

## FREEDOM ON THE INSIDE

BY JANICE TEO

It was a late Saturday night like many others before. Western Australian Steve McKinnon, then a 20-year-old youth worker, was wandering around the city of Perth looking to connect with as many street kids as he could.

He found them – a group of about 15 who had just missed the last bus home.

“What are you going to do now, guys?” he asked them. “You’ve got no ride home.”

“Ah, don’t worry mate, we’ll just steal a couple of cars no worries,” they replied nonchalantly.

“No don’t do that,” Steve said, “come in my car. I’ll get you home.”

So 15 teenagers – many of whom had been drinking – piled into Steve’s Datsun 120Y. Not surprisingly, he was stopped by the first police car that saw them.

“The cops thought I’d stolen the car,” Steve laughs as he recalls this story to *Challenge News*.

They searched the car expecting to find drugs but found nothing. “You’re clean but overloaded,” they told Steve. “You’re going to have to let them out.”

“But they’ll just go steal some cars and that’ll be heaps more trouble for you,” Steve reasoned with them. “Just let me take them home this one time.”

Deciding that would be the lesser of two evils, the cops let him go.

The incident had the most unexpected effect on Steve’s passengers.

“Now we know there’s a God,” they said. “Cos we know you’re a Christian – and for sure God saved you tonight. Anyone else would have been arrested. And cos He saved you, He saved us as well!”

Steve was indeed a Christian – he was raised in a Christian home and at the age of nine he made a personal decision to follow God.

“Young as I was, I understood that God loved me, but it was the fact that He would die for me that got hold of my heart,” the 55-year-old shares.

Steve McKinnon



“I felt just as it says in the song *Amazing Love* – ‘Amazing love, how can it be, that You, my God would die for me.’ And I also knew even then that something was required of me.”

Steve has always felt led to help the marginalised, lost and broken in society. His father wanted him to follow the more conventional path to success and become an engineer, but Steve went into youth work instead. That’s how he ended up with 15 kids in the back of his Datsun. Following their declaration, they now believed in God because he didn’t get arrested.

Steve jumped at the opportunity and told them that in that case, he would take them to church that Sunday.

At that service the pastor, who knew him, addressed him during the sermon, saying: “Steve’s learning something, aren’t ya, Steve? He’s learning that Jesus was despised and rejected [not a member of the elite].”

Steve says he was shocked to realise the pastor was right.

“I thought Jesus was white, male, middle class and probably voted Liberal but here’s this guy telling me Jesus was one with the oppressed minority – the black and the poor.”

“That turned my life on its head and after that I prayed that I



Steve with his family.

would do right by Him because the people on the streets I was meeting – they were Him!”

Referring to a Bible passage in Matthew 25:42-46, he adds: “I didn’t want to be one of those who saw Him naked and didn’t clothe Him, or hungry and didn’t feed Him, or in prison and didn’t visit Him.”

Since then, Steve’s overarching passion is to bridge what he sees as a chasm between the church and the streets, to be the “repairer of the breach.” (Isaiah 58:12)

“If those in need could connect with a church community of love, hope and faith, they would be helped.”

From youth work, Steve became the WA coordinator of Christian charity TEAR Australia and three years ago was appointed state manager of Prison Fellowship WA.

Prison Fellowship is the brainchild of American Charles Colson, who went to prison in 1974 for his part in the Watergate scandal and became a Christian while behind bars. He established the organisation in 1976 convinced the only answer to crime was new life in Christ.

Prison Fellowship Australia was established in 1981. The organisation, which is funded by donations, runs 10 programs, all conducted by trained volunteers.

The programs include inmate visits, camps, Bible studies, court chaplaincy, family support and post-release help with jobs and accommodation. The WA branch has about 120 regular volunteers.

“At Prison Fellowship I see God working without me doing very much at all,” Steve says.

“We just present the Gospel [the good news about Jesus Christ] material and actually see God actively working and changing prisoners’

lives right in front of our eyes.

“God brings wholeness, healing and restoration.”

When asked what part of the Gospel message touches inmates the most, Steve doesn’t hesitate to answer: “Forgiveness.”

“Many of them have friends or family who can’t forgive them and many can’t forgive themselves, so to hear that God forgives them – it’s powerful and life-changing. It breaks them for the better and the tears start to flow. They cling to it.”

“I don’t know how successful I’ve been, but I’ve tried to stay true to what I feel is my calling to be that bridge for God.”

## Profound truths in animated classic

BY SIMEON NEO

WITH THE RECENT live-action adaptation of one of my favourite animated shows of all time, there comes a renewed interest in *Avatar: The Last Airbender*. While the Nickelodeon classic has heavy references to East Asian spirituality and culture, I can’t help but see parallels with Zuko’s famous redemption arc to another popular parable in the Bible: the Prodigal Son.



Zuko and Aang in *Avatar: The Last Airbender*.

In the first half of the show, Zuko is introduced as the main antagonist to protagonist Aang, who is also the Avatar – a saviour-like character destined to save the world. We soon learn that Zuko is a banished prince, exiled by his own father, the Firelord. The only way to earn back his honour and the approval of his father is to capture the Avatar.

In the first two seasons of the show, Zuko sets out on his mission with an obsessive fervour that, at times, puts

his own life at risk. Journeying alongside him is his uncle Iroh, who is a father-figure to Zuko, training him in battle skills while also providing words of wisdom.

In the middle of the show, Zuko eventually reaches a pivotal moment in his journey where he has to decide between capturing the Avatar and receiving his father’s acceptance, or join the Avatar to end the war. Unfortunately, he chooses the first option, at the expense of sending Iroh to prison.

Zuko returns to the Fire Nation where he enjoys all the prestige and honour as a prince. But even with everything that he has, he soon finds himself conflicted and empty and he leaves the Fire Nation once again. This time, to seek forgiveness. In Luke 15:11-32, Jesus tells the parable of the Prodigal Son. In the parable, the son demanded his share of the inheritance from his father – an act that was akin to cursing his father to death.

● Turn to page 2

**YOUTH TRUTH** Page 9

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

**BACK PAGE**

**OLYMPIC FAITH**

# Time for a C change

BY JANICE TEO

**A** word to the wise – when trying to persuade your mother to jump onto the train of a life-changing experience with you, it's best not to tell her she'll be damned if she doesn't.

Ewen Lin was 14, and what does a 14-year-old know about tact and sensitivity?

No sooner had he told his mother about his newfound Christian faith, followed by his insistence that she repent or go to hell, than she had called his pastor to protest.

The Lins had high hopes for Ewen, who was literally on the fast track to success. He had scored a track and field scholarship at one of Singapore's most prestigious schools and his engineer parents wanted him on that road to commercial success.

They were nominal Taoists and did not know anything about Christianity. They worried that his new religion would hamper the future they planned for him.

"Then again, it's not quite right to say my family wasn't religious," Ewen tells *Challenge News* with a chuckle.

"They did have a religion – they worshipped money. We were a comfortable middle class family and like many of my friends my goal in life was to score the 5Cs – cash, car, credit card, condominium and country club membership.

"Study hard, go to uni, get a good job, earn as much as you can, then die. That kind of thinking was instilled in me. Going to school was never to learn or have fun; it was to get a good meal ticket."



Ewen Lin with wife Charis and their three children.

Blissfully unaware that any other option existed, Ewen went along with this strategy – until a classmate invited him to church when he was 14 and everything changed.

"What struck me the most, even at such a young age, was seeing people who were living for more than themselves or material success," he says.

"They were driven by something else. They gave their time and money to missions, to bigger causes. It really surprised me.

The school Ewen went to was a Christian school, so he was familiar with the basic elements of Christianity, but going to church, he says, "really put the meat on the bones of the picture I had of God".

Within a year, he committed his life to God. "It wasn't one dramatic

moment; it was just attending church week in, week out, hearing messages and singing songs that resonated with me.

"I learned who He is, who I am, where I came from and where I'm going. I also confronted the fact that I was a sinner – and that's around the time I had that conversation with Mum.

