

I WANTED A BETTER LIFE

BY LOU HAVILAND (ABRIDGED)

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

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

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

His uncle meant that it was important to defend yourself, always stand up for yourself, and not let anyone take advantage of you.

Demarcus would put that counsel to use in a matter of years.

Lured by false status

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

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

Demarcus’ grandparents were very active in their church and brought him along as often as possible.

They taught Demarcus to pray and to develop a strong inner life with God. He admits that, while God was drawing near to him, he wasn’t ready to draw near to God.

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

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

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

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

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

Walking in the wrong path

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

By age 14, Demarcus was selling marijuana and developing a steady clientele. Soon he moved on to selling crack cocaine and heroin.

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

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

New role models

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

After an attempted robbery that had gone bad, he was sentenced to more than 15 years in prison.

Serving time was not the celebrated pit stop Demarcus had heard so much about. He disliked being labeled a criminal and recalled the values and integrity his family had lovingly poured into his life. Being locked up made him face what he had become.

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

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

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

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

“I was like, ‘I surrender. I submit.’ And it wasn’t because I wanted to go home. That’s when I started reading the Bible.”

Daily, he began to build himself up – studying the Bible, exercising, opening up more with family members, and learning as much as he could about running a business to prepare himself for life after release.

Going where the growth is

Demarcus had the opportunity to have a paying job in the prison.

But he turned it down because he heard that the first Prison Fellowship Academy was coming.

The academy uses targeted curriculum, compassionate coaches, and the power of community to replace participants’ criminal thinking and behaviors with purpose and biblically-based life principles.

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

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This isn’t how life is supposed to be!

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

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

So, WHY do bad things happen?

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

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

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

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

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

They believed there was something more valuable in existence than God Himself, something more valuable than having a personal relationship with God.

And this world system – with all of its faults – came as a result of the choice they made.

Their story is the story of all of us, isn’t it? Who hasn’t said – if not audibly at least in their hearts – “God, I think I can do this without you. I’ll just go this one alone. But thanks for the offer.”

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

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

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

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

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

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

What’s God view on all of this? He’s not smug. He’s compassionate, hoping we will turn to Him so that He can bring real life to us.

Jesus said, “Come to me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest.” (Matthew 11:28). But not all are willing to go to Him.

But what about when life is unfair, when bad things happen to us? What about those horrible circumstances

that hit us in life, caused by someone other than ourselves?

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

God more than understands what you are going through.

There is nothing in life that could be more painful than what Jesus endured on our behalf, when He was deserted by his friends, ridiculed by those who would not believe in Him, beaten and tortured before His crucifixion, then nailed to a cross, in a shameful public display and then dying of slow suffocation.

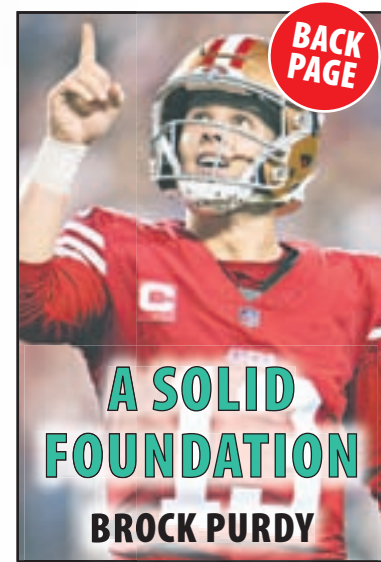
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STOCK PHOTO



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



A SOLID FOUNDATION
BROCK PURDY

I WANTED A BETTER LIFE

• From page 1

Building positive change

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

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

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

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



Demarcus is now the owner of a successful cleaning company.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Out of the darkness

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

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

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

He joined the gang after dropping out of school at 15. His father gave these uplifting words of advice to his son: "You must not be greedy and fearful of death. Remember to be loyal and not to betray your brothers otherwise I will kill you first."

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

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

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

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

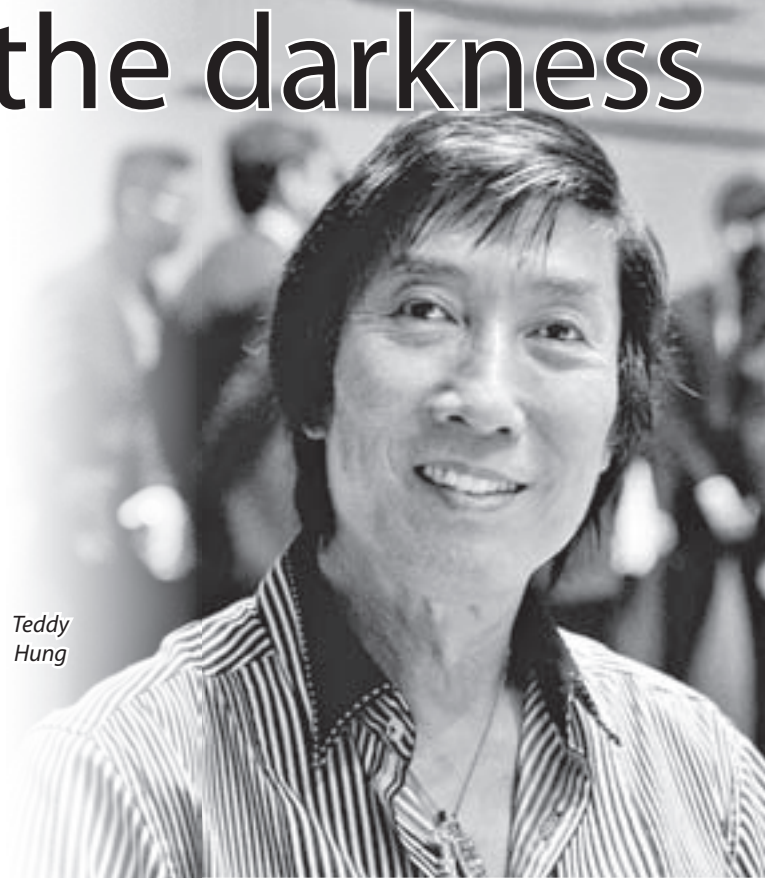
The obvious solution would have been to shut his business down but how could he do that? Teddy wrestled with this dilemma night and day.

