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A CHRISTMAS TO REMEMBER

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

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

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

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

Then Polly developed breast cancer and had to undergo radical surgery and chemotherapy. At the same time their daughter, who had already been in trouble with the law



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

on more than a dozen occasions, got arrested again for fraud and jailed for three years, leaving Elliott and his wife to raise her two children.

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

He travelled a great deal of the time with a company that he called “Heathen Tours.” The purpose of these tours was to provide any and every sort of “pleasure” the clientele could afford. He, too, participated in the immoral acts he offered to

his clients.

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

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

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

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

He tried to kick it under the bed, but the bedframe was solid and the Bible could not go under. It fell open to John 14:27, which says: “Peace I leave with you, my peace I give to you: not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your heart be troubled neither let it be afraid.”

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

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Breakthrough for the broken

Stubborn, bitter, broken and angry – that’s how Nina Mhlanga describes what she was like in her younger days.

“I went through a lot of pain when I was a child and even as an adult,” Nina, 30, tells *Challenge News*.

“As a result I really wanted revenge on the people who hurt me.”

It bothered her a great deal that she could not shake off these feelings even though she had become a Christian when she was 12.

“I grew up in a Christian home. We attended church service every week. I joined the choir. I had such a passion for God I also joined the Scripture Union at school.”

Even so, Nina says she never really understood what it meant to fully commit her life to Christ.

“I served God while I was broken and still wanted revenge. I never had peace and joy in my heart.”

However, it was this very discouragement that led her to pursue the promise of Psalm 16:11: “In thy Presence is fullness of joy.”

She approached her pastor, who led her to pray and recommit her life to God.

That made all the difference. “I accepted Christ when I was 12 but I became a transformed Christian



Nina Mhlanga

two years ago,” says Nina.

“That was when I discovered I had been living a life full of unforgiveness and brokenness. I went through Biblical counselling and that really changed my life.

“It helped me to forgive everyone who caused me pain.”

Since her breakthrough three years ago, Nina says she has become a “true Christian” and is “living happy and free”.

In fact one of her greatest delights is helping others experience the same joy.

“There is peace and joy in Christ when we forgive. I am no longer a victim of bitterness. Because God healed my heart, mind and soul I am also no longer a victim of depression. Instead I have victory through Jesus Christ.

“God is my strength, my salvation and my hope.”

Nina, who is now a missionary (someone who tells people about the good news about Jesus), realises that the missing part of the puzzle in her life was accepting she had a problem in the first place.

“I accepted that I really needed help because I was so tired of being bitter.

“The Lord came through for me. I was in bondage to unforgiveness for 15 years but when I opened myself up to God and the Bible He made my life brand new.”

ASKING THE RIGHT QUESTION

BY JOHN HUTCHINSON

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

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

The question should’ve been, “Do you believe in Christ?” It’s the all-important question. To believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God and that He came into the world to save us from our sins and give us eternal life is a life and death issue. The correct answer can be life-changing and impact us for eternity.

The Bible says in John 3:16-19: “For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn

the world, but to save the world through Him. Whoever believes in Him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because He has not believed in the name of God’s one and only Son.”

Jesus said to his friends, “I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in Me will never die.” (John 11:25-26) It’s vital to believe in Jesus for He said, “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.” (John 14:6)

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

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

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

The right question is, do you believe in Jesus? ●

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An awe-inspiring view!



A formula for life

BY JOHN HUTCHINSON

THE living of life requires some thought. Our days rush past and they cannot be relived. Many, of course, start from disadvantage. I remember a 14-year-old, just out of a remand centre, who came to work with me. We were cleaning out a sheep dip – not my favourite job.

I was passing up buckets of foul sludge when I heard him mumble, “Do you know what my problem is?” I asked, “What is your problem?” He said, “I’ve got nothing to live for. I’m bored stiff and if there was a tablet which would end my life I’d take it.” That’s not how it should be! There’s so much to live for, even in difficult circumstances.

