

Prisoner to Princess

False ideas have held Tina Cook captive to her feelings for most of her life. She was trapped in deception but eventually found a way out to the truth. This is her story in her own words.

Looking back, I was saturated with the belief that there was something wrong or 'lacking' in me, that I was unworthy, unlovable, didn't measure up and never did anything right. This mindset chartered a path of destruction that took me very far from the truth of my real identity.

I began people-pleasing, performing, and approval seeking as a pre-teen. I later became an easy target for drugs, sex, and rebellion in any form. Unsurprisingly, by age 15 I was pregnant and before I turned 16 had undergone an abortion that left me unable to ever have children. Right after my 16th birthday, I tried to commit suicide and was committed to a psych ward.

Promiscuity, abortion, and my attempted suicide propelled me into a world of shame, regret, and guilt. Even worse, I developed a detrimental belief that God was punishing me for what I had done, by taking away my hope of ever becoming a mother.

All of these emotions further validated my belief that I was worthless. I was caught in a trap that I simply could not find my way out of. The more I tried to make the feelings of inadequacy go away...the further down the rabbit hole I seemed to travel.

I used anything and anyone: alcohol, drugs, material things, and sex with lots of men to try to escape from my reality.

Eventually, my life was unrecognizable to me in those cold moments of clarity that hit me like a ton of bricks! But, one more drink, one more line, one more hit, one more man...and I could make it go away again for a while.

I was estranged from my family, homeless, owned nothing, sold my body for money, then spent it all on drugs, as soon as I got it.

I had been voted 'Best Dressed' by classmates in High School; now, I was swapping dirty clothes with people so I would have something different on.

I had been in and out of jail since 1989 and it was now October of 2011. In fact, in the previous nine months I'd been to jail three times already, was currently bonded out



Tina Cook's mug shot from her past life (below) and Tina with an Instagram filter reflecting her royal status now.

“ I am a new creation and the life I'm living is a do-over. ”

by a man who I don't even remember meeting, and had just missed my court appearance, when I got arrested again smoking a hit of rock-cocaine. But, this time a series of events took place that sparked a change in me.

First of all, I was convinced that I was going to die in the sorry state I was in, as my recent prison sentence wasn't the 'party' I had had during my other incarcerations. I kept to myself and was in deep thought about my life...how I was raised by a good Christian woman

and where I had come from, how I was living now and where I had ended up. The realization of it all was heart-breaking!

It was at this point that I came to the end of myself and fell not only into the arms of Jesus but began to fall head-over-heels in love with Him as well! This life-altering event freed me to take action by joining the jail's working pod so I could be productive and have a semblance of normalcy with a schedule to follow. I started attending the Bible studies that were offered. I began asking

for help, applying the steps from 12-Step programs that I had learned during my many recovery attempts, and reading things that edified me.

One of the first books I read was Joyce Meyer's *Battlefield of the Mind*. In it, she explains the importance of thinking about what you are thinking about. So, as I sat at the industrial sewing machine making inmate uniforms, I began to consider, "What are you thinking about right now, Tina?"

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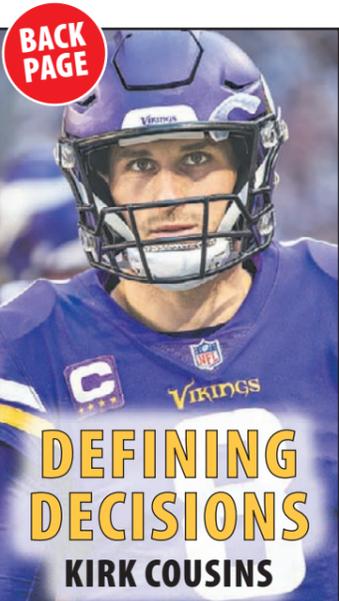
Fun for Kids

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Youth Truth

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Welcome to 2023, don't look back

BY JODY BENNETT

"THE past is a foreign country: they do things differently there," wrote L.P. Hartley in his 1953 novel *The Go-Between*. And so as we take our first steps into the "new country" of 2023 it may feel a bit like emigrating – frightening, yet exciting at the same time.

When my husband and I immigrated to Australia in 2006, we made a conscious decision to burn our bridges and not look back. We left our friends, we left some family; we left a lovely big house and our two dogs and my husband's stable job. It was risky and scary and thrilling to bring our three children, all still under three year's old, to a new country there we had no friends, no job and no idea of what the future held.

And we have been extremely happy. I attribute that in part to the fact that we chose to face forward and not second-guess ourselves. Many fellow-immigrants we have met keep harking back to what

might have been or all they left behind and they have not made the transition as well. "Whinging poms" is a well-known criticism, but "whinging Saffas" equally applies!

In the same way, launching into 2023 we need to leave the failures, disappointments, and regrets of 2022, in the past; and look with expectation and determination at what lies ahead. We can't fix yesterday, no matter how much we fret about it, but we can make the best of tomorrow.

And it is just as unhelpful to nostalgically live longing for things to be the way they once were. We need to leave 2022's achievements, milestones and joys back there too.

In the Bible is the famous story of Lot's wife looking back to the city of Sodom as God was destroying it, and being turned into a pillar of salt. There is also the story of the Israelites wandering in the desert and hankering back to the foods they ate in slavery in Egypt, rather than looking forward to the honey of the Promised Land.

These stories illustrate how a backward focus

either freezes us in place, stuck in the past; or it makes us grumble, complain and compare. We are then unable to appreciate the better things ahead.

However, we all know things in our world are not good at the moment. Looking forward into 2023 might even be a bit scary. We might be fearful about the future of the economy, or politics, or the climate, or crime, or the moral decline, or whatever else we worry about. We may be entering the year with health concerns, or relationship strife or financial burdens.

Nevertheless, Christianity gives me, and many others, the courage to look forward and face the new year with boldness because we serve a God who knows the end from the beginning. The God of the Bible already knows all about 2023. Neither the past nor the future are a foreign county to Him.

He promises those who trust in Him that He will eventually right all the wrongs in the world, evil will be judged, and pain, sin and death will finally be defeated. For Christians the best still lies ahead, at the end of the age, in a new heavens and a new earth. As some Christians like to say, if it's not good; it's not over yet.

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Ancient best seller won over novelist

Author Andrew Klavan was raised in a Jewish family but by the time came for his bar mitzvah (the Jewish coming of age ceremony), he said he was completely estranged from the tradition. It meant nothing to him.

In an interview with One for Israel on YouTube, Andrew said he got the worst possible marks in every class in Hebrew school.

"I was forced to be bar mitzvahed and say these things that I didn't believe," he admits. "I was making up Hebrew words to get through it!"

As part of the ceremony, Andrew received valuable gifts. He put all the gifts inside a box and put it in his closet. Occasionally he would take it out and stare at the wealth he had accumulated.

"It was the first time I ever had anything, any wealth that was my own – I was 13 years old and I was very excited by it," he recalls. But over the next few months, the joy and excitement faded and he began to feel like a hypocrite.

"I was bought off – I let someone give me money to say what I did not believe," he says. "I kind of naturally had a sense that God was there, but I hated the hypocrisy. I hated the fact that I'd been bullied into something. I hated the fact

that I'd been bought off."

So one night, after everyone else in the house had gone to sleep, he took out the box, crept outside and pushed the box into the bin.

"And that was meant to be the end of my religious life," he says.

Andrew loved to read and wanted to be a novelist himself so he studied literature. He quickly learnt that Jesus was at the centre of all of Western literature. He felt he should learn more about this so he got his hands on a Gospel of Luke and began to read it.

"While I'm reading this, [my father] walked in without knocking."

He was furious. Andrew recalled the rage bubbling out of his dad like hot tar. He tried to explain to his father his reason for reading the book: "I'm not reading it for religious purposes, I'm reading it for literary purposes." But his father continued to fume.

"He pointed his finger at my nose, and he said, 'If you ever convert, I will disown you,'" Andrew remembers.

When the time came for Andrew to go to college, he applied for a university far away from his home in New York. There, he sunk into his first deep depression.

"I knew I had a talent for writing stories, but I couldn't write stories that people liked because my mind

was so messed up. I was so full of rage.

"My books became unreadable," he recalls. "I not only couldn't sell my books anymore, I couldn't even get an agent. I couldn't do anything – I was just frozen. I was so depressed."

One night, Andrew thought about taking his own life. He thought his wife and his new baby daughter would be better off without him.

"I'd had suicidal thoughts before, but this was different. This was the real deal. I was sitting there thinking, I don't know how to live."

The radio was playing a baseball game in the background and Gary Carter was being interviewed. Gary was a Christian and usually attributed his success in baseball to Jesus. Gary also had terrible knees and after this game the interviewer asked

him how he could run so fast when his knees were so bad. He replied, "Sometimes, you just have to play in pain."

"I heard that, and I remember thinking, well I can do that. I'm a tough guy. I've always been a tough guy. I can play in pain. And that was the answer. How do you live? Sometimes, you've got to play in pain."

It was the last time Andrew had thoughts of suicide. As the years went on Andrew's career took off. He had come through his period of pain and his life was going well.

One day he was reading a sea adventure story. The main character was an intellectual man and Andrew identified with him. He got to the end of the chapter and it said the character said a quick prayer and fell asleep.

"I thought, if he can say

a prayer, I can say a prayer," Andrew says. "So I said a three-word prayer, I said, 'Thank you God,' and I went to sleep. The next morning I woke up, and everything had changed. I was suddenly more alive. I suddenly saw everything more clearly."

Andrew had always been looking for a way to be connected to life and he finally found it.

