

DEATH KNOCKS TWICE

“You might not know my story,” begins Matt Manzari, “but if you do then you know I should be dead.”

“I guess you could say I was a calculated adrenaline junkie. Growing up in upstate New York, my family and I loved adventures — skateboarding, snowboarding, water skiing, boating, camping, fishing, you name it. Then we moved to Florida and I caught gators and lived on the lake all the time.”

Once he tried wake skating, Matt never looked back. Soon all his dreams came true — he was only 15 and sponsored by big brands like Nike, travelling the world doing the sport he loved.

“But honestly there was still something missing,” he admits. “I couldn’t really put my finger on it. But my life felt somewhat selfish and kind of meaningless. I thought, ‘This can’t be it.’”

“At the top of my career, the adventure was losing its satisfaction.”

Having grown up in a church-going home, Matt considered himself a Christian at the time, but his

attitude was more of someone taking the free gift of salvation offered by Jesus like a free stimulus check with no strings attached. Matt told the podcast Faith and the Fast life, “I believed in Jesus, I believed in God, but I was still the king in charge of my own life. ... My daily focus was on how do I get more money, more sponsors and more exposure. I was very focused on myself, and not on loving God and others.”

Matt married his good friend Bobbye Jean and went to Bible college.

Up to this point in his life, astonishingly, Matt had

never even broken a bone in all his crazy adventures. Then, two days before he was supposed to graduate, he hit the shoreline during a competition.

Matt’s skull was shattered; his jaw, tailbone and hand were broken; and a rebar punctured his leg. He was knocked unconscious.

“Before my accident I thought God

only cared about the big picture — whether you got saved or not — but through my recovery I realised He cares about everything — my bills were paid, I got to graduate on time and my parents took in my wife and I until I got better. God was taking care of all my needs.”

Matt went through several reconstructive surgeries; over a couple of

years his body began to heal and he got his life back on track. This time he pursued what God wanted and ways of sharing Him with others.

“Looking at me, you wouldn’t know I almost died,” he says amazed. “Having a full recovery was a gift I will never take for granted.” When he went back to wake skating it was like he had never crashed at all. He

was riding even better than before. But the worst was yet to come.

In 2013, Matt, then 31, was helping to trim trees at a church in a high reach bucket and ended up in a coma, having been hit by 14,000 volts arching over nearly six metres through the air, into the metal bucket.

The electricity had flowed through Matt’s hand and blown through the top of his head, incurring fourth and fifth degree burns (through the muscle tissue and part of the bone) — the equivalent of hooking him up to six electric chairs. Matt’s skin was so badly charred that it left his sternum and ribcage exposed.

Doctors told Bobbye Jean that he likely wouldn’t survive.

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Matt Manzari is back to wakeboarding, despite his terrible injuries from being electrocuted, which have left life-long scars.

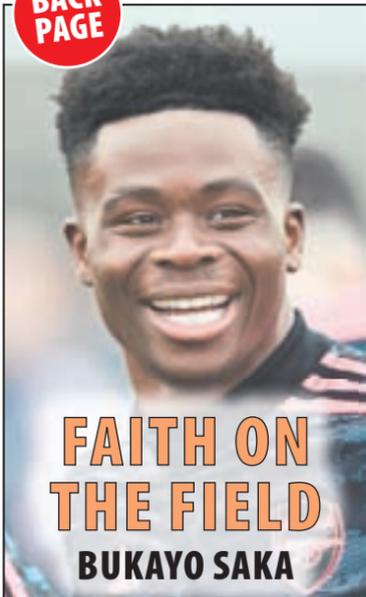
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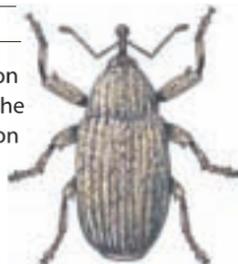


Turning disaster into opportunity

BY JON COURSON

IN the late 1800s, when cotton was the undisputed king of the South, every cotton plantation in Coffee County, Alabama, was wiped out by the boll weevil. The economic fallout was disastrous, causing the Christians in the little town of Enterprise to meet together and pray, “We thank You, Lord, that you have blessed us for so many years with cotton. Now it’s gone, but we know You work all things together for good. So we trust You.”

Following their prayer meeting, the town of



The boll weevil.

Enterprise decided to change crops from cotton to peanuts.

Now, although peanuts at the time were virtually unknown, there was a man of exceptional intelligence who, in that same year, was also talking to the Lord. George Washington Carver, who had a deep interest in astronomy, prayed, “Father, teach me the secrets of the universe.” Then he hung his head and said, “Lord, I know that’s too presumptuous to ask. Just teach me about the peanut.”

And how the Lord answered his prayer! Beginning in 1895, Carver developed over 300 products from the lowly peanut — of which the primary discovery, as far as I’m concerned, was peanut butter!

As a result of Carver’s discoveries, suddenly there was an unexpected, unprecedented demand for peanuts. And Coffee County began to prosper beyond belief. What had been a disaster became a blessing. What had been adversity became prosperity — all because instead of being eaten up by the worm of negativity, the people of Enterprise glorified God.

If you go to Enterprise today, you will see a monument in the town square with a boll weevil on top and this inscription below:

In profound appreciation for the boll weevil and what he has done as the herald of prosperity, the monument is erected by the grateful citizens of Coffee County, Alabama. “All things work together for good” (see Romans 8:28).

When life gives you lemons...



DO you ever run into roadblocks on your life journey? Do you ever get frustrated when things go wrong and your plans don't work out as anticipated? What seems like

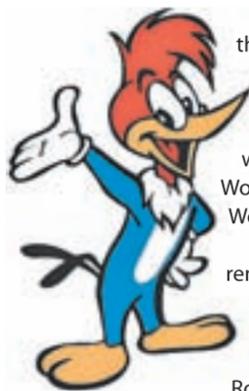
a detour can lead you straight to your destination.

Grace and Walter Lantz rented a rustic wooden cabin in the forest for their honeymoon. At the first dawn there, a woodpecker started its pounding on the roof.

The newlyweds couldn't sleep for the noise. But by the time they returned from their honeymoon, they were inspired to create a cartoon character, "Woody Woodpecker." Walter drew the pictures. Grace became Woody's voice.

Years later, at their 50th wedding anniversary, Grace remembered the problem of the noisy woodpecker and said, "It was the best thing that ever happened to us."

In 1859, a New York chemist travelled to Pennsylvania, to watch the drilling for oil. He was Robert Chesebrough, who watched as the oil drillers cursed a colourless oily residue that stuck to their drills. Though it



was a problem that gummed up the works, the oil workers smeared this stuff on their cuts and burns. It helped to heal. Chesebrough took this oily residue back to New York. By 1870, he was manufacturing what he had developed from that oily problem. He called it Vaseline Petroleum Jelly.

A violent storm posed a problem for the captain of a slave ship. He was John Newton, born in London on July 24, 1725. He transported slaves from Africa to America. On March 10, 1748, a storm frightened him so badly that he called out to God for mercy. The problem of the storm started a storm in his heart. He remembered his childhood faith.

Finally, that inner storm gave him the opportunity to give up the slave trade.

At age 39, he became a priest of the Church of England. He wrote a hymn called *Amazing Grace* to tell how God's love changed his life. 250 years later people are still singing it. That storm provided showers of blessing in his life and for many others in the years to come.

In each of these instances, a setback turned into an opportunity. Try to change your perspective on whatever difficult situation or trial you are facing at the moment; view it creatively and turn it into an opportunity to learn and grow. •



Matt and Bobbye Jean with the first of their three sons.

Death knocks twice

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They warned that if he did wake up, he would have brain damage and need an arm amputation. However, all their predictions proved wrong.

Matt had to undergo 70 surgeries, including a procedure to remove the burnt muscles and ligaments from his chest, as well as multiple skin grafts.

To this day Matt's father, Darren, recalls the screams as his son's wounds were debrided three times a day – a procedure that lasted two hours each time and was akin to torture.

At the time of the electrocution, Bobbye Jean was pregnant with their first child.

"It was hard to see a light at the end of the tunnel, it feels lonely. My identity as a professional wake skater wasn't enough," Matt recalls. "When I saw my son for the first time I was filled with such overwhelming love. It made me appreciate how hard it must have been for my dad to watch me suffer.

"But his suffering and mine are nothing compared to what Jesus went through for me on the cross, or what His Father went through watching Him. My scars don't compare to His. My pain doesn't come close to His.