"I very quickly became involved with church. My whole social life went from school to church and after about a year I knew I didn't want to go to university; I wanted to go into ministry."

As expected, that news did not go down well with his parents, who took to leaving strategically-placed engineering study brochures on his desk. But Ewen stuck to his guns and enrolled in a Bible college in Singapore before moving to Perth in 2010 to further his degree.

He has lived in Perth ever since. His ministry, called The Gospel Stand, is an outreach program to university students and he has been struck by how open people have been to the Gospel message (the good news that Jesus Christ came to Earth to die for our sin).

"I find that while some people don't really want to talk about God or the church, they are fascinated by the person of Jesus Christ and I use that as a springboard to deeper discussions.

"So my team and I tell the story of Jesus – the Man who claimed He was God, who was wooed by the rich and powerful yet also loved by the poorest, who didn't commit a single crime yet was crucified because hundreds of people demanded it.

"I offer them the chance to read the Bible together with me because I believe God does His work through His Word.

"I went to church to meet girls – and I met God instead."

Ewen did indeed meet the girl of his dreams at church. Her name is Charis and they have three children. •

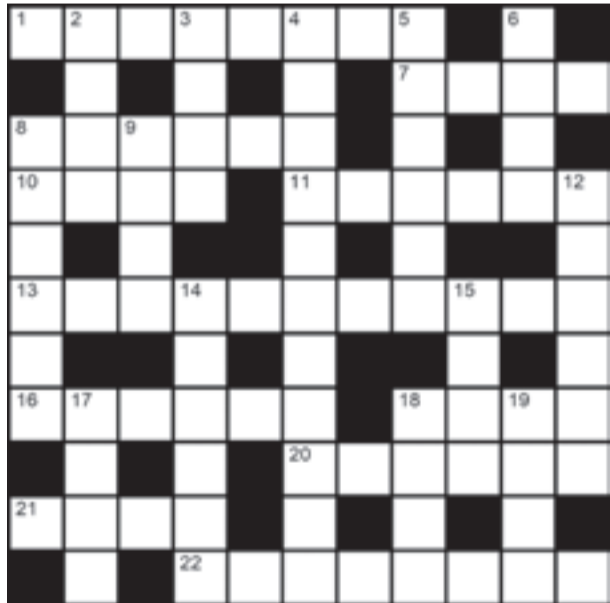
## Coffee Break CROSSWORD & SUDOKU

### ACROSS

- 1 Investigate further (6,2)
- 7 Domestic furnace
- 8 Plane shelter
- 10 It means "oil"
- 11 Gum-leaf eaters
- 13 1980s Soviet economic policy
- 16 Gullet
- 18 A swimming mammal
- 20 High principles
- 21 High fidelity, in short (2,2)
- 22 US parliament

### DOWN

- 2 Verbal, spoken
- 3 Plastic blocks game
- 4 Powerful desktop computer terminal
- 5 A spud
- 6 A white salty cheese



- 8 Meat/potato stew
- 9 Close in proximity
- 12 Uses delaying tactics
- 14 Foreign or unusual
- 15 Reflection result
- 17 Designated successor
- 18 Char a little
- 19 Austrian mountains

### SOLUTIONS PAGE 11



RICHARD GUNTHEER

3	5			9	1		
			7	1	8		
		3		9			
	2	3		7	1		
	4		2	5	6		
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**"God is too good to be unkind and He is too wise to be mistaken. And when we cannot trace His hand, we must trust His heart." — Charles Spurgeon**

## Profound truths in animated classic

• From page 1

However, the father gives in to his son's request and the son leaves home and squanders his wealth.

Utterly broke and living among pigs, he decides to return home to ask his father for forgiveness, expecting to return as a servant. Yet, upon seeing him, his father embraces the son with these words: "For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found" (Luke 15:24).

In a similar vein, when Zuko finally meets Iroh again, he apologises, expecting his uncle to reject him for betraying him. However, Iroh embraces Zuko almost immediately upon seeing his nephew. With tears running down his face he says, "I was never angry with you. I was sad because I was afraid you'd lost your way... and you found it again."

As I rewatched *Avatar: The Last Airbender* as an adult, I find myself relating more to Zuko than Aang.

Like Zuko, there were many times when I chose to pursue things like ambitions, wealth or even relationships. While these things are not bad in themselves, making them our main pursuits often leads to emptiness. But the Bible says that we who "once were alienated and enemies" of God are now reconciled to Him through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ (Colossians 1:21-22).

The stories of Zuko and the Prodigal Son illustrate the power of redemption, forgiveness and the Father's love. The Bible tells us that, "But to all who did receive Him, who believed in His name, He gave the right to become children of God" (John 1:12).

If you find yourself unfulfilled and empty from pursuing the things of this world, believe in Jesus and come back to God and He will receive you with open arms. •

## Ask Y: Peter Meadows answers your questions about God

**QUESTION: CHRISTIANS CLAIM THE EVIDENCE ABOUT JESUS IS SOLID, SO WHY DO SO MANY PEOPLE DOUBT IT?**



**IF WE DIG** deep to look at why it is reasonable to trust what history says about Jesus, we find lots of seemingly solid reasons to do so.

To name just a few: What was written (called the gospels) was by those who were there at the time, or talked to those who were. It was written down close enough to the event for anyone to have been able to say, "It didn't happen that way."

And those who wrote had a huge motivation to get it right – even down to recording the things that made them look like not being the fizziest bottle in the fridge.

So – good question – how come intelligent and clever people scoff at the idea that we should trust what is written about Jesus? Why do they assume that belief has to involve us parking our brains?

The best way to face this issue is to identify those who don't have a problem with the record of Jesus' life being accurate.

What you'll find, time and again, is that historians – those who deal in making sense of the past – will tell you the gospels are an amazing record of history.

In their eyes, diligent witnesses set it all out with care, archaeology supports what they wrote and we are inundated with good copies of the manuscripts to show they have not been meddled with during the passage of time.

Historians will line up to tell you that the records of Jesus' life outshine those of any other comparable figure in history.

Who are those who struggle with the events recorded in the gospels? Not historians but theologians – those who make their living working out what God is like. •

They are not scientists but thinkers, some of whom have a preconceived idea as to what is allowed to happen in the universe and how God should behave.

That means when the historical record says something they have never seen happen, or they don't think could happen, they make their own judgment against the hard evidence.

In their terms, the things written down are impossible – people just don't walk on water, deliver banquets for 5,000 people from a few fish and loaves, or rise from the dead – so there must be another explanation.

And the explanation they like is that it is not true.

This begs a simple but profound question: "If God had come to Earth as Jesus, lived among ordinary people, done extraordinary things, suffered a criminal's death and came to life three days later, what evidence would have been left behind?"

Disbelieving theologians say, "I don't like the question because it just can't have happened."

Open-minded historians say, "The gospels, of course."

The gospels record events that may seem beyond belief.

And we may find it hard to accept that they happened, judged against what goes on in the average high street on a Monday morning. But the authentic nature of the gospel record means we can be absolutely confident that the version of Jesus' life found there can be trusted. •

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

# Hope in the midst of grief

BY DEBORAH ROBERTSON

I can't remember exactly where I was when I realised that "that" feeling had gone. "That" feeling would overwhelm me especially when I was having a wonderful time with my son. "That" feeling was profound sorrow. I think we were at the kitchen table...

It was at the same kitchen table about eight years before that I couldn't take it anymore. It was breakfast and my son was enjoying his cereal when I looked across at him and was overwhelmed with "that" feeling.

I couldn't help thinking, "You are such an amazing boy! Where is your brother? Where is your sister?"

I must've gotten up to do something at the sink when I accidentally broke a cup. The sound of it smashing on the ground was nerve-shattering. Then I knocked my knee on the kitchen chair which really hurt. Somehow I stifled a scream and then drove my son to school. I got home and broke down at that same kitchen table.

