

MIRACLE ON THE INSIDE

BY JANICE TEO

June 5, 1990, was a glorious day but trade was slow in the garden supplies business that Australian Niv Neyland and his brother ran. A friend invited him for lunch at a nearby hotel. Niv agreed and asked his brother to come along.

Niv had lots to celebrate. He was soon to be married, and it was his 35th birthday.

The friends ate lunch, drank. When it was time to leave, Niv got into the driver's seat.

There was a tricky stretch of road he'd need to cross, but he didn't give it a second thought as he'd navigated it successfully many times before.

"I changed gears, found my spot in the traffic and whipped across the highway. I thought I timed it perfectly," he told *Challenge News*.

Except he didn't.

What he did was run straight into a car doing 100kmph. The impact catapulted his vehicle into a gutter, where it landed upside down.

"It was like a baseball bat hitting a baseball, it was that hard," Niv, now 70, told Focus on the Family's One on One podcast.

He was knocked out for a few seconds; when he came to he was relieved he could still wiggle his fingers and toes and move his neck.

But it wasn't his side of the car that bore the brunt of the T-bone collision. It was the passenger side. His brother's side. Things were not well on that side.

"I turned and looked at my brother and I saw his nostrils were full of blood and little air bubbles were coming out. He was like that

for a few seconds and then he died right in front of me.

"I was shocked – all of my life reeled before me.

"In the next few seconds I had to make decisions about my life, about God. I crawled out of the window a different man."

Niv failed the police breath test and was arrested.

He was taken to hospital where he had to do the "hardest job I've ever done in my life – ring my mother and tell her that I'd just killed her only

other son."

He expected his family members to reject him, "but thankfully my mother and four sisters forgave me."

Preparations for his trial consumed his family for the next year, during which Niv lost his business

“He died right in front of me.”



Niv Neyland with his wife Heather.

and his home was robbed three times. The family prayed fervently for a favourable verdict and Niv was confident he would not go to jail.

"I thought, 'I have a mother who's lost her son, a wife who's three months pregnant, and business issues to work out. God's surely not going to put me in jail.'

"But God had different ideas," he said ruefully. Niv was convicted of alcohol-related vehicular manslaughter and sent to prison.

"Everybody's sorry when they get caught," the judge said – and slammed the gavel down.

Niv went straight from the courthouse to prison – a maximum security facility with armed guards and razor wire-covered walls.

His heart sank as the prison door closed behind him.

"When you hear the clang of the door slamming shut you don't know if you have any future at all," he said. "I was devastated.

"All I could do is just place myself into the hands of the Living God."

Niv had committed his life to God when younger, but admitted he had "fallen into some bad stuff" later on.

Prison, he told Focus on the Family, was "cold and remindful. It was the consequence of my decision to drive while over the limit. I shouldn't have been drinking."

Yet it was also the place he experienced the grace of God and rededicated himself to his faith.

"I got my wife to bring in a little New Testament, and I immediately felt better. I felt more at ease with the Lord, and I just basically laid down the next 10 months to Him."

One of the hardest things Niv had to do was forgive himself for his brother's death. His family had

forgiven him, but it took years for him to do the same.

"With self-forgiveness in those darker moments we think of how foolish we are, and we go down into that pit of memory.

"But forgiveness is part of God's overall love. He wants us to forgive ourselves because we limp forward if we don't, we can't walk forward in His ministry.

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Breakthrough at last

BY SIMEON NEO

"I spent most of my adult life taking advice from people to try and 'fix' myself," Lisa Carnahan (pictured) told *Challenge News*. "I was especially drawn to alternative and wellness therapies."

From pregnancy yoga to mindfulness and meditation, Lisa had dabbled in various spiritual practices throughout her adult life. When she started experiencing pain in her hands and feet, a friend introduced her to a reiki healer. Reiki is a New Age spiritual healing practice which practitioners claim 'channels' energy or life-force.

"She said I needed my hormones and energy levels balanced out after having children so close together," said the Northern Ireland local.

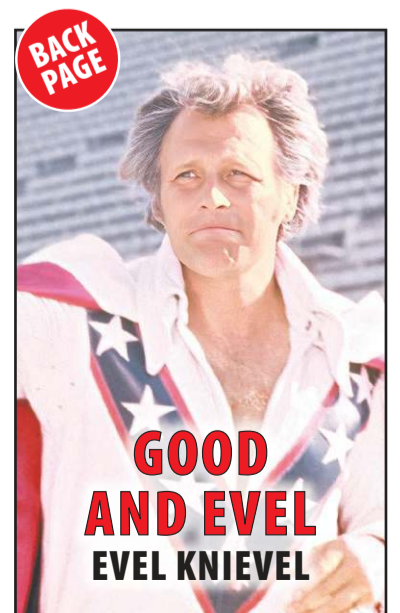
When her pain went away, Lisa decided to learn how to do reiki healing for herself. But after a few days, something didn't feel right. "I had this strange feeling where my hands wanted to move by themselves, as crazy as it sounds."

She called the reiki healer, who told her that she could stop at any time. "So I stopped."

A few weeks later, she was driving to pick up her children when thoughts about leaving her husband popped into her mind.

"I started getting these thoughts in my head that I needed to leave my husband and that he was not good for me anymore. And I needed to get rid of him," she shared while speaking at New Testament Pentecostal Church.

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Ask Y: Answers to tough questions about God

QUESTION: HOW DO WE KNOW JESUS EVEN EXISTED?



BY PETER MEADOWS

IT'S A VERY fair question to ask if Jesus was ever a real person. Especially as four out of 10 people do not believe He was, according to a recent research study in England.

The study also showed that younger people have the greatest doubts about Jesus having walked the earth. And that might be because they are far less likely to have come across the evidence that points to Jesus being a man and not a myth.

What is that evidence? Let me quote you the unbiased view of Wikipedia which says, "There is near universal consensus among scholars that Jesus existed historically." That word 'scholars' is important. Out there are big brained academics – lots of them – who have given their lives to researching this and they agree Jesus was real.

Wikipedia quotes one of these mega-smart professors as saying, "There are those who argue that Jesus is a figment of the Church's imagination, that there never was a Jesus at all. I have to say that I do not know any respectable critical scholar who says that anymore."

Don't imagine these academics are those who study religion – and so need Jesus to be real. They are 'give-me-the-facts' historians, committed to finding what was true, no matter the outcome.

What kind of evidence have these historians sifted? It includes the writings of non-Christian historians of Jesus' day. The Jewish historian Josephus clearly mentions Jesus twice and the Roman historian Tacitus once. And academics are impressed that these references should be there at all, seeing Jesus' public life was short and in an obscure part of the world.

Experts also look at the writings by Christians close to Jesus' death – the Gospels and the letters written by church leaders. Experts see these as being far too close to the events – and to include so much historical and geographical detail that is accurate – to have a central figure that was invented. To this I'd add one event in history that should put the issue beyond doubt. It's that Jesus came to life after having been dead.

There is no other reasonable explanation for the changed lives of His followers, or their willingness to die for what they saw and experienced, than that this was true.

Beyond reasonable doubt, Jesus was real. More than that He spoke of being God and coming to give His life to free us from our guilt before God. And demonstrated it to be true through His resurrection. Amazing.

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

Miracle on the inside

• From page 1

"God has a specialty of reaching down into the darkest pit and providing hope. He can raise you up and put you on solid ground again. There is life after everything."

In prison, Niv invited many inmates to join Bible studies and prayer groups. He co-developed and ran an anger awareness program and said he was blessed by God beyond measure.

"It says in John 10:10 that Jesus came to give us 'life to the full'. It was in prison that I started to experience that abundant life."

Niv has also written a book, *Finding Myself Inside: When a Prison Sentence Becomes God's Gift of Love* – is his story of grief, guilt, redemption and forgiveness.