"My love for my son, and my dad's for me, is small compared to God's incredible love for us.

"When I got home and looked in the mirror, I saw a new me. My value and identity are in God. His love is unconditional. His power is made perfect in my weakness. In Him I'm



Matt Manzari

a new creation."

Although Matt will have pain and scars for the rest of his life, he deems it all worth it in light of the grace he discovered while healing, and the resilience it built into his marriage to Bobbye Jean.

“My scars don't compare to His.”

Bobbye Jean wrote in a blog on March 1, 2014: "My husband continues to praise Christ and pursue Him even in daily struggles. He is a strong man who trusts God with his whole life."

Today Matt is a full-time Christian motivational speaker.

On his blog site beyond-theburn.life he says: "God has been faithful and caring through the good times, and even more so in our suffering. We want to encourage all to stay positive and persevere, because this life is only temporary. No matter how big our problems are, God can carry us through!"

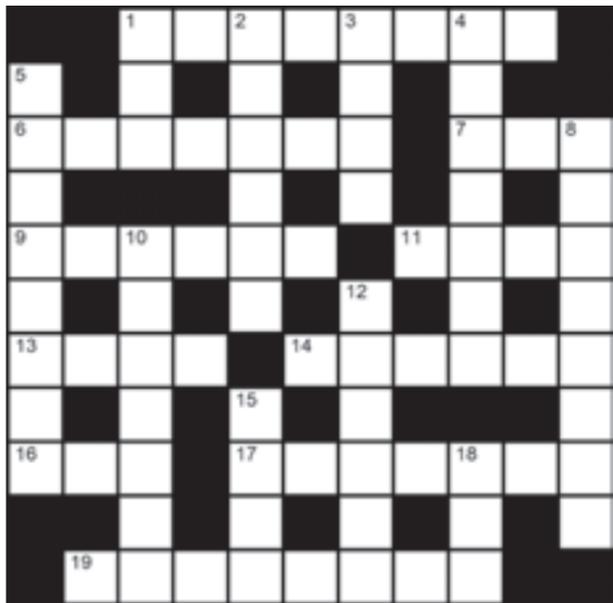
Coffee Break CROSSWORD & SUDOKU

ACROSS

- 1 Viewers, listeners
- 6 Vast
- 7 Bunk or berth
- 9 Decay and disappear
- 11 Like many old cellars
- 13 Highway off-ramp
- 14 Desert mammals
- 16 Pull along
- 17 Old as the hills
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DOWN

- 1 Chair part
- 2 Relating to Denmark
- 3 Used for seeing
- 4 A leaf vegetable
- 5 Easiest to do
- 8 Down-payments



- 10 Network of trains
- 12 Waltzed, for example
- 15 Dry watercourse (North Africa)
- 18 Organ for hearing

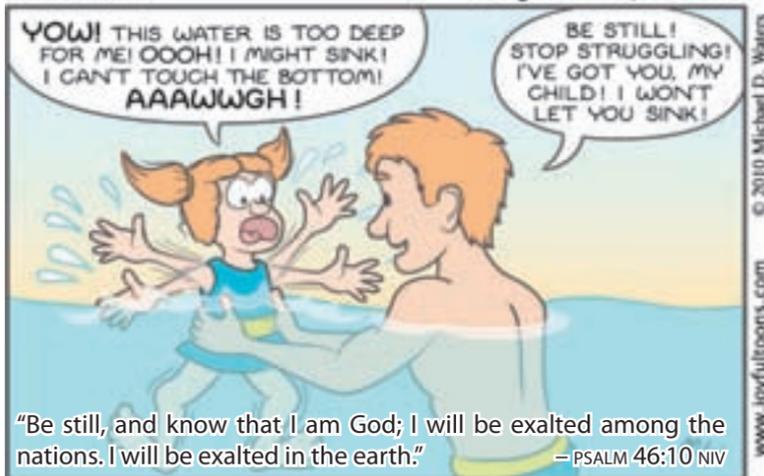
SOLUTIONS PAGE 11



"Once I got my barking under control the neighbourhood fell in love with me."

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BE STILL



"Be still, and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations. I will be exalted in the earth." — PSALM 46:10 NIV

Wise words on suffering

YUVAL Noah Harari writes in his bestseller, *Sapiens*. "Happiness is not the surplus of pleasant over unpleasant moments. Rather, happiness consists in seeing one's life in its entirety as meaningful and worthwhile. ... A meaningful life can be extremely satisfying even in the midst of hardship, whereas a meaningless life is a terrible ordeal no matter how comfortable it is."

TRAILS and subsequent suffering in life are inevitable, unpredictable and variable. And while never pleasant, they become purposeful and profitable when responded to correctly [by using them as an opportunity to draw closer to God].

IT has never been quite enough to say that God is in His heaven and all is right with the world; since the rumour is that God had left His heavens to set it right.

GOD specialises in hard situations. He is most at work, most active, most powerful, most strategic when the odds are stacked against people; whether that's lifting people out of pits, storms, dry valleys, deep waters, shipwreck, islands, deserts, wilderness, even graves. God showed up and redeemed. Hope is not God's side hustle. God is there for you, and the harder the fight of life gets, the harder He is fighting for us.

WARREN Wiersbe states: "Our faith is not really tested until God asks us to bear what seems unbearable, do what seems unreasonable, and expect what seems impossible."

I'VE lately been reminded that when it's cloudy and you can't see the sun, we still trust that the sun is there. It's the same with God. He's still there, even when it feels brutal.

"LIFE with God is not immunity from difficulties, but peace in difficulties."

"GOD allows us to experience the low points of life in order to teach us lessons that we could learn in no other way."

"LIFE is hard. Life is going to be hard if it's not already really, really hard. But I believe we can live so well in the hard. ... You have a stunning capacity to endure incredibly hard because of Jesus in your story. You are actually anti-fragile. ... With Jesus in your corner, you are so much stronger than you think; you can endure very, very hard things. You can stay in the hard, you don't have to leave. You can do it. You can do this, because of Jesus."

Poet's journey to faith

From the time she was five years old, Traci Neal knew that her passion was to express herself through words, and from 13 she wanted to make poetry her career. That ambition would take 20 years to fulfil but in the meantime Traci learnt some life lessons that have made her poetry so much richer and deeper.

Growing up, the now 34-year-old was a shy girl who got teased by her peers and whose writing became an outlet from the bullying and low self-esteem. Unfortunately, she also tried to find acceptance through romantic relationships with the wrong sort of guys and ended up being the victim of domestic violence at 16 and rape at age 20.

During this time Traci admits to being fuelled by selfishness, pride, and greed.

"These traits escalated in college, especially when I turned 21. I partied, had sex with men and wanted to make lots of money. I drank the most I ever drank on my 21st birthday and was very drunk," she confesses.

Since Traci had grown up going to church every Sunday and been taught the Bible, she thought of herself as a Christian; but it took total brokenness to bring her to a place of wanting a real relationship with Jesus.

"I believed [wild living] would satisfy my soul. Instead, I felt super empty. After I graduated, I decide to give up partying, sex, and schemes to make money. All of it got old. I also chose to have a more 'stable' career. I decided to teach."

"I felt lost and uncertain about life."

Traci then spent 10 years trying, unsuccessfully, to become a certified elementary school teacher.

"My divine intervention begins in Beijing, China," she shares. "I taught English to Chinese children for six months from 2012 to the early part of 2013. While over there alone, I realised my relationship with God was what was sustaining me in the midst of adapting to cultural differences."

Back in the United States in South Carolina, Traci did a range of jobs that she hated because they all involved cleaning something unsanitary. Although at the time she resented God for allowing her to suffer such degrading work, she now realises that He was developing a servant heart in her.

Things were hard on the romantic front too. Traci met a man and they planned to marry but just after her 27th birthday, her fiancé died at the age of 35 from a brain injury.

That pushed Traci into a very dark place where the world was not clear anymore.

"I felt lost and uncertain about life. I had prayed day and night for his healing but now I was angry because I felt Jesus had let me down," she recalls.

Interestingly, her response was not to reject God and walk away but to decide that since nothing – not love, nor partying, nor money, nor a career – had worked out as she had hoped, she would give the whole mess to Jesus and surrender her whole heart to Him.