I had been used to maintaining an image. I had been working as a model/actress but for about a year I couldn't stop eating and I just stopped caring about keeping up appearances. I told my agent to stop sending me to auditions. I wanted to get going again and I used to scold myself over and over, "Just get up, stop stuffing your face with biscuits and chocolate, do some sit ups and go and earn some money again!" But somehow, scolding didn't work.

You see, I'd had some miscarriages and trying to just get on with life wasn't working.

The first one was very difficult but I thought I could handle it. But straight after the second one I was filled with fear. I lay on the bed with my partner immediately afterwards and

went stone cold. I thought it meant that I was never going to be able to have another baby. My partner couldn't comfort me. Nothing could comfort me. I was inconsolable.

Not long after the miscarriages we split up. Years went by but the pain in my heart affected every part of my life. I decided to give myself some space to properly grieve. My son and I moved to a less expensive home and I started to write the song I thought no one would ever hear.

The chorus goes like this: "I can't say one good thing, and I pray 'cos I can't think, that the Lord above has you in His arms, He's holding you close and He's being your Mum."

You see, somewhere in the midst of all of this I had cried out to God and surrendered my will to Jesus. I realised how I was living my life was simply not working and He was my last chance.

Everyone I went to church with seemed so "happy and shiny". I wanted to be "happy and shiny" too but something



Deborah Robertson

inside me told me that I needed to start telling it like it was. I got an old exercise book out and started writing: "Broke a china cup this morning, knocked my knee upon a chair, I looked across the table at your face that wasn't there."

The feelings poured out of me: "I can't keep on hiding all the tears I should be crying, all the loneliness inside me and the way I still care."

I turned to food a lot of the time while I was working through the grief but there were also times I'd write more songs. In fact, I wrote quite a few. I started having keyboard lessons with a beautiful and compassionate Christian woman named Yanina. I really enjoyed sharing some of my songs with her and learning some chords. I told her I had written a song about a miscarriage I'd had and that I didn't really know if it was any good. She insisted that I sing it to her, so I did. By the end of it we were crying our eyes out. It was so healing to cry with

this beautiful woman of God.

Yanina encouraged me to write a positive ending to the song. This is what came... "I can't say one good thing. But I'll pray and I will sing because the Lord above has you in His arms. He's holding you close and He's being your Mum."

Somehow that last chorus changed the whole song. Somehow that chorus has changed my whole life. There was hope in that chorus. I had a revelation that my babies really are with Jesus and that one day my son and I will meet the rest of our family. This was a tremendous comfort to me. My pain was cut in two.

Once I knew this in my heart I could finally, albeit slowly, get on with my life again. I've sung He's Being Your Mum at conferences and festivals and people have reacted very strongly to it. They seem to appreciate the honesty of the song. The pain of losing your baby or babies is real but Jesus is there to comfort. As it says in Matthew 5:4, "Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted." He is true to His Word.●

To listen to Deborah's music and for more information visit [deborahrobertsonmusic.com](http://deborahrobertsonmusic.com) and [facebook.com/deborahrobertsonmusic](https://facebook.com/deborahrobertsonmusic).



Deborah performing at Heartsong Festival in 2022. Photo by Nicky Collinson.



Keith and Melody Green. Picture from Facebook/Melody Green Official Page.

## Singer's legacy lives on

At only six years old Keith Green dreamt of becoming a famous musician. He could already play the guitar and piano and was writing and singing his own songs. Five years later it seemed as though his dream came true when he was signed to a label and his pictures were in teen magazines. But his career fizzled out early and Keith ran away from home in search of adventure and spiritual truth. When he found it, his music took on a new focus, and continues to be popular today, despite his untimely death.

Keith shared some of his story in an interview in 1978. He described his search for satisfaction that took him into drugs, Eastern religion, meditation and yoga. "They [satisfied me] for hours or days at a time but then I'd always come down and go, 'Well that didn't do it,' because I always knew that when I'd find true happiness and peace it would last."

When Keith was 19 he met fellow musician Melody, who was on a similar spiritual search. They married the following year. It was around then that he noticed a common thread through the different religions and beliefs he was investigating.

"They always gave some credit to Jesus Christ... all these people were pointing to Jesus," he said. "They're going, 'Well yeah, Jesus is one of the ways but we're one of the ways' and they wouldn't all agree on anything except that Jesus was one of the ways. Then I looked into the Bible in John 14:6, where Jesus says, 'I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.' So they all gave Him credit and He only gave Himself credit... I had no choice but to go with Him and then I started praying to Jesus."

Keith said for two years he prayed to Jesus and read the Bible but at the time "Jesus was just another guru." He had been brought up in a cult which denied Jesus' divinity so that was hard for him to accept.

However, in 1975 Keith said he could no longer deny Jesus Christ was God. "I remember one day in the summer of '75 walking down the street and looking up and going, 'Alright Jesus, I buy it. You're God.'"

After that Keith's life changed forever. "That was the greatest miracle that He could have done. I could have seen Mount Everest go skipping across the United States and jump into the ocean and that wouldn't have done as much for me as Him changing me," Keith recalled.

He was so convinced of God's love for him that he said he was willing to give up everything for Him.

Melody also accepted Jesus as her Lord and Saviour and the couple opened their home – the Greenhouse – to anyone with a need, such as those who wanted help getting off drugs, or just needed a place to stay.

Keith's music also changed dramatically, now focusing on Jesus; as Keith was in all areas of his life. He and Melody wrote songs together. The lyrics were honest and vulnerable and called for a radical commitment to God.

"Loving Him is to be our cause," he said. "He can take care of a lot of other causes without us, but He can't make us love Him with all our heart. That's the work we must do. Anything else is an imitation."

Although his albums were topping industry charts, Keith gave them away for whatever people could afford, even for free. Hundreds of thousands of albums were given away to prisoners and to the poor. He also didn't charge for his concerts, which always included an opportunity for people to commit their lives to the Lord.

Keith and Melody continued to support people in their home and this grew to about 70 people in seven houses. They called what they were doing Last Days Ministries and started a magazine which is still in existence today.

Sadly Keith died at the age of 28 in 1982 in a small plane crash. His three-year-old son Josiah and two-year-old daughter also died in the crash. Melody was at home with one-year-old Rebekah and was six weeks pregnant with Rachel.

Melody still oversees Last Day Ministries and has written a book called *No Compromise: The Life Story of Keith Green*. Despite the many personal tragedies she's faced, she says, "Today I have more faith in God's goodness and ability to provide than ever before. Even when terrible things happen He can turn those things towards our good... but only if we have the patience to wait while we are hurting." Keith's music continues to make an impact on the world to this day, inspiring listeners with his love and commitment to God. ●

# SCARRED BUT VICTORIOUS



Beth has been through many storms but knows she is never alone.

BY JANICE TEO

Sitting in her neat and spotless home in a leafy suburb of Perth, retiree Beth\* chuckles. “If you told me 30 years ago I would be happy and so content today I would not have believed you,” she says.

“I’ve had many hardships in my 77 years but today, life is good,” she tells *Challenge News*.

Beth certainly has more than her fair share of battle scars, reminders of the domestic abuse she suffered and the surgeries she has endured.

The avid gardener moved to Perth from Singapore in 1981 to marry a man she’d met on holiday here and for a year the marriage was “sunshine and rainbows”.

Then the beatings began. Her husband, an alcoholic, took his frustrations out on her. The abuse was so bad Beth had to take time off from work.

It was during this time that Beth became a Christian – something that enraged her husband even more and triggered more abuse.

“I don’t know why he was so angry that I became a Christian,” says Beth, “but he really did. He would throw

my Bibles away and lose his temper when I went to church.”

He finally abandoned Beth after two years, just months after their daughter was born.

Born and raised in Singapore, Beth had wanted to be a nun when she was a child, but a visit to the Carmelite monastery quickly snuffed out that dream.

Says Beth: “When I saw how they lived – sleeping on thin mats with stone pillows – I decided this was not the life for me!”

