

BATTLE FOR HEART AND SOUL



BY HARRIET COOMBE

It was 1969 and Peter Jackson was an Australian Army private in the Vietnam War. Walking in single file, his company patrolled the area, looking for enemy soldiers.

As they crossed a fallen log which acted as a bridge, Peter tried to ignore his fear of heights and the distance below him.

“When I was right in the middle of the log, an enemy sniper opened up – and I was a sitting target,” Peter tells *Challenge News*. “In the jungle it’s very quiet so when a machine gun opens up it’s a terrible sound.

My first thought was, ‘Who’d want to shoot me?’ A whole spray of bullets fired at me while I walked across the log. I wasn’t going very fast, but not one bullet hit me. I should have died.”

Peter was only 19 when he was conscripted. He had just started teaching at a primary school in Kellerberrin, Western Australia.

At that stage, Australia had been helping the US fight against the communist regime in Vietnam for seven years.

Peter says he was a pacifist but wanted to serve his country. After completing his training, he found himself on board the HMS Sydney and on his way to Vietnam.

“My job was in the infantry. We would go out into the jungle for six or seven weeks at a time and patrol,

looking for enemies. Throughout the whole year I was there I had a bullet in my rifle but I never had to fire a shot. I never saw an enemy, dead or alive.

“I believe I had people praying for me back in Australia. I’ve got a fairly positive nature and I think that

“I wanted to just forget about Vietnam.”

helped me. Sometimes I felt afraid. When I heard the bullets flying by, my heart used to beat fast – that was quite scary.

“We had a good tour because we only lost three men in the whole year in my company, which is pretty good compared to Gallipoli where literally thousands died.”

Some of the children from the year three class Peter taught in Kellerberrin wrote to him while he was away. When he returned to Australia he visited his old school with presents for the children (dolls for the girls and helicopters for the boys) from the class he used to teach. He got a job in a new school and life returned to normal.

“I wrote a diary in Vietnam. When I came home I threw it away. I threw my medals away. I wanted to just forget about Vietnam.”

Something had changed in Peter.

“I was as flat as a tack. I found out later I had what’s called clinical depression, which is a chemical imbalance in the brain. I loved teaching but obviously the change of going from a war zone to a classroom must have affected my brain. But also the Americans sprayed a defoliant called Agent Orange. I spent a year in the jungle. They can’t say definitely that that defoliant caused any problems but quite a lot of veterans and their children have gone through stuff.

“When you’ve got clinical depression, you don’t want to do anything. Like you’re depressed or want to stay in bed, and that’s not like me.

“Back then with mental health no one ever told me to go to the doctor. But I started jogging, which stimulates the endorphins in the brain. After a few weeks I was alright.”

Since returning from Vietnam, Peter had been questioning what the point of life was.

The power of a changed life

Pat Waria-Read grew up with a single mother, Winnie Branson, who worked for the Federal Council for the Advancement of Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders from 1967 to 1971.

“I guess she passed on the legacy to me and my brothers and sisters to be advocates for our community,” Pat tells the 40 Stories Project.

“I was terribly against white people. I hated them because they were just authoritarians over us and wanted to rule us to be like they were and so I was racist against white people. But God has a way of changing that.”

Pat is a descendant of the Ngadjuri Indigenous Australian tribe from South Australia’s mid-north and grew up at Point Pearce Aboriginal Mission on the Yorke Peninsula in South Australia.

She became a Christian after being supported by a Papua New Guinean pastor.

“He said, ‘Maybe God’s reaching out to you [in ways] that you don’t know about, Pat.’ I got accepted into Christian training in Papua New Guinea... the thing that I’ve learnt in all the years is that all you have to do is trust in our dear Heavenly Father and then step out in faith.

“It has been a long jour-

ney and I know that my God is always there with me and that’s the God that I want people to see.” Pat tears up as she declares, “When you fall in love with God it’s amazing. And He helps you to deal with your racism and He helps you to deal with all of those things that you think you could never put aside, that you could never lay down to believe that I could make a difference.”

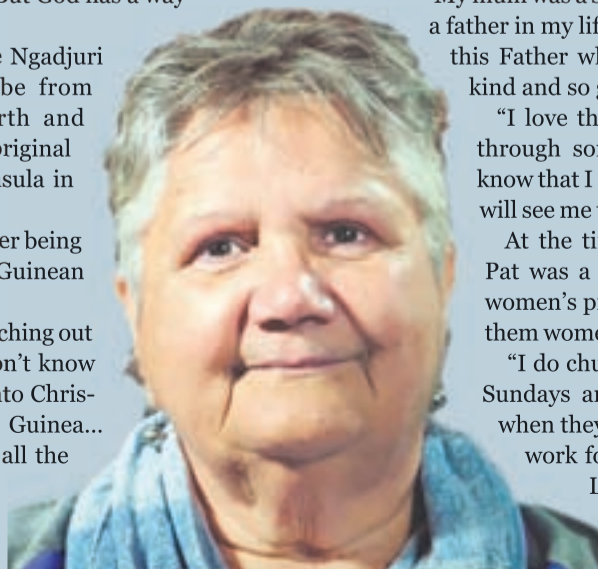
Pat spent a year in the Christian training school, building her relationship with God.

“My mum was a single mum so I never had a father in my life and here I was meeting this Father who was so loving and so kind and so generous.

“I love the Lord and He’s got me through some difficult times but I know that I can count on Him and He will see me through no matter what.”

At the time of 40 Stories’ video, Pat was a chaplain in an Adelaide women’s prison. “I love working for them women,” she says with a smile.

“I do church service in the jail on Sundays and I work in the courts when they come out. I’ve seen God work for them. I just praise the Lord when I think about what He has done for them women.”



Pat Waria-Read. Photo: YouTube/@40storiesproject

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Perth man Peter Jackson with pictures of the time (main picture and inset) he served in the Vietnam War as an Australian Army private.

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BACK PAGE

STANDING TALL
JONATHAN ISAAC

Battle for heart and soul

• From page 1

He had attended church as a child and was about 12 when he prayed to God, while at a Christian camp, to commit his life to Him. But as Peter grew older his faith became less important to him.

"I was really into the girls," he admits with a smile.

Since returning from Vietnam he kept meeting people who were Christians.

"When I was 23 someone invited me to go to a Christian convention called Keswick.



"After that I started going to church. But I was still into the girls and going to the nightclubs.

"A year or two later, I went to Europe and I met these Christians on the streets.

"They were sharing their stories of what God was doing in their lives. I came back to Australia on fire for the Lord. I said, 'Okay, Lord, You've got me. You're the boss.' I made a commitment to follow Him.

"I turned away from sin. I stopped going to the nightclubs."

In 1976 Peter married Diane and the couple travelled to New Zealand to attend Bible college.

"That's where the Lord put a real call on my heart to work with children – and the fire is still there.

"I want children to know that there's a God in heaven who loves them. I want them to know that the Jesus that I have found loves them and died on the cross for their sins."

As well as teaching at a school, Peter would also run Christian kids clubs. In 1987, when he was 40, Peter became a full-time children's pastor at a local church.



Peter Jackson in his army days.

After 12 years he started his own children's ministry, which he continues to this day, at the age of 76.

"A few years ago, I rang up the school in Kellerberrin and asked if I could come back and do a talk. They said yes and I went to every class and I told them about a day in the life of a soldier.

"They had an ANZAC Day service, and a woman came and brought the doll that I had given her when I came back from Vietnam."

Peter has stayed in contact with some of the men from the company he was with in Vietnam.