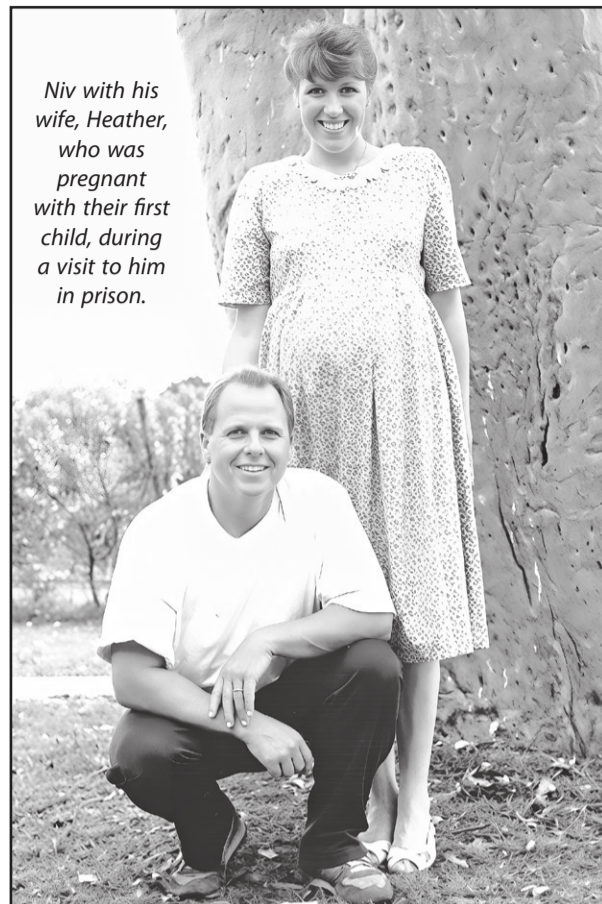
He said he had no doubt that without the tragic events of his 35th birthday and time in jail his focus in life would be material success. Family relationships may have been sacrificed in the process.

But instead, Niv's focus today is on his work for God. He was the first chair of Friends of Dismas, a church for ex-inmates in Victoria and is a long-term member of Prison Fellowship Australia.

He travels sharing his story of how God transformed his life.

"My story is a story of stupidity but also of God's grace. It's about how you can stuff up but God can reach down and still make something of your life even though you might not think it."

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Niv with his wife, Heather, who was pregnant with their first child, during a visit to him in prison.

The future's so Bright

When Princess Opeyemi Bright stepped up to accept her role as one of the youngest city mayors in the UK in May 2025, her acceptance speech didn't touch too much on power, politics or ambition.

Instead, the 29-year-old chartered accountant – who is the youngest ever mayor in her London district of Barking and Dagenham – zeroed in onto what she firmly believes is the real power behind the throne – her faith in God.

"My being here," she declared, "is nothing short of God's grace."

Princess grew up in East London, the daughter of Nigerian immigrants. Her father, Pastor Gbolahan Bright, leads a local church. Not all pastors' kids keep the faith, but Princess has never wavered.

"I've always been surrounded by faith," she remarked. "But the moment my parents' faith truly became my own was in 2011, when I was diagnosed with Crohn's Disease [an inflammatory bowel disease]."

"It was a deeply challenging time, but it was also when I experienced God's presence and healing in a personal and undeniable way."

"His hand of reassurance carried me through, and I began to truly understand what it means to trust Him completely."

"That turning point marked the beginning of a much deeper, personal walk with Christ, and I now carry that faith into everything I do."

"Since then, I've seen Him show up in countless ways – opening doors, giving

me peace in uncertainty, and reminding me that all things really do work together for good."

That experience so cemented her personal relationship with God that "any time I speak about my journey, I can't separate it from my faith. God's guidance has been with me every step of the way."

That guidance proved invaluable three months into her dream job after graduating.

It was 2017 and she was just 21 when she was approached by her local MP to stand as a councillor, an opportunity she grabbed with both hands.

Unfortunately, she was also working in a government department at the time and was informed by the human resources department that running for local government position was a conflict of interest.

Resign and run for city government or stay in her dream job and forsake what she felt was her life's calling? It was one of the toughest choices she had ever had to make.

The decision came down to what she believed was God's plan for her. "I've always known He wants me to be a light to this generation, so I took a leap of faith," she reflected.

She resigned from the job, was duly elected councillor at 22 – again the youngest ever. And two months later, "God presented me with another job



Princess Bright with her husband, Kehinde Olaifa.

that was even better!" she shared in an interview with Premier Christian Radio.

"What God had for me was bigger than my own imagination." Divine calling or not though, her busy life can sometimes be challenging and tiring.

"I sometimes doubted whether I could live up to the call I felt in my heart but every time that happened God met me with grace."

"I believe God will not put you in any situation that you can't handle. He will always equip individuals with the right skills, talents and people to make his purpose come to life."

The district, or borough, she is mayor of is an extremely diverse one, but Princess is not afraid to speak the name of Jesus in public life.

"Being a Christian is my foundation, my identity, and the reason I'm able to lead with purpose. It's God's backing that gives me the strength to do the work I love and I don't try to hide it."

"Though I respect everyone, I don't dim my own faith. I am blessed to have God as my foundation and guiding source."

Coffee Break CROSSWORD & SUDOKU

ACROSS

- 1 Surgical sutures
- 7 Sign of boredom
- 8 Soak up
- 10 Blow the whistle
- 11 Make larger
- 13 Meeting with a doctor, say
- 16 Round Table warrior
- 18 Painting, dance, etc.
- 20 Bring into country
- 21 Soft, fluffy feathers
- 22 Ominous; eerie

DOWN

- 2 Toothpaste holder
- 3 Shed item
- 4 Winter sleep
- 5 Solar ____
- 6 Romulus or Remus
- 8 Launch an assault

1	2	3	4	5	6
				7	
8		9			
10			11		12
13		14			15
16	17			18	19
			20		
21					
		22			

- 9 Open-palm hit
- 12 Very much dislike
- 14 Heart and kidney
- 15 Money in Madrid
- 17 When shadows are short
- 18 Chimps and bonobos
- 19 "That's accurate"

SOLUTIONS PAGE 11

Smile files...



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6			3	8	7		2
2			7	4		1	9
	2			1	3		4
3							1
4		6		2			9
1		5		7	2		8
7		4	9	5			3



Princess Opeyemi Bright is serving as the Civic Mayor of the London Borough of Barking and Dagenham.

Second sight: How blindness birthed new vision

BY JANICE TEO

Paul Yuen was in agony. Overnight, a build-up of fluid in his left eye had caused it to balloon and become so intensely painful he could not open it.

He was rushed to hospital. By the time he got there, the pressure in his eye, which should have been between 12 and 18, was 42. It looked – and felt – like it was going to pop.

This happened in 1987. Paul, who was 20 at the time, occasionally suffered from blurred vision but thought nothing of it as it did not trouble him often.

But it was far from nothing. It was juvenile glaucoma, and despite surgery, the disease claimed his eyesight. Five years later, in 1992, he was completely blind.

By the time this happened though, Paul had found a new strength and a new way of coping. In the hospital after his first surgery, he reached out to God.

“I had heard of God and Jesus before, but it was only when I found out I had glaucoma and could go blind, that’s when I started to look for God. I was very afraid.”

It was this anxiety and the need for divine help that led him to accept a friend’s invitation to a church youth service on Valentine’s Day, 1988.

However, afraid of backlash from his parents if he became a Christian,

Paul told his friend he was happy to listen to what the pastor had to say, but nothing else.

Things did not go as Paul planned. “That day the pastor preached about the Kingdom of God, about what a wonderful place it is, and how there is no sickness there. It gave me such hope.

“When he invited people to commit their lives to Jesus to stand up, my legs automatically obeyed! I don’t know how or why because I certainly didn’t think I would!”

“I felt so good that when the pastor asked me if I needed to get permission from my parents I said no.

“I joined the church and everyone prayed for me. I was so hopeful that God would restore my sight.”

However even with the years of prayer that followed, that did not happen and Paul admitted that in 1992, the year he went completely blind, “was the darkest year of my life.

“I spent a lot of my time crying. But that was the time God taught me how to wait on Him.”

A few months later at a prayer meeting, the speaker predicted that God would enable him to preach around the world.

Doubt and joy hit together. “I thought ‘wow’ and ‘impossible’ at the same time! How could someone like me have an international ministry, right? I should never



Paul Yuen found strength and purpose after losing his sight.

miracle or I could trust Him and do what He has called me to do. I chose to trust Him.

“There is work to do. I cannot just hang around and wait for God to heal me before doing His work. I have to live well. I have to live well in God.”

Today Paul leads his own church in Singapore. They have planted a church in Hong Kong and he has a worldwide ministry. Last year, he held meetings in London, Berlin and Africa – something he would never have dreamed possible a decade ago.