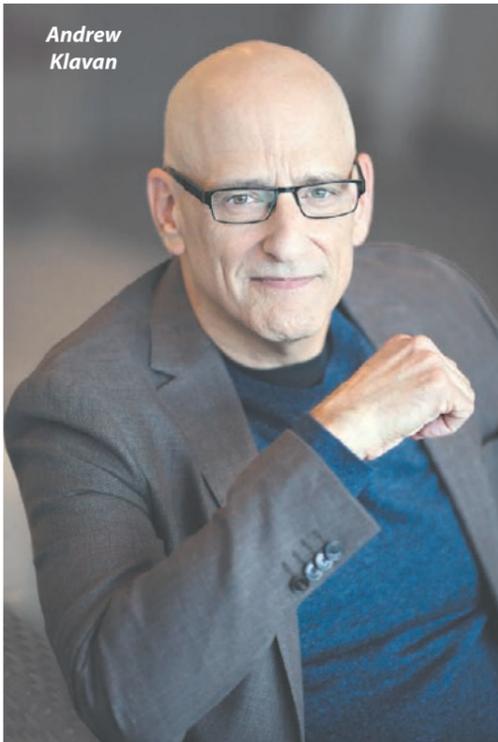
"You can't be directly connected to life until you've been directly connected to God because God is the source of life," he explains. "And you can't know God –

He's just too big for the mind unless you know him through Christ who is a man like you."

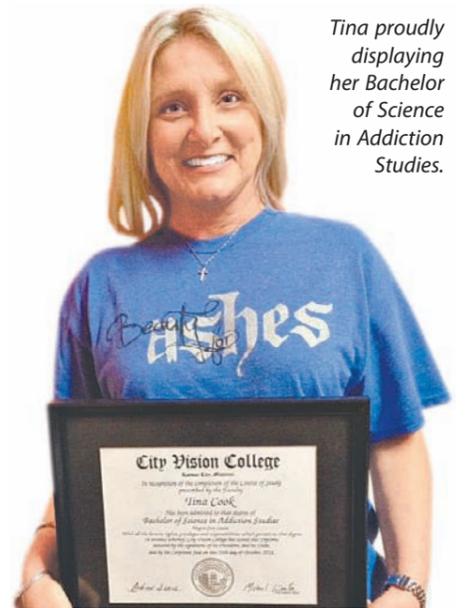
Andrew said although his father was worried he would leave Judaism behind if he converted to Christianity, he actually never felt connected to Judaism until, at age 49, he found Jesus.

"When I found Jesus, that's the first time I started to think, oh that's what all that stuff in the Bible meant!" he exclaims.

Explaining how his life has changed since becoming a Christian, Andrew says, "It's the difference between sailing in absolute darkness on a stormy sea and sailing in darkness on a stormy sea, but you can see the North Star, so you know where you're going. And suddenly the storm doesn't bother you, suddenly the darkness doesn't bother you because you know exactly where you're headed because you've got that Star to lead you."



Andrew Klavan



Tina proudly displaying her Bachelor of Science in Addiction Studies.

Prisoner now a Princess

• From page 1

I was distressed that in spite of my sincere belief that I wanted to change... I was sitting there thinking about how to find my drug dealer and johns when I got out.

The book told me to replace this ungodly, against-my-will thinking with good thoughts. That was when I began to practice thinking about what I was thinking about and replacing it with Bible verses, with memories of my life that were worthwhile and full of promise, and with mental snapshots of my family.

Not long after that, my father died. It was that terrible - not only could I not go to his funeral, but my family did not WANT me there! I made a vow to God, "I'm going to stop missing out on the important stuff in my life!" About a month later, I found out my mama had terminal cancer.

My mother had been the constant in my life, although my behavior had finally caused her to release me to God to protect herself from the pain my lifestyle caused her. So, I made another vow to God, "My mama may never talk to me again, but I'm going to live everyday so I'll be available just in case she wants to!" A year later, I was holding her hand when Jesus led her into eternity.

I celebrated eight years of sobriety on October 28, 2019. Emotional freedom has come at a great cost to me but the rewards of attaining it are priceless!

I made a lot more vows to God (and kept them!) that I believe have been critical in my ability to remain on the path of recovery. The first one was that I would stop looking for a man and start living for THE Man (Jesus)! The next vow was to leave behind those regrets...all that shame and guilt that held me in bondage, and live the life I wished I had lived.

I am a new creation and the life I'm living is a do-over. I'm getting a second chance to be a new and improved me. That doesn't mean it's always easy! But God is good...and with His help I've learned how to find the purpose He created me for.

In October 2014, I graduated university Magna Cum Laude with a BS in Christian Addiction Studies and Urban Missions. In June 2016 I officially became the Executive Director of a local non-profit agency.

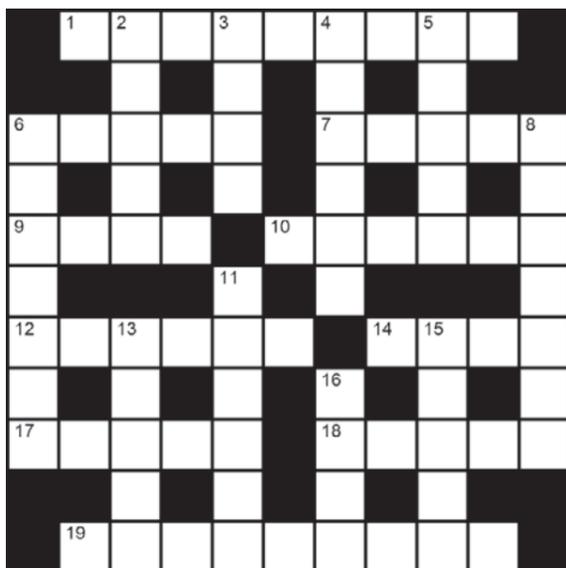
I am also an Alabama and Nationally Certified Addiction Counselor. It took commitment & determination on my part not to quit because I wanted to, many times, which is old behavior for me!

I am convinced that freedom comes when we face the fact that we can't change ourselves and that no one else can change or fix us. We can then embrace that there is only one who can set us free and that is THE ONE, Jesus who created each of us. Today I am a free woman... today my life is God's story of triumph.

I am Princess Tina: beloved daughter of The King.

Coffee Break CROSSWORD & SUDOKU

- ACROSS**
- 1 Spicy sausage
 - 6 Property or money
 - 7 Police car's wail
 - 9 Small coral islands
 - 10 Toolbox item
 - 12 One with a bill to pay
 - 14 To practise boxing
 - 17 Espionage persons
 - 18 Bikini or Tarawa
 - 19 Non-caged hens (4,5)
- DOWN**
- 2 Short written work
 - 3 Feeling of empathy
 - 4 Light sound of leaves
 - 5 Medical worker
 - 6 Shopping streets
 - 8 Nasal cavity
 - 11 Foamy hair product
 - 13 Wild rosebush
 - 15 Fork spike
 - 16 Space agency



SOLUTIONS PAGE 11

Welcome to 2023, don't look back

• From page 1

In a religion like Hinduism, with its concepts of karma and reincarnation, your past determines your future; however, in Christianity your past sins are washed away and separated from you as far as the east is from the west, because Jesus paid for them on the cross.

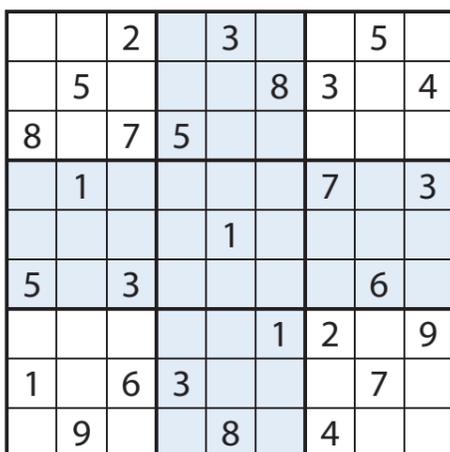
If you want your future to be bright, regardless of politics and

climate change; nuclear threats or pandemics, then throw your lot in with Jesus; let Him deal with the sins of your past, direct the plans of your present and give you a future beyond your wildest imagination.

"That is what the Scriptures mean when they say, 'No eye has seen, no ear has heard, and no mind has imagined what God has prepared for those who love Him.'" 1 Corinthians 2:9



The Story of A Lawsuit: Chapter One



Lars Jensen reading his Bible on a boat in Greenland.

Forgiveness thaws heart of Arctic fisherman



Lars Jensen standing on the spot where his family's home used to be.

Just as the arctic sunlight appears after a long dark winter, so the light of hope has come to heal the broken hearted in Sisimiut, Greenland, 50 km north of the Arctic Circle.

Lars Peter Jensen grew up in Itilleq, 45 km south of Sisimiut, in a tiny house that no longer exists.

In an Arctic Light documentary for Youth with a Mission, Greenland, Lars indicates the area where he slept as a child, and where his parents slept.

He recalls: "My stepfather was very abusive, especially towards me. He rejected me because I was not his real son. He often tried to be alone with me so that he could do things to me. I was afraid to be alone with him. When I was alone with my stepfather

I would at times wet myself if he so much as looked at me. When he looked at me in a certain way then I knew he would start screaming. When I would do something wrong according to him, he would beat and punch me. I had bruises everywhere."

Lars' mother was no protection. "Sometimes my mother got drunk and was brought home by other men. Those men dragged her here," he says pointing at the area that was his parent's bedroom, "where they abused her. I witnessed that often. I often felt scared and hopeless. I wanted to run away but there was nowhere to go," he says beginning to sob at just the memory of those times.

A lot of people in Itilleq have experienced similar neglectful, abusive

childhoods.

When he was six, Lars' stepfather decided the family would move to another village, but just as they left, his stepfather took Lars out of the boat and said "you are not coming with us". Lars was left alone.

"My stepfather had rejected me, which was very hard for me. I was very sad. I continued to experience abandonment, abuse and loneliness," he says.

"Later, as a teen, I started to live a nightlife. I started drinking a lot of alcohol and we also used to sniff gas and other things to get high. Because of all that I became depressed.

"At that time I got to know my wife, Bolette, and we married. We had a

lot of problems in our relationship. I came home very little and I committed adultery. At a certain point my wife became a Christian.

"During those days I was fighting between feelings of guilt and rationalization. We decided to separate. When I left Bolette, she put a Bible in my suitcase. She said, 'This might help you.'

Lars decided to commit suicide. "I put a gun in my mouth. When I was about to pull the trigger, I heard

a voice saying: 'Don't be so selfish, what about your friends and family?'

