

I WAS A HOMELESS ADDICT

BY CHERISE BOPAPE

In Sheaveal's childhood home, the refrigerator often stood empty, and the pantry shelves sat bare. Her mom and dad struggled with personal challenges that kept them from meeting some of their family's basic needs. By the time Sheaveal was 11, she discovered what those challenges were.

"My parents were doing drugs," she says. "I didn't really know what it looked like, but I knew they were doing something different."

Stealing to eat

Sheaveal grew tired of waiting on her parents to provide food for her and her four younger siblings. At 16 years old, Sheaveal decided to fix this situation.

"I started shoplifting, going into the grocery store stealing food, even going to my grandmother's house stealing food," she says.

The situation was so bad that when Sheaveal earned an athletic scholarship and went off to college, she constantly thought about her

siblings' well-being.

"That was a real big worry for me while I was away from them," Sheaveal says. "I knew that if I was there, that they were going to eat."

Spiraling downward

Four months into her college education, Sheaveal's worries multiplied after she met her first boyfriend. She was smitten. Though she had lived with parents who were under the influence of cocaine, she didn't know her new boyfriend was using it too.

When she found out, she didn't leave him. Sheaveal thought that if the young man she loved could do drugs, then it was okay for her to use them, too. But she would later consider that decision her biggest mistake.

"I tried crack cocaine for the first time in my life," she says, "and my life just spiraled down from there."

Her childhood dream of being in law enforcement faded. She

started skipping classes, and then her grades fell. Soon, she even lost her athletic scholarship. Like her mom and dad, she was addicted to cocaine.

After receiving a tip from a family member about their daughter's irregular school attendance, Sheaveal's parents paid her a surprise visit. Initially, she lied about losing her scholarship just two weeks prior to their arrival. And when she did tell the truth about her scholarship, they packed up her belongings and drove her back home.

While at home, Sheaveal continued to steal. She was arrested 10 times on shoplifting charges, but the judge was always lenient.

However, when Sheaveal began committing drug-related crimes, which were felonies, she served time in prison on four separate occasions. Each time she was released, she returned to the

“

I just knew I was going to die.

”



Sheaveal

same challenging, temptation-filled environment.

"I would actually stay out of prison... no more than six months," Sheaveal says. "Then I would start back using drugs because I went back to the same neighborhood."

Broken promises

Between her jail and prison stints, Sheaveal had six children. But she never had the chance to raise any of them. The children were all born addicted to cocaine, so she lost custody of them.

"It was a rough road not having them [in my life], and [I promised] them that I was going to get them every time I got out of prison," Sheaveal says.

But she broke her promises and knew her behavior didn't honor God. She grew up learning about Christ in church. Her parents—and especially her grandparents—were religious people. Even when her parents didn't attend church, they sent Sheaveal and her siblings to services.

"There was always a pull in my life to want to serve [God], but I was just addicted," she says.

Rock bottom

Every time Sheaveal was released from prison, she connected with a local church. However, her attendance would always dwindle until she stopped going altogether.

Then in December 2011, she hit rock bottom. She started doing things she had told herself she'd never do. Sheaveal was sleeping in a roach-infested van and became homeless.

One night, she knelt in a hotel room and begged the Lord to deliver her from drugs. She promised to serve Him for the rest of her life if He did.

She felt as empty as the refrig-

erator in her childhood home. At the time, she had been smoking cocaine for three days straight and hadn't been taking her prescription medications. Sheaveal struggled to breathe. When she looked down at her body, she noticed it was swollen – an effect of her drug abuse. Although her kids weren't there to hear her, she muttered apologies to each of them. Climbing into bed, she thought her life was over.

"I just knew I was going to die, and I saw my kids' faces flash in front of my eyes," she says. "When I lay down, I tell you, I lay down to die."

But when God woke her up the next morning, she knew it was only because of His grace and mercy that she had survived a drug overdose. God had kept her safe.

"God saved me"

Grateful to be alive, Sheaveal honored her promise to the Lord.

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A Christmas to remember

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

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

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

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

Then Polly developed breast cancer and had to undergo radical surgery and chemotherapy. At the same time their daughter, who had already been in trouble with the law on more than a dozen occasions, got arrested again for fraud and jailed for three years, leaving Elliott and his wife to raise her two children.

