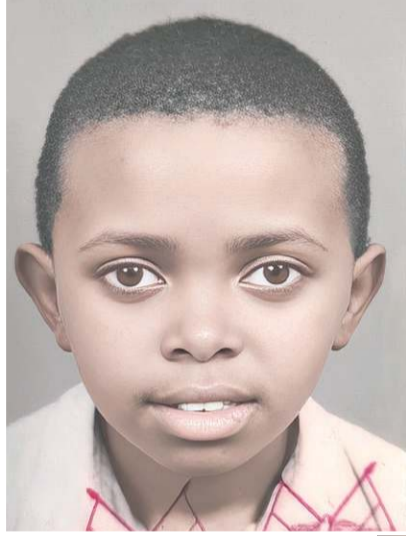


# MY FIRST CHRISTMAS

# GIFT

After Rwanda's brutal genocide, five-year-old Alex Nsengimana found himself in an orphanage, where he received his first ever Christmas gift. That shoebox planted a seed of hope within him that helped him begin to make sense of the trauma he had lived through. Now Alex shares that hope with others.



Alex Nsengimana as a child growing up in Rwanda.

To say Alex Nsengimana has faced trauma in his life would be a massive understatement. One of his earliest memories is of his mother dying of AIDS. Then, during the genocide, family members he lived with were brutally murdered in front of him. Somehow though, he still manages to be thankful for the blessings in his life.

After his mother died, Alex and his siblings went to live with their grandmother and uncles. They lived in poverty, sleeping on banana leaf beds. Their grandmother took them to church, and Alex recalled feeling jealous of the altar boys. At just four, he decided he wanted to be a priest.

When Alex was five, ethnic violence swept through Rwanda. Hutu

militias began targeting the Tutsi minority.

"It was so brutal; this hatred was so ingrained in people's lives that a neighbour never saw a neighbour anymore as a human being and the dehumanisation went on for years and years," Alex told Paul Hastings on the Compelled podcast.

On April 7, 1994, Alex awoke to the sounds of bombs. Soon, men stormed their house.

"We were watching through the window. It was the toughest day. It was rough because these people were not strangers. These were our neighbours. And it wasn't a gun. It was just literally beating our grandmother to death with sticks."

Not long after, Alex's uncle was also killed.

"We were right there, closing our ears," Alex remembered. "They shot him through the ribs... As little kids standing there and watching that, that [destroyed] me, my brother and my sister very deeply and years later we would reap the consequences of that trauma."

The children fled to their aunt's home in Kigali, where 19 other people were sheltering. One day, a militia member discovered them.

"And he is looking at us and he's yelling at us to lie down and he went to load his gun. In the process of loading his gun, the magazine fell out of the gun and his bullets fell to the ground."

Alex's life was spared again when a bullet narrowly missed his head. Eventually, Tutsi rebels captured Kigali and ended the genocide. In just 100 days, up to one million people were murdered, 500,000 women raped, and 95,000 children orphaned.

### Life after the genocide

The violence had ended, but the effects continued. Soon after, Alex's



In 2013 Alex returned to the Rwandan orphanage where he used to live to deliver gifts for Operation Christmas Child.

aunt and her husband died. His sister went to live with family friends, while Alex and his brother were placed in an orphanage.

"After three months on the run, the trauma we had been unable to process was catching up with us. In the middle of the night, there were screams after screams in the orphanage, because the kids were reliving exactly what they saw."

The orphanage encouraged the children to pursue faith. Remember-

ing his grandmother's example, Alex began attending church.

"I memorised scripture and prayers, but I did not have a relationship with the Lord," he admitted.

That Christmas, Alex received a shoebox gift through Samaritan's Purse's Operation Christmas Child.

"That was the very first time I got to receive a gift.



When we got to receive that gift, the orphanage shared with us about Jesus Christ being the greatest gift of all. For me, a seed was planted but I didn't know what kind of seed it was."

### Seeds of faith

After two years, Alex and his brother joined the African Children's Choir, a Christian organisation providing education and care for orphans.

• Turn to page 2

**YOUTH TRUTH** Page 9

**Fun for Kids** Pages 5,6,7

**BACK PAGE**

**JUMPING FOR JOY**

**NICOLA OLYSLAGERS**

# Never the same again

BY FAY FOSTER

IT STARTED AS just another 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 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.

• Turn to page 2



# Ask Y: Peter Meadows answers your questions about God

**QUESTION: FOLLOWING JESUS SEEMS LIKE THE RIGHT THING TO DO, BUT WHAT IF I STILL HAVE TOO MANY 'BUTS'?**



**LET'S FACE IT**, weighing up a step that is this significant – letting God rule and reign in your life – can raise all sorts of fears and barriers. My guess is your hesitance could be down to one of the classic three 'buts'. Or maybe even all of them!

• **It may be – but I'll have to admit I was wrong.** It has been said, "To err is human, to admit it is unlikely!" Indeed, seeming to lose face with those we know well can be stomach churning.

But sometimes owning up to what is true is the only thing we can do and still maintain our integrity. And it's not simply about owning up that you've been driving north for an hour when you should have been heading south. This is a matter of life and death.

What's worse – to look foolish or to pass up the opportunity to become the person God created you to be?

• **It may be – but there's still so much I don't understand.** But how much more will be enough?

In some ways the step of faith you need to take is a lot like marriage. At some point my knowledge about my wife, Rosie, was enough for me to make an initial commitment to marry her. By saying "I will," I gave all I knew of myself – at the time – to all I knew of her – at the time. Looking back, I now see I didn't know much about either of us.

But the journey of discovery had begun and that is all God asks of us. The invitation is not to a heedful of knowledge but a lifelong growing relationship.

• **It may be – but what will others think?** To lay ourselves open to snide remarks about having joined the God Squad or parked our brain is not any sane person's idea of fun.

But isn't it interesting that, in this present 'tolerant' age, it is only following Jesus that evokes such scorn? You can get more respect for claiming you're the reincarnation of Napoleon's horse trainer.

However, scorn and ridicule come with the territory. Throughout history, many have suffered deeply for their belief in Jesus – losing their reputation, livelihood, home, family, friends, and even life itself.

They made their choice based on the belief that there is nothing too great to sacrifice in order to know the forgiveness and new life that Jesus offers. •

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

# MY FIRST CHRISTMAS GIFT

• From page 1

In Uganda, Alex learned English and more about Jesus.

"I started to think, does God love me? Does God really care?... The Bible said we were all created in the image of God, and that God sent His Son Jesus Christ to die on the cross for all of us for all of our sins.

"As a nine-year-old boy in Uganda, I'm thinking, how can a God who loves all of His children in this world, who created all of us, watch a million of his children being killed in Rwanda?"

"He loves me so much. He loves us so much that He sent His Son Jesus Christ to die on cross for me. Why would He watch while my grandmother and my uncle were being killed in front of me? How about the people who killed my grandmother and my uncle, does He love them? Did He send His Son Jesus Christ to die for them on the cross?"

"I was so angry... But the angrier I got, the more I pointed fingers at God, the more I missed out on the miracles that He did to protect me because I had never processed the fact that I'm

alive, that I walked through it for three months and nothing happened to me."

While reading the Bible, Alex came across Jeremiah 29:11: "For I know the plans I have for you, declares the LORD, plans of welfare and not of evil, to give you a future and hope."

He reflected on the miracles in his life – that his mother's HIV virus was not passed to him, that a gun jammed, that he survived bullets and explosions, and that a shoebox gift had planted the Gospel in his heart.

"When I saw that God's presence



Alex spending a moment with his surviving uncle who cared for Alex and his siblings during the opening days of the Rwandan genocide.

was with me from the day I was born, that's when I specifically invited Jesus Christ in my life, to be the Lord of my life."

### Processing the past

On tour with the African Children's Choir in America, Alex's chaperone

Christine encouraged him to share his story.

"The more I did that, the more I realised I was actually processing."

Christine asked him, "What would you do if you saw the person who had caused you the most pain in your life?"

Alex already knew: "I would kill them."

He began to pray instead: "Lord help me to heal so that one day I can actually see them. I can see them face-to-face and tell them what You have done."

Over time, he realised that God even loved those who had hurt him.

"We will never ever forget about

that pain. But that pain doesn't have to define who we are."

### New life, new mission

When Alex was 14, he and his brother were adopted by an American family.

Every Christmas, he packed shoeboxes for Operation Christmas Child – the same kind of gift that had once given him hope. That eventually led to an internship and then a job with the organisation.

In 2013, at age 24, Alex returned to Rwanda to distribute shoeboxes at the same orphanage where he had once lived. With help from the director of the prison system, Alex was able to meet the man who had killed his uncle.