"One night I thought about that Bible. I started reading it from the beginning. As I was reading that Bible I cried a lot. I could feel something change inside of me, but I did not understand it at all. I felt as if there was still hope for me."

Lars decided to visit his wife and daughter. "Bolette and I started talking a lot. A lot of evenings we cried together and we forgave each other." The couple ended up reconciling.

Some Canadian believers that they knew, who understood their situation, asked Lars if he wanted to become a Christian. "They asked if I wanted to open my heart to Jesus and, without hesitation, I agreed."

After Lars prayed confessing his sins and asking Jesus to take control of his life, "the Lord started working in me but my life as a believer was hard because of all the scars I was carrying from my childhood."

Lars understood that the key to his own healing was forgiving his stepfather and others who had hurt him.

Then Peter came to Him [Jesus] and said, "Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? Up to seven times?" Jesus said to him, "I do not say to you, up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven." Matthew 18:21-22

"In time, my stepfather got old and came to live in an old age home. As he became older, I saw him getting weaker. During those days, I still felt a lot of anger toward him. I started to feel like I should forgive him, but I struggled with that for a long time.

"Eventually, I visited him in his room. I told him, 'I forgive you and I love you.' When I hugged him he was silent for a long time. He was shocked. It touched him deeply. He didn't say anything but he became very calm. I think he was relieved. He knew what he had done to me, but still he was hugged and forgiven.

"I was so relieved. It was like a heavy burden was lifted from me. As I went through the process of forgiving my stepfather, I noticed a love flow into my heart that I had never experienced in my whole life. Because I learnt to forgive, I did not fall back into my old life."

Lars now plays guitar in his church, reads his Bible regularly and has a healthy relationship with his children and grandchildren.

"I am very happy with my family," he concludes.

Tough guy craves masculine affection

BY RYAN ZEPEDA

Raised by a Gulf War veteran, Victor Bell became a hulking football star. Behind the tough guy exterior was a deep desire to be loved with affection and tenderness.

"I felt that girls received more affection, they received more consideration," Victor remembers thinking. "I didn't get the hugs that my female cousins got, or the hugs that my sister got or the kisses on the forehead. With boys, I felt we were treated rough."

Victor Bell was raised in a Christian home. But when he saw a soap opera on T.V. at five-years-old, he was fascinated by the love the girl on the program received.

"She's loved. She's getting affection, she's getting care, she's being treated with gentleness, with kindness," he remembers thinking. "I want to feel what she feels. I want to be loved like she's loved."

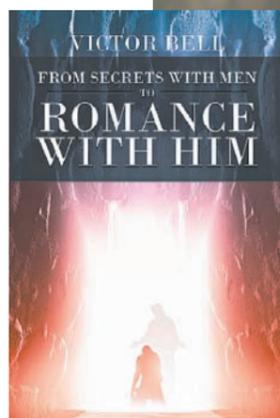
This yearning planted in his heart led him to experiment with boys, craving their attention from a very young age.

"I jumped at the chance to be the girl playing house, or the woman playing doctor, or the girl nurse because it was an opportunity for me to re-enact the soap opera scene," he says frankly. "I have an imagination that creates these atmospheres of what it would be like to be loved like her. They were exciting adventures of discovery."

Meanwhile at church, Victor didn't feel loved. "I knew about Hell. I knew about Heaven," he says. "I didn't care."

Throughout middle school, high school and into college, Victor pursued sex with men and with women.

"That was my life," he says. "I was having sex with a lot of girls. A muscular guy, football player, I'm having sex with men too. I drank, I smoked. I indulged in these activities to feel good all the time. "I still felt empty," he adds. "The space of empti-



ness was growing. So, I felt like I kept needing to fill it more with the activities I was indulging in."

In 2008, Victor graduated from college and got a job as a long-term substitute teacher. He moved back in with his parents, trying to hide his gay party life from his parents.

After three years of chasing the illusion of love, Victor came home drunk from a New Year's Eve party in 2011.

His mom responded by requiring him to go to church on Sunday.

"Go and sin no more," the Bishop told Victor at church.

The words were uttered as a prediction specifically for Victor.

The words echoed through his mind and it maddened him because he didn't really want to stop sinning.

"No! That means I can't be gay no more," he argued with God. "I was arguing with Him like, 'Leave me alone. I don't want your salvation. I'm ugly. I'm insecure. I'm not confident. I'm afraid. I'm angry! You don't know what it's like to be me!'" God responded quietly, impressing this on his



heart: I love you. I was beaten, I was tortured, and then I was murdered because I love you. Give me everything, and I'll give you my love.

Victor was momentarily speechless and then managed to utter "Yes," to God.

"He exchanged His love for every dead thing, and it is the greatest experience I have ever experienced, and I will never turn back," Victor marvels.

"His love had snatched me out of the life of lust and perversion, snatched me out of being a secret homosexual."

He became a new creature in Christ, with new heartfelt desires. "I was excited about the Word and I was excited about the things of God."

Victor is now married with two beautiful children.

He's not shy about sharing his story and pointing people to the pure, unconditional love found in Jesus.

"It's more fulfilling and more satisfying than anything that I have ever felt and ever have experienced," he says. "The weight of His love is something I can't describe. And it is what anchors me, and it is what keeps me. It is what brings me joy. It is what fulfills me."

The article first appeared on godreports.com and is used with kind permission.

Tragedy shot her to stardom

Twenty-year-old American country musician Anne Wilson has the deep voice and thoughtful lyrics one would expect of an older artist. But her experiences and her faith have been forged in the fires of family tragedy. Anne lost her 23-year-old brother in a car accident when she was in tenth grade.

"In 2017 my older brother, Jacob, passed away," Anne said in an interview with *The Christian Post*. "That was such a hard season in my life. He was my best friend, and I loved him with everything in me.

"We were so close and he died tragically on impact," she continued. "So out of nowhere the police come to our house in the middle of the night and tell us the news. As you can imagine, it's very devastating to receive news like that."

And that was when the rubber hit the road in terms of the family's Christian faith.

"Instead of turning from [God], we chose to walk closer to Him through that time," she said. "We just chose to trust Him. We saw the Lord do a lot of really incredible things and [He] was just so faithful and kind to me and my family and it was such a sweet season.

"When [my brother] passed away ... instead of turning to medication or alcohol or something else, it was like I wanted to turn to the Lord for my medicine. When I needed comfort, or when I needed just to be comforted, [I'd] go straight to the piano and worship and sing," the Kentucky native explains.

Anne's mother heard her singing and asked her to play at her brother's funeral. Although Anne had spent much of her childhood behind a piano, this was her first public performance, and it launched her career.

"I ended up making a video of the song that I sang at the funeral and posted it on YouTube," Anne related. "That was what ended up going viral and I met my manager from that video and that's how everything started. I started working in the industry and doing co-writes and really just processing all the loss of Jacob and what I had gone through with him, and then ended up signing a record deal in 2019 and started walking down the path of being a Christian artist."

Although she grew up in a Christian home, saving faith in Jesus is

not something one catches by osmosis — each person has to make a personal decision to follow Christ as Lord of their lives. Anne made this decision for herself in seventh grade, three years before Jacob's death, after a Bible teacher came to her school and explained the gospel [love and story of Jesus] in a way that convinced her of her need of a savior.

"For me, I had to get over myself; I had to start living for the Lord, I had to start seeking Him daily. It also got to a point where I realized I can't continue to live for the world anymore and I don't want to continue to walk down the path that I'm walking down, because I realized that was never going to get me anywhere but destruction. Heaven and Hell finally clicked with me.

"It's really easy to fall into the ways of the world and give in to temptations, and to peer pressure ... But for those that stand for truth, and when

you stand in who you are as a child of God, and you pursue the Lord, you're going to be blessed abundantly for that," she added.

Anne acknowledges that following Jesus isn't always a beautiful journey. However, she attests that as a Christian God is present to strengthen you in every season of your life and "you're never going to have to go a day or a second without Him."

In April 2022, Anne released her first full-length album, called "My Jesus", named after her chart-topping first single. She is the first female artist to debut at No. 1 on the Billboard Christian charts with her title track, which was also the lon-

gest-running No. 1 song on the chart for 2021 and voted Top Christian Song of 2022. The song "My Jesus" also charted on the Spotify Viral 50, Shazam Top 200, and Rolling Stone Top 25 Trending charts. Anne's 14-song debut album is loaded with power-packed declarations.

Watching God "do what He did when my brother passed away, I did not want to write just the normal happy songs," she said. "I wanted to speak to people walking through loss, walking through real-life situations. All those things that are in my songs, I wanted to stand firm in those truths and speak those, and I wanted my songs to reach all different age

groups and all different walks of life."

Anne's song lyrics all come from her journals and personal experiences, especially in nature.

"Every song speaks to believing what the Lord says about you, rather than what the world says, and standing for truth, and really stepping up and not being lukewarm, not just calling yourself a Christian but actually being in love with the Lord and seeking Him that way," the young musician concluded. •



Anne Wilson in a photo from her website (main) and (inset) performing onstage during the 53rd Annual GMA Dove Awards at Lipscomb Allen Arena on October 18, 2022 in Nashville, Tennessee. (Photo by Jason Kempin/Getty Images)

Psychic has epiphany during crisis

BY JENNIFER NIZZA



Jennifer Nizza

I started having premonitions at age 12. I'd see an event in my mind and soon after, it would come true. Curious about the spiritual realm, I started visiting tarot card readers at the age of 13 and two years later, I got my own deck. In my early twenties, I began seeking out mediums. I kept going back and kept going back, in the hopes of finding some sort of peace. Before I knew it, I was hooked.

At age 24, I became a mother. I loved my daughter, but I was restless. Unfulfilled. I had so many unanswered questions about my identity and my value. It didn't help that I was having all sorts of strange spiritual experiences. I was seeing dark figures and other things, hearing things, and receiving information about strangers. Many of the things I saw and heard were terrifying.

Eventually, I decided to turn this "gift" into a career; I became a professional psychic medium. There was all sorts of recognition and praise, so I was easily convinced

that I was doing "God's" work — even though I neither truly believed in nor knew Him. I still encountered the darkness and strange things, but I tried my best to look past it.