"Suddenly, He did a miraculous wonder!" she attests. "Jesus showed me how tremendously He loved me. He restored me from my pain and loss. He even blessed me with a husband, not long afterwards – on my 29th birthday, Zach proposed."

"I also began to understand something of why I went through my season of brokenness – so that I can relate to the suffering, hopelessness and need of others."

flourished and she has won two awards for it. Her poems have highlighted what being a servant truly means and why serving others is a priceless gift. She loves to use her creativity as a witness of the goodness of Jesus, offering hope to the hurting that Jesus can make all things new, even as He did for her.

"Life can feel unfair," she admits. "Sometimes it may not make any sense but, never forget this, Jesus is a light to see you through your darkest days. When we open our hearts to Him, Jesus can show us the way."

"In my past, I could not imagine any of these things happening to me. I know God has a purpose for my life, even when I sometimes do not see greatness in myself. Pain is never a fun procedure, but oftentimes it is necessary for a person's development. If you are going through a time of suffering, I want you to remember this. Hold on to Jesus and refuse to give up. You are still breathing. Your heart is still beating. You are stronger than you think. May God bring you out on the other side of your sorrow."



Traci Neal

The blood of Jesus

BY TRACI NEAL

My problems can feel like thunder clouds and waves of wonder. How do I escape thoughts in my mind? Where do I find peace to stop living blind? I cannot free myself. I am weak on my own.

The blood of Jesus makes me whole. The power of Jesus is unbreakable and unshakable. Now, I live to take a back seat. I will not allow Satan to put my life on repeat. My smile spells pure joy. I walk in victory. Jesus wins my battles. He breaks my chains. The blood of Jesus set me free.

I am a new creature with evident new features. Jesus in me will forever shine bright. He is my everything. I love being in His light! The blood of Jesus washes. Jesus can make anyone clean. Jesus is the way to God, the Father. Watch God move. Let Him take over your scene.

A life of loss, yet filled with hope

Tony Hickman knows what it is to suffer loss. When he was 14, his mother suddenly passed away from a brain haemorrhage. More recently, he has lost a sister, brother and niece to stomach cancer – something he has also battled with.

But he has found something that gives him hope and peace in times of suffering.

Tony's parents took him to church as a child, but it was a very old chapel and he struggled to understand anything. He knew God was real but he always thought God was angry, like his dad, who had a temper and regularly spanked his kids.

"Although I'm sure I heard about Jesus and God's love as a child, it had never truly registered that His love was for ME," Tony says.

After his mother's death Tony made friends with a boy from school with Christian parents, who invited him to attend a more contemporary church with them. "[There] I began to understand that Jesus died for the whole world," Tony says.

When he was 15, Tony read a book in which the main character, a scullery maid, asks a pastor how to become a Christian. The pastor told the maid to pray: "Lord, show me myself." Although he didn't fully understand what it meant, he prayed the maid's simple prayer and in the months that followed, he became aware of the state of his heart.

"Although I hadn't committed much in the way of outward sins, I saw that my heart was indeed very sinful to God and I started to truly want to know I was forgiven," Tony explains. "This was a big battle for me as my parents taught me that God would only forgive a special few that He had chosen before they were even born. I was desperate to know whether I could be accepted or forgiven."

Tony attended yearly Christian youth camps and, during the second year of youth camp, he felt fully ready to give his life to Jesus. He asked for forgiveness and invited Jesus to be his Lord and Saviour. However he struggled to truly know he belonged to God.

"The real knowing I was born of God and the joy of forgiveness only fully came a year later at the same youth camp when I was 18," Tony says. "I was sitting quietly praying in the tent after a meeting with everyone when the Holy Spirit just came down unexpect-



Tony Hickman before (above) his stomach removal and afterwards (below).



edly and flooded my heart with his love and presence.

"I prayed and praised for what seemed about 10 minutes but when I opened my eyes, the tent was empty and looking at my watch I discovered I had been praising the Lord for two hours! I had such a joy after this that I jumped with joy and have many times looked back to that day when I have had other battles and it has comforted my heart to know how much He really loves me."

Among Tony's battles has been the loss of several family members. Six years ago his sister passed away from stomach cancer at 53 and the following year her daughter passed away at 31 from the same cancer. After this, members of Tony's family were tested for a dangerous gene and 11 out of 14 had it, with an 80 percent chance of dying from cancer.

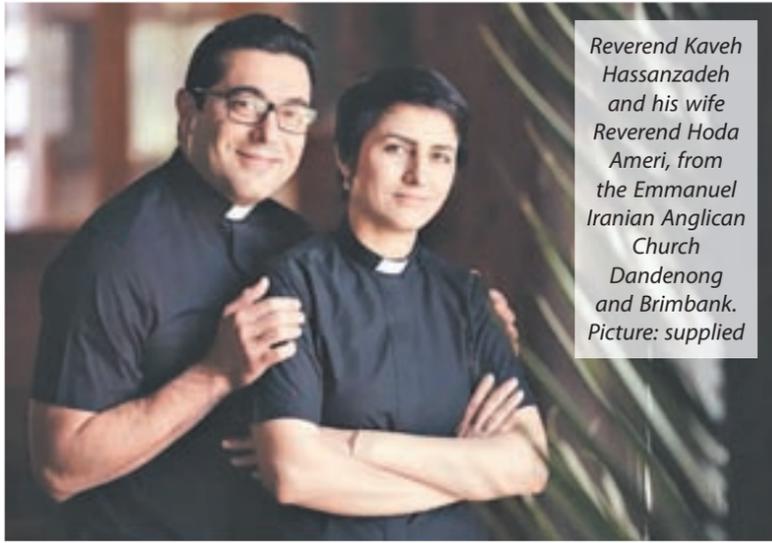
"My youngest brother decided to go into hospital and have his stomach removed as a precaution – he was not ill at all and had no symptoms," Tony says. "Sadly when they operated they decided not to remove it and sent him home with stage four cancer. He died a year later aged 51. Following this, I had biopsies and the consultant said I have some stage one tumours in my stomach and that I should seriously consider removal."

At the age of 63, Tony had his stomach removed and he began a long and painful recovery.

"Many times, I was tempted to give up and at times wanted to die because I was vomiting daily, losing a lot of weight (30kg) and bile was burning my oesophagus every day so that every mouthful of food hurt all the way down," Tony explains. "I was so miserable. Yet, through it all, I was reminded of the goodness of God and the hope that I would recover. I would wake up each morning with a fresh hope and desire to get back to the church and help others who I knew were suffering. I am now back as a full time pastor and have gained back some of the weight."

Tony says his battles have enabled him to understand the pain and distress people go through in life.

"To anyone who is suffering, I want to say, you are not alone," he encourages. "Jesus suffered more than any of us and He is waiting for you to call out to Him. He truly loves you and will answer your call and give you strength. There is hope, and there is an amazing future in store for those who believe. It's a future with no more pain, suffering or tears. Ask Jesus into your life today. He will receive all who call on Him and He will not reject you!"



Reverend Kaveh Hassanzadeh and his wife Reverend Hoda Ameri, from the Emmanuel Iranian Anglican Church Dandenong and Brimbank. Picture: supplied

Asylum seeker finds God at sea

Four months pregnant, adrift at sea, starving and terrified, Iranian refugee Hoda Ameri thought she might die in the boat that was meant to bring her to freedom.

But suddenly the light from an Australian Navy ship blazed into view. Hoda was rescued, and together with her fellow refugees found a new home in Australia.

To Hoda, once a devout Muslim, this was a clear sign that the Christian God she had learned about during her flight from Iran, was real.

Her story is told in *The Melbourne Anglican*, which reported that Hoda was an extremely observant Muslim and was deeply knowledgeable of the Koran. Growing up in Iran she was unlikely to be anything else.

In her country, people had little option to think about, talk about, or follow anything but Islam, Hoda said.

"I came from a community where most of the people were struggling with pain, suffering, broken life, sadness and anger, and although they have a good heart for God, and for each other, they suffer because they have lost the truth and the way, as I had."

She and her husband Kaveh Hassanzadeh decided to leave Iran because his beliefs were at odds with others in their community. A fresh start in another country was the only way they would be able to enjoy a peaceful life.

It was while they were on their way to Australia that they met an Iranian Christian family in Indonesia and were touched by their compassion and concern.

It was through that relationship that Hoda and her husband got interested in learning about the God

of the Bible and, given their difficult situation, were deeply moved by the hope He offered.

They accepted Jesus Christ as their Saviour and Lord, and it was to Him and their new faith that they clung during that storm.