"It was the toughest day of my life. I've never been so nervous in my life." Alex shook the man's hand and prayed with him. "I shared how God had transformed me and that God loved him too."

Alex said he can never forget what happened to his grandmother and uncle, but he now knows that doesn't have to define him.

"The journey of forgiveness is not easy, but it is possible." •

This article is adapted from an interview with Alex by Compelled Podcast. To listen to it and other stories, visit [compelledpodcast.com](http://compelledpodcast.com).



## You are not alone this Christmas

**CHRISTMAS IS OFTEN** pictured as a joyful time, filled with family, friends, and celebrations. Yet for many, it can feel empty or lonely. Even in a crowded room, we can sense something missing – a quiet longing in our hearts that no gift, meal, or festive event can fill. That sense of emptiness is real, and it points to the One who came at Christmas: Jesus.

The reason for this emptiness is the reality of sin. We've all fallen short of God's perfect standard, and that separation from Him brings pain, guilt, and loneliness. As the Bible says, "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23). Left on our own, there is no way to fix it, and that gap creates the ache we often feel inside.

But Christmas brings good news. Jesus came to bridge that gap. He lived a perfect life, died on the cross in our place, and rose again so that anyone who trusts Him can be forgiven and restored. "The gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 6:23).

Jesus offers more than comfort; He offers salvation and a relationship with Him. "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved" (Romans 10:13). This Christmas, you don't have to face loneliness alone.

You can take a step today – speak to Jesus, invite Him into your life, and discover the peace, love, and hope that never leaves.

For more information, see the box entitled **How Do I Become Christian** on page 11. •

## Coffee Break CROSSWORD & SUDOKU

### ACROSS

- 1 Loch Ness site
- 7 Off-ramp
- 8 Changing house
- 10 Inviting store sign
- 11 Restored to health
- 13 Winter sleep
- 16 Beard removers
- 18 Gardener's gear
- 20 No longer a teenager
- 21 Bath stopper
- 22 Good-looking, ... man

### DOWN

- 2 Farm harvest
- 3 Identical individual
- 4 Kabul's country
- 5 Take off, as a plane
- 6 Abrasive tool
- 8 \_\_\_ of pearl
- 9 Action word
- 10 Shrek's bestie
- 14 Adequate for need
- 15 Clothes presser
- 17 Friend in war
- 18 Coop females
- 19 Flower's stalk

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### SOLUTIONS PAGE 11

## Smile files...



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## Never the same again

• From page 1

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! 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).

I suspect that none of the shepherds stayed in the fields that night – hopefully God looked after the sheep on this very special occasion.

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.

Sometimes, 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.

# BACK FROM THE DEAD

BY JANICE TEO

Lying in her hospital bed, her body covered in tubes, and fighting a losing battle for every breath, Cathy Hayes knew she was going to die.

Multiple sclerosis is a cruel disease. It attacks the nervous system, causes muscle weakness, pain, vision loss and, in cases like Cathy's, paralysis and respiratory failure.

Cathy was 23 and had been married for just six months when the symptoms first appeared; 25 when her condition became full blown.

She tried every treatment available, from stem cell therapy to chemotherapy but "everything just went pear-shaped after some years", she told the whyJesus YouTube channel.

"The doctors told Ben, my husband, to get my affairs in order."

She was so close to death she said could actually feel it, describing the sensation as "my body and soul coming apart and separating from each other. I was so scared."

"Ben said he knew it too and he brought my daughter Sophie, who was eight, to say goodbye."

It was while she was in this fevered and weakened state that Cathy reached out to God, who up to then had no role in her life.

"I didn't think I needed God," she admitted. "In fact I wondered what kind of God would put a young family through this ordeal. What kind of God would give a person in the prime of their life this disease?"

But desperate times call for desperate measures – and she prayed.

"Not even knowing who I was speaking to, I said quite firmly, sternly even, 'If You are real, prove it to me. I have a husband and an eight-year-old daughter who need me... don't You take me yet. I need to be here. I promise I will go to church if You help me now.'"

Immediately, she felt a change. "Suddenly I had an overwhelming sense of peace. I knew something had happened."

Through a series of miraculous events beginning the very next day with the arrival of a new doctor who prescribed a different – and far more effective medication – she did indeed walk out of hospital a week later.

God kept up His end of the bargain. Cathy on the other hand, did not. For the next six years she did not set foot in a church and went back to "doing life on my own".

Life "on her own" was a nightmare. Although her discharge from hospital was remarkable, the chemotherapy, steroids and antibiotics she'd taken had turned her



During treatment for MS, Cathy Hayes experienced a turning point in her life.

bones to glass and she had to have six joint replacements in six years – double knee, double hip and double shoulder. "It was an absolutely awful time."

Instead of going to church, she tried what she recognises now to be witchcraft, joining a group of women who "channelled spirits".

She did see changes in her life, none of them welcome.

The spiritual atmosphere in her home became so uncomfortable that she and her husband considered selling it.

"There were icy cold spots in the house," she revealed. "There was one particular room that none of us dared to go into because it felt so negative, so evil. Anxiety was through the roof with all of us. I told my husband, 'This spiritual awareness thing I'm doing...it's wrong.' And he said, 'I've been telling you this for so long.'"

Deciding that enough was enough, she woke up one Sunday morning in 2022 and told her husband she was going to church. "Good luck with that," he told her.

That impulse turned the tide for Cathy and her family.

Ben joined her for service the following week – it was Easter Sunday.

Somewhere between the second and third songs, just as he felt the need to escape the "boring service", he felt an "overwhelming sense of love and peace"

and sensed someone say to him: "You are meant to be here."

Ben had never had any kind of Christian upbringing but knew that God had touched him. Cathy felt it too – "an intense inner peace that I had never felt before but that made perfect sense because getting MS at 23 made me an angry human, resentful and wondering 'why me'."

"But now I say there was a reason it was me. I never would have found God's love otherwise."

"I had made a promise six years ago in hospital, and on that day six years later with Ben, I committed myself to following Christ forever."

On Easter Sunday this year, their daughter Sophie surrendered her life to Christ.

Today Cathy is in complete remission from MS.

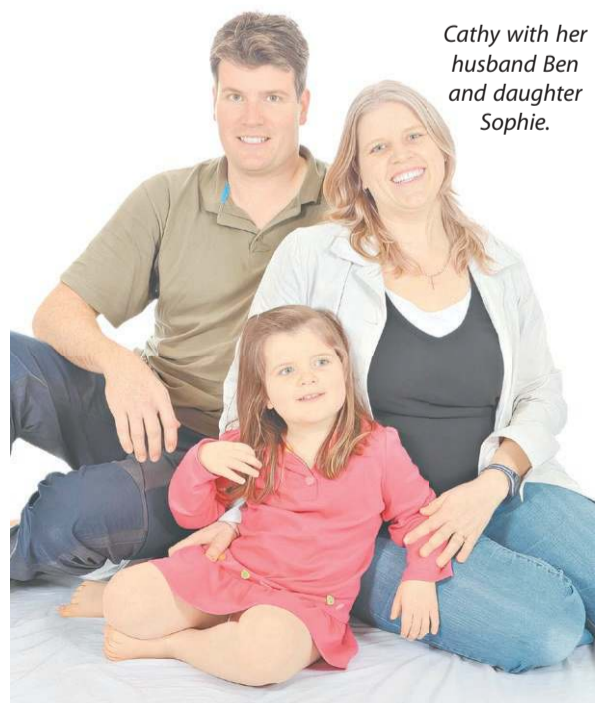
She has gone from being at death's door to being so healthy she and Ben compete in the rough and tough world of gravel rally racing and were in fact the 2023 Australian 2WD rally champions.

"I am a totally different person. My MS is no more and Jesus guides my life."

"I am so grateful God didn't give up on me. It's been a long journey, but I'm stoked to say now I'm a Christian."

"The best thing about being a Christian is having inner joy and peace... I don't need anything now in my life other than Christ."

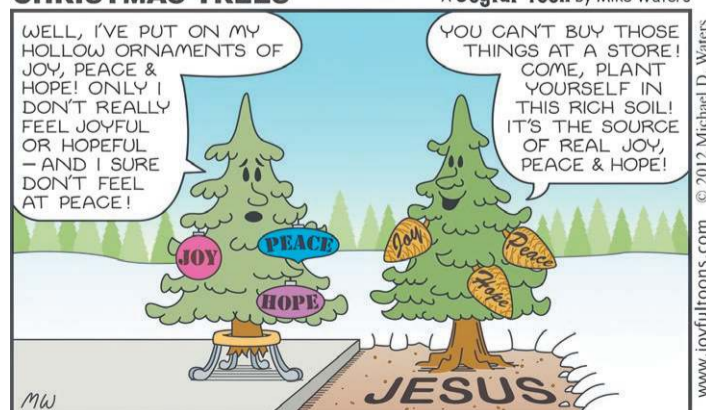
“Suddenly I had an overwhelming sense of peace.”



