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# MY EASTER REBOUND

Ben Hylden almost died on Good Friday, but found a miracle at Easter.

BY MARK ELLIS (ABRIDGED)

Sixteen-year-old Ben Hylden was in a hurry to get to physical therapy stemming from a high school basketball injury. Running late, he decided to take a shortcut down a gravel road from his farm in Park River, North Dakota.

“There was ice and snow on the road,” he told God Reports. “I lost control on a patch of ice, went down into a ditch head-on, and flipped my car into a field numerous times.”

It happened to be Good Friday.

Ben wasn't wearing his seatbelt

and got ejected through the passenger door, landing face-first in a field.

“At that moment my whole life shifted, everything changed in my life,” he recalls. “I was really into sports; I was an athlete and that was my identity in life. I thought that was all there was to life.”

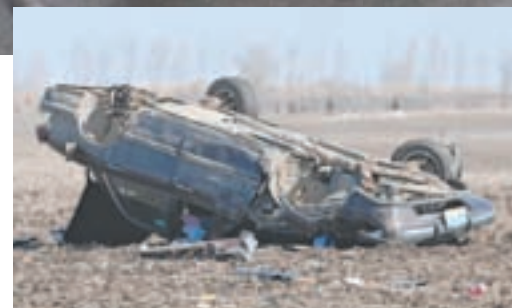
Ben had a strong faith in God when he was young, but by the time he arrived in high school, his relationship with God was tenuous at best.

Spiritually, he was going through the motions. “God began to be something like a checklist. Okay, I went to church. Okay, I went to youth

group. Okay, I went to Bible camp. Instead of actually knowing God and having a strong faith, it was more about works.”

He was also not on good terms with his parents. “I grew angry and stressed out because of the pressure of sports. I didn't want to be on the farm working; I didn't want to be milking cows. So we'd fight all the time, I'd be mad at them all the time. I just wasn't in a good place. I was an angry person at that point in my life.”

Ejected violently from the car, lying helplessly, Ben wondered if anyone would find him. “It was a



Ben Hylden survived a horrific crash (inset) on Good Friday when he was 16. Photos from benhylden.com.

back road. No one takes that road because of the snow and ice,” he recounts. He had little hope.

When Ben face-planted into the dirt, he bit through his tongue.

“I was swallowing all that blood and it went into my lungs instead of my stomach, so I was suffocating.”

“I shattered my entire face, broke my nose into nine pieces. My palate broke in half, and I broke six ribs. My pancreas, small intestines, liver, lungs, and kidneys were all bruised and bleeding, and the artery in my right leg was crushed.” Later, it would be determined he also suffered a brain injury.

Ben actually attempted to crawl on his back toward home, using his elbows to move a few inches at a time, because he wanted to tell his parents he loved them before he died.

Miraculously, it was Ben's parents who discovered him five minutes after the crash. “They weren't looking for me because they thought I was already in town. But for some reason they decided to take that road, on that day, at that time.”

At first, they couldn't identify their own son. “My face was totally distorted. They couldn't recognize me at all, because it was so full of mud and blood and swollen.”

Immediately, his parents called 911. Ben's mom looked down at his feet. “That was her first moment of recognition after she put a coat on me. She recognized my feet,” he says.

As his parents attended to him, they watched their son's body go limp for about four minutes. “I wasn't breathing and I was gone. I remember taking that last breath.”

It took at least 15 minutes for the ambulance to arrive.

Ben was still breathing in the ambulance when it arrived at the hospital. The doctors' prognosis was grim. “I had a really bad brain injury. I was supposed to lose parts

of my organs, I was supposed to lose my right leg, have brain damage for the rest of my life.”

When doctors attempted exploratory surgery, his lungs collapsed. “I wasn't breathing again for around five minutes,” he says. Then doctors placed him on a mechanical ventilator.

“They said my lungs would swell and I would suffocate and die by Easter.”

Defying the odds and the doctors' expectations, Ben's lungs never swelled up.

“By Monday, I was rapidly healing. I was actually out of the ICU the next Thursday, in six days, which was in the doctors' minds insane.”

● Turn to page 2

## Sacrifice and salvation

BY HARRIET COOMBE

**THE TRAGEDY OF** the sinking of the Titanic is well-known across the world but you may not have heard about another ship, the Empress of Ireland, which sank two years later, in May 1914.

The 1477 passengers on board were on their way from Canada to London in foggy conditions when it was struck by a Norwegian coal ship, creating a large hole in the middle of the ship.

The Empress of Ireland sank rapidly, taking just 14 minutes to disappear beneath the water. Because of this, only a few lifeboats could be launched. Sadly, many passengers were trapped below deck, asleep in their cabins, and had little chance to escape. Only 465 people survived, making it one of the worst peacetime maritime disasters.

Among the Empress of Ireland's passengers were 167 members of the Canadian Salvation Army, who were on their way to a conference in London. Their cabins were near where the lifejackets were stored so they were among the few who were able to quickly put them on.

But once they were in the water and saw so many people struggling to survive, they quickly gave up their lifejackets. It is understood that they swam through the freezing water, asking distressed passengers, “Do you believe in Jesus?” If they said “No,” then, in an act of selfless love and sacrifice, the Salvation Army member would remove their lifejacket and give it to the other person. This came at a great cost – only eight of the Salvation Army members survived. But they chose to die so that others could live and have the chance to find eternal salvation through Jesus.

### The heart of Easter

I think this story mirrors the heart of Easter perfectly. Just as the Salvation Army members sacrificed their lives for others, Jesus Christ willingly laid down His life for



The Empress of Ireland. Photo: Getty Images.

humanity. His death on the cross was the ultimate act of selfless love and sacrifice, ensuring that all who believe in Him could be saved from the consequences of sin [wrongdoing against God].

The Bible says in 1 John 1:9, “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.”

Good Friday is the day we remember Jesus' death. The reason it is called “Good” is because of what it means for us – His death bought our forgiveness and eternal life. Three days later He rose again, demonstrating His victory over sin, death, and the grave, proving He is the Son of God and the Saviour of the world. Our response to Jesus' sacrifice is simple. Romans 10:9 says: “If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved.”

### Answering the question

The question posed by those Salvation Army members in freezing waters in 1914 is as important today as it was over a century ago: “Do you know Jesus?” If you have not yet made the decision to follow Christ, today can be your moment of salvation. See the box on page 11 entitled *How do I Become a Christian* for more information. ●

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**BACK PAGE**

**A LIFE OR DEATH CALL**

**DARRYL STRAWBERRY**



Ben with his book, *Finding Faith in the Field*.

# My Easter rebound

• From page 1

Ben faced many challenges during a long recovery process. “There were many times that I just couldn’t understand why all these things would happen to me. There was a point after my accident I got so depressed where I wanted to commit suicide. I was admitted into a psych ward.”

It wasn’t until Ben was a sophomore in college that he fully surrendered to God. “That was a tough year because I had another leg surgery, which really brought me down because that artery in my right leg stopped working. I thought I was done with all the injuries.”

Before the surgery, Ben had been attracted by the party lifestyle in college. “I started getting into the world, the drinking and the temptations of life. I was lost. I didn’t want to do it. But then I kept doing it.”

On the anniversary of his accident, something changed in Ben. “I woke up and I just began crying, just crying my eyes out. Because I knew I was in this pit. I just felt so empty and so full of guilt and sin and just didn’t know how to get out of it.”

Ready for change, Ben turned away from his wrongdoing and asked God for forgiveness.

God had rescued his body; now God rescued his soul. “As I was crying, that burden was being taken away.”

He recognized he had to let go of trying to be good and placed all his faith and trust in Jesus Christ. With childlike faith, he asked the Holy Spirit to make him into somebody new. “This was the greatest moment of my life, my spiritual resurrection, because it gave me freedom,” he says.

“From then on, it’s been a journey to share my story and to share the gospel (the good news about Jesus).”

Ben has written a book about his life called *Finding Faith in the Field*. •

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

# My double life became whole

BY SIMEON NEO

When Jazlyn Tham moved to Australia from Singapore, she had no ambition or purpose. She felt insecure and found little meaning in life.

“I was lonely and desperate to fit in, so I would do anything for attention,” she tells *Challenge News*.

She struggled to make friends with the girls in her class, so she sought companionship through relationships with boys. But when those relationships failed, she felt the void in her heart grow wider.

“My self-esteem dwindled through the years as I fought to feel worthy to the people I cared about. I felt like God was a distant parent telling me what to do. And all I had to do was nod ‘yes’, repent [express regret for wrongdoing] the next Sunday, and do it all again.”

Growing up in a Christian household, Jazlyn was familiar with Christianity and knew about God.