Guilt and shame racked him, leading to severe insomnia and depression. In desperation one night, Teddy decided to kill himself.

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

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

"I pointed at the Bible and I said 'Jesus! If You are real, You cure my



Teddy Hung

illness and let me sleep and I will trust You." He was asleep before he finished the sentence.

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

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

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

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

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

Confused and frightened he asked his pastors "What kind of God is this? When I believe in Him, He causes me to lose all my business; when I don't, He doesn't let me sleep!"

"My pastors said to me, 'Taking two years of leave was what you wanted, not what God wanted. Would you let your children go into illegal businesses like you are doing now? He loves you and that is why He wants to lead you out of it.'"

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

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

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

"I tore up the will and fell asleep."

When he woke up, Teddy knelt down and prayed. For the first time, he called God 'Father God'. He says God showed him heaven and hell – an experience that left him forever changed.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

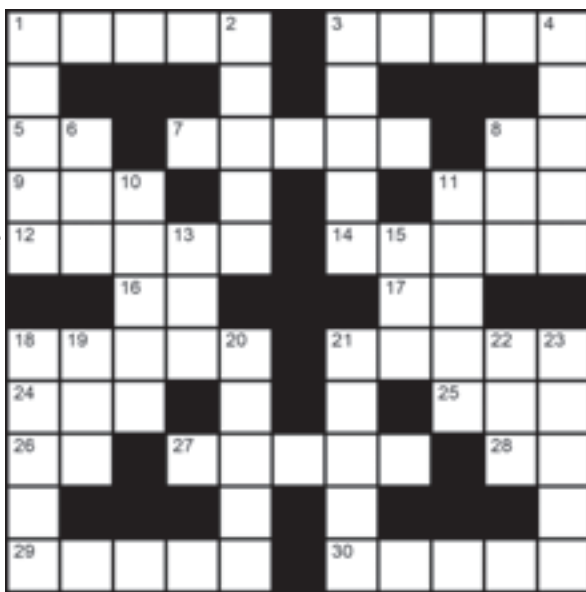
Teddy Hung died in 2018 of cancer. He was 70 years old.

“This God is formidable!”

Coffee Break CROSSWORD & SUDOKU

ACROSS

1. Copycat
3. Hang around, basically
5. Passport etc
7. Plain writing
8. Down's opposite
9. Took a load off
11. Aka mad cow disease
12. Fraud, robbery
14. Back tooth
16. __, myself and I
17. Date for she
18. Tricked, fooled
21. Change, as the Constitution
24. Juvenile newt
25. Golfer's goal
26. A refusal
27. Nobleman
28. Or not to be?
29. EU island state
30. Role player



DOWN

1. Like tearful eyes
2. Diamond unit

3. State in NE India
4. Become narrower
6. Zip-a-Dee-Doo-__
8. Stars and Stripes land
10. Entice
11. Censor (out)
13. Service charge
15. Electrical unit
18. Jeans material
19. Weird blip on the radar
20. Serious TV show
21. Oven smell
22. Apprehend
23. Gloomy

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SOLUTIONS PAGE 7



"How was your nap?"

This isn't how life is supposed to be!

• From page 1

This was no surprise to Jesus.

He was aware of what was coming, foreknowing all the details, all the pain, all the humiliation.

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

Some of it is explained by selfish, hateful actions on the part of others.

Some of it defies an explanation in this life. But God offers us Himself. God gives us the knowledge that He has endured also, and is aware of our pain and needs.

Jesus said to His disciples, "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid." (John 14:27). There is ample reason to be afraid, troubled, but God can give us His peace, which is greater than the problem before us. And if we will trust Him with our lives, relying on Him, though we encounter difficulties, He will hold us securely.

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

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

From criminal to criminologist

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

'S hanghaied' from an open camp back to a maximum-security prison on a drug related charge, it was 1981 and my fifth Christmas since entering prison as a 22-year-old. As I robotically paced the prison yard, I suddenly thought, "Have you found happiness in your life; real meaning and purpose?" That night in my tiny cell, I thought about hanging myself. Happiness? I needed to find a reason to live.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

"What's happened to you? Your eyes, your face is glowing."

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

"It's just you; only you've got it." He even got me to look into the latrine's dingy stainless steel 'mirror' to see what he could see. Amused at first, I realized that whatever it was I felt, and was somehow reflected in my face, was related to the previous night.

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

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

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

and two sons. Demitri and Daniel

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

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

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

Arthur is a criminologist, speaker, actor and writer.

MY CHAINS ARE BROKEN

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Thulani has served nine years of his sentence.

"Being in prison is not nice.