Cathy with her husband Ben and daughter Sophie.

## CHRISTMAS TREES

A Joyful 'toon by Mike Waters



May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in Him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit. – Romans 15:13



STOCK PHOTO

## The perfect gift

BY SIMEON NEO

LAST CHRISTMAS, I experienced the same struggle I experience every year: what do I get my friends and family for Christmas?

Although I'd consider gift-giving one of my top love languages, buying gifts for friends has become more challenging as I have gotten older. I wanted to gift something that was more personal than a box of chocolates, yet not too expensive that I'd be emptying my bank for it.

That day, I was shopping specifically for my friend, Kate. As I roamed through the shopping centre, I was overwhelmed by the endless options I seemed to have, yet underwhelmed at how little choices I actually had.

I knew her well enough that she liked perfumes (too expensive!) and makeup (which I already got her on her birthday) so those options were out.

So what else was left?

After nearly 10 years of friendship, surely I'd know what to get her by now?

Not knowing what else to do, I decided to mumble a quick prayer under my breath.

"God," I prayed. "You know Kate better than I do. Please help me get her a gift that she'll cherish."

As I did that, I walked into Myer and my eyes landed upon a moka pot – a stovetop metal pot that uses steam pressure to extract coffee.

It was the perfect gift for my caffeine-addicted, former barista friend. And since it was on sale, it was priced below my budget. What a find!

### The gift

As I handed over the nicely wrapped giftbox to Kate, I watched her eyes light up upon seeing the moka pot.

"Wow! You know me so well," she said.

Seeing her reaction, I couldn't help mentally patting myself on my back.

But recently as I reflected on this incident, I am reminded that it wasn't me who made the choice of getting her a moka pot. It was God.

The thing is, Kate, who is not a Christian, doesn't know God (or she doesn't have an active relationship with Him). But that doesn't matter because God *knows* her.

I, who have known her since our uni days, was clueless on what to get her for Christmas. But the God of the universe, the God who created her, knew her enough to know exactly what she wanted.

It reminded me of the famous verse in the Bible from Psalm 139:13, "For You created my inmost being; You knit me together in my mother's womb."

God created my friend Kate while she was still in her mother's womb. That's how intimately He knows her. It's little wonder that He could so easily pick out the one gift that would bring a smile to her face.

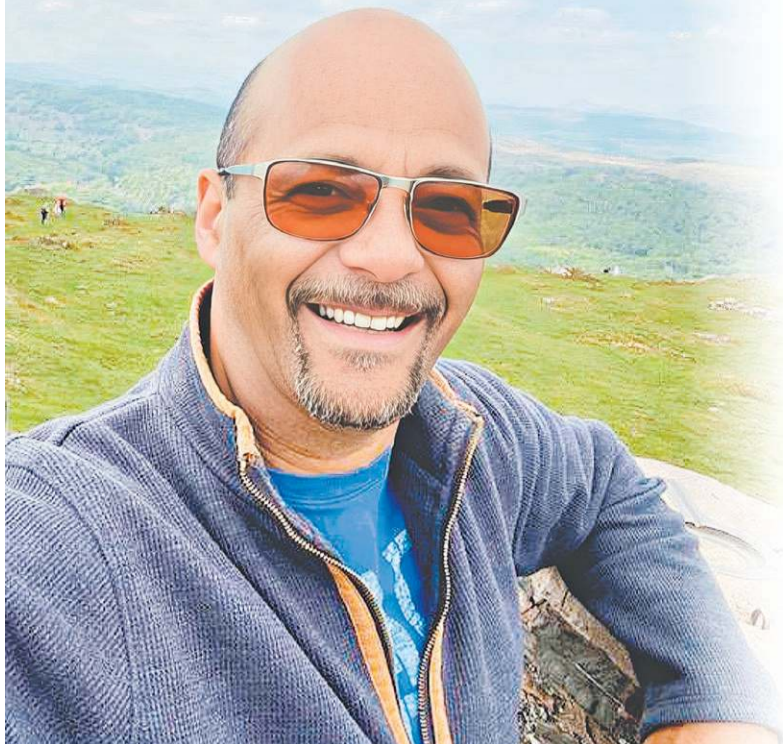
The good news is whether or not you know Him, God knows you. He's the One who carefully knit you together while you were in your mother's womb!

He's the God who numbers every strand of hair on your head (Luke 12:7). And He is the God who desires to have a relationship with you.

This is why He gave us His greatest gift – His Son Jesus Christ – to live as a man on Earth and die on the cross for our sins [wrongdoing against God] so that we can have a relationship with Him when we surrender our lives to Jesus.

For more information, see the box entitled **How Do I Become a Christian** on page 11.

# GUN-TOTING GANG MEMBER TRANSFORMED



Ex-inmate Paul Ogunyemi is now a prison chaplain.

BY JAMES HASTINGS

It was when Paul Ogunyemi decided to murder a rival gang member that he first encountered Jesus.

Walking through central Manchester seething with rage, Paul vowed revenge on the man who had assaulted his girlfriend.

Suddenly, someone appeared in front of him holding a leaflet in his hand. Paul grabbed it from the stranger.

“What’s this?” he asked. “It’s about Jesus,” replied the man. “Yeah, Jesus was a good guy and look what happened to Him.”

“He gave His life for you. Do you know Him?”

“I know good or weak people get trod on. That’s the law of the jungle. Only the strong survive, not the nice.”

“Jesus died so you could be saved.” Simmering with rage and hatred, Paul threw the leaflet to the ground. As he stormed off, the stranger

shouted: “Jesus loves you and died for you.”

Remembering that encounter, Paul, now in his 60s and a chaplain at a prison in the East Midlands, recalls how those words stuck in his mind as he marched furiously away.

“I wondered how anyone could love me,” he explained. “I had just decided to murder a man. How could a nice guy like Jesus love me?”

Despite being only 23, Paul was no stranger to violence and crime. He was only 11 when first arrested for shoplifting. He turned to pick-pocketing instead, and by 16 was a member of a Manchester gang or ‘crew’ that mugged people. Soon he moved on to robbing security vans, earning in one day what most people earn in six months.

He recalled: “I spent the money in nightclubs, cars and clothes. I had a wardrobe full of designer clothes, some tailor-made.”

The law eventually caught up with Paul and he was sentenced to three years for robbery – 14 months of which saw him locked up at the notorious Strangeways prison.

“On my release day, my crew were waiting outside the prison to greet me. We went straight back to where we left off,” he recalled.

After being imprisoned for another offence, his use of violence moved up a level. Paul’s weapon of choice was a sawed-off shotgun. One night he sprayed a pub with gunfire because a rival gang frequented it. He survived being shot at twice. Other members of his crew died.

At the height of this violence, Paul’s girlfriend was attacked. He swore to murder the man who did it, even if it meant a lifetime in prison.

That was when he met the stranger who told him: “Jesus loves you.”

As he walked away, the 23-year-old’s mind was swimming.

“I thought if I died that night, if I got murdered, what would Jesus think of me? What redeeming features would He see? Why would He give His life for me?”

“I heard the devil tell me that Jesus didn’t love people like me. I was evil. I couldn’t change. I was kidding myself. I was a hopeless case.”

But something inside Paul resisted those lies: “No,” I told the devil, ‘I need to look into this.’”

Paul arrived back at his brother’s home, where he was staying, burning with a desire for something more than the crime and violence which had been his daily life for 12 years. He flew into a rage, punching the walls.

The police arrived, thinking he was high on drugs or insane, and he was nearly detained before being released.

On the taxi ride home, Paul spotted a bright light in the dark November gloom. It was coming from a church. Telling the driver to stop, he walked into the church where a youth group welcomed him. Noticing his distressed appearance, they asked if they could pray for him.

Falling to his knees, 23-year-old Paul prayed for perhaps the first time in his life: “Jesus, You need to help me or I will kill or be killed. I believe You love me. I believe You died so I can be saved. I need to be saved.”

Recalling that evening, Paul explained: “I felt God’s love and forgiveness pour out on me. I’d never experienced anything like it in my life. It was real. It was the love that stranger told me about and I knew then Jesus loved me.”

That same week, he bought a Bible and later met a friend who invited Paul to church. More recently, he started training as a prison chaplain and is now part of a chaplaincy team at an East Midlands prison.