But his life has also been marked by personal pain. He was married in 2000 but his wife left him in 2007. “She said she couldn’t take having to look after a blind man. I was heartbroken. I refused to sign the divorce papers; I just let her go and allowed the marriage to dissolve automatically after several years.”

He said God has used these adversities to transform and mould him for service.

“Some people think life will be a bed of roses after becoming a Christian but that’s not true – and that’s not the reason to become a Christian anyway.

“There will be mountains and valleys to go through. Yes, there are blessings but there are also hardships – but everything can be used for His kingdom. Being a Christian means we must be willing to allow God to fulfil His purposes through us – in a way of His choosing. The most important thing is that when we yield to Him, we will carry the presence, the power and the love of God with us wherever we go.”

have doubted God.”

Slowly but surely, doors began to open. In June 1993, Paul left his job and went on staff at church, where he led the youth group and was active in prayer and healing services.

His international ministry began with a trickle of trips close to home – Malaysia, the Philippines, Taiwan and then further abroad, to China.

Many people he prayed for during these trips received healing – yet Paul

himself remained blind.

“Of course I asked the Lord why. Why are You using me to pray for the sick and they get healed and set free yet You won’t give me my sight back?”

“Finally, after much wrestling with God, He brought me to a place of acceptance. He showed me that my life – the good and the bad – is in His hands and I had a choice.

“I could either keep complaining, do nothing and wait for my personal

What is St. Patrick’s Day all about?

EVERY MARCH 17, the world celebrates St. Patrick’s Day. Cities turn green, parades march through streets, and people raise glasses in the spirit of Irish pride. But behind the festivities lies a story of courage, faith, and transformation – a story that still speaks today, beyond cultural traditions.

St. Patrick was born in the late 4th century, likely in Britain, and was captured as a young teen by Irish raiders. He spent six years in captivity, working as a shepherd and learning the ways of the land. It was during this time of hardship that Patrick turned to God, praying fervently and finding hope in faith. Eventually, he escaped and returned to his family.

But Patrick’s story did not end with his freedom. He felt a deep calling to return to the land of his captivity – Ireland – to share the message of God’s love.

With courage and compassion, Patrick travelled across Ireland, teaching about God, caring for the people, and helping them turn away from fear and superstition. Legend says he used the shamrock, a simple three-leaf plant, to explain the Christian concept of the Trinity: one God in three persons – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Over time, Patrick’s mission bore remarkable fruit. Ireland gradually became a nation transformed by faith, and his legacy of courage, hope, and devotion to God has inspired millions. Today, St. Patrick’s Day is celebrated worldwide, often with a focus on Irish culture, music,

and food. But at its heart, it is a story of faith overcoming fear, love overcoming oppression, and a life devoted to something greater than oneself.

The message of St. Patrick is still relevant. True love, hope, and peace are not just cultural symbols or feelings – they come from knowing God personally.

The Bible tells us, “For God so loved the world that he gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life.” (John 3:16) Patrick’s life was an example of living in response to that love – a love that is available to everyone.

If you have never experienced this kind of love, St. Patrick’s story invites you to explore it. You don’t have to earn it or be perfect to receive it. God offers His love freely to anyone who will open their heart.

You can begin by praying a simple prayer: acknowledging your need for God, believing in Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection, and inviting Him to guide your life.

St. Patrick’s Day reminds us that faith can change a life and even a nation.

The shamrocks, parades, and celebrations are symbols – but the true joy comes from knowing God, whose love transforms fear into courage, emptiness into hope, and death into eternal life. Today, you can experience that same life-changing love for yourself. For more information see the box entitled **How Do I Become a Christian** on page 11.



Breakthrough at last

● From page 1

“That scared the life out of me because I knew that those thoughts didn’t belong to me.

“I love my husband very much. We hadn’t even had an argument or anything, so it was so strange for these thoughts to come flooding into my mind.”

Even before, Lisa had strange encounters happen to her. Once, when she was in Edinburgh, she suddenly couldn’t speak.

“I had this heavy, horrible feeling all the time which I could not understand.”

But it was during a chat with a fellow mum at her daughter’s dance class that Lisa found an answer.

“I asked her about her opinions on yoga and reiki. I said, ‘I feel like I’ve done something wrong but I don’t know what.’

“She explained, ‘When you participate in these practices you open yourself up to evil spirits.’

“I asked, ‘How do you know this?’ I’ll never forget what she said to me, ‘When you walk with God, you’ll know.’”

It turned out the woman that Lisa was talking to was a Christian. She put Lisa in contact with a pastor from a local church so she could receive prayer.

“The pastor explained to me that the feeling I had been feeling is called sin [any thought or action that goes against God’s will] and that no one can take that away but Jesus Christ.”

Though Lisa did not have a religious upbringing, she had attended children’s church as a child.

“I heard the Bible stories before but I never thought that they applied to me. To be honest I didn’t have an opinion on Jesus or the things of God.

“They told me that God loves me so much that He sent His Son, Jesus Christ, to the world as a man and He died for me and took my sin.

“Three days later, He rose again and He’s alive and in heaven and He sits beside God the Father and He’s always praying for me.

“They also explained that I needed to repent [turn away from rebellion against God] and ask Jesus Christ to be the Lord of my life.

“And that’s exactly what I did. I repented of practicing those spiritual practices because I knew it was wrong.

“Initially, I had only turned away from these practices but I didn’t know I needed to turn to Jesus Christ [to be free].

“But as soon as they told me the good news, I grabbed onto Jesus because I knew He could fix me.”

As the pastors prayed for Lisa, she described what happened next as “an absolute miracle.

“I can only describe it as the Lord literally coming in, grabbing all that yucky sin and throwing it right out of me.”

Though Lisa could feel it, her friend who came with her saw the whole thing. The friend eventually accepted Jesus into her life after witnessing the whole thing. When it was over, the pastor instructed Lisa to read the Bible.

“And that’s exactly what I did. I haven’t stopped reading, studying and praying since.”

It has been eight years since Lisa’s life turned around. Her whole family has also accepted Jesus into their hearts.

“He saved the life of someone like me who didn’t go to church,” Lisa said.

“He broke into my life in such an unbelievable way that I am just forever grateful. I will sing of His praises as long as He wants me to.”

Lisa’s story is summed up by the verse Colossians 1:13: “For He has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son He loves.”

She added, “The truth is Jesus Christ is alive. He saves lives and if He can save me, He can save you!”

“I knew that those thoughts didn’t belong to me.”

A DIVINE MISDIAL

Nurettin (pictured) was born into a Kurdish family in eastern Türkiye (Turkey) and raised as a Muslim, but he never really believed in the Islamic concept of Allah. “I wasn’t an atheist,” he said. “I didn’t doubt God’s existence. I just didn’t see Him in Islam.”

Not interested in religion, Nurettin instead focused on Kurdish politics and making as much money as he could. His political ambitions led him to become a city councillor, and his business interests flourished. Over time, however, he found those achievements unfulfilling.

When a friend invited him to meet with some foreigners in a part of the country not commonly visited by tourists, Nurettin was intrigued. During their meeting, Nurettin listened but wasn’t particularly interested. Then, when the strangers stood to leave, one of them offered Nurettin a book he had never read – a Bible.

“I didn’t expect much of it,” he said. “But because he offered it, I took it. Then I started getting curious [about] what was written and what it said, so I started reading it.”

As he read the Bible, Matthew 7:7-8 spoke to his heart: “Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened.”

A wrong number?

A year later, Nurettin received an unexpected phone call from the man who had given him the Bible. The foreigner was a Christian worker, and he had called Nurettin by accident while trying to reach another man named Nurettin, whom he thought was more interested in meeting to talk about Christ.

But the ‘wrong’ Nurettin decided he should meet the Christian again.

During their second meeting, Nurettin was



astonished when another Kurdish man with the Christian worker prayed over their meal using Jesus’ name.

“When he prayed, I realised he was Kurdish and he was a follower of Jesus,” Nurettin said. “Something just hit my heart. I thought, ‘How is it possible for a Kurd to be a follower of Christ?’”

That question remained on his mind as he continued to read the Bible. Then, one day while reading the Book of Revelation, Nurettin had a vision of Christ. “Jesus was standing right in front of me,” he said. “I confessed right then that Jesus was Lord.” In the vision, Nurettin sensed the Lord saying that God wanted to use him to save others.