She continued going to church, but admits her faith was perfunctory at best. It wasn’t until the trouble with her husband that Beth turned earnestly to God.

A friend at work who knew what was going on invited her to his church.

Beth went to the service but almost stormed out at the end, when the pastor asked the congregation to bow their heads and invited people to commit their lives to Jesus Christ. Beth was appalled.

“I thought to myself, ‘Who is this pastor to ask me to bow my head? How rude!’ I thought he was very rude.” It wasn’t until two women sitting beside her explained that bowing

her head was a mark of reverence to God that Beth relented. Gently one of the women asked her if she would like to become a Christian.

Beth agreed and prayed with her two new friends.

To her surprise, she says, “I immediately felt different. I felt like a heavy weight lifted off me. I asked the two ladies, ‘What’s happening to me?’ I felt so peaceful.

“They told me it was the presence of God. God was so good to overlook my stubbornness and since that day my life has changed for the better.

“Yes I have had other problems, but since then I always faced them with God by my side. Before then I did not have God.”

Those “other problems” were several life-threatening medical issues. In 1992 she caught a viral lung infection that laid her up for the better part of a year.

A serious bout of pneumonia that again required complete bed rest, followed a year later.

A few years after that, a mysterious abscess appeared on her back and grew to the size of a golf ball.

Doctors were no help; the surgeons she consulted backed away from removing it, telling her they didn’t know what it was while at the same time informing her it was probably life-threatening.

She finally found a doctor who agreed to perform the surgery, came through the operation with flying colours and promptly promised him a lifetime supply of curry puffs.

However, this wasn’t the end. In 2012 she found a lump in her breast that turned out to be cancer. A double mastectomy followed.

Looking back at her life, she says honestly that she would be lying if she said there hadn’t been tears and worries.

But, she continues with a twinkle in her eye, “I have an anchor that I have hung onto throughout my troubles. His name is Jesus. When I went through all my illnesses, I prayed and He told me, ‘This is not unto death.’ So I knew He would heal me.”

In 2022, Beth was declared cancer free.

“My sister used to be so worried for me in the early years, but I told her, ‘My God is my Provider. No need to worry.’

“And truly He has helped me in many areas of my life. He provided me with people to live with after my husband walked out and I had nowhere to live, then He provided me with affordable government housing, even a car that some church friends gave to me!

“I have never lacked anything. I don’t have luxuries but I have never lacked.

“He has preserved my life through all my illnesses. I know He has plans and purposes for my life – maybe it’s to testify how good and faithful He has been. I know God still has work for me to do.”

\*Not her real name. A pseudonym has been used at her request.

nudge

WITH KARL FASSE

## Drifting in a sea of darkness

**EARLY IN 2012**, a piece of ocean junk was found floating off the Canadian coast. This though was not an ordinary piece of rubbish, it was a 50-metre long fishing boat washed out to sea by the Japanese tsunami 12 months before. This vessel had once been a commercial fishing boat but had been drifting in the ocean for a year.

Life can do this to us. We can go from fully functioning people to hollow individuals drifting in a sea of darkness or anxiety. The tsunami can be personal loss, the pain of conflict, significant health issues or a traumatic experience that leaves you shattered.

Unlike the Japanese fishing vessel, you can and will be restored. God cares for you and will restore you. Take time to reach out to God in your darkness and know He won’t leave you drifting.

## The messenger’s race

I am Bruce Walker of the Bundjalung tribe. I was born at a place called Turtle Point in New South Wales in the 1940s.

I grew up there... chased down wildlife, food, living on fish, turtles – whatever there may be. Then we moved over to a place to where we live now, the new reserve, Tabulam Village... Throughout my life I believe God had His hands upon me.

I remember going to school, we used to ride on a horse for 3km. My uncle was an elder – Eric Walker was his name. He opened the gate for me and I still remember his words as though they happened only yesterday. He said, “There’s Somebody watching you at all times.”

It could have been from that time something within me happened spiritually. God deposited something in my life.

As I was riding along there was a big tree on the road. I pulled up and I looked up into the tree. I was looking up into the heavens and I said [to God], “Hey if You’re there, come reveal yourself to me. I want to know You more.”

But little did I know the plan of God. Growing up I always thought about the Lord. I never drank. I never smoked in my life. God didn’t allow me to go down that track.

When I became a teenager, I was pretty swift on my feet. For the 1956 Olympic Games, the manager came and he asked my mum for permission to take me to train me for that 1956 Olympic Games in Melbourne.

My mum said, “No I don’t want you to go.” One hundred metres, I would have raced against the great Jesse Owens.

But God had put me in another race. He’s put me in this other race that I can run. Run to be a messenger for Him.

At the age of 15 I gave my heart to the Lord in our little church at Tabulam where

God was moving mightily amongst the Elders. I gave my heart to Jesus there.

I found a beautiful girlfriend. On May 4, 1960, we got married. God gave us six beautiful boys, two daughters, and I lost count of my grandsons. Last I counted there were 22! My great grandies are about 26 so I’m a bit like Father Abraham who had many sons!

When my dad passed away, I was elected as a pastor to the church. Forty years I’ve been a pastor there. Father Abraham had many sons and I feel that I have had many sons and daughters in those 40 years.

My wife has been called home [to heaven]. We had a wonderful time loving one another, caring for one another. All I can say is God is so good. There’s got to be a change across this land of Australia.

If we stay in God’s ordinance we will have all the blessings and all the beautiful things that God offers us. God is so good and that’s what I like to say to people. He’s so loving. He’s so kind. He’s our helper in times of trouble. He’s always there.

You know if this nation would only turn back to God. If it don’t change we’re going to face disaster – if we don’t change, if the politicians don’t change.

We’ve got to change back to loving one another and caring for each other and doing what He put down in the Word for us – love the Lord with all our heart. He will look after this great land of ours if the people only come back to God.

God is calling this nation back to repentance. He loves everybody, no matter who it is, because the Word (Bible) says God is not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance.

If we turn back to our first love – towards God – He will restore this land of Australia. You’ll see things that you’ve never seen... grow in this great land.

Families will be saved, everybody will be living in harmony, there will be rejoicing, there will be singing, shouting, praising the Lord all over the place if this nation would only turn back to God.

You know what He promises?

He said He will take away every sickness and disease. It’ll be heaven on Earth if we can only just turn back to God.

This story is used with kind permission from 40 Stories. To watch Bruce’s story as well as others in video form, go to [40stories.org.au](http://40stories.org.au)

Bruce Walker. Photo: youtube/40storiesproject.

# Do creationists deny science?

BY DR JONATHAN SARFATI

**EVOLUTIONISTS OFTEN MAKE** bold claims that creationists deny science. But what science do creationists deny? And what does history say?

## Foundations of science

Before discussing science, we should wonder why it even works. Science requires an orderly universe, but why should it be orderly in the first place? Evolution can't explain it.

However, the Bible teaches a Divine Lawmaker – the God of order, not confusion (1 Corinthians 14:33) – made the universe. God gave mankind dominion (Genesis 1:28), implying we are meant to study the creation and find out how it works (see also [creation.com/whyscience](http://creation.com/whyscience)).

University – a medieval church invention – first laid the foundations of science. Its pioneers were clergymen/natural philosophers (natural philosophy was the old term for 'science'). A few centuries later, the Reformation led to rediscovering a more objective understanding of Scripture, which was transferred to nature. Science historian Peter Harrison wrote, "The Bible and its literal interpretation have played a vital role in the development of Western science" (see [creation.com/roots](http://creation.com/roots)).

## Specific sciences

Let's explore several scientific branches to see if creationists deny them. Actually, why would we, since creationists founded them? (See [creation.com/name-game](http://creation.com/name-game)).

**Astronomy:** Johannes Kepler (1571-1630) discovered the three laws of planetary motion. He also invented the refracting telescope used by modern astronomers, and discovered low eyes focus incoming light. He said his scientific work was, "thinking God's thoughts after Him."