Life hasn't always been easy for Peter and he has endured periods of clinical depression a few times.

"At one point someone encouraged me to go to the doctor, who prescribed medication," he shares.

That, combined with the motto, "Happy people are the givers and the forgivers", and his strong faith, pulled Peter through and he continues to serve his community and now proudly marches alongside other veterans on ANZAC Day.

Light of the world

BY JODY BENNETT

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

God's relationship with time is to ours – He is unaffected by it.

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

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

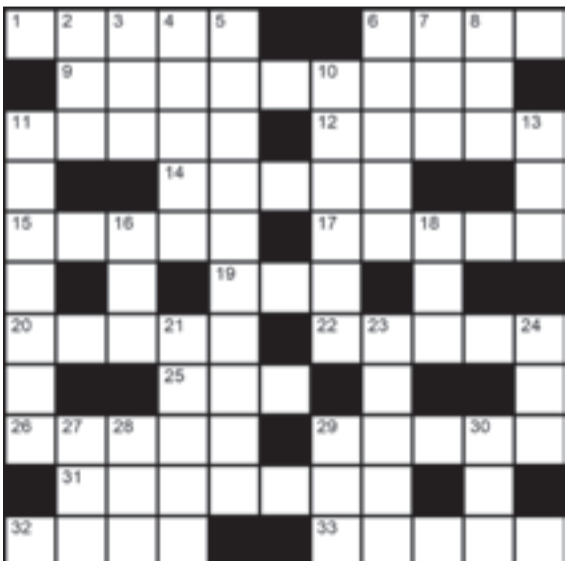
That is one of the compelling things about Christianity for me – that God is so "other", so beyond our little human understanding or ideas. So – in the true meaning of the word – awesome!



Coffee Break CROSSWORD & SUDOKU

ACROSS

- 1 Spitting snake
- 6 Troubles
- 9 Field goal attempt (5,4)
- 11 Room at the top
- 12 "Come in!"
- 14 Scattered, as seed
- 15 Net access provider
- 17 Parachute material
- 19 Chum
- 20 Birth-related
- 22 Alpine call
- 25 Blend
- 26 Kind of duty
- 29 US bird symbol
- 31 Professional food provider
- 32 Just say no
- 33 Con artist's skill



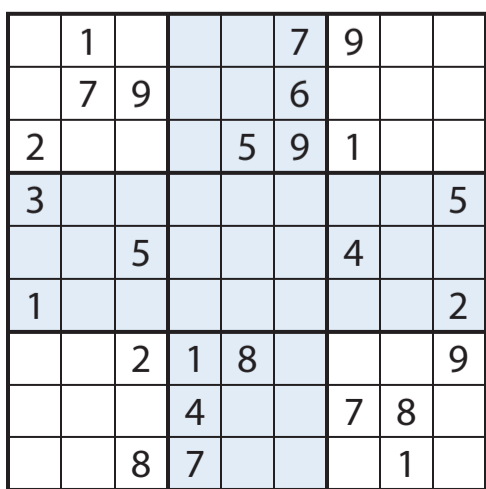
DOWN

- 2 ___ out of (decide not to)
- 3 Deli sandwich, initials
- 4 Elevate; lift
- 5 Criminal's associate
- 6 Blowing a lot
- 7 Tenth month
- 8 Barely make, with "out"
- 10 Intently
- 11 Annual book of data
- 13 Sprint, move fast
- 16 Mark above an "i"
- 18 Young fellow
- 21 Island in "Jaws"
- 23 Egg producer
- 24 To Kill A Mockingbird author
- 27 Rink surface
- 28 Delivery vehicle
- 29 Electric fish
- 30 PC linkup

SOLUTIONS PAGE 11



"There was hissing, and yes ... there was barking."



The power of a changed life

• From page 1

Pat refers to Psalm 23 while sharing her story: "The Lord is my shepherd, I lack nothing. He makes me lie down in green pastures, He leads me beside quiet waters, He refreshes my soul.

"He guides me along the right paths for His name's sake. Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I will fear no evil, for You are with me; Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me.

"You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies. You anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows. Surely Your goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever."

"[God] gives you rest," Pat attests.

"He'll never let you be a lost sheep. He will look after you through all of it and at the end of the day your home is gonna be with Him.

"We're all the same people and we are all one in His sight.

"The love that God offers each and every one of us – if we can reach out and grab it – is the thing that will bring us all back to who we should be and that's God's children.

"When He says, 'I will do something', you know He will do it. Look at me – I'm a living proof of it.

"I've seen Him do it. God is our way. God will lead us to unity. God will build our nation together. We need to trust and have faith in our Heavenly Father. They talk about [Australia] as the 'Great Southland of the Holy Spirit' – well that is true because the Holy Spirit will lead and guide us to do God's will.

"We have to trust, we have to believe, we have to know that the Holy Spirit will make us God's people to change this land Australia to be the land it should be – the land of the Holy Spirit."

This story is used with kind permission from 40 Stories. To watch Pat's story as well as others in video form, go to 40stories.org.au

I found peace when I gave up control

BY ALISON HENDERSON

I was quite a headstrong kid. I remember I always had to be right and had a lot of pride and selfishness in thinking that I was a pretty good person.

I remember struggling with anger

In another dimension

IMAGINE there are two people on a flat piece of paper. These people are two-dimensional, having height and width but no depth; the paper is the extent of their world. Can they see you? No. They can see only what's on the paper (in their world). They have no depth perception. Now pretend you use your finger to touch the paper. Now can they see you? They cannot see all of you, but they can see the tip of your finger, the part that has entered their world.

That is an analogy to our situation with God. God exists outside our dimensions. He can exist outside of time and space as we know it. Therefore, it is difficult to "see" Him. We are like the flat people on the two-dimensional paper. We can't see what's in a third dimension. But in this case, we exist in four dimensions (height, width, depth, time), and God exists beyond that.

So how are we to know such a Being? Just as the "flat people" on the paper could not know about you unless you touched the paper, we cannot detect God unless He reveals Himself. He must "touch the paper" of our world. God has to step down in dimensions.

As we study human history, especially religious history, do we find any instances where God "touched the paper" of our world? Consider that God's "finger" has touched our world in a person known as Jesus Christ. Jesus claimed to be God (John 8:58, 17:3), said that to see Him was to see God (John 12:45, 14:9), said that He was the only person who had come directly from God to our world (John 3:13), and forgave people of their sins, which only God can do (Mark 2:5). Many other passages of the New Testament affirm Jesus' deity. He was God who "became flesh and made his dwelling among us" (John 1:14). He is the "image of the invisible God" (Colossians 1:15). If we are the "flat people" it makes sense that the multi-dimensional Creator God entered our four-dimensional world by becoming a human being. He revealed himself to us. But why would God do that?

"For God so loved the world that He sent His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life" (John 3:16). He entered our world to live as an example and die as an atonement (payment) for our sin, in order that one day, if we commit to Him, we can come and live with Him in His multi-dimensional, perfect, timeless world for all eternity. •

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

a lot as a kid. I would try hard to be the person I thought I should be or I thought my parents wanted me to be but this just led to a cycle of more frustration and anger.

My parents were committed Christians and we always attended church. Every morning at breakfast Dad would read a passage of the Bible.

I grew up on a farm in Caltowie, South Australia, and it was a wonderful childhood. I am the second oldest in a family of five kids and we were all born within six years so we were quite close as we did a lot together. My childhood involved a lot of sport and helping out on the farm, mostly with sheep work.