Then, as I was approaching my late thirties, I suffered a major physical trauma. In the heat of the moment, I cried out to Jesus, though I'd never known Him. I remember being surprised by that, because I could've cried out to a deceased loved one or a "spirit guide." But ... I'd called Jesus. After that, I found myself disinterested in my medium work. I kept working, because I was the breadwinner, but something in me had changed.

Crazily enough, a few months later, a psychic friend of mine told me that she'd become a Christian! She invited me and my husband to her church; he went, but for some reason, I stayed back.

After he'd been going for about a month, I decided to join him. I remember being so intimidated by all the people with their hands raised, the beautiful music, and the lyrics on the screen. But when I heard the lyric "Jesus saved me," I was instantly transported back to the moment I'd cried out to Him months earlier.

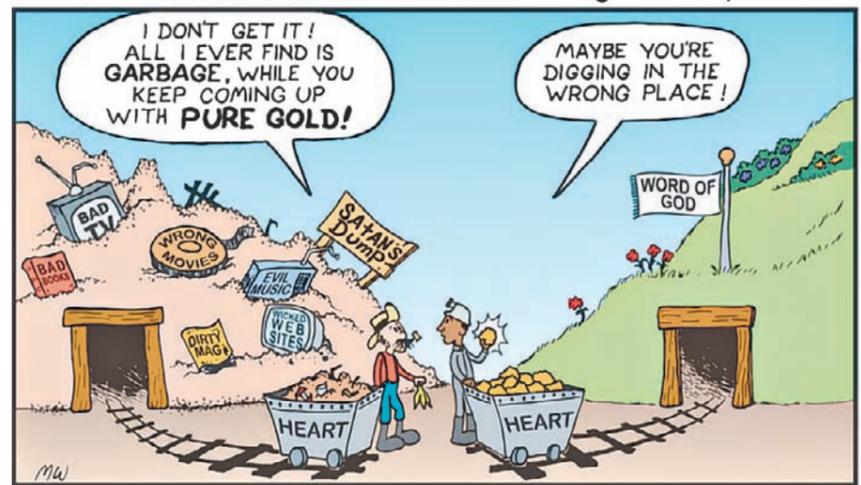
All of the sudden, the knowledge of His existence and goodness hit me and I started bawling. When I got home, I did something that I'd never done in my life: I read God's Word. When I saw His direct condemnation of psychic practices, I told my husband that I was quitting my job.

That day was the first day of my new life in Christ. I picked up my cross and followed Him — and I still am, six years later! •

As told to and edited by Adira Polite and originally published on *Then God Moved*

GARBAGE DUMP

A Joyful 'toon by Mike Waters



The good man brings good things out of the good stored up in his heart, and the evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in his heart. For out of the overflow of the heart his mouth speaks. —LUKE 6:45 NIV

nudge
WITH KARL FAASE

Just think!

HUMAN beings are equipped with the ability to learn and reason. We can grasp logical laws and relationships, sense our surroundings, remember the past, and reflect on ourselves through introspection. How did these abilities originate?

The Bible insists that God created our minds and bodies for a purpose. He made us in His image so that, among other things, we could think like Him. Although sin affects even our mental lives, it does not obliterate our capacity for reason altogether.

So Christianity accounts for the fact that our reasoning powers are generally, though not perfectly, reliable.

On the other hand, if atheism were correct, humans would be the byproducts of blind forces that had no intention to produce rational creatures. From evolutionary philosopher Daniel Dennett's perspective, "the human mind is something of a bag of tricks, cobbled together over the eons by the foresightless process of evolution by natural selection."

But if our minds were not designed, why would we trust them? In a happenstance evolutionary world we would not expect our minds to guide us to truth.

As C.S. Lewis recognized, "If my own mind is a product of the irrational ... how shall I trust my mind when it tells me about Evolution?" •

Dennett, D., *Breaking the Spell: Religion as a Natural Phenomenon*, Viking, New York, NY, p. 107, 2006.

Lewis, C.S., *Christian Reflections*, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, MI, p. 89, 1967.

Youth Truth

Search for love ends unexpectedly

BY DAHLIA GONZALEZ

By the time Alyssa Gordon went to high school, her mom had been thrown in jail for too many DUIs.

"My family was pretty dysfunctional," she says on her Wonderful Acts YouTube channel. She was a military brat born and raised in Italy. Her mom was an alcoholic. Plagued with suicidal thoughts, she ran away from home from time to time and grew up seeking in guys the love she felt was missing in her family.

Alyssa played the part of the social butterfly party girl with a smile facade but internally she was frustrated that guy after guy just took advantage of her and never wanted a true and lasting relationship.

"I began to get in this cycle of me really desiring love, to have someone genuinely care about me," she says. "I would give myself to these men physically looking for that true love that I never got. I got really dark, it got really depressing and the cycle just kept continuing. The last guy who I thought genuinely cared about me cut me off...would act like I didn't



Alyssa with her husband Sudan

exist." This guy broke her heart badly and she took it out on God.

"I'm cursing at God, I'm throwing things," she relates. "I was yelling

and screaming, 'God if You're real, I need You to show me ... right now!'"

She had attended church, but with her mother's example speaking

louder than her words, Alyssa didn't respond to God's offer of grace and love.

As a second year in college, she luckily had a friend who encouraged her.

"I don't know if God is real anymore, because if He's real where is He?" she asked him.

"Alyssa, God has you in the fire right now and gold has to go in the fire to be purified," he replied.

Once again, she cried out to God in her dorm room. His response was terse: *Alyssa, your boyfriend never really loved you to begin with.*

Oh. She was taken aback. What might appear obvious to anyone was a thunderbolt epiphany for Alyssa. And the weight lifted from her shoulders.

From that day onward, Alyssa read her Bible.

"It was alive, every word was speaking to me. Every step of obedience I took, He was there. I did not know how good God was."

So on May 20, 2010, in her bathroom, Alyssa prayed to ask Jesus to take over her life and she began to experience God in a whole new way. She stopped looking for love in all the wrong places. Jesus was her best friend.

"The depression went away," she says. "He built up my self-confidence."

Alyssa became celibate and kept herself pure for six years until she met and married a man who truly loves her.

Then at Howard University, she studied communications but went to the sciences library to study because that's where the serious students were. Sudan was a pharmacology major who Alyssa thought was cute.

But when she found out he had a

girlfriend, she immediately limited him to the "friends" category.

They were both Christians and frequently studied together at the library. They compared notes on the Christian activities they were involved in.

After a few years of this, they found themselves in a car with two of Alyssa's girlfriends.

"So Sudan, what are you looking for in a wife?" one girlfriend in the front ventured to ask.

"I'm looking for someone who is a combination of my mother and Alyssa," he responded matter-of-factly.

The girls up front squealed.

Well, this is awkward, Alyssa thought at the time. She began to aim dagger eyes at her friend for broaching the subject.

"I feel like this is a God moment," then Alyssa's girlfriend continued, ignoring the dagger eyes. "Is there anything else you would like to say, Sudan?"

"Yes, I have been praying for a long time," he said, turning to Alyssa, "to see if you would like to enter a courtship relationship to see if we might get married."

It was more than Alyssa could process. She had never thought of Sudan as anything more than a friend. The levels of awkwardness were now registering off the meter.

"Ok, I'm going pray about all this," Alyssa said. It was the best answer she could come up with at the time. And, having arrived at her waitressing job, she got out of the car.

Now they're married.

"I am pursuing my dreams and the calling that God has given me in my life," Alyssa says. "I have purpose, I have meaning, I have joy and it's all because of Jesus."

“**I have purpose, I have meaning, I have joy.**”

MY QUESTIONS WERE ANSWERED

Eric Field was a philosophy student on a mission to discover if there was something more than just the physical world. It was a journey that led him to explore New Age ideas and practices. But, instead of being answered, his questions multiplied, and so he turned in a different direction.

In a video on YouTube, Eric shared that he had been an atheist but became convinced there was a spiritual dimension when he started studying philosophy and science.

"I was looking at metaphysics and self-help books, where people were talking about the world from a spiritual perspective," he remembers. That led him to discovering meditation, astral projection and lucid dreaming. He now refers to these practices as 'New Age'.

"Little did I know that I was walking down a very dark road to a horrible destructive place," he shares. "At this time in my life I was so prideful. I thought everything revolved around me. My ideas about New Age spirituality were all just to help me progress and grow, to gain further knowledge and wisdom."

Eventually, Eric realized that his questions about life, origin, meaning, morality and destiny were not being answered by the New Age spirituality ideas.

"I'd run into ideas like karma, in the sense that every birth is a rebirth paying for your last life's karma that you have built up," Eric explains.

"[I thought] if every life is paying for a past life, then when you had your first life, what are you paying for? And I would bring these questions to others and they would give me lofty answers that didn't really hit on the truth."

At the same time, some Christians Eric met started asking him questions about whether he believed in Jesus' existence and resurrection.

"Eventually I looked into these questions myself," he says. "I was seeking after the truth and I thought, if I can disprove the resurrection, then I'd have more data to know what the truth of reality is." Eric spent the next 18 months studying whether Jesus really rose from the dead.

"I came to the conclusion after all that study that Jesus really did rise from the dead, that the Gospels are historically accurate early accounts – not legendary accounts but early eyewitness testimony," he attests.



Eric Field

When he became convinced the Gospels were historically accurate, the next step was for him to read them.

"I started in the Gospel of Matthew and I remember reading about Jesus for the first time and thinking, wow, this guy's answering the questions that I've been asking in such a true and poignant way... I kept reading the Gospels, learning about Jesus, learning about sin, depravity, what is evil, how God means for us to live, how pride leads to destruction and humility as a way of flourishing for the human person."

As he read, Eric said he could see a path of light out of the darkness that he was in. He realized that when he practiced New Age

spirituality, he was trying to be his own Savior, but no matter what he did, it wouldn't be enough.

"I can never do enough work on myself to build myself back to God – the work that needed to be done was done by Jesus Christ," he explains.