On 4 April 2010, Nurettin was baptised [a symbol of dying to your old life] in secret. Twenty days later he received an early-morning visit from the police.

A Bible behind bars

Police interrogated Nurettin for hours, mostly about his political activities, but to his surprise they also asked him about his faith.

“Are you a follower of Jesus?” they asked. “How did you become a follower? Why did you become a Christian?” He later learned that someone had posted information about his baptism online.

“I knew the basics,” he said, “and I shared the Lord’s Prayer with them. But all I could explain was the basics about the faith and the Gospel [the good news of how Jesus’ death and resurrection reconciles us to God].”

Turkish authorities sentenced Nurettin to two years in prison for his political activities. As he adjusted to life behind bars, he took comfort from praying the Lord’s Prayer each morning and night. Later, he found a Bible in the prison library that he read eagerly but cautiously.

After completing his prison sentence two years later, Nurettin had no income or social standing. But his faith had grown stronger; he spent hours each day praying and sharing God’s Word with his wife. Slowly her heart changed, until she too came to faith in Christ.

In the months after his release, Nurettin distanced himself from politics. However, the government still considered him a potential threat to national security because of his previous political connections. After 18 months of freedom, authorities rearrested Nurettin and sentenced him to two-and-a-half additional years behind bars.

During his second sentence, he was allowed to bring Bibles inside and give them to others. “Pretty much everyone heard the Gospel. They knew I was a follower of Jesus, so they would always ask me questions and I would answer them.”

From prison to pulpit

After his second release from prison, Nurettin trained to become a pastor, and today he leads a small, thriving congregation of Kurdish believers.

A few of the men he ministered to in prison have sought him out since their release, and he prays that they will come to faith in Christ. He wants more Kurds to experience what he did when he read that first Bible he received years ago.

“God willing, I will spend the rest of my life preaching His Word until I reach eternal life,” he said.

Nurettin wants everyone to know God’s love, a love he believes led the front-line worker to call him years ago. “It is not a coincidence,” he says. “God was orchestrating His divine purpose.”

This is an abridged version of a story originally published by Voice of the Martyrs Australia at vom.com.au and is used with kind permission.

I found a love without reason

Research scientist Sean Cheng’s university education in China was steeped in atheism, which informed his worldview while he was growing up.

Days after Sean was born, his parents sent him away to Chengdu to be raised by his grandmother. Sean understood that in order to escape a harsh life in the poor and rural Tibetan mountains, he had to work hard to get into a good college.

“This became the whole purpose of my life and I studied very hard,” he shared on his blog, ji-dian.blogspot.com.

At 16, Sean left for Shanghai where he entered Fudan University to pursue his education in science.

“While in Fudan, I became interested in western culture and began to develop a self-centred worldview that was influenced by western philosophy.

“I thought my faith was ‘I do not believe in anything.’”

After graduation, Sean returned to Chengdu to work in a research institute as a polymer scientist.

“I entered the real world without a fixed faith or a matured worldview.

“I felt lost and aimless. And I started to do what everyone else did.”

He started gambling every night while getting drunk on baijiu, a type of hard liquor. Yet, Sean knew he wanted to do more with his life.

He witnessed the student movement protests in 1989 on the streets of Chengdu. But the protests came to a cruel end on June 4, with the crackdown at Tiananmen Square.

“My heart sank into deep darkness and hopelessness. I was unable to find an answer to my heart’s questions, and life became meaningless and unbearably painful.

“I was lost and spiritually broken.”

Sean began to seek out philosophies and spirituality, hoping to find the answers to his questions.

“I read a lot on spirituality, ranging from western philosophy to traditional Chinese beliefs, and even things like qigong (a form of Chinese meditation) and fortune telling.

“Occasionally I would find a little speck of human wisdom in these writings, but they did not give me any significant answers.

“Some of my readings were related to Christianity, but most of these depictions were negative and critical.



Even labelling Christianity as a superstitious religion or an imperialist tool.”

In 1990, Sean joined a British expedition team as an interpreter.

Besides scientific research, the team would also use a hovercraft to send humanitarian aid to the villages in the remote Tibetan mountains.

While on the expedition trip, the team faced many obstacles from bureaucracy challenges to harsh weather conditions.

“I saw how the Christians prayed and trusted their God with their difficulties, and how they showed love, not only to the people they helped (mostly the Tibetans), but also to those who made it difficult for them, with forgiveness and understanding.”

In 1992, Sean arrived in America to pursue his studies.

“Thinking back today, it is clear that I was able to come to the US only because God’s loving hand was working behind everything.”

Separated from his family, life in a foreign land was lonely and difficult. But he received help from other Chinese students who were Christians.

“They picked me up from the airport, gave me rides to the shops, invited me to their homes for meals, picked up an old mattress for me to use as a bed and offered help whenever I needed it.

“Their loving deeds and kindness brought a lot of warmth to me, and I was touched by the love they lived out which I knew had to come from their Christian faith.”

They invited him to Bible studies where he got to meet other Chinese and American Christians. It was there that Sean got to ask questions and debate with them on topics such as creation versus evolution.

“But the greatest factor of all was the love that these Christians had demonstrated to me through their actions.”

For Sean, the unconditional love that these Christians had shown him was a surprise.

“I had grown up in a communist culture which taught us to hate our enemies. Mao [Zedong] even famously said that, ‘There is absolutely no love in this world without reason.’

“But by the Yangtze River in the Tibetan village and in this little college town in the US, I did experience and witness a kind of love that has no worldly reason.”

One Sunday in 1992, Sean was attending service at a local church when he felt so touched by God, he started tearing up.

“I realised what a sinner I was, and was strongly moved by Christ’s love.

“When the pastor made a call for people to come and accept Jesus into their lives, I walked to the front and told him that I wanted to accept Jesus Christ as my Saviour and Lord right there and then.”

When the internet was invented, Sean felt a need for an apologetics movement on the cyberspace. Going by the pen name ‘Jidian’ (the Chinese name for Gideon), Sean has been reaching out to Chinese netizens and evangelising to them on various digital platforms.

“Looking back on my spiritual journey, I am filled with great awe and thankfulness for God’s grace on me. I pray that I will be endowed the faith and strength to serve God and follow Christ all my life.”

Sean Cheng



Some things cannot be scheduled

I LIVE BY my diary – meetings, retreat times, days away travelling and specific tasks are all carefully added to the diary. Each day is scheduled, each week is programmed, each year planned.

When I need help with my time management there is no end to the fabulous devices available to help me.

Yet the truth of life which constantly confronts me is that some things can’t be scheduled.

We all find this difficult because we live in a buy-it-now, fix-it-quick, take-it-all and have-it-all society.

But you can’t schedule love. You can’t just ‘order in’ strong relationships. Health issues are not always a quick-fix away and the joys of families and children do not always happen on cue. Pandemics strike suddenly and everything changes.

When schedules are cancelled or in disarray, we are reminded that we don’t control life, and that some things are a matter of trust and faith.

The weakness of our scheduled lives is that we can start to believe that we control everything.

It is a tough lesson to discover we are not God and we can’t control life – that job is already taken.

But it’s also a lesson of comfort and hope, because when we realise we aren’t in control, we are free to hand over control to someone who knows much better than we do: God. I urge you to do that today.

The appendix: Not so useless after all

BY MICHAEL THOMPSON

Many people have been advised to get their appendix removed, sometimes even when it wasn't causing any issues. After all, why not, if it removes the possibility of getting appendicitis one day – especially when we've been told repeatedly that it's a useless organ, a relic of our evolutionary past?

But is it really useless? We are increasingly learning that it isn't.

The belief that the appendix – that tiny, worm-like appendage attached to the top of the large intestine – is useless stems from the Darwinian idea that the long process of evolution would have removed its functionality.

Instead, we find over and over the hallmarks of a Designer in the human body, with function and purpose present in even seemingly unimportant organs.

In 1871, Charles Darwin suggested that the appendix was a useless organ left over from the process of evolution. In fact, he thought it was evidence for evolution. Unfortunately,

the mainstream adoption of Darwin's evolutionary ideas in biology has led to misunderstanding of the purpose of many organs.

In 1925, during the infamous Scopes 'monkey' trial in the US (over the teaching of human evolution in schools), experts supporting evolution claimed there were 180 vestigial organs in our body!