As I grew older I understood that I would have to choose for myself whether or not to follow Christ. I was under no illusions as to the way of salvation and the truth that it had to be a personal commitment.

When I was 11 I had a dream about the end of the world. All I can remember was that it was really dark and I had the strong realisation that I wouldn't make it to heaven because I hadn't decided to follow Jesus.

For the next two years I wrestled between running my life my way or giving it over to God.

I came to dread church and Bible studies because I knew that I had to



Alison Henderson

make a decision to follow God or not, and I just kept putting it off.

When I was 13 my younger brother and sister became Christians and this really shook me. At the time I thought I should have become a Christian first because I was older.

I also became weary of the constant cycle of anger and frustration; of trying in my own strength to be good enough but always failing in some way. In July 2007 at a monthly Sunday night meeting, I chose to give my life to Christ. I did this by acknowledging that I was a broken sinner in need of a Saviour. I believed

that Jesus Christ, the Son of God, died for my sins and set me free from them. I then prayed, confessing my sins to God and thanked Him for His payment and forgiveness of my sins through His blood. I confessed that I was tired of living my life in my own strength and asked Jesus to come into my heart and take full control of my life.

Immediately, I felt an overwhelming sense of peace flood my heart – the struggle was over.

My love for the Lord grew quickly and I now enjoyed studying and reading the Bible.

When I was 15, I left the farm and went to Adelaide for two years to complete my schooling.

I guess you would call this the first real test of my faith.

During those two years I was just surviving city life and I could count on one hand the number of times that I had a personal prayer time with the Lord.

However, I was staying with my grandparents and cousins who all loved Jesus. Grandpa read the Bible faithfully to me every morning and my uncle was often learning passages of scripture when he drove us into school.

When I returned home, my drive to work was a 90-minute round trip each day and I used this time to

begin to learn passages of scripture and pray. I grew close to the Lord during this time and was baptised [immersed in water as an outward symbol of dying to one's old life] with my older brother when I was 19.

In the years after my baptism I was really passionate about God. At about this time my older brother was diagnosed with autism and really began to struggle with his health.

For the first time in my life there was something I couldn't control and it really scared me. I remember sitting in my bedroom one night listening to him next door really struggling and I realised that I had to choose either to trust God or continue to be eaten up with anxiety.

I cried out to God and He poured His peace into my heart and assured me that He was in control.

To this day He has remained faithful to His promise of protecting and delivering my brother from his struggles.

Another struggle I've had in my Christian life is letting God have complete control of me.

In recent days I have started up my own Merino sheep stud.

Through the many uncertainties in farming God has taught me that if I don't let Him take control then I will become eaten up with anxiety and worry for all the things that I can't control.

It's such a relief and blessing to hand all the control and responsibility over to God. When I do, He blesses me in unimaginable ways. •

“ I felt an overwhelming sense of peace flood my heart. ”

GOING TO PRISON SET ME FREE

Chris Roby knew he was dying. He knew every time he took a drink he was one step closer to an early grave. He'd been an alcoholic for 30 years, just like his mother – and it killed her.

"I was dying but I couldn't stop drinking," he says.

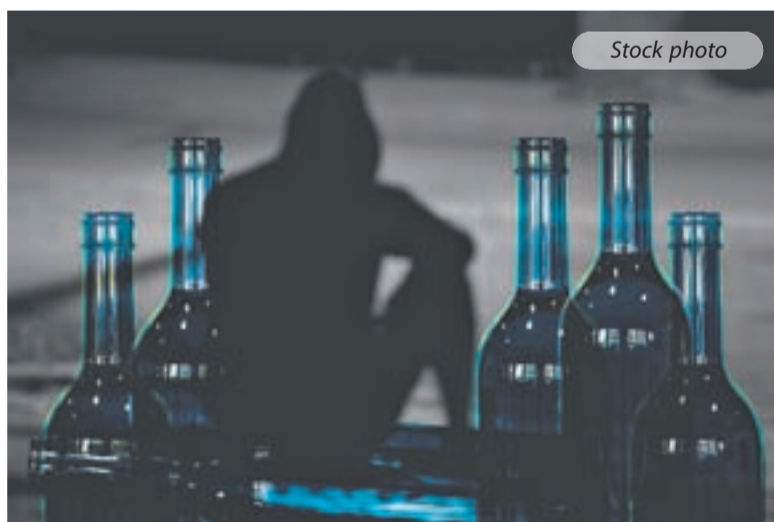
"Mum was an alcoholic and sadly died an alcoholic. Over the years I also became a burnt-out drunk. I was hopeless."

Hunger was a constant companion while living on the streets of New South Wales, Australia, so when Chris was told he could get a free dinner at the neighbourhood Salvation Army, he made a beeline for it. And that was where Chris met Salvation Army officer (Retired) Major Steve.

"Steve challenged me to pour out my grog and that's how it all started," Chris tells the *Salvation Army* magazine.

"I poured out three longnecks of beer and a bottle of rum on the steps of The Salvation Army. I had a massive anxiety attack. I tried every excuse not to, but I did it."

That simple but courageous act proved the turning point for Chris – though there were other factors in play. He had not been brought up in a religious family, but somehow he knew to pray to God.



Stock photo

"Sometimes in my drunken stupor I'd say, 'Please God, don't let me keep doing this,'" he shares. And now he prayed to commit his life to Him.

Not long after meeting Major Steve, Chris served time in prison even though he prayed he might somehow avoid it.

He was disappointed he didn't get the outcome he prayed for, but God was at work in His own way – it was in jail that

Chris began to experience some success in his efforts to overcome his drinking.

"I wasn't going to be able to stop drinking without going to prison," says Chris. "I know that now. Prison turned into rehab and the set of circumstances that happened in jail weren't accidents."

While in prison, Chris was encouraged to pray for healing. He'd been battling hepatitis for 29 years – "my eyes were yellow, I was grey, my liver was swollen" – but the doctors could not treat him because he was always drunk.

After finishing his prison sentence, Chris entered Adele House (now run by the Salvation Army) for rehabilitation and finally gave up his drinking.

"I'd prayed for healing to get rid of my hepatitis and I believed," says

Chris, adding that he had faith God could heal him. True enough, he shares that the doctors found no trace of the disease.

"When I got sober the doctors couldn't find the hepatitis. They said it's rare for it to go out of your body by itself without treatment."

Chris' life has been transformed since he committed himself to Jesus.

"When I was 45, I was full of hepatitis, I couldn't put two words together, I was unshaven, filthy dirty and was just existing," he says.

"But I've been born again. Not my old life fixed up a bit. A whole new life. Freedom... Putting down the drink would have been enough, but I've got a whole lot more. I can talk to people now; I can look them in the eye... My health is getting better, I'm losing weight.

"I'm so grateful for the suffering Jesus went through for us. It overwhelms me. It's the biggest sacrifice out of the love He has for us," he says.

It has been more than a decade since Chris poured out his drink on the steps of the Salvation Army in Coffs Harbour.

After God turned his life around, Chris joined a pub ministry and also became a member of the Salvation Army's motorbike chaplaincy group.

He shares the gospel (the good news that Jesus came to Earth to die for our sins), and tells them: "Don't give up. You can do this. I did it." •

“ Don't give up. You can do this. ”

Mo Lalakobau



Son comes home

After 13 years living in chaos, Mo Lalakobau had given up. He gave up on himself, on his future, on his life.

“By that time I was thinking to myself ‘I don’t care whatever comes my way, even if death is out there.’ I was going to allow my life to just go nowhere.”