“I was brought up as a regular churchgoer and gained a lot of head knowledge about Christianity over the years. I went to church every Sunday to hear that Jesus loved me, then lived Monday to Saturday as if He did not.”

When Jazlyn entered her late teens, things got worse. She craved more freedom and started lying to her parents. By the time she graduated from school, she was living a life of partying, alcohol, smoking and drugs.

“I continued going to church to



Jazlyn Tham

prevent any suspicions about what I was doing outside. I hid my life from my church friends out of guilt, yet I couldn’t give up this worldly freedom that I idolised.”

Once, while she was leading worship at church, she fell asleep on stage under the guise of praying.

“I was at my lowest in those days and so ashamed of who I had become,” she admits. “I felt so far from God.”

When Jazlyn moved to Australia, she was introduced to an Overseas Christian Fellowship (OCF), a student-led Christian club that meets for Bible studies, speaker events and social get-togethers.

“I was looked after and ministered to. There were times I felt too guilty and wanted to step away, but God encouraged me, and I kept showing up.”

Jazlyn decided to start attending church again and recommitted her life to Christ. But this time, she allowed her heart to be changed.

“I was crushed upon realising how far I had strayed from the faith,” she

admits. “I mustered the courage to give up the worldly pleasures that seemed fun but only served to damage my physical, mental and spiritual health.”

With the help of her community from church and OCF, Jazlyn’s faith began to grow.

“I reconnected with my old friends from church and felt liberated from the lies at last. I also found encouragement from sermons and meeting new friends who were grounded in Christ.”

Jazlyn is now married and continues attending church with her husband. She is also serving regularly on the worship team at her church. Reflecting on how her life has been transformed, Jazlyn sees a change in her heart and her attitude from the old person she was.

“I was loved by the people around me and reminded that I did not have to do this alone. It was a painful process losing some loved ones, but I have never looked back since.”

“Despite my rebellion and selfishness, God welcomed me back with open arms like a prodigal son.” •

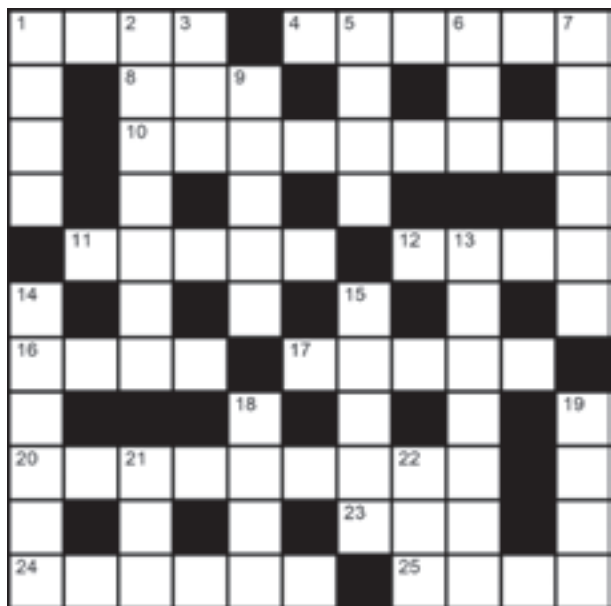
## Coffee Break CROSSWORD & SUDOKU

### ACROSS

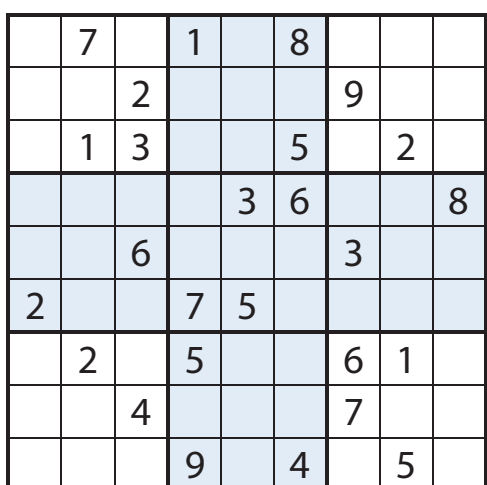
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SOLUTIONS PAGE 11



“Hold that insightful legal point until we’re back from commercial”

# Belief despite living in a broken world

BY KELLY LADD BISHOP

THERE IS A lot of bad news. I often hear people lament; how can you possibly believe in God when bad things happen? I look at it from the opposite angle. When bad things happen, how can you possibly not believe in God?

The news is just one frustrating story after another, from American politics to world news, it can feel overwhelming. It is overwhelming. Sometimes I think it is more than the human soul can handle.

I believe in God for many reasons. To me, there is enough historical evidence to make a convincing case. To me, there is enough documentary and historical evidence around the Bible and the life of Jesus, that it certainly deserves serious consideration. To me, that serious consideration leads to solid evidence that the Scripture is true.

But faith is more than just being convinced of facts. Faith is a matter of heart. It comes from experiencing repentance, knowing our own brokenness and experiencing forgiveness.

We call it salvation. It’s real. I believe in God for all of these reasons and more. And I believe in God because the world is a difficult place. Some people say that Christians and people of faith just need to believe in God to make them feel better.

The idea of God brings them comfort. It helps them deal with anxiety, and that’s fine.

It’s like we are taking some kind of supernatural pill to relax our nerves or buying into a fairy tale because it makes us feel good.

But to those who believe, it’s not just about feeling

good. And walking with God is certainly not always relaxing. But it does bring us hope.

God brings hope because nothing makes sense without God. Without God we live in a difficult world that will just continue to be difficult forever, or until we destroy it, or it destroys us. Without God, the problems are insurmountable, and the struggle is meaningless.

But for Christians there is the promise of redemption. The Bible says, “the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the freedom and glory of the children of God” (Romans 8:21).

God promises us that this is temporary. The world won’t be difficult forever.

The world will be “liberated from its bondage to decay.” That’s powerful imagery. And it’s a promise.

Just as we experience redemption in our souls now through salvation, all of creation will one day be redeemed. In the meantime, we are to live in that promise. We are to make the

world better wherever we can, bringing in glimpses of redemption, working with God, loving God’s world and people.

The world is difficult. But God hears our cries. God answers prayers.

And God has not forsaken us. God is doing a greater work, and because of God, one day bad things will no longer happen. Thank God.

“He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death, or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away” (Revelation 21:4).

Kelly holds an M.Div. and a B.A. in Biology. She spent seven years working in youth ministry, and has most recently worked as an associate pastor. She is passionate about exploring God’s word and issues of faith and culture. You can read more at [www.kellyladdbishop.com](http://www.kellyladdbishop.com)



STOCKPHOTO

# HOPE IN DARKNESS

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

“Unfortunately for me, my childhood was black.” Patricia, now 28, tells *Challenge News*. Patricia’s childhood was thrown into darkness when she was eight and her parents, whom she adored, divorced.

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

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

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

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

After the break-up, Tricia’s mother would go out each day to work, leaving Tricia to take care of her brother and sister.

“At a tender age I threw my childhood out the window and put on my mother’s shoes to take care of my siblings,” she recalls.

Her world became even darker in 2012 when her mother was diagnosed with stage 3 cervical cancer.

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

Unfortunately, neither did Tricia’s anger against God.

“I went from church to church to ask Him three questions – why do You hate us so

much, why do You allow divorce and why don’t You show Yourself when people call upon You?”

“From 2006 when my father left to 2015 I was looking for God. I carried so much bitterness, anger, pain and fear in my heart every day. I lived the life of a victim. I felt like the whole world was against me and whatever I did was not enough. I felt so unloved and that this was God’s fault.”

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

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

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

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

Nine years later, Tricia draws on her painful past, sharing a message of hope during dark times.

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

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

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

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



Patricia Londo

# From fantasy to freedom

When life gets difficult, many of us turn to some form of distraction as a means of escape from the harsh reality.

Growing up in a broken family filled with abuse, Rhyme Murray turned to anime (Japanese animation), pornography and marijuana as a form of escape.

His parents eventually divorced and Rhyme went on to have three stepfathers, which left him confused and struggling with his self-esteem.

“I got engulfed in pornography and escaped reality through anime and weed,” he tells *Challenge News*.

“I also ignored my heart, acting like someone I’m not and taking the forms of characters I like in the anime.” Rhyme had known about God his entire life as his mother attended church.

But it was only in August 2019 that he made the decision to give his life to Jesus at a friend’s swimming pool.

“I decided to become a committed Christian because I have nothing on Earth that I want more than Him, who saved me from all my sin.”

But life was not all smooth for Rhyme even after he accepted Christ.

“Life was hard at first after I gave my life [to Jesus],” he recalls.

“I lost friends, bonds, the trust of my parents and my social skills perished.

“God then showed me it was His purification process and gave me new godly things.”