"He was the innocent perfect Lamb. The strong Lion of Judah who paved that way for me to enter back into a relationship with God. This person of Jesus changed everything in my life."

Eric explained that Jesus was not an impersonal force like the New Age ideas of 'prana' or 'the universe'.

"God made Himself personal in the man Christ Jesus, and showed us the true character of God ... Jesus saved me from a life of pride, narcissistic isolation and the burden of a messiah complex. And now, I realized that it is Jesus alone who saves and if there is anything in me to boast of, it's to boast of the knowledge of Christ Jesus and what He has done for me, to boast that I am a recipient of that grace and I'm set free."

"New Age spirituality promises everything that Christianity promises, but it comes up short, where Jesus fulfills all those promises. If you are looking for truth, Jesus is the Way, the Truth and the Life. If you're looking for joy and happiness, and some sense of purpose, it is only the Creator of the universe that can give you true objective real purpose, not some fake fairy tale purpose that people

are making up for themselves ... Jesus freely gives, just like He freely gave Himself on the cross for you and for me. And that's why I gave my life to Him, and I'm never going back."

“**I thought everything revolved around me.**”

The life or death choice

BY GREG LAURIE

ACCORDING to a report by the American Psychological Association, 91% of Generation Z (those born within the period from 1997 to 2012) have high levels of anxiety and stress.

I think one of the reasons that things are harder for Generation Z is that many in this generation come from broken homes. In addition, violence has escalated and, of course, social media amplifies everything and has changed things dramatically.

One-third of those in Generation Z also struggle with suicidal thoughts. To those who have contemplated or even attempted suicide, I want you to know this: You are loved. You're loved by more people than you could ever imagine. You are wanted. And God has a special plan for your life. You matter, and we need you.

Whatever you're going through, you'll get through it.

Don't ever let the devil whisper in

your ear that you should take your life.

The Bible says that the devil is a liar, the father of lies (see John 8:44). Jesus said, speaking about Satan, "The thief does not come except to steal, and to kill, and to destroy" (John 10:10).

In contrast, Jesus also said, "I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly" (verse 10). You have a choice: life in a relationship with God or death outside of a relationship with God.

I don't know the trajectory of your life today or what decisions you have made. But it's never too late to change. It's not a matter of changing the way you feel. You need to change the way you think.

Would you like to have a fresh start right here, right now? If you turn from your sin and put your faith in Jesus, He will come into your life and change your eternal destination from Hell to Heaven. He can change the course of your life, starting today.

Contact Challenge!

Do you have a story to tell, a tricky question to ask or want to let us know how *Challenge* has impacted you? Email harriet@challengenews.org

Youth Truth

Where true love is found

BY CAROL ROUND

IN the early 80s, a popular Country Western song became one of the soundtracks for the movie, *Urban Cowboy*. The song, *Lookin' for Love*, expressed the song writer's feelings with these lyrics: "lookin' for love in all the wrong places."

The song's lyrics refrain "lookin' for love in too many faces, searchin' their eyes, lookin' for traces of what I'm dreaming of..." is all too real for those dreaming of perfect love.

Don't we all dream of being loved by someone special? We search for it. Pray for it. Seek it on dating websites as well as in the real world of venues designed to attract a significant other.

Relationships are complicated. There's no doubt. Just check the statistics for divorce. Two of my relatives have been married multiple times. One is on her fifth marriage. The other is on his sixth. For almost 19 years, I've been single.

After my 28-year marriage ended in 2001, I only came close to remarrying once. What I've learned during my almost two decades of singleness is how much God loves me and wants the best for me. When I married at age 19, I was naïve, under the impression many of us have, that "two halves make a whole".

In relationships, that doesn't work. When two people with emotional baggage—scarred and insecure—drag it with them into a relationship, those problems are actually intensified. It takes two whole healthy people to make one happy healthy whole relationship. Psalm 147:3 reveals what we really need is God's help to heal. "He heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds" (ESV). We must seek wholeness in the love of a Heavenly Father. There's an expression, "You can't give away what you don't have."

If you don't love yourself, your insecurities will lead to seeking someone else to make you feel 'fulfilled'. And that is a burden too heavy for any one person to carry.

We can only love well—giving and receiving love in all our relationships—when we've reconciled ourselves to a loving God. His love is sacrificial, perfect, pure, faithful, unconditional, lavish, forgiving, lasting, hope-filled, all-encompassing, enduring, redeeming, gracious, and so much more. God is love. And God's love is the only love strong enough to hold all our needs and expectations. I grew up in the church. However, I was in my late 40s before I encountered the Living God and began to understand the meaning of "true love." True love is not based on us. It's not based on our abilities or striving to be good enough. You can't earn true love. It is given freely. God's invitation is open to all who are looking for authentic love—a lifetime love that will not fail.

God's love knows no boundaries and has no limits. There's also no place too deep that His love can't reach us.

How can we discover God's amazing love? By seeking Him in the pages of His love letter to us – The Bible.

Pursuing God leads to wholeness and true love in His outstretched arms. Romans 5:8 is a reminder. "God showed His love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us."

This article appeared on the Assist News website and is used with kind permission.

I found my true identity

BY HARRIET COOMBE

"As a young person I always struggled with feeling like a failure," says Nissi Chiasson. "I always felt inadequate because I was always standing in the shadow of my parents' powerful faith."

Nissi's parents were missionaries and from a young age she was encouraged to read the Bible and pray, and one day follow in her parents' footsteps. She felt under pressure to believe and live as they did.

Like many teenagers, Nissi rebelled against her parents and, when she was 15, she started dating in defiance of their rules.

As missionaries, relying on donations, her family often didn't have enough money for food. When this happened, they would pray together for God to provide, and He did.

Nissi saw many answers to prayer – miracles and healings. But it still was part of her parents' faith, not her own choice to follow Jesus.

"Some nights I felt the presence of Jesus in my room giving me peace," she remembers.

"This began to help me know that Jesus was present in my life... The missionary staff used to come and babysit us and they always inspired me to know Jesus through their deep passion for Him."

After watching a play called *Heaven's Gates and Hell's Flames* when she was seven, Nissi had prayed the salvation prayer.

But, she admits, her motivation was her fear of being separated from her family when she died.

She said she didn't truly understand what it was to be a Christian.

The turning point came when she was invited to help out at a Christian summer camp for children from troubled homes.

"I decided to go mostly to get



Nissi with her husband

away from my family and be able to find who I was apart from them," she admits.

"Little did I know, I would meet Jesus in this time away. I found Him and this time I felt for the first time that I understood that He loved me and that He longed for me to know Him. Simply as myself, nothing to do with my family.

"I felt able for the first time to believe in Jesus because He had truly shown Himself to me.

"The pressure of being a missionary kid faded away in His love for me."

Nissi now found her identity in Jesus instead of her parents.

"I began to blaze my own path so I could be myself and not always live in my parents' shadow," she says.

"God helped me overcome lots of my fears with my dreams. He helped me find all I needed in Him."

Nissi said she also learnt that in the storms of life, God is close to the broken-hearted.

Later in her life, ironically, she began working with the same missionary organisation her parents had been a part of.

"I was in full-time ministry overseas in Asia, when I heard from my

because I have overcome the world.' (John 16:33). The Heavenly Father held me so close in this time.

"Being married myself, God has used my marriage to bring forth beauty and a renewed sense for how to be married in a godly way. Although I am still in a healing process, I know that nothing is impossible for Jesus!"

Nissi has these words for those suffering the pain of having their parents separate: "I encourage you to find healing and fulfilment in the arms of a loving Savior who died for you and wants to heal and mend your broken heart. Only in Jesus is full healing possible.

"Lean into the loving arms of Jesus who bore every pain you ever have gone through, or will go through. Take it to the cross and nail it there.

"Let His greatest sacrifice bring forth beauty from your ashes as He brought beauty by rising from the grave, so that you might rise as well into who He has created you to be all along."

Faith finally free

BY FAITH

I was born in South Korea, but at five months old, I was adopted by a family in Alaska. A few months later, I was diagnosed with a traumatic brain injury. The physical effects are similar to the effects of a stroke: I have very little control over the right side of my body, so I move differently. I also struggle to pronounce some sounds and words. But despite the difficulties, I grew up happy and full of laughter. I always had a strong sense that God had a plan and purpose for my life. I trusted that He would use me, just in a different way.

But once I entered high school, my faith wavered. I was left out, left behind, mocked, and betrayed so many times that my heart hardened. The emotional and physical pain was overwhelming – and the more I suffered, the angrier I got. Quite honestly, I thought that God was cruel. I couldn't see a future, I couldn't see a purpose, and I certainly didn't feel any hope. With time, I became depressed and began battling suicidal thoughts.

But when I turned 16, God brought me back to Him. One day, I opened up my Bible to Psalm 139:13-14, which reads, "For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb. I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well."

As I read this, I realized that my pain was not going unseen or unheard. God had been with me since the very beginning! My life wasn't by chance or a mistake – all of it, even my pain, was a part of a bigger plan that I could not see. Through me, God was revealing His glory!

Finally, I let Him have the pen and I trusted Him to write my story. With that surrender came so much freedom, as well as the joy that had been missing.

Hard days still come, but God is stronger than any fear, doubt, or trial I ever face. I never walk alone!

With every step, God is right there, guiding me and holding my hand. As believers, we can trust that no matter what comes, we can trust in Him. God isn't just good, He's PERFECT! So, trust in His plan for your life...whatever He has for you will be a thousand times better than anything you've planned for yourself.

As told to and edited by Adira Polite and originally published on Then God Moved



Faith

Adopted as His child

BY GREG LAURIE

GROWING up, I didn't know my biological father. But my mother married a man named Oscar Laurie, who adopted me formally. He treated me as a father should treat a son. He disciplined me when I went astray. He did the best that he could in helping me to be a good boy. But tragically my mom left him, and I didn't see him for the rest of my childhood.

However, I did have the privilege of reconnecting with him as a young adult, after I became a Christian and a pastor. I also had the privilege of leading him to the Lord.

Just as Oscar Laurie adopted me, God has adopted you, if you have put your faith in Christ. The Bible says, "For all who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God" (Romans 8:14 NLT).