Every day Paul meets young men just like he was four decades ago: “Most come from broken homes. They fall in with a crew and find friends, even a family, like they never knew before. They enter a lifestyle that promises them money and position, but for most it’s a life spent behind bars. They become used to violence. Prison does not change people if they don’t want to change. I believe justice needs to be seen to be done but I also believe prisoners can’t just be locked away with no future prospects. They need to be taught a trade and given a purpose or they will most likely return to their criminal activities on release. Many young men want to talk about God. They have heard about Jesus but most have grown up without any kind of prayer or church life.

“They are amazed when they hear my story. I tell them how my life was changed. It boils down to one thing – Jesus loves you.”

“I had just decided to murder a man.”

## From doctor to disciple

Driven by performance and numbed by addiction, a doctor encountered the real Jesus in his lowest moment. That encounter reshaped his life, and today, he’s leading a movement to reach youth across Australia.

BY PAUL BEDWELL

If you had told me a few years ago that I’d be leading Youth for Christ Australia, I probably would have laughed – or cried. Back then, I was working as a doctor, outwardly successful but inwardly spiralling.

I grew up in a Christian home and had a sense of God from an early age. But by the time I entered medical school, I had become deeply anxious, driven, and obsessed with achievement. I believed I had to prove my worth – through grades, performance, and eventually, through my career in medicine.

When the anxiety became overwhelming, I turned to coping strategies that only deepened the problem.

Alcohol and prescription drugs

dulled the pain, but they couldn’t heal the deeper wound. I was living a double life. High-performing on the outside, but numbing myself to survive.

In the middle of that mess, Jesus found me. Not the Jesus I’d known in theory growing up, but the real, living Christ who met me in my brokenness.

He didn’t shame me. He embraced me. He opened my eyes to the truth that I didn’t have to earn love – I already had it in Him.

That encounter changed everything. I walked away from medicine, not because it wasn’t valuable, but because I knew God was calling me to something else: to share the hope I’d found with the next generation.

Today, as I step into the role of national director for Youth for Christ Australia, that calling burns brighter than ever.

I’m also a husband and dad to three young children, and I carry this mission not just as a ministry leader but more personally as a father who longs to see my own children live for Jesus. I want them to grow up witnessing real-life examples of Christians who are willing to lay everything down and pay any price to take the Gospel to the world.

We are on a mission to reach young people across this nation with the love and freedom only Jesus offers.

It’s not easy ground, but it’s crucial. I know what it’s like to be young, lost, searching for meaning and in desperate need of Jesus.

Thank you for standing with us in this mission. Your partnership means that sto-

“I didn’t have to earn love.”



Paul Bedwell

ries like mine aren’t rare. They’re multiplying.

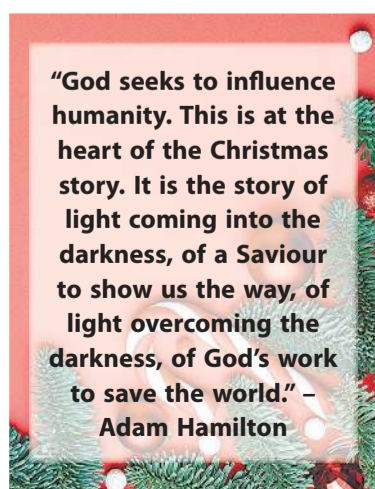
Together, we’re seeing Jesus rewrite lives – one young person at a time.

Youth for Christ is a Christian inter-denominational, non-profit, evangelical youth movement operating in over 110 countries. At its core, YFC is a movement of people unified by a common heart for Jesus and for young people.

This article was first published by dailydeclaration.org.au and is used with kind permission.



Paul Bedwell with his family.



### Creating God in our image

IT HAS BEEN said that in the beginning God created us in His image and we’ve been returning the favour ever since. We keep assuming that the values we have grown up with and accepted for ourselves are obviously God’s values and that God is on our team.

This is especially true when we think about the person of Jesus.

Over the past several years, Jesus has been portrayed as the left-wing radical, the feminist, the right-wing conservative and the prosperous materialist. The question, though, is – what is Jesus really like? It is too easy to create Jesus in our image, to put our words in His mouth, to put our attitudes on His heart, to instil our values in His mind. We just make Jesus the personification of current political correctness.

Can I encourage you to discover the real Jesus? Find time to read the Bible.

Don’t take other people’s word for it; find out for yourself. Read through the Bible accounts of Jesus in a modern translation. In the process, allow Jesus to challenge and change you, rather than putting your values onto Him.

# Organ changed Harvard doctor's mind



Illustration by Carolyn Dyk – Wycliffe Bible Translators.

## Noah's ark: Fact or fiction?

### Part 2: How could Noah collect all the animals?

BY TAS WALKER, CMI

**Many doubt the biblical story of Noah's Flood. To many the story seems a gross exaggeration or a work of fiction. And if Noah's Flood is not believable, why trust any historical account in the Bible? People have posed many objections to a factual interpretation of this event and this article answers many of the key questions people have about the Flood and the Ark.**

**NOAH DIDN'T HAVE** to travel to far-away places and collect all the animals to bring them on board. The Bible tells us that God sent the animals to Noah without being rounded up:

*"Of birds after their kind, of animals after their kind, and of every creeping thing of the earth after its kind, two of every kind will come to you to keep them alive." (Genesis 6:20)*

This would have been a supernatural gathering, but we see amazing animal behaviours in the world today (worldwide migrations [monarch butterflies, albatross, salmon, whales, etc.] and other activities such as hibernation and awareness of earthquakes).

Plus the arrangement of the continents and the climate was different before the Flood.

Noah likely lived in a region that was able to support all the biblical kinds without them needing to travel very far. More variation within the kinds would have developed in the animal kinds after the flood, due to greater variation in environments and ecological niches. Also, the best conditions for rapid variation and speciation occur with small, geographically-isolated populations—just like those dispersing from the mountains of Ararat!

#### Were dinosaurs on board?

Yes. Dinosaurs were just another air-breathing, land-dwelling animal that God made along with the others. This is clear from the fact that dinosaur fossils were clearly buried in the flood, showing that dinosaurs were alive with Noah.

Thus they would logically have been included in the land animals taken as passengers. But how

would they fit? Some dinosaurs were smaller than chickens (with no relation to birds; God created dinosaurs a day after He created birds). The average adult size of all kinds of dinosaurs was about the size of a buffalo. Dinosaurs hatch out of eggs, and the largest egg is only about the size of a football. Indeed, they could not be much larger, otherwise the shell thickness needed to support the weight would block oxygen flow to the embryo.

Also, analysing growth rings on dinosaur bones show that they went through a juvenile growth spurt. It would make sense for God to choose pre-growth-spurt dinos.

So, even the biggest dinosaurs, like apatosaurus and brachiosaurus, would easily fit on the ark when young. Elephants and rhinos could have been handled the same way. Flying reptiles, such as the pterodactyl, were on the Ark too, but not marine reptiles such as the plesiosaur. Like other creatures, the number of dinosaur kinds would have been much less than the number of genera assigned to them. Also, paleontologists have recently recognized that baby and subadult specimens have been given different names to the adult specimens of the same type of dinosaur.

#### Weren't dinosaurs extinct long before the flood?

No. The belief that dinosaurs died out long before man is an evolutionary idea. In Genesis we see that God made all the land-dwelling creatures on Day Six of creation week about 6,000 years ago. That included dinosaurs, since they were land animals. He made Adam and Eve on the same day. There is strong scientific evidence that the dinosaurs were not millions of years old. Scientists have found soft tissue, proteins, and DNA in dino bones, but this should have all disintegrated in a fraction of the time.

In Job chapter 40 (after the flood), the description of behemoth with a tail like a cedar, the biggest tree of the Middle East, only matches an animal like a sauropod dinosaur. So behemoth's ancestors must have been on board the ark, therefore dinosaurs were alive after the Flood.

In 1982, Dr Ming Wang arrived in the US alone with \$50 to his name and a Chinese-English dictionary.

Today, Ming is a Harvard graduate and one of the top eye surgeons in the US.

"Even though I was nearly penniless, I was happy because I was free," he told Lila Rose on YouTube.

Ming was six years old when the 1966 Cultural Revolution swept through China. Educational institutions were closed and youths were sent to labour camps for life.

Though his parents encouraged him to continue his studies, they had to stop when he was 14 to avoid the government sending him away.

"I studied really hard and I was a straight-A student and I was looking forward to attending high school," he told Sean McDowell on YouTube.

"[But] if I went on to high school, I would be deported like the 20 million others into a lifetime of poverty and hard labour.

"[My parents] had to stop me from furthering my education, therefore shutting down my dream of becoming a doctor."

Then in 1976, the Cultural Revolution ended.

"My parents came home and said, 'You can go back to school again.'

"I thought I'd never be able to hear those words in my lifetime."

Ming eventually went to the US to continue his studies. After getting his PhD in laser physics, he decided to apply for medical school at Harvard.