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

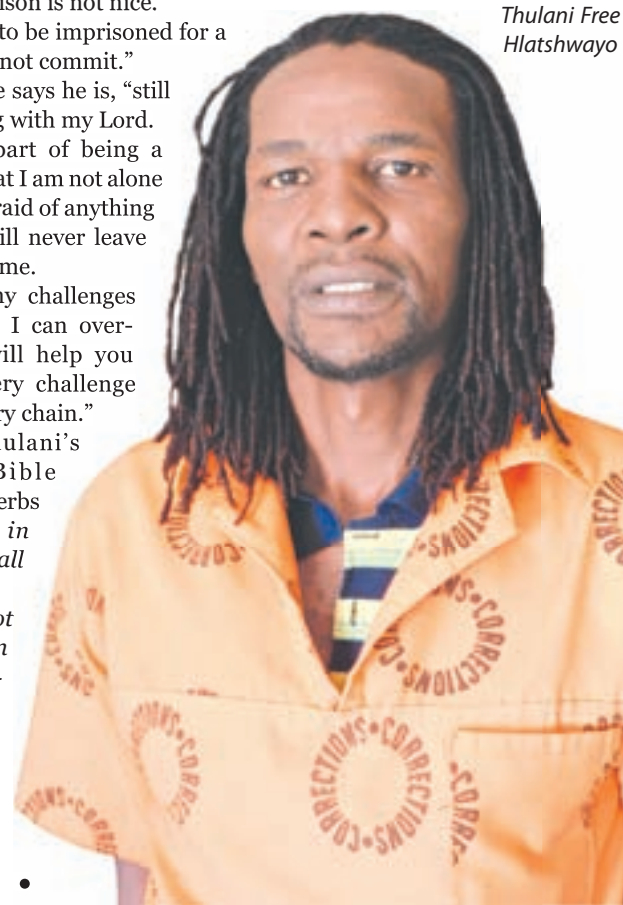
However, he says he is, "still walking strong with my Lord.

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

"I face many challenges but with God I can overcome. God will help you overcome every challenge and break every chain."

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

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



Thulani Free Hlatshwayo

“ I needed to find a reason to live. ”

DON'T STAY IN THE SEWER A Joyful 'toon by Mike Waters



What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? By no means! We are those who have died to sin; how can we live in it any longer? — ROMANS 6:1-2 NIV

About Crossroads

The Crossroads Prison Ministries mentorship program connects you with mentors who help you study the Bible.

Mentors write to you, answer your questions, share stories from their own lives, help you see how God is speaking to you through His Word and encourage you to continue to grow in your faith.

Through the mentorship program, Crossroads offers more than one dozen different correspondence Bible study courses that each contain up to 14 lessons.

Each course is designed to help you learn more about God and how to follow Him.

If you are interested in joining the program, please fill out the attached application form and mail it to us today!

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STUDENT COMMITMENT

I will finish each lesson I receive in a timely manner and, with the help of my mentors, I will complete each course that I start. I agree that Crossroads may use anything I submit, such as my picture, testimony, writings or artwork, for promotional purposes or to further its mission.

Student Signature: _____ Date: _____

When you have completed this form, please return it to:
 Crossroads Prison Ministries | PO Box 900 | Grand Rapids, MI 49509-0900
 Crossroads Prison Ministries Canada | PO Box 5837 | Burlington, ON L7R 3Y8

I thought I was unforgiveable

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

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

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

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

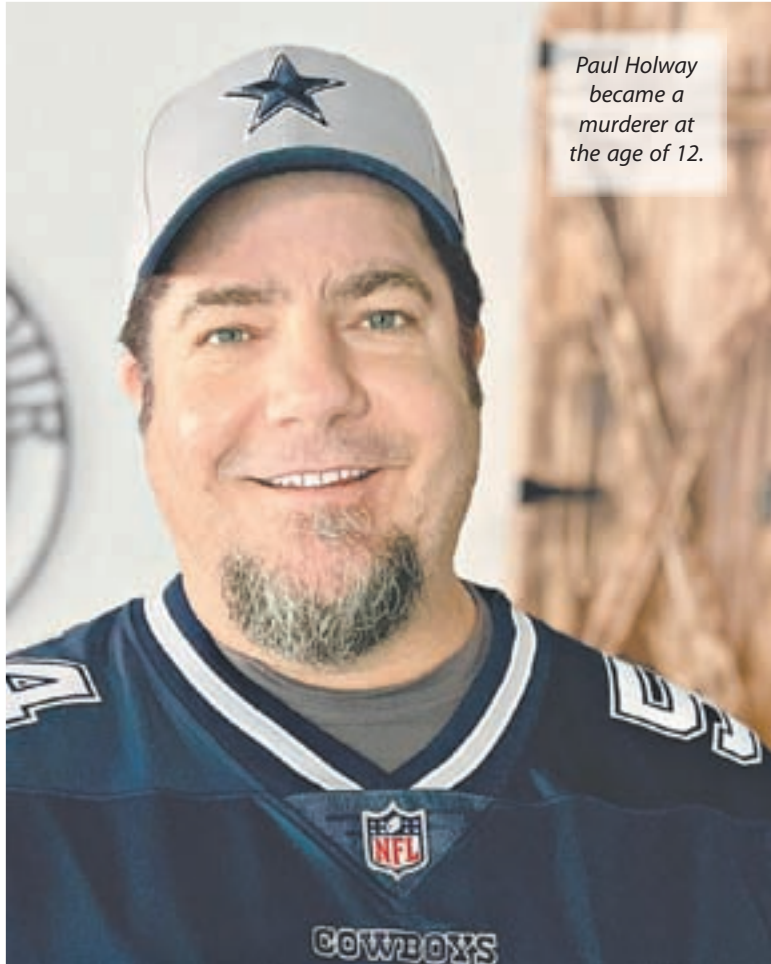
“I started feeling isolated and withdrawn. I felt like nobody loved me and I started to turn all of my emotions inward. Those emotions became anger and hatred.”

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

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

Then Paul started abusing animals. “On several occasions, it resulted in the death of the animal. Each time I killed an animal, my respect for life diminished, until I started to view people as objects instead of living beings.”

Paul writes in his first book, *Life After* that he hated what he was doing, but his anger had total control



over him. Then Paul discovered pornographic magazines in his father’s closet. The images on the pages fed his beliefs about people being merely objects. He also started stealing from stores as well as his own friends, family, teachers and fellow students.