Mo was born in Fiji and moved to Australia with his family when he was a young boy. His father was a Methodist minister and ultimately they settled in the Sydney suburb of Haberfield.

“My cousins tell me I could swear fluently in several dialects,” he tells Michael Cruz Caudre on the Everyday Fijians podcast. “Of course, that’s nothing to be proud of,” he chuckles.

He grew up in church but in 2006 he turned his back on his family faith - and thus began his descent into the chaos that almost broke him.

His life spiralled. He went to jail three times. “I was totally out of control. “I was out of position with God. I’d left Him and I hid in my work, in the drink and in the parties. I went from driving offences, to spending time in jail with people who were on life sentences!

“In prison I’d see my friends die or get addicted, because in jail you’d come in and leave addicted. This was the environment I was in.”

Things could have ended very badly indeed, but they didn’t because, Mo says, while he had abandoned God, God hadn’t abandoned him.

“Throughout I could hear the voice of God calling out to me, ‘Son where are you? Do you understand what’s happening to you?’

“I started to look at everything around me to look at where my life was. I kept hearing God saying to me ‘Son do you really understand what’s happening?’ I had totally given up on myself but He hadn’t.”

That voice became louder and louder and soon drowned out other voices which told Mo he was a loser, that God didn’t care about him and didn’t love him. After his release from prison in 2019 he went to a church where he heard a sermon about the prodigal son. The parable Jesus told in Luke 15: 11-32 is about a father who waits and welcomes his son after years of wayward living.

Mo realised this was God’s way of calling out to him and he re-dedicated his life to Christ.

Now a minister at a church in Sydney, Mo’s messages draw often from the theme of redemption.

“There’s nothing that God can’t do... I stand here today to tell you how good our God is, I understand now who the source of my life is. I understand now. Hallelujah! I understand the source of my being.

“I don’t deserve to be here, but if God can change a sinner like me, who was in jail a few years ago...He can change anyone.”

STINGER

A Joyful 'toon by Mike Waters



“Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?” The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. – 1 CORINTHIANS 15:55-57 NIV

I found another way to live

Christynn Sim grew up in a small town in Malaysia. Her life was simple and filled with one dream – getting a scholarship to study overseas.

“My life was studying,” she tells *Southern Cross* magazine. “I wanted to get a scholarship so I put academic studies as my priority.

“My life was study, take a nap, then study.”

Once a year, she would go to church, but says she had no idea who Jesus was.

“I didn’t understand why people sang and danced happily because I didn’t understand what they were teaching.”

Reading the Bible only led to more frustration, especially since the only one she had was a King James Version – which is written in 17th century English.

Christynn called herself a Christian but did not understand what that meant, or what Jesus Christ had done for her.

As she came close to finishing high school, a friend challenged her to explain what it meant to be a Christian and gave her *Two Ways to Live*, a simple pamphlet that explains the gospel (the good news that Jesus

came to earth to die for our sins) clearly and without jargon.

“A lot of Chinese believe we are born good and innocent and pure,” Christynn recalls. “The second part of *Two Ways to Live* (about mankind’s rebellion) was helpful – it changed my mindset.

“That’s when I finally understood why Jesus had to die for us. It’s not me who accepts Christ but Christ who accepts me.”

Christynn, who was 17 when she committed her life to Christ with a full understanding of what that meant, did indeed go abroad to study. She graduated with a degree in accounting and commerce from the University of Auckland.

She is also an active member of the Auckland Overseas Christian Fellowship (OCF), a student-led Christian club that meets for Bible studies, speaker events and social



Christynn Sim

get-togethers. In New Zealand, she joined a church and frequently shares her faith on campus. Although she struggles with talking to strangers at times, Christynn says she perseveres for the sake of reaching others with the good news of what Jesus has done for them.

This story is adapted from an article in *Southern Cross* magazine and is used with kind permission.

The fish symbol – what does it mean?

BY WIL POUNDS

YOU see the symbol of the fish all the time on the rear of cars, trucks, briefcases, lapel pins, entrances to houses, logos on businesses, etc. Sometimes the symbol contains five Greek letters, IXOUS. It is pronounced “ichthus.” What does the fish represent?

Because of intense persecution of believers in the early church, when two complete strangers met they would enter into a conversation, and after a few minutes one of them would take his foot and draw an arch on the ground. It would be the top or bottom half of the fish symbol. If the other person were a Christian, he would take his foot or finger and complete the other half of the symbol of the fish. Then the other person would put the first of five Greek letters inside the fish. After writing the letter “I,” the other person would write “X,” and then the other person “O” and vice versa until the two had written the word “IXOUS” inside the fish symbol. The Greek word “IXOUS” means “fish,” and is the normal word for fish in the Gospels.



STOCK PHOTO

However, the early Christians gave the word for “fish” an even greater meaning. It became the acronym for four of the great truths of Christianity.

I represents Iesous, which is the Greek word for “Jesus.” An angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph and told him that his fiancée Mary, “will bear a Son; and you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins” (Matthew 1:21). The Hebrew form of His name was Jehoshua, meaning “Yahweh saves,” “Jehovah saves.” He was named after His Father in heaven. Jehovah, Jesus will save His people from their sins.

X stands for Xristos, meaning “Christ.” The word means “anointed.” Jesus is God’s “Anointed One.” “Christ” is the Greek translation of the Hebrew word for “Messiah.” “He is Christ the Lord,” the angels said to the shepherds after Jesus was born (Luke 2:11). Peter declared, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God” (Matthew 16:16).

O stands for Theos which is translated “God.” Jesus the Messiah is God.

U represents Uios translated “Son.” Jesus is “the Son of God.” “God, after He spoke long ago to the fathers in the prophets in many portions and in many ways, in these last days has spoken to us in His Son, whom He appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the world. And He is the radiance of His glory and the exact representation of His nature, and upholds all things by the word of His power. When He had made purification of sins, He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high” (Hebrews 1:1-3). The angel told Mary the only way to account for her pregnancy was the overshadowing of the Holy Spirit. “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; and for that reason the holy Child shall be called the Son of God” (Luke 1:35).

S stands for Soter, meaning “Saviour.” “Today in the city of David there has been born for you a Saviour, who is Christ the Lord” (Luke 2:11). He is the promised “Saviour of the world” (John 4:42). The idea is a deliverance, saving from disaster, rescue from a hopeless situation, breaking the chains of bondage. Indeed, the Bible tells us, “And there is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men by which we must be saved” (Acts 4:12).

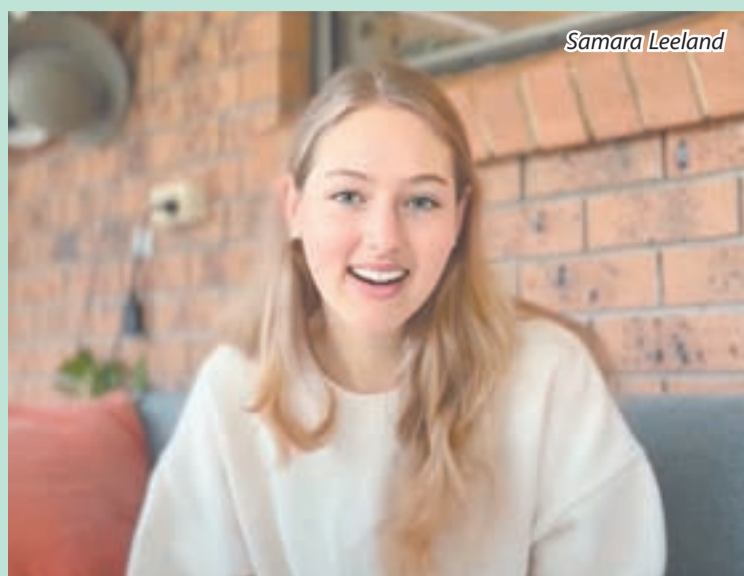
The Gospel of Jesus Christ is for everyone who will “believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in His name” (John 20:31).

