

NEW LIFE ON DEATH ROW

I was a mess!

Sibusiso Sikhakhane is three years into a 15-year prison sentence. It didn't have to be this way for the 28-year-old South African, who is serving time for damaging essential infrastructure.

He shares with *Challenge News* that although he didn't have both parents, he grew up in a warm family with loving grandmothers who "gave me the best they could".

"But after I finished school I became too independent. Everything went from good to bad. I made the wrong kind of friends, took alcohol and drugs and got arrested for a long time.

"My life was a mess."

However, it was during the trial, and later on in prison, that Sibusiso came into contact with some pastors who visited the prisoners and preached about Jesus Christ.

That was when Sibusiso heard the gospel – the good news that Jesus came to Earth to die for mankind's sins and he became a Christian in 2022.

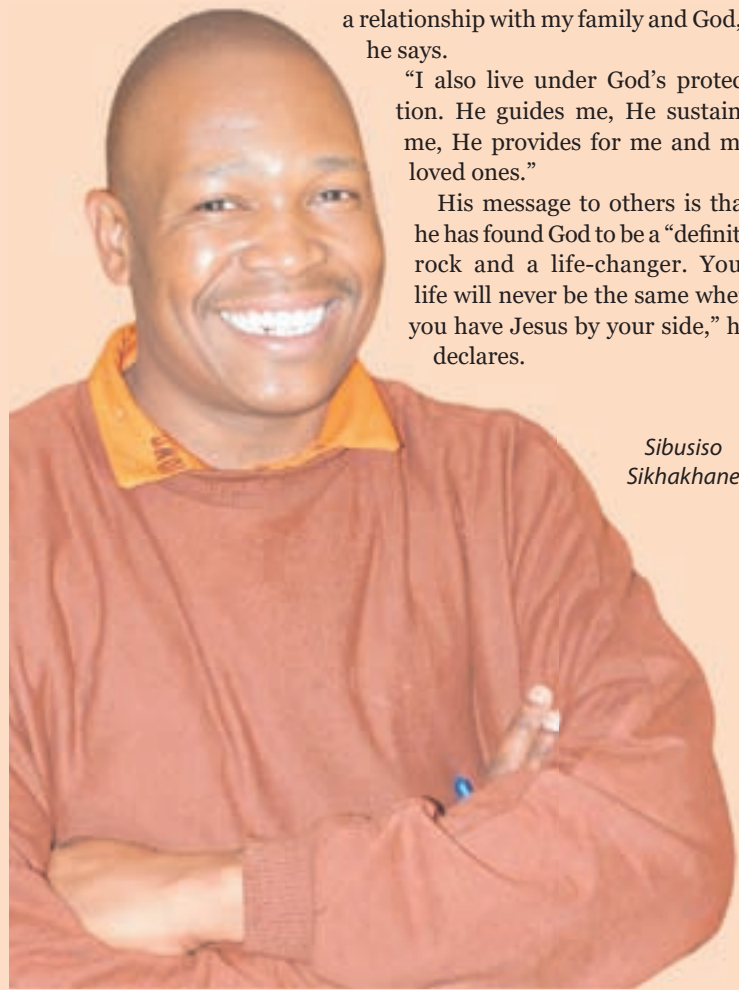
"By that time I was fed up by the fake and demonic life I was living," he shares.

"I couldn't take it anymore and I surrendered my life to Jesus and received the light of life. I gave my life fully to Him."

The biggest change, he says, is that he now prays and has seen a difference for the better in his life. "Now I have a relationship with my family and God," he says.

"I also live under God's protection. He guides me, He sustains me, He provides for me and my loved ones."

His message to others is that he has found God to be a "definite rock and a life-changer. Your life will never be the same when you have Jesus by your side," he declares.



Sibusiso Sikhakhane

“I made the wrong kind of friends, took alcohol and drugs and got arrested for a long time.”

Forty-two years ago, Karla Faye Tucker and her boyfriend murdered two people, while high on a cocktail of heavy drugs. It didn't take long for the police to catch up with them and they were taken to county jail.

It was there Karla experienced a transformation that gave her a sense of peace and joy that even 14 years on Death Row couldn't break.

Karla told her spiritual advisor, Linda Strom, about her challenging childhood. She remembered her parents fighting a lot and they divorced multiple times.

She began experimenting with drugs when she was just seven or eight.

By the time she was in the seventh grade she was using drugs heavily and dropped out of school.

During her parents' divorce proceedings when she was 10, Karla discovered she was the product of her mother's extramarital affair.

When they split for the last time, she lived with her mother and at 14, followed her into a life of prostitution.

At 16, Karla married a man who also had substance abuse problems. After the pair separated a few years later, her best friend, Shawn, and her husband, Jerry Dean, introduced her to Danny Garrett.

The pair began dating when Karla was 21 and they lived in a group house full of drugs, sex and physical abuse.

In June 1983, Karla and her friends spent a weekend partying and using heroin, cocaine and other drugs.



Karla Faye Tucker's mugshot (Photo by F. Carter Smith/Syigma via Getty Images)

She told Lifeway that Shawn arrived at the party with bruises on her face.

The group discussed the couple's recent breakup and Karla wanted to get even with Jerry.

Sleep-deprived and high on drugs, Karla and Danny drove to Jerry's apartment, planning to case the place so they could steal his motorbike.

Jerry was asleep in bed with a woman he had met that day at a party, Deborah Thornton.

"Something went horribly wrong," Linda writes in her book, *Karla Faye Tucker Set Free: Life and Faith on Death Row*.

"Instead of stealing a motorcycle, Danny and Karla murdered two people."

Karla later told Larry King that she didn't feel guilty after the murder.

"I didn't care about anybody. I didn't care about myself. I didn't

place any value on myself or anybody else."

In April 1984, Karla's trial began. But since her crime, Karla had transformed. She had come to faith in Jesus.

While in the county jail awaiting her trial, a Christian prison ministry group visited the jail and put on a puppet show.

"When I walked through the door, my mouth kind of dropped," Karla told Linda. "I felt something that I had never felt before. I know now that it was the presence of God."

She looked at the ministry team and thought, *I want to feel what they are feeling*.

"They had such a peace and a joy – something that was real. I had never seen that in anybody."

When the service finished, Karla stole a Bible, not realizing they were being given out for free.