This faulty evolutionary worldview had dangerous consequences. For example, the thymus gland, located behind the breastbone, was long believed to be a useless evolutionary vestige.

Decades ago, radiation treatment was used to reduce its size and even get rid of it to try to reduce sudden infant deaths. Why not, since it was useless anyway?

However, we now know that not only was the treatment useless, but that the thymus plays an important role in early childhood in 'training' the immune system.

So, not surprisingly, this irradiation led to an increased risk of infections, autoimmune diseases, and even coronary heart disease.

Also, since the nearby thyroid

gland was exposed to radiation, many died later from thyroid cancer.

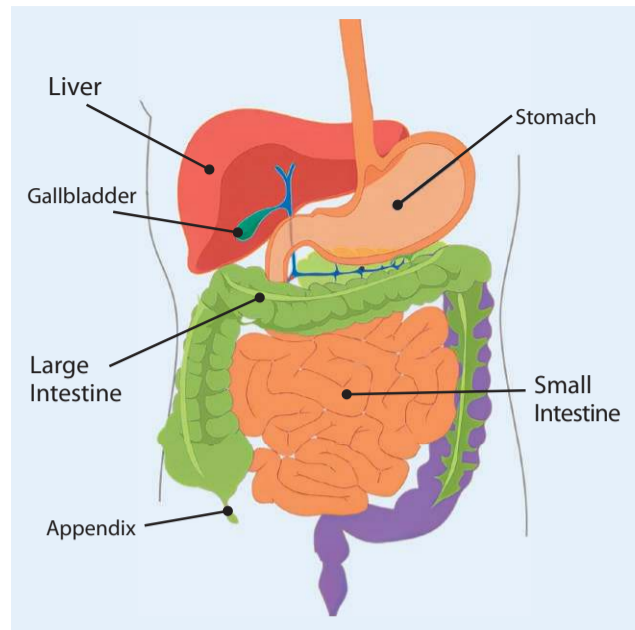
Another example is the colon. Historically, parts of it were sometimes removed because doctors believed that it was an unnecessary evolutionary leftover.

But in fact, all of the colon is crucial. Removing a portion of it resulted in 'short bowel syndrome', which often led to severe nutritional deficiencies and chronic diarrhoea.

Fortunately, medical science has progressively caused the list of 'useless' organs in our bodies to shrink dramatically. Today, most authorities would agree that none are 'useless'.

The appendix is a part of the digestive system. The inside of the large intestine has a vast community of 'good' bacteria and other microorganisms (collectively called the gut microbiome).

These help digest food and are generally useful for health, especially gut health. They are distributed



will never get appendicitis." Now, however, as experts are learning more reasons why the appendix is not useless, this practice is increasingly being seen as questionable, at the very least.

There are of course very good reasons for removing the appendix in certain circumstances.

Think of situations in which a doctor would consider amputation of a limb. Amputation is not because the limb is useless, but because there is a life-threatening or debilitating condition associated with the limb which can be overcome by its removal.

Similarly, an infected appendix is at significant risk of bursting without treatment. This will rapidly give rise to peritonitis (inflammation of the abdominal lining), a medical emergency with a high probability of a fatal outcome.

Removal of a non-infected appendix may also improve the symptoms of ulcerative colitis.

While removal is clearly a complex decision, the researchers concluded that, "One thing appears quite certain: The appendix is not useless."

In conclusion, the appendix, like any other organ, can become diseased.

But that is not because of faulty design or being an evolutionary leftover.

Humans were created "very good" in the beginning (Genesis 1:27-31), so there wouldn't have been issues like appendicitis.

However, the consequence of sin is death (Romans 6:23), and after Adam and Eve's rebellion (Genesis 3), everything changed. We now live in a world with broken bodies and diseases of many kinds – and the inevitability of death.

Fortunately, we have a great and merciful God who will give those who believe in Jesus a new perfect body (1 Corinthians 15:42) to spend eternity with Him on a restored Earth. •

Michael Thompson is a speaker/scientist for CMI (Aus) in Brisbane, Australia. He has a Ph.D. in coastal engineering and specialized in the application of artificial intelligence for measuring coastal processes. He is currently researching flood sedimentology and geology related to biblical creation. For more: creation.com/michael-thompson.

Noah's ark: Fact or fiction?

Part 4: How could Noah look after all those animals?

BY TAS WALKER, CMI

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

NOAH NEEDED TO keep the animals warm and clean, and stow enough food and water for 370 days. According to author John Woodmorappe, food for 16,000 animals would have taken only about 15 percent of the ark's total volume, and drinking water about 10 percent.¹ This could be reduced by storing dried and compressed foodstuffs, and by collecting rainwater.

Woodmorappe estimates that eight people could care for 16,000 animals without any special devices. Deep bedding of sawdust, wood shavings or peat moss can last unchanged for many months, and would absorb moisture and odour. Some cages may have had sloped or slatted floors, so the manure could fall and be flushed away.

Even in modern times, Dutch farmers keep animals over the winter months with low-maintenance stables called potstals and grupstals. Noah may have had systems to automatically supply water and food to the animals and clear away their waste.

Today, a small group of farmers can raise thousands of cattle and other animals in a small space. We would probably be surprised at the



imaginative devices on board the ark to feed and care for the animals.

How would Noah have powered these devices? Perhaps by wind or gravity or the rocking of the ark. There are many possibilities.

In a natural disaster, most animals react in ways that allow them to survive. Many may even have hibernated while they were on the ark.

Did the Flood destroy everything alive?

No one today has seen a hurricane, earthquake or rainstorm as destructive as Noah's flood. The worst natural disasters experienced in historical times are tiny compared with the global cataclysm that destroyed the earth in Noah's day.

The Bible speaks of the 'fountains of the great deep' being broken open. That means earthquakes and volcanoes, as well as molten lava and super-heated steam and water blasted from inside the earth in a furious, frenzied upheaval. It was only after 150 days into the flood that these fountains were stopped.

"And all flesh died that moved on the earth: birds and cattle and beasts and every creeping thing that creeps on the earth, and every man.

All in whose nostrils was the breath of the spirit of life, all that was on the dry land, died" (Genesis 7:21-22). In other words, every person and land vertebrate animal outside of the ark perished as the flood waters rose and rose relentlessly until there was nowhere to flee for safety.

Of course, that did not include fish and other marine animals, although many of these perished in the cataclysm, too. In December 2004, an earthquake near Indonesia triggered a tsunami that devastated many countries around the Indian Ocean. Just one tsunami obliterated whole towns within a few minutes.

After the water returned to the sea, the world was shocked at the destruction. Some 200,000 people perished. Imagine what would happen if the tsunamis just kept coming, one after the other, day after day, for five months, until the highest mountains were covered. •

References and Notes

1. Woodmorappe, J., Noah's Ark: A Feasibility Study, Institute for Creation Research, El Cajon, Calif.

Part 5 will continue in the next edition of *Challenge News*.

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throughout the colon, including part of it called the cecum, which is near the appendix.

The appendix acts a bit like a storehouse for these good microbes. When we suffer an intestinal infection, diarrhoea is a mechanism to try to expel the disease-causing microbes. However, it also flushes out the good bacteria.

These can be replenished from the appendix's natural backup supply. So, for those without an appendix, it can take longer to recover from diarrhoea.

The appendix also contains lymphoid tissue, which is a part of the immune system. This tissue is in many other parts of the body, such as the lymph nodes, thymus gland, spleen, and tonsils. In the appendix it produces three immunity-related antibodies (immunoglobulins).

It is likely that lymphoid tissue in the appendix is particularly important in the fetal and early post-birth stages of life.

New research has found that those without an appendix have a higher risk of many gut issues such as an increased risk of irritable bowel syndrome, colorectal cancer, infection after non-typhoidal salmonella, and type 2 diabetes following surgery (if under 30).

This is further evidence of this organ's function, even though not all is yet understood.

Removing a healthy appendix during another abdominal operation used to be a fairly common practice.

The rationale was, "We might as well do it while we're there, it has no function and that way this person



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YOUTH TRUTH

I FOUND HOPE AND BELONGING

Madeline “Maddie” Edwards grew up in a home where faith was part of everyday life.