**Chemistry:** Robert Boyle (1627-1691) overturned the pagan-Greek view of the four elements: fire, water, earth, and air. He proposed the modern definition: a substance that can't be broken down into anything simpler. Boyle discovered that gas volume is inversely proportional

to pressure. He also wrote books defending Christianity.

## Physics:

Albert Einstein's three scientific heroes were Faraday, Maxwell and Newton ([creation.com/einsteins-heroes](http://creation.com/einsteins-heroes)). Michael Faraday (1791-1867), a very conservative Christian sect member, pioneered electrochemistry (important for electroplating) and magnetic induction (vital for electric generators).

James Clerk Maxwell (1831-1879) hugely contributed to thermodynamics and his electromagnetism equations were foundational for Einstein's relativity. Maxwell rejected Darwinism and affirmed Noah's flood.

Sir Isaac Newton (1642/3-1727) discovered the laws of motion, gravity, cooling and the spectrum of light. But he wrote more about Scripture than science.

## Scientific mathematics:

Newton also co-invented calculus. Other outstanding creationist



mathematicians include Blaise Pascal (1623-1662), discoverer of probability and hydraulics, and Leonhard Euler (1707-1783), who probably discovered more mathematics than anyone else.

So creationists are hardly likely to reject physical sciences, having played a huge part in discovering and developing them. But maybe creationists deny biology? Actually, creationists founded many branches of biology too.

**Genetics:** Gregor Mendel (1822-1884) discovered genetics while he was a monk, then an abbot. Darwin ignored his work and had a completely wrong view of inheritance.

John Sanford (b. 1950) invented the

gene gun and showed how rapid gene mutation makes evolution impossible. Also, we would be extinct if long-age dogma were true.

**Anesthesia:** James Simpson pioneered anesthesia, especially to relieve childbirth pain. Some evolutionary propaganda accuses Christians of opposing anesthesia, as it supposedly attacks God's decree that women suffer childbirth pain (Genesis 3:16). Simpson's biblically justified retort: God used anesthesia on Adam to

make Eve. And Jesus showed that alleviating aspects of the curse was a blessing. No notable Christian raised any religious objection; most were highly supportive (see [creation.com/simpson](http://creation.com/simpson)).

**Germ theory:** Antonie Philips van Leeuwenhoek (1632-1723) discovered bacteria. He said they, "glorify the Lord and Creator of the universe."

Joseph Lister (1827-1912) saved countless lives by introducing antiseptic surgery procedures.

Louis Pasteur (1822-1895) disproved spontaneous generation (life from non-life).

One antibiotic penicillin discoverer was Ernst Chain (1906-1979), an

Orthodox Jew and strident anti-Darwinist.

## What's left to deny?

Evolution relies on variation and natural selection. But creationists don't ever deny these. Not today and not even before Darwin (1809-1882). We just deny the unproven claim that such processes could turn bacteria into biologists.

## Variation

Anglican Bishop John Wilkins (1614-1672) founded the metric system and the Royal Society. He also realised that comparatively few Ark kinds gave rise to many more varieties.

Carl Linnaeus (1707-1778) called 'the Second Adam' for classifying creatures (Jesus is the Last Adam – 1 Corinthians 15:45), understood that God created them to vary.

## Natural selection

Historians of biology inform us that pre-Darwinian creationist biologists understood natural selection was real. But unlike Darwin, they comprehended it was a culling force, not a creative one, and that it didn't explain the arrival of the fittest.

## Conclusion

Creationists don't deny real science, they founded most types. Variation and natural selection are part of the biblical creationist model. As a matter of logic, if something is part of two rival models, it can't be used to support one against the other. •

## A DINOSAUR MADE BY THE FLOOD

BY KEVIN LAMOURE, CREATION MINISTRIES INTERNATIONAL

**BEGINNING IN THE** early 1970s, American paleontologist James A. Jensen (1918-1998) led a series of fossil-hunting expeditions in Colorado's Dry Mesa quarry (Jurassic).

During this time, "Dinosaur Jim" uncovered a number of huge dinosaur bones, including vertebrae, and shoulder and pelvic elements.

He found what appeared to be three new types of dinosaurs, all of them truly giant long-necked sauropods. One of these, which he named *Ultrasaurus macintoshi*, would stand out above the rest.<sup>1</sup>

It was apparently a brachiosaurid, estimated as over 30 metres long, and weighing as much as 180 tonnes.<sup>2</sup> *Ultrasaurus* ("beyond lizard")<sup>3</sup> was described as "a whopping great dinosaur!"<sup>4</sup>

Discovered and described in the 1970s and 80s, this giant sauropod captured the imaginations of many during the early 1990s, when "Dinomania" was affecting popular culture.

## Giant identity crisis

But in the background to all this fame, *Ultrasaurus* had scientific problems, including a name clash with a Korean dinosaur find in 1983. So, in 1991, *Ultrasaurus* became *Ultrasauros*.

However, it was about to lose a lot more than its name.

A critical assessment of the fossil bones assigned to *Ultrasauros*, undertaken in the mid-1990s, revealed that it in fact never really existed.

It was a mistakenly interpreted chimera, comprising up to three different sauropod dinosaur species: *Brachiosaurus*, *Supersaurus*, and/or *Barosaurus*.<sup>5</sup>

## A 'Chimerasaurus' made by the flood

This makes sense if one interprets the world through the lens of the Bible's worldwide flood. During the flood, all vertebrate life on land that was not in the ark was eventually overcome by water (Genesis 7:21-22). That included the enormous, whale-sized sauropod dinosaurs. After succumbing to the prevailing waters, the giant bones of Jensen's sauropods had become separated from each other. This was likely due to a process of "bloat and float" rotting of the ligaments that had held them together<sup>6</sup> and/or scavenger action. Thereafter, powerful water current action in the midst of this massive, complex catastrophe likely jumbled up these bones, before they were rapidly entombed by

flood-carried sediment. This would have protected them from further scavenging and decay. The minerals in the encasing sediment caused it to soon harden. Such events would have resulted in a disordered bonebed.

However, when this bonebed was interpreted under an evolutionary worldview it led to the 'discovery' of a dinosaur that never existed.

## A biblical legacy

The story of *Ultrasauros* is more than just an interesting episode in the history of dinosaur discovery. It can actually teach us important biblical truths, e.g.:

- The relevance of a biblical worldview that takes Genesis as history.
- The amazing "extreme engineering" displayed in Christ's creation of dinosaurs.

- The incredible power and complex dynamics of the flood.

- The awesome seriousness of God's judgment on sin.

All of this points to the profound reality of what Christ accomplished, by dying on the cross for the forgiveness of sins. •

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nudge WITH KARL FAASE

## A huge shift

**IN NOVEMBER 2023**, Ayaan Hirsi Ali wrote an article in the UK-based *Unheard* magazine entitled – Why I am now a Christian.

This is a huge shift for Hirsi Ali. She was born in Somalia and later radicalised by the Muslim Brotherhood in Nairobi Kenya. She moved to Belgium and joined the atheist movement. She was known to key leaders of the New Atheists like Richard Dawkins.

So why the change? It seems it's a complex story but here is what Hirsi Ali wrote in the article:

"I have turned to Christianity because I ultimately found life without any spiritual solace unendurable – indeed very nearly self-destructive. Atheism failed to answer a simple question – what is the meaning and purpose of life?"

She has found in Jesus what she needed the most. •



*Ultrasaurus macintoshi*. Picture from [wikicommons](http://wikicommons)



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# YOUTH TRUTH

## I HIT ROCK BOTTOM

**F**rontperson and lead singer for alternative pop/metal band *Flyleaf*, Lacey Sturm speaks of the deep depression that nearly killed her and the prayer that changed everything.

My mom always told me about God. I think I had an idea that God was big and good, but as time went on and I saw more and more tragic things happen around me, I think that was the beginning of me just questioning everything about life and about God.

When I was 10 years old, my stepdad came to pick me up and he said that my cousin Kelly was dead. I remember being so mad and really just deciding that if God was big and good why wouldn't He protect my cousin?