"I wasn't interested in anything else except science because for the first time in my life, I finally had the opportunity to study science. I was not going to be distracted by anything else."

When Ming met a blind patient in one of his classes, he decided to be an eye surgeon.

"I realised that for someone who never had the opportunity to see, they had to substitute their sense of vision with something much less ideal like textile and temperature.

"I thought it would be so inspirational to devote my life to bring people out of the darkness. I think every human being deserves to see."

While studying the human eye, Ming was intrigued by the complexity of the tiny organ.

"It's interesting that in our human brain, half of the brain neurons are involved in vision."

His upbringing in communist China meant that there was only room for atheism and no other religion. Yet, Ming's atheist worldview was starting to crack.

"How can these trillions of cells combine themselves to form a functional eye in a short span of nine months during a pregnancy?"

"There are so many things that could go

wrong. Most of us should be born blind, but most of us are born with eyesight."

One day, after listening to his questions, his professor took him out for lunch.

He pointed to a car across the road and asked, "What's the difference between a car and a human eye?"

"I said, 'A human eye's a lot more complicated.'

"He said, 'Can you imagine random pieces of metal on the street assembling itself into a car?'"

"I said, 'No way.' Then he leaned over and said, 'How about the human eye?'"

"So right there he opened a window in my life."

For the first time, Ming realised that the human eye was created with a purpose.

"That purpose is for eyesight so there's a designer behind it and there's a creator."

His professor handed him a Bible where Ming read about the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

"He told me that in the universe not only is there a God, but also a unique and true God," he told Zong Qing Chen on his website.

Ming began looking into Jesus' resurrection [the event where Jesus came back to life three days after He was crucified], which was foundational to the Christian faith.

"To me [the resurrection] was unquestionably true because it was proven by different people at different times through different means.

"From a scientific standpoint, the fact that it has been proven by different people who are not related at different times and different ways... it's a very scientific way of seeing if something is true or not."

Gradually, he surrendered his life to Jesus.

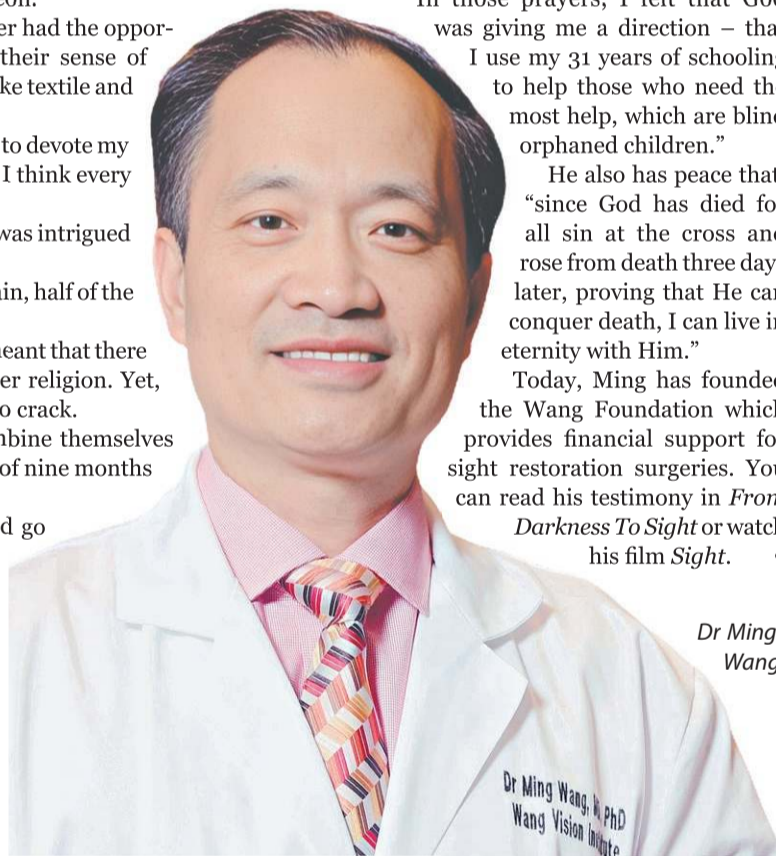
Since then, Ming has found a greater purpose in his work.

"In those prayers, I felt that God was giving me a direction – that I use my 31 years of schooling to help those who need the most help, which are blind orphaned children."

He also has peace that, "since God has died for all sin at the cross and rose from death three days later, proving that He can conquer death, I can live in eternity with Him."

Today, Ming has founded the Wang Foundation which provides financial support for sight restoration surgeries. You can read his testimony in *From Darkness To Sight* or watch his film *Sight*.

Dr Ming Wang



### God of the gaps

**THERE ARE MANY** people, both atheists and some Christians, who think that we believe in the "God of the gaps". In other words, we use God to explain what science can't tell us about the world or the universe. People can think that belief in God is just a way to cover ignorance.

However, Christian faith does not decrease as scientific knowledge increases. Science helps us understand the world that we live in, but it does not give an explanation of all of human existence, nor the origin of life itself. As Professor John Lennox of Oxford University says, you don't have to pit science against belief.

Science tells us about the world we live in, but it does not give us an explanation for life itself. However, the Bible and the Christian faith can.

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Part 3 will continue in the next edition of *Challenge News*.

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# MORE THAN ACHIEVEMENTS

BY SIMEON NEO

**W**hen Fei Kho moved back to Perth as a nine-year-old, she spoke with a thick Chinese accent that made her feel like an odd one out.

"It just felt like I never belonged," she told *Challenge News*. "I was picked on for being different and for speaking a different way."

"I felt very hurt by people. Perth didn't feel like home anymore."

As a child, Fei's family moved around a lot so making friends was difficult.

"I grew up in an environment where I didn't really know where I belonged."

In high school, she shifted her attention towards pursuing academic achievements.

"All the ones who did well and were smart, they were the ones who had friends. And I really wanted friendship," she shared.

"I learned as a child that when you do well, people notice you. And I realised that when I did well, I got praised."

"So that was my focus in high school."

At university, Fei was introduced to a Christian group for international students. While she was neither an international student nor a Christian, she found community there.

"I was the odd one out as the only Aussie there. But during that time, I experienced a lot of love and they helped me feel like I belonged."

Growing up in an agnostic household, her parents didn't subscribe to a particular faith.

"My sisters and I grew up in an environment where God wasn't in our lives. And even if God was, He could be anything," she explained.

Having met many Christians, she often wondered about the existence

of God. "These Christians seemed to have a community and they seemed to belong, which I didn't. I didn't have a lot of close friends."

Her cousin, who is a Christian, encouraged her to talk to God. So she would pray every night before going to bed.

"I wouldn't necessarily think about who God is, I just asked Him for things," she admitted.

However, the more she learned about God, the greater her curiosity.

"Up until that point, God was always this distant being and it felt like I could never reach Him."

"But I learned that God is love. He is kind, gracious and just. He is all these things that I never knew before."

Then she learned about Jesus, who came into the world as God in human form.

Fei Kho



"God knew that we couldn't reach Him so He came down to reach us. "That really touched my heart."

For the next year, she continued attending their weekly meetings and learning more about Jesus.

"I liked how the Christian story acknowledged that even though by our own efforts we cannot reach God, God Himself came to connect with us and gave us the opportunity to know Him personally."

However, Fei's journey came to a pivotal moment when she realised that there is only one way to reach God – by believing in Jesus.

"The only way we can be with Jesus forever is by believing that Jesus came to die for our sins."

"That was the point where I didn't like the story because I realised that my family was not saved."

"[My mother is] one of the best people in my life who has loved me regardless and has been there for me. [But] she's not going to be with God forever, she's not going to be in this place where there's no more tears and no more depression. All because she doesn't believe in Jesus."

"I felt like that's so unfair."

Fei wrestled with God over this issue. She couldn't understand how someone as patient and kind as her mother could not go to heaven based on her own efforts.

"It wasn't until one time, my mum really hurt me. It made me realise that my mum also falls short of the glory of God. She's also imperfect."

"She's also in need of forgiveness and grace."

"I needed that whole journey to fully

appreciate the Gospel and the price that Jesus paid for me [by dying on the cross].

"Even though we might think that there's good in a lot of people, it's far from the goodness of God. And that's why we need Jesus."

"Gradually, I was more and more sure that this God is real."

After a year of attending Bible studies and getting to know Jesus, Fei surrendered her life to Him.

"The more I lived in the reality [that Jesus died for my sins], the more I saw how I was transformed in so many ways."

Since then, she has been able to forgive the people who hurt her and find freedom from her need to achieve and prove herself worthy. More than that, she found a new identity in Jesus.