“My parents are both born again Christians,” she shared. “I grew up going to church and Sunday school, reading the Bible as a family, talking about God and praying. So I knew about God, who He is, and what He has done for me, and I believed it – but it was all head knowledge, not heart knowledge.”

On the surface, life looked good, but deep down, Maddie felt something was missing.

“As a child, I just went through the motions of what I was brought up with. I was selfish. I only looked out for myself. My concern was to live a happy life that pleased me.”

Her childhood also brought physical struggles. She developed nodules on her vocal cords, leaving her voice husky and making her self-conscious.

“I could no longer sing in church, and I became very self-conscious of my voice. I hated the sound of it.”

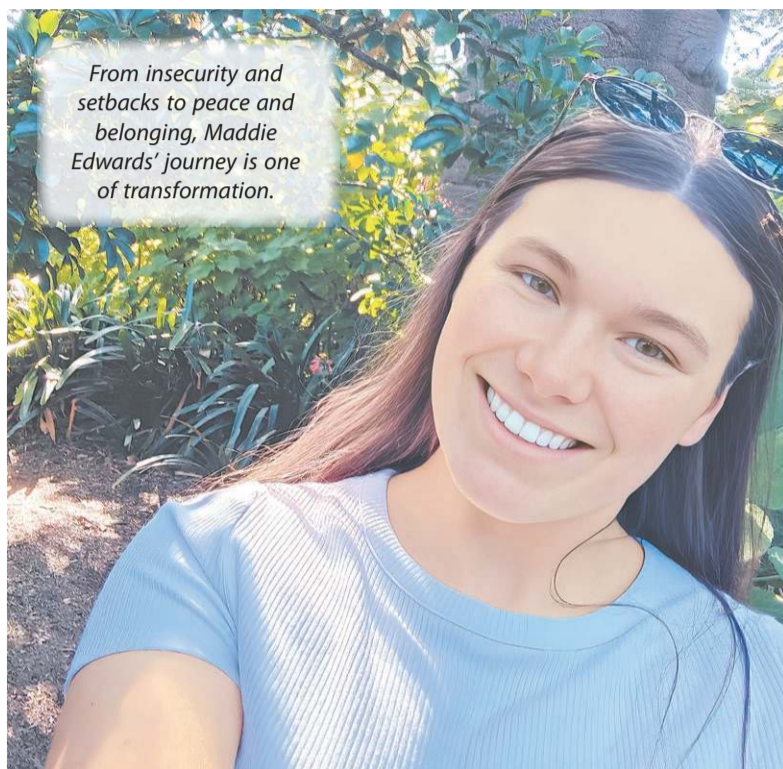
A fall from a bunk bed caused a back injury that lasted years.

“These effects on my health made me very sad and bitter. I could not understand why God had allowed these things to happen to me when I was so young. It didn’t seem fair.”

Even though she knew the Bible and prayed regularly, Maddie never felt truly secure in her faith.

“I kept being a Christian on the outside, but I was severely lacking a change on the inside. I had no assurance of salvation.”

“Every time the preachers asked if anyone wanted to put their hand up and get saved, my heart would race,



From insecurity and setbacks to peace and belonging, Maddie Edwards' journey is one of transformation.

but I kept saying to myself, ‘No, I’m saved.’ But a little voice would say, ‘Are you?’”

By age 16, the doubt and guilt had become unbearable.

“One night, I was lying in my bed contemplating my salvation, when I just broke down.”

“I cried and cried. I couldn’t live with the doubt and the guilt of my sin anymore. I cried out to God and said, ‘Lord, I just want to be Yours. I just want to belong.’”

She opened her Bible and read a verse about belonging to God.

“It was just like God was speaking directly to me,” she said.

Right then, she prayed: “God, I just want to be Yours, and I want You to be mine. I am sorry for all my sins. I know I am a sinner and need Your forgiveness. Please forgive me and wash my heart clean. Thank you for sending Jesus to take the punishment for me. Please come into my heart and live in me. Please change me.”

The peace she felt was immediate and profound. “The peace that just washed over me after I prayed this prayer is something I can’t explain. It was total assurance, total love, acceptance, cleanliness and belonging. It was more than a feeling. It was the peace of God.”

From that moment, Maddie’s priorities changed.

“My aim in life is no longer to live a happy life, but to live a life that brings honour and glory to God. It is to love others and show them the love of God that has changed my life.”

Life hasn’t been without challenges. “Life has not been easy, and I’ve had my ups and downs, but I have never been alone. I have always had God helping me through these times. I have always had someone to go to for advice, comfort, strength and healing.”

Her health also improved over time. “I can now sing in church, and my voice is less husky. Praise the Lord!”

But for Maddie, the deeper lesson was about more than physical healing. “Your health is not everything. My health was not what was leaving me feeling empty inside. It was not having Jesus in my heart. So if you have Jesus, you have everything.”

Looking back, she sees the difference faith has made.

“Without Him, I would be an insecure, selfish and bitter person. Now I am a child of God.”

“I just want to belong.”



Maddie (third from left) with her brother Lachie, dad Troy, brother Max, mum Louise, sisters Ashley, Ali and Kate.

Peace after pain

Growing up in George in South Africa’s Western Cape, Reuben Barnard’s childhood seemed ordinary at first, but by the age of six, life began to shift dramatically.

“My father started showing up less and less at home. It came to a point where me and my two brothers didn’t see our father on weekends,” he recalled.

The absence of their father took a toll on the whole family.

“Our mother started getting sad over this and what was happening in the house. After a few years, my mother found out that my dad was cheating on her with someone else.”

The turmoil didn’t stop there. Constant fighting and abuse left deep emotional scars.

“My dad started to hit me and tried to play it off like he was making me ‘tough.’”

High school brought further challenges, including his parents’ divorce. “This left me devastated, and throughout high school, it was something that kept me depressed.”

Like many teenagers, Reuben sought approval from his father and a sense of worth. He threw himself into rugby, hoping to prove himself.

“I started training – jogging five kilometres in the morning, going to the gym after school for an hour, then rugby practice later in the afternoon. I was doing this every day for the end of grade 11.”

His hard work paid off: he earned a spot on the school’s first team and a ticket to the World Schools Rugby Tournament in Thailand.

But then disaster struck. During tryouts, his leg collapsed in a scrum, and a doctor later told him he would have “leg problems for the rest of my life and that I wouldn’t be able to play rugby anymore.”

For Reuben, rugby was more than a sport; it was a way to reconnect with his father.

“My whole life fell apart because the one thing I was doing to get back with my dad was gone, and I felt like a failure.”

The hopelessness became overwhelming, and he came dangerously close to taking his own life.

It was during this darkest time that Reuben’s perspective began to change.

“I always knew God, but I grew up in church and didn’t think much of it until I went on a [Christian youth] camp, which completely broke my religious mindset. I learned that I could have a relationship with God.”

At the camp, something extraordinary happened.

“They prayed for my leg, and God healed it. From that day, I knew I had to change my old ways and truly go full out for God and His will for my life.”

The experience went beyond physical healing. Reuben surrendered his life to Jesus Christ and found emotional and relational restoration.

“Not only did my leg get healed, but I also forgave my father for what he has done to me and my family. Today the Holy Spirit is working with my father to restore our relationship because my dad started reaching out to me and wants to spend time with me.”

The transformation Reuben experienced touched every part of his life. “After I became a Christian, I felt relieved and like all my burdens were taken away.”

His newfound faith helped him embrace authenticity.

“I started to be the ‘real’ me and started to really care about others around me. My heart started going out to people in similar situations as me.”

Reuben draws inspiration from 1 Corinthians 13, which speaks about love and enduring commitment. He has also learned a key life lesson about resilience.

“Life won’t be easy when you give your life to Jesus, but because you have a solid foundation in Jesus, you can easily come back on your feet and stand up from mistakes.”

Through his journey, Reuben discovered that true healing comes not just from overcoming physical or emotional setbacks, but from building a life on a foundation of faith, forgiveness, and purpose.



Reuben Barnard

“The one thing I was doing to get back with my dad was gone.”

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COUNTRY STAR'S FIRM FAITH

BY MARK ELLIS

Lainey Wilson took home the top honour of Entertainer of the Year at the 2025 Country Music Association Awards, along with Album of the Year for *Whirlwind*. Beneath the 33-year-old star's signature bell-bottom style and raw, heartfelt storytelling lies a foundation grounded in her rock: Jesus Christ.