The couple were settled in Victoria, where Hoda ran a restaurant, but realised what she really wanted to do was join her husband in his ministry at the Emmanuel Iranian Church.

In 2013, Hoda became a lay minister and says that supporting fellow asylum seeker parishioners at the church is what gives her the most joy in life. She encourages them to find courage even during their darkest moments by putting their faith in God.

"It has taken me years to understand God's plan for my life," she said. "But it was the Holy Spirit who guided me to say yes to my calling and to do what pleases God."

She now attends a theological college in Victoria and is working towards becoming a priest.

The congregations she serves are not big—but they are family.

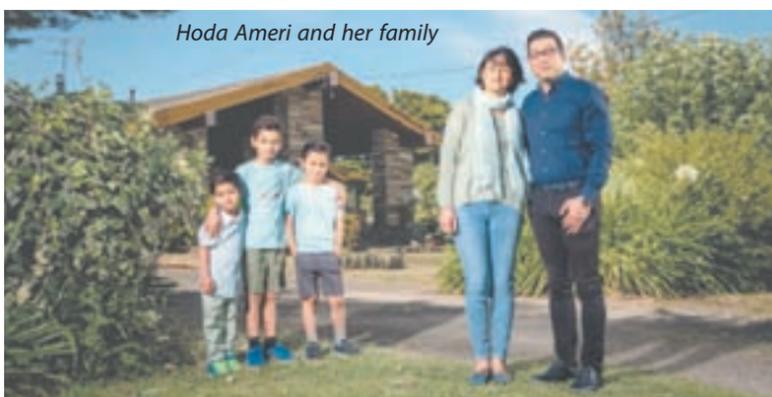
"Many of them could not find themselves in this society, so the church is not just a church for them," she said. "We are like a family. It means a lot for them. Like a community. Like a home."

Her hope for the Iranian people is that they would also have the opportunity to hear and accept the gospel [the message that Jesus Christ came to Earth to die for our sins].

"I wish they would have a chance to know Jesus, not as a Muslim prophet, but as the Lord Jesus Christ. And that they would look for their hope in Him, experience the true hope, joy and peace and love of Christ, and follow Him, whatever it would cost."



Hoda Ameri



Hoda Ameri and her family

Abuse victim had to expel 'seaweed' from his soul

BY BENJAMIN LAHOOD

For his dad, Tim Lasebnik was a piñata.

He beat him repeatedly as if he was trying to tear out his insides.

"Dad was just an angry man," Tim says on a 100 Huntley Street video. "I guess I was his piñata. When Dad lost his cool, there was just no filter. There was no off button. He was truly brutal."

After being beaten and then locked in the furnace room in the dark for hours, 11-year-old Tim resolved to run away. He packed his little suitcase and the next day instead of going to school he went to a nearby township in Canada.

He was hoping to be adopted by a family or live in a commune, but instead he was preyed upon by a paedophile. The predator pretended to call some nurses to take him in. Instead, he took Tim to his apartment and raped him brutally.

Those two wounds — the physical and sexual abuse — became his deep, dark secret that was too painful to talk or even think about.

As he matured, Tim turned to drugs to deaden the pain that was choking his soul. He fell into Rochdale College's 1968 cooperative experiment in student housing and free college, but it degenerated into a haven for drugs, crime and suicide.

"I was doing everything I could to medicate the pain that I was feeling from my wounds: drugs, alcohol, sex, everything, and I became a drug dealer," he says. "Rochdale is where I would go to get my drugs."

One day, his supplier informed him, he could no longer provide the drugs he needed to sell and consume.

"Why?" Tim asked.

"Because I found the Lord and I'm not doing that anymore," he responded.

His response was completely off the radar for Tim, so he agreed to go to church and see what it was about.

It was 1972, and St. Paul's Anglican Church was experiencing revival among the students. The Thursday night service attracted upwards of 2,000 people, and Tim went home afterward and fell to his knees.

"I asked Jesus into my heart," Tim remembers. "And there was a change in me."

But the wounds were deep and rejuvenation was not easy, so he quit Christianity.

Tim didn't just walk away. First, he prayed.

"One thing I ask," he said to the Lord, "is that day when I stand before You on Judgment Day, please remember that I gave it my best shot."

He let go of God but God never let go of him.

Years later, Tim was married with a 3-year-old son and older

stepdaughter. He was visiting his brother-in-law at Lake Aquitaine, talking, sharing, eating. They lost track of time when his stepdaughter ran in frantically.

"I'll never see my brother again!" she screamed.

"Where's your brother?" Tim asked panicked.

"He is drowned in the lake..." Barefoot, Tim ran out into the frigid March waters.

He arrived to see a stranger coming out of the water with his son in his arms.

Tim grabbed the child, carried him to shore and tried to administer CPR. The child had been underwater for five minutes. There was no response.

"I cried out to God, 'Please don't take my son. I'll do anything,'" he pleaded.

Continuing in his attempt to revive him, Tim managed to expel not only water but also seaweed from the child's airways.

Eventually, the little boy coughed and cried.

"This stranger, I believe, to this day was an angel. He was an angel."

The story made the front page of the Toronto Sun two Sundays in a row.

More significantly, Tim came back to Jesus.

This time, he dealt with the wounds.

He went to a Christian retreat called Band of Brothers Bootcamp. Away from distractions, Tim searched deep within his heart, seeking healing for years of pain he harboured within.

"I was in a cocoon of love," he remembers. "God was speaking to me, 'You've carried that wound long enough. Give it to me.'"

Tim noticed the similitude as he expelled years of compounded pain choking his soul, and his son's expelling water and seaweed.

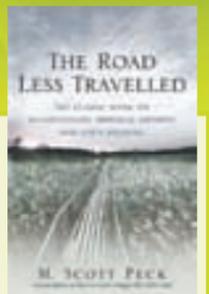
Could he trust God? Tim dared to forgive — his dad, the sexual predator, himself and God.

"It was like that junk was just coming out of me, just pouring out," Tim says. "I had to forgive God. I had been angry at God for all those years."

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nudge

WITH KARL FAASE



M SCOTT Peck has written a best-selling book called *The Road Less Travelled*. It is an old book now but starts with a great piece of wisdom.

Peck writes, "Life is difficult... once this is accepted, the fact that life is difficult no longer matters."

A very simple and very helpful truth. We go through life assuming it should be good. We live like we deserve an easy, trouble-free life. Then, when life is difficult, we become angry and resentful.

Where did we get that idea from? Why do we assume life should be good?

We should not be surprised when life proves to be tough. Instead, we should expect this to happen, not as a pessimist but as someone who has a positive approach to each challenge we face.

A key reason we can be positive is that we are not in this alone. God has promised to be there with us in the hard times. This is a wonderful promise which allows us to face the most difficult times with peace. God loves you and will never leave you.

GARMENT OF PRAISE

A Joyful 'toon by Mike Waters



"Because the Lord has anointed [Jesus] ... To comfort all who mourn ... to give them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of despair."

— Isaiah 61:1,3

YOUTH TRUTH

EMMA'S SECOND CHANCE AT LIFE

BY NICOLE ALCINDOR,
CP REPORTER

Louisiana resident Emma Benoit remembers wearing a constant smile on her face “as a façade” in her early adolescent years to cover up her deep ongoing sadness.

In an interview with *The Christian Post*, Emma recalls that while her life appeared to be picture-perfect on the outside, she felt herself slowly deteriorating mentally and emotionally.

Despite being raised in a close-knit Christian household of four, Emma says that her faith took a back seat during most of her teenage years because being a popular cheerleader was more important.

“I always felt like I could never be myself and even though I had all these friends on the outside, and it looked great, it really wasn’t. It’s isolating. Because I didn’t feel like my friends would like me if I was myself. I protected my image and wore a mask.”

“I began to really struggle with self-esteem issues and self-doubt and peer pressure at a very early age. I was about 12 and came from an environment where those things are not really talked about. It was really challenging,” Emma recalls.

She says that as a teenager, there was always the lingering cloud of depression, and she also felt anxiety, like a “crippling fear” within.



Emma Benoit was left permanently disabled after her suicide attempt.

In the summer before her senior year of high school in 2017, Emma decided she could no longer pretend to be “the always-happy-person”

any longer, so she attempted suicide by shooting herself in the chest with her father’s gun. She was left permanently disabled.

