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CRIKEY! CROC HUNTER FAN'S MISSION

Jono Millar grew up dreaming of becoming the next Steve Irwin, with his passion for conservation eventually leading him to study evolutionary biology at university. A staunch atheist, Jono considered himself far too intelligent to believe in anything beyond what he could see — until one night at a college party, when he looked up at the stars and began to wonder if there was more to life than he had imagined. What followed was a series of encounters that challenged everything he thought he knew.

For years John 'Jono' Millar lived his dream life.

A lifelong fan of the famous Australian conservationist Steve Irwin, Jono devoured books on conservation biology, dreamed of working in Africa and imagined a life spent protecting endangered species and a career as a conservationist.

Everything fell neatly into place for the New Zealander. He got his degree in evolutionary biology, volunteered with the Department of Conservation and enjoyed experiences few people ever get.

Surveys on remote mountaintops, helicopter drop-offs onto steep terrain and long days driving through forest parks surveying skinks and other rare species – it satisfied every nook of Jono's nature-loving heart.

But for all the enjoyment, something was missing – there was a hollowness he couldn't put his finger on.

> "I realised I was empty."

When he was 19, he attended a typical university party – loud music, flowing drinks. He was surrounded by friends yet all alone.

Stepping outside, he looked at the stars. The realisation hit him like a comet. There was a God and he had deliberately turned away from Him. The emptiness was spiritual.

Sharing his journey to faith on the YouTube channel Bible Tracts Inc, Jono said: "When I was a boy, I went to church a little bit and I heard about God but then I threw that away when I started getting taught evolution in high school and I got a bit bitter about some things in life and decided, you know what, there's no God.

Jono Millar now helps others discover the truth he once dismissed.

"At the party I realised I was empty. When I looked up at the stars, in my heart I knew there was a God. And I knew that I had turned away from Him.

"I had gotten myself into a whole lot of sin [wrongdoing against God] and all that had left was an empty feeling."

It was around this time that three different people spoke to him about Jesus Christ – a colleague who invited him to her church's youth group meetings, a former high school friend who asked him questions about God, and his sister, who gave him a simple booklet which contained the Gospel message that Jesus came to Earth to save mankind from its sins.

He read the booklet and for the first time the message made sense to him. He began attending church, which fleshed out the message of the Bible's own anti-extinction plan for humanity.

"I suddenly understood I was hearing the Gospel message for the first time. When I went to church as a boy, nobody ever explained that to me properly."

He began attending regularly and said his heart "became increasingly convicted.

"I understood that at this crossroad in my life, God was bringing different people across my path to bring me to see Him for who He really is – the Creator of all of this and the Creator of me.

"God was seeking me. It was no coincidence these people were in my life. God had brought them across my path."

But then amidst the euphoria of that revelation came a distressing thought: "I realised I was in great trouble with God.

"He loved me enough to look for me, but He was so holy that He knew all my sins and everything I had done wrong. He knew all the secrets of my heart.

"He'd seen everything I had done in the shadows of my life, and I knew that I was in trouble with a holy and righteous God. But I also saw the love that put Jesus Christ on the cross for me."

That awareness was deeply unsettling. Eventually, after weeks of reading the booklet night after night, Jono knew he had to make a decision.

"I knew I needed to ask Jesus Christ to save me from my sins. I knew it was true.

"I knew it was real. I knew Jesus Christ had been here 2000 years ago, died on the cross, and rose from the dead to save me.

"I got out of my bed. I got on my knees. And I asked Jesus Christ to be my Lord and my Saviour that night to save me from my sins. And He did."