In a shop once, I noticed the words on a plaque: “Live simply. Laugh often. Love much.” Later I saw something similar: “Live simply. Love generously. Care deeply. Speak kindly.” That’s good but we need to think deeper. Let me share a formula which will enrich us with meaning and purpose and help us in our day-to-day experience of living:

Live in awe

Be a ‘wow person.’ Marvel at wonders. Meditate on the spectacular. Think about the phenomenal. It’s like a spiritual inhalant. Be like the poet Roger McKnight who wrote in his poem *Some Chordal Notes*: “In awe of everything, I sing and marvel more.”

Wonders are everywhere and begging for us to be amazed. For me, the precision of a sunrise is breath-taking. Sometimes as daylight appears I say, “23 hours, 56 minutes and four seconds.” How phenomenal – every 23 hours, 56 minutes and four seconds, this enormous weight of matter spins like a giant top at 160kmph so precisely it’s measured in thousandths of a second! What about its orbit of the sun? In a year Earth travels 940 million km and 365.24 days. What about the air we inhale? It is just the right amount of oxygen and other elements – and with a thin layer of ozone guarding us from harmful rays. What about Earth’s terrain – its mountains and plains, fiords and glaciers, rivers, oceans and lakes? The more we travel the more we have to think we live on Planet Spectacular.

I listen a lot to the birds. I love the notes of the wattle jacks, the soft whistle of the thrush and the laugh of the kookaburra.

What beauty we see in the flowers and plants – the wonder of bees and the taste of honey! What about the oceans and islands and all the myriads of fish and sea creatures. We live in a world of miracles and wonders. While we can marvel at all these phenomenal things, we need to realize that once it wasn’t there. Science and the Bible tell us that at one time it didn’t exist. Today it does! The Bible says in Ecclesiastes 5:7, “Therefore stand in awe of God.”

Live in appreciation

Thankful people are happy people. It can be hard when things are against us, but look for something to be grateful for.

Thank God for the gift of life. I thank Him a lot for my eyes. What a spectacular faculty is sight. I grew up near a boy who was born with little sight which gradually left him. It made me appreciate my vision.

But he was always cheerful and happy, and grateful for the lovely dog which led him wherever he wanted to go. He even travelled overseas with the aid of his labrador. The Bible says in Psalm 92:1, “It is a good thing to give thanks unto the Lord.” Yes, it’s a very good thing and also to thank others for all they do and mean to us. Perhaps the best way to express gratitude is sharing and giving. As Jesus once said, “It is more blessed to give than to receive.” (Acts 20:35) The Bible says in 2 Corinthians 9:15: “Thanks be to God for His indescribable gift!” How we need to thank God for Jesus our Savior – God’s great gift to the world.

Live in anticipation

Looking forward to good things puts spark into living. It may be a holiday, a special celebration, the birth of a baby, the footy finals or a visit from friends or even getting out of the hospital.

Anticipate good things in each day. Be optimistic about what might happen. Be expectant! Anticipation, however, needs extensions. The Bible says in 1 Corinthians 15:19, “If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are to be pitied more than all men.”

I’ve attended funerals which disappoint. They refer to a life lived and what has been achieved with no hint of hope. One day a 98-year-old, just one day before he died, lustily sang the hymn *How Great Thou Art*. What wonderful words of anticipation did he sing in the last verse:

“When Christ shall come, with shout of acclamation, and take me home, what joy shall fill my heart. Then I shall bow, in humble adoration, and then proclaim: ‘My God, how great Thou art!’”

The Bible says in 1 Corinthians 2:9: “Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, neither has it entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love Him.” Jesus conquered death and through His resurrection is able to assure believers of eternal life beyond the grave.

Adding anticipation to awe and appreciation is a great way to live. ●

Freed from my anxiety



Gené Joubert

Gené Joubert had heard about God her whole life. Born and raised in Ladysmith in KwaZulu-Natal, she attended church with her family and read the Bible but she viewed God as an angry God, waiting for her to slip up and do something bad.

“I knew of God but I never knew Him,” she recalls. “I only followed His rules and I didn’t see Him as loving. He was always distant, I only went to Him if I needed something.”

Gené describes herself at this time as, “really legalistic, following the Bible as a rule book, judging people and I didn’t fully understand the love of God.”

Despite trying to keep God’s rules, she says she struggled a lot with sexual immorality, unforgiveness, pride and jealousy.