He was so tiny and so awesome such a funny brilliant little guy. Why wouldn't God protect him from a huge muscle guy like his stepdad? He beat him to death.

I remember thinking that same year that my cousin died about the depth of the evil in the world.

I never wanted to have kids. It was just a new person to suffer. That was the year I started to cry myself to sleep every night, and stopped believing in God.

I couldn't get away from my own depression, so I started studying other religions. There was a lot of nice ideas, but there wasn't any tangible healing.

And I remember thinking, I'm tired of the pain in my heart, I'm tired of going to bed that way, I'm tired of feeling like a burden, just tired of not knowing why I'm alive.

And so I remember the night I laid in bed and I knew I was going to commit suicide the next day. I knew that I was not going to live past tomorrow.

On the day that I planned to commit suicide, I came home from school and my grandma was there.

And she wasn't supposed to be there. And she looked at me and said, "There's something wrong with you, you're gonna go to church."

I was like, "No way I'm going to church." And she screamed at the top of her lungs. We were fighting back and forth, and I just didn't want to listen to her yell anymore.

So I decided, fine, I'll go, and then afterwards I'll go ahead and follow through with my plan.

So I went to the back of the church and slumped down to my chair and hated everybody in the room, and the pastor started speaking.

I hated him more than anyone. And he says, "There's a suicidal spirit in the room", and of course all hair stood up on the back of my neck and I thought, this is really weird.

And I got up and went to the door, and a white-headed man was standing there and he stopped me.

And he said, "The Lord wants me to speak to you. He wants you to know that even though you've never known



Lacey Sturm. (Photo by Tim Mosenfelder/WireImage)

an earthly father, that God will be a better father to you than any earthly father could ever be. God knows the pain in your heart. He's seen you cry yourself to sleep at night."

The idea was so overwhelming to me.

He's like, "Do you want me to pray for you so that Jesus can take the pain out of your heart?"

He put his hand on my shoulder and started to pray. It was as if the God of the universe showed up right in front of me.

And the first thing I noticed was that God was holy and good. And the second thing I noticed was that I was so not holy and not good.

If God had looked at me and said, "Go away forever", He would have been right.

It would have been justice.

The same time I felt that, I felt Him inviting me to an embrace of grace and love unconditional.

It was like God was saying, "I love you, I know you're tired of the way you've been living, and I will make you new if you'll let Me."

My heart just said, "Yes, I need that, I want that. Please." And that's why when I woke up the next day, I just felt such a peace, and a joy almost, that I'd never felt before.

Jesus saved my life. And on top of everything else, the life of my son and the new baby that wouldn't be if Jesus hadn't intervened and rescued me.

The most overwhelming thing is to think that Jesus became sin, and it was my sin.

And it was things that I've done to house them on the cross. It was things that I've done.

He hung naked on a cross bleeding in a shameful way, so that I would never have to be ashamed for the things that I've done.

The truth is, there is no other way besides Christ and what He did. There is no life outside of that. •

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

“  
I just felt such a peace, and a joy almost, that I'd never felt before.”

“  
I became very jealous of people who had things I wanted.”



Zander Hoffman

## Victim no more

**S**outh African Zander Hoffman, 20, struggled through his childhood. He was bullied mercilessly for being skinny and weak; the taunts and insults hurt him deeply.

He always felt like an outsider, unworthy and looked down upon. Those feelings of rejection scarred him and followed him into his teenage years.

"My childhood was rough," he tells *Challenge News*. "I didn't know who to ask for help.

"I became very jealous of people who had things I wanted but couldn't own."

Adding to his emotional struggles were the choices he made to lie and harbour unforgiveness, both of which piled guilt on top of him.

He remembered his parents telling him about Jesus Christ when he was a boy.

"My parents taught me that Jesus died on the cross to pay for everyone's sins, every generation's sins. I wanted to be God's little soldier that He could use to help others.

"But when I was older and was bullied I wondered if He really existed at all."

Nevertheless Zander continued attending church and finally, six years ago, surrendered his life to Christ during a service.

Today, he carries with him the reassuring knowledge that he is never alone.

"No matter how I feel, I know Jesus is always there, always listening to me and supporting me.

"I believe He gave me challenges in my life to help me, to teach me and change me into a better person, friend and Christian.

"The best part about being a Christian is knowing that there is at least one person who loves you no matter what you are or what you did.

"The hardest part is trusting God through the dark times but I know He was with me during my darkest times and gave me hope and strength even though all the odds were against me.

"I want to say that God will always stay by your side." •

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# lifestyle and entertainment

## Recipe of the month



### QUINOA BURRITO BOWL

This dish has entered our regular weeknight rotation. It's delicious, only takes a single pot to prepare, and as long as you go easy on the cheese and sour cream, it's incredibly good for you. Quinoa is one of the seven "super grains" and provides high protein, fiber, and minerals not found in rice.

**Prep: 10 min**  
**Cook: 30 min**  
**Total: 40 min**  
**Serves 4 to 6**

Shredded lettuce, optional  
Sour cream, optional  
Reserved guacamole

#### Method

Pour oil in a large saucepan or Dutch oven and preheat over medium heat.

Sauté onion, garlic and jalapeño until fragrant, about 1 minute.

Add broth, black beans, quinoa, tomatoes, corn, and salt to the pot. Stir to combine and bring to a boil. Stir well and reduce heat to a simmer.

Cover and simmer until quinoa is cooked and liquid has been absorbed, about 25 minutes.

Remove from heat. Stir in cilantro and lime juice. Set aside.

Serve quinoa mixture in a bowl. Top with cheese, lettuce, sour cream, and/or guacamole as desired.

From MakeBetterFood.com

#### Ingredients

1 tablespoon canola oil  
1 small red onion, finely diced  
1 jalapeño, seeded and finely diced  
2 cloves garlic, minced  
1 ½ cups chicken or vegetable broth  
1 can black beans, rinsed and drained  
1 cup uncooked quinoa, rinsed well and drained  
2 tomatoes, diced  
1 cup frozen corn  
½ teaspoon kosher salt  
¼ cup chopped fresh cilantro or parsley  
½ tablespoon lime juice  
Homemade or store-bought guacamole, optional  
Shredded cheddar or monterey jack cheese, optional

## SINGER'S LIFE OF FAITH

Rebecca St James may be a household name in the music industry, but life has not always been smooth for the veteran singer-songwriter.

Before launching her first major album at 16, Rebecca and her brother worked odd jobs to help her parents pay the bills.

Her father had lost his job after they moved to the US from Australia and the family struggled financially.

It was so bad that Rebecca and her family had to scramble for coins in the house just so they could afford to put petrol in their car.

Being the eldest daughter, Rebecca went with her mother to clean houses.

Her parents raised Rebecca and her siblings in a Christian home and they gathered daily in their bare living room to pray for God's provision.

Those prayers would later be answered in the form of helpful neighbours and friends. "We lived by faith for a couple years because our family went through some big challenges but we saw God move and that was a real time of adventure and a time of preparation for what we had coming up," she tells Candace Cameron Bure on her podcast.

"We saw the power of prayer. We saw so much of God's character in how He showed up for our family."



Rebecca St. James with her husband, Jacob Fink, in March. (Photo by Danielle Del Valle/Getty Images for Someone Like You Movie)

These experiences would become the foundation to Rebecca's life and career.

Rebecca took her Christian faith seriously from a young age and at 12 she prayed, "God, I give you my gifts. Use my life to make a difference and change the world."

It wasn't long before her music career took off. Rebecca toured Australia and the United States, as well as internationally in Europe, New

Zealand and India, where she played music and shared the Gospel message [the good news about Jesus dying for our sins] to her audience.

But as she got older, Rebecca longed for marriage and a family of her own.

In 2000, she released her hit song *Wait For Me* as an expression of her hope for that dream to come true.

But it would be nearly a decade before she met her future

husband, and another three years before her first child would be born.

In 2010, Rebecca retired from her music career.

