



Saved from addiction, violence, and hopelessness, Sybil found freedom in faith.

# NEW YEAR NEW LIFE

**D**rugs, alcohol, domestic violence, loneliness and rejection led Sybil down the path of utter despair. She left school when she was 11 and ended up on drugs and alcohol.

So at midnight in December 2019 Sybil, then 31, was exactly where you might imagine she would be – on the street ready to ring in 2020 in a drunken haze.

The single mother of four had half a bottle of whisky in her backpack.

She seemed more on edge than usual. After so many years of living rough, and struggling with an on-again-off-again relationship with her abusive partner, Sybil didn't think 2020 would be any great improve-

ment on 2019. Finding an empty bench, she made New Year's resolutions and prayed: "Please God, I want to be free. I want to follow and obey Jesus like I promised. Please help me."

Sybil had a bit of a backstory with God. In 2007, when she was 19, she moved to a remote mining town in Australia where she met the man who would become the father of her four children.

When the relationship turned abusive and violent, she fled with her children to Cairns in 2014, where she bounced from shelter to shelter and one drunken crisis after another.

Sharing her story with Leigh Pryse, host of the *Why Jesus* channel on YouTube, she said: "I was so alone. I had no one. There was nothing for me anywhere."

She said she lived under a cloak of shame for many years and felt unworthy of love or redemption.

"I was rejected by my own parents so I grew up looking for love but in all the wrong places."

But in December a simple invitation to a Christmas party at church changed everything.

"As soon as I walked into the church I felt it was so pure and holy."

"I felt I shouldn't be there, that I wasn't good enough. I could see the dirt on myself and I felt so ashamed of the sin I was living in."

"But I couldn't leave. Something drew me in. I don't know how to explain it."

So she stayed – and was given the warmest of welcomes. "People came up to me to say hello, they asked my name, talked to my kids. I never felt that before."

"They kept talking about Jesus and I wanted to know who He was. I knew He was the one making them so happy."

She explained that she now knows it was "God Himself drawing me into His family because He wanted to take my brokenness away and put

His love in my life." The sermon that day was about the love of God and how He can set us free from the worst situations.

Sybil said it felt like the preacher was speaking only to her.

"That day I was right at the edge of the cliff and his words just touched me. When he asked who wanted to ask Jesus into their life, I put my hand up. As soon as I did that I felt something warm and gentle come into me. Almost like a shelter on the inside."

Soon she was baptised (a public declaration of faith in Jesus Christ, symbolising the believer's cleansing from sin, death to their old life, and resurrection into new life through Christ.)

**“ I grew up looking for love but in all the wrong places. ”**

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## The habit that heals

BY HARRIET COOMBE

**EVERY JANUARY, WE** make promises to ourselves – eat better, work smarter, save more, stress less. We buy new planners and try to shake off whatever last year threw at us. But if we're honest, most of us drag one thing into the new year whether we want to or not: hurt.

It might be something small we never dealt with, or something big we've learned to carry like a heavy backpack. A friendship that soured. A family wound. Someone who betrayed our trust. Or even regret about choices we made ourselves.

We tell ourselves we've moved on – but some part of us knows we haven't.

### Why forgiveness matters

Forgiveness is one of those things we admire in other people but struggle to practice ourselves. It feels too costly, too unfair, too vulnerable.

And yet, the research keeps saying the same thing: carrying resentment affects us more than the person who hurt us. It chips away at our emotional health and even our physical wellbeing.

Forgiveness isn't pretending things didn't happen. It isn't excusing anything. It's simply deciding that the wound won't be in charge anymore.

That's hard work. But it's also freeing. And a new year is as good a time as any to think about it.

### The most radical act of forgiveness in history

No matter your beliefs, it's hard to ignore the impact of Jesus' words on the cross: "Father, forgive them."

He wasn't talking about His friends. He was speaking about the very people who were in that moment rejecting Him, mocking Him, and killing Him.

It's hard to find anything else like that in history – someone forgiving others at the exact moment they're being wronged. But they weren't the only people He forgave on the cross. Ephesians 1:7 puts it, "[God] is so rich in kindness and grace that He purchased our freedom with the blood of His Son [Jesus] and forgave our sins."

Sin is anything we think, say, or do that goes against God's way. It separates us from Him and damages our relationships with

others and ourselves. And Jesus' death on the cross means we can be forgiven of it all when we turn to Him in faith and repent [turn away from sin].

As it says in 1 John 1:9, "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."



Stock photo

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**YOUTH TRUTH** Page 9

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

**BACK PAGE**

**UNBREAKABLE SPIRIT**  
MONTY WILLIAMS

# Ask Y: Peter Meadows answers your questions about God

**QUESTION: IT MAKES SENSE TO START TO FOLLOW JESUS BUT WHAT IF I CAN'T KEEP IT UP?**



**TRUE, IT'S A** big step to launch out on a new relationship with Jesus – determined to live the kind of life He designed you for. And it makes sense to seriously ask yourself, 'Am I going to make it?'

But there is a huge difference between turning to follow Jesus and setting out to run a marathon or swim a great distance. That's because you are not about to launch out on a feat of endurance that can only be achieved by the sweat of your brow.

Rather, what's ahead is a wonderful journey of adventure – with a guide to help you and an endless supply of forgiveness when you get it wrong.

All Jesus asks is for you to turn from your past and a life centered on 'you' and to start walking in His direction with a life centered on Him.

What if you severely mess up? The reality is it's not 'if' but 'when'. Like a child learning to walk, there are times when you will graze your spiritual knees as you take your first tottering steps in following Jesus.

That's how it is for all of us who put our hand in His. And the reason is simple – those who follow Jesus are not perfect but forgiven.

God is geared up to see you through. He's there – on your side – to help you make it and to forgive you when you don't. God's a loving father, not a manic personal trainer.

In fact, it is your understanding of what following Jesus truly means that is going to matter most. Think of it this way – imagine when it's all said and done and you arrive at the gates of heaven. And there you are asked, 'Why should God let you in?'

The answer you expect to give will tell you if you have the right understanding. If it's along the lines of: 'I've tried my best, been nice to lots of people, and never done anything really bad. I've also turned up at Your place regularly and read Your book and prayed a bit,' then you've missed it.

That's because following Jesus is based not on what we try to 'do' but on what He has already 'done' and our response to it. The keys that open the door of heaven are not those that follow a journey of trying hard, being sincere, doing our best, or even being religious.

Heaven is not a place where people walk around with pride because they earned the right to be there. It's filled with those who don't deserve it, but Jesus paid the price to let them in.

That's why all Jesus asks of you as you set out on this great adventure is to put your hand in His and to trust Him.

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.

## Coffee Break CROSSWORD & SUDOKU

### ACROSS

- 1 Plumbing
- 4 Blacksmith's block
- 7 Ashes holder
- 8 Daughter of a sister
- 10 Racket
- 12 Glass container with a neck
- 13 Bro's sibling
- 15 City in Alaska
- 18 Terrific tennis serve
- 20 Opposite of days
- 22 Pain (slang)
- 23 To disprove a point
- 25 University, abbr.
- 26 Military trainee
- 27 Wash oneself

### DOWN

- 1 Comic-strip frame
- 2 Chart type
- 3 Seek damages
- 4 Pyrenean country
- 5 Classic, antique

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- 6 Flax fabric
- 9 Stylish
- 11 Easy does \_\_\_!
- 13 Caught
- 14 Athletic throwing event
- 16 Adolescent skin concern
- 17 Bit of high jinks
- 19 Wood shaping tool
- 21 A casual hello
- 23 Josh
- 24 Cave dweller

### SOLUTIONS PAGE 11

## Smile files...



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# Trucker finds new direction

BY JANICE TEO

In 1974, 19-year-old Michael O'Brien had an 'I-couldn't-care-less' attitude towards life and work.

"I was such a lost and foolish person that I couldn't make a wise and rational decision, and would have rather gone to the pub," the 70-year-old career trucker told *Challenge News*.

Alcohol played a big part in Michael's apathy.

"It had such a grip on me that I became violent with it, to the point of no control."

So much so that in 1980 he was arrested and jailed for nine months.