Raised in the tiny farming community of Baskin, Louisiana – population around 200, with no stoplights and plenty of dirt roads – Lainey grew up in a home where faith wasn't just talked about; it was lived.

Her family attended Baskin Baptist Church every Sunday, a place where her parents were married and where young Lainey made her decision to follow Christ.

"A lot happened at Baskin Baptist Church," she shared in a recent interview with *Us Weekly*.

"My parents got married there, and I got saved as a little girl there. It was full of good people – the kind that would give you the shirt off their back."

That simple, Bible-believing upbringing shaped everything about her.

In a 2022 appearance on Southern Living's Biscuits & Jam podcast, Lainey reflected on those formative years: "The church was a huge part of my growing up and our family foundation.

"We love Jesus. And I'm not sure where I would be right now on this journey without Him. It's just a part of who I am."

When Lainey first moved to Nashville at age 19, she lived in a camper trailer parked outside a recording studio.

Her faith became her

anchor there.

She credits the grit instilled by her parents – and the calling she felt from God – as the driving force behind her perseverance.

"I knew from an early age that this was my calling," she said in an interview with Movieguide.org.

"I knew that this was a gift. I truly believe that if you feel like you have a gift, you're supposed to share it with the world."

Lainey's music reflects that conviction unapologetically. Songs like *Me, You, and Jesus* lay it out plainly: true love and life work best with Christ at the centre.

Her track *Sunday Best* draws directly from those childhood memories of dressing up for church, reminding listeners to bring their best to God no matter the storms of life.

And in collaborations that bridge country and Christian genres – duetting with Anne Wilson (no relation) on the powerful *Praying Woman*,

honouring faith-filled moms; joining Matthew West on *My Jesus*; or teaming with Zach Williams on a rousing *Go Tell It on the Mountain* for CMA Country Christmas – Lainey proclaims her beliefs without hesitation.

The faith-filled Grammy winner joined the cast of *Yellowstone* in 2022, with some of her songs being featured in the series until it ended in 2024.

While filming her first season of *Yellowstone*, Lainey's father, Brian Wilson of the Beach Boys, experienced severe health issues including a stroke and an infection that resulted in the removal of his

left eye.

Wanting to be closer to him, she considered quitting the show.

However, her father encouraged her to continue filming regardless of his health outlook. He eventually recovered and was seen accompanying her on the red carpet at the 56th CMA Awards, according to Fox News.

Since 2021, Wilson has been in a relationship with former NFL quarterback Devlin "Duck" Hodges. In February 2025, Wilson and Hodges announced their engagement, as reported by *People* magazine.

As arenas fill with fans singing along to hits like *Heart Like a Truck* and *Watermelon Moonshine*, Lainey remains the farmer's daughter from Baskin who starts her day talking to Jesus.

Her story is a reminder that performers don't have to compromise their faith to reach the top. In fact, for Lainey Wilson, surrendering to Christ has been the most important element of her journey.

As she continues to shine brightly in country music, one thing is clear: Lainey's light comes from the One who called her out of a small Louisiana town and into His great adventure of faith. And she's not afraid to tell the world about it. ●

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“
I knew from an early age that this was my calling.”



Lainey Wilson performs onstage during New Year's Eve Live: Nashville's Big Bash at Bicentennial Capitol Mall State Park on December 31, 2025 in Nashville, Tennessee. (Photo by Jason Davis/Getty Images).

Recipe of the month



Orange, almond and polenta cake

I LOVE SLIGHTLY unusual cakes – not-too-sweet, spiced, no-icing cakes that are better suited to grown-ups than the under eights in your household. And this cake is another in that category. There is texture from the polenta, spice with the inclusion of star anise in the syrup and beautiful perfume from a judicious sprinkling of orange blossom water. But it is a simple cake to make, and would be a wonderful finish to dinner with friends, served with some Greek yoghurt or a dollop of cream.

Ingredients (serves 8-10)

200 g butter, at room temperature
200 g demerara sugar
3 large eggs
200g ground almonds
100 g fine polenta
zest of 2 large oranges
1 teaspoon orange blossom water*
1 teaspoon baking powder
1 teaspoon icing sugar, for decoration
Orange and star anise syrup
250 ml orange juice
juice of 1 lemon
125g caster sugar
1 teaspoon orange blossom water
1 small star anise

Method

Preheat oven to 165 C.

Lightly grease a 22 cm diameter springform tin and line the base with silicon paper.

In a medium-sized bowl beat together the butter and sugar until pale and fluffy. The sugar will not completely dissolve, as the crystals are quite large.

Add the eggs one at a time, beating well between each addition.

Add the almonds, polenta and orange zest and beat for one minute.

Finally, add the orange blossom water and baking powder and beat for another minute, making sure they are well incorporated.

Turn the batter into the tin and carefully spread out evenly with a flat bladed knife.

Bake for 40-45 minutes, or until the cake springs back lightly when gently pressed with your fingertips.

It should be golden

and evenly risen. Carefully remove from the tin and turn onto a serving plate. Cool to room temperature.

To make the syrup place the orange and lemon juice in a small saucepan with the sugar, orange blossom water and star anise.

Bring to the boil and simmer gently for 20 minutes. Set aside to cool to room temperature.

When ready to serve, dust half of the cake with icing sugar.

Two choices now – serve the cake and pass the syrup around for people to pour on their own slice, or dramatically pour the syrup over the whole cake at the table and then serve individual slices.... I'm firmly in the pour-over-the-cake-then-serve camp.

The cake will keep for two to three days stored in an airtight container.

Don't store in the refrigerator, and if the weather is very humid, just forget the diet and eat it on the day it is made.

*Orange blossom water has been a traditional ingredient used often in North African as well as Middle Eastern cooking.

Orange blossom water can be purchased from good delicatessens or a Middle Eastern supermarket.

If it is unavailable you can leave out, but it adds something special to the cake. Be very careful not to use too much, as it is quite strong, and is only used for perfume, not flavour.

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NUDGE
WITH KARL FAASE

When enough is never enough

THERE IS A disease sweeping the western world and Australia has not been immune.

Unfortunately, quarantine controls have not saved us from being infected. The disease is "affluenza".

The unsuspecting victims of this condition are compelled to spend every waking moment thinking about, or working towards, collecting symbols of affluence in the vain attempt to hold off the terrible symptoms of this condition.

The symptoms include feelings of jealousy, greed and the overwhelming fear of being a loser in the race of acquisition.

The most unfortunate side effect of affluenza is that there is no way to keep ahead of it.

It does not matter how much you manage to accumulate, there will never be enough to feel satisfied.

There will always be something more you will just "have to have" in order to feel life is complete.

So what is the cure for such a terrible illness? Simple – give. The only antidote to affluenza is to give to others.

Look to the example of Jesus who gave His life for others. Let Jesus be your example and inner motivation. Don't be another victim of the affluenza disease. ●

BUILDING BETTER RELATIONSHIPS

Life is not a soap opera

BY ROB FURLONG

I CAN HONESTLY say that I never watched a single episode of *Neighbours* or its mutant offspring *Home and Away*, so I went online (in the name of research!) to see what I had been missing.

To say I was utterly bewildered by the end of my search would be an understatement – I was totally confused!

I do have to admit though that I laughed loud and hard when I read the plotline concerning a guy named Bob who lost his leg in a mountaineering accident only to be reunited with it when his leg was discovered by a young couple on a romantic weekend camping trip.

Can you imagine it? “Oh my, isn’t that Bob’s leg hanging from a tree? We must tell him quickly!”

Why are people so obsessed with

soap operas? I think it is because many of us conclude our own lives are quite boring and the “soaps” somehow fill a void for us by making life a little more exciting.

But life is not like a soap opera! Life consists of many things and these include the exciting as well as the mundane.

Listen to the words of King Solomon in the Bible: “*There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under heaven...*” (Ecclesiastes 3:1).

In other words, there is a set time for everything that happens to us during our lives as well as there being a specific duration for each of them.

Solomon describes many of these events in the words that follow: times of birth and death, weeping and laughing, mourning and dancing, loving and hating, war and peace.

None of these events, or others, always occur all the time – they each

are given a set time.

And none of them lasts forever – they have a period of duration that can sometimes be long or short, depending on the circumstances.