“I always knew I wanted a more intimate relationship with God,” she shares. Then in 2021, a friend invited her to a new church.

“[It] told me more about having intimacy with God, seeing Him as a Father who is loving and caring, not angry.”

It was then that Gené said she fully committed her life to God, received His forgiveness and understood Jesus’ sacrifice on the cross had washed her clean from sin.

“When I saw how it is in a real relationship with Him, He came and met me. He freed me from heavy anxiety and misery and He adopted me.

“The moment I realised I wanted to fully commit to the Lord was when I felt His presence in a tangible way. When the people at church prayed for me to be free from my anxiety I literally felt it release me and God was there holding me.”

Since committing her life to God, Gené says she now sees His blessings, love and grace (God’s unmerited favour) a lot more than before.

“I strive to please Him more because I know He saved me from the dark hole of misery I was stuck in and I believe that what He has for me is so much more than what I could ever imagine.

“I started to trust God more, knowing that He will handle the situation and that I shouldn’t try to figure things out on my own. He gave me community and people who love me. My perspective on how the world works has changed. I always believed you should follow the laid out plan society gives you but God has a unique path for everyone and it’s exciting.” Gené says the best thing about being a Christian is the feeling of security and hope, which carries her through everything.

“With the community God has provided me with, I am frequently reminded of how good He is and that we are not made for isolation – in every problem I face I am never alone,” she attests.

Her favourite Bible verses are John 1:5: “The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it” and Psalm 25:5: “Guide me in Your truth and teach me, for You are God my Saviour, and my hope is in You all day long.” ●

New life with no regrets

As a young man, Ayoro B. Dominique (known as Dominique) was a heavy drinker, a liar, angry and an idol worshipper. Where he grew up in Burkina Faso, they traditionally worshipped rivers, mountains, stones or anything else really, he tells *Challenge News*.

In primary school Dominique first heard about Jesus when he found a piece of paper on which someone had written, “Jesus is coming very soon.” He wondered who this Jesus was.

In 1991, when he was 17, he started to attend church but it wasn’t until the following year, on March 14th 1992, that Dominique prayed to God asking Him to forgive his sins and rule his life. That is when Jesus became his Saviour and Lord.

He says, “I’m no longer an idol worshipper. My life changed completely. Now I’m a servant of God.”

However, his parents were not pleased with their son’s decision and Dominique was rejected by them and chased out of home. His friends abandoned him and he had to find new people to call family.

Twenty-seven years after that decision however, Dominique has no regrets and urges others: “Jesus Christ is the way, the life and the truth. He is the Sav-

our of all mankind. If you open your heart, He will enter into your heart.”

He quotes John 3:16 from the Bible as one of his favourite Bible verses, “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.”

Dominique is now a pastor and married. ●



Ayoro B. Dominique

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

Shona translation

Kuita hunhu hwakanaka kwatadza kugutsa

Theresa Zulu akakurira mumhuri yakanga yakaparadzana, baba na mai vakange vasiyana. Hupenyu hwawe hwakaoma uye mari ichinetsa zvokuti aigarozvibvunza kuti ko Mwari vanoregererei zvakadai zvichiitika.

Zvisinei nechimiro chakadai, Theresa akava nemoyo wokuita zvakanaka. Anoti “ndaifunga kuti kuva mutendi kwaiva kuita mabasa akanaka zvokuti ndaitoti kupa nokubetsera vanotambura kwakakosha kupfuura uga-muchira Kristu. Somunhu akaurira mukuita mabasa akanaka ndaivawo nomurangariro wokutya Mwari zvokuti ndaiedza nepose pandinogona kufadza Mwari. Ndaiti kana ndikanyepa kana kuita godondaikumbira kuregererwa na Mwari.”