Though the process of refinement was difficult, Rhyme got to experience God’s providence and goodness.

He found new friendships and his relationship with his parents grew deeper than before.

“I have an amazing mother and father. I can have full-on heart-warming talks with my dad about God and he educates me.”

Rhyme has also learned to uplift and encourage in his interactions with others rather than



Rhyme Murray

to tear down. He has since been freed from his addictions to pornography and anime, choosing to stay grounded in reality.

“I’m more focused on reality instead of fiction.” Even now, Rhyme admits that he still struggles to obey what God says in His Word, especially when life gets difficult.

“The hard part is staying committed to God’s Word and remembering Scripture when times get tough.

“[But] the best part about being a Christian is knowing that God will provide for me in times of trials and adversity.

“God can take a broken and empty heart and refill it with His love and show you that His love is within all of us.”

Rhyme’s favourite Bible verse is Matthew 18:1-5: “At that time the disciples came to Jesus, saying, ‘Who then is greatest in the kingdom of heaven?’ Then Jesus called a little child to Him, set him in the midst of them, and said, ‘Assuredly, I say to you, unless you are converted and become as little children, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven. Therefore whoever humbles himself as this little child is the greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven. Whoever receives one little child like this in My name receives Me.’” •

# A new identity, a lifelong journey

BY LOU HAVILAND (ABRIDGED)

When Boanergez first encountered a new way to live, it seemed both alien and attractive. And he discovered it after a lifetime of violence in the least likely place: behind bars.

While there were many men in prison he could relate to, they differed from him in an important way. They possessed something Boanergez knew he was missing: hope, peace, and indescribable joy.

He adds, “It came to the point where it was like, ‘Man, how do you get that?’”

## The wrong kind of refuge

When Boanergez was five, his father walked away from the family, leaving Boanergez’s mother to care for him and his three siblings. She worked hard to feed her children but was rarely home.

With the absence of both their parents, Boanergez and his siblings were in dire need of guidance, support, and protection. Unfortunately, his older brother found refuge in one of the many gangs in their southern California neighborhood. His brother looked to them for the sense of belonging he lacked at home.

His brother’s gang involvement brought alcohol, drugs, and violence into Boanergez’s home, and he and his other siblings felt pulled into that way of life.

“He exposed me to a lot of criminal activity and the things that he and his friends used to do,” Boanergez recalls.

“Basically, he turned my mother’s house into a hangout place where everybody did most of their crimes.”

His brother had become addicted to alcohol and drugs and physically abusive toward Boanergez. Despite this, Boanergez looked to his brother for the direction he needed.

“He became like a father figure and showed me a lot of negative things pertaining to how a man should be,” Boanergez says.

Ongoing bullying at school only added to the instability in Boanergez’s life. When he opened up to his mother and older brother about it, he was simply told to stop crying.

“As an eight-year-old kid, I had to learn to cope with these things the way I could, any way I could,” he says.

Boanergez confronted his intense powerlessness and isolation in the way he knew best: He joined a gang. He determined to never be hurt by anyone ever again.

“My best way of dealing with it was having violent behavior,” he says. “I took all these unaddressed issues into my adulthood.”

## Finding freedom behind bars

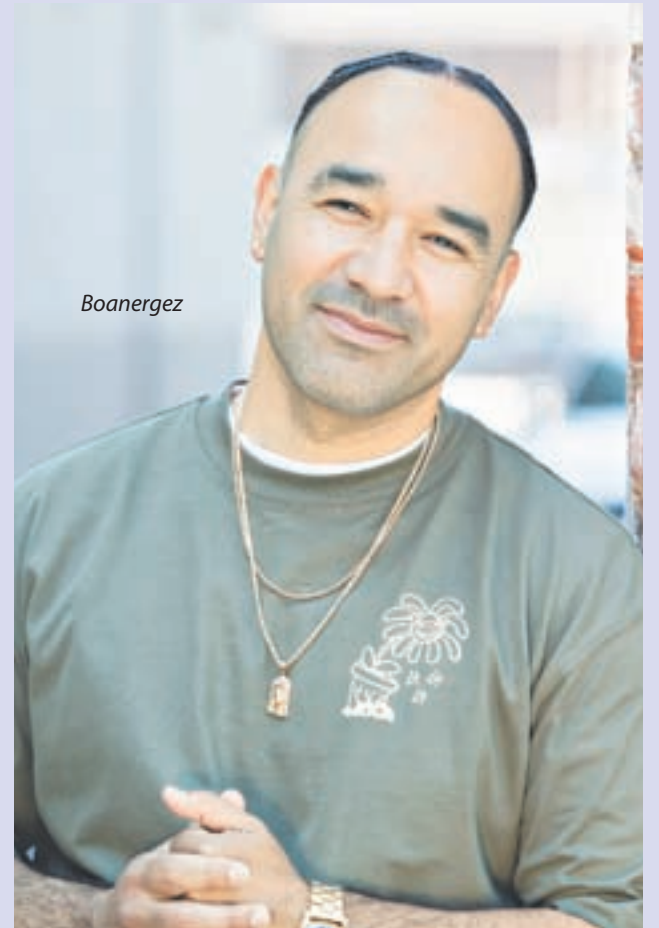
Boanergez mimicked the violence he witnessed in childhood until it became part of who he was. Soon, like his brother and other gang members, Boanergez was steeped in a life of crime which led him to serving time in prison.

Eventually, Boanergez was incarcerated, serving a life sentence. For the first few years, he continued living as he had been, with the gang mindset of violence.

“I didn’t have any hope. I was selfish,” he says. “I felt like nobody cared about me, so I didn’t care about nobody else.”

For so long, Boanergez had hidden his emotions behind a mask.

That coping mechanism was challenged by former gang members from his neighborhood



Boanergez

who started inviting him to church services in the prison chapel.

“I was just like, ‘No, I’m good,’” Boanergez recalls. “It was that fear of leaving something that I knew my whole life, which was the gang. If I left that, then who am I now?”

As much as he wanted to dismiss the invitations to church, Boanergez could not ignore the real change he began seeing in men he had known for years.

These fellow gang members and neighbors – who had been raised as he was, looked like him, and with whom he shared similar backgrounds – were different now that they followed Christ.

“I could see they had joy, and they had peace behind those [prison] walls,” he says. “That’s what interested me, attracted me to that. I wanted to learn about their faith.”

Boanergez chose at that point to begin making his own decisions – no longer living for what his gang required him to do, but

instead living for Christ.

## A future to look forward to

Once the time came for Boanergez’s release, after serving 13 years, bringing Jesus home with him was a priority. He had seen too many men leave their faith behind when they walked out of prison.

“I always told myself that I wasn’t going to leave Christ in prison, because I’ve seen it before; when it’s time to go home, they leave their Bible on the table in the day room,” he says. “For me, this is a lifelong journey.”

Boanergez kept his commitment and now works as a reentry specialist, helping formerly incarcerated people navigate life after their release.

“All the things that I needed help with and I experienced, I’m actually helping individuals getting out... to support them so they can have a successful transition,” he says.

He is eager to be a positive contributor in the town he once knew only as a gang member.

“My community, I destroyed it for years, with my lifestyle of crime,” Boanergez adds. “My goal is to be the best person I can be in order to help others. I know I can’t change the world, but I can do my best to just keep serving people and to encourage them that change is real, and it’s possible.” •

The original of this story can be found at [www.prison-fellowship.org](http://www.prison-fellowship.org) and it is used with kind permission.

# ASTRONAUT'S DISCOVERY



ABOVE: Barry "Butch" Wilmore works outside the International Space Station (ISS) in 2015. (Photo by NASA via Getty Images)

RIGHT: Barry Wilmore (left) and Russia's cosmonauts Alexandr Samokutyaev and Elena Serova during a training session at the Gagarin Cosmonauts' Training Centre. AFP PHOTO/STRINGER (Photo by STRINGER / AFP) (Photo by STRINGER/AFP via Getty Images)



## My addiction cost me everything

Robby Graham was an athlete and was excelling in his sport. As a teenager and young adult he was involved in bodybuilding competitions until a terrible injury changed everything. He became addicted to the painkillers he was prescribed, even injecting them intravenously.

Robby's addiction cost him everything, eventually leaving him homeless and completely defeated. However, Robby is now on a mission to help other people live healthy lives and share with them how his addiction vanished.

He recalls the injury that set him on his destructive path in an interview with Billy Hollowell of CBN: "I was doing some heavy squats one day and I blew out my lower spine. When I went to the doctor, they said it was the L5-S1 vertebrae in my lower back. It was a pretty significant injury."

Robby's doctors recommended he try rehabilitation before surgery and prescribed heavy painkillers.

"That's when my addiction started," he admits.