“On November 17th 1988, I made a decision that proved to change the direction of my life and the lives of my family. Through everything that was building up inside me to this point and the trouble I got into at

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

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

“During those five years, my hate

for life and for myself increased,” he says in *The Shame Identity*. “When I looked in the mirror, what I saw looking back was a monster.”

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

that paid for all my sins.”

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

“God has turned a horrible tragedy that was meant to destroy into something life giving—spiritually life giving. He has restored my relationship with my family. My wife and I just passed our 22nd wedding anniversary and have an almost 17-year-old son.”

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

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



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

Light of the world

BY JODY BENNETT

WHEN we try to imagine God, so often we think of some sort of superhuman. That, if God exists, He must be like us but stronger, faster and invincible. Maybe like some sort of Father Christmas or Father Time, old, bearded and benevolent. Or like Zeus, angry and vengeful like a warrior.

However, the Bible tells us that God is not human. We are made in His image – we are like Him in some aspects – and He revealed Himself to us as the man Jesus, but God the Father is not a man, He is a spirit (John 4:24). In the Bible, God does call Himself a Father and there is mention of His hands and eyes and ears. But the Bible also uses animal imagery to try to describe God, it talks about God’s wings and Jesus is compared to both a lion and a lamb. And God also uses inanimate things to convey information about His attributes, like God being a pillar of fire and the cloud that the Israelites saw in the wilderness.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



Now I have a future

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

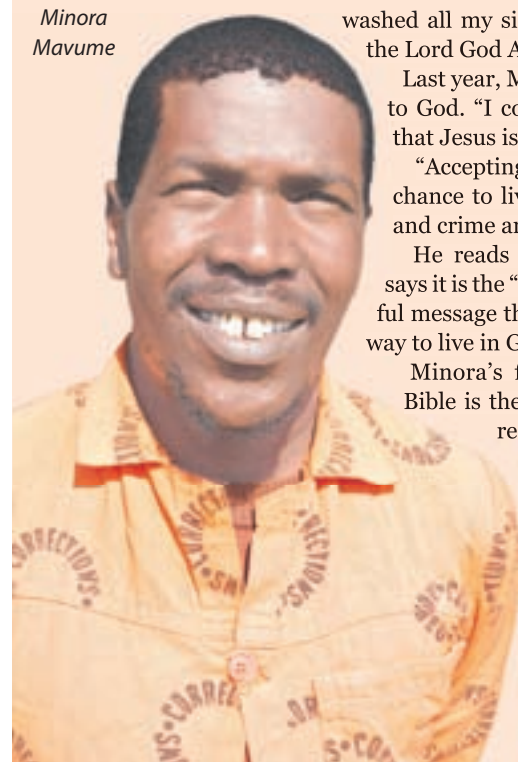
Last year, Minora committed his life to God. “I confessed with my mouth that Jesus is my Savior.

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

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

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

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



I THOUGHT PRISON WAS MY HOME

BY CHERISE BOPAPE (ABRIDGED)

Ryan's life flashed before his eyes. He had sustained three gunshot wounds while intruding into a residence and committing armed robbery. Scrambling to leave the premises, he made his way to a friend who was waiting for him outside. Ryan stumbled into the vehicle they had used earlier to drive to the residence, and the two friends sped to the hospital where Ryan was immediately taken into surgery.

"Amazingly, I lived," Ryan said. "I went from the surgery room at the hospital, to county jail, and off to prison for the first time." He was 19 years old.

Trust issues

Growing up, Ryan knew his single mother did the best she could to raise him and his older brother. When things got tough, she'd take her sons to a stable location: their grandparents' home or their aunt and uncle's place.

While she gave them all she could, Ryan's mom could never be the father her boys wanted and needed. Ryan's own dad wasn't present, and different men cycled through the boys' lives. Because of some of these men's negative influences, Ryan

formed a general distrust of men. His behavior worsened.

When his older brother got into some trouble and spent time in a juvenile detention center, Ryan missed him. To fill the void, he began hanging out with the older neighborhood guys whom he thought were "cool."

Alongside this crowd, Ryan experimented with drugs and broke the law frequently. Then, at 15 years old, his crimes caught up with him. He ended up at a juvenile detention center too.

Surrendering

During his teenage and young adult years, Ryan was incarcerated frequently. He said, "I used to live with the mentality – in my mind and in my heart – that prison was home and out here was a vacation."

During one of his "vacations," he attended church with his mother. Although seeds were planted, they didn't take root. When new struggles surfaced, Ryan trekked down the familiar, dark paths that led to his addiction and incarceration.

Again, Ryan landed himself a spot in the county jail. This time, he was facing a charge that carried a life sentence: assault with a firearm. For



Ryan now has hope in his life.

Ryan, more was at stake than ever before. Months before his arrest, he got engaged to his long-time girlfriend Jet'aime. And now, she was pregnant with his twin girls, Kallie and Kambria. (She gave birth before Ryan could be moved from the

county jail to a long-term facility.)

Although Ryan's thoughts about his daughters were a source of joy, sadness was on the heels of the birth announcement. His mother suddenly died while he was still dealing with the court proceedings for his crime.

Ryan said, "I understand what it feels like to have no hope, to have to see your life shattered and the ones you love the most suffer and hurt by the bad choices you make in life." Ryan realized he needed Christ. He fell to his knees in his cell one morning and, at 36 years old, surrendered his life to the Lord.

Turning around

Slowly, Ryan's situation began to turn around. When his county's highest-paid attorney took on his case for free, he knew God's presence was with him.

Then instead of a life sentence, Ryan got five years. Jet'aime stuck by his side and brought Kallie and Kambria to visit frequently – behind a glass partition.