Theresa aifunga kuti chivi chake chokunyepa chaikonzereswa nevakereki vake avo vaikoniwa kumupa zvaaida. Naizvozvo ainonyepera hama dzemumhuri kuti dzimupe zvaaida. Theresa anoti “Hupenyu hwakaoma saizvozvo uye mari isingawaniki apawo vakereki vasina chokubata, ndaingogaro bvunza Mwari kuti sei zvakadai. Ndakafunganya zvikuru kuti Mwari vava norudo kunavamwe kupfuura imi here? Naizvozvo ndakatsvaka Mwari aikomborera vamwe kuti agondikomborerawo. Ndakatanga kudzamisa ruoko rwangu nezvoMweya, ipapo Mwari vakatanga kutaura muupenyu hwangu asi panguva iyi ndaisaziva kuti kugamuchira Kristu kwairevei.

Ndakaendawo kukereke uko ndakanzwa shoko raJesu richipariddzwa. Mufundisi akaparidza kubva mubhuku ya Dhanyero 5: 25 – 28 apo Dhanyeri anotaura nezve chirango chakapihwa mambo achiti mambo vatadza pa Uso hwaMwari. Theresa anoti “Ndichiunzwa shokjo iri ndakaona kuti ndirimutadzi kuna Mwari, nyangwe zvozvo ndakanga ndichiita

mabasa akanaka mabasa aya aisandiponesa. Naizvozvo ndakada kugamuchira Kristu nokuti ndakaziva kuti pasina Kristu mabasa angu ose akanaka aisareva chinhu. Ndakanamata kuna Kristu ndichireurura zvivi zvangu, ndichidana zita rake kuti apinde mumoyo mangu awe Ishe noMuponesi wangu. Hupenyu hwangu hwakashanduka sezvo Mwari vakandipa chido chokukura pamweya pamwe nokubatsirawo vamwe kuti vazivewo Jesu.”

Theresa anoti “Mwari vakandibatsira kukunda zvivi pamwe nokuwa nendangariro dzisina mature nokuverenga pamwe nokudzidza Bhaibheri uye nokuwadzanawo nevamwe vatendi.” Ndima yomuBhaibheri yakanyanya kubatsira Theresa parwendo rwo-kutenda inova mubhuku yaJoshua 1:8-9, iyo inoti “gwaro rino romurairo harifaniri kubva pamuromo wako, uchadzamisa ndangariro pamusoro paro siku nesikati kuti uite zrose zvakanorwa mariri, ipapo ucharuramisa nzira yako nokubudirira.”

Theresa anoti “nyaya yandinoda kuudza vamwe ndeyekuti rudo rwaMwari rukuru kwazvo, anoda munhu wose akaitwa nomufanidzo wake sezvakanyorwa muna Johane 3: 16 kuti “ Mwari vakada nyika nokudaro wakaipa Mwanakomana wake kuti ani nani anotenda maari arege kufa asi awe noupenyu husingaperi.” Ukagamuchira Jesu, rudo rwaMwari runova pamusoro pako. Tinoverengawo muna Johani 1:12 kuti “kuna vose vakagamuchira akavapa simba rokunzi vana vaMwari kuna avo vakatenda muzita rake, Makomborero awa anopihwa vose vanotenda noMwoyo wose munaJesu.”

Theresa anopedzisa achiti “ndinotenda Mwari nechipo chomurume akanaka uyo anonditsigira mukutenda kwangu uye tine vana vana nevazukuru vaviri. •

Theresa Zulu knows now that doing good works is not the same thing as becoming a child of God.



English translation

Being religious is not enough

Theresa Zulu grew up in a family where her parents had been divorced. Life was hard financially and there were times when she asked God “why?”

Despite the difficult environment, Theresa grew up to be a very religious person. “I thought that being a Christian meant doing good works,” she says.

“In fact I thought doing charity work was more important than being ‘born again’.

“Growing up as a religious person meant that I had a fear of God. I did my best to remain committed to God. When I committed sins like lying and jealousy, I would ask God for forgiveness.”

Theresa believed that her sin of lying was caused by her parents being unable to meet her needs. To get what she wanted from other family members she had to lie to them.

“With life so hard, especially financially, and coming from such a poor family I asked God why this was the case.

“I began to ask whether God loved others more than me. So I searched for this God who blessed others, so that I could be blessed,” Theresa admits.

“I started to think about spiritual things and God began to speak into my life, as at the time I had no idea what being ‘born again’ as a Christian meant.

