Zacharia Tnllam had come to a major crossroad in his life. It was 1995 and the high schooler was old enough to know something was broken in his life that needed to change.

"There were specific things which I struggled with," he says. "Addictions, a bad temper and lying. Even when I knew I was wrong in certain situations, I could not admit it. Instead, I chose to lie."

He knew the decisions he was making in his life would have consequences. He had attended Sunday School as a child. He knew right from wrong. In fact, he loved listening to the stories about God but that was where his commitment ended.

"I did not know God on a personal level," he admits. "It was all just nice stories and games. I didn't know the deeper truths of what it meant to be a Christian."

“Even when I knew I was wrong in certain situations, I could not admit it.”

All of that changed, though, during Zacharia's time in high school.

"I heard more about God and started accompanying my parents to church," he tells *Challenge*.

One day in 1995, a mission team went to Zacharia's school. One of the ministers on the team talked to the students about Jesus and how He had healed a woman who had bled for 20 years. (The story can be found in Matthew 9, Mark 5, and Luke 8).

Zacharia was amazed by the story and touched by the compassion and love Jesus had shown for the outcast woman. "I knew that He was God and the God of all Creation."

That very day, Zacharia realised what he needed in his life and decided to become a Christian: "I wanted eternal life after death. So, I received Christ as my personal Lord and Saviour and was baptised with water [an outward sign of his inner commitment]."

He explains, "I first confessed myself as a sinner,

confessed my sins and then prayed to God for His forgiveness. Now, my life is so much better because it's all about Christ. I love interacting with my new friends who know about Jesus."

Now, the 41-year-old looks back and knows that he made the right decision.

Zacharia's favourite Bible passage comes from Romans 8 verses 31-34, which says, "If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare His own Son, but gave Him up for us all - how will He not also, along with Him, graciously give us all things? Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies. Who then is the one who condemns? No one. Christ Jesus who died - more than that, who was raised to life - is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us."

Zacharia admits it can be hard to do the right thing when

temptation comes, yet he knows that he is a changed man because of what Jesus has done in his life and wants to share this with others.

Zacharia works as a prison officer and has many opportunities to talk to the inmates about Jesus and the salvation He freely offers. Quoting from John 14:6, he says, "I can tell them about Jesus being the only Way, the only Truth, and the only source of Life." •



Zacharia Tnllam

Afrikaans translation

Geraak deur 'n vrou met bloedvloeiing

Zacharia Tnllam het by 'n groot kruispad in sy lewe gekom. Dit was 1995, en die hoërskool leerling was oud genoeg om te weet dat iets in sy lewe stukkend was, en dat verandering nodig was.

"Daar was spesifieke goed waarmee ek gesukkel het," sê hy. "Verslawing, 'n slegte humeur en leuens. Selfs toe ek geweet het dat ek in sekere situasies verkeerd was, kon ek dit nie erken nie. In plaas daarvan het ek gekies om te jok."

Hy het geweet dat die besluite wat hy in sy lewe gemaak het gevolge sou hê. Hy het Sondagskool as kind bygewoon. Hy kon reg en verkeerd onderskei. In werklikheid, was hy lief daarvoor om die stories oor God te hoor, maar dit was waar sy toewyding geëindig het.

"Ek het God nie in 'n persoonlike verhouding geken nie," erken hy. "Dit was alles net mooi stories. Ek het nie die dieper waarhede van wat dit beteken om 'n Christen te wees geken nie."

Maar dit het alles verander gedurende Zacharia se hoërskool jare. "Ek het meer van God gehoor, en ek het begin om saam met my ouers kerk by te woon," vertel hy vir *Challenge*.

Eendag in 1995, het 'n sendingspan na Zacharia se skool gegaan. Een van die predikante op die span het vir die studente oor Jesus vertel, en hoe Hy 'n vrou wat vir 20 jaar aan bloedvloeiing gely het, genees.

(Die verhaal kan in Matteus 9, Markus 5 en Lukas 8 gevind word).

Zacharia was verstom oor die storie, en was geraak deur die deernis en liefde wat Jesus betoon het aan die uitgeworpe vrou.