Now 22, Emma uses a wheelchair and a walker to move around. She says that surviving the incident has brought her closer to God because she was given a second chance.

The following year, she dedicated her life to Christ and now works as a mental health advocate.

Before coming to Christ, Emma said she thought that what people thought of her was “everything”, calling it “my go-to form of validation [which] gave me a short-lived feeling of confidence”.

“I put a lot of emphasis and value into the way I looked, into how well I was performing, and that really moulded a person who was never really secure in themselves, who

was never really confident,” she admits.

“My high school years were filled with this great feeling of hopelessness and that ‘nothing will change. My life is going to be this hard, forever. It’s so permanent.’ And those feelings only grew bigger and bigger; the longer that they went on, unaddressed and not talked about.”

Emma says that she has found peace in Jesus, and that Christianity changed her perspective on life and her viewpoint on her pursuit of happiness.

“Once my life was spared, I felt like there’s got to be some reason why I’m here. So, I decided to just really put my effort and energy into learning more about God and learning more about the Bible and learning more about Christ,” she said.

“I’m so grateful for this journey. I look at things so much differently now. I just see things in a different light. And I mean, it truly all boils down to the fact that we are imperfect human beings, and it’s not our job to fix ourselves. We can’t rely solely on ourselves in this life.”

Emma says that her Christian faith has been instrumental in helping her walk through her recovery process.

“My faith has been super crucial for me in my recovery because I’ve been able to totally give everything to God and just rely on Him completely and utterly to get me through hard things. And I’ve really realised that while I might not be able to pray away my depression, I certainly can utilise the tools that I believe God has given us in this life to navigate life in a different way.” Additionally, Emma now sees a therapist whom she says helps her navigate life alongside Jesus.

“I believe that therapists, counsellors, teachers, knowledge, education and medication are skills and gifts that we have been given to help one another through life. And honestly, I think my overall perspective on life is

much different because I know that there’s hope. And I know that this isn’t our permanent home [because Jesus promises us an eternal home in heaven after we die].”

I nearly died, now I fully live



BY MARIO GIOVANNI

I began using drugs in middle school, but the addiction began the summer before high school, when I started taking painkillers for a knee injury. I had suffered from anxiety for a while and the pills had a calming, quieting effect. I quickly fell in love.

When my knee healed and the prescriptions dried up, I found a way to get more. Eventually, my experimentation expanded from painkillers and Xanax to cocaine, acid, and Vyvanse (an ADHD medication). The last of these had the strongest hold on me. It got to the point where I was snorting on a daily basis. Soon after, I started dealing.

The drugs really tore at my heart. At this point, I believed in “God,” but I had no idea who Jesus was. I was angry at God for many reasons, so I wanted nothing to do with His commands. I chased sinful pleasure, daily, and I felt no conviction or guilt of any sort. I didn’t owe anyone anything. I often came home high out of mind and got in screaming matches with my mum. “I don’t even see Mario anymore,” she’d say, “I see the devil in your eyes.” And she was right.

At age 18, I overdosed. It was 1am on a school night. I was on Vyvanse and had just finished smoking weed with my buddy. Little did I know, mixing the two can be fatal. We were having a post-smoke chat in my car when I suddenly lost the ability to speak. I then felt a sharp pain in my side — my liver — and began struggling to breathe. Then, my heart picked up speed. The beats were so many per minute that I lost count.

I put my car into gear and began speeding to the hospital. On the drive, for the first time in years, I talked to God. I pleaded with Him: “Please, please, don’t let this be it. Please give me another chance.” As I pulled up to the hospital, I felt this immense peace wash over me. I was taken into the emergency room and hooked up to a bunch of machines. My heart rate was at 190-200 beats per minute. They told me that if I hadn’t been admitted that night, I very well could’ve died.

When I woke up, conviction and remorse were with me. Whereas I’d previously felt no guilt, the sorrow was now overwhelming. This led to a lot of introspection and what I found wasn’t pretty: I was incredibly, intensely angry. This wasn’t just a normal, occasional anger; it was a burning resentment towards others and its root was my own self-hatred. Frankly, it was evil.

Around this same time, the Word of God entered my life. The more I learned about Jesus, the clearer my own wretched nature became. I was nothing like Christ, but I wanted to be. And God promised that He could wash me clean: “*But if we walk in the light, as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, His Son, purifies us from all sin*” (1 John 1:7). I wanted to walk in the light, so I repented, turned away from my sin. I surrendered to Christ and He faithfully enabled me to turn from the drugs, the anger, and my many other sins.

God knew the hardness and stubbornness of my heart, so He knew exactly how to reach me. I would never have found this faith on my own; He gifted it to me.

For the past three years, I’ve been living such a happy life with Jesus. Surrendering to Christ has cost me, as Scripture warns that it will; I’ve lost friends, respect, and more. But, my worth is not measured by titles or money or likes or any of the things of this physical world. It’s measured by who I am in Christ: a beloved child of God! And, in Christ, even my worst sins weren’t in vain. God has turned my sin and suffering — the things the enemy thought would destroy me — into tools to be used for His good. For one, I have this testimony! For anyone who is in a similar struggle, know this: Jesus has saved me from my sin and He can do the same for you, too. Jesus saves.

As told to and edited by Adira Polite and originally published on Then God Moved



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YOUTH TRUTH

MY ABUSIVE DAD TRANSFORMED

As a child Tanner Williams always felt on edge.

"I had to be aware of how my father was and his emotions and as a result I could never come home and just relax," he shares in a Their Testimonies video on YouTube. "I was constantly on guard about where he was and whether he was going to explode on me for something I did."

He grew up in a big family and found it hard to stand out among his five siblings. But despite this, he still seemed to draw attention from

his father – and not in the way he wanted. "Something would upset him and he would end up beating me because of it," Tanner shares.

His family attended church together, and Tanner hated the way his father would act like a loving father but the next day, "I'd be woken up by him beating me because of something I did wrong ... I hated it because I saw my dad act like a two-faced person. I despised the church because every time I went to church it seemed so fake to me."

Tanner became more aggressive

himself.

"I was never at rest or I never felt peace in my life and I was angry all the time."

He says he tried to numb his heartache by trying to do well in school, having a lot of friends and playing sports, but he admits it didn't work. Then something changed in Tanner's father.

"My dad actually started taking his relationship with God more seriously. He started working on himself and started going to anger management and he stopped abusing me. But I still

had all of this baggage and all this resentment toward my dad so even though he started treating me really kindly I didn't really believe it or accept him or forgive him."

The following year, Tanner's parents "forced" him to volunteer at their church's summer camp, where he met Christians his own age.

"[They] really loved me and cared for me and throughout that entire summer they were just constantly showing God's love to me. Over time my heart started [opening] to the Lord and I started to come to realise who Jesus is and what He did for

me, that Jesus' sacrifice [on the cross] has covered everything. Even though I had gone through a lot of hardship growing up I knew throughout that summer that God's love overcomes all of that."

Then, before Tanner went into 10th grade, he went to a beach house retreat with his church youth group. It was a time to get away and read the Bible and worship God together.

"The Lord transformed my heart. I forgave my father for what he had done to me in the past and accepted Jesus for the way that He died for my sins on the cross for me."

After that Tanner's relationship with his father improved.

"I changed as an individual and became less aggressive and less upset all the time," he attests. "I'm grateful that I do have a loving father in my life now – we have a great relationship."

In college, Tanner didn't know what he wanted to major in and struggled in his classes.

By his second year he was in academic probation.

The following year, Tanner was forced to take the year off from college completely due to constant sickness. Instead of going to classes,



Tanner Williams

he spent his days reading his Bible. At night when he couldn't sleep, he would read the Bible until he did.

"Instead of watching TV or being on my phone I was reading my Bible and using that as a way to get closer to the Lord ... over time my sleep schedule got better, my health got better and then I was able to finally recover from all my sickness."

By the start of his fourth year of college, he was able to attend classes again.

"I started doing really well in school. I was on the Dean's List (an award for academic excellence) ... there was a lot of suffering [but] I felt so strong by the end."

Tanner says he has learnt not to worry about his future but to rely on God.

"As a kid I was really angry and upset all the time, I never had any peace and now I'm much more chilled and relaxed and when things go awry in my life I know that I can rely on God."

"When hardships do occur I know how to get through them. The biggest way the Lord has transformed me is not relying on the outside world for validation but relying on Him and who He is."