In 1982, he married Mary, a "nice girl" from Queensland. But after eight years Mary took their two children and left him.

Michael responded by getting drunk for a week. "I thought to myself, 'I don't need her, I'll go to Adelaide and start again.'"

Then he had a completely unexpected thought. "No good changing towns again, I've got to change me."

He didn't know it then, but that moment changed his life.

"Today I know that from the minute I accepted that thought, I gave God the chance to work in my life. Actually, I believe He gave me the thought in the first place."

Michael rang Mary. "I know our marriage is over and it is too late for me to do anything about it, but I need to straighten myself out. Will you be behind me?"

She agreed, and their marriage was in fact resurrected.

"Right there, we unknowingly activated a biblical law according to Matthew 18:19 and 20 – 'I say to you, that if any two of you shall agree on earth as touching anything that they shall ask, it shall be done for them by my Father which is in heaven,'" Michael shared.

"I believe this is particularly powerful for married couples as they are in a covenant by marriage."

He admitted himself to hospital. An aunt sent him a book titled *They Came to Believe*, about people with similar problems whose lives were transformed after an encounter with God. "After reading the book I prayed, 'Lord, if You are real, please show me and I will do whatever You want.'"

That night Michael said he dreamt of Someone saying to him: "If you live your life My way you'll be right. Things past will pass away."

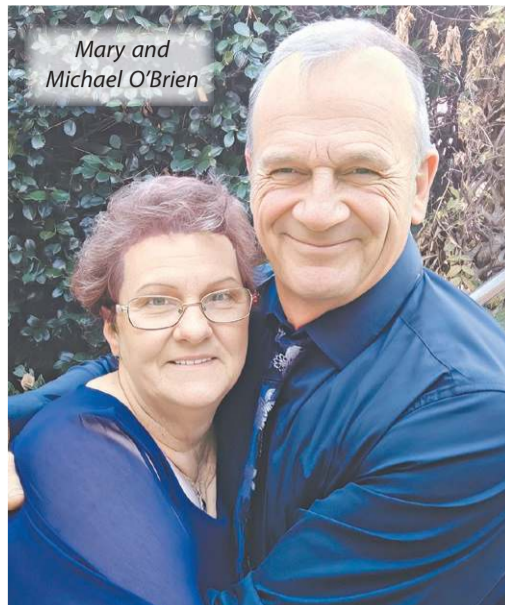
Michael said he knew at once God was speaking to him. "When I woke up those words were so vivid and alive in me. I felt different. I was different. I was 'born again' and didn't know it."

He shared his dream with his friend Jim. "That wasn't a dream, that was God ministering to you," Jim told him.

"I jumped into reading the Bible as if it was the only thing I had in my life – and at the time it was," said Michael, smiling.

Jim repeatedly told Michael the answer to life was Psalm 37:5: "Commit your ways unto the Lord. Trust also in Him and He shall bring it to pass."

He began attending church, taking to the praise songs "like a newborn calf takes to its mother's udder."



Mary and Michael O'Brien

Bible classes and AA meetings filled his calendar. He admitted he fell off the wagon occasionally.

"I would go to AA meetings then to the pub. Once, in a pub I started talking to a man about Jesus. I wouldn't shut up even when he tried to frighten me off. Suddenly the presence of God came over me. I walked out of that pub and have not drunk alcohol or been to an AA meeting since."

Michael did not complete the rehab program. Mary was not happy about this, but was encouraged by the change she saw in Michael's behaviour.

"I spent the days at home immers-

ing myself in the Word of God," he said. "I read the Bible for hours. After a few weeks Mary came to her first 'alive' church meeting."

Unknown to anyone else, she had an ulcer ("from worrying about me for so long," said Michael).

As the pastor began to pray for her, he said: "The Holy Spirit tells me you have a sickness in your stomach Jesus wants to heal you of."

"Mary was healed of that ulcer that day," said Michael.

Since then the couple has experienced the Holy Spirit's guidance and presence constantly.

"He has filled our lives and our home and has led us through every situation, teaching us to trust Him and rely on Him in every circumstance."

"Sometimes we fail and miss it, but when we do we turn back to God and go right on. The Holy Spirit is our teacher not our condemner."

Michael continues to work part-time as a trucker and shares his testimony and the love of God everywhere he goes.

In October 2022, he and Mary celebrated their 40th anniversary – "all by the grace of our Redeemer and Lord, Jesus Christ. I give thanks to God for the peace in my soul and the love in my house," Michael concluded.

## New year new life

• From page 1



Sybil said she is now free from pain.

But her new faith was derailed when her ex-partner was released from prison. He found her, persuaded her to get back together and the vicious cycle of domestic violence and alcohol began again.

For the next five years Sybil battled her old demons – losing every time – as she fought to fulfil her promises to God – until that fateful New Year's Eve of 2019, when she prayed. As she finished the prayer she unthinkingly reached into her backpack for that bottle of whisky – and nearly cut herself.

Looking inside, she saw that the neck of the bottle had snapped cleanly off the body, sending bits of glass into the whisky and making it undrinkable. She didn't know how that could have happened – she said she never touched the bag, or even put it down.

Other revellers came around and offered her drinks. She tried them – and literally threw up with every sip. She tried a cigarette – and had a coughing fit so severe it brought on an asthma attack.

Then she knew. "I looked up and I said, 'Okay God, I know You did this.'"

From that day onward, Sybil said she has not had a single drink or cigarette.

The next day, she prayed with a friend and recommitted her life to Christ.

She has stuck to her guns about

making the right choices for herself and her children – breaking it off completely with her ex-partner, completing a three-month discipleship course with international missionary organisation Youth With A Mission.

Today she works as a care worker in a drug and alcohol rehabilitation centre in Mount Isa, Queensland.

"God never left me even though I backslid so many times," she said gratefully.

"There was one day I heard Him say to me: 'Come back, my daughter. I love you. You belong to Me.' I heard that while I was drunk and couldn't even stand yet He said He loved me."

"God saved me from all my pain. I want to encourage everyone that if you are feeling rejected or unloved, Jesus Christ can set you free."



Robert, Grace and Esther Mponye

# BEATING DEATH

BY JANICE TEO

December 31, 1990. As everyone in his village near Kampala celebrated the coming of the new year, Ugandan Robert Mponye, feverish and bedridden, was sure he himself wouldn't live to see it.

The 23-year-old had been unwell since October with a mysterious illness that doctors had not been able to identify, let alone treat.

"It started without warning with pain all over my body," Robert told *Challenge News*. "By December I was bedridden and could barely move."

As the curtain prepared to fall on 1990, Robert prepared for it to fall on him as well. "I literally felt my life going out of me," he said.

Robert had grown up in a nominally Christian home. He had been to church often as a child but in high school he fell in with the wrong crowd, and got into drugs, drinks, crime and women. At 19, he ran away from home and for the next three years, cut off all contact with his family.

But life on the run was nowhere near as exciting as he'd imagined. In fact, it was so difficult he returned home.

"I was so relieved that my family took me back. My father cried when he saw me," Robert said.

He resumed his studies to become a teacher. But in September 1990, in his second year of university, his mysterious illness began.

Two months later Robert found himself praying on his deathbed: "God, I know I'm going to die. But please, don't take me to hell."

The miracle happened in seconds. A sudden warmth in his limbs. A surge of energy. To his astonishment, strength returned to his body.

Two minutes after praying, he jumped out of bed and ran to his father's bedroom. "Dad, I'm healed!" he shouted. His parents stared in disbelief. Ten minutes earlier their son had been dying; now he stood before them, strong and smiling.

The next morning – New Year's Day 1991, and Robert's 24th birthday – Robert walked with his father to the local church where he gave his life to Christ.

"That day God gave me a new life. I truly became born again," he shared.

After graduating, Robert prayed for direction. "I told God, I don't want just a job – I want to go where I can glorify You."

He fasted and prayed for three days. On the third day, he sensed God speak through Isaiah 55:5: "Nations you do not know will run to you."

A friend told him about a teaching job in the small Ugandan town of Mityana. Robert took it – and has served there ever since.

He later married Esther, a fellow teacher, and the

couple soon welcomed a daughter, Jemima. Robert was content raising his family, working at the local school and picking up preaching engagements in nearby towns.