"Ek het geweet Hy is God, en die God van die hele skepping." Daardie eerste dag het Zacharia besef wat hy in sy lewe nodig het, en hy het besluit om 'n Christen te wees: "Ek wou die ewige lewe na die dood hê. Toe het ek Christus as my persoonlike Heer en verlosser ontvang.

Hy verduidelik, "Ek het eers myself as 'n sondaar erken, my sondes bely en het tot God gebid vir Sy vergifnis. Nou is my lewe soveel beter want dit gaan alles oor Christus. Ek hou daarvan om met my nuwe vriende wat Jesus ken, te kommunikeer."

“Selfs toe ek in sekere situasies geweet het dat ek verkeerd was, kon ek dit nie erken nie.”

Nou, as hy terug kyk, weet hy dat hy die regte besluit gemaak het. Zacharia se gunsteling Bybel verse is Romeine 8: 31-34 wat sê, "As God vir ons is, wie kan teen ons wees? Hy het Sy eie Seun nie gespaar nie, maar Hom oorgelewer om ons almal te red. Sal Hy ons dan nie al die ander dinge saam met Hom uit genade skenk nie? God self spreek hulle vry. Wie kan ons veroordeel? Christus Jesus het gesterf, maar meer as dit: Hy is uit die dood opgewek, Hy sit aan die regterhand van God, Hy pleit vir ons by die Vader."

Zacharia erken dat dit moeilik kan wees om die regte ding te doen as versoeking kom, maar hy weet dat hy 'n veranderde man is, deur wat Jesus in sy lewe gedoen het, en hy wil dit met ander deel.

Zacharia werk as 'n gevangenebewaarder en hy het baie geleenthede om met die gevangenes oor Jesus te gesels, en die verlossing wat Hy so vryelik bied.

Hy haal aan uit Johannes 14:6, en sê, "Ek kan hulle vertel oor Jesus wat die enigste Weg, die enigste Waarheid en die enigste bron van lewe is." •

Zulu translation

NGATHINTWA UZWELO LOMAMA OPHAYO

U Zacharia Tnllam wayefike ekugamanxeni kwendlela empilweni yakhe. Kwakuwunyaka ka 1995 lomfundi wamabanga aphezulu wayazi ukuthi kukhona okungahambi kahle empilweni yakhe okwakudinga ushintsho.

"Kwakukhona izinto ezithize ezazingihlupha," esho. "Ukugqilazeka, ulaka kanye namanga. Noma ngangazi ukuthi ngisephutheni ezimeni ezithize, ngangingeke ngivume. Ngangingamane ngiqambe amanga."

Wayazi ukuthi lezenzo zakhe zizoba nemiphumela emibi ekugcineni. Wafunda kwa Sunday school ekukhuleni kwakhe. Wayazi okuhle nokungekule. Empeleni wayezithanda izifundo ezimayelana noNkulunkulu kodwa ukuzinikela kwakhe kwakuphelela lapho.

"Wayengamazi uNkulunkulu yena ngokwakhe," evumela. "Kuyena kwakuyindaba emnandi. Ngangingazi amaqiniso ajulile okuthi kusho ukuthini ukuba umKristu." Konke lokho kwashintsha, uma uZacharia eya emabangeni aphezulu. "Ngezwa kakhulu ngoNkulunkulu ngaqala ukhamba nabazali bami ukuya esontweni," etshela i challenge.

Ngelinye ilanga ngo 1995, iqembu labashumayeli lavakashela eskoleni soZacharia. Omunye wabashumayeli wathshela abafundi ngokuphiliswa kowesifazane owayopha iminyaka ewu20. (Lendaba itholakala ku Mathewu 9, Marku 5 nakuLuka8). UZacharia wathinteka ngalendaba nesihe nothando uJesu alubonisa lowesifazane owayelahlwe. "Ngazi ukuthi unguNkulunkulu wendalo yonke."

Ngalo lelolanga uZacharia wazi ukuthi uyamdinga, wakhe wakhetha ukuba umKristu. "Ngangifuna Impilo engunaphakade uma ngifa. Ngase, ngamukela uJesu Kristu njengeNkosi ngabhabhadiswa (uphawu lwangaphandle lwesinqumo sanga phakathi)."