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

He travelled a great deal of the time with a company



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

that he called "Heathen Tours." The purpose of these tours was to provide any and every sort of "pleasure" the clientele could afford. He, too, participated in the immoral acts he offered to his clients.

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

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

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

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

He tried to kick it under the bed, but the bedframe was solid and the Bible could not go under.

It fell open to John 14:27, which says: "Peace I leave with you, my peace I give to you: not as the world gives it give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled neither let it be afraid."

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

His father had beaten it into him that "men don't cry" but he knows now that men who do not cry explode.

● Turn to page 3



Ask Y: Peter Meadows answers your questions about God

QUESTION: ISN'T IT JUST DAFT TO SPEAK OF JESUS AS 'GOD'?



IT DOES SOUND far-fetched to claim the God who created everything came as Jesus to live among us in human form. And that Jesus was far more than a supercharged version of Gandhi, Mother Teresa, Bono and David Blaine rolled into one.

Some say the idea that Jesus was God was invented by the Church because it matched what they wanted to be true. Others say the followers of Jesus so wanted Him to be God that they made it up.

So what can a sane and reasonable person – you! – believe? Let me give you a few thoughts for starters. What could possibly point us to believing such a mind-shattering claim could be fact? Let's start with the impact Jesus made. It is not the final word but it does speak volume. And Jesus impacted history more than any other person to have breathed air on planet Earth.

Two thousand years after his birth, Google the name "Jesus" and you'll find well over eight hundred million pages referring to him at the present count. And no one else comes close. In other words, when it comes to impact on history and interest in the history maker, there's Jesus and there's the rest.

This proves nothing conclusive but is enough to suggest we should keep looking. So what about the things Jesus did as recorded

by those who watched Him do them? For me they are exactly what I'd expect someone to do if they were God. I'm thinking of simple "God things" like miracles.

I know we have seen magicians do spectacular stuff. But we know it's a trick. Somewhere there's a trap door, a mirror or an accomplice. But the only-God-can-do-them things Jesus did were altogether different.

Up which sleeve did Jesus keep 120 gallons of wine that mysteriously appeared at a wedding? Or, if He just used sleight of hand and a little colouring agent, how come the guests gave it five stars? Where did Jesus hide enough bread and fish to feed more than 5,000 people in one sitting? How did He heal the crippling conditions of multitudes? How did He bring back to life someone who'd been dead so long his grave clothes stank with decay? And how did He... The list is endless. How? If Jesus was no more than flesh and blood the answer has to be "no way." But if He was God come in human form would be a piece of cake – and quite a lot of loaves and fish.

And that's only a fraction of the answer as to why we should take the claim that Jesus was God seriously.

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.

I WAS A HOMELESS ADDICT

● From page 1

Wanting to make amends, she called a woman whom she had stolen from a couple of months prior.

After offering the woman her apologies, Sheaveal went to church. But before she could leave the service, a police officer arrested her. The woman she'd talked with earlier had alerted law enforcement officials.

A judge sentenced Sheaveal to five-and-a-half years in prison. Sheaveal grieved because she knew she would be breaking her promise to her children once again. She wouldn't be coming to get them anytime soon. Yet she knew this prison sentence gave her exactly what she needed – time to work on herself and grow closer to God.

"It was a peace that was just over me because [my struggle] was over," Sheaveal says. "God had saved me!"

Restored relationships

During one of Sheaveal's stints behind bars, she saw a flyer about Prison Fellowship Angel Tree.



Sheaveal is now the Angel Tree coordinator for her church and helps lead community service efforts.

She was happy to learn that if she signed up her children, a local church would provide them with the Gospel and a gift on her behalf. Sheaveal signed the kids up every year she was in prison.

Angel Tree helped her feel connected to her children. When Sheaveal was released in February 2017, her kids' ages ranged from 13 to 21. She continued working diligently to gain their trust.

She called, visited, and helped them as much as she could, admitting that their new situation was strange at first.

She knew they were wondering whether she would go back to prison this time.

"The longer that I stayed out, they trusted me. They call me Mom," she says. "They call me now just to see how I'm doing, just to say that 'I love you.'"

Now Sheaveal is the Angel Tree coordinator for her church and helps lead various community service efforts. Sheaveal may have committed crimes, broken promises, and lain down to die, but when she got up, she bounced back, got busy, and started building up others.