Eventually, he was transferred to Shafter Modified Community Correctional Facility, a small private prison that was about 25 minutes away from Jet'aime and his baby girls, so they continued to visit him at least once a month. Most importantly, Ryan was growing in his faith.

He began attending Celebrate Recovery, a yearlong 12-step program that helps incarcerated people in recovery from a variety of "hurts, habits, and hang-ups" experience fellowship through Christ's healing power. He said, the Lord "has become the Father I never had in my upbringing and has renewed my heart from being hardened to a gentleness that's not explainable by any words."

Ryan fulfilled three years of his five-year sentence in prison before being paroled. Two days after his release, he married Jet'aime.

In the free world, Ryan continues to pair his faith with good works. He does that, in part, through his role as a ministry leader for Celebrate Recovery. He is also a volunteer with Prison Fellowship.

He also plans to volunteer in the Prison Fellowship Academy, an intensive in-prison program where participants learn biblical values.

Ryan said he serves from a stance of humility. When he considers why he keeps coming back to serve with Prison Fellowship, he said, "I want to give back freely what's been given to me."

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

"I understand what it feels like to have no hope."

Mercy wouldn't let go

BY LOU HAVILAND (ABRIDGED)

By the age of 13, Jose was already smoking marijuana and drinking alcohol. By high school, he had been expelled from the school district, causing his family to move to another town for his schooling. Unfortunately, the move didn't change his behavior.

"It was more of the same," he recalls. "I got kicked out of another school and got into heavier drugs at that point."

By age 17, Jose had moved on to smoking meth – and to what he calls "a pretty long" arrest record. Although police arrested Jose for increasingly serious crimes, he admits the justice system gave him multiple opportunities to change his ways.

He eventually served a 10-month sentence, only to land back in jail just three months later for a more serious crime. But this time, he faced life in prison.

Incredibly, his victim's family spoke up on Jose's behalf, asking the court not to hand down a life sentence.

"Ultimately, I got 17 years," he says. "I was 23 when I got arrested but much younger in my mentality."

It was during this prison stay that Jose finally began to see that all the chances he had received had led to a moment of decision.

For his first few years in prison, Jose thought of nothing but getting through his sentence. "I was going through the motions, still getting involved with stupid stuff, a lot of the vices that were available there," he says.

At one point a prisoner named Robert, whom Jose describes as "an ex-Crip from Venice Beach," began sharing with him the good news of Jesus.

"It started with him inviting me to church. He was pretty persistent, and I was like, 'Yes, maybe.'"

Jose put off Robert's invitations to church until one day, he finally decided to attend. And he returned again and again. Jose had a lot of questions about what he heard there. Robert always listened and gave answers. Eventually, Jose realized he needed to leave behind the life he had been living.

"I'm done," he finally prayed. "I'm done with this lifestyle. God, please forgive me. I want to just follow You."

As a new Christian, Jose continued attending church and encouraged those around him to do the same. In this early phase of his walk with Christ, he was zealous "but with very little knowledge."

Eager to learn more from God's Word, Jose took part



Jose spent 13 years in prison.

in The Urban Ministry Institute (TUMI), a four-year intensive biblical studies program facilitated by Prison Fellowship in partnership with World Impact.

After serving 13 1/2 years of his 17-year sentence, Jose was released from prison in 2020, just as the COVID pandemic was beginning.

He was eager to attend a church after his release. He had been corresponding with a pastor while incarcerated who would send Jose textbooks from his seminary. The pastor recommended two churches for Jose to visit.

"I called them both when I got out," he recalled. "One of them responded, and I've been going there ever since."

The pastor of Jose's new church met with him twice a week,

providing Jose with much-needed encouragement and accountability. And despite a drop in church fellowship because of the pandemic, Jose recalled kindnesses extended to him by his new church family.

"They were very welcoming," he said. "There were people that I became very close with. They would invite me over to their houses, and we would have dinner. I'd be there with their families and stuff like that."

Jose experienced many of the peaks and valleys people routinely face when re-entering their communities after prison. Because his mother owned her home, he was able to stay with her and his children following his release. At first, he struggled to reinstate his driver's license because of paperwork issues but was blessed to be able to receive it eventually. Jose met his wife after his release, and they have been married for two-and-a-half years. He found employment as a welder after completing classes at a local community college.

While he is currently serving at his church as a deacon, he would like to pastor his own church one day.

"My pastor has been training me and preparing me," he says. He hopes to be a pastor within the next few years.

When Jose looks back at his life, he is nothing less than astonished at the mercy of God and His hand in his life.

"I did 13-and-a-half years. I had been to prison before that, I was a drug addict, all kinds of stuff," Jose says. "Now when I talk to new people at church, eventually I let them know about my past, and they're surprised. That's something only God can do. It's really humbling and a glory to God, of how He transforms people."

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

In another dimension

IMAGINE there are two people on a flat piece of paper. These people are two-dimensional, having height and width but no depth; the paper is the extent of their world.

Can they see you? No. They can see only what's on the paper (in their world). They have no depth perception. Now pretend you use your finger to touch the paper.

Now can they see you? They cannot see all of you, but they can see the tip of your finger, the part that has entered their world.

That is an analogy to our situation with God.

God exists outside our dimensions. He can exist outside of time and space as we know it. Therefore, it is difficult to "see" Him. We are like the flat people on the two-dimensional paper.

We can't see what's in a third dimension. But in this case, we exist in four dimensions (height, width, depth, time), and God exists beyond that.

So how are we to know such a Being? Just as the "flat people" on the paper could not know about you unless you touched the paper, we cannot detect God unless He reveals Himself.

He must "touch the paper" of our world. God has to step down in dimensions.

As we study human history, especially religious history, do we find any instances where God "touched the paper" of our world? Consider that God's "finger" has touched our world in a person known as Jesus Christ.