Echaza, "ngavuma ukuthi ngisoni, ngavuma izono zami ngacela ukuthethelwa uNkulunkulu ngomkhuleko. Manje, impilo yami seyingcono kakhulu, ngoba isingoKristu. Ngiyathanda ukuzibandakanya nabahlobo bami abasha abazi ngoKristu." Manje ubheka emuva azi ukuthi wathatha isinqumo esiphusile. Ivesi elithandwa uZacharia likubaRoma 8:31-34 lithi: Uma uNkulunkulu engakithi, ubani ongamelana nathi? Ongagodlana iNdodana yakhe, wayiNikelela thina sonke- angeke futhi yini kanye Nayo, asinike konke? Ubani ongabeka icala labo uNkulunkulu abakhethile? UNkulunkulu olungisayo, ubani obalahlayo? Akekho, uJesu Kristu owafayo, waviruswa waphakanyiselwa esandleni sokunene sika Baba la esinxusela khona njalo."

UZacharia uyavuma ukuthi kunzima ukwenza okulungile njalo, umakufika izilingo, kodwa uyazi ukuthi uyindoda eguqukile ngenxa yalokhu uJesu akwenze empilweni yakhe afisa ukukwazisa nabanye. UZacharia ungujele, unamathuba amaningi lokutshela ababanjwa ngoJesu nensindiso aphana ngayo mahhala. Usho etomula kuJohane 14:6 ukuthi uJesu iyona yodwa iNdlela, neQiniso kanye nomthombo wokuPhila." •

"LOOK UP ON A starry night and you will see THE MAJESTY AND POWER of an infinite Creator."

- Billy Graham

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 2:18-3:12

INTRODUCTION

WE have already seen that Mark wants us to see that the Lord's ministry was accompanied by miracles. Chapter two records the healing of the paralytic man, much to the surprise of those present. These miracles were not just a display of power, but they were proof that Jesus' claim to come from the Father in heaven was true.

As well, the wonder works taught truths. For instance, physical sight for the blind pointed to spiritual sight for the spiritually blind. There was a reason behind all that Jesus did. It is our joy to read on and appreciate more about Him.

Chapter 2, verses 18-20

"Now John's disciples and the Pharisees were fasting. Some people

came and asked Jesus, 'How is it that John's disciples and the disciples of the Pharisees are fasting, but yours are not?' Jesus answered, 'How can the guests of the bridegroom fast while he is with them? But the time will come when the bridegroom will be taken from them, and on that day they will fast.'"

There were certain people who followed John the Baptist, and others who followed the Pharisees (Jewish leaders), putting aside time to go without food and to pray. The question seemed to contain the idea that Jesus' disciples were not as sincere as these others. Jesus explains that while the bridegroom is present, guests are glad, not solemn. Of course, He is referring to Himself as the bridegroom who will one day be taken away.

Verses 21, 22 *"No one sews a patch of unshrunk cloth on an old garment. If he does, the new piece will pull away from the old, making the tear worse. And no one pours new wine into old*



IMAGE: BIBLEPICS.CO

wineskins. If he does, the wine will burst the skins, and both the wine and the wineskins will be ruined. No, he pours new wine into new wineskins."

Here are two simple lessons. New cloth sewn to old cloth doesn't work. Neither does new wine work with old wineskins. What is Jesus driving at? He is saying that the religious observances of the Jews were old and out of date. Something new was now in place. The old must be set aside.

Verses 23, 24 *"One Sabbath, Jesus was going through the grain-fields, and as His disciples walked along, they began to pick up some heads of grain. The Pharisees said to Him, 'Look, why are they doing what is unlawful on the Sabbath?'"*

Walking through grain-fields and picking ears of corn was quite lawful according to the Old Testament. (The disciples must have been feeling a bit hungry.)

But the point the Pharisees were making was that picking grain was working, which is not allowed on the Sabbath, the seventh day of the week.

Verses 25-28 *"He answered, 'Have you never read what David did when he and his companions were hungry and in need? In the time of Abiathar the high priest, he entered the house of God and ate the consecrated bread, which is only lawful for priests to eat. And he also gave some to his companions.' Then He said to them, 'The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. So the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath.'"*

Jesus points out that there are times when human need is more important than religious observations.

David was much respected by the Jews and yet he ate bread not meant for him. Also, the Sabbath is not more important than people. It has its purpose and the Son of Man (Jesus) is Lord over it.