Are you a child of God? That comes through believing in Jesus

Christ. He can pardon you of every sin you have ever committed. Maybe you're thinking, "I've messed up and made mistakes. I have sinned."

You don't have to be controlled by your past. And you don't have to be crippled by it, either. You can put it behind you. You can become a new person in Jesus Christ. This is your moment to come into a relationship with the God who loves you. He loves you so much that He sent His only Son Jesus Christ to come to this earth, die on the cross for your sin, and rise from the

dead. Now He stands at the door of your life and knocks. And if you hear His voice and open the door, He will come in.

Are you worn out and exhausted? Are you filled with sadness and depression? There is hope. But this hope is not in religion or in rules and regulations. It is hope in Jesus Christ coming to live inside of you.



An ear for the truth

BY DANIEL DAVIDSON

A young John Leslie arrived in Salt Lake City, Utah in the winter of 1974. It was to be the first time he had come into close contact with the Mormon Church, but it was the beginning of an exciting and unexpected journey.

He was there to begin working on his Ph.D. in Experimental Pathology at the University of Utah, where he would study with a renowned expert on blood vessel formation.

He had been exposed to Christianity as a child by his parents, and knew a basic set of Bible stories, but not much more. When he was a teen, his parents divorced and John felt disillusioned and confused about faith.

John began to do a bit of reading to try and understand Mormonism. The first book he picked up was a critique of Mormonism written by a Bible believing Christian. Reading this, John was forced to think about his own beliefs and realized that he knew very little.

But he knew that he needed God and he knew that Jesus had something to do with it—and that's what John told God as he came to that place of committing his life to Him. It was a transforming experience he acknowledges.

"I knew something had happened to me, but I wasn't sure what it was," he recalls.

But one of his professors knew what had happened so he began to mentor John. John learned that he had indeed been transformed—'born again' by the power of Jesus Christ, the Creator of the universe.

This had intellectual as well as spiritual consequences. John saw the world of science in a new light. As a new Christian and a new graduate student, delving into the study of biology, he began to see the wisdom and grandeur of God in creation.

John thrived in the research-intensive world of graduate school, even co-authoring a paper in the prestigious *New England Journal of Medicine*. He also met his future wife, Barbara, in the research lab. They were married

in August 1980, John received his Ph.D. in December of that year, and then they headed to Australia, where John had a research fellowship at Monash University.

It was in Australia that he heard a speaker on biblical creation, a representative of an organization that was later to become Creation Ministries International. John had already come to appreciate the world as God's handiwork. But he had not thought much about how or when God created.

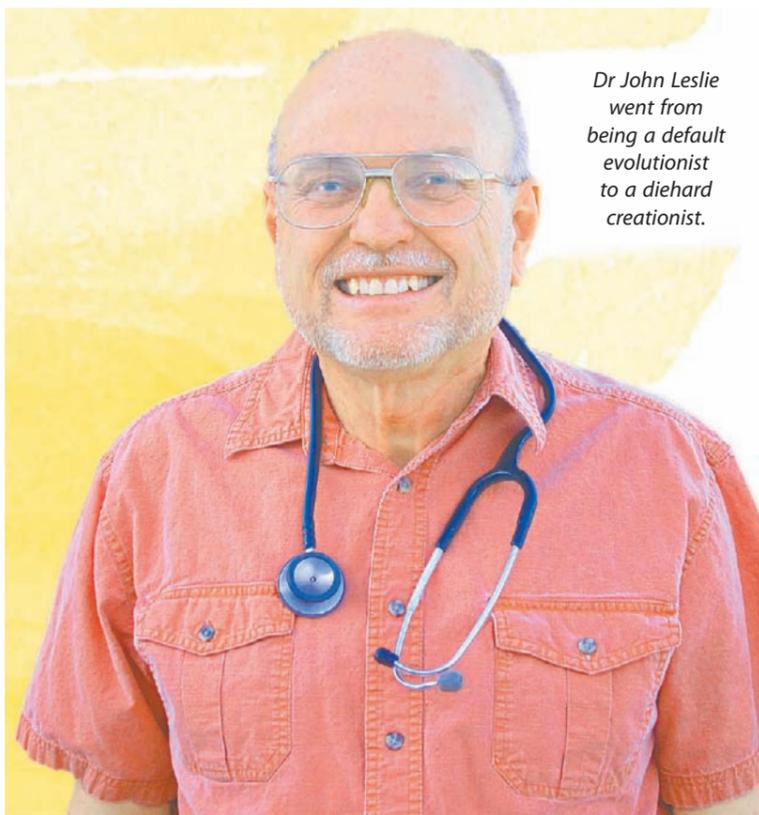
He had always been taught that evolution was a fact and hadn't questioned it. Until hearing this presentation, John had not known there was a way of thinking about origins apart from the evolutionary model. But after this, he began to rethink his position from both Scripture and science. As he says now, "I went from being a default evolutionist to a diehard creationist."

John became convinced that Darwinian evolution was ultimately not based on science. Instead, he came to see it as a non-Christian 'faith system' that was itself trying to provide answers for the meaning of existence. He began to see the genetic code as particularly persuasive evidence.

On the one hand, the failure of evolution to account for this fundamental building block of life demonstrated to him the bankruptcy of evolutionary theory, while on the other hand, the incredible design evident in the genetic code testified to the glory and wisdom of God.

Then, in 1985, another door opened: medical school. John headed back to the US and earned his M.D. degree and had both internal medicine and paediatric residencies, becoming Board certified in both. This all confirmed his awe of the Creator's handiwork—and provided him with new reasons to reject evolutionists' claims.

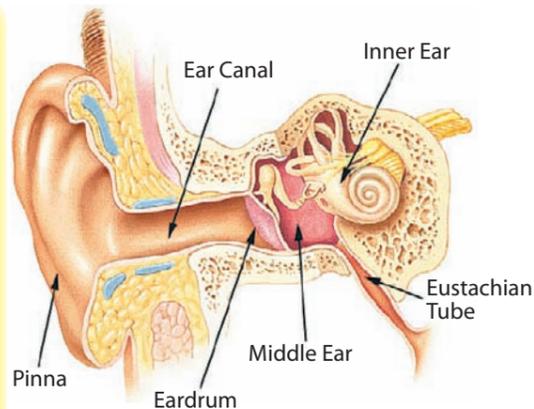
"For evidence of design, you can pick the cell, you can pick the organ, you can pick the body as a unit," John says. "Every organ of the body is incredibly unique in its design and highly complex. The one that I find



Dr John Leslie went from being a default evolutionist to a diehard creationist.

“**Every organ of the body is incredibly unique in its design and highly complex.**”

John Leslie: “[The ear] poses real problems for evolutionists: Any mutation you can imagine in just about any component of the complex structure of the organ would bring it down.”



most fascinating is the hearing and balance mechanism of the ear.”

John explains the intricate relationship between the bones in the inner ear, the pressure balance maintained in the ear drum, the way in which air vibrations are converted to electrical impulses, and the nerves which transmit these to the brain. This system poses real problems for evolutionists: “Any mutation you can imagine in just about any component of the complex structure of the organ would bring it down,” he says.

In recent years John has studied biblical archaeology which allowed him to study the Bible more closely. One of the areas he has looked at was the worldwide flood.

“Linguists talk about the characteristics of a ‘true narrative’,” John explained. “In my paper, I looked at how the Flood account in Genesis displays those characteristics.” So is there good reason to believe the Flood account? John’s answer is an emphatic “Yes”. Looking at the way the biblical narrative is put together, and the way it intersects with everything we know about the world, we have every reason to trust the Bible.

Whether we look at biology, geology, or anthropology, the Flood fits with what we know about the world.

“In anthropology, for instance, we see that all the major areas of the earth have people groups with a flood account with basic common characteristics: A god who is displeased by sin and evil but preserves a man or group that has the god’s favor. They are sealed into some craft, protecting them, while a

flood is sent to punish the others.”

While John originally thought that he might practise medicine overseas, it turned out to be closer to home, as he served people in rural and disadvantaged areas in Oklahoma and now in New Mexico.

“I loved the research I pursued, understanding how the creation worked,” John says, but medicine was fulfilling on a whole different level. “It put me right in the middle of people’s lives, helping them to address not only their physical problems, but their emotional, social, and spiritual problems.”

As a Christian, John sees this as a great challenge and a wonderful opportunity.

Believe it or not

BY CREATION MINISTRIES INTERNATIONAL

Sticky truth re flatworms

HERE'S a challenge. Design an extremely strong glue which can adhere quickly to surfaces underwater, can withstand the strongest tides, and be durable but able to be dissolved when needed.



That doesn't sound like any superglue from the supermarket; but in the ocean, it is found in tiny tiny flatworms called monogeneans¹. Monogeneans are parasites that live on the gills, fins and skin of fish.

Flatworms attach themselves to fish with this glue, which is made up of two non-sticky components that only adhere when the two parts come together—just like a man-made two-part epoxy resin. The glue is produced in two kinds of glands in the head region, and is extruded through tiny holes in front of and beside the mouth.

University of Queensland researchers discovered this creation from specimens gathered on the Great Barrier Reef. They believe that this natural superglue will have 'almost limitless' potential as a commercial adhesive, with applications from underwater construction to sticking people back together again after surgery.

Team leader Dr Ian Whittington said, "You can't help but marvel at the amazing properties of these glues."

Indeed, it's only when our technology begins to get close to God's that we start to understand the 'marvellous' designs that He has used!

¹ Flatworm Superglue, Australian Geographic 57:120, January–March 2000.