Jesus claimed to be God (John 8:58, 17:3), said that to see Him was to see God (John 12:45, 14:9), said that He was the only person who had come directly from God to our world (John 3:13), and forgave people of their sins, which only God can do (Mark 2:5).

Many other passages of the New Testament affirm Jesus' deity. He was God who "became flesh and made his dwelling among us" (John 1:14). He is the "image of the invisible God" (Colossians 1:15). If we are the "flat people" it makes sense that the multi-dimensional Creator God entered our four-dimensional world by becoming a human being.

He revealed Himself to us. But why would God do that?

"For God so loved the world that He sent His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life" (John 3:16).

He entered our world to live as an example and die as an atonement (payment) for our sin, in order that one day, if we commit to Him, we can come and live with Him in His multi-dimensional, perfect, timeless world for all eternity.

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

"The only love that won't disappoint you is one that can't change, that can't be lost, that is not based on the ups and downs of life – or of how well you live. It is something that not even death can take away from you. God's love is the only thing like that." – Tim Keller

WORDS FOR THE HEART

STUDIES IN THE GOSPEL OF MARK

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

Mark 2:1-17

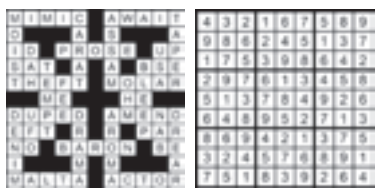
INTRODUCTION

WE have seen already how Mark's Gospel is full of action. Chapter one saw John the Baptist in action, the baptism and temptation of Jesus, the calling of first disciples and Jesus healing a number of sick ones. We can see plainly that the focus of Mark's record is on the Lord Jesus, helping us to understand who He was and is. Someone very different. A man with no equal.

As we move on we will see more and more evidence of a life that was unique. And a life that cannot be ignored. It had a goal and purpose which concerns us intimately.

Chapter 2: Verses 1-2 "A few days later, when Jesus again entered Capernaum, the people heard that He had come home. So many gathered that there was no room left, not even outside the door, and He preached to them."

Jesus came back from His journeys and the townsfolk gathered around to hear Him speak. They over-filled someone's house and spilled outside.



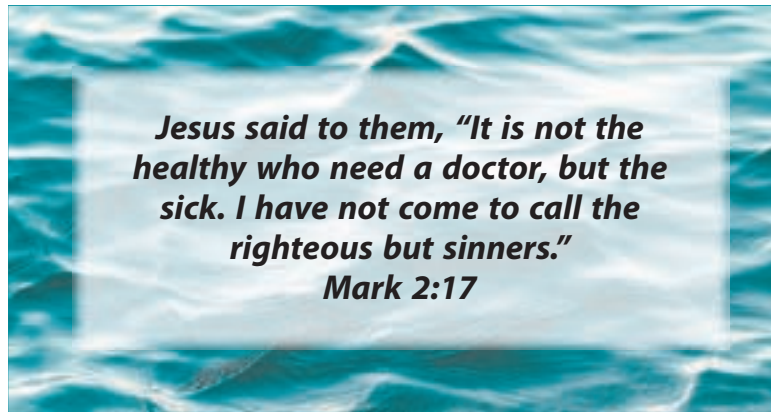
We can imagine the scene.

Verses 3-4 "Some men came, bringing to Him a paralytic, carried by four of them. Since they could not get him to Jesus because of the crowd, they made an opening in the roof above Jesus and, after digging through it, lowered the mat the paralysed man was lying on."

These men must have been determined to bring their friend to Jesus. And they must have been convinced that Jesus could heal him. Eastern houses had flat roofs as a rule and steps up the side of the house leading to the roof where they could sit. Being made of tiles, these men simply dislodged enough of them to allow the mattress to be lowered, perhaps with lengths of rope. They were able to place it right in front of Jesus. What a surprise for all the onlookers! It would have caused quite a stir.

Verse 5 "When Jesus saw their faith, He said to the paralytic, 'Son, your sins are forgiven.'"

Jesus recognised that these men must have had strong faith in Him to go to this trouble. But His words are surprising. Obviously, the man wanted and needed to be healed. But Jesus spoke about sin. In Jesus' view, the greatest need the man had was forgiveness. Maybe the man had a



longing for forgiveness that he didn't express. No doubt the Lord knew what was in his heart. It is the same for us. Being forgiven and knowing it is a powerful thing and thankfully is available to us today.

Verses 6-7 "Now some teachers of the law were sitting there, thinking to themselves, 'Why does this fellow talk like that? He's blaspheming! Who can forgive sins but God alone?'"

The critics were wrong about Jesus blaspheming but they were right in asking who can forgive sins but God only. Forgiveness can only be given by the one sinned against. A man cannot forgive sin because it has been committed against God. But Jesus spoke that way because He is God by nature.

Verses 8-9 "Immediately Jesus knew in His spirit that this was what they were thinking in their hearts, and He said to them, 'Why are you thinking these things? Which is easier: to say to the paralytic, "Your sins are forgiven", or to say, "Get up, take your mat and walk?"'"

To blaspheme was very serious thing so Jesus needed to explain what He had said. His question "which is easier?" was hard to answer. Forgiving someone and healing someone were things out of reach, impossible. Except to Him.

Verses 10-12 "But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins... He said to the

paralytic, 'I tell you, get up, take your mat and go home.' He got up, took his mat and walked out in the full view of them all. This amazed everyone and they praised God, saying, 'We have never seen anything like this!'"

The whole incident revealed the authority and power of the Lord Jesus. Who could contradict Him in the light of what happened in front of them? Probably the critics were silenced but maybe still held to their unbelief. The Gospel record shows continual refusal of leaders to believe even in the face of clear evidence.