What to do with loneliness

BY ASHLEYNE SEITZ

I'VE felt lonely while sitting in my car at a stoplight, radio blasting and windows rolled down. I've felt it in a crowded room, surrounded by laughter and friends. I've felt it in the middle of the night, both in my dreams and when I wake up suddenly in the dark. Loneliness. It's a familiar feeling for all of us.

Ever wonder what we were made for? The Bible explains that God wired us for connection, for community. Often we idealise romantic relationships and even friendships, thinking that if we only found the right person, we'd never be lonely again. But loneliness can be found even in happily married men and women. Not only were we wired for connection with other humans, we were wired for connection with God. Even wealth, achievement, and honour are not enough to keep us from loneliness. There are stories in the Bible that talk both about people who had it all and still felt lonely and other people who had nothing but found what they needed by approaching God.

Solomon was a king of Israel to whom God granted immense wisdom. And he literally had it all: huge piles of gold, a giant palace, and hundreds of wives and concubines. You'd think Solomon would have been the most content man on earth! But he wrote a book about how pointless life is: "Yet when I surveyed all that my hands had done and what I had toiled to achieve, everything was meaningless, a chasing after the wind; nothing was gained under the sun" (Ecclesiastes 2:11). You can hear his loneliness and desperation in that statement!

In comparison, one day when Jesus was walking through a town, he was met by a man with leprosy. Lepers were outcasts and rejects, often abandoned by friends and family to beg on street corners just to have something to eat. Jesus touched the leper – a person who had likely not been touched by another human being in years – and healed him. His life suddenly had joy and meaning, despite the fact that he still had nothing and no one.

We were made to have a relationship with God. It's the one thing that can bring us out of our loneliness, because it's the connection we were made to have. That one interaction with Jesus, who is God, brought meaning, comfort and joy to the life of that leper, while all the jewels, gold, and women in the world didn't bring meaning to Solomon's life. Having a personal relationship with God changes everything; it is the answer to our loneliness problem.

That said, does having a relationship with God protect

us from feelings of loneliness for the rest of our lives? No. Simply put, the system is broken. We are separated from God by our sin, our desire to live apart from God. In this world, we cannot experience life the way it was meant to be, without ever feeling loneliness or evil or sorrow or fear. So now what? Despite the fact loneliness is a reality of being human with no immediate cure, there are two things that can help in the here and now:

Community: how to deal with loneliness

Because we were created for connection, a big part of dealing with loneliness is to be in community. No friend will save you from being lonely ever again, but when you have people around you who care about you for who you are (not for your body, skills, money, or ability to hold alcohol) it can help you see you are not really alone.

Someone who understands your loneliness

When Jesus was going through the worst hours of his life and about to be crucified, his friends abandoned him and even pretended they didn't know him. Jesus knows what it is like to be a lonely human. The Bible says in Psalm 34:18, "The Lord is close to the broken-hearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit." What would it feel like to know in your deepest moment of loneliness, you are not alone? The God who made you is with you and will never leave you!

The sin that separated us from living in a world without loneliness is what keeps us from God now.

No matter how good you are or how hard you try, you cannot overcome that separation. God sent Jesus to earth in order to restore our relationship with him. Jesus, the perfect son of God, died for your sins so that you could be clean like the leper; you are no longer an

outcast or a reject but a child of God. God sees your worst moments and loves you all the same — He wants you to come to Him.

Would you like to start a relationship with God and let Him help you in your moments of loneliness? You can do that right now by believing Him and accepting Him into your life through prayer, which is simply talking to God. God knows you and your heart, so the words don't matter as much as the attitude in which you say them. Here's a suggested prayer:

Lord Jesus, I want to know You personally. Thank You for dying on the cross for my sins. I open the door of my life to You and ask You to come in as my Saviour and Lord. Take control of my life. Thank You for forgiving my sins and giving me eternal life. Thank You for being with me and for promising that You will never leave me. Please help me to feel Your presence.

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STOCK PHOTO

“I forgave my father for what he had done to me in the past.”

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Inside my heart

PETER'S CORNER

I HAD the most amazing experience back in 2020. I saw inside my own heart! I had experienced some irregular heartbeats, so I went for a procedure to identify the problem.

The surgeon put three catheter wires inside my heart to measure how the electrics of the heart operated. He located a minor short-circuit, and worked out that it could not cause me any real problem and was best left alone. He also “took my heart for a spin” to try to reproduce the symptoms I had, but without success.

I was awake during the procedure, watching large monitor displays, and the surgeon explained it to me. When the heart beats, an electrical signal first causes the right atrium chamber to beat. The signal then reaches the AV node, where it is delayed a short time before it travels on to cause the ventricles to beat. The timing delay is just right to ensure efficient pumping of blood. The AV node does other critical things also.

Some questions: Would a heart without an AV node work? Not at all. Would an AV node work without a heart? Again, no. Would a heart without a valve work? Would a heart without chambers and connecting arteries and veins and blood work? No — all the parts of the heart needed to be there from the beginning.

There is more: How does the AV node know what to do, to be useful for the external purpose of keeping me alive? Who told it?

There are such amazing designs and components in the heart, it is clearly mistaken to imagine the heart evolved from slime by blind random accident (which is evolution). The parts, working together, have the ability to do something that is external to what each part can do. That is how we know it is an intelligent design. The designer is God and God only, and the Bible tells us how He did it.

I hope these words help you, as they have me, in your journey to surely trust the Creator.

Peter Mikula is a mining engineer in Kalgoorlie who loves stargazing and talking with others about Jesus.

Battle to believe

BY GARY BATES

Chang-Sha Fang B.Sc. (Hons), M.Sc., is a scientist who is also a dedicated supporter of Biblical six-day creation, but it wasn't always that way.

Despite having a strong Christian heritage (his father and great-grandfather were pastors), Chang-Sha, named after a famous battle of the Sino-Japanese war, was to face his own battle, an ideological one, in years to come.

Growing up in the Fang household in a small Malaysian village called Kampong Koh, belief in God and His Word was taken for granted.

“Bible stories and verses were read all the time and the entirety of God's Word was believed,” Chang-Sha recalls. “No one ever challenged the validity of the Bible and we had never concerned ourselves with the theory of evolution, as it wasn't emphasised in school science classes back then.”

Chang-Sha eventually encountered the theory of evolution “full on” when at 19 years of age he left for Australia to study zoology and biology at Perth's University of Western Australia (UWA).

He remembers that when the subject of creation was raised it was always regarded as religion. But evolution was taught as fact.

“Being from an Asian background where we hold teachers in great respect, I felt too intimidated to challenge their authority,” he shares.

Without the support of his family and Christian fellowship, and with the constant indoctrination of evolution being taught as fact by his lecturers, Chang-Sha graduated from university with barely any faith left.

He wondered how his family could have been wrong for all of these years.

He understands that for some, their parents' foundation may be enough. But he says, “I had an enquiring mind, and, like a ‘doubting Thomas’ (John 20:24–29), I required evidence to counter my disbelief.”

After Chang-Sha married, his wife Barbara became a Christian.



Plant scientist Chang-Sha Fang

Having no difficulties with the Creation account in Genesis, she would often show him snippets of information and creationist articles that she came across.

The turning point came during a visit by his mother from Singapore, when one night after dinner Chang-Sha told her that he was not attending church anymore. A large debate ensued.

“I told her that the Bible was a collection of stories and that Jesus was just a good teacher and philosopher,” he says. “I knew my mother's heart must have been stabbed to the core.”

His mother, devastated by her son's departure from faith, arranged for groups of friends and family to pray around the clock for her son's salvation.

“My research was not going well at the time and I was also frustrated due to the internal conflict I was going through,” Chang-Sha remembers.

“Unable to counter me with scientific arguments, my wife and mother gave me a book of sermons to read... God spoke to me through one of the sermons and said, clearly, ‘I am the Creator and I can deliver you from your frustration. Just reach out to Me.’ I was convicted of my need of God and my sin of denying Him. I broke down and cried like a child.”

Shortly after, creationists Ken Ham and Dr Gary Parker visited Perth and Chang-Sha attended the meetings, where they spoke about the complexity in created things – design and the relevance of Creation to the Gospel of Christ.

“After listening to them, I realised that I had been totally deceived by the false science of evolution, which had caused me to become spiritually blind,” Chang-Sha says. “I bought so many books and devoured them one after the other. At the same time God provided me with a good teacher in the Scriptures. Now I was so excited at all of this new information from the Bible and Answers in Genesis, but at the same time I also felt angry, because for so many years I had been brainwashed to believe the lie of evolution and deny my Creator and Saviour.”