"I opened the Bible and started reading," Karla told Linda.

"I don't know how long it took, but I remember that I was kneeling on the floor, crying, asking God to come into my heart and forgive me for what I had done.

"I don't know that I felt forgiven at that point, but I do know I felt love.

“I didn't place any value on myself or anybody else.”

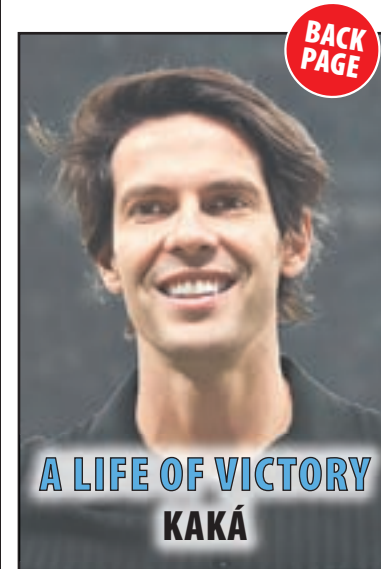


Karla Faye Tucker in December 1997, two months before she was executed by lethal injection for the 1983 pickax murders of Debra Ruth Davis Thornton and Jerry Lynn Dean. (Photo by Smiley N. Pool/Houston Chronicle via Getty Images)

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WITCH DOCTOR WAS FULL OF DARKNESS
page 3



Ask Y: Peter Meadows answers your questions about God

QUESTION: SO WHAT IF JESUS SAID HE WAS GOD? IT DOESN'T MEAN HE WAS RIGHT.



YOU ARE RIGHT. Just because Jesus spoke of Himself as being God – through His words and actions it doesn't mean He was. Much like the people they used to lock away for believing they were Napoleon.

But the fact Jesus declared Himself to be God does create a trilemma – which is one step worse than a dilemma!

Because someone who says with confidence they are God can be only one of three things: 1) A fruitcake. 2) A fake. Or 3) Telling the truth. So, which of the three was Jesus? Could Jesus be a lunatic?

How else could you describe someone who sincerely believes they are God, that they have the ability to forgive sins, and will one day give away seats in Heaven?

If Jesus had so lost touch with reality He can only be pitied. But does that sound like Jesus to you? Weigh up the quality of His life and relationships, the skill and insights of His arguments, and the sheer wisdom that streamed from His lips. Measure the total richness of all He said and did—and its life-enhancing impact throughout history. That just doesn't sound like someone who went through life completely deluded.

In which case... could Jesus simply be a liar... knowing it was not true that He was God but saying He was anyway? Knowingly and willingly

He told one of history's greatest porkies. But think how much store Jesus put on the need for people to tell the truth. He even said, "The truth shall set you free." Which means He would be more than a liar, He would also be a hypocrite. And is it really possible for such insight, wisdom, compassion and love to come from the life of someone so knowingly deceitful? Could the greatest and wisest moral teacher in history really be so immoral? It would be like discovering Greenpeace owned a nuclear power plant.

More than that, people only lie because it is in their best interest. But Jesus gained nothing from His 'lie' – in fact it was the reason for His death on a cross.

So if not a loony or a liar, what then? It can only be that Jesus was who He claimed to be—God, the Lord of all. And that what He said was true. It's the only conclusion that fits the data. There is no other.

And this is the incredible reality at the heart of the Christian faith. God stepped into first-century dust and dirt to make Himself known – to those then and to people like us for all time. Your dilemma is how you now respond.

Peter Meadows is the co-author with Joseph Steinberg of *The Book of Y* the basis for the eight week Y Course that explores life's biggest questions.

NEW LIFE ON DEATH ROW

• From page 1

I knew that no matter what I had done, I was loved, just like that, just like I was.

"That's when the whole weight of what I did fell on me. I realized for the first time that I had brutally murdered two people and there were people out there hurting because of me." At her trial Karla was repentant and emotional. She confessed to the murders and was found guilty of capital murder. Two weeks later, she was sentenced to death.

Not long after this, Karla received a letter from Jerry Dean's sister, Peggy, saying that she forgave and loved Karla, and that Jesus did too.

While in prison, Karla earned her high school diploma and married a man, Dana Brown, who was involved in a prison ministry group.

"She also earned the respect of prison guards who credited her with helping prevent the suicide of two other inmates," Laura writes. Karla called Death Row "Life Row" as "The Life of the Lord is here!"

Karla told Justice Files, "I love life now. Instead of taking lives I just want to share the life in me." Karla's first execution date was set for June 30, 1992 but the Court of Appeal stayed the execution. This was lifted in 1995 and in 1997, a new execution date was set: February 3, 1998.

Despite appeals and requests to review the case and a request to then Governor George W Bush to commute her punishment to life imprisonment, Karla was executed by lethal injection. She was the first woman to be executed in Texas for 135 years.

A month before her death, when Karla was interviewed by Larry King, she told him, "when you have done something that I have done, like what I have done, and you have been forgiven for it, and you're loved, that has a way of so changing you. I mean, I have experienced real love. I know what real love is. I know what forgiveness is, even when I did something so horrible. I know that because God forgave me and I accepted what Jesus did on the cross. When I leave here, I am going to go be with Him." •

The Lord's show

Poem by Karla Faye Tucker

It seems like so many years ago that I went to see this show. There were puppets and people who used to be just like me But they were really different, these people.

This I would soon be able to see. As I entered the room with them My body felt weird All through each limb.

I walked to a chair, and then I sat down

My mouth wide open, hanging almost to the ground.

Then I heard a cackle from a girl named Ellen

What's going on? I wondered, But there was no tellin'!

That was the last sound I remember hearing

At the show that night But I remember seeing people

They glowed with such a wonderful light!

The message I heard, but not by their words

For God's presence was there, YES! It was everywhere!

Their faces all glowed As the Holy Ghost flowed

Jesus delivered me that night from death to LIFE

I snuck a Bible back to my cell For something was happening

But what I couldn't tell! I sat on my bunk

And in the corner I sunk. You see, I needed to hide

For I was still so full of pride. But as I opened that Book and started to read

Pretty soon I was on the floor Down on my knees

I asked for forgiveness as the tears did fall

"Come into my heart Lord Jesus, I'll give you my all

"O God I'm begging You, please set me free

"Come into my life and give me liberty.