He had no idea what was about to happen. In 2004, while he was away preaching, his wife called.

She told him some locals had found a newborn baby dumped in a latrine pit and had brought her to the hospital. Wrapped in a plastic bag and thrown down the 30-foot drop, she should not have survived.

Yet she did. But who would take her? Robert and Esther were well-known in town for taking in and helping poor or abandoned children and educating them for free. It was to Esther that the hospital staff naturally turned.

"My wife told me: 'I believe that God wants us to take this baby.' So we took her and named her Grace."

Grace had major health issues. Her eyes, eaten away by maggots while she was underground, were swollen shut. It took five major surgeries before she was a year old to open them surgically. Open yes, but sightless; Grace was completely blind.

And then, another miracle. When Grace was about 18 months old the family was at church when the toddler suddenly began walking on her own, without needing to hold anyone's hand as she usually did.

As Robert and Esther watched her navigating the chairs and tables without help, they suddenly realised she could see! "God healed Grace in that service. We danced, we cried, we praised God!"

That miracle changed everything.

"One night, my wife said, 'God is going to bring more Graces to us,'" Robert remembered. "I joked 'I think one Grace is enough.' But that was God's plan."

In the following months, more children showed up at Robert and Esther's door – orphans, abandoned babies, those whose parents had died or couldn't afford school fees. Robert and Esther taught and cared for these children themselves in their home for free.

What began with a handful of pupils soon became King's Kid Ministries, officially founded on February 13, 2005.

Today, the ministry cares for more than 350 children, providing food, clothing, education and vocational training.

Funding is often tight, but the Mponyes have worked to make the project self-sustaining. They've opened a bridal salon, a bakery, a catering service, computer training, and most recently a corn flour mill that supplies both the school and the wider community.

But Robert never forgets where his story began – on his deathbed, gasping for breath, pleading with God for mercy.

He knows what it means to be given a second chance – and he is determined to give the same to others.

"He rescued Grace and me from the pit. And He is still doing the same for many others today."



Grace, a living miracle.

# I got out of the director's chair

BY ABIGAIL AGUILAR

Kap Chatfield was selling his "Give Tanks" tank tops on Bourbon Street during Mardi Gras when he ran across a woman who ruined his good vibes.

"It was an avalanche of debauchery: drunk people, people doing drugs, people throwing up on the sidewalk," Kap said on his YouTube channel. "All of a sudden I see the giant wooden cross in the middle of the road. It was a glaring juxtaposition. These fire-breathing Baptists were the biggest buzzkill."

He approached one of the Christian ladies. "Who do you think you are?" he challenged her. "Are you saying I'm not a good person? I'm running this (T-shirt) company and we're giving money to kids in Nicaragua."

"You're not doing that for God's glory," the lady responded. "You're doing that for your own glory."

Try as he might, he couldn't get her words out of his mind, and it ruined his "good vibes" – until Kap began a journey to discover the truth.

Kap grew up in Maryland and D.C. in a stable home. His parents took him to churches of different denominations.

As he grew up, he became curious about Christianity and asked the pastor if he should read the entire Bible. He expected to be encouraged to do it.

"I don't know if I would do that if I were you," the pastor told him.

The pastor's response dampened his hunger for God. In middle school Kap questioned if he believed and by high school, he "hated" Christians and was an avowed atheist.

He studied film at the University of Miami and launched a company selling tank tops that read "Give Tanks," an attempt to spread gratitude.

Kap hawked the tanks on the street, and they sold well. He and a buddy took them to Mardi Gras in New Orleans where he crossed paths with Sister Buzzkill.

He wanted answers. Back home, he confronted his only Christian friend. He didn't unload judgment on Kap, but when Kap asked about this lady's "out there" approach, his Christian friend made an unexpected response:

"Do you think everyone is going to make it to Heaven when they die?"

Kap was unsettled, but he responded that he thought yes, they

Kap Chatfield. Photo from kapchatfield.com.



would make it to Heaven.

His friend took a breath and then stated with sober conviction: "Kap, not everyone is going to make it to Heaven. In fact, most people won't."

"I was really moved," he added. "I could tell this dude really believed it and was concerned about me. To be honest, I became a little concerned about me."

Kap's friend encouraged him to read the Bible and explained the Gospel [the good news of how Jesus' death and resurrection reconciles

us to God]. "It's not a religious rule book," he explained. "It's an epic love story spanning the course of 1,500 years."

Kap attended church but didn't accept Jesus the first time: "Heck no," he turned down the opportunity to say a prayer committing to following Jesus. "But I'll let you know if I ever do." The

next day in his car on the way to the gym he stopped at a red light. Kap was confronted by the still small voice of the Lord: "Give it up. You've been the director of your life. There's only room on the set of your life for one Director. You're not Him. It's time for you to get out of the Director's chair."

Kap began to weep and confess his wrongdoing to God. "I was bawling like a baby," he said. He drove to the parking lot and continued to pray and confess.

"The backpack of shame and guilt that I wore my entire life fell off of me," he said. "I felt peace for the first time – the peace I was looking for with good works, with drugs, with girls." Now Kap is a pastor and entrepreneur based in Omaha, Nebraska. He is married to Joy and they have four children.

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

“ I became a little concerned about me. ”

# The habit that heals

• From page 1

And that's the kind of freedom we can't manufacture on our own.

**Starting the year right**

Maybe there's someone you need to forgive this year. Mark 11:25 says, "If you have anything against anyone, forgive him, so that your Father in heaven will also forgive you your wrongdoing."

Maybe there is someone you need to ask forgiveness from. Or maybe the person you need to forgive is yourself. How would it feel to begin the year with a clean slate? Jesus' act

of forgiveness isn't just a historical moment – it's a personal invitation. A chance to receive a clean slate that goes deeper than resolutions or habit trackers.

**An invitation**

If you're ready to start afresh on a deeper level – not just with new routines, but with a new heart – this New Year is the time to turn toward Jesus and receive the forgiveness He offers for your sins.

For more information on how to do that turn to page 11 and see the box entitled, *How do I Become a Christian*.

# Energy healing to true healing

When Jamie Zhu told his father he wanted to make YouTube videos for a living, his father was livid.

“He screamed at me for two hours like any Chinese parent would. He said not to do it because he knew the film industry,” he told Deliverance Down Under.

“But then I hung up and put everything into making prank videos for the next two years.”

Jamie was raised in Sydney by his mother after his parents split. Even though his father called him every night, the 31-year-old admitted that he still struggled with not having his father around.

“I always felt neglected by my father because he just wasn’t here, so I was always trying to fill the void he left.”

His videos eventually went viral and he gained millions of followers overnight on Facebook.

“I started experiencing the first wave of Australian social media success.”

Within two years, Jamie had everything he wanted – money, fame and status.

“But I was actually the most depressed, anxious, unfulfilled, and pessimistic I’d ever been in my life,” he admitted.

“I thought, ‘This is all it is? What do I do now? Chase more fame, money, women, success?’”

In a bid to fill the void inside, Jamie turned to New Age spirituality, hoping to find meaning.

“I did energy healing work and hypnotherapy, but there was always something wrong with me.”

By 2021, he was struggling with obsessive-compulsive disorder and a range of mental health issues. So his girlfriend introduced him to a woman who did reiki healing.

“When I tell you this was the single worst decision I have ever made in my entire life, I’m not exaggerating.

“I thought the reiki was supposed to help me, but it made me much worse.”

After the reiki healing session, Jamie began to experience strange and disturbing sensations.

He would be plagued by dark thoughts and be woken by a feeling of being stabbed.

“Even before, when I was going through chaos, I was never suicidal.

“But I started hearing audible voices saying, ‘Jump off the 25th floor of your balcony. Go into the kitchen and stab yourself with a knife.’”

“I’d lose the plot, start throwing things around, trashing my apartment, running away and escaping, driving somewhere.”

He sought help everywhere, from Maori healers to mental health professionals.

“Every single person told me what I was experiencing was all in my head.

“I went to everyone, but no one knew what was wrong with me.”

Finally, he went to a Hindu astrologer for help. It cost him \$1000 but Jamie didn’t care. This was the first person who seemed to have an answer.