“Then I went to Church and I heard the gospel (good news about Jesus) preached. The pastor spoke from the book of Daniel chapter 5 verses 25-28 where Daniel speaks God’s judgment on the king, and says he is found wanting in God’s eyes.

“As I heard this message I realised I was wanting in terms of my life.

“Even if I did good it could not save me. So I decided to become a Christian because I realised that without Christ all my good works meant nothing.

“I prayed to Christ confessing my sins, calling upon His name that He may come into my heart and be Lord and Saviour of my life. My life changed as God gave

me a desire to grow spiritually and also to help others to know about Christ,” says Theresa.

“To overcome sin and particular attitudes God helped me through the reading and studying of the Bible as well as having time with fellow Christians.”

A Bible verse that has been helpful to Theresa along her journey comes from the book of Joshua chapter 1 verses 8-9 which says; “This book of the law (Bible) shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate in it day and night, that you may observe to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous and then you will have good success.”

“The message I want to share with people is that God’s love is great.

“He loves every person created in His image as we read in John 3 verse 16, ‘For God so loved the world that He gave his only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him, shall not perish but have everlasting life.’

“If you accept Jesus Christ, the love of God will come upon your life.

“Again we read in John chapter 1 and verse 12; ‘But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name.’

“These blessings come to all who genuinely believe in Jesus.

“I thank God for the precious gift of a good husband who has been an inspiration to me in my Christian walk and together we have four children and two grandchildren,” Theresa concludes. •

Persistent prayer helps battered wife

Zimbabwean Evelyn Gidi grew up in a family that loved Jesus but she did not realise how important her faith was to her until she married someone who wanted to beat it out of her!

“My husband wouldn’t let me go to church, so I would go to pray out in the bush very early in the morning, between 4am and 6am,” Evelyn remembers.

“I was seriously in need of Jesus’ help because my husband was a drunkard.”

When her husband wanted to hit her, her mother-in-law would intervene and eventually they persuaded her husband to go to church, where he gave his life to Jesus and God changed him so profoundly that he became a minister.

“We led a church from 1975 to 2010, when my husband died,” Evelyn shares. “All the people in the family became followers of Jesus.”

Her message to others is clear. “Don’t give up praying and fasting for God to reach people. Jesus is able to reach poor or rich, young or old. God can change anyone.

“And read your Bible every day,” Evelyn urges, “So that you can overcome sin.

“Even now I still need to fight sin, like unforgiveness against people who hurt me,” she admits.

Evelyn loves the passage Psalm 91 in the



Evelyn Gidi says we should not give up praying and fasting for God to reach people.

Bible, which talks about how God protects and looks after His people. It ends with: “Because he loves me,” says the Lord, “I will rescue him; I will protect him, for he acknowledges my name. He will call on me, and I will answer him; I will be with him in trouble, I will deliver him and honour him. With long life I will satisfy him and show him my salvation.”

Evelyn can testify to the truth of those verses. •

“If you accept Jesus Christ, the love of God will come upon your life.”

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Victim no more NEVER THE SAME AGAIN

South African Zander Hoffman, 20, struggled through his childhood. He was bullied mercilessly for being skinny and weak; the taunts and insults hurt him deeply.



Zander Hoffman

He always felt like an outsider, unworthy and looked down upon. Those feelings of rejection scarred him and followed him into his teenage years.

"My childhood was rough," he tells *Challenge News*. "I didn't know who to ask for help. I became very jealous of people who had things I wanted but couldn't own."

Adding to his emotional struggles were the choices he made to lie and harbour unforgiveness, both of which piled guilt on top of him.

He remembered his parents telling him about Jesus Christ when he was a boy. "My parents taught me that Jesus died on the cross to pay for everyone's sins, every generation's sins. I wanted to be God's little soldier that He could use to help others. But when I was older and was bullied I wondered if He really existed at all."

Nevertheless Zander continued attending church and finally, six years ago, surrendered his life to Christ during a service.

Today, he carries with him the reassuring knowledge that he is never alone.

"No matter how I feel, I know Jesus is always there, always listening to me and supporting me. I believe He gave me challenges in my life to help me, to teach me and change me into a better person, friend and Christian.