Verses 13-14 "Once again Jesus went out beside the lake. A large crowd came to Him, and He began to teach them. As He walked along, He saw Levi son of Alphaeus sitting at the tax collector's booth. 'Follow me,' Jesus told him, and Levi got up and followed Him."

We could well wonder at the call of this man. We know that he was also known as Matthew and that he became a disciple. But how amazing that the Lord picked him out, gave the call and immediately he obeyed. Surely, Jesus was a man who could not be ignored. Other disciples had responded in a similar way.

Verses 15-16 "While Jesus was having dinner at Levi's house, many tax collectors and 'sinners' were eating with Him and His disciples, for there were many who followed Him. When the teachers of the law who were Pharisees

saw Him eating with the 'sinners' and tax collectors, they asked His disciples: 'Why does He eat with tax collectors and sinners?'"

We need to understand that tax collectors were most despised and hated generally. The Romans ruled and it was to them the tax was paid. But Jesus showed favour toward 'sinners' and spent time with them. The Pharisees would never be seen in such a situation. They thought that to be holy meant keeping away from lower classes of people. But Jesus had come to save the lost as He goes on to say.

Verse 17 "On hearing this, Jesus said to them, 'It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous but sinners.'"

We can understand His statement but there could be more behind it. Did He think there were certain good people who didn't need Him? Not so. His teaching is very plain. All people are sinners and the ones who thought they weren't, were condemned strongly by the Lord on various occasions. So, His answer on this occasion was enough to silence the critics and to show His concern for the outcasts of society.

CONCLUSION

We have used the word 'unique' with regard to Jesus. He certainly is, and these events we are reading about make that plain.

He is doing things that are impossible to others. He speaks in a way that shows deep wisdom and yet with love and compassion.

His three years of ministry appear to have a number of goals. To save the lost through His death and resurrection. To teach about God and His Kingdom. Also, to raise up a group of people who know and love Him who will take the Gospel to the world. Of course, He was able to achieve all His aims.

It is our privilege to observe it all happening in His Word.

HOW DO I BECOME A CHRISTIAN?

Anyone can gain the eternal life offered through Jesus Christ

We read in God's word: "God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16)

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

Here is an example of how you can pray.

Dear Father in Heaven. I come to you now because I want to be saved. Please, forgive me of my sins. I believe that you sent your Son Jesus Christ to die for me and that you have raised him from the dead. I now ask Jesus Christ to come into my life as my Saviour and Lord. Take control of my life. Please make me the person You created me to be. In Jesus Christ's name. Amen

The Lord Jesus says: "I tell you the truth. Everyone who believes in me has eternal life." (John 6:47).
He gives life of a wonderful quality that continues forever.

What now?

1. Tell someone - either a fellow prisoner who is a Christian, or your Prison Chaplain.
2. Ask a friend or family member to bring you a Bible. Ask the Prison Chaplain to sign you up to a correspondence discipleship program.
3. Keep praying. Talk to God anywhere, about anything. He is always listening, and you don't need a formula.
4. Find out if your prison has church services and attend them regularly.

AS A NEXT STEP:

I have prayed the prayer [ABOVE]

Please send me: Bible
 Some 'starting off' literature
 Information on a helpful church

* Please check and write clearly *

Name _____ Age _____

Address _____

Send to: Challenge Literature Fellowship, 2634 Drake Road, Lebanon Ohio, 45036

All overseas enquiries are referred onto someone in their own country

Back to the Bible or back to the jungle

BY NICO BOUGAS

THE phrase, "God helps those that help themselves", is often quoted as a favourite Bible verse and if you thought that this non-Biblical verse comes from the Bible you are in good company. According to an official survey 82 percent of Americans, thought so as well.

We get a sense of the widespread Biblical ignorance when we find that fewer than half of all adults can name the four gospels. Many Christians cannot identify more than two or three of the disciples. According to data from the Barna Research Group, 60 percent of the population can't name even five of the Ten Commandments.

And at least 12 percent of adults believe that Joan of Arc was Noah's wife. Another survey of students graduating from high school revealed that over 50 percent thought that Sodom and Gomorrah were husband and wife. And many thought that the Sermon on the Mount was preached by Billy Graham. Truly although the Bible is still a best seller we have become a generation of biblical illiterates.

Early on in his ministry, evangelist Billy Graham said, "When the Bible goes down anarchy and confusion will take its place. This will be followed by a condition such as the world has never known. This generation has to face the appalling fact that it is either back to the Bible or back to the jungle."

We neglect the study of the Bible at our peril. The Bible makes it clear that the way to progress and develop your spiritual life is to spend time studying and meditating on the Word of God. When Joshua took over from Moses to lead the Children of Israel into the Promised Land he was given this advice: "Study this Book of Instruction

continually. Meditate on it day and night so you will be sure to obey everything written in it. Only then will you prosper and succeed in all you do." Joshua 1.8 NLT

No book has had so much impact on the world as the Bible. George Washington said, "It is impossible to rightly govern the world without God and the Bible."

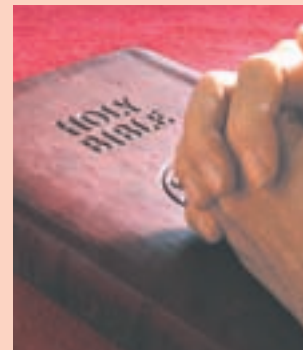
Former British Prime Minister, William Gladstone said, "I have known 95 great men of the world in my time and of these 87 were followers of the Bible."

Abraham Lincoln said, "This book is God's greatest gift to mankind. All the good things we know about God are communicated to us through this book." Napoleon Bonaparte said, "This is no mere book but a living creature with a power to conquer all that would oppose it."