“The whole premise was to get rid of the spiritual affliction through Hindu modalities while he prayed for me from a distance.”

By the second exorcism ritual, Jamie had spent \$17,000 worth of



Jamie Zhu

him that night, told him that the moment the Bible started playing, he fell asleep.

Out of everything he’d tried, this was the first time something worked. Jamie was intrigued.

The next week, a friend had invited him to a Korean barbeque where he met some Christians who invited him to church.

“The moment I set foot into the church, I felt like I got struck by something that entered my body and I just started weeping. It was the peaceful, loving feeling I’d been looking for my entire life.”

When the pastor gave an invitation for people to accept Jesus into their life, Jamie raised his hand.

“He started saying this prayer [to accept Jesus into my life] and I recited it with all my heart. I knew something huge had shifted in my life. I had found God.

“I cleaned up my life. I stopped sleeping around, which was a big part of my life back then. I went celibate and started this entire new life.”

Today, Jamie is no longer involved in the New Age.

“In 2 Corinthians 5:17 it says, ‘Therefore those who are in Christ are made a new creation.’”

“That’s so true because I felt like I was made into a brand-new person at that particular time in my life where everything just started to fade away.”

To watch the rest of Jamie’s story as well as others in video form, go to Deliverance Down Under on YouTube. This story has been used with kind permission from Deliverance Down Under.

gold, at the request of the astrologer. Once the ritual was over, the astrologer declared Jamie healed.

But a couple of hours later, Jamie felt nauseous. Turns out, he wasn’t healed.

In fact, the nighttime attacks got worse. One night, he was up for six hours, unable to sleep.

So he searched YouTube for solutions to what he now knew were demonic attacks. A video of a woman came up and instructed him to download the Bible app and play the narration out loud.

“I thought, ‘What do I have to lose?’ So I downloaded this Bible app.

“I played [the book of] Matthew and put my head on the pillow.

“Suddenly, it was the next day and I woke up.”

His roommate, who had been with

“**Something huge had shifted in my life.**”

I felt like I was made into a brand-new person at that particular time in my life where everything just started to fade away.”

## Are you ready to say “I do”?

**MARRIAGE IS ONE** of the most profound commitments a person can make. Standing before family, friends, and God, a couple pledges, “I do.” They promise to love, honour, and remain faithful through life’s highs and lows. Becoming a Christian is strikingly similar – it’s saying “I do” to Jesus.

When someone chooses to follow Christ, it begins with a heartfelt commitment. It’s not about checking off rules or attending church; it’s about surrendering your life, your plans, and your heart to someone who loves you perfectly. Like a spouse, Jesus promises faithfulness, protection, and guidance – but He asks for trust in return.

Marriage is a covenant, a lifelong promise that goes beyond a contract. Christianity, too, is a covenant relationship. You are not entering a casual arrangement; you are committing to a lifelong journey with Jesus, trusting His wisdom, mercy, and plan for your life. And just like a strong marriage, this relationship grows deeper over time. You learn, forgive, and are transformed.

Marriage requires vulnerability. Partners share fears, weaknesses, and dreams.

Choosing Jesus also calls for

honesty: admitting your mistakes, your need for help, and your desire for change. Unlike human marriage, which can fail, Jesus’ love and His covenant are perfect and unbreakable – His promises are secure.

In both marriage and faith, a public declaration matters. Couples say “I do” before witnesses. Christians publicly declare their commitment through baptism, signalling that their life now belongs to Jesus.

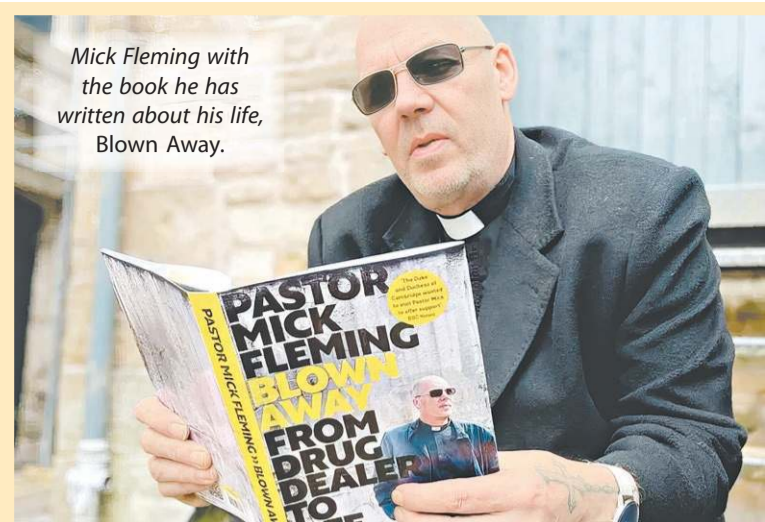
And like marriage, following Christ is not a one-time event but a lifelong journey – one of daily choices, growth, and transformation.

If you’ve ever longed for love that never fails, for peace that truly lasts, or for purpose that endures beyond the temporary, consider saying “I do” to Jesus. Today, you can invite Him into your life. You can choose to trust Him, follow Him, and begin a relationship that will never end.

Here’s a simple prayer to start:

**“Jesus, I recognise my need for You. I invite You into my life today. Please forgive me, guide me, and help me follow You. I choose You as Lord of my life. Amen.”**

By making that choice, you are stepping into a relationship – an eternal one – that changes everything.



## A gun and a prayer

Mick Fleming had two knives hidden in his clothes as he walked towards the man. Having been sexually assaulted by the man as a child, Mick was ready for revenge. But a voice in his head stopped him in his tracks.

Life was normal for Mick until the year he turned 11. He’d been on his way to school when he was assaulted by a man at a park. But before he could tell his parents about what happened, his sister collapsed and died from a heart attack at the age of 20.

“My dad came through the front door and shouted, ‘Come down, your sister’s dead,’” Mick told Sky News. “It was cold and blunt... then he broke down. He was a tough guy, my dad, but a nice man. I’d never seen him cry.”

That same year, he found his mother’s painkillers and took some. “I felt numb,” he recounted. That was the beginning of a drug addiction that would last for three decades.

“I began stealing first then I began selling drugs,” he told Christian Life Testimonies. His addiction led him to become a criminal enforcer, where he was paid to use intimidation and violence to collect debts for organised crime figures.

“The need to use drugs and alcohol got so strong that I couldn’t get past the day without using anything.”

For 30 years, Mick lived a life of violence and drugs. He was also arrested multiple times for murder, armed robbery and possession of firearms.

Once he was out collecting a debt when out of nowhere, a bright light shone in his face. “It was white, brilliant white. For 15 seconds I couldn’t see,” he said. “It was like looking into the sun and I was paralysed by it.

“I collapsed, then struggled back to the car. I felt sick. I was shaking, sweating, heart beating fast. I could hear my pulse as if it was in my head. I didn’t know what was happening to me.”

He parked his car in an isolated area and for the first time in a long time, Mick cried out to God. “God, if You’re real, please help me.” But nothing happened.

“In that moment I felt that even if there was a God, He couldn’t love somebody as evil as I was.” So Mick pointed the gun at himself and pulled the trigger. “I pulled the trigger expecting death and it clicked. But it didn’t fire.

“I dropped the gun on the floor and I cried for the first time since I was a boy.” Before he threw the gun away, Mick fired the gun at the ground three times. “It fired every time.”

He realised that God had answered his prayer to help him. “I was alive – I should have been dead. So I think my faith began just in that moment.”

Within 24 hours, he was arrested and sent to a psychiatric ward.

“There was this little old lady that would sit down next to me and tell me that Jesus loved me and she touched my face.”

He also met Pastor Tony who befriended him and prayed with him.

Mick left the psychiatric ward sober and he wanted to remain that way. So he started praying. “At the end of every prayer I’d say, ‘Thank You God, the Father and the Holy Spirit and Jesus.’”

A year later, he spotted the man who raped him when he was 11. He was drunk and in a bad shape. “I bought him a coffee and I said I could help him.” But Mick had no intentions of helping him. “I was going to kill him. I didn’t care who sat there and if I had to go to prison for the rest of my life. It would have been worth it.” But a voice in his head stopped him.