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

Never the same again

BY FAY FOSTER

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

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

Each day, the shepherds led their flocks out of the fold to find pasture, then at night, once all the sheep were counted back into the fold, they would lie across the door of the fold to protect their flock. Thieves, wolves, lions and bears were constant dangers. It is very likely that the shepherds took turns to sleep.

Shepherding was considered an unskilled job, and shepherds were on the lowest levels of society. How amazing then is this account from Luke chapter 2, verses 8-14, of the night when Jesus was born:

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

"Suddenly a great company of the heavenly hosts appeared with the angel, praising God and saying, 'Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on Earth peace to those on whom His favour rests.'"

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

The second chapter of Luke's



this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about" (verse 16).

We don't know how long it took the shepherds to walk to Bethlehem, or how they managed to find the right building. Luke just tells us that they "found Mary and Joseph and the baby, who was lying in the manger". And once they had seen the baby for themselves, they couldn't stop talking about what had happened. Everyone who heard them was amazed at what the shepherds said to them (verses 17-18).

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

Why else would the angel tell them they would know they had the right baby when they saw Him wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger? And how could they NOT respond on such an amazing night?

So the shepherds said to one another, "Let's go to Bethlehem and see

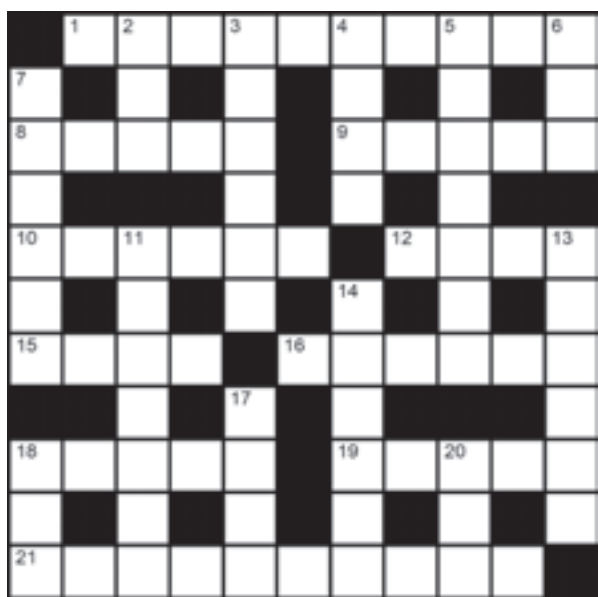
The shepherds returned to their flocks, but they would never be the same again. They had seen and heard things that filled them with a new kind of faith. As they walked back to the fields, they glorified and praised God for all the things they had heard and seen, which were just as they had been told.

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

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

Coffee Break CROSSWORD & SUDOKU

- ACROSS**
- 1 Changed business from public to private ownership
 - 8 Athletics venue
 - 9 French city
 - 10 Course component
 - 12 Freckle's place
 - 15 Harp ancestor
 - 16 In short supply
 - 18 Fossil preserver, at times
 - 19 Entire quantity
 - 21 Non-deciduous trees
- DOWN**
- 2 Regret deeply
 - 3 Capable of survival
 - 4 Freeway fare
 - 5 Variety of pool
 - 6 MS ____
 - 7 Type of warm-blooded animal

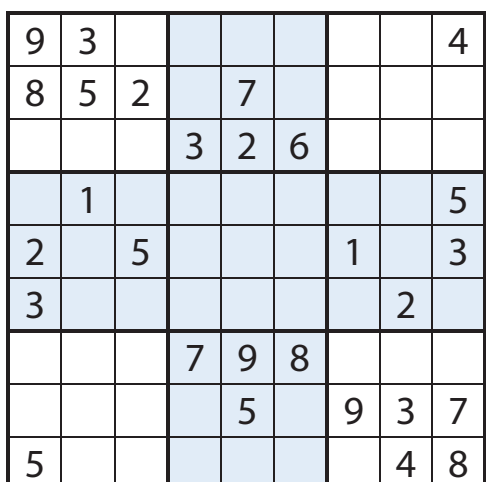


- 11 Long-lasting
- 13 Compass pointer
- 14 Crop cutting tool
- 17 A steep rugged rock
- 18 Terrific tennis serve
- 20 Tuna fish container

SOLUTIONS PAGE 7



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



nudge
WITH KARL FAASE

The insight of the wise men

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

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

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

These men are smart enough to read the signs of the day and see the evidence of God at work. What about today? With the eyes of faith, I believe you can see God at work everywhere. From the beauty of creation, to the birth of children, to the wonder of our universe, through to the acts of grace and kindness by people who could only be motivated by the Spirit of God.