As a scientist trained in plant pathology, he says he can now see in his work the awe-inspiring beauty and design of the Creator, but laments that during his many years

spent researching and studying, he was blind to the Maker's handprint.

Chang-Sha is aware that evolution, as commonly understood, must supposedly have been capable of generating lots of new genetic information that was nowhere in the world previously. He also knows from his own field of science that selection can only ‘choose’ from the genetic information that is already there in that population.

This is so, whether selection is done artificially, through selective breeding, or occurs in nature by differential survival/reproduction (‘survival of the fittest’). It cannot create any new information.

“I had been totally deceived by the false science of evolution”

Mutations (genetic copying mistakes) are supposed to do so, but so far no one has seen even one of the many information-adding mutations that should be present. Even those few which give a survival benefit turn out to be losses of information.¹

The case of the domestication of the lupin plant, *Lupinus angustifolius*, is used by Chang-Sha to illustrate how selection loses information. The full domestication of this species, combining the sweetness gene with the non-shattering pod, was one of the success stories of plant breeders in Western Australia. As this species was especially adapted to sandy soils, sweet cultivars of lupin soon became a very popular alternative grain crop

for farmers.

Unfortunately, the new cultivars were found to be susceptible to anthracnose² disease. In selecting attributes for sweetness, non-shattering of pods and other yield attributes, the resistance for anthracnose disease was lost.

Similarly, blackleg³ disease of oilseed rape (canola) devastated the industry in Australia in the early 1970s. To obtain the genes for resistance to this disease, which genes had been lost in the process of selecting for other attributes, plant breeders in Australia had to return to the ‘original population’ from which the resistance had been lost – oilseed rape stocks in Europe.

By “back-crossing” with these European plants, genes conferring resistance to blackleg were transferred to our Australian cultivars.

“It seems obvious,” says Chang-Sha, “that selection gets rid of information; it doesn't create any, and so is the opposite of what is supposed to have happened in microbe-to-man evolution. But many people think that once you have an example of something adapting by selection, you have an example of evolution. So, it almost can't be pointed out often enough.”

References and notes

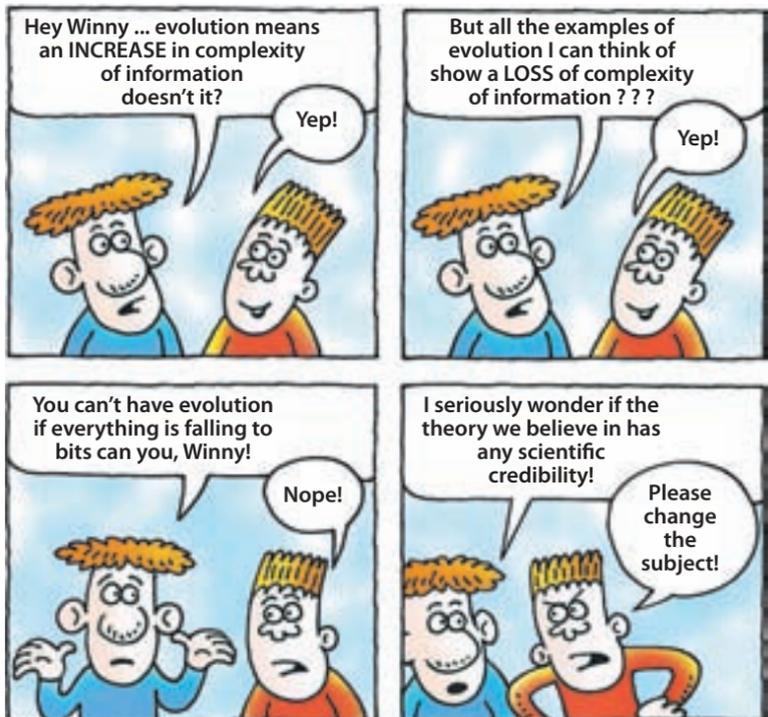
1 Wieland, C., Beetle bloopers, Creation 19(3):30, 1997.

2 Anthracnose disease is caused by a fungus. Symptoms include bending of stems, lesions and death of leaves and stems above these lesions.

3 Blackleg disease is caused by a fungus that affects the roots, causing stunted growth and possible death of the plant.

Dar and Winny

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BUILDING BETTER RELATIONSHIPS

Mending fences and dismantling walls

BY ROB FURLONG

IN his famous poem, "Mending Wall", Robert Frost begins with the line:

"Something there is that doesn't love a wall."

The poem goes on to recount how he and his neighbour meet at the fence line dividing their rural properties each spring to repair the damage done to the "wall" during winter. While his neighbour insists, "Good fences make good neighbours", Frost doesn't agree and throughout the poem, he pushes against the idea, even suggesting at one point he would like to ask his neighbour:

*"Why do they make good neighbours?
Before I built a wall I'd ask to know
What I was walling in or walling out,
And to whom I was like to give
offence."*

Frost's question challenges us to think about the walls we erect between each other and why they are there!

We "wall" each other out over race, religion, gender, and social status,

resulting in division and the inability to hear each other.

Is it possible to break down the walls that exist between us? I think so!

One day, Jesus had a conversation with a woman, which by the custom of His day was unthinkable — He spoke to a Samaritan woman as she drew water from the local well, in the middle of the day.

The conversation is unthinkable because firstly, she is a woman; it was culturally inappropriate.

Secondly, she was a Samaritan, which meant there was a religious and racial wall between her and Jesus.

Finally, because of her lifestyle, she was a social outcast in her community, which is why she was drawing water in the middle of the day, when other women would not be around.

Jesus broke down the walls of race, religion, gender, and social status in one conversation!

Of particular interest, it is Jesus Who initiates the conversation, and as simple as this sounds, it is the key to how we can go about dismantling the walls we have erected with others. The

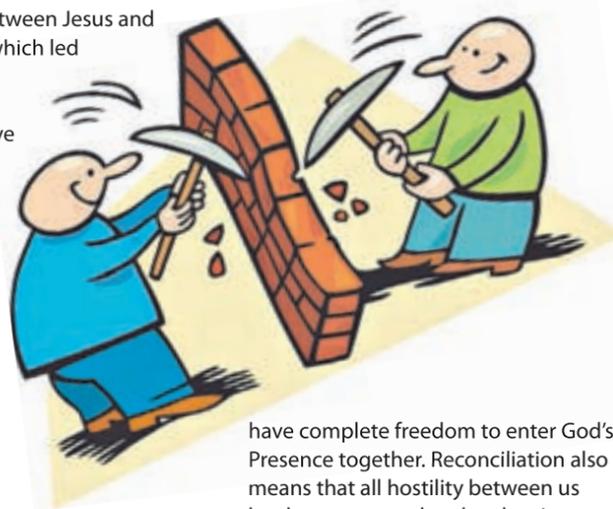
conversation between Jesus and the woman — which led to her spiritual awakening — would never have happened if Jesus had not begun by acknowledging her presence and speaking to her.

It's the same with us. We all have relationships where a "wall" exists, but if that wall is to ever come down, then someone must make the first move, and that someone may have to be you.

All you need do is find the courage to talk to the other person. There is no doubt in my mind that one of the saddest experiences in ministry is when I speak with two people — you can almost feel and touch the wall between them — and neither one is willing to take the first step to dismantle it.

Jesus tore down the wall of separation between us, God, and people by becoming "our peace" and reconciling us to God through His death and resurrection.

Reconcile means to change from one condition to another. Before Jesus, Jews and non-Jews were enemies — now we are united and



have complete freedom to enter God's Presence together. Reconciliation also means that all hostility between us has been removed and no barrier to unity has been left.

Because Jesus accepts all of us, we can also accept each other!

It's a very simple message. Making peace with God means our relationship with Him has changed. We have gone from being His enemy to being His friend.

But being at peace with God also changes our relationships with people. We now love those we once despised, care for those we once ignored and accept those we once rejected.

Jesus didn't like walls — between people and God or people and people — so He tore them down and brought about reconciliation.

Is there someone you find difficult to love or accept? Reflect and pray again on the above and ask God to show you how to love them.