"The best part about being a Christian is knowing that there is at least one person who loves you no matter what you are or what you did.

"The hardest part is trusting God through the dark times but I know He was with me during my darkest times and gave me hope and strength even though all the odds were against me. "I want to say that God will always stay by your side."

BY FAY FOSTER

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

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

Each day, the shepherds led their flocks out of the fold to find

pasture, then at night, once all the sheep were counted back into the fold, they would lie across the door of the fold to protect their flock.

Thieves, wolves, lions and bears were constant dangers.

It is very likely that the shepherds took turns to sleep.

Shepherding was considered an unskilled job, and shepherds were on the lowest levels of society.

How amazing then is this account from Luke chapter 2, verses 8-14, of the night when Jesus was born:

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

"Suddenly a great company of the heavenly hosts appeared with the angel, praising God and saying, 'Glory



STOCK PHOTO

to God in the highest heaven, and on Earth peace to those on whom His favour rests."

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

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

“ How could they NOT respond on such an amazing night? ”

Why else would the angel tell them they would know they had the right baby when they saw Him wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger?

And how could they NOT respond on such an amazing night?

So the shepherds said to one another, "Let's go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which

the Lord has told us about" (verse 16). We don't know how long it took the shepherds to walk to Bethlehem, or how they managed to find the right building. Luke just tells us that they, "found Mary and Joseph and the baby, who was lying in the manger".

And once they had seen the baby for themselves, they couldn't stop talking about what had happened. Everyone who heard them was amazed at what the shepherds said to them (verses 17-18).

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

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

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

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 Christian that you know or email us at info@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. Reach out to the ministry that distributed this paper (see back page) and/or 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 tick and write clearly *

Name _____ Phone _____

Address _____

Disciple Making Movement's
C'o Methodist Church In Zimbabwe
111 JMN Nkomo ST & 11th Avenue, Bulawayo, Zimbabwe
Contact: +263 713 619 000 +263 736 785 555

Want to explore more?

Here are some free, helpful, Christian online resources

Online Bible - Olive Tree app (we recommend that you start with an easy-to-read version like the ESV)	Audio Bible - Bible.is app , or Youversion Bible app
Christian radio stations - CBN radio app and Trans World Radio	Christian podcasts and sermons - Edifi app
Christian movies, serials and kids' shows - Good. app	Daily thoughts and inspiration - Our Daily Bread app
Advice on specific issues, Bible reading plans and studies for new believers - Youversion Bible app .	The Bible explained with visual aides - Bible Project on YouTube .
Alpha Film Series on Youtube - an online introduction to Christianity	For kids - Superbook Kids Bible, videos and games app
Comic book Bible online- goodandevilbook.com	Manga Messiah app 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**

More inspiring faith stories - **back issues of Challenge News** at **challengenews.online**



The insight of the wise men

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

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

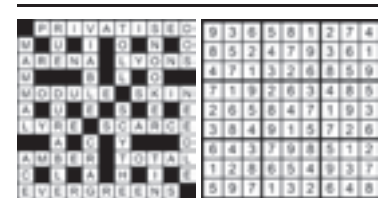
Yet these foreign intellectuals head off to meet and worship Jesus.

These men are smart enough to read the signs of the day and see the evidence of God at work. What about today?

With the eyes of faith, I believe you can see God at work everywhere. From the beauty of creation, to the birth of children, to the wonder of our universe, through to the acts of grace and kindness by people who could only be motivated by the Spirit of God.

God is at work in our world. Can I encourage you to look more closely for the hand of God in your life?

The evidence is there, you just have to be ready to see it.





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



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

OLYMPIC FAITH

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

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

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

Sydney McLaughlin-Levrone, USA – 400m hurdles gold

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

going to church again.”

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

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

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



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

Nicola Olyslagers, Australia – high jump silver

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

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

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

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

remembers being nervous about her new surroundings.

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

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

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

Gabriel Medina, Brazil – surfing gold

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

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

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

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

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

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

After winning gold, the sprinter



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

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

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

Team Fiji

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

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

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

Tsige Duguma, Ethiopia – track and field 800m silver

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