God is at work in our world. Can I encourage you to look more closely for the hand of God in your life? The evidence is there, you just have to be ready to see it.

I now have peace within

Jinito Mdluli, 35, was a drug addict and a violent one.

He tells *Challenge News* he was quarrelsome and used to beat up people for “simple and useless things”. He also led a sexually immoral life and lived to have fun.

Five years ago, he began a 15-year sentence for assault (grievous bodily harm) at Modderbee Correctional.

In 2017, just before his prison sentence began, Jinito accepted a friend’s invitation to go to church, where he heard the Gospel (the good news that Jesus Christ came to Earth to die for our sins).

He shares that by that time he was looking for inner peace. The message that day talked about life after death.

“I wanted to understand more about this, and I wanted to become a better person.”

He says he found the service “fantastic” and that it “changed my mindset.”

“My dreams about my future changed as well.”

He committed his life to Jesus Christ.

“Jesus is the Messiah, meaning that He saved us from being unholy and gives us eternal life.”

Not long after that, Jinito began his prison sentence.

He admits that the hardest part of being a Christian is resisting temptation.

However, he says he has changed. He says he is able to forgive others and that he is no longer on drugs or a gangster.

“Peace is now within me. I have dreams which are bigger than what I am today.

His favourite Bible passage is Romans 12:1-2: “Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God – this is your true and proper worship. Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.



Jinito Mdluli

Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is – his good, pleasing and perfect will.”

“In God’s family we are children of God. We will only find peace in Him. Jesus Christ is a good example for us. We have to endure all suffering as He did.”

I found a place to belong



Jean-Pierre Visser

Jean-Pierre Visser is only 24 and is just months into a 10-year prison sentence for stealing copper cable and damaging infrastructure.

For Jean-Pierre, who had a good childhood in a Christian home and never got into trouble as a boy, it all began when he became addicted to crystal meth.

That addiction led to him becoming homeless and living on the street. He also had trouble with alcohol, lying and anger.

After he landed up in prison, Jean-Pierre says he remembered the things his grandmother had taught him about Jesus.

He says, “I decided to become a Christian when my life hit rock bottom. I needed to get my life back. I started attending church. After 11 months I got baptised. This was seven years ago.”

Now, although he lives with the consequences of his poor choices, he declares: “I have more peace of mind. I have found that I have a purpose.

“The best part is knowing I belong somewhere. I would tell others that if they ever feel like they don’t belong they just need to open the Bible because that’s where they will find the answers.”

A Christmas to remember

● From page 1

Elliott shut the Bible and called Polly to say goodbye.

Polly asked him to at least call her pastor, which he did.

Though it was Christmas Eve, this pastor came and spent time with Elliott.

He spent the next three days in the motel reading that Gideon Bible.

On Sunday, he attended church with his wife where he knelt and asked Jesus to forgive him, free him of his addictions and help him to live right.

“The minute I asked Him, He forgave me,” Elliott marvels.

“My sins were cast away as far as the east is from the west. They were cast into the deepest part of the ocean.”

The God Elliott surrendered his life to during Christmas 1996 was nothing like what he thought He would be.

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

Elliott grew up in Los Angeles California in a strict Jewish home.

He had no real knowledge of Jesus Christ and was not even permitted to speak His name.

His father was a “heavy hitter” dad, one with whom he had no relationship.

At 17, Elliott escaped the violence at home for a different kind of violence in Vietnam.

Over three years, the army turned Elliott

from a non-drinking, non-smoking good boy into a drug addict, alcoholic womaniser.

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

Had it not been for Polly’s actions that night before Christmas he may well have killed himself.

But, as he found out after he gave his life to Christ – “God is awesome to forgive – wives are another story,” he says ruefully.

After his conversion, Elliott stayed with his dying mother for a while and contacted an organisation called Jews for Jesus, which helped him to learn more about how his new faith was compatible with and had its roots in his Jewish background.