"[At 16], I didn't know what healthy 'yesses' and healthy 'nos' looked like at that point," she says.

"So 15 years in, I was starting to lose my voice from stress and anxiety.

"It was almost like I was having a panic attack on stage where I just couldn't breathe and you have to be able to breathe to sing."

By this time, Rebecca was burnt out. So she left the stage to focus on her family.

"I felt like God was saying 'Hey, I have a greener pasture for you and I'm bringing you out into this new thing and this new season.'

"It was a powerful and important time in my life for sure."

But it was during this time when Rebecca struggled with her identity and purpose.

"I had worked myself into this mode of performance where I had to do this and do that to feel like I'm contributing.

"I really had to sift through my identity and my value."

She also experienced two miscarriages.

Amidst the grief, her brothers [Joel and Luke Smallbone from For King and Country] invited her to join them on stage at a concert in Alaska. It was there that Rebecca experienced God's healing.

"While I was in worship, I had this encounter with the Holy Spirit [unseen presence of God]," she recalls in an interview with Focus on the Family.

"It reframed my journey with music. He set me free from pain that had to do with both my music and also the miscarriages.

"I remember feeling, 'Jesus, I miss the connection that I have with You when I sing.'

"I was crying at one point - we generally didn't do that onstage - and the audience was sniffing and crying, too."

Rebecca and her husband eventually went on to have two more children.

"It was such a story of redemption. It was clear that [God] was just going 'Rebecca just wait and see what I've got for you. It's a new season and I'm doing something new in your life. So just wait and see.'"

In 2020, Rebecca released her first EP album *Dawn* - since coming out of retirement - as a declaration of God's unwavering love and faithfulness even amid grief and pain.

Rebecca's family's story is told in the 2024 film, *Unsung Hero*, which chronicles their move to Nashville, Tennessee from Australia.

## The relationship that makes our lives complete

BY MAL DAVIES

**SOME SINGERS ARRIVE GRADUALLY.** They build a following busking or playing in pubs, and then they do some self-funded recording and try to attract sales. Others arrive in a hurry and are famous quickly.

Lewis Capaldi is one of the latter. The Scottish singer/songwriter with the wonderful voice released his first single, *Bruises*, in March 2017. In November 2018, he released *Someone You Loved* and was nominated for a Grammy.

The song was the biggest selling UK single of 2019 and reached number one on the US charts.

Other number one UK singles followed - *Before You Go* in 2020 and *Forget Me and Pointless* in 2022.

*Pointless* is a lovely ballad; a man singing about how he and his partner care and provide for each other:

"I bring her coffee in the morning/ She brings me inner peace/ I take her out to fancy restaurants/ She takes the sadness out of me/ I make her cards on her birthday/ She makes me a better man/ I take her water when she's thirsty/ She takes me as I am."

It's a song about a couple who seem to know and love and support each other, and he recognises the value of that when he sings, in each chorus: "Everything is pointless without you."

Most people have felt the same about someone else. Whether it's a romantic partner or your child or best friend or a parent - there's someone who helps make life complete.



Lewis Capaldi. Photo: Harald Krichel, CC BY 3.0, via Wikimedia Commons.

Without them, well, the rest just seems pointless. Millions of people today say the same about Jesus. In fact, Christian writer and Oxbridge academic CS Lewis said, "I believe in Christianity as I believe that the sun has risen; not only because I see it, but because by it I see everything else."

For Lewis, knowing Jesus gave life clarity and purpose; everything was pointless without Him.

Someone worth knowing, don't you think? •

Major Mal Davies is a Salvation Army officer (pastor) in South Australia. This article was first published in *Salvos Magazine* and is used with kind permission.



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# BUILDING BETTER RELATIONSHIPS

## An old, familiar story

BY ROB FURLONG

**LIFE IS A** lot like *Star Wars*.

Some years ago, a book was written which explained that when you examine any work of fiction, there are only seven basic plotlines around which a story is built.

There is the “overcoming the monster” plot where a group is threatened by an evil monster, but a young, insignificant hero arises who destroys the monster and rescues the town. (Think of Jack and the Beanstalk).

Or there is “the quest” story where the hero embarks on a journey against impossible odds to overcome great evil and along the way, grows and matures as a person – *Lord of the Rings* is a classic example!

And then there is *Star Wars*. An evil Empire arises, but a rebellion is formed to fight against it; there is a powerful and conflicted villain, and a young hero guided by a wise mentor and who ultimately wins the day. That plotline has been repeated in countless sci-fi movies for decades since! The point is, there are many

things that repeat themselves, over and over in life.

As he contemplated the meaning of life and relationships, the biblical writer Solomon observed: “*History merely repeats itself. It has all been done before. Nothing under the sun is truly new. Sometimes people say, “Here is something new!” But actually it is old; nothing is ever truly new.*” (Ecclesiastes 1:9-11)

In other words, life is a lot like *Star Wars* – it’s all been seen and done before – and this is often exemplified in the way we approach life and relationships.

Think about John D Rockefeller Senior. In the mid-1800s he entered the world of business as a fit, healthy young man ready to make his mark. He drove himself relentlessly to succeed and by the age of 33 he had made his first million dollars.

At 43 he controlled the largest business in the world and at 53, not only was he the richest man on the planet, but he was also the world’s first billionaire.

But it came at a terrible cost. He was deeply hated by those who worked



STOCK PHOTO

for him in his Pennsylvanian oil fields, and he had to be protected by bodyguards day and night. He once declared, “All I want is to be loved” – he had no peace or happiness, and restful sleep eluded him constantly. Suffering from alopecia – he had no hair on his head or eyebrows and no eyelashes – he was described as “looking like a mummy.”

At the age of 53, one writer said Rockefeller was “the oldest man I have ever seen. He lived on a diet of crackers and milk; his body was wasted away, and his obituary had already been written as it was widely held he would be dead in a year.”

One night, Rockefeller had a revelation – he realised when he died that he could take none of his money with him – it wasn’t to be hoarded but used for the benefit of others. Acting on this, he established the Rockefeller Foundation and poured hundreds of millions of dollars into research,

universities, missions, and assisting the poor. Research funded by him led to the discovery of penicillin and toward better treatment for malaria and diphtheria – millions of people to this day have benefited from his generosity.

Rockefeller learned that people were more important than things and that a relationship with God transforms our lives and our priorities – he lived to the age of 98!

The first part of Rockefeller’s story isn’t new. As Solomon says, it’s one of those things that “repeats itself, it’s all been done before.” It’s a bit like *Star Wars* – the same story, just different characters.

We don’t have to make the same mistakes when it comes to our relationships – putting things, careers or goals before people.

Like Rockefeller, we can change the narrative and with God’s help, write a new story!

## HOW DO I BECOME A CHRISTIAN?

**Anyone can gain the eternal life offered though 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 :

I have prayed the prayer [ABOVE]  Please send me:  Bible  Some ‘starting off’ literature  Information on a helpful church

\* Please tick and write clearly \*

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

Address \_\_\_\_\_

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

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

All overseas enquiries are referred onto someone in their own country

## Want to explore more?

Here are some free, helpful, Christian online resources

Online Bible - <b>Olive Tree app</b> (we recommend that you start with an easy-to-read version like the ESV)		Audio Bible - <b>Bible.is app</b> , or <b>Youversion Bible app</b>	
Christian radio station - <b>CBN radio app</b> (different channels for all genres of music)		Christian podcasts and sermons - <b>Edifi app</b>	
Christian movies, serials and kids’ shows - <b>Good. app</b>		Daily thoughts and inspiration - <b>Our Daily Bread app</b>	
Advice on specific issues, Bible reading plans and studies for new believers - <b>Youversion Bible app</b> .		The Bible explained with visual aides - <b>Bible Project on YouTube</b> .	
<b>Alpha Film Series on Youtube</b> - an online introduction to Christianity		For kids - <b>Superbook Kids Bible, videos and games app</b>	
Comic book Bible online- <b>goodandevilbook.com</b>		<b>Manga Messiah app</b> Christian comic with free games app, illustrated in Japanese-style art	
<b>YMI</b> (meant to be read as “Why am I?”) Christian news outlet for young adults with various content, devotionals and resources. <b>ymi.today</b>		More inspiring faith stories - <b>back issues of Challenge News at challengenews.online</b>	

## The power of the words we choose

BY MAL DAVIES (ABRIDGED)

**A FEW YEARS** ago, my wife and I were fortunate enough to fulfil a long-term dream and holiday in Greece and the Greek islands.