"I learned more about how wonderful it is that God made me in His image, how He knew me before I was even formed in my mother's womb [Psalms 139:13].

"Gradually, achievements didn't matter so much anymore because there was no longer a need to prove myself worthy. My worth has been predetermined by my Creator."

"Nothing can change that."

# Letting go of what won't last

BY LAURA CRAWFORD

I was fortunate to get to know God from a young age because my parents are Christian and so I always went to a Christian school and went to church every week. I've had many moments that have shaped my faith, but a particular turning point was last December when I heard a sermon that asked the question: "How do you know if you're really a Christian?"

The minister said, "you will have a balance between being devastated by your sin and disobeying God, while also being so joyful because we're so forgiven and so loved." After the sermon, I remember debriefing with my dad. I was so disturbed because, while I'd always been grateful that I'm forgiven and I know that my sin is wrong, it never devastated me – and I wanted it to. I hated that I was too arrogant to really feel and understand how deserving of God's anger I am. I asked Dad how to change this, and he said to ask God to help me realise my sin because only He can change our hearts.

Over the summer, I intentionally tried to seek God and it was amazing to see how he answered my prayers so powerfully. I found through reading Christian books, especially *Counterfeit Gods* by Tim Keller, God opened my eyes to how sinful I am in every aspect of life. I realised that even though

I had been in a relationship with God, I valued so many things on Earth way too much. I didn't depend on God like I should.

“My life had been built around people liking me.”

My life had been built around people liking me, succeeding in sport, school or work, being comfortable and ultimately feeling good. I began to realise that I'd been unsatisfied for a lot of my teenage years because I was craving all these things more than God. I saw that when I got these things, I needed more of them, and when I didn't get them, I felt worthless.

After I read the Keller book, I went on beach mission [to run Christian outreach programmes at a holiday caravan park], and God continued to show me that I put too many things before him.

The theme of the week was "What is your treasure?"

I spent the week reflecting on what I value the most in life. It became evident that knowing God and sharing his love with the people around me is the only thing I want to do, even though I fail at it every day and choose approval or success or comfort before Him. No matter what I try to pursue, it doesn't last and it doesn't satisfy me. When I get approval from people, it makes me want it more. When I go on holidays, it makes me want to keep travelling. When I play well in netball, I focus on playing better in the next game. I realised nothing good satisfies me when I love it more than I love God.

After hearing the same message persistently over the summer that I needed to put God before everything else, I was able to see just how much grace God shows to me every day, even when I consistently put things above Him.

Now I am in constant awe that we have a God who forgives us over and over again. It's my prayer that God will continue to teach me and grow me more in these things every day.

This article first appeared in Southern Cross magazine and is used with kind permission.



Laura Crawford

## Anxious world, peaceful heart

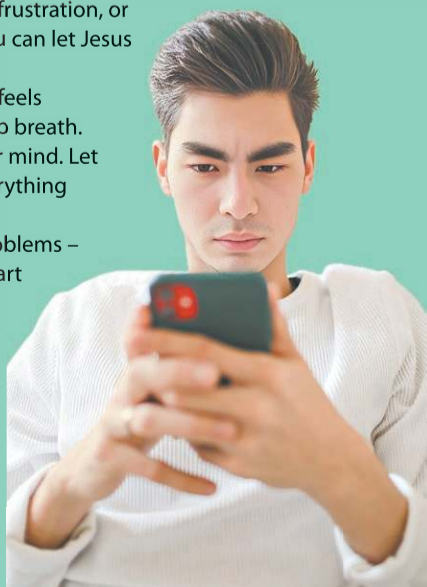
**HAVE YOU EVER** scrolled through your feed or turned on the TV and felt like the world is falling apart? Accidents, crimes, fights, disasters... it can feel like there's no end to the bad news. Before you know it, it starts to weigh on you, and anxiety creeps in.

The Bible has something powerful to say about this. Colossians 3:15 says, "And let the peace of Christ, to which you were also called in one body, rule your hearts. And be thankful." That word "let" is key – it's like God saying, "You get to choose." You can let worry, frustration, or bitterness run your heart... or you can let Jesus take control.

Here's the challenge: when life feels overwhelming, pause. Take a deep breath. Invite Jesus into the chaos of your mind. Let Him hold you together when everything around you feels out of control.

Peace isn't about having no problems – it's about having Jesus in your heart while they're happening. When you let Him in, calm replaces panic, hope replaces fear, and gratitude replaces stress.

So today, no matter what's happening online, at school, or at home, choose to let Christ's peace rule in your heart. It's not always easy, but it's always worth it.



**Contact Challenge!**  
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# THE STAR: THE FIRST CHRISTMAS SEEN THROUGH ANIMALS' EYES

BY RUSTY WRIGHT

## CHRISTMAS MOVIES ARE

common this time of year, and you've probably seen many. But have you ever seen one about the first Christmas as experienced by ... animals?

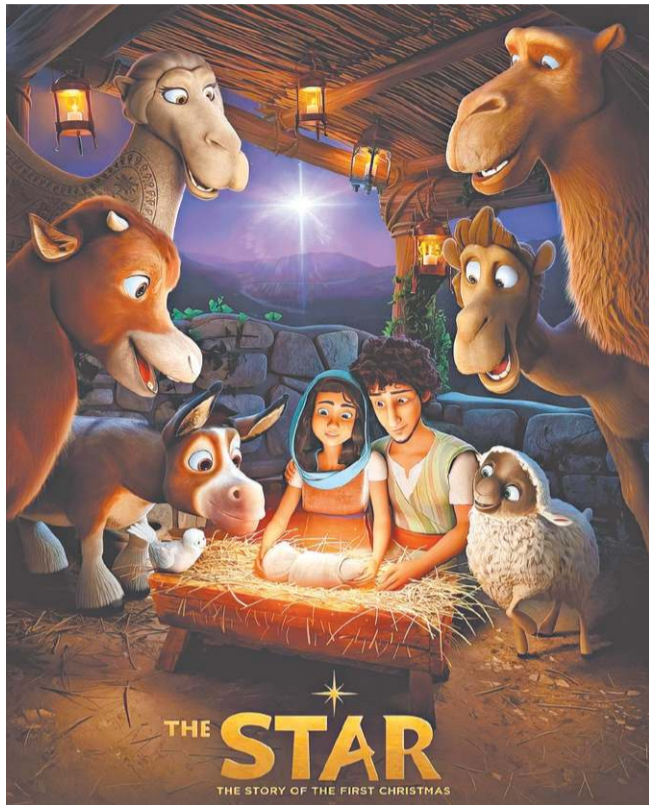
*The Star* (2017) is a fun and funny animated film-with-a-message and follows Bo, a rambunctious young donkey, on his quest for freedom from the daily grind at a mill. He escapes his bondage and teams up with Ruth the sheep and Dave the dove as they follow an unusual star in the sky. Along the way, their band grows to include three wisecracking camels, a goat, a cow, a mouse, and a slew of other creatures.

The star leads them to a manger in Bethlehem, where they sense something significant and wonderful is about to happen involving a pregnant woman named Mary and her husband Joseph.

### Celebrity voices

The list of celebrities voicing the animals and humans is what first grabbed my attention about this one. Oprah Winfrey, Tyler Perry, and Tracy Morgan voice camels. Kris Kristofferson voices a donkey, Kristin Chenoweth a mouse, Patricia Heaton a cow, and Oscar winner Christopher Plummer does King Herod.

Gina Rodriguez (*Jane the Virgin*) is Mary; Zachary Levi (*Chuck*) is Joseph; Aidy Bryant (*Saturday Night Live*) is Ruth the sheep. Grammy winner Kelly Clarkson voices a horse; comedian Gabriel Iglesias is a dog; radio personality Delilah



The Star film poster.

plays Mary's relative Elizabeth.

Claims of fun and inspiration echo from cast members. For instance, Emmy winner Patricia Heaton says this "animals'-eye view" is "funny, engaging and inspiring ... the perfect family movie!" She's right.

Executive producers of this Sony film include DeVon Franklin (*Miracles from Heaven*), Lisa Henson and Brian Henson (The Jim Henson Company). Academy Award nominee Timothy Reckart (*Head Over Heels*) directed.

### Spoiler alert

God causes Mary to conceive, telling her she will give birth to the Messiah. She explains this to Joseph, who is predictably perplexed, but remains with her. A

government census takes them to Bethlehem, where there is no room at the inn. The couple retires to a stable. When the child is born, they lay him in a manger. But you knew all that.

The beauty of this film is capturing the emotion of very human moments – plus equine, canine, bovine, and a host of other creaturely moments – to help us sense what the actual players might have been feeling and thinking and how their stories might apply to our lives.