"Opiates were the biggest lie I've ever been associated with. They made me feel amazing of course. They masked the pain so I was able just to keep going. It went from recreational to then really eating them and drinking alcohol with them. Then I started to crush them and snort them."

By the time Robby reached his late 40s/early 50s, he was an IV drug user. He says it's a miracle he is alive at all.

"[My addiction] landed me homeless at the Salvation Army. I'd lost everything. I lost all of the material things that I had gained over the years. All of it was gone

because every bit of it went into my veins. I was beaten, broken and defeated."

Robby recalls the day everything changed – April 28, 2013. The hymn *Amazing Grace* was playing.

"I had a radical encounter with the Living God," Robby attests.

"God grabbed a hold of me, drove me to my knees and I wept like I've never wept before... After that song I sat back down. In the course of one song the Lord flashed everything before my eyes. He showed me all the places that I should have died. All of this was happening at the speed of thought. At that moment I knew I was going to be His forever."

Robby asked God to forgive him of everything wrong he had done in his life (sin) and he accepted Jesus as his Lord and Saviour.

"All of the need to drink and take drugs was removed at that moment..." "I gave my life to Christ and I've never looked back."

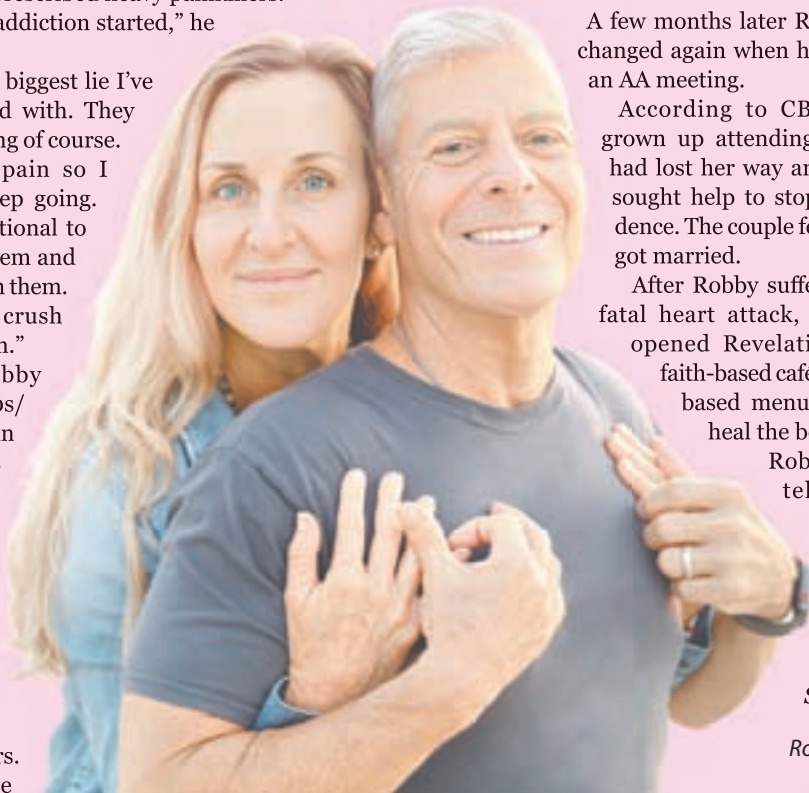
A few months later Robby's world changed again when he met Mia at an AA meeting.

According to CBN, she had grown up attending church but had lost her way and eventually sought help to stop her dependence. The couple fell in love and got married.

After Robby suffered a nearly fatal heart attack, he and Mia opened Revelations Cafe, a faith-based café with a plant-based menu designed to heal the body.

Robby and Mia tell their full story in the new documentary, *Revelations Café: Food for the Soul*. •

Robby and Mia Graham.



“He showed me all the places that I should have died.”

”

again. I had received salvation but knew little of His Word. Up to then I didn't know that I didn't know the Bible.

"So in my mid-20s I began a long journey of study of God's Word in depth. The Scriptures started to come alive to me piece by piece verse by verse, chapter by chapter, book by book. It made such a complete and total difference in my life, in my walk, and my understanding and my closeness with my Lord. I'm still learning... the more I'm exposed to Biblical truth the more finite I see that I am and how great our mighty God is.

"I've been asked if I needed to have a spiritual experience when I went to space – I've been asked that several times. The answer's no, I didn't need to go to space to know any to learn anything about my Lord.

"Everything I need to know about Him is in the pages of Scripture.

"I certainly am grateful for... that vantage point, but I didn't need to go there to know Him because Scripture is replete with all that I ever needed to know."

During his time as a Naval officer, he flew missions for Operation Desert Storm and Desert Shield and won a string of awards. He retired from the Navy in 2000 and joined the NASA Astronaut Corps in 2000.

Robby has also been teaching a Bible study at a local prison for 10 years. "Some of these gentlemen are in prison for life," he shares.

"I can't think of a worse way to live out your life and to not have any hope for anything outside the prison walls... but how much bleaker it is for those that don't know Jesus Christ as Saviour. They have no hope eternally.

"The thing that sets biblical Christianity apart from every other religion is that in every other religion, man has to do something. There's some act, some prayer, something that man's got to do to atone.

"But [in Christianity], there's nothing man can do as Christ has done it all. He paid the price. I now know that at the point of salvation you may not understand everything about obedience, you may not understand everything about repentance, you may not understand everything about the lordship of Christ, but everyone that is truly saved will strive to obey. "True salvation brings repentance over sin. It's about turning from our sin and seeking Christ and His lordship and power in our lives.

"Revere Christ as Lord even if you don't understand it." •

American astronaut Barry "Butch" Wilmore remembers the time he came face to face with the wonder of creation.

It was in 2014. The captain was on a six-month stint as the commander of the International Space Station, 400 kilometres above Earth.

He was outside doing some maintenance work when he caught sight of his reflection in a radiator. He saw himself floating in space. Then he looked down and through the infinite skies, saw Hawaii and the surrounding landscapes.

"I saw the beauty of the islands, the blue water and the clouds, the blackness of the sky and the silver space station," he says in a YouTube video.

"And wow, it was just a sensory overload, mesmerising, amazing. I looked back at my reflection and thought, 'How did you get here?'"

"The answer to me was very clear – I was there because the Lord in His planning purposes allowed me to be there and gave me that desire of my heart. My purpose in being there was to glorify Him."

Barry is one of the two astronauts currently stuck in space. He and Sunita Williams were sent to the International Space Station on June 5, 2024, and were supposed to be there for about eight days. When their spacecraft failed to meet NASA's standards for crewed flight, it returned to Earth without them.

Barry was born into a Christian family and attended church services, "Sunday morning, Sunday night and Wednesday night".

He accepted Christ as his personal Saviour when he was eight after a sermon convinced him about the reality of sin [breaking God's laws] and hell. "I knew immediately that sin separated me from God," he says. "That's where I started to understand the truth of Scripture but for the next two years I struggled to comprehend what salvation was."

He spent many nights "in tears because I felt the burden of my sin". When he was 10, his mother explained the good news about Jesus dying for his sins to him again and "from that point on I felt confident in my salvation."

After he graduated from college, Barry joined the Navy. "I felt this patriotic tug to do my part for my country and in my mind's eye I thought one of the great ways to do that would be to fly airplanes."

While on deployment, he received a letter and a tape from a friend asking him about the parable of the sower and the seed (Matthew 13).

His friend asked him which of the characters in the story was a true Christian. Barry didn't know.

"Here I was, a Christian for 15-ish years and I couldn't answer that question."

He listened to the tape, which explained that the true Christian in the parable was the person who was fruitful.

"It was at that point that the Lord began to show me how little I knew of His Word and I became truly born



NASA astronaut and US Navy Capt. Barry Wilmore talks about his experiences as commander of the International Space Station in 2015. (US Air National Guard photo by Staff Sgt. John E. Hillier/RELEASED)

**"The resurrection of Jesus changes the face of death for all His people. Death is no longer a prison, but a passage into God's presence. Easter says you can put truth in a grave, but it won't stay there. You can nail it to a cross, wrap it in winding sheets and shut it up in a tomb, but it will rise!" - Clarence W Hall**

# A LIFE IN SCIENCE

BY PHILIP BELL, CMI

Scientist Nigel Crompton had a happy childhood in the seaside town of Southport, UK.

At school, he captained the cross-country running team, led the Christian Union club, and was active in a local church youth group.

He had an early penchant for science and was soon training for a science degree in genetics and cell biology at university. Although a Christian, he never saw any conflict between evolution and the biblical account of creation because, he tells *Creation* magazine, “Darwin’s ideas were simply embraced” in the church, and this subtly influenced his thinking.