On our last day on Mykonos we visited the archaeological museum where they were promoting a showing of jewellery through the ages. In the small booklet that was available I noted some of the introductory text, “The Museum, from an entrenched Foucauldian heterotopia, is converted to a space-time wormhole ready to take visitors on a journey to the Cycladic heterochronies of the past.”

Read that again, slowly. Then go and have a cup of tea and a good lie down.

What on earth does that mean? More so, who was paid to write it? The point of writing is to have people read your words and understand something.

Writing becomes pointless when someone – say a visitor at a museum – can’t even understand the brochure provided to explain what is on display.

I think my vocabulary is pretty good, but really: “heterotopias”, “Foucauldian”, “heterochronies”?

When you boil it all down, the sentence simply means: “We’ve changed things around a bit so that you can see some old Greek stuff.”

Our choice of words is important. Words can build others up and also tear them down (see James chapter three in the Bible for a good explanation of this). We can encourage someone with a word (“Champion!”) and also reduce them to tears with a word (“Loser!”). We can also say words that play like a tape in someone’s mind, constantly on repeat – imagine hearing, “You’ll never amount to anything, you’re useless,” over and over in your mind for years.

The Bible contains more than 700,000 words and every one has been discussed, debated, studied and explained over the past 2,000 years. Scholars can, and have, spent a lifetime studying this deep and meaningful book.

I’m so glad that the apostle Paul – who wrote many books in the Bible – was a master of simplifying complex truths. In a letter to the church in Rome, he said: “*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 10:9-10) Well, that’s pretty straightforward. No need to look up “heterochronies” to understand that message. Believe in my heart and confess my faith in Jesus and I’m saved.

Paul’s focus was on helping us enter a life of faith and an understanding of who Jesus is, rather than forcing us down a Foucauldian wormhole! He chose his words carefully... and so should we.

Major Mal Davies is a Salvation Army officer (pastor) and writer living on Kaurua land, Adelaide.

This article was first published by Salvos magazine and is used with kind permission.





Sydney McLaughlin-Levrone of Team USA celebrates her gold medal and new World Record in the Women's 400m Hurdles Final of the Olympic Games Paris 2024. (Photo by Julian Finney/Getty Images).



Brazil's Gabriel Medina during the 5th heat of the men's surfing round 3, during the Paris 2024 Olympic Games. (Photo by Jerome Brouillet/AFP via Getty Images)

# OLYMPIC FAITH

The limelight shone bright on the medallists of the Paris Olympics.

For one particular group of athletes though, that glory rightfully belonged to Someone else – it belonged to Jesus Christ. And that's where they directed it.

Using songs, Instagram and even sign language, they declared their thanks and faith to God.

## **Sydney McLaughlin-Levrone, USA – 400m hurdles gold**

Four-time Olympic gold medallist, world champion and world record holder – American hurdler Sydney McLaughlin-Levrone wears many crowns.

But the one that means the most to the 25-year-old has nothing to do with her athletic accomplishments. “The title that means the most to me,” she says, “is daughter of God.”

She shares her faith story in her autobiography *Far Beyond Gold: Running from Fear to Faith*.

At the post-race press conference after winning the gold, she said: “I credit all that I do to God... I have a platform and I want to use it to glorify Him.

“Whenever I step on the track it's always the prayer of, ‘God, let me be the vessel in which You're glorified...’ Regardless of what happens, He's going to get the praise through me. That's why I do what I do.”

Sydney wrote in an article on the Guideposts website that she had been raised in the church, but she didn't really know God.

“I'd been avoiding Him because I had this idea of Him as a harsh taskmaster who'd demand that I give up what I enjoyed, including running, to serve Him. Even so, my soul must have been yearning for Him, because I found myself thinking, ‘The only way I'm going to heal

from this is with God.’ So I started going to church again.”

Her personal life changed when she met former NFL player Andre Levrone Jr. They were married in 2022 and she credits him with helping her to fully embrace her faith.

She disclosed in her book that it was with his help that she realised “my life wasn't about me. It was about showing the world God's power, wisdom, kindness, love, and forgiveness.

“Win, lose, or draw, it's an opportunity to glorify Him, and my value is already secure in Christ.”



Australian high jumper Nicola Olyslagers reads her Bible and writes in a journal during a competition. (Photo by David Ramos/Getty Images).

## **Nicola Olyslagers, Australia – high jump silver**

Few people understand having a higher calling than Australian Olympic high jumper Nicola Olyslagers.

At 1.86 metres, the 27-year-old not only stands tall in regular life, but also in her sport. At the Paris Olympics in June, she won the silver medal and in doing so became the first Australian field athlete ever to win a medal at consecutive Olympics, having bagged a silver at the 2020 Games in Tokyo.

She sets the bar high for the other – greater – purpose in her life: living for Jesus Christ.

Nicola became a Christian in her

teens. In her last year of primary school she went to a new school and remembers being nervous about her new surroundings.

But she worried for nothing. “When I walked in I was immediately met by this overwhelming, non-judging love from the students and teachers,” she recalls.

“It was a love that left me with questions and envious of how they were able to show that sort of love. They all said they loved because Jesus loved them... it changed my entire life. It was the first time I came into full realisation of the Gospel [story of Jesus saving us from our sins] and the reality of God.

“I committed my life to Jesus.”

Her Instagram profile is peppered with Bible verses and prayers.

After winning the silver, she posted: “Praise be to God my Rock! He is my strength and song!!”

## **Rayssa Leal, Brazil – skateboarding bronze**

Sixteen-year-old skateboarder Rayssa Leal got around an Olympics rule forbidding her from sharing her faith out loud by using sign language to declare “Jesus is the Way, the Truth, and the Life.”

## **Gabriel Medina, Brazil – surfing gold**

Brazilian surfer Gabriel Medina was told to remove an image of Jesus from his surfboard as he was in breach of the Olympic Charter, which prohibits political and religious manifestations.

It didn't stop him from winning the gold medal with a score of 9.9 – the highest ever in Olympic surfing history.

The picture of him surfacing from the wave – with a hidden message – has gone viral. It shows him and his surfboard seemingly levitating as he points his index finger to the sky – a gesture well known to Brazilian evangelicals as praising and thanking God.

Gabriel's post-victory Instagram post bears this out: he quoted this



Tsige Duguma of Ethiopia. (Photo by Sam Mellish/Getty Images)

verse from the book of Philippians – “I can do all this through Him who gives me strength.” (Philippians 4: 13)

## **Noah Lyles, USA – track and field 100m gold, 200m bronze**

As he lined up for the men's 100m final, USA's Noah Lyles could be seen mouthing the words: “Thank you, God. Thank you, God.”

After winning gold, the sprinter told Premier Christian Radio that he had to find his “own journey with God”. “I thank God every day for getting me through each and every round. Healthy, mentally and physically”, he added.

In a victory interview with BBC Sport, the 27-year-old was asked what his final thought was before

the race. He said with a grin: “Thank you, God”.

## **Team Fiji**

Team Fiji delighted the athletes by singing worship songs in the Olympic village regularly. Australian water polo player Matilda Kearns shared the moving scenes on Instagram. “Having the best seat in the Village being next to the Oceania building,” she wrote in a post. “Still not sick of it!”

## **Tsige Duguma, Ethiopia – track and field 800m silver**

Ethiopian track and field athlete Tsige Duguma won silver in the 800m. The words “Jesus is Lord” were written on the back of her race bib – fitting words to end this wrap-up.

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