Sometimes life is vibrant and exciting but sometimes it can be plain boring! Can you relate to that? I most certainly can! This is the ebb and flow of life, and it is grounded in reality, not some ridiculous soap opera.

I am writing like this because so many people manage their relationships as if they were living in a soap opera.

We all love the romantic movie where the knight rides off into the sunset with his princess and they live happily ever after.

We conclude that this is how marriage is... but is it?

In our own marriages we discover that there are times of happiness but also conflict and in extreme cases, it seems to be only conflict.

What happened to the romantic ending?

For one thing, we don’t have the privilege of seeing how things worked out for the knight and the princess, but I am pretty certain they will have had their tense moments as well.

We have been duped into thinking that happiness in marriage is merely



STOCK PHOTO

about finding this wonderful person and then everything will automatically flow from there – we have been “Hollywoodised” about love and marriage.

All marriages, even the best ones, have their times and seasons: times of laughter and passion and yes, times of conflict and boredom.

The solution is to try and make sense of these times. This is why Solomon also said, “*God has made everything beautiful in its time...*” (Ecclesiastes 3:11).

It is God who brings meaning to every moment of our lives. We can only ultimately be completely fulfilled in Him, not through some soap opera or unrealistic view about love and relationships.

And He is also able to bring

meaning and fulfillment to our marriages.

A growing marriage begins its life when two people say “I do” to each other and to God.

Then they are truly free to grow into unselfish people who find meaning in the times and seasons of their relationship with each other and with God.

HOW DO I BECOME A CHRISTIAN?

Anyone can gain the eternal life offered through Jesus Christ

We read in God’s word: “*God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life*” (John 3:16)

OUR PROBLEM: **Separation from God**
“Everyone has sinned. Nobody is good enough because God’s standards are perfect” (Romans 3:23) **ADMIT**

GOD’S REMEDY / SOLUTION: **Jesus died on the cross**
“God demonstrates His own love for us in this; while we were still sinners, Christ died for us” (Romans 5:8) **BELIEVE**

OUR RESPONSE: **Trust Jesus by receiving Him**
“To all who received Him, to those who believed in His name, He gave the right to become children of God” (John 1:12) **COMMIT**

Here is an example of how you can pray.

Dear Father in Heaven. I come to you now because I want to be saved. Please, forgive me of my sins. I believe that you sent your Son Jesus Christ to die for me and that you have raised him from the dead. I now ask Jesus Christ to come into my life as my Saviour and Lord. Take control of my life. Please make me the person You created me to be. In Jesus Christ’s name. Amen

The Lord Jesus says: “I tell you the truth. Everyone who believes in me has eternal life.” (John 6:47).
He gives life of a wonderful quality that continues forever.

What now?

1. Tell someone - either a Christian that you know or email us at info@challengenews.org
2. Use the resources in the green box on this page to find a Bible to read and more information regarding Christianity.
3. Keep praying. Talk to God anywhere, about anything. He is always listening, and you don’t need a formula.
4. Find a Bible-teaching church to attend.

AS A NEXT STEP :

Please send me: Bible Some ‘starting off’ literature Information on a helpful church

I have prayed the prayer [ABOVE]

* Please tick and write clearly *

Name _____ Phone _____

Address _____

Email address _____

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

All overseas enquiries are referred onto someone in their own country

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

NUDGE

WITH KARL FAASE

Staying married longer

AN INTERNATIONAL STUDY conducted several years ago by the University of Western Sydney has revealed that the divorce rate in Australia has dropped for the first time in 20 years.

The research highlighted three trends: couples are getting married more often, staying married longer and getting divorced less frequently.

And the New York Times reported at the end of 2014, that if current trends continue, nearly two-thirds of marriages will never involve a divorce (according to recent data from Justin Wolfers, a University of Michigan economist).

This seems to point to a new attitude to marriage and relationships. It seems that the childhood experiences of the current generation who suffered through their parents’ divorce has led to a greater commitment to making their own marriages work. The experiment of drifting in and out of numerous relationships has proved to be unsatisfactory, and now couples are discovering the satisfaction of long-term relationships.

This should be no surprise to us. We are designed to live in relationships, and the best relationships are those which have proven the test of time and are based on deep love rather than the temporal nature of desire and attraction.

I believe that personal faith can help this process. Knowing that we are loved by God, despite our failings, will help us love our partners.

American daredevil Evel Knievel (1938-2007) makes a motorcycle jump over 13 AEC Merlin buses at Wembley Stadium in London in 1975. The stunt ended in a crash in which Knievel broke his pelvis. (Photo by Kypros/Getty Images)



GOOD AND EVEL

Robert “Evel” Knievel was a man who defied gravity and expectations. Famed for his death-defying motorcycle stunts in the 1960s and ‘70s, he became an American icon, known for his audacious jumps over buses, canyons, and fountains. His career was marked by both spectacular successes and harrowing crashes, resulting in numerous broken bones and hospital stays. Yet, beyond the fame and physical feats, Knievel’s life took a profound turn in his later years – a spiritual transformation that surprised many.

Born in Butte, Montana, in 1938, Knievel’s early life was as rugged as the terrain he hailed from. He worked in the copper mines and later found his calling in motorcycle stunts, captivating audiences with his fearless performances. Despite his public persona, Knievel privately grappled with personal demons, including struggles with alcohol, gambling, and tumultuous relationships.

For much of his life, Knievel resisted embracing faith.

He candidly admitted, “I believed in God, but I couldn’t walk away from the gold and the gambling and the booze and the women.”

However, in the months leading up to his death, he experienced a spiritual awakening.

On Palm Sunday 2007, Knievel appeared on the television program Hour of Power to share about his newfound faith.

“I just was a person who always believed in God – there was a ‘God power’. But I always had trouble believing in Jesus Christ, the Son of God. I don’t know why I fought it so hard.”

Knievel said earlier that year, during the Daytona Bike Week, he started thinking about God more

and more. He called old friends to discuss his thoughts about God.

One of them called him back a week later and told him, “I’ve had my whole church praying for you.”

“And I said, ‘Well, that’s not the first time that this has happened. My daughter’s had her entire church praying for me in Bozeman, Montana. And my ex-wife, Linda, she’s had her whole church praying for me in Butte, Montana.’

“I don’t know if it was the power of the prayer or God Himself, but [He] just reached out, either while I was driving or walking down the sidewalk or sleeping. And the power of God in Jesus just grabbed me. It just took a hold of me. So strong. I can’t tell you how strong it was...

“All of a sudden, I just believed

“ I couldn’t walk away from the gold and the gambling... ”



Evel Knievel at Daytona Bike Week 2007, nine months before he died in November 2007 at the age of 69 (Photo by Jeff Daly/Getty Images)

in Jesus Christ. I did. I believed in Him!”

It was his second night in Daytona. Knievel went to the balcony of his hotel room and told the devil to get out of his life.

“I got on my knees and prayed that God would put His arms around me and never, ever, ever let me go. All of a sudden, I was just overcome by the Spirit of God Almighty.”

After that, Knievel started to read the Bible. He also read a book called *The Case for Christ* by Lee Strobel which provides compelling evidence for the life, death and resurrection of Jesus.

Knievel wrote in his book, *Evel Ways* in 2000 that he’d had a life better than any king, any president, or any prince.

“I was talking about the Rolls Royces I had – five of them. The Ferraris I’ve had – five of them. The Stetsons. The Lamborghinis. The jet airplanes – two of them. I flew one alongside the other so I could read my name on the side of them... The diamonds, and the gold, and the racehorses, and the women, and the booze.”

After becoming a Christian, Knievel realised all of that meant nothing. Why? “I didn’t have Jesus Christ in my life.”

Knievel said he wanted to share his story on television to “scream to the world that I am a born-again Christian, and I’m so proud of it.”

After sharing his story, Knievel was baptised – a public declaration of faith in Jesus Christ.

Baptism symbolises the believer’s cleansing from sin, death to their old life, and resurrection into new life through Christ. Knievel’s televised testimony triggered mass baptisms.

In the final months of his life, faith became the cornerstone for Knievel.

He passed away on November 30, 2007, at the age of 69, after battling various health issues. He requested that his tombstone include the words “Believe in Jesus Christ,” a testament to his newfound belief. ●



American daredevil and entertainer Evel Knievel poses for a portrait before a stunt in circa 1976. (Photo by Michael Ochs Archives/Getty Images)

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