"You said You love me, "But I just can't see

"How such a lost sinner "Can ever be a winner."

Then Jesus put His arms around me

And gently said, "My precious child, your sins are forgiven; you are no longer dead."

The puddle beneath me was quite a sight,

I was redeemed by the blood of the Lamb that night.

As I looked at my tears in the puddle below,

I thanked my Savior for that awesome show.

And then all of a sudden I knew without a doubt

The Holy Ghost had come with a mighty shout

He opened my eyes and to my surprise

I was given new life He made me His wife!*

Yes, I remember that night so long ago.

I remember it well, Jesus. It was quite a show!

*Editor's note: The Bible compares the relationship between Jesus and the church to the union of a husband and wife in Ephesians 5:22-33.

From disowned to found

BY PAIGE DEUR

Nearly two decades ago, Kenneth Wahinya Njau sat in a prison cell in Kenya, feeling hopelessly alone. At 19, he had destroyed his chance at an education by selling drugs on his college campus, and his family disowned him.

"Behind bars, nobody would come to visit me. Nobody would come and see me," Kenneth recalls. "Actually, one time, I tried to go and call my father, and my father said he didn't have a son; he didn't have a student that had gone to that college. He said they could do with me whatever they wanted because I wasn't his son no more because he had disowned me completely."

Keneth struggled to find a connection with any of the people incarcerated alongside him. Then, one day, a nearby church sent people to share the Gospel [the good news about Jesus dying for our sins] at his facility. The preacher passionately shared that there was hope for people even if they were behind bars. Seeds of hope and curiosity were planted in Keneth's heart and mind that day.

"I began wanting to know, wanting to inquire about the things they were saying," he says. "I wanted to know about this Jesus and the hope He would give a person who was rejected by society, rejected by his parents, and rejected by his people."

After Keneth finished his sentence, he found a church with a pastor who took Keneth under his wing and began mentoring him, explaining the answers to his many questions. The pastor was the only one at the



Keneth, a Crossroads area coordinator in Kenya, leads a worship service inside a Kenyan women's prison.

church who knew about his past, and he showed great care and concern for Kenneth. The pastor's love and support helped Keneth eventually make the decision to follow Christ.

After Keneth accepted Christ, his pastor continued to mentor him and invited him to return to prison and speak to the people there.

"That is how the passion to reach out to prisons came to be in my life," he explains. "I've been doing this now for more than 15 years. Going into prisons, preaching to the people, and encouraging them... We know these are people that are loved by God, people that God cares for, people that God called to become a part of His Kingdom."

Keneth became involved with Crossroads nine years ago when he was invited to serve as a Crossroads mentor. His involvement grew over the years, and he now serves as an area coordinator in Mombasa.

In his role as area coordinator, Keneth invites churches to live out God's calling to care for those in prison and equips them to remember people impacted by the criminal justice system, just as Keneth's pastor did for him. •

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



Illustration by Between Sundays

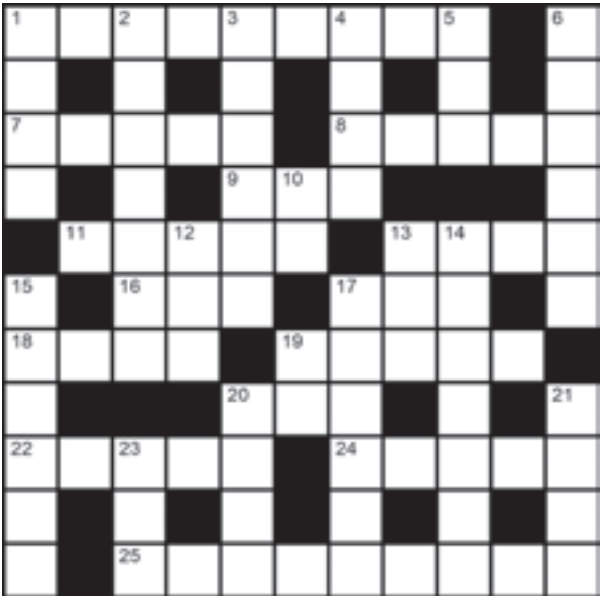
"The Christian Gospel is that I am so flawed that Jesus had to die for me, yet I am so loved and valued that Jesus was glad to die for me. This leads to deep humility and deep confidence at the same time. It undermines both swaggering and snivelling. I cannot feel superior to anyone, and yet I have nothing to prove to anyone. I do not think more of myself nor less of myself. Instead, I think of myself less." – Timothy Keller

**At my lowest: God is my hope.
At my darkest: God is my light.
At my weakest: God is my strength.
At my saddest: God is my comforter.**

Coffee Break CROSSWORD & SUDOKU

ACROSS

- 1. Reduced sentence
- 7. Answer that is incorrect
- 8. Bulky, big
- 9. Be in the red
- 11. A380, e.g.
- 13. Engine lubricants
- 16. Bird-to-be
- 17. Aardvark's tidbit
- 18. "Another thing..."
- 19. The Pacific is one
- 20. Painter's piece
- 22. Speedboat's power part
- 24. Workers' collective
- 25. Medical conveyance



DOWN

- 1. Coral formation
- 2. Game played with glass balls
- 3. Undiluted
- 4. Doing nothing
- 5. ___'wester

- 6. Macaroni and ___
- 10. I and others
- 12. Long ___ (in years past)
- 13. Half plus half
- 14. From Turin or Milan
- 15. Fish for a grizzly
- 17. For real!
- 19. Hospital hot spot
- 20. The "A" in U.A.E.
- 21. Patella's place
- 23. Oolong, for one

SOLUTIONS PAGE 7



"If you truly want to do more around the house, now would be a good time to start"

4				7		1
		6	1			
3	8					
			9	2		3
			6	4	8	
1				9		5
		3	4	5		7
9			2	1		6

WITCH DOCTOR WAS FULL OF DARKNESS

Glory was born into a family of witch doctors. When she turned 13, she went to live with her grandmother, the official village witch doctor, for training and service.

Before dying, Glory's grandmother transferred her powers to Glory and gave her the traditional witch doctor garment. This dress symbolized her authority as the new witch doctor in the village.