“Man, why are you living in his sin?” said the voice. Mick went to the toilet, where he started shaking. The voice spoke again, “Why are you living in his sin?” Mick began to feel like what he described as like light shining into him. “It was shining inside me and doing something in me.

“I realised my sin had been bad enough – why would I take somebody else’s [sin] and live that instead? I felt completely forgiven and I felt clean.” But it was only later, during a conversation with a friend that Mick fully understood that not only did Jesus forgive him of his sins [any thought or act that goes against the will of God], but Jesus also took on the punishment of sin by dying on the cross.

“Jesus takes it because He loves you,” he told his friend.

“My friend was in tears and we held each other and we realised in that moment that [Jesus] took it for us. I wanted to follow Jesus from that moment on.”

Two years later, the rapist died. “In the end, I can honestly say I didn’t hate him.”

Today, Mick runs a charity called Church on the Street that supports those who struggle with poverty and addiction.

“**I was going to kill him.**”

# FROM SCEPTIC TO SCHOLAR

BY NEVILLE CHAMBERLAIN, CMI

For years Tommy Chan laboured under the belief that faith in God was only for the weak-minded, the unsophisticated and the gullible.

"I regarded religion as something for those who were naive or unable to find logical answers," the professor of civil engineering told *Creation* magazine's Neville Chamberlain.

Growing up in Hong Kong, he attended a Catholic school but dismissed God and swore allegiance to science instead.

"I believed science held the answers to all problems," he shared.

In the early 1980s, Tommy went to Brisbane as an overseas student with six others. Two in his group were devoted Christians.

"The two Christians were very kind and helped us settle into life in Australia, even though they were also newcomers. I valued their friendship, but I considered myself more knowledgeable, especially in the area of science."

When they invited him to church, he declined but their faith piqued his curiosity.

"To challenge their beliefs and expose Christianity as irrational, I visited a Christian bookstore. I wanted to find books about Christianity that I, with my superior knowledge, could critique and refute."

The bookstore staff thought he was sincerely searching.

Noticing he was Chinese, they quietly asked a local Chinese church to pray for him.

Not long after, Tommy had a horse-riding accident and fractured his arm. While in hospital, his two Christian friends and a church elder visited him.

"I was deeply moved by their love and compassion, especially considering they barely knew me," he revealed. "Lying in the hospital,



I realised how fragile life was. Had my head hit the ground instead of my arm, I might not have survived."

This newfound realisation of his vulnerability shook Tommy's all-encompassing belief in science.

"I began to question my belief that

science could explain everything, in particular the ultimate origin of the universe. The evolution I had learned might explain changes over time, but not how everything began. If one just said it started with a big bang, it wouldn't address what caused that in the first place."

His studies in thermodynamics added to his doubts.

"The first law states that energy cannot be created or destroyed. This suggests that something must have

always existed – either an eternal God, an eternal universe, or an unknown cause for a beginning.

"The second law indicates that everything naturally moves towards greater disorder. This seemed to contradict the idea that the universe was evolving into a more complex state."

He also realised that a belief in atheism was just as much a belief system as faith in God.

"My once-mocking question to Christians – 'If God created the universe, then who created God?' – now seemed to have an answer," he admitted.

"By definition, if God needed to be created, He would not be God. The very nature of the God of the Bible is that He is eternal – without beginning or end."

After leaving hospital, his friends invited him to church again.

With his arm in a cast, Tommy couldn't use work as an excuse again and accepted the invitation.

After the service, a church leader invited him home for a meal.

The conversation was light and casual.

Tommy dropped his guard – and that's when the Bible found its mark.

"God shows His love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us," the church leader told Tommy, quoting Romans 5:8.

"At that moment, I felt overwhelmed by God's love," Tommy remembered.

"When the elder asked if I wanted

to receive Christ, my eyes filled with tears. I realised how foolish I had been and how much God had been pursuing me.

"That day, Jesus Christ became my Lord and Saviour."

Another church leader, who was a lecturer in university, lent him a book called *The Genesis Flood*, which he finished in less than a week.

"It opened a new horizon for me," remarked Tommy.

"It aligned with my understanding of thermodynamics and provided an alternative perspective on the age of the Earth."

One of the things Tommy is most grateful for is that teaching gives him a natural platform to share his faith.

"By God's grace I can tell my students that I am a Christian who takes Genesis literally and truly believes what it states."

After graduation, Tommy returned to Hong Kong, taught at the HK Polytechnic University for 16 years and also led Bible studies for Chinese scholars.

"Many Chinese scholars valued intellectual discussions and were curious about why someone in academia would embrace Christian-

ity. This allowed me to explain why I find the Bible so reliable and how its teachings are in harmony with scientific principles."

He revealed that many reject God not for lack of evidence but because "they do not want to acknowledge a Creator... they prefer to live without divine accountability."

In 2007, he returned to Brisbane, where he

has been leading a "seeker" Sunday School class since 2009.

Around 200 or more have come to Christ through this ministry during the last 16 years.

Tommy often meets people who casually accept evolution because "they assume that science provides strong evidence for evolution."

"However, if one studies the so-called 'facts' of evolution more closely, it becomes clear they are not actually scientific but are based on incorrect assumptions."

The professor gives top marks to the Bible, which he asserted "already provides the best explanation for the fossil record without having to reinterpret the biblical narrative." •

## Noah's ark: Fact or fiction?

### Part 3: Was the flood really global?

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.*

**MANY SAY NOAH'S** flood (if a real event) was only a local flood. Why? Because they believe our world is millions of years old. In that view, the fossils in the rock layers represent the appearance of new forms of life over eons of time.

But scientists did not always see the fossils that way. Geological pioneers, like Nicholas Steno, connected the fossils, buried in water deposits of mud and sand, with Noah's flood.

Ideas (like families) are related. The idea of evolution means the 'fossil record' accumulated gradually over millions of years, and that means there is no geological evidence for Noah's flood. So, Christians who believe in evolution and/or millions of 'geological years' must insist on a local flood.

Evolution (or even just 'millions of years') also means that the fossils, which represent pain, death, bloodshed, disease and suffering, formed before Adam and Eve sinned. So, what did God mean when He described His finished creation as 'very good'? Evolution means that death and suffering are not the result of sin. That destroys the meaning of the death and resurrection of Christ.

**The Bible describes a global flood**

If the flood was just a local affair,



for the water – rain from the sky and water surging from the breaking up of 'all the fountains' of the 'great deep'. These fountains, being mentioned first, may have been the most important source of the water for the flood. It may refer to huge underground sources of water. The 'breaking up' implies large-scale volcanic and earthquake activity.

Geologists have discovered that the rocks in the mantle deep inside the earth still contain abundant water (enough to fill the oceans twenty times over). They believe that, in the past, some of the water in the mantle came out on the earth. The mountains and land masses were different before the flood. Some creationist scientists believe that the break-up of a single continent was part of the mechanism that caused the flood.

**How could the ark survive the flood?**

A study by naval architects found that the ark specified in the Bible is one of the most stable shapes to handle large waves in a rough ocean. It would remain upright under the most adverse conditions.

Unlike the sailing ships of the Middle Ages, the ark did not need to travel anywhere. It just needed to float. Slightly rounded ends may have improved the handling of the ark in large waves, making it less likely to turn sideways into the waves. But the Bible is not clear, and it is possible that the ark was a simple box, which would provide maximum storage and be structurally strong.

**Part 4 will continue in the next edition of Challenge News.**

This article was first published by Creation Ministries and is used with kind permission.

“Lying in the hospital, I realised how fragile life was.”



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**CREATION MINISTRIES INTERNATIONAL**

# YOUTH TRUTH

## Teen's legacy of hope

BY HARRIET COOMBE

I WAS 14 years old in April 1999 when news of the tragic Columbine High School shooting made international headlines. Though I was over 16,000 kilometres away in Perth, Western Australia, the story made its way into homes across the globe – including mine.