Chapter 3 Verses 1, 2 *"Another time, He went into the synagogue, and a man with a shriveled hand was there. Some of them were looking for a reason to accuse Jesus, so they watched Him closely to see if He would heal him on the Sabbath."*

It seems that Jesus not only had faithful followers, but there were others who criticised and

here is an amazing thing. Having seen a miracle which would have blessed the man in a wonderful way, these Jews wanted to get rid of Jesus.

He was a threat to them and their whole outlook on life. They claimed to be holy but were plotting something that was evil.

Verses 7, 8 *"Jesus withdrew with His disciples to the lake, and a large crowd from Galilee followed. When they heard all He was doing, many people came to Him from Judea, Jerusalem, Idumea, and the regions across the Jordan and around Tyre and Sidon."*

The lake mentioned is Galilee, around which much of the ministry of Christ took place.

But here we learn of His growing reputation. People from all around, and some from fairly long distances were coming to observe Jesus, but perhaps mainly to obtain healing.

It is clear that the miracles of Jesus actually happened and were completely genuine. Otherwise, why would people go to so much trouble to see Him; not a few but crowds.

Verses 9-12 *"Because of the crowd, He told His disciples to have a small boat ready for Him, to keep the people from crowding Him. For He had healed many, so that those with diseases were pushing forward to touch Him. Whenever the evil spirits saw Him, they fell down before Him and cried out, 'You are the Son of God.' But He gave them strict orders not to tell who He was."*

We can see that if Jesus was in a boat near the edge of the water, He could still speak to the people, but the people could not press upon Him. It must have been thought that even touching Jesus would give them healing.

It appears that there was a rise in the activity of evil spirits (demons) during the time of Jesus' ministry. They seemed to know who He was and they feared Him. Why He told them not to reveal Him, we can't be sure.

Conclusion

Mark's Gospel compels us to see the power of the life of the Lord Jesus.

No one can be compared to Him. No one should ignore Him right now, seeing He is alive and He is Lord. Let us come to Him with all our needs just as people did of old.

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 <i>"Everyone has sinned. Nobody is good enough because God's standards are perfect" (Romans 3:23)</i>	ADMIT
GOD'S REMEDY / SOLUTION:	Jesus died on the cross <i>"God demonstrates His own love for us in this; while we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8)</i>	BELIEVE
OUR RESPONSE:	Trust Jesus by receiving Him <i>"To all who received Him, to those who believed in His name, He gave the right to become children of God" (John 1:12)</i>	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

RELIGIOUS BUT LOST

BY NICO BOUGAS

ONCE, after addressing a group of church workers, the famous evangelist Dwight Moody was confronted by an angry person.

"Mr. Moody," she said, "do you mean to tell me that I, an educated woman, taught from childhood in good ways, and all my life interested in the church and doing good, must enter heaven the same way as the worst criminal of our day?"

"No, madam," said Mr. Moody, "I don't - God does. He says everyone who would enter heaven, no matter how good they think they are, or how well educated, or zealous in good works, must be born again."

The difficult thing to grasp is that our sin has made us spiritually dead to God. This is why we all need to be reborn spiritually. To become a member of the human family, we were born physically.

To become a member of God's family, we need to be born again spiritually. It isn't by being good or through good works...or religion. It is simply by confessing our sinfulness to God and by believing that his Son, Jesus Christ died on the cross for our sins, and by responding to his call to receive him into our heart and life as personal Lord and Savior.

RISING STAR STAYS GROUNDED

**Challenge
SPORT**



Houston Texans quarterback CJ Stroud (7) during a game between the Pittsburgh Steelers and Houston Texans on October 1, 2023. (Photo by Leslie Plaza Johnson/Icon Sportswire via Getty Images)

BY CASEY REDMOND

His parents divorced. Then his dad, a former pastor, got locked up for 38 years. Thrown on economic hard times, his family lived in a small apartment atop a storage facility and ate insect-infested cereal to get by.

Californian CJ Stroud aimed for the NFL to provide for his mom and three siblings. Now he's predicted to be named the Houston Texans' first league MVP for the 2024 season.

It hasn't been an easy road. Born October 3, 2001 in Rancho Cucamonga, California, Coleridge "CJ" Bernard Stroud IV was the youngest in the family. He learned football from his father, who was a pastor for 20 years after turning his back on a life of crime.