Lessons from a sick bed

BY JODY BENNETT

I HAVE recently been suffering with prolonged ill health, during which I spent several weeks mostly in bed and feeling rotten. Illness naturally makes one morbid and introspective, but I don't like self-pity, and as a Christian I believe that everything happens for a reason, so I sought to use the time not to ask the tempting question "Why, Lord?" but instead "What are you trying to teach me, Lord?"

Here are the first three of 10 insights I had:

1. Patients are aptly named! It takes a lot of patience to be sick for an extended period. And patience is a virtue that is hard to develop and takes — by definition — a long time to learn!



When ill one has to have patience to wait for appointments, and results, and a correct diagnosis, and the pain to abate, and the medications to take effect. Waiting for an explanation, while worrying about one's symptoms, is particularly hard in a day and age where we expect to be able to get answers to just about any question with a quick Google search. The Bible uses a very descriptive word as a synonym for patient — "longsuffering".

The book of Psalms has a lot to say about waiting patiently on and for God. I have found that He often replies "wait" in answer to my prayers, and it is always a difficult answer to accept. I have to learn to be longsuffering.

2. While one is waiting for the answers to bigger prayers, like "Please heal me!" it is good to acknowledge the answers to many other prayers that might have been prayed along the way.

For instance, for me nausea was a real problem for a while, and nausea tablets are no longer sold over the counter. Then I happened to watch a YouTube nursing skit where they talked about how sniffing alcohol wipes helps combat nausea. Who knew!? After that I got great relief from sniffing rubbing alcohol, until I could get a script for tablets. Small mercies...

3. As I have put aside my impatience and embraced the journey, it has been really nice to have a proper rest. Life is so busy! There are so many small chores that I usually attend to from the moment I get up, and then there is work and exercise and commitments. It was really lovely to break the routine, to do nothing but lie on the couch listening to a book or watching TV or sleeping, and not feeling guilty because I was too sick to care! If we can put aside our impatience and alter our expectations, rest can be a great blessing and a precious time.

To be continued...

For the full article online see www.challenge.news/jody

HOW DO I BECOME A CHRISTIAN?

What? Salvation is an eternal relationship with God — now on Earth and, after we die, in Heaven.

The Lord Jesus says: "I tell you the truth. Everyone who believes in Me has eternal life." John 6:47

"In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world." John 16:33

Who? Anyone can gain the eternal life offered through Jesus Christ, regardless of how you have previously lived or what you have previously believed.

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

Why? Because sin separates us from a holy God. Sin is all the wrong things we do, say and think, as well as our desire to be our own boss.

For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. Romans 3:23

How? The Bible says you become a Christian by confessing with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believing in your heart that God raised Him from the dead.

If you declare with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you profess your faith and are saved. Romans 10:8b-10

Ready to change your life forever? Here is a prayer you can pray, but you can also use your own words. The words are not as important as the heart attitude — which only God can see.

Almighty God, Creator of Heaven and Earth,
I acknowledge that I am a sinner. Please forgive me for all the ways I have disobeyed and defied You.

Thank You for sending Your Son, Jesus Christ, to earth to live the perfect life I couldn't, and die on the cross for my sins. Thank You that His blood was sufficient to pay my debt to You, and His resurrection proves that there is life beyond death. I accept that His sacrifice is all I need to get right with You — I bring nothing I have done but I give you everything I am. Help me to live for You. Please be my Saviour and my Master. Amen.

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:

I have prayed this prayer. Please send me: Bible Some 'starting off' literature Information on a helpful church

* Please tick and write clearly *

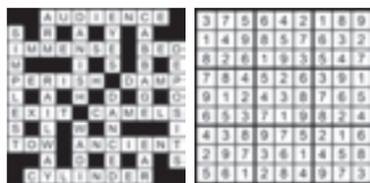
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Challenge Literature Fellowship, PO Box 978, Cloverdale WA 6985
info@challengenews.org

All overseas enquiries are referred onto someone in their own country



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 - Olive Tree app (we recommend that you start with an easy-to-read version like the ESV)	
Audio Bible - Bible.is app , or Youversion Bible app	
Christian radio station - CBN radio app (different channels for all genres of music)	
Christian podcasts and sermons - Edifi app	
Christian movies, serials and kids' shows - Good. app	
Daily thoughts and inspiration - Our Daily Bread app	
Advice on specific issues, Bible reading plans and studies for new believers - Youversion Bible app .	
The Bible explained with visual aides - the Bible Project on YouTube .	
Alpha Film Series on Youtube - an online introduction to Christianity.	
For kids - Superbook Kids Bible, videos and games app	
Comic book Bible online - goodandevilbook.com	
More inspiring faith stories - back issues of Challenge News at challengenews.online	

Bukayo Saka of Arsenal runs with the ball during the Premier League match between Arsenal FC and Crystal Palace at Emirates Stadium on March 19, 2023 in London, England. (Photo by Shaun Botterill/Getty Images)



FAITH ON THE FIELD

English soccer player Bukayo Saka is one of the new generation of English football stars, praised for their decency, work ethic and talent. A tee-total, straight-A student, more likely to be found horsing around in the pool than falling out of a bar, Bukayo — like teammates Marcus Rashford and Raheem Sterling — has a faith in God that seems to have a positive impact both on and off the pitch.

An attacker for Arsenal, Bukayo grew up in West London in a Christian family, attended a primary school with a strong Christian ethos and has continued that faith into his adult life. The 21-year-old still lives at home with his parents and brother, and says his family regularly pray for his success. His Instagram bio says: “God’s child” and a quick scroll through his feed finds none of the usual excesses often associated with young footballers. Instead, there’s plenty of thanks to God for



Bukayo Saka during a training session in March, 2023. (Photo by Stuart MacFarlane/Arsenal FC via Getty Images)

the growing number of accolades he has been amassing. Following the 2020–21 and 2021–22 seasons, he was named as Arsenal’s player of the season, and he was part of England’s squads at UEFA Euro 2020 and the 2022 FIFA World Cup. Bukayo is widely considered to be one of the best young football players in the world, according to Wikipedia. He told talkSPORT during Euro 2020: “I just have faith in God that wherever He takes me, He’s going to deliver, He’s going to provide and be there for me.”

In answer to the question ‘Do fame and Christian faith go together?’ he wrote: “I grew up in a Christian family who believe strongly in God. This always made me curious to get to know God more and I have done so by reading my Bible a lot and going to church a lot over the years. My faith is continually being exercised when I’m put in different situations or I play in big football matches such as my England debut.

“I hold onto God’s promises ...

So before every game I ask God to help me play well, help my team and try to score a goal or assist a goal and He answers my prayers, so this is why I point to the sky to thank Him.”

The Guardian noted a couple of years ago that: “In football, a religious transformation of sorts has taken place, partly driven by an influx of devout players from overseas such as the Brazilian Liverpool goalkeeper Alisson Becker.”

Signs of the cross on the pitch, and hands raised in prayer before games and after goals, are now commonplace.

Bukayo recently told *GQ* magazine that his Bible is one of 10 things he couldn’t live without.

He says on YouTube that his dad gave him his Bible and he reads it every night before bed: “I’ve learnt a lot from it. It’s important for me. Religion is a big part of my life. I would say I’m a strong believer in God. Reading this Bible all the time helps me learn more and more about God. I’ll normally memorise the messages and [learn] what it means, and try and take it into my life.

“We were taught by our parents to have faith in God, and when you’re younger you don’t fully understand. But throughout life, you keep exercising your faith, so when you get

into different challenges, you decide, ‘This time I’m going to trust God,’ and God comes through for you. That’s how [faith] kept building and building for me, so I can be confident and go into places knowing that God has got me.”

“
I can be
confident ... that
God has got me.
”

Selina Stone, who lectures in political theology at St Mellitus College in London, told *The Guardian*: “For Saka, Rashford and Sterling, there is clearly a recognition that there is something of God’s blessing on them for them to be where they are, along with a recognition that, having been so blessed, they have to take respon-

sibility for helping others.”

Raheem is helping young people to access education and employment opportunities through his foundation; Marcus Rashford received an MBE (Member of the British Empire) for his services to UK children during the Covid-19 pandemic; and at the end of 2022 Bukayo paid for 120 children from Nigeria, his country of origin, to undergo life-changing surgeries.

“It makes me very happy, especially when I see the kids happy ... So yeah, I’m happy and I just want to do more and more and more to help as [many] children as I can,” the generous young man explained, following his Saviour’s instruction to “Do to others as you would like them to do to you.” (Luke 6:31) •

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