Glory's life was full of darkness. The villagers feared her supernatural powers, and she became a known thief.

As she fell further into her transgressions, her friends told her there was no hope for her.

They said, "God doesn't love you and will never forgive you." Glory fell into a cycle of sin and ended up going to prison multiple times.

On her third time in prison, Glory was in bed for three days with hypertension. She received no medical treatment. When Jenya, a Christian woman who ministered at the prison arrived, the other prisoners told her about a dying woman who needed urgent prayer. Jenya saw that Glory was in a critical state and prayed for her healing. Jenya told her, "God loves you and will forgive your sins." Glory responded, "No, not me."

Jenya told Glory the story of the thief on the cross and that if Jesus forgave that man He could forgive her too.

Jenya asked, "Do you want God to forgive your sins?"

Glory replied, "Yes." They prayed and Glory accepted the Lord.

The next week when Jenya visited



AI generated image

the prison, Glory was beaming with joy and said, "Look at me! I am healed!"

The authorities saw such a radical change in her behaviour that they released her early.

Nevertheless, Glory had no Christian community, was not baptized and had not been disciplined. Upon release, she fell back in her old ways.

While being chased by angry victims of her crimes, Glory broke her leg. She was caught and went back to prison for the fourth time. At this time, Jenya's prison ministry was starting to teach the five-part *Walking with Jesus Film*.

As Jenya taught, Glory began to apply these lessons, and her life continued to radically change.

After the final lesson about witchcraft in the *Walking with Jesus* series, Glory went back to her cell, took the witch doctor outfit gifted to her by her grandmother, and burned it. She was then baptized and went on to spread the message to others, disciplining many in prison.

People who knew Glory before she was saved noticed the massive change in her.

One woman saw Glory in the market and said, "Nice sandals! Where did you steal those?"

Glory replied, "I don't steal anymore. I work for God, and He provides."

Today, Glory is laying down her life to train 120 leaders in discipleship, preaching, showing the *Jesus* film (jesusfilm.org) baptizing new believers and mentoring.

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

My burden of fear is gone

BY YVONNE SMUTS

Joshua* felt that deep overwhelming burden constantly, the burden of fear.

Finding himself in prison once again, fear would rise, dagger in hand, to destroy hope, and Joshua would wrestle as the anxiety would manifest itself in enormous sadness during the day, and in terrible dreams throughout the night.

He was due to leave prison soon... again. But how could he be sure he would not end up back here...again?

"Why should things be different this time?" he wondered.

His courage failed him over and over during this most recent prison sentence.

Daniel, a chaplain in the Darwin Correctional Centre and Victor, a volunteer chaplain for Prison Fellowship Australia, met Joshua halfway through his sentence.

They would share words of encouragement, compassion, and understanding.

Daniel and Victor patiently journeyed alongside Joshua, reinforcing the true freedom that comes from accepting the fact that Jesus died on the cross for our sins.

They prayed with him knowing it is an individual journey we all have with the Lord, and that only the Holy Spirit can bring the knowledge of this truth to the heart.

Victor and Daniel encouraged Joshua to persevere. They assured him that concerns, anxieties, and doubts are common to all believers at times – whether inside prison or outside.

Each sojourner has seasons of



STOCK PHOTO

'going deeper' and exploring and anchoring their faith.

Then came a day when everything changed! A change that was so apparent, so evident in Joshua – his face was no longer etched with fear and sadness, but now shone with hope and possibility.

Joshua had read Philippians 4:6-7 – "Be anxious about nothing, but in everything, by prayer and petition with thanksgivings, let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God surpassing all understanding will guard your

hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus."

Paul's encouragement had touched Joshua's heart and it was as if a physical burden had been lifted from him.

The breakthrough had come for Joshua.

The chains had been broken.

The strongholds of his fear, brought down. The enormity of the power of his salvation and the price Christ paid for him on the cross, was truly grasped.

"It is like someone being in this prison now, taking my place – serving this sentence for me. And I could walk free," he said. What he had known in his head, he now knew in his heart.

The power of the gospel became tangible: that in taking the sentence which is rightfully ours to pay for eternity, Christ has redeemed (purchased) us and paid our debt once and for all. And we walk away and are set free!

Joshua now faces the future with confidence and assurance.

Daniel and Victor encouraged him to attend his church when he left prison and to truly live this new life in Christ, surrounded by other believers and remembering this Scripture verse: "And I no longer am living, but Christ is living in me. And what I am now living in the flesh, I am living by faith in the Son of God – the One having loved me and handed Himself over for me." (Galatians 2:20)

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

“It is like someone being in this prison now, taking my place.”

nudge

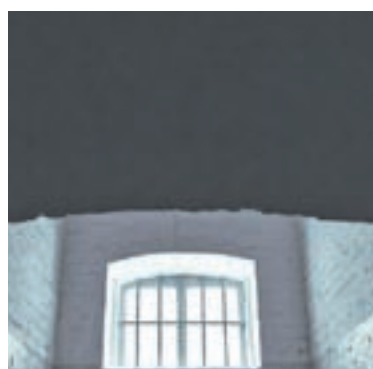
Wake me up inside

WITH KARL FAASE

THE BAND EVANESCENCE released a song back in 2003 called *Bring Me to Life*. While it's over 20 years old now, it still has some great truths to consider. The songwriter cries out "wake me up inside" and to "save me from the nothing I've become." What a great challenge for us today.

We can think that being asleep is doing nothing but it is possible to be busy, really busy and yet asleep. We can be asleep to all the opportunities around us and to what life could hold. We can be asleep in busyness, in work, in acquisition, in our relationships and all the activities that fill up our time. There is so much more to life than working to acquire and consume. There is love of our family and friends, there is beauty that surrounds us – in nature and in art – and there's a God who cares for us.

Wake up to the possibilities in life and the opportunity of a relationship with God. Recognise that God is reaching out to you. God does not want to stop you from enjoying life but in fact to complete you and for you to experience fulfilment. You were created to live in a relationship with God. God wants to bring you to life.



Light in the cell

"And a light shined in the cell,
And there was not any wall,
And there was no dark at all,
Only Thou, Immanuel.

Light of Love shined in the cell,
Turn to gold the iron bars,
Opened windows to the stars;
Peace stood there as sentinel.