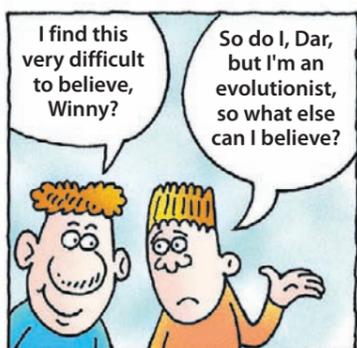
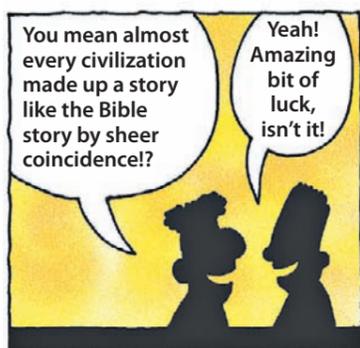
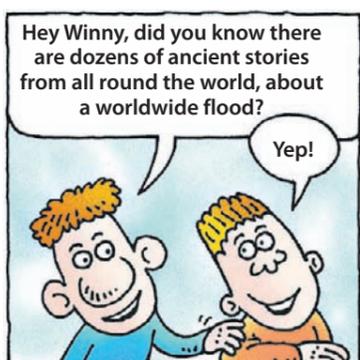
As a doctor, he also sees the importance of understanding the consequences of sin and the Fall. This makes it possible to understand how sickness, pain, and death came into God's creation: "God made a good creation in the beginning, but now due to sin, things are falling apart."

An understanding of creation and redemption provides hope.

As a doctor, John says, "My job is to alleviate suffering," following Christ's example while on earth. This job points forward to our ultimate hope—full restoration through the fulfilment of Christ's work, as He brings about a new heavens and a new earth.

This article originally appeared in Creation Magazine and is used with kind permission.

Dar and Winny



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BUILDING BETTER RELATIONSHIPS

Becoming a piece of world peace

“A smile is the beginning of love.”
– Mother Teresa

Agnes Gonxha was born in Skopje, the capital of modern-day North Macedonia and at the age of 18 entered the Order of the Sisters of Loreto with the intention of becoming a missionary to India – she arrived there in 1929. Now known as Sister Teresa, she was deeply moved by the overwhelming poverty and destitution of people living on the streets of Calcutta and sensing the call of God, in 1948 began working to alleviate their suffering.

Eventually joined by a group of young women, she founded the Missionaries of Charity with the vision of providing “wholehearted free service to helping the poorest among the poor.” They worked with AIDS, Leprosy and Tuberculosis sufferers, allowing them to die with dignity in the Mission’s hospice, provided food, and founded orphanages, schools, and mobile clinics. In time her ministry grew to 4,500 nuns serving in 133 countries.

It has long been recognized that poverty is a major threat to peace in the world, and because of her work to overcome poverty, she received the 1979 Nobel Peace Prize. Now known as Mother Teresa, she was asked at the time, “What can we do to promote world peace?” Her reply was profound in its simplicity:

“Go home and love your family.”

In a speech not long after, she expanded on her answer by saying, “I have found the poverty of the West so much more difficult to remove. When I pick up a person from the street, hungry, I give him a plate of rice, a piece of bread, I have satisfied. I have removed that hunger. But a person that is shut out, that feels unwanted, unloved, terrified, the person that has been thrown out from society – that poverty is so hurtful and so much, and I find that very difficult.”

Mother Teresa demonstrated that everyone, regardless of race, gender or religion is precious to God. She treated all people with dignity.

We can be the same kind of people.

She was once asked why she cared for suffering people who never became Christians and she responded by saying, “Because everyone needs to know that they are loved when they are dying, even if they do not accept Jesus.” She understood that every person is precious to God, known and deeply loved by Him.



Kindness to the less fortunate is a tangible expression of peace making.

This includes you.

I have been encouraging people to be peacemakers by committing to a Peace Declaration I recently wrote:

We, the people of this community, declare ourselves to be people of peace.

We believe peace begins with each one of us and that peace in our world and communities is achieved through multiple acts of love, courage, and kindness.

Peace can be expressed through a friendly smile to a stranger, by helping a neighbor in need, standing up bravely for truth and justice, and respecting each other, regardless of culture or faith.

Jesus said, “Blessed are the peacemakers.” Therefore, we commit ourselves to being peacemakers in our community.

With God’s help, every one of

us has the capacity to bring peace to our world.

When we welcome someone into our circle of friendship who is usually ignored, we bring peace.

Helping the poor, smiling at a stranger, or refusing to “blow up” at the shop worker who is only trying to do their job, are all small ways we can encourage peace. And we are most like a peacemaker when we choose forgiveness over hatred.

Jesus came to bring us peace with God and peace in all our relationships by healing and restoring them.

Share God’s love today by smiling at someone you don’t know and commit to being a peacemaker in 2023 by committing yourself to the Peace Declaration, and asking God to help you live it out.

The big question

BY GREG LAURIE

IN one of the oldest books of the Bible, the book of Job, the question is asked, “If a man dies, shall he live again?” (Job 14:14). That is a question everyone should ask in life. What will happen when we die? What is there beyond this place called Earth?

As a teenager I thought about this quite often. It was sort of a heavy subject to be contemplating, but I did find myself thinking about death on a semi-regular basis. My belief at the time was that once you stop living, you simply cease to exist. I wasn’t certain there was a place called Heaven. I definitely was hoping there wasn’t a place called Hell. My conclusion was that when you’re dead, you’re dead. And it really scared me to think that I could simply cease to exist.

This is something that many people are thinking about today, because numerous books have been published on the subject of spirituality and life beyond the grave. For my generation, the Baby Boomers, the inevitability of death is approaching. We are having to come face-to-face with our mortality. We used to sing that we were forever young, but that song doesn’t ring true like it once did. We are becoming forever old. The clock is ticking. Time is marching on. We are trying to pretend it isn’t happening and trying to turn back time, but we know that death is coming.

What happens beyond the grave? According to the Bible, there is life beyond the grave, either with God or eternally separated from God and His goodness. Because of what Jesus Christ did on the cross, and His resurrection three days later, we as Christians have the certainty that when we die, we will immediately go into the presence of God to a wonderful place called Heaven.

The question you need to ask yourself is; where am I going?

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HOW DO I BECOME A CHRISTIAN?

What? Salvation is an eternal relationship with God – now on Earth, and after we die, in Heaven.

The Lord Jesus says: “I tell you the truth. Everyone who believes in me has eternal life.” John 6:47

In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world. John 16:33

Who? Anyone can gain the eternal life offered through Jesus Christ, regardless of how you have previously lived or what you have previously believed.

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

Why? Because sin separates us from a holy God. Sin is all the wrong things we do, say and think, as well as our desire to be our own boss.

For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. Romans 3:23

How? The Bible says you become a Christian by confessing with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believing in your heart that God raised Him from the dead.

If you declare with your mouth, “Jesus is Lord,” and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you profess your faith and are saved. Romans 10:8b-10

Ready to change your life forever? Here is a prayer you can pray, but you can also use your own words. The words are not as important as the heart attitude – which only God can see.

Almighty God, Creator of Heaven and Earth,

I acknowledge that I am a sinner. Please forgive me for all the ways I have disobeyed and defied You.

Thank you for sending Your Son, Jesus Christ, to earth to live the perfect life I couldn’t, and die on the cross for my sins. Thank you that His blood was sufficient to pay my debt to You, and His resurrection proves that there is life beyond death. I accept that His sacrifice is all I need to get right with You - I bring nothing I have done but I give you everything I am. Help me to live for You. Please be my Saviour and my Master. Amen.

What now?

1. Tell someone - either a Christian that you know or email us at usaoffice@challengenews.org
2. Use the resources in the green box on this page to find a Bible to read and more information regarding Christianity.
3. Keep praying. Talk to God anywhere, about anything. He is always listening and you don’t need a formula.
4. Find a Bible-teaching church to attend.

AS A NEXT STEP:

I have prayed this prayer.

Please send me:

- Bible
- Some ‘starting off’ literature
- Information on a helpful church

** Please tick and write clearly **

Name _____ Phone _____

Address _____

Age, occupation (it helps) _____

Send to: Challenge Literature Fellowship, 2634 Drake Road, Lebanon Ohio, 45036
usaoffice@challengenews.org

All overseas enquiries are referred onto someone in their own country

A LIGHT FOR OUR PROTECTION

BY ILSE BEUKES

A LIGHTHOUSE is designed to warn the ships of dangerous rocks or shallows and show them the way they need to go. They deter ships from running aground, preventing the ship’s destruction and that of their

cargo and crew.

Now, if a lighthouse and a ship are on a collision course, who has to move?

Of course it is the ship that needs to move, otherwise it will be destroyed. The lighthouse will always be at the same spot. It is not designed to move,

but to be constantly showing the way. It will always be there to protect.

As long as those rocks or shallows are there, they pose a danger; in the same way, as long as sin will destroy people (i.e. always), God’s Word and principles will be a lighthouse warning us of the peril we face if we do not change our course.

His lighthouse of truth shows us the way to conduct our lives and to make the best decisions. It protects us from shipwreck and keeps us safe. If we follow God’s guidelines and commands we will always receive God’s best for our lives.

His lighthouse is there to keep us from destruction, not spoil our fun. Proverbs 6:23 reads: *Sound advice is a beacon, good teaching is a light, moral discipline is a life path.*

And Proverbs 2: 6-8 says: *For the Lord gives wisdom; from His mouth come knowledge and understanding; He stores up sound wisdom for the upright; He is a shield to those who walk uprightly; He guards the paths of justice, and preserves the way of His saints.*

Don’t you think the safest course is to let God’s Word and principles guide your life?