By age nine, CJ could throw a 50-yard pass, according to reports.

His dad was always at his games. But one day, Coleridge Bernard Stroud III didn't show up.

After divorcing CJ's mother in 2015, his dad broke into a woman's car, robbing and assaulting her. When the police tailed him, he crashed into a pole and jumped into the San Diego Bay from a bridge to escape police, according to reports.

Because he was a repeat offender, CJ's dad was sentenced to 38 years.

"My pops, he was my best friend. To have your best friend snatched like that, it was tough. I just look at the things my dad did that were positive, but for a while, it wasn't like that. I hated my pops for real. Like man, how could you just leave me like that?"

His coach at the time, Willy Munford, asked CJ where his dad was.

"CJ told me he didn't want to talk about it. I was going to leave that one alone," Willy said on a YouTube video.

"He played well that year. But he was different. You could tell. He wasn't playing as well as he was

supposed to. He still had the arm. But he went quiet."

After his dad's incarceration, lack of money figured prominently in his daily life. CJ, his three siblings and their mother moved into a small apartment atop a storage facility Rancho Cucamonga, which she managed.

CJ ate cereal with bugs in it and didn't have money for cleats. He used hand-me-downs.

There was, of course, no way he could hire a personal coach to raise his ability to NFL level, as many aspiring quarterbacks do. So instead, he watched Drew Brees videos on YouTube. The NFL Hall-of-Famer who played for the New Orleans Saints explained proper throwing form and tactics.

When he was running low on contact lenses because of a lack of money, CJ played with one contact lens, using just one eye.

"My life has been like a roller coaster. It's been up and down. I've been through hell and back. I've been through so much in my life. I was young. I was a kid when this stuff happened. I had to grow up early. I had to grow up so fast," CJ said on an NFL interview.

"I'm doing this for my mom and my brothers and my sisters – my family at home. Just those things."

In his last two years of high school, CJ threw well enough to capture the attention of the University of

Georgia, University of Michigan, University of Colorado and Ohio State University.

Representatives of those colleges came to visit his family – at the storage facility.

CJ committed to Ohio State and redshirted under Justin Fields (current quarterback for the Chicago Bears). In his first season as a starter, CJ threw for over 4400 yards, with 44 touchdowns and 71 percent completion rate and only six interceptions. CJ placed fourth in the Heisman race in just his first season.

When CJ got to college he made an important discovery.

"I found Christ for myself," he

tells Faith on the Field host Rob Maaddi. "It's definitely something that I'm still learning to this day. I'm definitely not perfect... It does keep me grounded; it does keep me humble just because I know anything can be stripped away at any point."

Now describing himself as a "follower of Christ" on social media, CJ tells Fox News, "I don't deserve [God's] grace and His mercy but He still gives it to me and I love Him for that. It's not about me, it's about Him and His glory..."

"Football has a lot of ups and downs, it has a lot of twists and turns, but at the end of the day, it's all about your foundation. And something that's set my foundation is my faith."

After his second season with Ohio States, CJ decided to go straight to the NFL draft.

In his first 15 games of his first season with the Houston Texans (this season), CJ threw for 4100 yards (rookie record is 4300), with a 66 percent completion rate, 23

touchdowns and five interceptions. He became the youngest quarterback to win a playoff game against the Cleveland Browns. CJ tied a record with Baker Mayfield for best touchdown/interception rate in the playoffs with an astounding 3/0.

With the money he got for playing in the NFL, CJ was able to buy a new home for his family, ensuring they would never be financially needy again.

He's an advocate for prison reform, believing his father was harshly sentenced and should receive mercy because he acted out of grief from the divorce. His cleat says, "Free Pops."

"When I talk to him now, I don't hold any ill will. I told him I love him. He's made his mistakes. I've made mine. It's not about the bad. It's the nature of the beast. You accept the good with the bad. I thank God for a second chance at this game."

The original of this story can be found at godreports.com and it is used with kind permission.



CJ Stroud #7 of the Houston Texans before kickoff against the New Orleans Saints at NRG Stadium on October 15, 2023 in Houston, Texas. (Photo by Cooper Neill/Getty Images)

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