### Family strife

For instance, lots of families experience strife: marital conflict, sibling spats, financial pressure and more. Joseph and Mary had their share of family challenges.

How would you feel if your

fiancé/fiancée exhibited apparent evidence of sexual activity with someone else during your engagement? Suppose your intended said that God had sanctioned the whole thing? Would your trust and self-esteem take a nosedive? Would you cancel the wedding?

Joseph, described as "a righteous man,"... did not want to disgrace [Mary] publicly, so he decided to break the engagement quietly." But an angel appeared to him in a dream, explaining that the child in her was conceived by God, and told him to "name him Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins."

### Humour and grace

*The Star* uses humour and grace to tenderly portray how Joseph might have reacted when he realised Mary was pregnant, and how the two resolved to become partners for life anyway.

Joseph's continuing commitment to Mary and Jesus played a significant part in the boy's birth and early childhood. With divine help, the family overcame major obstacles. And – as the film illustrates – so can your family.

Deborah the Camel (aka Oprah) gets my vote for best denouement line. As creatures gaze on the infant, she muses, "You know, I think people are gonna remember this night. What happened here around this manger will be celebrated for thousands of years." Though her dromedary pals scoff, I have a hunch she's right.

Rated PG (USA) "for some thematic elements."

Rusty Wright is an author and lecturer who has spoken on six continents. He holds Bachelor of Science (psychology) and Master of Theology degrees from Duke and Oxford universities, respectively. [www.RustyWright.com](http://www.RustyWright.com)

## When love came down at Christmas

BY CAROL ROUND

ONE OF THE things I love about this time of the year is the music, including the hymns and the contemporary versions of those songs. It's interesting to read the stories of the songwriters and what inspired the lyrics they wrote.

*Love Came Down at Christmas* is one of my favourite hymns. Written by Christina Georgina Rossetti in 1885, the lyrics capture the essence of Christmas in one word – love.

One of the most well-known scriptures is John 3:16: "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."

### The essence of Christmas

In his book titled *Christmas Gifts That Won't Break*, author James W. Moore, writes, "Well, of course, the essence of Christmas is love. God's incredible love for us, expressed when He sent His only Son into the world to save us. Love came down at Christmas – that's how the hymn writer puts it. That's the answer to our question. Whenever and wherever we receive God's sacrificial love, whenever and wherever God's love is accepted and shared, Christmas comes once again."

He explains it this way: "When we, like the shepherds, fall down in awe, wonder and commitment before the manger of God's love, there is Christmas! When, like the three wise men, give our best to the Master, there is Christmas! When we, like Mary and Joseph, trust and obey God and try our best to do God's will, there is Christmas."

In other words, we can celebrate Christmas every day of the year. It's not just a time to put up a tree and decorate. Buying and giving gifts isn't the meaning of Christmas – even though we like surprising our loved ones.

### Christmas happens when we love others

In Matthew 25:31-45, Jesus' parable about the sheep and the goats, reinforces a lesson He taught about love.

"Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave Me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave Me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited Me in, I needed clothes and you clothed Me, I was sick and you looked after Me, I was in prison and you came to visit Me...'"

During this time of year, we're usually in a giving mood. Caught up in the Christmas spirit, we're more generous. Donations to food pantries, coat and toy drives, and financial help to charities, increase as people are filled with Christmas joy. 1 John 3:18 reminds us that "our love should not be just words and talk; it must be true love, which shows itself in action." Love is a verb. Love is the basis of the Gospel of Jesus Christ [the good news of how Jesus' death and resurrection reconciles sinners to God]. He's our role model for loving others. Once we accept Him as our Saviour, His love dwells in our heart. It's unconditional love and we didn't do anything to deserve it. So, how can we love like Jesus?

### Loving others like Jesus

First, we can show kindness to everyone we meet. Whether it's our family, our neighbours, a co-worker, or a stranger, we can choose to be kind (see Ephesians 4:32). Second, we can pray for others and not just when they're facing trials. When we have nothing else to offer, we can pray for them, trusting God will answer (see Ephesians 6:18).

Third, before we can love another, we must love ourselves. This means we must receive God's love, which is freely given (see Matthew 22:29). Fourth, show patience. Each day, we encounter people who are different from us and we have no clue what battles they are facing (see Ephesians 4:2).

Finally, one of the most difficult choices we face is loving our enemies (see Matthew 5:44). When we choose love each day, then we can share the greatest gift of all, not just at Christmas but always.

I always love hearing from my readers. Please feel free to e-mail me at [carol@carolaround.com](mailto:carol@carolaround.com) with your thoughts or visit my blog for more inspiration at [www.carolaround.com](http://www.carolaround.com).



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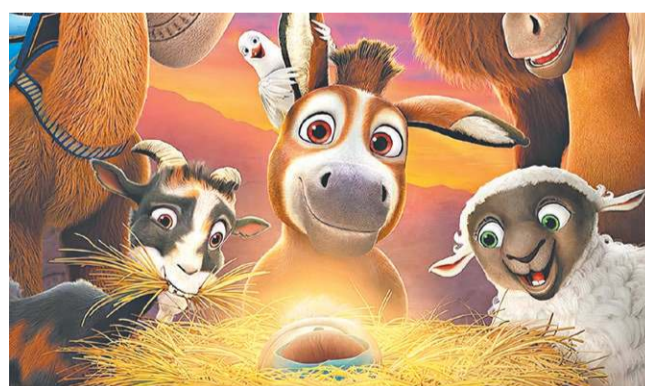
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The animals watch over Jesus in the manger.

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# BUILDING BETTER RELATIONSHIPS

## The gift of perspective

BY ROB FURLONG

**I REMEMBER READING** a Peanuts cartoon several years ago where Lucy was writing out her annual letter to Santa detailing what she wanted for Christmas that year. Her letter went something like this, "Dear Santa, I don't know exactly what I want for Christmas this year... just give me lots of stuff!" At her side is Snoopy, watching on and his thought balloon reads, "Tis the season to be greedy!"

By now, Christmas decorations have been in our department stores for a couple of months, reminding us that the silly season is just around the corner. I call it the silly season with good reason. For example, last Christmas, Aussies spent around \$30 billion on gifts which equalled an average spend per person of \$1,749!

Sometimes it can be difficult to put things into perspective. At the very moment when we are madly fussing over whether we need to buy our child the toy they "absolutely must have", some 648-719 million people in the world are living on less than \$2

per day. Only 34 percent of people in Papua New Guinea, one of our nearest neighbours, has access to safe drinking water and only 24 percent of their population has decent sanitation. Things that we take for granted in Australia are regarded as luxuries in countries like PNG.

Several years ago, US author Max Lucado, writing about greed, provided a disturbing insight into the habits of that most consumerist of nations, the USA. A study he cited revealed one in five American families owned three cars or more and that US citizens spent more on garbage bags than 90 of the world's countries spent on everything!

Gordon Gecko, the character played by Michael Douglas in the film *Wall Street* proudly proclaimed, "Greed is good!" I prefer Lucado's advice: "it is better to live life by not consulting your greed."

If you think I am trying to lay a guilt trip on you then you have misunderstood my intent. All I am asking is that you and your family will try and use this wonderful season of



Christmas to gain a little perspective this year. When you open your presents on Christmas Day or sit down to your Christmas lunch with family and friends, why not take some time to reflect on the many blessings that you all enjoy?

- Read the Christmas story aloud from either Matthew 1:18-2:23 or Luke 2:1-20. (We have done this every year as a family).

- Share with one another what you are most thankful for in the past year.

- Spend some time thanking God for His grace in placing you in a country like Australia and for the many freedoms that you enjoy.

Christmas is a great time to put things into perspective. Enjoy your meal together and the giving and exchanging of gifts – but don't fret over the fact that you could not afford the \$200 "must have" toy or the latest smartphone for your children – they will

not be scarred by this!

But the money that you save on that and send to a family that enables them to buy a filter for clean water will change their lives forever. I'm not saying don't give each other gifts; I am saying, find something in your budget to give something to the poor this Christmas, some need that touches your heart, even if it means trimming down your gift giving budget to make room for it.

At the heart of the Christmas story is the message that by sending Jesus, God was declaring "Good news to the poor and release for the captives."

So, this Christmas, remember Jesus, the reason why we celebrate this wonderful season, "who became poor that we might become rich" – rich in that greatest of all gifts that God freely offers us – His salvation.

May your Christmas be a spiritually enriched one!