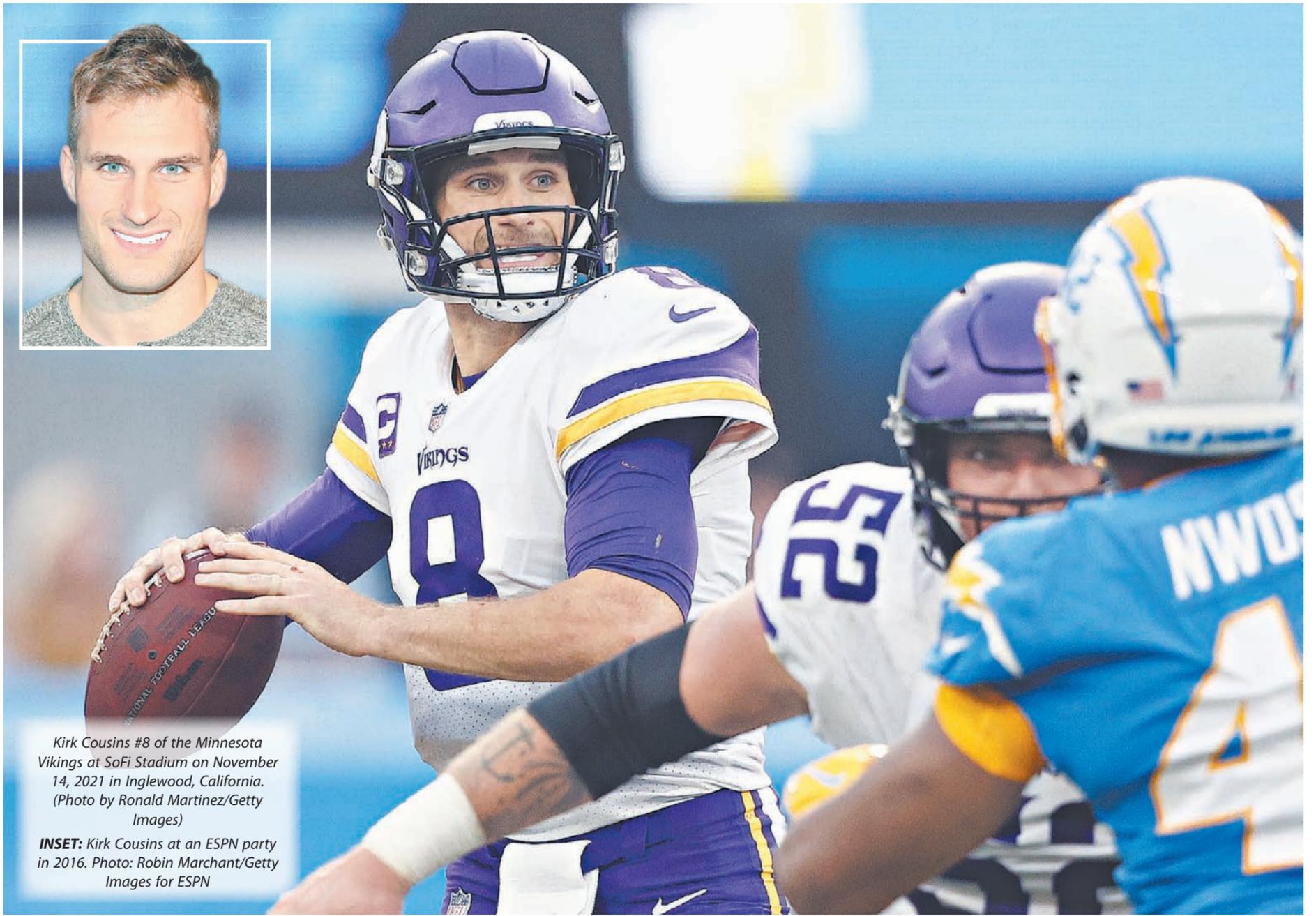
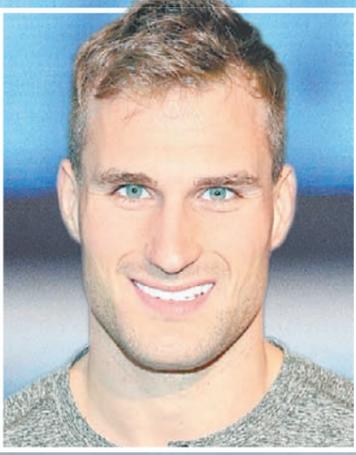
You can start by praying to invite Him into your life, and asking Him to empower you to live as He directs. Then read His instruction manual (the Bible) and be guided by its light.



Want to explore more?

Here are some **free**, helpful, online Christian resources:

Online Bible - Olive Tree app (we recommend that you start with an easy-to-read version like the ESV)	
Audio Bible - Bible.is app , or Youversion Bible app	
Christian radio station - CBN radio app (different channels for all genres of music)	
Christian podcasts and sermons - Edifi app	
Christian movies/TV shows - Good. app	
Daily thoughts and inspiration - Our Daily Bread app	
Advice on specific issues, Bible reading plans and studies for new believers - Youversion Bible app .	
The Bible explained with visual aides - the Bible Project on YouTube .	
Alpha Film Series on Youtube - an online introduction to Christianity.	
For kids - Superbook Kids Bible, videos and games app	
Comic book Bible online- goodandevilbook.com	
More inspiring faith stories - back issues of Challenge News at challengenews.online	



Kirk Cousins #8 of the Minnesota Vikings at SoFi Stadium on November 14, 2021 in Inglewood, California. (Photo by Ronald Martinez/Getty Images)

INSET: Kirk Cousins at an ESPN party in 2016. Photo: Robin Marchant/Getty Images for ESPN

DEFINED BY TWO DECISIONS

From the time he was a little kid, Kirk Cousins would walk around the house holding a football, almost as if he just knew that he wanted to be a ball-player one day.

Now 34, and the quarterback for the Minnesota Vikings, Kirk recalls two big decisions he has made in the intervening time that have defined his life and career.

The first was a decision he made when he was seven, to become a Christian.

In an interview with drjamesdobson.org, he explained: “When

your dad is a pastor, you get the opportunity to give your life to the Lord at a pretty young age. So I was probably seven or eight years old when the gospel was explained to me. I made that decision ... I was in a Christian school all the way through high school.

“It was probably midway through high school that I had a Bible teacher who challenged me and my fellow classmates about what it meant to not just pray the [sinner’s] prayer, but to actually become a disciple of Jesus. To be a fully devoted follower, as the Bible says in 1 John 2:6, *‘Those who claim to be in Him [Jesus] must walk as He walked.’*

“The Bible teacher challenged us; ‘How does your walk really look and does it really resemble the rabbi Jesus and His walk? Are you the real deal or are you just an imposter?’

“And so in high school, that’s when it became real for me. I said, ‘Okay, I’m going to become a fully devoted follower of Jesus Christ, whatever that may cost me or whatever that may change in my life, I’m all in at this point.’”

Going to a small school, Kirk was not going to be seen by the selectors until junior year in college. That first year would be crucial for his career goals – however, he broke his ankle in the first game of his first varsity season.

That was when Kirk made the second life-changing decision.

“I remember coming home with a cast on my leg, calling my dad, giving him the update that I had broken my ankle and there were tears in my eyes and I said, ‘Dad, this means that I’ll never be able to play college football at a high level.’ Because I was already an under-recruited player, no one knew about me. I knew I was not going to be able to play my junior year.

“My dad said, ‘Kirk, you don’t know that. You need to trust in the Lord and His plan for your life.’ And he referenced Proverbs 3:5-6: *‘Trust in the Lord with all your heart, lean not on your own understanding, in all your ways acknowledge Him and He will direct your steps.’*

He challenged me that day to take that verse deep into my heart, and make it a reality for me. At that moment, I decided, ‘Okay. Whether it’s my football career or the path of my entire life, I’m going to trust you, Lord, to lead.’

“And the Lord found a way for me to play college football and He was so much bigger than a broken ankle. Looking back now, I realize that He’s so much bigger than so many things. What we see as a mountain, God sees as just nothing.”

Kirk told FOX in 2020: “My faith is important to me, it’s the foundation of my life. And ultimately that’s where I gain my peace and my strength. Win or lose today, God is still on the throne and I take

comfort in that.”

“The ultimate foundation of my life is to be a fully devoted follower of Jesus,” he told the Sports Spectrum Podcast. “And that means so much more than just checking a box and saying you’re a Christian.”

“What we see as a mountain, God sees as just nothing.”

Kirk, who is now a married father, says prayer is not a religious ritual for him but part of his relationship with God.

“I want to talk to Him; I want to be giving Him my requests and my worries and my stresses and the pressures I face,” he says. “I want to give that over to Him because He says, *‘Cast your burdens on Me because I care for you.’* (1 Peter 5 verse 7)

“Some of my favorite verses are Colossians 3:23-24: *‘Whatever you do work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men,*

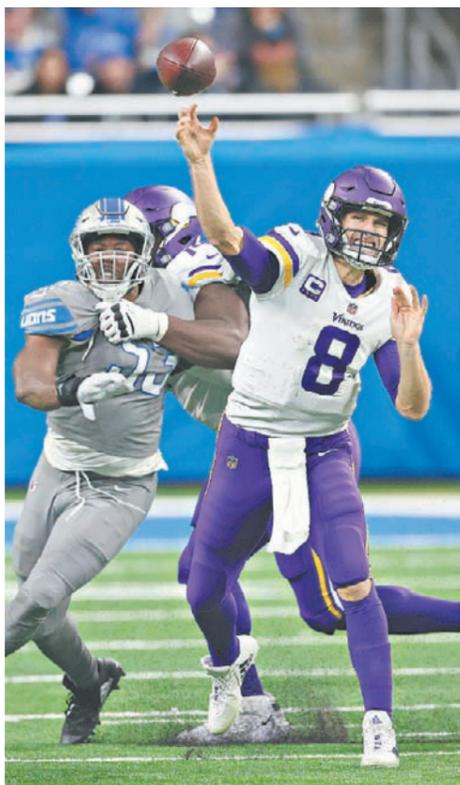
since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving.’

“While I seek to apply this verse to football, I know that football will one day end. Jesus however, and all who know Him, will live forever. This great truth means I have an identity, a foundation that can never be taken from me,” the wise player explains.

In 2018 when he ran a football camp to encourage young athletes, Kirk told them to use the Bible as a “playbook for life. Choosing to follow Jesus instead of the world ... in the long run, it pays off.”

Maybe that explains the paradox of Kirk’s career, as his dad once described it: “He’s consistently been overlooked and underestimated. He’s seldom the biggest, fastest or strongest, but in the end he’s had a lot of success.”

Maybe that is because ‘Captain Kirk’, as he has been called, has the biggest, fastest and strongest God on his side. ●



Kirk Cousins playing against the Detroit Lions in 2021 in Detroit, Michigan. (Photo by Gregory Shamus/Getty Images)