And then there were the doubters. Voltaire said, "Within 100 years you will only find the Bible in museums - today his own house is the office for the Geneva Bible Society.

The American agnostic, Robert Ingersoll, predicted that within 15 years the Bible would be in a morgue - not long afterwards he was in a morgue and the Bible is still a best seller.

It is time for us to get back to the Bible or back to the jungle. It is time for us to read, study and meditate on the Word of God. It is sharper than any two edged sword; it is alive and powerful; it is like a hammer that breaks the rock in pieces, a fire that burnt up the chaff, and a sword that pierces into your inmost soul until you are no longer reading the Bible but the Bible is reading you. Along with your other resolutions - to lose weight or cut down on your alcohol consumption - why not make a positive goal of reading through the Bible in a year? It could just be the most life-changing thing you ever do.



Quarterback Brock Purdy #13 of the San Francisco 49ers looks to pass during Super Bowl LVIII against the Kansas City Chiefs at Allegiant Stadium on February 11, 2024 in Las Vegas, Nevada. (Photo by Luke Hales/Getty Images)



A SOLID FOUNDATION

BY MILO HASKOUR

Called “Mr. Irrelevant” as the absolute last pick of the last round of the 2022 NFL draft, just one year later Brock Purdy led the San Francisco 49ers into the Super Bowl.

Brock got his start in football taking the humble Perry High School in Gilroy, Arizona to the state championship twice.

Even though he did well, his high school was unknown and he was shorter than most elite quarterbacks, so recruiters panned him. He was given an unspectacular three stars on scout reports.

He got an offer to the mighty University of Alabama, but Coach Nick Saban said his accuracy was mediocre. Brock felt pretty sure Nick hadn’t even watched his videos. Accuracy was and is his strong point.

Feeling he wouldn’t be given a chance at the Crimson Tide, Brock opted for Iowa State University.

Brock, who grew up in the Christian home but took ownership of his faith journey when he was in high school, recalls a life-changing moment that happened soon after he got to Iowa State. He tells Sports Spectrum Podcast that at the end of a difficult first week of fall camp, he got on his knees and asked God to forgive him for putting football ahead of his relationship with Christ.

“It was just a great reminder of where my

identity is, where it lies,” Brock says on the podcast. “And it’s in Jesus. And I continue to lean on Him. Again, the next day I didn’t go out and throw for 500 yards and was this awesome quarterback, but it was just this peace that I had with Him knowing that, ‘Hey, no matter what I’m going to face moving forward during college football, God and Jesus are going to be my identity. And whatever I face, I won’t be shaken from it. I’ve got a great foundation in Him.’”

At Iowa State he lifted the Cyclones to consecutive winning

seasons and a Fiesta Bowl win after beginning as the third string quarterback.

Pinpoint passing won him regard, but the play that made Brock stand out with his team was the time he scrambled for yards, having no passing or handoff option. Brock needed more yards and instead of skidding to a self-protecting down like most quarterbacks, he dropped his shoulder and smashed into two defenders.

Seeing his gutsiness, his teammates went wild. Brock’s willingness to sacrifice for his players galvanized his team, demonstrating his leadership.

Despite his feats at college, once again Brock wasn’t highly regarded by recruiters, now at the NFL level. He was dismissed for being shorter than the upper echelon QBs.

Round after round of draft passed agonisingly with no one showing interest in the Iowa star. Brock was resigning himself to the alternatives: either give up football or try out at a “walk on” for the team of his choosing.

Fortunately for Brock, he got the call before San Francisco exercised their last pick. Again, Brock was the backup plan, a third string QB for the 49ers.

It didn’t matter. He was used to being underrated, and Brock did what he always did when he was overlooked. He worked extra hard, learning the playbook forwards and backwards so that if ever got the call-up, he’d be ready.

On the 49ers, coaches and players were watching, seeing the commitment, assurance, and readiness. In 2002, Trey Lance was the starter and Jimmy Garoppolo was the backup man. In week two, Lance was injured for the season. In week 13, Jimmy suffered a foot injury.

Brock took the podium. He threw 210 yards and two touchdowns to win against the Miami Dolphins.

For the football world, which lacked the insider view of his work ethic, it was as if the 49ers had conjured a genie. Usually, the third string guy helps a team limp out of a season. But Brock went on to beat Tom Brady with the Buccaneers in his next game and in the following games carried his team into the playoffs.

“I believe in the Lord, and I trust in Him,” Brock declared. “I just go out there and I just play.”

Under the pressure of being a rookie in his first playoffs, Brock calmly produced his best performance yet, throwing for 323 yards and three touchdowns to send home the sad Seattle Seahawks and advance to divisional playoffs against the Dallas Cowboys. He beat

them too.

Unfortunately, against the Eagles, Brock’s arm got injured and his team lost.

“Mr. Irrelevant” – as a last-round, last-pick, third-stringer player gets teasingly called – became “Mr. Relevant.” At the beginning of the 2023 season, Brock was talked about as a potential Super Bowl contender at the beginning.

But after losing three games at the beginning of the season, pundits labelled him overhyped.

A bye week was all he needed. Brock bounced back. His numbers were phenomenal and MVP-worthy: #1 in QBR, #1 in yards per attempt, #1 in completion percentage.

He hasn’t lost a game since. He’s dismissed the “overhype” dismissal.

“I’m competitive. I like to win,” he says. “But I’m not defined by the wins or losses.”

This year, Brock became the lowest drafted quarterback to start a Super Bowl (Super Bowl LVIII). In the game, Purdy completed 23 of 38 passes for 255 yards and one touchdown in a 25–22 overtime loss to the Kansas City Chiefs.



Brock Purdy #13 of the San Francisco 49ers after scoring a touchdown against the Detroit Lions on January 28, 2024. (Photo by Cooper Neill/Getty Images)

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