## 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 \*

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

Address \_\_\_\_\_

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

Challenge Literature Fellowship, PO Box 978, Cloverdale WA 6985  
info@challengenews.org

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 - <b>Olive Tree app</b> (we recommend that you start with an easy-to-read version like the ESV)	Audio Bible - <b>Bible.is app</b> , or <b>Youversion Bible app</b>
Christian radio stations - <b>CBN radio app</b> and <b>Trans World Radio</b>	Resources including radio, videos, podcasts, devotionals and news - <b>Vision Christian Media app</b>
Christian movies, serials and kids' shows - <b>Good. app</b>	Christian podcasts and sermons - <b>Edifi app</b>
Advice on specific issues, Bible reading plans and studies for new believers - <b>Youversion Bible app</b> .	Daily thoughts and inspiration - <b>Our Daily Bread app</b>
<b>Alpha Film Series on Youtube</b> - an online introduction to Christianity	The Bible explained with visual aides - <b>Bible Project on YouTube</b> .
Jesus film project - 200+ videos in 2000+ languages <b>jesusfilm.org/app</b> <b>youtube.com/@jesusfilm</b>	For kids - <b>Superbook Kids Bible, videos and games app</b>
Christian news outlet for young adults with various content, devotionals and resources: <b>ymi.today</b>	Christian comics/manga - <b>goodandevilbook.com</b> and <b>Manga Messiah app</b>
More inspiring faith stories - <b>back issues of Challenge News at challenge.news</b>	

## Let there be peace on Earth

BY CAROL ROUND

**IN 1944**, JILL Jackson attempted suicide, but she didn't succeed. Later, in an interview aired on National Public Radio, Humankind, Jill talked about her background and what led her to write the song, *Let There be Peace on Earth*.

"When I attempted suicide and I didn't succeed," she said, "I knew for the first time unconditional love – which God is. You are totally loved, totally accepted, just the way you are. In that moment I was not allowed to die, and something happened to me, which is very difficult to explain. I had an eternal moment of truth, in which I knew I was loved, and I knew I was here for a purpose."

After this realisation, Jill's spiritual journey led her to explore a relationship with God. During this time, she discovered her love of writing and, along with Sy Miller, whom she'd married in 1949, began writing songs.

**Peace is a gift from God**  
While I don't know Jill's reason for attempting suicide, I can relate to her despair. She didn't know the unconditional love of our Heavenly Father until she didn't succeed at killing herself. Until I found peace with myself through a relationship with my Heavenly Father, I sought affirmation of my worthiness through people. I was an overachiever and a people pleaser. Then, Jesus set me free.

In his book, *Christmas Gifts that Won't Break*, author and pastor James W. Moore wrote, "More and more psychologists are telling us that we can't feel good about life and other people until we feel good about ourselves. They call it healthy self-esteem, which is simply another way of saying that we need to be right with ourselves."

We can get right with ourselves and find peace by inviting the Prince of Peace into our hearts and lives. It's then we'll understand that peace on earth does begin with each of us. Evangelist Billy Graham once said, "There can be no lasting peace until Christ has come to the hearts of all people and brought them His peace."

**We long for world peace**  
Strife. Fighting. Conflicts. War. Adam and Eve were at peace in the garden and with God, until their disobedience led to their expulsion from the Garden of Eden. But on a memorable night in the hills of Judea approximately 4,000 years later, the angels sang "Glory to God in the highest, and on Earth peace to men..."

Jesus' birth was a turning point for mankind. He came to save us, redeem us, to bring peace, healing, forgiveness, love, and reconciliation. His presence in our lives can show us how to love others. Peace on earth will become a reality when Christ abides in our hearts. His words in John 14:27, "Peace I leave with you," will continue to prove repeatedly the truth that peace begins with each of us when we let Him set us free. ●

I always love hearing from my readers. Please feel free to e-mail me at carol@carolaround.com with your thoughts or visit my blog for more inspiration at www.carolaround.com.

# JUMPING FOR JOY



**Y**ou'll never hear Australian high jumper Nicola Olyslagers complaining about anyone raining on her parade.

In September, even when the skies let it rip during the 2025 World Athletics Championships in Tokyo, halting the high jump competition twice, she stayed calm and focused.

While other athletes struggled with the delays and slippery conditions, Nicola retained her composure, wrote serenely in her soon-to-be sodden trusty notebook and leaned on her faith in God to carry her through.

When the action resumed, the gazelle-like 1.8m, 28-year-old lined herself up, grinned widely, clapped her hands – and launched herself over the bar.

She cleared 2 metres on her first attempt and won the gold medal.

At the post-event press conference, her famous faith, as always, came to the fore.

She said: "When the rain was pouring out there and I was waiting for hours between attempts, it was a joy because the light was inside of me and I knew that Jesus was

enough for me.

"And when I was jumping it was just worship. So even waiting out there in the rain, I have such joy... the gold medal was just the added bonus." Nicola had gone into the competition remembering she had finished dead last in 2017. It could have rattled her but it didn't.

Instead, she told the press: "I had so much peace because I knew that my performance didn't determine my identity and my value because I knew that if Jesus was enough for me when I was last, He's enough if I'm first. That took the pressure off.

"Every time that I was jumping, it was just worship. I was like, 'Let's go!'" Nicola's Christian faith is very well known; indeed it is an intrinsic part of her personality and her profession.

She has always been very open about it and acknowledges Jesus and the role God has played in shaping her in public interviews and statements.

For example, after winning the silver medal at the Paris Olympics she used that global stage to glorify God, explaining that to her, every

jump was an act of praise.

The athlete has faced several challenges on her journey to the top and has shared about her struggles and the faith that grounds her even as it has helped her soar.

"When I first started sports such as swimming, tennis or dancing, I was just terrible. But then at my first school athletic carnival, to my surprise, I started winning all the events. I realised I had a gift and my parents enrolled me in Little Athletics, which I immediately loved.

"High jump was a sport that challenged me physically and mentally and I enjoyed all the training and the feeling of jumping."

But her height also made her a target for bullying in school.

She explained: "I went to a new school in my last year of primary school and I was concerned about what would happen."

As it turned out, she worried for nothing.

Nicola's new school was a Christian one and her experience there proved life-changing.

"When I walked in I was immediately met by this overwhelming, non-judging love from the students and teachers.

"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 was simple yet it changed my entire life.

"It was the first time I came into full realisation of the Gospel [the good news about Jesus saving us from our sins] and the reality of God.

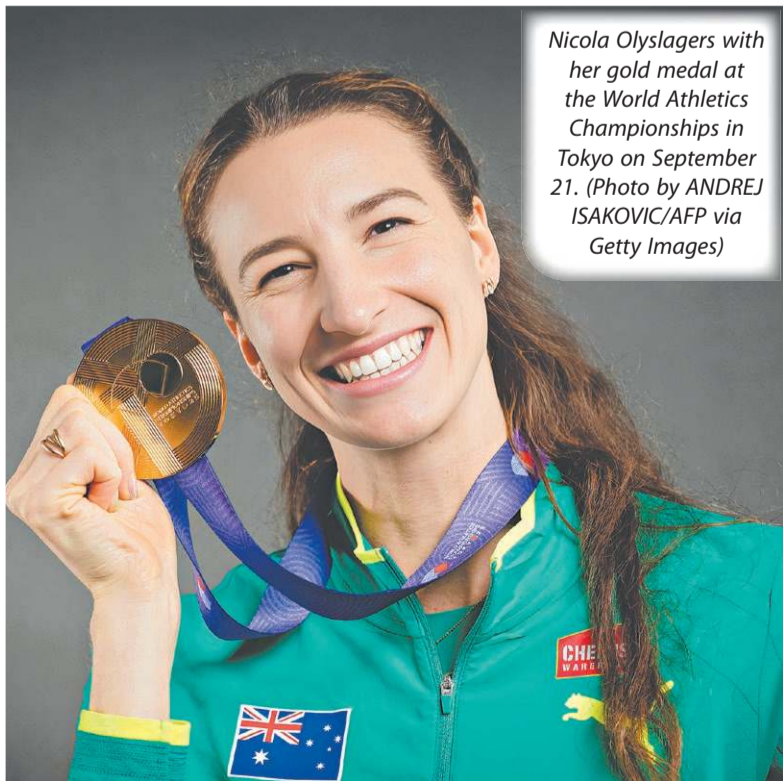
"I committed my life to Jesus and got involved in different youth groups and camps while at school.

"There were regular Bible studies, chapel services and opportunities at school which helped me grow in my faith. When I finished school I left my old church and joined my local church whose teachings corresponded more closely with my personal beliefs."

Nicola also joined the Evangelical Union at Sydney University where she was trained to lead Bible study groups and spoke about her journey of faith to large meetings.

She also began her own ministry – Everlasting Crowns – in 2017,

“  
The gold medal was just the added bonus.  
”



Nicola Olyslagers with her gold medal at the World Athletics Championships in Tokyo on September 21. (Photo by ANDREJ ISAKOVIC/AFP via Getty Images)

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