It was the first time I had ever heard of a school shooting and to this day, the Columbine High School shooting remains significant in my mind for the following reasons:

- It was one of the first major shootings to be covered extensively on 24-hour news cycles and online, making it widely known and discussed internationally.
- It sparked books, documentaries, music, films, and public debate around violence, bullying, and youth culture.
- Survivors reported that the shooters directly asked students if they believed in God and shot them if they did. As a young Christian, that both frightened and inspired me.
- Victims like Rachel Scott became symbolic figures in Christian and youth movements.

I read *Rachel's Tears*, a book written by Rachel's parents, the year after she died. Rachel was the first person killed in the shooting and was reportedly mocked for her faith and asked whether she still believed in God. Then, when she said she did, she was shot. When I heard this, I wondered if I would be brave enough to answer the same way or would I deny my newfound faith?

**A normal teenage girl**  
Rachel wasn't perfect.

She was a fun, creative teenager who loved drawing, writing, and hanging out with friends. But like many teens, she struggled to fit in and sometimes caved to peer pressure.

In her private journals, she wrote: "I lost myself trying to be like everyone else."

When I first read those words in her journals, it sounded familiar. I knew what it was like to want acceptance more than anything. But Rachel also felt an ache for something deeper – something that popularity couldn't fill.

**The decision that changed everything**

Rachel grew up in a Christian home, but faith wasn't real to her at first. That changed when, at 11 years old, she prayed and asked Jesus Christ to be her Saviour.

But it wasn't until high school that she fully surrendered her life to Him. One night, Rachel wrote in her journal: "I am not going to apologise for speaking the name of Jesus. If I have to sacrifice everything, I will."

According to her parents, that was when Rachel stopped living halfway and gave her whole life to God.

Rachel had discovered something powerful – a relationship with the living God.

**Living her faith boldly**

From that point on, Rachel's life looked different:



*Rachel Scott's life was cut short, but her bold faith sparked a chain reaction of love that still changes lives today.*

- She befriended kids who were bullied or lonely.
- She stood up for her faith, even when people mocked her for it.
- She prayed for her classmates, asking God to use her to make a difference.

Her compassion wasn't fake. It came from knowing how much God loved her – and wanting others to experience that love too.

In one journal entry, she wrote: "I have this theory that if one person can go out of their way to show compassion, then it will start a chain reaction."

Rachel had no idea just how prophetic those words would be.

**A life cut short... but not wasted**

On the day of the shooting, Rachel's life was taken in a moment of senseless violence. But the choice she made years earlier – to follow Jesus – meant that even in death, her life had eternal meaning.

Her story has since inspired millions through Rachel's Challenge, an anti-bullying movement that has saved lives, prevented suicides, and even stopped planned school shootings.

More importantly, Rachel's life

points to the same truth that changed her: you can have peace with God, forgiveness for your sins, and eternal life – if you turn to Jesus.

**What about you?**

Rachel was only 17, but she was ready to meet God. Are you?

The Bible says: "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23).

"But God proves his own love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8).

Rachel wasn't perfect, and neither are we. But Jesus died on the cross to take the punishment we deserve – and He rose again, offering forgiveness and eternal life to anyone who trusts Him.

**Your invitation**

You can make the same choice Rachel made. You can begin a real relationship with God right now.

Here's a simple prayer to express your heart to Him:

*"God, I know I'm a sinner and I need Your forgiveness. I believe Jesus died for my sins and rose again. Today, I choose to trust Him as my Saviour and Lord. Please change me and help me live for You. Amen."*

If you meant those words, the Bible says you now belong to Him. Like Rachel, you can live with purpose – and know that when your time on earth ends, you'll spend eternity with God.

## PEACE IN THE NIGHT

For Oliver Dunn, some of the biggest turning points in life didn't happen at school, in church, or at a big event. They happened quietly, in the middle of the night.

Oliver grew up in Adelaide, South Australia. Now 19, he's a school services officer at an outside school hours care service. His childhood looked, on the surface, like a typical Christian upbringing.

"I grew up with Christian parents and our family attended church regularly," he explained. "Because of this, I knew a lot about the Bible and its stories. I would attend Christian camps and knew how to act the part."

He had said prayers when he was young, asking Jesus into his heart – but looking back, he recognised, "I did not fully understand the full extent of what

this meant. For most of my early life, I lived my parents' faith." Oliver didn't have a dramatic rebellion or a public crisis. His moment of decision came during an anxious season at home.

"In 2019 when I was 13 years old, I began having trouble falling asleep," he recalled.

"While I was awake at night I would begin to stress about the fact that I couldn't get to sleep. This would in turn make it even harder to get to sleep."

It became a nightly battle. "For weeks I was stuck in this cycle," he said, "and most nights I would see if my older sister Meg was awake so that I wouldn't have to be alone."

**A question in the dark**

One night, everything changed. "After a couple of weeks, one night I went into Meg's room like usual," Oliver remembered. "Amidst consoling me, she asked if I was saved. It wasn't till then that I considered whether I was actually saved."

"When Meg asked me if I was saved I honestly responded, 'I don't know.' She asked me if I wanted to pray just to be certain, to which I said yes."

Oliver didn't recall the exact words of the prayer that followed, but he remembered the heart of it clearly: "It went along the lines of, 'Dear God, I am sorry for the sins I have done, I invite you into my heart, amen.'"

That moment became a foundation. "Since being converted," he explained, "my reasons for the things I do have changed."

**A new way of living**

Before that night, Oliver's faith felt inherited. After it, it became personal. "I seek the Lord with the big decisions through prayer, the Bible and other Christians' advice," he said.

"Before I was living purely for myself, but since then I've had times where 'myself' doesn't want to keep going, but God has seen me through the toughest times."

That change has touched every part of his life – from everyday worries to long-term plans. "I know that if I am still breathing, He has work for me to do," Oliver said.

Faith hasn't meant an end to struggles. Oliver still faces pressure like anyone else, but it has changed how he faces them. "God has helped me through so many circumstances," he reflected.

"I am still learning to take everything to Him first, rather than after trying it in my own power."

He's seen this in everyday life. "From school life to work life, breakups and sleepless nights, God has been my motivation, my helper and my friend."



Oliver Dunn

“My reasons for the things I do have changed.”

*"The Gospel is the good news that the everlasting and ever-increasing joy of the never-boring, ever-satisfying Christ is ours freely and eternally by faith in the sin-forgiving death and hope-giving resurrection of Jesus Christ." - John Piper*

“Rachel's life was taken in a moment of senseless violence.”

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 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

## ROCK STAR'S SEARCH FOR PURPOSE

Levan Wee had achieved everything he set out to do. As frontman for his band, Ronin, they became the top band in Singapore with their debut album distributed by Universal Music. Once, they performed live for up to 50,000 people.

In contrast to the fame and success of his adult years, Levan's childhood was filled with discrimination and insecurity. Born with albinism, Levan's physical appearances and issues with his eyesight made him different.

But things took a turn when he joined Ronin.

"It was a complete flip to the other end of the spectrum. I bought into the hype and thrived on the attention because I was searching for acceptance," he told Stories of Hope.

But at the height of his musical success, Levan left the band. "I thought that if we could just reach that goal of being the top band, life would have meaning — I would prove that my life had a purpose," he tells Thir.st.

"But when I reached the peak of the band's success, I felt even emptier and angrier than before."

He decided to pursue a doctorate in philosophy instead. "I thought that if I could score top grades, then life would have meaning."

And score he did. Levan received a full scholarship and graduated top in his cohort.

"And that high lasted for a week," he admitted.

While he achieved his goal, the same emptiness that he felt had returned.



Ronin frontman Levan Wee. Photo: youtube/Thirst

"The seeds of my depression were planted in my teenage years through mindsets of inadequacy and the need to outperform others.

"Everything I chased, I chased with zest," he said.

"But when I no longer had a consuming project at hand, there was nothing left to do but to face myself... and I was still not okay with myself."

His depression worsened and Levan thought of ending his life. In desperation, he cried out to God.

"Anyone who knows me knows that praying to God is one of the last things that I would have done," he admitted.

"I felt that anyone who believed in God was just weak." Levan especially disliked Christians who often told him that God is good and that He has a plan for his life.

"I really hated that because from my life experiences, the pain and insecurity that I felt, I couldn't believe it."

But as he looked out the window and contemplated ending his own life, Levan saw that he had nothing to lose.