The next time you see the sign of the fish and the letters IXOUS remember that Jesus is the Christ, the very Son of God, and our Saviour. Jesus is the perfect man, incarnate of God among men, fully human and fully God. He is the Christ, the Anointed One of God, the Messiah. He is the unique, only begotten, eternal Son of God. There are children by adoption into God’s kingdom, but no one like the Son of God. He is our Saviour who voluntarily went to the cross and died in our place to save us from our sins. He gives us eternal life through the power of His shed blood. Have you put your trust in Him to save you for all eternity?

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

YOUTH TRUTH

I lived a double life



Samara Leeland

I FOUND HOPE IN A TIKTOK VIDEO

Depression, anxiety and a crippling fear of death. All Samara Leeland wanted was peace and assurance. All she had was a suffocating sense of hopelessness.

The 15-year-old Australian said she had “a very strong conscience and I just knew my lifestyle wasn’t right. I was pursuing life my own way. I thought that was the way to live.

“I tried finding the release and joy I wanted in wrong behaviour and the happiness would last a little while but it would disappear quickly,” she tells the WhyJesus YouTube channel.

“I felt really empty. I knew the way I was living wasn’t going to bring me peace, satisfaction or fulfilment. I was really deep in anxiety and depression and just could not see the purpose of life and living.”

Samara credits her strong conscience to the fact that she was raised in church. Her father had become a Christian when she was eight and the whole family began attending church. “Prior to that I never had any real Christian influence in my life; that was the first time I ever heard anything about Jesus Christ. I believed God was some mystical, far-off person.”

As she grew older, Samara says she began to drift from church. She felt she didn’t need Jesus. “I didn’t see the beauty in living my life in relationship with Him.”

All this raged on the inside; on the outside Samara looked perfectly fine. “I think a lot of people thought ‘oh you’re such a good kid.’ I would go to church and I played the game but I wasn’t honouring God as Lord in my heart at all.”

What scared Samara the most was death. “I knew that I would have to stand before God when I died and that really terrified me.

“Everything I’d ever done would be shown and I knew that I’d been living in rebellion and turning against Him so I knew that if I were to die in my sin then I would be justly punished and condemned for that because I had chosen to reject Him.” It was a TikTok video that turned the tide for Samara.

Scrolling aimlessly through the video app on her phone just before Christmas 2019, she came across an item by a young man who was a Christian.

“It was super startling to me because I’d never seen a young person who was a Christian so willingly bold about their faith,” she says.

“I thought young people were only Christians because their parents told them to go to church, but I saw from these videos that he really loved God.

“He posted video after video about Jesus and why we need Him. There was something different about him; he really cared about every person that came across his videos. He cared about where they were going when they died and whether or not they knew Jesus.”

The young man’s sincerity touched Samara deeply and awakened her to the love of Christ. “The combination of being in that pit and then those videos... the Lord started to open my eyes.”

She spent the next week watching more videos and says somehow everything she’d heard “a million times before” suddenly made sense.

“I went into my room, shut the door, got down on my knees and I just cried out to God and I just surrendered.

“I remember it felt physically like I stopped running. I had been running from Him for so long but now I felt so intensely that He was just calling me to Himself and it was amazing and irresistible.”

Feeling a great burden lifted, Samara went to bed weeping. “The guilt I carried washed off me. Nobody else in the world could have done that, only Jesus. I know because I had tried seeking help from other people.”

Samara says her life changed instantly and that since that time four years ago, her fervour has only increased. She reads her Bible voraciously and says her eyes have truly been opened to the reality of God.

“Jesus actually went to the cross and paid the debt I owed to God. He absorbed every single ounce of wrath that I had earned.”

Everyone needs a big sister like Rochelle Briers. At least that’s what her younger brother Ruben would say.

Ruben, 18, was not on the straight and narrow and he knew it. The Perth teen was drinking socially and occasionally smoked marijuana.

Nobody in his family, all of whom are Christians, suspected anything.

“They never knew what I got up to, because on the outside I was still living this upright life, but I was just going through the motions, still conformed to the pattern of this world,” he tells *Challenge News*.

“My mind had not yet been renewed. I was drifting away from the values my family had raised me with.”

Left to himself, there was no telling where these unsavoury habits might have led him. But then his sister Rochelle, who had been working in Alice Springs for the past five years, came home.

“It was Rochelle who made the difference,” Ruben says. “We were always very close and I had missed her while she was away, so it was good just having her presence back home. We spent a lot of time together.”

Brother and sister had long conversations about God and life on the living room sofa. Rochelle, who often went on missionary trips, gently steered her brother back to the faith he had grown up with.

“My family means everything to me,” he says, “and I am so grateful to God for them.

“He has given me this wonderful gift of family and I felt the choices I was making were letting Him down. He gave me so much but I was giving Him nothing.”

During their chats Rochelle would point out Bible verses she felt would help her younger brother.

One verse in particular leapt out at him. It was Revelation 3:15, 16 – “I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish you were either one or the other! So, because you are lukewarm—neither hot nor cold—I am about to spit you out of my mouth.”

“That verse really showed me what my life was – I was just lukewarm. I called myself a Christian – and I never rejected or turned away from God – but I was just going through the motions. I would make excuses and give into temptation.

“I really believe God gave that verse to me through Rochelle. I was instantly convicted that if I kept on living the way I was I probably wouldn’t go to heaven.

“And if my whole family was in heaven but I wasn’t, how would they feel? They would be heartbroken.”

Ruben says what happened next was miraculous. A “sticky situation” that he worried about was “worked out perfectly by God”.

The temptations he had struggled to overcome suddenly lost their grip on him.

“God broke my addiction to unhealthy behaviours and showed me His love throughout my life. He blew my mind with everything He



Ruben Briers

did.” His life changed so dramatically that Ruben gave a speech about it during his high school graduation in October last year.

“I was living in the world... trying to find fulfilment in my fleshly desires, trying to find peace in what the world offered,” he told the school.

He said indulging in those desires only led to “disappointment, addiction, hate and anger.

“The hate, disappointment and dullness faded away.”

“We all have that little hole in our hearts – that little bit of brokenness. Many people believe this hole will be filled by sex, money or even drugs.

“Through my experiences I have seen... this only leaves us feeling empty.”

He says he felt a “great shift when I started focusing more on Christ. The hate, disappointment and dullness faded away.”

The addictions he could not break on his own “faded away and essentially disappeared. God was so much stronger.”

Ruben often refers to his “amazing” family. “I know that God has given me my incredible family for a reason. They’ve always been there for me and they are such a blessing.”

Asked what he thinks helped him to turn his life around, Ruben says: “Reading the Bible, getting healthy and my wonderful family.

“I feel nobody has a family like I do. My whole life has been just way too perfect to be coincidence.

“Just seeing God’s blessings in my life convinced me I needed Him.”

He says he isn’t sure what’s next for him but whatever the future holds, “I give it all to God.

“I’m listening and waiting for what God says. I want to follow whatever He tells me.

“God has worked wonders in my life but He won’t change your situation if you’re not willing to let some things go and give it up to Him.

“He wants the best for me and He wants the best for all of you.”

Contact Challenge!