While at university, he met a German professor during a science internship in London who asked Nigel to work in his research lab.

After graduating, he moved to Germany, where he was ‘adopted’ by a lovely German family with whom he lived for six months. This became a pivotal time in his thinking.

Nigel says: “The father, a wonderful man of deep Christian faith, introduced me to creation science.

“I thought it was fabulous. I’d only ever been indirectly exposed to it before; it was nice that folks took God’s Word seriously, but I just never took the time to carefully check it out.

“I had, unbeknown to me, been

indoctrinated to accept evolution, even though I well knew it was full of holes and missing links.”

This was a key turning point for Nigel as it awakened a greater interest in science: “To actually consider origins from a scientific point of view was invigorating and fascinating.” Nigel now pursued his research in earnest.

It was around this time he joined a like-minded group of committed Christian scientists who started a Christian academic organisation called Wort und Wissen: Word (Bible) and Knowledge (science).

Nigel quickly became an enthusiastic member, publishing articles about creation and speaking at many of their meetings.

His passion to explore the complexities of living things led to two doctoral degrees, fellowships and professorships in several countries, plus consultancy responsibilities with organisations in Europe, Thailand, South Africa, and China.

He has supervised many doctoral students (in science, medicine, and veterinary medical fields), published numerous articles (including many in prestigious peer-reviewed journals), and has acted as a referee for many international journals.

His area of expertise is radiation oncology (treatment of cancer with radiation) and he is a sought-after

“  
I had been indoctrinated to accept evolution.”



Nigel and his wife Angela celebrating a wedding anniversary.

## EGG HUNT

A Joyful 'toon by Mike Waters



In their fright the women bowed down with their faces to the ground, but the men said to them, “Why do you look for the living among the dead?” — LUKE 24:5 NIV



ABOVE: Dr Nigel Crompton at work at Cornerstone University (CU).

RIGHT: Nigel as a senior student at an inter-school CU event, one of many encouragements to his faith at the time.



speaker around the world on this subject.<sup>1 2</sup>

Nigel testifies of God’s guidance through his life, including his family’s move to the US in 2002, where he is a professor of biology at Cornerstone University in Michigan. He says he felt he should “teach God’s children, telling them about science from a Christian perspective.”

Nigel’s passion to affirm biblical creation is clear from his writing. His papers touch on subjects like the paradisaeidae (birds of paradise), and the rare, endangered Hawaiian silversword plants. He recently published on the diversity of butterfly families, relating this to the concept of the ‘kinds’ in Genesis.

Nigel recently co-authored a four-part series in CMI’s *Journal of Creation* about Mendelian speciation.<sup>3</sup>

The articles explain how different species can arise quickly, without any mutations, in thousands rather than millions of years. It simply assumes our Lord invested genomes with the necessary information right from the start. The genetic recombination during generation of sex cells (meiosis) and reproductive isolation does the rest.

Nigel continued: “Contrary to Darwin’s ‘pangeneses’, Mendel discovered the rules our Lord Jesus had set in place. Traits are shuffled in every generation so they will recombine into new arrangements.

“This is the main driver of the origin of new species within the original kinds, not natural selection acting on random mutations. Similarly, when playing cards are shuffled, they recombine to give many new hands.”

The series of papers by Nigel and his co-authors throws light on how Mendelian factors could allow for the significant changes, even speciation, that we expect within a biblical creation model. For example, many new cat species rapidly arose from the original pair of cats on the Ark with no new information needed.<sup>4</sup>

Those factors provide much of the raw material (inherited variation in organisms) that natural selection acts on. Growing evidence supports the idea that living creatures were ‘designed to vary’ from the beginning.<sup>5</sup>

While random mutations of DNA may explain a small number of the observed modifications in living things, these do not support evolution.

In particular, they rarely if ever result in new genetic information specifying for novel complexity, as neo-Darwinism would require.

These contributions by Nigel are motivated by their desire to advance understanding of creation biology.

God’s Word does not change, but our knowledge of the natural world continually advances.

Nigel says “these are helpful and encouraging ideas for Christians who wish to take God’s Word seriously.

“In God’s Word we read a very interesting declaration, made by created beings who stand in God’s presence and do not lie. It is about God and His creation: ‘Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of His glory’ (Isaiah 6:3).”

“When God conversed with Adam and Job face-to-face, both times He focused on His creatures to teach

man deep truths. “He said it was not good for Adam to be alone; he needed a suitable helper (Genesis 2:18-20). He taught Job from His creation that He is omnipotent, omniscient, and unerring (Job 38-41). Because our God’s existence is the most important reality of all, when we know more about Him, we are more alive. What God has revealed to us in creation is not empty of meaning, but full of instruction.

“The natural world is full of truths about God. We lose sight of that when we fall for the lie that it’s all a cosmic accident.”

### References and notes

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Nigel E.A. Crompton has had a long and fruitful scientific career in fields such as biology, genetics, neuroscience, and cancer research. He has a Ph.D. in biology from Justus Liebig University (Giessen, Germany) and a D.Sc. from University of Zurich (Switzerland). He lives and works in Grand Rapids, Michigan. Nigel is a committed follower of Jesus Christ, unashamed of speaking up about controversial issues surrounding science and the Bible. He has published many articles on these topics, including in CMI’s *Journal of Creation*. He and his wife Angela have four children.

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## The weight of depression lifted!

BY EMORY ROWLAND

Something was wrong. I was a 17-year-old American boy. I had enjoyed a wonderful upbringing in a loving family, attended church, worked a part-time job, made decent grades in school, planned to attend college, played lead guitar in a successful rock band, and... was very unhappy.

Despite the shiny future ahead of me, I felt a deep sense of hopelessness within me. If life held any meaning for me or anyone, I wasn't sure what it was. I didn't want to die and I didn't want to live.

What was I to do? I began to pray. Perhaps I did want to live but just didn't know what life was.

I had read the Bible as a boy and while I accepted it as credible, I had always imagined that those who were serious about implementing its principles were relegated to a life absent of pleasure and filled with severe forms of self-discipline.

They were the ones who wore funny clothes, went on retreats, held rummage sales, worked only on certain days, and confined themselves to their homes on weekend nights.

Incapable of emulating this demanding lifestyle, I felt uncomfortable around religious people.

However, a local minister had made an impression on me once when I visited his church.

There was something very different about Reverend Harold Rice that caught my attention.

He was the kind of guy who would just tell you outright that he loved you, not that there was any doubt.

Just the fact that he would actually say it echoed his actions, which included helping the sick, poor, and troubled or anyone with a need.

He would minister to his congregation, residents at the local nursing home, and people of other races with whom it was not acceptable to mingle in our small southern town.

I have met only a few people who immediately give me the feeling that they are full of love for their fellow man, an indiscriminate love that transcends the natural boundaries of what is typically understood as love.

Why did Harold Rice care so much about people? I guessed that his unusually robust love originated either in something he knew that others didn't or from a supernatural source.

Word had it that Harold worked on cars as a hobby. Supposedly, he had developed some type of gas-saving device that when installed on a vehicle, could increase the miles-per-gallon with little or no performance loss.

As my state of mind grew increasingly dispirited, I decided to stop by his home one afternoon under the pretence that I needed his advice regarding a mechanical problem my truck was experiencing.

The problem was real, but a minor one, something like a loose battery cable which I seem to remember him fixing with a penny. He soon realised

that the real reason I had visited was to find out the secret to the love and happiness that he possessed.

He sat down with me and enthusiastically answered my questions about God.

He didn't preach at me or try to scare me with hellfire, but explained things in a clear manner via the scriptures that he so passionately believed and the experiences of his own life.

He showed me that through an act of love, God sent Jesus to lift man out of the depressed state that he was in, the state that I found myself in.

I felt fortunate to receive an interactive message very different from that of the pulpits to which I was accustomed.

I came away with a sincere belief that Jesus Christ was not just some great religious teacher, but a person who was actually alive today due to the supernatural power of God.

I asked the Saviour into my life and discovered that He would literally enter me and live in me, my body being a temple for his Spirit.

The more I learned, the more amazed I became. The scriptures were coming alive for me. I hadn't realised that there was such a deep and intelligent divine plan outlined in the pages of the book that I had read as a young boy.

If anyone had ever explained God's purpose for me, I had missed it. The fact that I believed the words of Jesus and put them into practice made all the difference imaginable.

I admit that I did not fully understand all that was happening to me as my life transformed. I knew that what was happening to me was having a positive effect on my life and those around me. I felt better.

The weight of depression lifted as I began seeing life differently.

My life took on purpose and depth as I experienced the Saviour through faith.

Many years of discovery followed. I witnessed powerful miracles as well as painful trials as a Christian. I remain convinced that Jesus Christ was raised from the dead and is still alive today.