Dearest Lord, how can it be?
That Thou art so kind to me?
Love is shining in my cell,
Jesus, my Immanuel.

- Amy Carmichael

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!

CROSSROADS

Name: _____
First Last

ID #: _____

Date of Birth: _____ | _____ | _____
MM DD YYYY

Earliest Release Date: _____ | _____ | _____
MM DD YYYY

Gender: _____

Referred by: **CHAL**

Prefiero el curso en español.

Complete Mailing Address:
Institution: _____ Housing: _____
Street or PO Box: _____
City: _____ State: _____ ZIP: _____

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 5037 | Burlington, ON L7R 3Y8



STOCK PHOTO

I couldn't do it alone

BY PHILIP*, EX-PRISONER

When I was a child, I was abused by a family member and I never told anyone about it. I carried shame and embarrassment all through my life. As a teenager I got involved in petty crime, copious amounts of drugs and alcohol, and I was always hanging out with the “wrong crowd”.

By my late teens, I had already been in Residential Detention Centres for young boys and men. To me, this was an opportunity to learn more about crime and get deeper into that circle of people.

I had started going to nightclubs, and with more drugs and alcohol around me I kept burying my emotions and the impact of my childhood abuse.

It didn't take long for me to become violent towards other people.

My victims, generally family members and friends, tried to make me see the damage I was doing to myself and to everyone around me.

But I didn't listen to them. One by one they all dropped away... or more to the point, I pushed them away.

Let me add, I had still never talked of God in my life.

Eventually, I left everything behind and headed for a fresh start in a different city.

I thought that if I left everything behind me, I could start a new life. But that didn't happen and I was stuck in a constant cycle of violence, robberies, drugs, and alcohol.

In 2018 I was arrested and was facing a minimum of three years imprisonment.

My wife was devastated as I had been keeping my destructive behaviour hidden from everyone around me, including her.

At this point, I remember thinking, “Here I am on remand. I have finally done it, and I won't be getting out of this. Someone please help me!”

One night in prison, I stirred from my sleep as I saw a bright light come

through the doorway. I assumed it was the guards doing their night rounds.

But then a figure appeared and as he extended his hand to me, he said, “When you are ready, take my hand and I will walk with you.” As quickly as he appeared he was gone.

I had just seen a vision of Jesus, surrounded by a beautiful white light, covered in a brilliant white robe!

Well, this really spun me out! I tried to wake up my cellmate to see if he had seen anything, but he was dead to the world.

I didn't tell anyone about it except my wife.

She said, “You have been given an opportunity to change your life.” But I didn't see it that way, and I tried to forget the experience.

My wife decided to move back to our home country, and I was planning to join her there once I was released from prison. But when I got out, I started making stupid decisions again and ended up in prison with a 15 month sentence. I didn't get parole.

It was at this point that I started reflecting on my life.

Everyone except my wife and my best friend had turned their backs on me, and the embarrassment, shame, and guilt started to consume me again.

I spent many nights crying and wondering why this was happening to me.

After a month in prison I decided to go to a chapel service. I don't know why I chose to attend.

I had never believed in God or cared for religion of any sort, yet at that moment, I felt drawn to go. In the service it felt like God was speaking to me, as if the sermon was about me. But how could that be? The preacher didn't even know me!

I grabbed a Bible on the way out and took it back to my cell. What was I going to do with this? I didn't even like reading, unless it was a comic. I found myself opening the Bible at random pages and reading them, when I had this incredible moment of clarity.

“This is about me and the things I have done in my life to others,” I thought. I went to see the prison chaplain and spoke with him in depth about how I was feeling. He assured me that God was with me.

From that time onwards, my attitude toward others became one of compassion, love, and understanding.

My relationships with the other prisoners were more open. I started being honest with my wife for the first time in our 18-year marriage. I also reconnected with my father after 20 years of no contact. I truly believe this is the work of my God, and that God was leading my life to make change.

Six months into my sentence, I accepted Jesus Christ as my Savior, and last year I was baptized [a symbol of dying to your old life].

During the rest of my sentence, I was fortunate to assist in leading fellow inmates through The Prisoner's Journey program.

It's a great program that has given me a great understanding of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

I am now out of prison, and I'm still facing some challenges in my life.

But I have handed all my worries over to God. So, I say to you all, wherever you are on your journey, tell Jesus you can't do it by yourself anymore and he will surely say, “Take my hand.”

*Names have been changed. This article was originally published by Prison Fellowship Australia and is used with kind permission

Seed of faith takes root

BY AMY CAIN

As a young man, William was enamored with baseball. “My dad wasn't much of a dad to us, he was real hard on us, but one thing that made me proud of him was that he was a great baseball player,” William remembers.

“I lived at the ballpark, watching and playing with the other kids. As I grew up, a few of us kids took it seriously, and my dream was to play pro baseball. I started drinking a little bit but always said I would never touch drugs.”

Peer pressure soon got the best of him when his friend convinced him to try drugs just once.

“Not thinking about my future or anything else, I tried it, and at that moment, my life took a hard turn in the wrong direction,” says William. “I quit school and worked as a painter. It took its toll on me, and I quit and started selling drugs. That was about 40 years ago.”

William is currently serving time for possession and delivery of methamphetamine. This was his third time going to prison for drugs, and it turned out to be the wake-up call he needed.

“When I got here, I knew then that if I didn't do something different, I would most likely die at a young age when I got out,” he explains. “An inmate asked me to go to church one night, and there, that seed that was planted so long ago sprouted.”

William remembers when a small seed of faith was first planted in his heart.

“Both of my parents were nonbelievers, but yet they did make us kids attend the local church on Sundays,” he recalls. “Maybe the reason was so they could have a quiet house on Sundays, but whatever reason it was, I think the seed was then planted in me.”

That seed, however, remained buried for most of his life.

In prison, to encourage the growth of that sprouted seed, he signed up to study the Bible through Crossroads upon a friend's recommendation. As he worked through his first course, he was stunned by the compassion and care he felt when reading letters from his mentors – especially the mentor who sent a letter with his eighth lesson. He wrote a note to Crossroads to tell us how her words affected him.

“How she expressed her love for Christ – I'm so lost for words, but I can't tell you how much of an impact it had on me,” William writes.