Do you have a story to tell, a tricky question to ask or want to let us know how Challenge has impacted you?
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lifestyle and entertainment

Cherry pie bars

THESE thick, chewy bars are the midpoint between a blondie and a cherry pie. They can be easily made with fresh or frozen cherries. If using frozen cherries, be sure to thaw the cherries and drain excess liquid to prevent the bars from being gloopy.

Prep: 30 min Cook: 1 hour 15 min
Total: 1 hour 45 min Yields 32 bars

814gm cherries

If using fresh cherries, rinse and pit cherries. If using frozen cherries, thaw them and drain excess liquid. Set aside.

Crust and topping

1 tablespoon butter

Preheat oven to 180°C. Grease a 9x13 inch baking pan and line with parchment paper so that the paper hangs over the sides of the pan.

372g / 3 cup all-purpose flour

288g / 1 ½ cup sugar

¼ teaspoon fine sea salt

In a large bowl, combine flour, sugar, and sea salt with an electric hand mixer on low until well blended.

1 ½ cups butter (3 sticks), cut into cubes

With mixer running on low speed, add butter a few cubes at a time, blending as you go. Increase speed to high once added and blend until the mixture is crumbly and no larger than peas.

Using a measuring cup, reserve 1 ½ cups of the mixture and place in the fridge to use as a crumb topping later.

Take remaining mixture and spread in prepared pan, pressing down with a spatula to form an even, firm crust.

Bake at 180°C until light golden brown, about 12 to 15 minutes. Remove baking sheet from oven and let crust cool before adding fruit topping.

Cherry filling

384g / 2 cups sugar

93g / ¾ cup all-purpose flour

Pinch of fine sea salt

While the crust bakes, in a large bowl, whisk together sugar, flour, and sea salt.

4 large eggs

240g / 1 cup sour cream

Add eggs and sour cream, whisking until smooth.

Reserved cherries

Add reserved cherries and gently fold into mixture.

Once crust has baked and cooled, pour filling on top of crust and spread out.

Reserved crumb topping

Remove reserved crumb topping from fridge and evenly sprinkle over cherry filling. Bake at 180°C until top is golden brown and fruit mixture is bubbling, about 50 to 55 minutes.

Remove from oven and let cool completely before removing from pan and cutting into bars, about 3 hours. Leftover bars will keep in an airtight container in the refrigerator for up to 3 days. ●

Recipe and photo from MakeBetterFood.com



JESSE'S ACT OF FAITH

His name may not be a household one but his face is probably familiar; with 92 acting credits most people are sure to have seen Jesse Hutch gracing their screens. And then there's the 16 credits for stunt roles, four for directing, three for writing, three for producing and even a soundtrack credit.

The 43-year-old Canadian has been busy since his career began in 2001, but he has been selective about the roles he chooses and his strong faith has even cost him some jobs.

He told Christian Headlines he had been given a role as a secondary character in a major Hollywood series when the

filmmakers offered him a major role that would have required a bedroom scene with the female lead. Jesse declined the major role but lost the secondary role, too.

"Because I didn't take that [major] role, the next day, they rescinded [the secondary] role," Jesse shares. "People can get offended sometimes if you stand your ground, and that's okay. I can't live in that. I have to live in the fact that, hey, God put conviction on my heart. I gotta follow that."

Jesse became a Christian as a young child. "I asked the Lord in my heart when I was five years old, in my bedroom," he recalls in a Men's Leadership Network podcast episode. "I had one of those old-school beds with the four posts. And my grandmother got down and prayed with me... I still have the Bible she gave me when I was five."

Despite his young age, Jesse remembers feeling different after praying and giving his life to Jesus.

"It really felt like there was a peace upon me that I never could articulate at five years old, six years old, seven years old."

When Jesse was 11, his parents divorced. It was a painful time, but he recalls feeling "the hand of God" on him.

He had the same feeling when he had a near-death experience when

he was 21. "I drowned when I was 21 years old," he tells CBN Digital. "I should be completely, honestly dead. I shouldn't have lived, and, if I did, I shouldn't be able to speak, I shouldn't be able to hear, I shouldn't be able to talk."

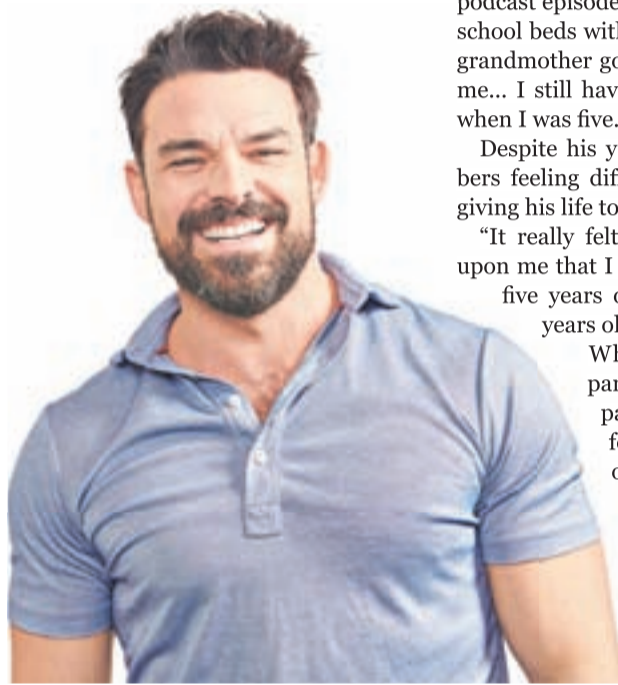
While working as a white-water raft guide, Jesse was trapped underwater for between 11 and 22 minutes. He says someone found him underwater and took him to a hospital, where he was put in a pressure chamber.

"It is an absolute miracle," he attests. "[In] weeks... I was fine. My eardrums didn't completely explode; they should have." He now says God protected him in that situation, and many other experiences he has been through.

As he reflects on his life, he says he can see that God has guided him. And, despite a busy schedule, Jesse and his family choose to follow that guidance.

"There's not a lot of good leaders out there," he says in a See Hear Love podcast episode, "and that's just the fact and so, who am I gonna follow? You have to answer that question, and for me I follow Scripture, I follow the Word of God, I follow Jesus Christ."

Jesse's television credits include *Dark Angel*, *Kyle XY*, *Smallville*, *Arrow*, *Almost Human*, *Supernatural*, *Batwoman* and *Project Blue Book*. More recently Jesse has focused on romantic comedies for Hallmark and Great American Family. ●



Jesse Hutch attends Christmas Con New Jersey 2022 at Expo Center on December 10, 2022 in Edison, New Jersey. (Photo by Emily Assiran/Getty Images for That's 4 Entertainment)



Book review: *These Silent Woods*

These Silent Woods by Kimi Cunningham Grant

BY HARRIET COOMBE

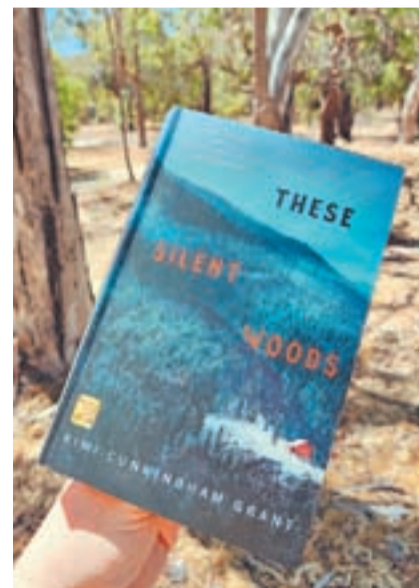
BOOK summary: A father and daughter living in the remote Appalachian Mountains must reckon with the ghosts of their past in Kimi Cunningham Grant's *These Silent Woods*, a mesmerising novel of suspense.