"I said, 'God, everything else I've chased, everything else I've longed to achieve has led to nothing. So if You're real, show me.'"

After that prayer, Levan started to see visions of objects in odd places that would later appear in person. In one of his

visions, he saw a supermarket trolley beneath a block of apartments with the words, "so strange, this trolley is in the middle of nowhere."

Later that day, his friend came over for a visit and they saw a trolley beneath the apartment block.

Not knowing about his vision, his friend blurted out, "Wow it's so strange the trolley is in the middle of nowhere."

As the visions got stranger and the situations got increasingly rare, Levan asked God for "irrefutable proof".

"I was heading out to buy coffee one day when I started to feel some sort of electric rain.

"It was as though I had stepped into a static field. I looked up, only to realise there was a ceiling over me so it couldn't have been raining.

"But I felt it. And as the rain fell, I was overwhelmed by a sense of love."

He was so shocked that he ran home and fell on his knees, praying.

"That's when I saw a vision of an open cave in my living room.

"There was a man in a white robe standing in the distance. I don't know how but I immediately knew He was Jesus.

"He held His hands out and the moment I touched Him, I

felt an electric current — the same feeling I experienced from the rain — going through my whole body. I started crying and saying, 'I'm so sorry, God. For my whole life, I never believed in You. I've always made fun of people who believed in You.'"

Levan felt three words resonate through his chest, "I love you."

"From that day on, I gave my life to God."

Since then, Levan continues to use his artistic talents to reach out to others. He created

Bible Bento, a series of short anime-style videos to help others learn about the Bible.

"The thing is, no matter how hard we try on our own, we are sinful by nature. So we can never reconcile ourselves to God on our own terms, by our own deeds," he added.

"And in His love, God sent His own Son, Jesus, to die on the cross for our sin as the perfect sacrifice. We weren't born to die. Only Jesus was."

To find out more about Bible Bento, visit mybiblebento.com.

**"I felt even emptier and angrier than before."**

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### NUDGE WITH KARL FAASE

#### The question of suffering

**AFTER THE TSUNAMI** and resulting tragedy in Asia in December 2004, many people asked why God would allow this to happen.

Some people believe that God has no ability to stop these events, so God must not be all-powerful; or that God does not care. If God does not care then how can He be all loving? And if He is a loving God, why does He allow suffering on such a huge scale? These are very complex questions but let me give you a couple of responses.

First, we live in a broken world. The Bible tells us that humanity is broken and so is the world we live in. This means that tragedies will occur.

Second, suffering reminds us of our morality and the frailty of life.

Thirdly, God knows and feels our human pain. Jesus' earthly life and His experience mean He understands our pain.

And lastly, out of such a tragedy God can bring good — people working together, miraculous survival and people reaching out to God in faith.

A complete explanation? No, but it is my hope that this may give you some insights that you can reflect upon in light of your own suffering and hardships.

### Read Challenge News online!

Did you know? Challenge — The Good News Paper shares real stories of hope, transformation, and faith in multiple languages and special editions. Whether you'd like to read in Afrikaans, Spanish, or explore powerful stories from those in prison or the military, you can find it all online at challenge.news.



### Recipe of the month

#### Rainbow salad with haloumi

**IF YOU ARE** looking for a salad packed with goodness, and full of delicious and colourful ingredients (and there is a saying that the more colourful your meal, the healthier it is) then this is a salad for you.

Topped with crispy-on-the-outside, oozy-on-the-inside haloumi it stands on its own as a vegetarian lunch, or a wonderful accompaniment to some grilled lamb or chicken.

The dressing is quite sharp and tangy to contrast with the saltiness of the haloumi and adds zing and a little bit of heat to the whole salad.

- Ingredients: (Serves 4-6)**
- 120 g mixed salad leaves
  - 1 each of medium-sized red, yellow and green capsicums
  - 2 carrots
  - 1 medium-sized fresh beetroot
  - 250 g mixed cherry tomatoes
  - 2 cobs fresh corn
  - handful fresh flat-leaf parsley
  - 1 small bunch chives
  - 1/3 cup pepitas
  - 1/2 cup pecan nuts
  - 180-200 g block of haloumi
  - 3 tablespoons extra virgin olive oil
  - juice of 1 large lemon
  - 2 teaspoons capers
  - 1/2 teaspoon chilli flakes
  - sea salt and black pepper

and julienne. Keep the beetroot separate from the other ingredients so its rich purple juice doesn't stain the other ingredients. Cut the tomatoes into halves. Using a sharp knife cut the kernels off the corn cobs. Roughly chop the parsley and snip the chives.

Make the dressing. Place 2 1/3 tablespoons olive oil, the lemon juice, capers and chilli flakes in a small glass jar with a lid. Shake well and then season to taste with sea salt and black pepper.

When ready to serve, toss all the salad ingredients together and place in a serving dish.

Heat a non-stick pan over medium heat and add the remaining olive oil.

Cut the haloumi into eight pieces and pan fry until golden. Place the haloumi on the salad, pour over the dressing and serve immediately.

Recipe by Margaret Warren, photo by Andrew Warren. Used with permission under a Creative Commons CC-BY-NC license.

**Method**

Heat oven to 180 C. Place the pepitas and pecans on a baking tray and bake for 10 minutes until they smell toasty and are satisfyingly crunchy. Take out of the oven and set aside to cool.

Dice capsicums into 1cm square pieces. Peel carrots and julienne. Peel beetroot

# BUILDING BETTER RELATIONSHIPS

## Planning for what really matters

BY ROB FURLONG

**FROM TIME TO** time my wife Karen and I sit down and have what we call a “planning meeting.” It sounds a bit too formal for a couple to have a planning meeting doesn’t it?

Not really.

Over the past 12 months we have been discussing how we can revamp our outdoor patio area and as the year ended, we sat down, looked at the options, considered the cost and finally agreed on what we would do.

Sometimes we have done this by grabbing a coffee together at our favourite coffee shop but this time we needed to have the area under discussion in full view, so we planned at home. I am pleased to say that we are already halfway to completing one of our objectives for our patio – roll on 2026!

What got us motivated was that we both have a picture of how we would like things to be around our home and so we made a commitment to start working steadily towards that picture. I have been always been impacted by the concept of the “big picture”. Over

many years, I have been learning in many different ways the importance of this concept across all areas of my life.

The trouble is, we all tend to believe that once we have the big picture, things will sail along smoothly. Not so!

A big picture is a wonderful thing, provided there is a strategy to help you move towards achieving it.

Michelangelo’s statue of David began as a picture in his mind but was only completed when the last piece of marble was chiselled away. In between there was a lot of hard work!

What I am talking about was beautifully illustrated in a book I read several years ago. The author wrote about the construction of the East-West railroad in the second half of the 19th century which connected the eastern states of the USA with the west.

One of the great visionaries of the project was Collis Huntington who was invited to a public ceremony to celebrate the driving of the first spike.

Surprisingly, he declined to attend, stating among his reasons for his non-attendance: “Anyone can drive the first



Stock photo

spike, but there are months of labour and unrest between the first and last spike.”

The author goes on to say that in his opinion Huntington was saying, “Look, it’s great to have a big picture but let’s not celebrate until we get the job done.”

The reason I am talking about the big picture is because now is an ideal time for you to sit down quietly somewhere and do an assessment of your life, marriage and relationships.

A great place to start is to ask yourself a couple of questions that I have been encouraged to ask myself over the years.

The questions are: “What am I living for?” and “What keeps me from a full realisation of what I am living for?”

Think about these questions

seriously and you will find that they are not easily answered. They require us to do some hard thinking, but in the long run they are worth asking and answering because when we do we make wise choices about the kinds of relationships we want, how we would like our marriages to be and where we can best invest our lives. And once you have formed the big picture, take the time to work out how you are going to get there – your big picture will not paint itself!

Don’t allow 2026 to become another year of wasted opportunities; pull out a pen and a pad, buy yourself a cup of coffee and do some thinking and planning!