“It's like I really could feel the presence of the Holy Spirit letting me feel joy I've not felt in a long, long time. She was such a blessing. She showed me through her sharing and caring that [even though] I made a mistake in my life, God loves me and will forgive me, and I can become a new person in Christ.”

As William continued to study, God continued to make the seed in his heart grow and flourish, watered by the encouraging words of his mentors. The more he learned, the more he grew to understand the depth of God's love and forgiveness.

“For 55 years, I lived in sin [breaking God's laws], knowing about God, and still I thought I knew what was good for me and just denied Him altogether,” William reflects.

“With all I've learned about Christ, I found out that He loves me and has always been right beside me, waiting on me to just reach out to Him, and I did and haven't looked back since. When I got saved, it was crazy – I didn't feel guilty or unwanted. All that sin I lived in is completely gone. I don't have that to worry about anymore.”

As William anticipates going home, he knows he will not return to his former ways.

“I'm so grateful for the knowledge in these studies that will help prepare me for my release,” he says. “I know Satan and his little demons are going to throw all their temptations at me. I'm going to suit up in God's armor and tell the devil to flee from me – I am a child of God now, and you can't hurt me ever again.”

Used with kind permission of Crossroad Prison Ministries (CPM). CPM instructors from churches across the world guide students in their walks with Christ through correspondence Bible studies and letters of encouragement. For more information, visit cpministries.org.

Jail saved me from death

“I WAS A robber and a drug taker. I used the money I stole to buy drugs. My mother told me crime doesn't pay but I did not listen.

I left home and stayed in the drug home and ended up in prison.

My childhood was good but when I got older I started smoking drugs and doing the wrong thing. I was not afraid of getting shot or killed but God didn't want me dead so He put me in prison.

I used to go to church with my mother but I had bad friends. But God saved me. “I [gave] my soul to God.”

I became a Christian because it is good to believe in God. God's way is good. The hard thing about being a Christian is that all my friends are dead in their sins.

Lucky Khumalo, 28, Modderbee Correctional

From opium fields to top tourist town

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

THE RIPPLE EFFECT



BY STACIA RAY (ABRIDGED)

Mark knows a lot about overcoming – he barely survived a horrific car crash at age 12. As a passenger in a vehicle racing at a perilous 110 miles per hour, Mark was hurled through the windshield, causing his heart to stop. First responders pronounced him dead at the scene. But he was rushed to the hospital, where, miraculously, doctors managed to restart his heart and revive him.

Unfortunately, that brush with death wasn't the only traumatic event in Mark's childhood. He had an unstable

home life and suffered sexual abuse from a young age.

In middle school, Mark started rebelling and lashing out. By 15, Mark was stealing and shooting up. Then, the untimely deaths of Mark's parents and older brother added to his troubles. As his grief increased, so did his drug use.

"My addictions had begun, and there was no stopping them. I was on the road to destruction," Mark says.

A long, difficult journey

That road was a 20-year path of alcohol, drugs, juvenile detention, jail, and eventually prison, where he was stabbed three times.

Mark was in and out of prison several times. But his fifth sentence would be his last ever. He had finally hit rock bottom and was determined to change. "I was just broken," Mark says. "I was so broken that I started to see that I needed help. So that's

why I reached out to God."

Mark had attended church as a kid, and he didn't recall going more than a few times – but later he learned that wasn't true.

"I had memory of only attending church on occasions," Mark explains. "But one of my cousins told me recently that her dad used to pick us up, me and my two brothers, every Sunday, and we'd go to church."

Mark now realizes these regular church visits were shortly before the sexual abuse began, and he now believes he blocked out a lot of his memories from those traumatic years.

But even if he didn't realize it then, the seed of God's love had been planted in him as a child.

Letting go of the grip

Despite wanting to get closer to God while in prison, Mark was still hesitant – until a Prison Fellowship volunteer came to lead a Bible study. During this Bible study, Mark read Jesus' words in Revelation 3:20: "Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with that person, and they with Me."

That verse hit him hard. He began to open the door of his heart to let Jesus in.

Mark signed up his kids for Prison Fellowship Angel Tree®, but his motives were selfish.

"I was still prideful," he says of his Angel Tree involvement. "I think I was doing it out of a [sense of] 'Look what Mark's doing for you!'"

In hindsight, he sees that he hadn't yet surrendered his life – and his lifestyle – to Jesus, and he still had some spiritual growing up to do.

"The Bible says when we were children, we acted like children. And I acted like a child a long, long time," says Mark. But the more he softened his heart, the closer to surrender he became.

"At the age of 42 years old, I'd finally grown up and let go of that childish behavior."

He wholeheartedly surrendered his life to Jesus on April 20, 2005.

"Someone told me a long time ago I should always remember the date I got clean and sober from drugs and alcohol and the date I started my relationship with Jesus," Mark explains. "And those two dates have been embedded into my heart."

Replacing patterns with peace

Mark's sober date is July 18, 2007, two years after he accepted Christ. During that period, he was released from prison, but he relapsed and was in and out of jail several times.

Thankfully, those slip-ups didn't stop him from getting right back on the straight and narrow path. He was facing yet another prison sentence when he says he felt a peace: "God had a whole different plan for me."

As he finally made the "conscious

decision to not use drugs or alcohol ever again," the courts decided he did not need to return to prison after all.

Shortly after being paroled for the last time, Mark was connected to a mentor named Rocky, who taught Mark about the ripple effect and how you can't keep what you have unless you give it away.

"I didn't really know what that meant until I got in recovery and learned about my serenity, my peace, my love, my joy, and all that other stuff. I can't keep that unless I give it to you," explains Mark.

Mark stayed busy, serving God and others through activities big and small. When Mark was asked to clean toilets at a thrift store, he jumped at the chance, willing to do "whatever it takes" to give away the love God had given him.

Those who walk the walk

During this time period, a friend invited Mark to church. The moment Mark walked in the door of the church, he was home. The people of the church made sure of it.

"Two ushers were standing at the door, Sam and Phil, and they welcomed me with open arms. I told myself, 'I'm going to come back next week,'" Mark remembers.

When Mark returned the following week, Sam and Phil were again at the door, and Mark was shocked by what happened next: "They remembered my name! And I'm not important at all, but they remembered me. And that right there was probably the first time I ever felt accepted in my life."