No electricity, no family, no connection to the outside world.

For eight years, Cooper and his young daughter, Finch, have lived in isolation in a remote cabin in the northern Appalachian woods. And that's exactly the way Cooper wants it, because he's got a lot to hide. Finch has been raised on the books filling the cabin's shelves and the beautiful but brutal code of life in the wilderness. But she's starting to push back against the sheltered life Cooper has created for her—and he's still haunted by the painful truth of what it took to get them there.

The only people who know they exist are Scotland, an overly friendly hermit with murky intentions, and Cooper's old friend, Jake, who visits each winter to bring them food and supplies. But this year, Jake doesn't show up, setting off an irreversible chain of events that reveals just how precarious their situation really is. Suddenly, the boundaries of their safe haven have blurred—and when a stranger wanders into their woods, Finch's growing obsession with her could put them all in danger.

When a shocking disappearance threatens to upend the only life Finch has ever known, Cooper is forced to decide whether to keep hiding—or finally face the



sins of his past. Vividly atmospheric and masterfully tense, *These Silent Woods* is a poignant story of survival, sacrifice, and how far a father will go when faced with losing it all.

My thoughts: Five stars. *These Silent Woods* was full of surprises for me. I bought it on a friend's recommendation but it sat on my shelf for a while and when I eventually got to it, I couldn't remember who had recommended it to me or why.

Billed as a thriller with an atmospheric front cover, I liked the idea of a father and

daughter survival novel. As I read though, it didn't really seem like your typical thriller. I'm used to exciting, fast-paced thrillers but this is more of a slow-burn, gently compelling you to keep reading and discover the truth about the secrets Cooper is keeping.

I really enjoyed getting to know all the characters—who were all refreshingly real—and found myself constantly questioning their motives.

These Silent Woods doesn't shy away from deeper issues like grief and military PTSD and at times some of the chapters were hard for me to read.

My favourite things about this book were the surprise twist ending and the overarching themes of sacrifice and grace which are weaved throughout the novel.

Grace can be a complicated concept and hard to define. We often hear about God's grace, which can be defined as His unmerited or undeserved favour.

I like how the author writes in *These Silent Woods*, "The thing about grace is that you don't deserve it. You can't earn it. You can only accept it. Or not."

The ultimate act of grace took place when God gave His Son, Jesus to die for our sins on the cross, giving us eternal life. His sacrifice means when we put our trust in Jesus we will inherit eternal life—something we can neither earn nor deserve. **If you would like to do this, please see the box entitled *How do I become a Christian?* on page 11.** ●

“
The thing about
grace is that you
don't deserve it.”
”

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BUILDING BETTER RELATIONSHIPS

How are you investing your life?

BY ROB FURLONG

JUST this past week I read an article based on data provided by the Australian Bureau of Statistics which revealed that people born between 2019 and 2021 will likely live an average 30 years longer than those who were born between 1891 and 1900.

The figures also showed that Australians are living to an average age of 84.3 years, and we are ranked third best in the world for overall life expectancy.

Centuries ago, Moses declared, "Seventy years are given to us! Some even live to 80... soon they disappear, and we fly away." (Psalm 90:10)

So, taking 80 as an average life span for people, if you're aged 40 now, then you have 14,600 days to live!

It doesn't sound like a lot when it's put that way does it?

The reason I am mentioning this is because it's a strong reminder that life goes by very, very quickly and given this truth, we need to consider thoughtfully and carefully what we

are going to invest into these precious days of our lives.

For me, one is relationships and to be specific, relationships with my immediate family.

This is not a new commitment for me. From the outset of our marriage, Karen and I committed ourselves to living by God's principles, and when we sought to start a family, we were both determined to raise our children in God's ways, be open with them about our faith and our own struggles, always being prepared to talk with them about spiritual things, and to do our best to model to them what it looks like for two people to love each other and work through their stuff.

Around 1997 I read a book called *Anchor Man* which only strengthened my commitment to the aims mentioned above. The author's basic premise was that it is a husband's/ father's responsibility to anchor his family in Christ through the life and faith he lives out and teaches to them. His challenge to men was to take up this responsibility and anchor their family in Christ for the next 100 years.

He also pointed out that those who came from non-Christian families had broken with the chains of their past and had now become the first link in a new chain that was being forged – this time in Jesus.

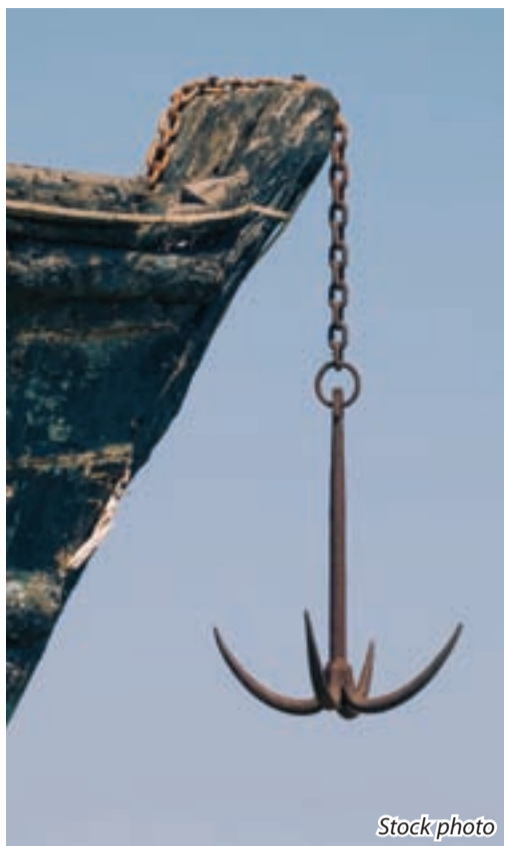
I had been trying to anchor our family in Christ for some years by then, but the new and encouraging thought to me was that I could see that God had broken the chains of my past and I was now forging a new one in our family history! I have not regretted the decision to invest my days with this aim, and truthfully, if I had the time over, I would try to do it better and with more intentionality.

Which brings me to the present.

I have realised in a fresh, new way recently that I am still the anchor man of my family and I have come into a new understanding and appreciation of the responsibility I have to them as husband, father, and grandfather.

In practical, relationship terms, this means praying for them, continuing to love and honour Karen, remaining faithful to God and reflecting Jesus in my character, and laughing, crying, and doing life with them.

Pastor and Author, Rick Warren, said some years ago: "Love leaves a legacy."



Stock photo

I have been at the bedside of many people in their final moments, when they stand on the edge of eternity, and I have never heard someone say, 'Bring me my diplomas! I want to look at them one more time. Show me my awards, my medals.' When life on earth is ending, people don't surround themselves with objects. What we want around us is people – people we love and have relationships with."

What are you going to invest into the days that are left to you?

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. 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 *

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All overseas enquiries are referred onto someone in their own country



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 station - CBN radio app (different channels for all genres of music)	
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 - the Bible Project on YouTube .	
Alpha Film Series on Youtube - an online introduction to Christianity.	
For kids - Superbook Kids Bible, videos and games app	
Comic book Bible online- goodandevilbook.com	
More inspiring faith stories - back issues of Challenge News at challengenews.online	

An unexpected message

BY JOHN HUTCHINSON

WHAT an epic finale to the recent 2024 Australian open tennis championships! Jannik Sinner came from two sets down and 2-4 down to Daniil Medvedev in the third to win in the fifth set 6-3.