Emory's story was shared on his website, [testimonyshare.com](http://testimonyshare.com) and is used with kind permission.

Emory Rowland



Simoné Janse van Rensburg

## I feel hope for the first time

By the time Simoné Janse van Rensburg left high school, she had been in and out of the hospital twice for alcohol poisoning.

"I didn't believe it at that time – but looking back I think I would say that I was an alcoholic," she tells *Challenge News*.

"I slept around a lot... And I had way more sexual experiences apart from just sex. I was also hooked on porn."

Simoné shares that her life was a mess. She was smoking and vaping, and started using marijuana. She felt insecure about herself and she had a habit of lying. "I lost all my relationships – especially with my family. I had no friends. I had a horrible idea of men. I hated a lot of people. I was popular and bullied a lot of people," she recounts. "I was very suicidal. And I just kinda gave up."

Growing up with loving Christian parents, Simoné says she followed Jesus when she was young. But when she found out that her father had an affair, she moved away from God and her faith.

"I moved away from Him and rejected Him because I was so disappointed with [God]. I thought my life was going to continue down that path forever and after school I wanted to run away from everything I knew."

After much convincing from her father, Simoné decided to enrol in Target Life, a Christian gap year programme. She began to learn about God as her Father and His heart for her, which inspired her love for God.

"I wanted to become a Christian because I couldn't get enough of God and I was just drawn to His heart. He changed my whole life in such a short period of time and in my Target Life year, there wasn't a moment where I didn't feel His love," she says.

Life for Simoné began to change. She stopped drinking and using drugs. She started attending church in 2023. While she says her relationship with her family is still in the process of healing and restoration, she says that for the first time, she feels hope.

"He restored my heart... He took my brokenness and loved me into a whole [person]. He changed my view of men and relationships and blessed me with a great man who loves me and accepts me. I have hope and love. I want to live and do His work."

Another change that came about was her ability to forgive.

"I started to forgive those who hurt me and I came to forgive myself. I stopped using drugs. I am confident in myself and I started loving people around me. I started loving myself."

However, Simoné admits that the Christian life is not always easy.

"Christianity is offering your will and your ways for God's will and His ways. And that is a really hard thing to do, but I have tried it without God and failed miserably," says Simoné. "It's tough to not do life like the world does and most of the time you will be swimming upstream."

"But my worst days with God in my life has still been way better than my best days without Him. When you give your life to the Lord, don't expect your life to just be perfect. The devil [may try to] come for you (attack you or lead you into temptation) but you are also not alone. You are doing life with someone who loves you unconditionally."

"[If] you fall out of God's will and ways – you fall into His grace and He loves you." Her life is illustrated by her favourite verse, Psalm 23:1: "The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want."

“There wasn't a moment where I didn't feel His love.”

nudge WITH KARL FAASE

### Regrets

REGRETS – WE ALL carry them.

It is only those people who suffer from a chronic lack of self-awareness who carry no regrets.

This choice we wish we hadn't made, an angry word out of place, a relationship that was unwise and unhelpful.

Regrets are common but our responses will be unique. Be sure to make regret your motivation, not your condemnation. Recognise where you can do better and focus on achieving that outcome. There is no point beating yourself up over past failure.

Our best response is to take our regrets to Jesus, here is the place of forgiveness and restoration.

God has never expected perfection from humanity, but God waits for our repentance so that grace can be extended.

"God does not love us because we are serviceable; He loves us simply because He loves us. This is the only kind of love we can ever be secure in, of course, since it is the only kind of love we cannot possibly lose. This is grace."  
– Timothy Keller

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# lifestyle and entertainment

## Easter's gift of peace

Danica McKellar might be known for her iconic role as Winnie Cooper in the 1988 beloved series, *The Wonder Years*, but in the education community, she is renowned for penning a series of children's maths books. Today, the *Dancing with the Stars* alumna is a popular rom-com actress, often appearing in romantic comedy films by Hallmark and Great American Family.

Throughout her career, she has appeared in more than 20 romantic comedies. Her latest film, *A Cinderella Christmas Ball*, premiered last year. In an interview with Michael Foust on *Crosswalk Videos*, Danica describes why she loves romantic comedies.

"[It's] not just giving people an escape but also modelling human behaviour that hopefully will be inspirational," she explains. "It's about seeing what human nature can be and then hopefully inspiring the audience to strive for that."

This comes as no surprise as the actress and author grew up with a strong moral compass and "a sense of doing something because it's the right thing just because it's the right thing to do."

"But I never really understood where that came from," she admits.

Growing up in Los Angeles, she had been exposed to the Christian faith, with her father converting to Christianity in



Candace Cameron-Bure and Danica McKellar in 2016. (Photo by Jerod Harris/Getty Images)

his 40s. But Danica remained resistant.

"I'd always been so biased against Christianity for various reasons, mostly because of the bad reputation it's gotten with causing wars," she shares with *Fox News*. "You think, 'Oh, Christians are these really judgmental people,' and all this religious stuff."

In an interview with CBN News, she says, "I'd always thought of religion and Christianity as being restrictive and limiting somehow."

So it came as a surprise when in April of 2022, the 47-year-old announced on a live Instagram video that she had made the decision to accept Jesus into her life.

"It all started one evening when I was struggling with the idea of forgiveness and DM'd my good friend @candacecure about a passage from the Bible she had read on her Instastories, and then she sent me a Bible, and invited me to church," Danica shares.

Fellow actress Candace Cameron Bure is known for openly sharing about her Christian faith online, including reading passages from the Bible on social media.

"I was curious and I'd been listening to when [she] would read the Bible on [her] Instastories," Danica shares on Candace's YouTube channel.

"I always felt so comforted and happy."

It was the Sunday before Easter that Danica visited the church. In commemoration of Easter, the church performed a play dramatising the last days of Jesus' life, leading up to the crucifixion.

As she watched the play, Danica felt like she "suddenly understood".

"There was something about watching Jesus do things even if they're hard because it's the right thing to do.

"It just hit me like a wave. It was immediate. The Holy Spirit [the unseen presence of God] just flooded me." That was the night that Danica accepted Jesus Christ as her Lord and Saviour.

"It was like these [romantic comedies] that we do. Like finding this relationship with Jesus and realising, 'Oh, it's

You. It's always been You.'

"At its core, this is the most miraculous and incredible gift in the whole wide world."

When she came home from church, she decided to share her new faith publicly.

"I was like, 'This is the most amazing thing ever' and I just wanted everybody to know and have this and that this relationship is there for them if they just ask for it and seek it. I'm experiencing a relationship with God and Jesus that I've never had before."

Since then, Danica has read the entire Bible.

"It's a lot of information and I want to [read] it again to let it soak in more."

Three years on, she continues to have the same peace and joy that she had the night she received Jesus into her life. Though life for Danica

is not without its troubles, she now has "a different way of dealing with them".

"I don't have to figure everything out," she says. "That's not my burden. I get to turn it over to God.

"You don't feel alone anymore in your moments where you are by yourself. You're not alone. [That's] available to everybody at any time.

"My wish for the world is that they would feel that [peace] as well and be open to God's love because it's transformative, and it's there for everyone."

## Recipe of the month



## STRAWBERRY PIE

**THIS DISH IS** like summer in pie form. Be sure to use fresh picked strawberries from your farmer's market or local orchard.

**Prep: 1 hour**  
**Rise: 2 hours**  
**Cook: 25 min**  
**Total: 3 hour 25 min**  
**Serves 8**

### Ingredients

1 1/3 cups all-purpose flour  
1 teaspoon salt  
1/2 cup vegetable shortening  
6 tablespoons ice cold water  
3 pounds fresh strawberries  
3/4 cup sugar  
2 tablespoons cornstarch  
1/2 teaspoon low- or no-sugar pectin  
Generous pinch of salt  
Reserved strawberries

### Method

**Pie crust:** Preheat oven to 350°F. In a large bowl, blend flour, salt, and shortening using two dull butter knives or a pastry blender until the shortening is the size of peas.

Fill a wide-mouthed glass with ice. Add water to the top. Measure or pour the ice cold water into the flour mixture. Using a spatula or your hands, mix the water into the flour to form a large ball of dough. You may need to add an extra tablespoon of water if you have excess flour. If you added too much water, add additional flour until the dough is well formed but not too sticky. Handle and mix the dough as little as possible.

Form dough into a disc and wrap in wax paper. Put wrapped dough in the freezer for 10 minutes or the refrigerator for 30 minutes.

Roll out onto a lightly floured surface and place in a deep dish pie plate.

Place a second pie plate on top of the pie crust to weight it down.

Bake at 350°F until edges are golden brown, about 20 to 25 minutes. Remove from oven and let cool for at least 10 minutes before adding filling.