After his mother’s funeral, Elliott returned home and he and Polly worked on their marriage.

He then got a job with a Christian touring company, which put him in contact with Christians from all persuasions and allowed him to encourage others with his story.

Polly fully recovered from cancer and worked two jobs so Elliott could complete Bible school.

Elliott became a pastor in 2000. Today both his daughters are happily married, raising his grandchildren.

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

“**The minute I asked Him, He forgave me.**”

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

I HAVE A NEW IDENTITY

BY JOSIAH HEMP (ABRIDGED)

“I wanted to fight them every time,” Rusty says, describing his arrests. “I wanted someone to shoot me.”

Rusty wanted the arresting officers to think that he was going to hurt them, but they never took the bait.

Rusty wandered far away from home on a long, violent, and chaotic road. It wasn't where he and his family thought he would go in life.

Rusty's childhood

“I didn't know there was such thing as a dysfunctional family,” Rusty says. “That's how good my childhood was.”

Rusty's dad was a county sheriff, and his mom was a third-grade schoolteacher. In southeast Oklahoma, they lived a middle-class lifestyle. “I had a great family,” Rusty says. His childhood presented him with many opportunities for success, “so the choices I made were devastating,” Rusty says. “To come from that environment and to make those choices, it's kind of like I cheated the world.”

The prodigal son leaves home

Between his junior and senior years of high school, Rusty went to basic training for the National Guard. When he came back, he thought of himself as a grown man who didn't need to listen to his parent's advice.

“I didn't ever need no one to tell me what to do anymore,” Rusty says.

He started drinking and partying, and he led his new friends down that path as well. “We thought we were the Mafia,” Rusty says. He walked away from his family, leaving a strong community behind for a different sort of life. He refused to go home and seek forgiveness, continuing down a path of drugs, violence, and crime.

His decisions also led to instabil-

ity in his home life. Rusty married a woman, having two children with her, but he left her. He met another woman, Brandy, and had two children with her. “There was not a thought in my mind that had life in it,” Rusty says. “There was no future in my life that I could see. There was no hope. There was nothing.”

“I was so evil... there was nothing left in my life that was life. It was all dead... Every situation I put myself in was chaos and violence.”

He didn't try to kill himself, but he wanted to die.

Encountering the law

Rusty lived this way for seven years. He thought he could get away with anything. But in 1997, he received his first drug charge. Then came a felony assault on a police officer and a first-degree burglary charge. With two back-to-back violent crimes and other drug related convictions, he went to prison repeatedly. “I could never figure out how to get out of prison and live the right life,” Rusty says. “I went from prison back to the life that I'd chosen. But I couldn't forgive myself for the things I'd done.”

Resisting grace

When Rusty arrived in prison for the fourth time, Trevor, his best friend from high school, was serving a life sentence in the same prison. Rusty discovered that Trevor had become a Christian.

Seeing Trevor's new behavior shocked Rusty. He knew how violent and dangerous he had been, but something was different, and Rusty did not like his friend's new faith.

Trevor kept sharing about Jesus through a crack in the cell door, but Rusty did not want to believe it.

“When I came in, I was doing the worst I'd ever done in my life,” Rusty says. “I didn't care; chaos ruled my life.”

In prison, he continued doing drugs and participating in any wrongdoing he could find.

Someone invited him to a weekend ministry event in the prison's gym. Rusty still didn't want Christianity, but the prison had been locked down for so long that he decided to attend the event, just to get time out of his cell.

Rusty mentally kept his distance.

One night during the event, he prayed from his bed, “God, You're going to need to show me You're real.” On the third day, Rusty felt like he was having a heart attack. He felt an intense pressure in the room and a weight on himself.

He opened his eyes, looking for a correctional officer to get him medical help. In front of Rusty, a volunteer was staring at him and crying. Rusty says he saw the love of Christ in the volunteer's eyes.

“I gave Jesus everything that day,” Rusty says. “God put his kingdom around me after I gave my life to him. He just restored everything, everything that had been taken by the devil.”

Lasting freedom

In 2012, Rusty was released from prison. This time, he wasn't going back. He went to a ministry home for his first few months on the outside. There, he learned how to find a job, pay his bills, and live wisely. He paid off around \$30,000 in fines – taking responsibility for the first time.