The match was watched by multiple millions. It was the first for an Italian to win the Australian open. At just 22 years of age, Jannik defeated the experienced Medvedev – said to be one of the craftiest players of the sport. Medvedev had endured a number of strenuous five-set matches before meeting Sinner. Sinner had only dropped one set throughout the tournament – to multiple Grand Slam winner Novak Djokovic – before defeating his Russian opponent in the final.

During the epic final a camera spotted a man standing in the crowded stadium with a message in bold black letters on his white t-shirt. It said, "I am a Sinner."

He was letting the world know he supported Jannik Sinner. But, his message, "I am a sinner," reminded me of a verse in the Bible which says, "There is no difference, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23). Little is said about sin (wrongdoing against God) these days but you only need to read a newspaper to know what it is doing to us.

It puts people in prison, it starts fights and wars, it steals and kills, is self-driven without regard to others. It's the most destructive influence on earth and it affects us all. And, most seriously, it has severed our relationship with God. We don't have to be taught how to sin. We're sinners by nature.

There's a wonderful message of hope: The apostle Paul said, "This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the worst" (1 Timothy 1:15-17). Jesus was the only person who resisted sin. Of Him the Bible says, "He did no sin" (1 Peter 2:22); "He knew no sin" (2 Corinthians 5:21); and "In Him was no sin" (1 John 3:5).

We then see sin at its worst. It crucified Christ, the Son of God. But in His crucifixion, in a way beyond our comprehension, Jesus conquered sin on our behalf. The Bible says, "Christ died for our sins" (Galatians 1:4, Romans 5:8).

The resurrection of Jesus authenticated all He did in laying down His life for us.

So here's the good news: The Bible says: "For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life through Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 6:23).

Could you get anything better than that? The gift of God is eternal life through Christ Jesus our Lord. To receive God's wonderful gift be prepared to say, "I am a sinner and receive Jesus Christ as my Saviour and Lord," and then you will be able to say, like the apostle Paul, "It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. The life I now live... I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me" (Galatians 2:20).



STANDING TALL

Jonathan Isaac of the Orlando Magic dunks the ball against the Milwaukee Bucks in November 2023 (photo by Rich Storry/Getty Images). INSET: Jonathan Isaac stands as others kneel before the start of a game between the Brooklyn Nets and the Orlando Magic on July 31, 2020 (photo by Ashley Landis - Pool/Getty Images).

Jonathan Isaac began his professional basketball career in 2017 when he was selected sixth overall by the Orlando Magic in the NBA draft but was then plagued by injury which kept him sidelined for three seasons. Despite not playing, the 26-year-old Haitian-American still managed to make headlines when he stood for what he believed in despite pressure around him to conform.

Six months after joining the Magic in 2017 Jonathan was ruled out with a right ankle sprain.

In his second year in the league, he became a starter for the Magic in 64 games, posting career-high averages in points, rebounds, assists, and blocks per game.

In October 2019 he posted 24 points in a 95-104 loss to the Toronto Raptors but in January, he was sidelined after suffering a traumatic knee injury during a 122-101 win over the Washington Wizards.

He played again in August 2020, winning 132-116 over the Sacramento Kings but tore his left anterior cruciate ligament (ACL) during the game.

Despite a successful surgery on it that month, the injury kept him off the court until January 2023.

During his return he recorded 10 points, three rebounds, and two steals in nine minutes in a 113-98 win over the Boston Celtics. During practice the following month, he tore his left adductor muscle and underwent surgery, ending the season for him.

In 2020 Jonathan made headlines when he refused to kneel during the National Anthem or wear a Black Lives Matter t-shirt with the rest of the league following the death

of African-American George Floyd while in police custody.

At a press conference, reporters questioned whether he believed black lives mattered.

"Absolutely," he replied. "I believe that black lives matter. A lot went into my decision and part of it was my thought was that kneeling and wearing a t-shirt doesn't go hand in hand with supporting black lives... Everything that plagues our nation, that plagues us as a society I think the answer is the gospel [the good news that Jesus came to earth to die on the cross for our sins]."

Jonathan later told Liberty University students, "The heartbeat of what I was trying to do was (share) that I believe that we all fall short of God's glory, and if any of us are throwing stones at any person or anything, we are throwing stones in a glass house. If we would love each other the way that God loves us, which is in spite of our sins and shortcomings, there could be real change between white and black people, for all people."

Jonathan has written a book about his decision to stand for what he believes in called *Why I Stand*.

In the book, Jonathan describes being raised in a church-going family in the Bronx. When his parents divorced, Jonathan moved to Florida with his mother.

"Coming from Bronx, New York, a predominantly Black community to Naples, Florida, a predominantly white community, 'different' is exactly what I was," Jonathan

writes. "That was the first time that I started to develop a sense of anxiety and really, self-awareness that I was different from the other kids and I wasn't fitting in. And so that led me towards basketball and starting to refine my skills there. The girls started to talk to me, the guys wanted me to be on their team. And so that drove me to put every single ounce of time and practice that I could into basketball, into becoming better."

The hard work paid off and Jonathan was accepted to play at Florida State University on a full scholarship. But his intense fear of failure followed him, manifesting in anxiety attacks. He was prescribed anxiety medication, which helped him to be able to play.

The anxiety continued when he was selected by the Orlando Magic in 2017.

During his rookie season he was invited to a chapel service.

"The chaplain started the message and he quoted Luke 6:46 that says, 'Why do you call me Lord, Lord, and not do what I say?'" Jonathan remembers. "And the verse hit me like just a ton of bricks. I started to reflect on that verse even in the game, at night-time I'm thinking to myself, that's me."

After a season-ending injury, a stranger told him, "I can tell you how to be great."

"Tell me," Jonathan replied. The stranger said, "You have to know Jesus."

"Have to know Jesus? Man, I'm a Christian, I grew up Christian,"

“**My life got flipped completely upside down.**”

Jonathan said but deep down he knew he was missing a personal relationship with Jesus.

"I was hell bent on experiencing everything that the NBA had to offer," Jonathan tells the Christian Post. "I had that kind of cliché Christianity of 'I go to church from time to time or when times get tough, I pray', but it wasn't something that was real or tangible. From that moment on, my life got flipped completely upside down. I really got a sense of God intervening in my life and leading my footsteps and ordering things in order to get my attention."

"I finally said, 'Wow, God, you love me for me. I don't have to work for it. I don't have to be perfect.' I was so used to walking around with so much anxiety and trying to plan what I would say, plan what I would do, because I didn't want anybody to reject me. So it was the first time in my life that I could take a breath and be like, 'I'm okay. God loves me for me. I don't have to perform. I don't

have to make a shot.'" Those beliefs were tested in the summer of 2020 when Jonathan chose to stand for the freedom found only in Christ.

"Any political structure or ideology, doesn't, in itself, have the necessary tool for salvation," he explains. "Which is what I ultimately believe is what everybody needs. I look out into the world, I can see that racism is not the only thing that plagues the hearts of men. But I know based on what I've experienced, in my life, that the gospel is what changes the hearts of men... I believe that if we can choose to love people the way that God loves us, which is in spite of our faults, in spite of our mistakes, in spite of our sin, and we can choose to forgive people the way that God forgives us and ultimately get back to God in the first place, we can have the real change that everyone is aiming to get to, but is trying to do it by alternative measures."

Jonathan recently launched an athletic apparel brand dedicated to his Christian faith called UNITUS. ●

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