And if you would like to know how our patio renovation is coming along, drop me a line in three months! ●



**Scan here to donate to the work of Challenge around the world.**

## 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>
Alpha Film Series on <b>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 <a href="http://jesusfilm.org/app">jesusfilm.org/app</a> <a href="http://youtube.com/@jesusfilm">youtube.com/@jesusfilm</a>	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 - **back issues of Challenge News at challenge.news**

## 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](mailto: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](mailto:info@challengenews.org)**

*All overseas enquiries are referred onto someone in their own country*

## What is Valentine’s Day all about?

**ON FEBRUARY 14** every year, millions of people exchange roses, chocolates, and heart-shaped cards. It’s a day that celebrates love in all its forms – romantic, friendly, and familial. But few know that Valentine’s Day began not as a commercial holiday, but as a story of courage, compassion, and faith that still speaks to the heart today.

The origins of Valentine’s Day reach back to the third century in Rome. At that time, Emperor Claudius II banned marriage for young men, believing single soldiers fought better than married ones. It is said that a Christian priest named Valentine quietly defied the emperor’s order. He continued to marry couples in secret, believing that love and commitment were gifts from God worth protecting.

When his actions were discovered, Valentine was imprisoned. Legend says he befriended his jailer’s blind daughter and prayed for her – and that she miraculously received her sight. Before his execution on February 14, he sent her a note signed “from your Valentine.”

Over time, Christians began to honour his faith and sacrifice, and the day became associated with love, hope, and the courage to care for others no matter the cost.

Centuries later, medieval poets like Geoffrey Chaucer helped link Valentine’s Day to romantic love, and by the 18th century, handwritten notes and tokens had become common. Today, Valentine’s Day is celebrated across the world – sometimes with flowers and chocolate, sometimes with acts of kindness. But at its heart, it began with someone who believed that love was sacred, selfless, and divine.

That idea still matters. Real love – the kind that lasts beyond feelings or gifts – is rooted in something deeper than romance. The Bible describes it this way: “Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one’s life for one’s friends” (John 15:13). Valentine risked his life to honour that kind of love, and his story reminds us that love is strongest when it gives rather than takes.

Whether you celebrate Valentine’s Day with a partner, family, or friends, it’s also an opportunity to think about the ultimate source of love. God Himself is love – not just a feeling, but a person who cares deeply for you. Jesus showed that love when He gave His life so we could be forgiven and restored to God.

You don’t have to earn that love or prove yourself worthy of it. It’s freely offered – the truest Valentine message ever written.

If you’ve never experienced that kind of love, you can begin today. Simply open your heart to God and tell Him you want to know Him.

Believe that Jesus died and rose again for you, and ask Him to be part of your life.

Because the real story of Valentine’s Day isn’t just about cards or candles – it’s about a love so powerful it changed the world, and it’s still reaching out to you. ●

# UNBREAKABLE SPIRIT

**M**onty Williams is a big name in the NBA scene. Known for his time as the head coach of the Phoenix Suns, the team won the first two games of the 2021 NBA Finals – a first for the team since 2003. A year later, Monty was voted Coach of the Year for his work with the Phoenix Suns.

As a former NBA player himself, Monty played as a forward for teams such as the New York Knicks, San Antonio Spurs, Denver Nuggets, and Orlando Magic. But he was forced to retire from playing in 2003 due to chronic knee problems.

Apart from his accolades as an NBA coach, Monty was also known for his faith and resilience. In 2016, tragedy struck the Williams family when Monty's wife, Ingrid, died in a head-on collision. Three of their five children were in the car during the accident but they survived.

Ingrid had been driving on a four-lane road when a sedan approached from the opposite direction, going more than twice the speed limit.

The police would later find a substantial amount of methamphetamine in the body of the driver, who was believed to be cradling her dog on her lap while she was driving. Both the dog and the driver died at the scene.

At the funeral, everyone expected Monty to grieve, to share about Ingrid's larger-than-life personality and heart for people, and he did. But at the end of his eulogy, Monty gave a speech that stunned the crowd into silence.

"Everybody is praying for me and my family, which is right. But let us not forget that there were two people in this situation. And that family needs prayer as well. And we have no ill will towards that family," he said.

"In my house, we have a sign that says, 'As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord' [Joshua 24:15]. We cannot serve the Lord if we don't have a heart of forgiveness."

In the heaviness of surmountable loss at the hands of another, Monty



Head coach Monty Williams talks to Killian Hayes while playing the Toronto Raptors at Little Caesars Arena on December 30, 2023 in Detroit, Michigan. (Photo by Gregory Shamus/Getty Images)

decided to forgive. Eight years later, Monty's heart of forgiveness remains.

"I realised that the lady who was driving that car was going through a lot in her life for her to be a part of an act like that," he shared on the Sports Spectrum podcast.

"And I probably understood God's love more now than any other point in my life."

Monty grew up in a rough neighbourhood in Oxon Hill, just outside of DC.

It was a neighbourhood where "you could either hustle and sell drugs or just not have," he told *Sports Illustrated*.

He was raised by his single mother in a Christian household.

His grandparents on his father's side were Christian missionaries and his maternal grandfather was a pastor, which he said, "had a huge impact on [him]." At 10 years old, Monty said a prayer to give his life to Jesus.

"[But] I didn't take [my faith] seriously until I was 18 and the doctors told me that I had a heart condition, and I was probably going to die if I kept playing basketball," he told *Andscape*.

As he grew, he learned to behave like a Christian but looking back, he admitted that he was mostly putting on an act. He'd cuss when the adults were not around and his prayers were mainly about getting rich and having fast cars.

Then in 1989, he met Ingrid at Notre Dame. Monty credited Ingrid for encouraging him to

take his faith in God seriously. He watched as Ingrid reflected the love of Jesus by volunteering two hours every week to bathe and talk to an elderly woman with Alzheimer's.

It went against what Monty was taught to do, which was to perform charitable acts for the purpose of strengthening his own public image.

"It was so real, and raw."

Through watching Ingrid live out her faith, Monty eventually recom-

mitted his life to Jesus and started taking his faith seriously. However, trials would come soon to test his faith.

At 18, Monty was told that he had to stop playing basketball, or he'd die because of his heart condition. It was like a death sentence to him.

"My career was over at 18."

When he announced the news to Ingrid, she told him, "Honey, Jesus can heal your heart."

A coach told Monty about a risky experimental treatment that, if it failed, could stop his heart for good. But it was a chance he would take, if it meant he could go back to playing basketball. Hours after the treatment, he woke up. Not only that, but he could play basketball again. For Monty, it was a God-given miracle.

Referencing this incident in his eulogy at Ingrid's funeral, he says, "I'm evidence that God can work it out. This is hard for my family but this will work out."

Eight years later, Monty admitted



During his playing days: Orlando Magic forward Monty Williams is fouled by Minnesota Timberwolves forward Malik Sealy during the second quarter of the game at the Arena in Orlando in December, 1999. (Photo by TONY RANZE/AFP via Getty Images)

that forgiveness didn't come easy.

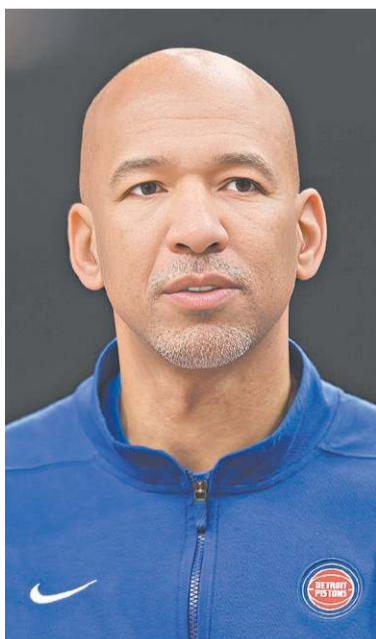
"The reality is when it first happened, I really didn't care. I just wanted my wife back and I wanted my life back.

"As time went by, I understood how God uses all things together for

the good of those who love God and those who are called according to His purposes [Romans 8:28].

"She's in the best place possible and someday I will see her again.

"That gives me and my family a lot of hope."



Head coach Monty Williams of the Detroit Pistons during the NBA game against the Phoenix Suns at Footprint Center in February 2024 in Phoenix, Arizona. (Photo by Christian Petersen/Getty Images)

**“ I was probably going to die if I kept playing basketball. ”**

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