**Filling:** Wash and hull strawberries. Place any overripe, smashed, or second tier berries in a measuring cup until you have 1 1/2 cups. Reserve remaining strawberries. Place 1 1/2 cup of second tier berries in a food processor and process until smooth. In a small saucepan, combine pureed strawberries, sugar, cornstarch, pectin, and salt. Whisk until combined.

Heat over medium-high heat, stirring constantly with a rubber spatula.

Heat until a boil and then cook for two minutes at a boil. The mixture will bubble up and then thicken and darken, ensuring that the pectin and cornstarch are fully dissolved.

Transfer strawberry syrup to a large bowl and add reserved strawberries. Gently mix until well coated.

**Assembly:** Pour strawberry filling into baked pie shell.

Chill in the fridge for two to five hours. After five hours, the syrup may become a bit watery or runny, but the pie will still taste great.

Just prior to serving, beat cream and sugar on high with an electric hand mixer until thick and fluffy, about three minutes. Serve as desired.

From MakeBetterFood.com

## Singer finds a little bit of hope

BY MICHAEL ASHCRAFT

Lou Bega, the Berlin mamba singer whose catchy tune *Mambo No. 5 (A Little Bit Of...)* set the world dancing, has turned himself over to Christ after reading the Bible in a bungalow in the Maldives when unending rain wouldn't let him, his wife and daughter out for sun and snorkelling.

"In depression, I found a Bible and started to read. After a few pages, I started to realise this was the truth that I was always looking for," he says in *The Last Reformation* documentary. "I've looked into different sets of religions before, everything that was trendy and cool, like Buddhism and some New Age stuff.

"But I had passed over Jesus Christ for so many years, to my regret," he adds. "There He was calling me, giving me the opportunity. I started reading and I felt so convicted. I broke down, started crying. That was the Holy Spirit."

He then saw a street evangelist on YouTube and called him to baptise him in 2018. The evangelist baptised and prayed for Lou and his extended family.

"I felt like a baby," Lou, whose real name is David Lubega Balemezi says. "I felt like a newborn. That's why the term born-again is really fitting. You're fresh. Your transgressions, your iniquities are gone. I was so joyful and clean."

Lou hit No. 1 in many European cities with his 1999 remake of Pérez Prado's *Mambo No. 5*. For it, he earned a Grammy nomination. The pinnacle of his career pales compared to his simple encounter with Christ.

"Even in the days I was rebellious and didn't listen to You (Jesus), didn't obey You, You never dropped me, You gave me a family, You gave me love, You gave me everything I have," he says. "It's weird; you want to sing; you want to dance. It was the best moment of my life. It was way better than winning a Grammy nomination."

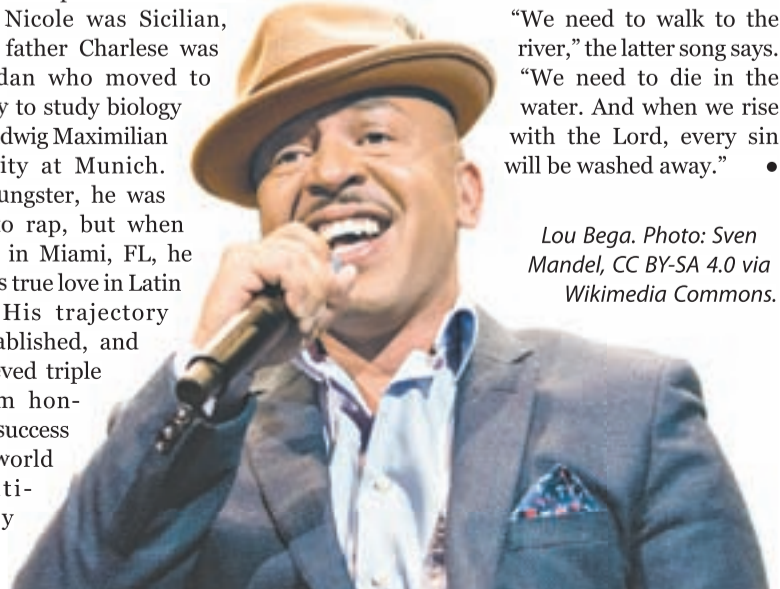
Lou grew up in Bavaria. His mother Nicole was Sicilian, and his father Charlese was a Ugandan who moved to Germany to study biology at the Ludwig Maximilian University at Munich. As a youngster, he was drawn to rap, but when he lived in Miami, FL, he found his true love in Latin music. His trajectory was established, and he achieved triple platinum honors. But success in the world was ultimately unsatisfying.

Living with God the Holy Spirit is now what motivates him, he says.

"The biggest difference in my life, in our household, is that the Holy Spirit sits with us," Lou told *The Christian Post*. "When we have breakfast, when we go to bed, He's here. We are in constant conversation with the Creator of the Universe, which is Jesus. This is a big change. There's the world and there's the Spirit and there's a hard separation sometimes but it's the greatest thing man can do." Almost immediately, Lou and his singer wife Jenieva produced *When Jesus Comes Around and Walk to the River*.

"We need to walk to the river," the latter song says. "We need to die in the water. And when we rise with the Lord, every sin will be washed away."

Lou Bega. Photo: Sven Mandel, CC BY-SA 4.0 via Wikimedia Commons.



## Faith snippets

"God is real. God is love. God is the only way. God is the true way. God blesses. It's my job to lift God up, to give Him praise, to make sure that anyone and everyone I speak to the rest of my life understands that He is responsible for me. When you see me, you see the best I could do with what I've been given by my Lord and Saviour."



Actor Denzel Washington as told to *Esquire* magazine

# Building better relationships

## An old, familiar story

BY ROB FURLONG

**LIFE IS A** lot like *Star Wars*.

Some years ago, a book was written which explained that when you examine any work of fiction, there are only seven basic plotlines around which a story is built.

There is the "overcoming the monster" plot where a group is threatened by an evil monster, but a young, insignificant hero arises who destroys the monster and rescues the town. (Think of Jack and the Beanstalk).

Or there is "the quest" story where the hero embarks on a journey against impossible odds to overcome great evil and along the way, grows and matures as a person – *Lord of the Rings* is a classic example!

And then there is *Star Wars*. An evil Empire arises, but a rebellion is formed to fight against it; there is a powerful and conflicted villain, and a young hero guided by a wise mentor and who ultimately wins the day. That plotline has been repeated in countless sci-fi movies for decades since!

The point is, there are many things that repeat themselves, over and over in life.

As he contemplated the meaning of life and relationships, the biblical writer Solomon observed: "History merely repeats itself. It has all been done before. Nothing under the sun is truly new. Sometimes people say, 'Here is something new!' But actually it is old;

nothing is ever truly new." (Ecclesiastes 1:9-11)

In other words, life is a lot like *Star Wars* – it's all been seen and done before – and this is often exemplified in the way we approach life and relationships.

Think about John D Rockefeller Senior. In the mid-1800s he entered the world of business as a fit, healthy young man ready to make his mark. He drove himself relentlessly to succeed and by the age of 33 he had made his first million dollars.

At 43 he controlled the largest business in the world and at 53, not only was he the richest man on the planet, but he was also the world's first billionaire.

But it came at a terrible cost. He was deeply hated by those who worked for him in his Pennsylvania oil fields, and he had to be protected by bodyguards day and night. He once declared, "All I want is to be loved" – he had no peace or happiness, and restful sleep eluded him constantly.

Suffering from alopecia – he had no hair on his head or eyebrows and no eyelashes – he was described as "looking like a mummy."

At the age of 53, one writer said Rockefeller was "the oldest man I have ever seen. He lived on a diet of crackers and milk; his body was wasted away, and his obituary had already been written as it was widely held he would be dead in a year."

One night, Rockefeller had a



STOCK PHOTO

revelation – he realised when he died that he could take none of his money with him – it wasn't to be hoarded but used for the benefit of others.

Acting on this, he established the Rockefeller Foundation and poured hundreds of millions of dollars into research, universities, missions, and assisting the poor. Research funded by him led to the discovery of penicillin and toward better treatment for malaria and diphtheria – millions of people to this day have benefited from his generosity.

Rockefeller learned that people were more important than things

and that a relationship with God transforms our lives and our priorities – he lived to the age of 98!

The first part of Rockefeller's story isn't new. As Solomon says, it's one of those things that "repeats itself, it's all been done before." It's a bit like *Star Wars* – the same story, just different characters.

We don't have to make the same mistakes when it comes to our relationships – putting things, careers or goals before people.

Like Rockefeller, we can change the narrative and with God's help, write a new story!