Soon after, Mark was the one standing at that door, handing out bulletins and greeting people. He did this for the next two years without being asked. He wanted to show others that same welcoming love he had been shown – that ripple effect.

Second chances

Mark is now 18 years clean and sober, and he owes a lot of his recovery success to Celebrate Recovery (CR), the Christian 12-step program he first connected with nearly two decades ago. He serves as a ministry leader and as a CR state representative overseeing 29 other CR groups.

For the past 13 years, Mark has been a maintenance technician for an apartment complex. "That's a big achievement!" Mark says.

"I'd never even held a job for 30 days [before prison]." He is grateful the company he works for values his work ethic and hasn't let his criminal record overshadow that.

Mark is also happily married to his wife of eight years and gets along great with his adult children, who have long since forgiven him for the selfish behaviors he showed when they were young.

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

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 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



Boanergez

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.

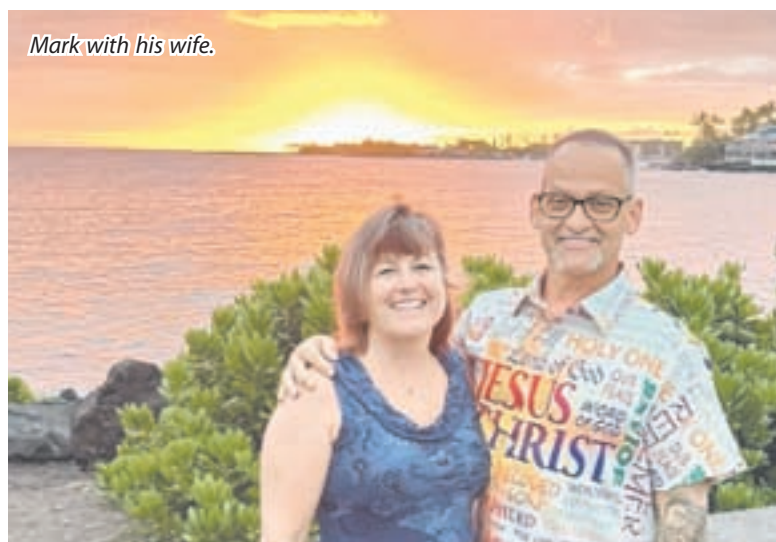
"All the things that I needed help with and I experienced, I'm actually helping individuals getting out... to support them so they can have a successful transition," he says.

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.prisonfellowship.org and it is used with kind permission.

“ I was on the road to destruction. ”



Mark with his wife.

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 4:35-5:20

INTRODUCTION

MARK TELLS US what Jesus said and did. He wastes no time; he moves from one scene to the next without delay. There is great wisdom and depth in what Jesus says and sheer wonder in what He does. It is no wonder that so many people wanted to see and hear Him. It is a joy for us that we can join in listening to Him.

Chapter 4 verses 35 to 38: *That day when evening came, He said to His disciples, "Let's go over to the other side." Leaving the crowd behind, they took Him along, just as He was, in the boat. There were also other boats with Him. A furious squall came up, and the waves broke over the boat, so that it was nearly swamped. Jesus was in the stern, sleeping on a cushion. The disciples woke Him and said to Him, "Teacher, don't you care if we drown?"*

Jesus and His men were taking a trip across the Sea of Galilee. Jesus had something in mind; it was not just recreation. Strangely, even though a storm hit them, Jesus slept on until they woke Him. (It was

common for sudden storms to hit this body of water. It is the same there today.) So, there was panic in the boat at the same time as Jesus was taking a rest. The disciples' question "Don't you care if we drown?" sounds like a rebuke. It showed fear rather than faith.

Verses 39-41 *He got up, rebuked the wind and said to the waves, "Quiet! Be still! Then the wind died down and it was completely calm. He said to His disciples, "Why are you so afraid? Have you still no faith?" They were terrified and asked each other, "Who is this? Even the wind and the waves obey Him!"*

The disciples should have had no fear while Jesus was with them. But they were learning to have more trust. They were learning that Jesus had power over nature as well as over sickness and demons and all circumstances. They needed to answer their question "Who is this?" A most important question.

Ch 5: 1 *They went across the lake to the region of the Gerasenes.*

There were many places they could have gone but we can see that the Lord had something in mind in coming to this place. We read on.

Verses 2-5 *When Jesus got out of the boat, a man with an evil spirit came from the tombs to meet him. This man*



STOCK PHOTO

lived in the tombs, and no one could bind him any more, not even with a chain. For he had often been chained hand and foot, but he tore the chains apart and broke the irons on his feet. No one was strong enough to subdue him. Night and day among the tombs and in the hills he would cry out and cut himself with stones.

This man was possessed by a demon and hopelessly in bondage to it. We don't know much about evil spirits but we know they became more active during the ministry of Jesus. They are agents of the devil. The description given shows a terrible condition, a most awful state for any human being. Did Jesus somehow know this man was there and that was the reason for crossing the sea? It is likely to be so.

Verses 6-8 *When he saw Jesus from a distance, he ran and fell on his knees in front of Him. He shouted at the top of his voice, "What do you want with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? Swear to God that You won't torture me!" For Jesus was saying to him, "Come out of this man, you evil spirit!"*

The words of this poor man are strange to us, but we need to

remember he was not in control of himself. Jesus opposes the spirit, a clash between good and evil.

Verses 9-10 *Then Jesus asked him, "What is your name?" "My name is Legion," he replied, "for we are many." And he begged Jesus again and again not to send them out of the area.*

It has now become clear that there were many demons, not just one. The words of Legion are not his really, they are the words of the spirits. Why they were so anxious to stay in the area, we have no idea.

Verses 11-13 *A large herd of pigs was feeding on the nearby hillside. The demons begged Jesus, send us among the pigs; allow us to go into them." He gave them permission, and the evil spirits came out and went into the pigs. The herd, about 2000 in number, rushed down the steep bank into the lake and were drowned.*

This is an amazing scene which shows the supreme authority of Christ. Just why demons are so desperate to occupy a body, we don't know. We do know pigs were shunned by Jews.

Verses 14-17 *Those tending the pigs ran off and reported this in the town*

and countryside, and the people went out to see what had happened. When they came to Jesus, they saw the man who had been possessed by the legion of demons, sitting there, dressed and in his right mind; and they were afraid. Those who had seen it told the people what had happened to the demon-possessed man – and told about the pigs as well. Then the people began to plead with Jesus to leave their region.