At first, because his relationships with his family had been broken, his

“I was so evil... there was nothing left in my life that was life.”



Rusty and his wife, Brandy

church, his re-entry program, and Celebrate Recovery provided him with his main source of community.

One day, the mother of two of his kids arrived at the ministry home. She was on drugs, and Rusty gave her a phone number for a women's ministry home. Six months later, Rusty saw her again and realized that she had become a Christian too.

“Give me someone to serve with,” Rusty remembers praying when he first became a Christian. He never dreamed it would be the mother of two of his kids. He married Brandy, and they continue to serve God together today. “God restored everything,” Rusty says. “My kids, my mom and dad, my grandma, all of them, everybody that I've burnt the bridges with.”

Rusty served in response to hurricanes and tornados with the Southern Baptist Disaster Relief Team, served as Celebrate Recovery Ministry Leader at First Baptist Church-Clairemore for eight years, and earned a bachelor's degree in community counseling. Years of

ministry prepared him to serve men in prison.

Returning to prison – to serve

In April of 2023, Rusty once again walked through the halls of a prison – but this time as a free man and as a Prison Fellowship Academy manager at a correctional center in Oklahoma. He was shocked when, on his first day, an officer handed him a set of keys.

Rusty teaches classes, leads service projects and community-building events, and meets one on one with prisoners. Reflecting on his story, Rusty often describes the change in his life to others like this: “Before I surrendered, I was inmate 261023, a liar, a thief, an adulterer, a drug addict, a deadbeat dad, a mean and violent person. After Jesus took over, I'm Rusty, a friend, a brother, a son, a father, a ministry leader, a good employee, a homeowner, and as far as I know, the best papa in the world.”

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

ASKING THE RIGHT QUESTION

BY JOHN HUTCHINSON

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

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

The question should've been, “Do you believe in Christ?” It's the all-important question.

To believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God and that He came into the world to save us from our sins and give us eternal life is a life and death issue. The correct answer can be life-changing and impact us for eternity.

The Bible says in John 3:16-19: “For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through Him. Whoever believes in Him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because He has not believed in the name of God's one and only Son.”

Jesus said to his friends in grief, “I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in Me will never die.” (John 11:25-26)

It's vital to believe in Jesus for He said, “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.” (John 14:6)

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

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

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

In jail with Jesus

By Kenny

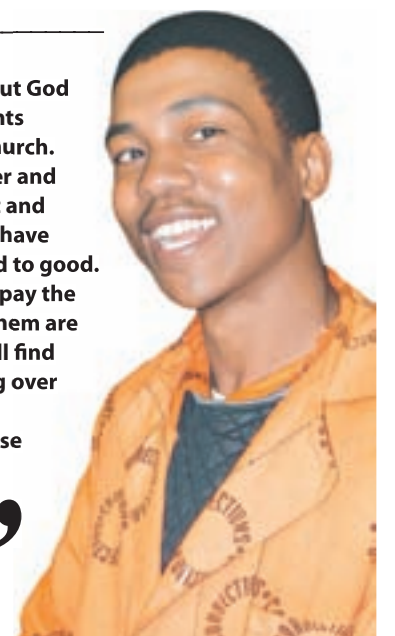
Alone one night
In shame and despair
I looked for my help
But no one was there,
No future...but prison
No past...but pain
I looked in the mirror
My tears...the rain
By justice condemned
In time to die
My only hope God's Mercy
For his grace I cry...
Then a seed planted
Somewhere long ago
In the midst of my sorrows
Began to grow...
This seed was Christ
Who died for me
In jail with Jesus
I am set free...
No longer in the hell
Of my sinful ways
He has made me a new person
Who loves and prays
Though seasons come
And holidays pass
In jail with Jesus
My hope does last...
So, I do share
With you my friend
In jail with Jesus
It's not the end! •

Strength to never lose hope

“I had a great childhood. I heard about God at church when I was a child. My parents were Christians who brought me to church. My life before Jesus was full of anger and unforgiveness. I prayed day and night and gave my heart and soul to God. Now I have hope that my life will change from bad to good. I thought my family would help me pay the fine to get me out of jail but none of them are willing. But by God's grace I know I will find help somehow because God is looking over me. He is giving me strength never to lose hope.”