## From opium fields to top tourist village

**A VIETNAMESE VILLAGE** has undergone a dramatic transformation. Where there were once opium fields, there are now picturesque rice terraces and manicured vegetable plots.

Once made up of almost all drug addicts, Sin Suối Hồ village is now one of the top tourist attractions in Southeast Asia.

Pastor Hang A Xa describes the bleak period in the village's history to CBN News.

"We were selling opium like selling chickens. Everyone was addicted so no one worked in the fields. We did not have food, just leaves from the jungle. People were fighting. It was a very messy time," Pastor Xa says.

Pastor Xa's father, Hang A Lung, was an opium addict and the village chairman.

Due to this position, the government gave him a radio so he could listen and stay informed about its policies.

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

"My father heard the Gospel [the good news about Jesus coming to Earth to die for mankind's sins] and became the first believer," Pastor Xa shares.

"He wanted our whole family to receive Jesus. He summoned my brother who was studying in another town to come home right away. He said, 'You need to receive Jesus. If He comes, we all go to Heaven, and you go to hell.'"

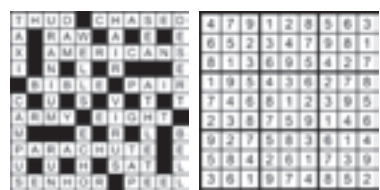
Lung found a Bible in his language and read it and shared it with other villages.

Through their study, they felt convicted to quit drugs and live a life pleasing to God.

Instead of opium, they planted orchids which became a source of income.

They also started running various other businesses.

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



**nudge** WITH KARL FAASE

## Unbearable emptiness

**BILL HAYDEN IS** a well-known Australian ALP politician who was foreign minister under Bob Hawke and went on to be Australia's Governor General. All his life as a politician he was well known as an atheist.

Then, at the age of 85, Hayden converted to Christianity and was baptised [a symbol of dying to your old life]. Greg Sheridan tells this story in his book titled *Christians* and he records the answer Hayden gave to his question about what changed his mind.

Hayden answered: "I couldn't bear the emptiness. In my mind there was an emptiness without belief."

Hayden's story is a reminder that it's never too late to consider revisiting the existence of God.

Can I encourage you to open a Bible and read again what it has to say about faith in Jesus? You might find an answer to the unbearable emptiness.

## 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)

**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)

**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)

**ADMIT**

**BELIEVE**

**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 Savior 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 Christian that you know or email us at [usaoffice@challengenews.org](mailto: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:** Please send me:  Bible  Some 'starting off' literature  Information on a helpful church

I have prayed the prayer [ABOVE]

\* Please check and write clearly \*

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Phone \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

Email address \_\_\_\_\_

**Challenge. 2634 Drake Road Lebanon Ohio 45036** Cell: 513-804-8818 E-mail: [usaoffice@challengenews.org](mailto:usaoffice@challengenews.org)

All overseas inquiries are referred onto someone in their own country

## Want to explore more?

Here are some free, helpful, Christian online resources

Online Bible - <b>Olive Tree app</b> (we recommend that you start with an easy-to-read version like the ESV)	Audio Bible - <b>Bible.is app, or Youversion Bible app</b>
Christian radio station - <b>CBN radio app</b> (different channels for all genres of music)	Christian podcasts and sermons - <b>Edifi app</b>
Christian movies, serials and kids' shows - <b>Good. app</b>	Daily thoughts and inspiration - <b>Our Daily Bread app</b>
Advice on specific issues, Bible reading plans and studies for new believers - <b>Youversion Bible app.</b>	The Bible explained with visual aides - <b>Bible Project on YouTube.</b>
Alpha Film Series on <b>Youtube</b> - an online introduction to Christianity	For kids - <b>Superbook Kids Bible, videos and games app</b>
Comic book Bible online- <b>goodandevilbook.com</b>	Manga <b>Messiah app</b> Christian comic with free games app, illustrated in Japanese-style art

**YMI** (meant to be read as "Why am I?") Christian news outlet for young adults with various content, devotionals and resources. [ymi.today](http://ymi.today)

More inspiring faith stories - **back issues of Challenge News** at [challengenews.online](http://challengenews.online)

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





Darryl Strawberry of the New York Mets bats against the Pittsburgh Pirates during a Major League Baseball game at Three Rivers Stadium in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. (Photo by George Gojkovich/Getty Images)

# A LIFE OR DEATH CALL

Throughout his 17-year-career, Darryl Strawberry has made eight consecutive All-Star game appearances and captured four World Series championships.

Yet, the Mets and Yankees star was suspended three times throughout his career which was overshadowed by controversies, drugs and incarceration. Growing up in a home that was filled with abuse and violence, the former athlete struggled with anger and brokenness.

“My early years were a real struggle because I grew up in a very broken, dysfunctional home,” he tells the *Jesus Calling Podcast*.

“My dad was a raging alcoholic and he would come home night after night, drinking and disturbing the whole house and waking us up in the middle of the night.” One night, his father had come home drunk.

“My older brother Michael said, ‘Why don’t you just get out of here and leave us alone?’ And [my father] actually pulled out a shotgun and said he was going to kill the whole family at that particular time.”

Darryl’s older brother grabbed a butcher’s knife while Darryl got hold of a frying pan. Though only 15 and 14 at that time, Darryl and his brother were determined to protect their mother. “And had it not been for Mom getting us out of that house that night, it would have been a tragedy in my life,” he recounts.

After that day, his parents divorced and his mother was left alone to raise five children. Though peace had finally come to the household, the anger and brokenness from growing up with abuse had remained.

Baseball was an outlet that he could use to channel his anger and hurt. His talent got noticed and he was drafted as the first pick into the New York Mets in 1980. That was the beginning of his life as a star baseball player.

But despite his achievements, Darryl could not escape from the pain from his childhood. Eventually, the pressure to do well drove him towards alcohol and drugs.

“I did everything to make me feel good,” says Darryl in an interview with *CBN News*.

“I drank alcohol, took amphetamines. Later down the line, I got introduced heavily into cocaine, which was my outlet and my escape. That was the biggest escape for me. When I found that, I can escape



Darryl in October 2024. (Photo by Daniel Shirey/MLB Photos via Getty Images)

away from everybody and everything.” His struggle with addiction soon led to his suspension from baseball. Darryl’s career was hitting rock bottom.

“My mom passed away. I wasn’t going to play any more baseball, because I had been suspended from the league for drugs. I went through that battle, and I just kind of like had had enough.”

It was at this point when he got invited to a convention by evangelist Morris Cerello. This was his first encounter with God.

“That weekend, all I did was cry when I heard him up there preaching,” he says.

Darryl’s career got back on track after he got out of rehab. He was asked to play for the Yankees in New York and he helped his team win the ‘96 and ‘98 World Series championships. He also married his second wife, Charisse. However, his drug habit resurfaced which affected his marriage.

Things took a turn for the worse when Darryl was diagnosed with colon cancer.

Though he was miraculously back on the field again after six months of treatment, he got arrested for soliciting a prostitute and drug possession. Once again, his life had hit rock bottom. Over the next few years, Darryl lost everything, including his career and his marriage.

It was at a drug convention centre where he met Tracy, whose influence as a Christian had encouraged Darryl to turn to God once again.

“I just had to surrender. I had to get with God myself.

“I had to separate myself from everything and everybody. God was calling me, and it was either

I was going to answer this call or I was going to die.”

Darryl made the decision to come back to God. In 2006, Darryl and Tracy got married and they founded the Darryl Strawberry Foundation, which is dedicated to children and adults with autism.

Though Tracy had a direct influence on his faith journey, Darryl also credits his late mother. Darryl and his siblings had found their mother’s journal under the bed where she wrote prayers for all five of her children to be saved.

“Her faith is probably why I am who I am today, where I sit today,” says Darryl. “Because her prayers were, ‘God, knock him off his throne, save him. I don’t care what you do. I’m not concerned about his celebrity lifestyle, his fame, and his fortune. Do what only You can do: save him.’”

Since rededicating his life to God, Darryl has been used in powerful

ways to reach out to the rest of his family – including his estranged father. “God... speaks to me: ‘How dare you not forgive him when I forgave you.’”

“I asked my father to forgive me, and he did. A tear came out of his eye and he said, ‘Yes.’ And I just lost it.

I just laid in his lap and cried so hard.”

Darryl led his father in a prayer of repentance and acceptance of Jesus Christ as Lord.

Reflecting on his faith journey, Darryl says that, “I had every earthly thing. I had money, I had fame, fortune, women, whatever it was. But at the end of the day, I’m so glad that He found me where I was in a pit and brought me to a pulpit.”

Today, Darryl is an ordained preacher, sharing the hope of Jesus Christ.

“**I had to separate myself from everything and everybody.**”