Instead of being glad that the man was set free, these people were afraid of Jesus, and some were unhappy about losing so many pigs. They seem to have been somewhat superstitious, thinking Jesus would bring them bad luck.

Verses 18-20 *As Jesus was getting into the boat, the man who had been demon possessed begged to go with Him. Jesus did not let him, but said, "Go home to your family and tell them how much the Lord has done for you, and how He has had mercy on you. So, the man went away and began to tell in the Decapolis how much Jesus had done for him. And all the people were amazed.*

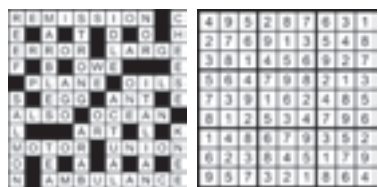
This man must have been well-known because of his wild behaviour and the inability of anyone to tame him. But now, he had a story to tell of amazing deliverance. He must have told as many people as he could. The Decapolis was the ring of 10 towns in the Galilee area.

CONCLUSION

Think of the words "tell them how much the Lord has done for you, and how He has had mercy on you." This could be said of all who have found Jesus as their Savior. All can say they have been delivered from sin and darkness.

Not all sinners are demon possessed but they are in need of a Savior. No matter how badly they have broken God's commands, there is still forgiveness and a new life to be found in Christ. Repentance and faith are what is needed. Repentance being a change of mind and attitude toward God and faith is simple trust in the Savior and His saving power.

"Trust in the Lord Jesus and you shall be saved" (Acts 16:31)



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: 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 _____ Age _____

Address _____

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

All overseas enquiries are referred onto someone in their own country

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 into 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 cry. 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 from Kelly at www.kellyladdbishop.com



**Challenge
SPORT**

Kaká of AC Milan Legends in action during a match between Sao Paulo and AC Milan at Morumbi Stadium in December 2023 in Sao Paulo, Brazil. (Photo by Giuseppe Cottini/AC Milan via Getty Images)

A LIFE OF VICTORY

Brazilian soccer player Kaká (whose full name is Ricardo Izecson dos Santos Leite) shares his story with mojpribeh.sk.

When I was eight, I moved to Sao Paulo, Brazil where I began to play soccer.

I played on the junior team for Sao Paulo in 2000. We were in the middle of the Paulista Junior Championships when I received a yellow card.

I was suspended for the following game, so I took advantage of the free weekend to visit my grandparents, who lived in Caldas Novas at the time.

My brother, my parents, my grandparents and I went to a water park. As I was coming down one of the slides into the pool, I hit my head on the bottom of the pool and my neck snapped.

I fractured the sixth vertebra in my neck. At the time, I had no idea what happened. I almost became paralyzed and lost my ability to walk and even play football.

I returned to Sao Paulo to train on Monday. On Tuesday, I called the coach and told him that I could not bear the pain any longer. He sent me to see a doctor at the hospital. It was in that x-ray that the fracture was shown.

The doctors told me I was very lucky that that nothing more serious happened. I believe it was not a luck. I believe God was protecting me during that time

from anything.

Many people think that I became a Christian after the accident, but that is not true.

My parents are Christians and they raised me with biblical values. The accident happened in October of 2000. Throughout November and December, I could not play.

I began to play again in January of 2001 and after about 2 weeks, I was called to play for the Sao Paulo professional team. Because of this,



Kaká in September 2024 in Milan, Italy. (Photo by Marco Luzzani/Getty Images)

I believe God had a purpose in that accident.

It is something that happened just before I had the great blessing of starting as a professional in Sao Paulo and initiating my career as a professional soccer player.

As I said before my parents always taught me the Bible and its values, and also about Jesus Christ and faith.

I did not have a specific conversion experience, but little by little, I stopped simply hearing people talk about the Jesus my parents taught me about and there came time when I wanted to live my own experiences with God.

I need Jesus every day of my life. Jesus tells me in the Bible that without Him I can't do anything.

I have the gift and capacity today to play soccer because God gave it to me.

The day He wants me to do something else, I will do it and this is why I need Jesus in my life every day.

I am successful in my financial and my professional life, but all this has come from God and is a gift of grace from Him for my life.

All that I have, I thank Him for.

The difference Jesus makes in my life is that I know I will always have victory, I will always have joy, and I will always have success. This is

“ I lost my ability to walk and even play football. ”

independent of the situations I face or will face. This brings me great peace.

I usually tell the people who ask, that the Bible is like the user's manual to life. It has every-

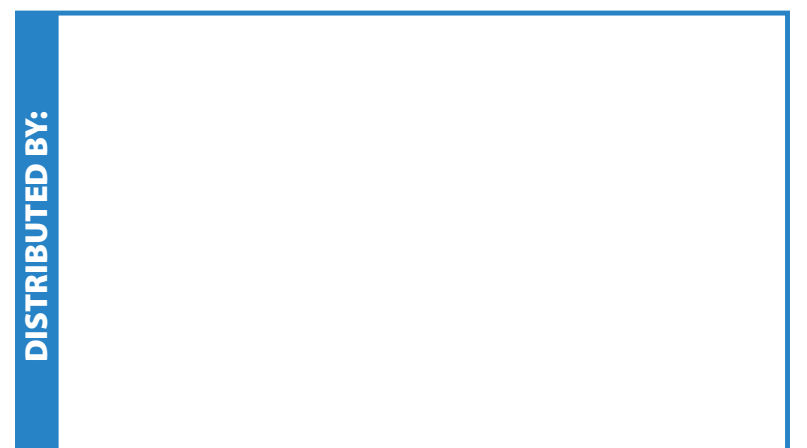
thing we need in it. It makes me happy to read the Bible every day, to

study it and to be in fellowship with God and learn more and more about Jesus. I will win many matches and I will lose many matches, but I know that in all of them, God has a plan.

This is why I try to understand the plan of God for me in each moment so that I can have peace during times of pressure. Everyone wants to be a winner, but for me, the true meaning of winning is having Jesus in my life.

It is a life of prayer, a life of intimacy and a lifelong friendship, knowing that God is our Father. I can say that I'm victorious because Jesus lives in me.

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