”

- Blessed Ramatsepe, 28, a prisoner at Nigel Correctional.



English translation

HOPE IN THE DARKNESS

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Unfortunately, neither did Patricia’s anger against God.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

mother in prayers.”

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

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

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

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

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

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



Zulu translation

Ithemba ebumnyameni

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

“Lapho ulahlekelwe ikhokonke, uThixo uyikhokonke.

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

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

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

Afrikaans translation

Hoop in die Donker

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

broer en suster te versorg.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Ek het die lewe van ‘n slagoffer geleef.

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

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

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

“I felt so much peace and joy.”

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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 3:13-4:9

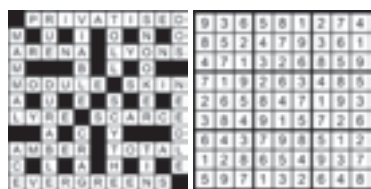
INTRODUCTION

THE early chapters of Mark show us how the reputation of Jesus quickly spread. People came from all directions to see Him and to experience healing.

The days were full, and the Lord and His disciples had little time to themselves as the needs of people were pressing on them. Now we are faced with new developments which we will look at.

Verses 13-15 "Jesus went up into the hills and called to Him those He wanted, and they came to Him. He appointed 12 – designating them apostles – that they might be with Him and that He might send them out to preach and to have authority to drive out demons."

Up to this point, there had been a number of people closely following



Jesus but were not committed to Him. Now Jesus was pointing out 12 who were to have part in His ministry and in fact, to be carriers of the Gospel for the rest of their lives. By being with Him they would learn and experience what it was to be messengers, preaching God's Good News. They were but ordinary people with much to learn.

Verses 16-19 "These are the 12 He appointed: Simon (to whom He gave the name Peter); James son of Zebedee and his brother John (to them He gave the name Boanerges, which means Sons of Thunder); Andrew, Philip, Bartholomew, Matthew, Thomas, James son of Alphaeus, Thaddaeus, Simon the Zealot, and Judas Iscariot, who betrayed Him."

Reading the four Gospels we hear much about these men. They were not immediately useful, efficient workers and they made many mistakes. But they went on loyally, endeavouring to please their Lord. The one exception is Judas, now well-known as the betrayer of Jesus.



IMAGE: BIBLEPICS.CO

Verses 20, 21 "Then Jesus entered a house, and again a crowd gathered, so that He and His disciples were not even able to eat. When His family heard about this, they went out to take charge of Him, for they said, 'He is out of His mind.'"

We can imagine a house full of noisy people, all talking and jostling and excited. It was a situation hard to control as people simply crowded around.

Jesus had parents and brothers and sisters who heard what was happening and felt alarmed about such behaviour. Was Jesus unwell? Was this carrying on, madness? They simply did not understand, though later in His ministry they understood great deal more.

Verse 22 "And the teachers of the law that came down from Jerusalem said, 'He is possessed by Beelzebul. By the prince of demons, He is driving out demons.'"

These Jews from Jerusalem must have heard how people were flocking to hear Jesus, so they came to the Galilee area to see for themselves. Their accusation was as low and insulting as could possibly be. Here was the Son of God doing good as no-one else could and they brand Him as being in league with the devil! Prejudice can make people think and say almost anything, even outlandish things.

Verses 23-27 "So Jesus called them and spoke to them in parables: 'How can Satan drive out Satan? If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand. If a house is divided against itself, that house cannot stand. And if Satan opposes himself and is divided, he cannot stand; his end has come. In fact, no-one can enter a strong man's house and carry off his possessions unless he first ties up the strong man. Then he can rob his house.'"

The Lord pointed out what should have been obvious to these people. Evil spirits were being cast out, so it certainly wasn't Satan who was doing it. It is simply unreasonable to say that any cause will act against itself. So, these accusers were suggesting something that simply makes no sense. They should have been honest and recognised that Jesus was doing good in opposition to Satan and his works.

Verses 28-30 "I tell you the truth, all the sins and blasphemies of men will be forgiven them. But whoever

blasphemes against the Holy Spirit will never be forgiven; he is guilty of an eternal sin.' He said this because they were saying, 'He has an evil spirit.'"

All manner of sins can be forgiven by God. (Remembering that we need to repent and confess our sins.) But to attribute the work of the Holy Spirit to Satan is to put the speaker beyond mercy. They are condemned. So, this event has produced a very solemn warning.

Verses 31-35 "Then Jesus' mother and brothers arrived. Standing outside, they sent someone in to call Him. A crowd was sitting around Him, and they told Him, 'Your mother and brothers are outside looking for you.' 'Who are my mother and my brothers?' He asked. Then He looked at those seated in a circle around Him and said, 'Here are my mother and my brothers! Whoever does God's will is my brother and sister and mother.'"

In their concern about Jesus, it seems that His family wanted to take Him home to prevent any embarrassment. Of course, their concern was misplaced. Perhaps

the response Jesus gave is a bit surprising. But He wasn't disowning His own people, but He was showing that He has a bigger family – all those who do the Father's will.

Chapter 4 verse 1 "On another occasion Jesus began to teach by the lake. The crowd that gathered around Him was so large that He got into a boat and sat in it out on the lake, while all the people were along the shore at the water's edge."

We can visualize this scene. To prevent the crowd pressing on Jesus, sitting in a boat just out from the edge of the lake was a good move to make.

Verses 2-8 "He taught them many things by parables, and in His teaching said: 'Listen! A farmer went out to sow his seed. As he was scattering the seed, some fell along the path, and the birds came and ate it up. Some fell on rocky places, where it did not have much soil. It sprang up quickly, because the soil was shallow. But when the sun came up, the plants were scorched, and they withered because they had no root. Other seed fell among thorns, which grew up and choked the plants, so that they did not bear grain. Still other seed fell on good soil. It came up, grew, and produced a crop, multiplying thirty, sixty, or even a hundred times.'

"Then Jesus said, 'He who has ears to hear, let him hear.'"

This well-known parable shows the different responses to the Word of God as it is proclaimed. In the first three cases the result is failure, the last case speaks of a real and true response to the Gospel message.

CONCLUSION

We will say more about this parable in our next study. It reflects so much in our experience which is so typical, so common. In the meantime, we need to ask ourselves what response we are giving to what we are hearing. Mark is giving more and more evidence showing who Jesus is. Is He Master and Lord of our lives? That is the central question. •

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

From opium fields to top tourist town

VIETNAM'S SIN SUỐI HỒ village has undergone a dramatic transformation. Where there were once opium fields, there are now picturesque rice terraces and manicured vegetable plots. A village once made up of almost all drug addicts, it is now one of the top tourist attractions in Southeast Asia.

Pastor Hang A Xa describes the bleak period in the village's history to CBN News. "We were selling opium like selling chickens. Everyone was addicted so no one worked in the fields. We did not have food, just leaves from the jungle. People were fighting. It was a very messy time," Pastor Xa says.

Pastor Xa's father, Hang A Lung, was an opium addict and the village chairman. Due to this position, the government gave him a radio so he could listen and stay informed about its policies.

But Lung only knew the Hmong language, not Vietnamese. The only radio program he could understand was a Christian broadcast which shared the good news about Jesus and excerpts from the Bible in Hmong.

"My father heard the gospel and became the first believer," Pastor Xa shares. "He wanted our whole family to receive Jesus. He summoned my brother who was studying in another town to come home right away. He said, 'You need to receive Jesus. If He comes, we all go to Heaven, and you go to hell.'" Lung found a Bible in his language and read it and shared it with other villages. Through their study, they felt convicted to quit drugs and live a life pleasing to God.

Instead of opium, they planted orchids which became a source of income. They also started running various other businesses.

Ten years later, Sin Suối Hồ village was recognised by the government as a top tourist destination and in 2023 ASEAN recognized it as a top tourist attraction in Southeast Asia. •



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



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

OLYMPIC FAITH

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

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

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

Sydney McLaughlin-Levrone, USA – 400m hurdles gold

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

going to church again.”

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

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

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



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

Nicola Olyslagers, Australia – high jump silver

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

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

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

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

remembers being nervous about her new surroundings.

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

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

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

Gabriel Medina, Brazil – surfing gold

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

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

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

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

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

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

After winning gold, the sprinter



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

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

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

Team Fiji

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


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

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

Tsige Duguma, Ethiopia – track and field 800m silver

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

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