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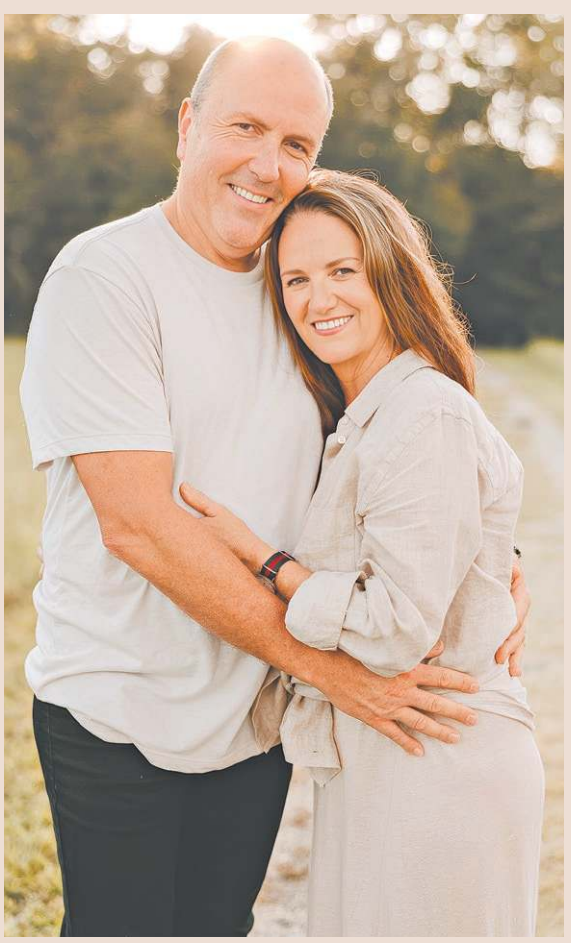
I was almost crushed to death



Samantha Jackel with her husband, Peter.

BY JANICE TEO

The quad bike flipped without warning. One moment, 55-year-old Samantha Jackel was peering over the handlebars across the long grass of her New South Wales hobby farm, looking for hidden holes or logs. The next, the 280kg machine had rolled and pinned her to the ground.

"I've rolled the bike! I've rolled the bike!" she screamed to herself as shock set in.

Then something extraordinary happened.

Sam, now 57, told *Challenge News* she suddenly found herself outside her body, looking down at the wreck. She could see the overturned bike and her body trapped beneath it.

A darkness she described as "thick tar" fell on her as she slipped into unconsciousness. Then she heard a voice – "calm, compassionate, filled with love and authority" – saying, "Sam, you are not going to die. You are NOT going to die."

"I didn't just hear the words," she recalled. "They resonated through me. The voice was gentle, yet earth-shattering." Suddenly, a light she described as "pure, radiant and living" shattered the darkness. Instantly Sam was back in her body – crushed, gasping, and praying desperately: "Jesus, help me!"

Sam's life had always been a struggle.

Raised in regional Victoria, she said she endured years of physical, emotional and sexual torment.

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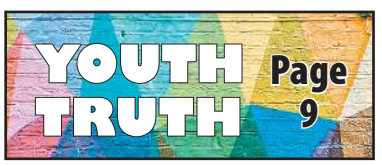

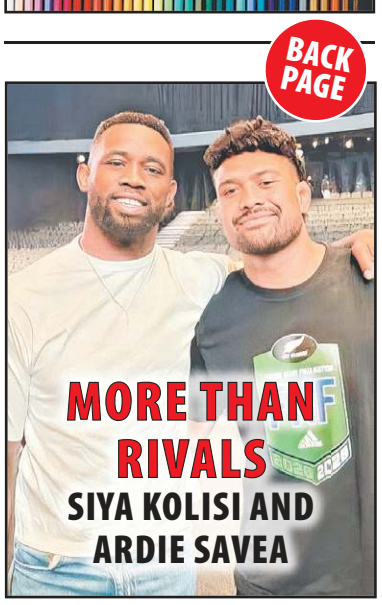

Croc hunter fan's mission

● From page 1

"I didn't hear angels singing. There weren't bright lights in my room or anything but I knew from the Bible that whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved. And that's what I had just done. I had called on Him."

Jono rolled over and peacefully went back to sleep. He woke up the next morning a different 19-year-old.

"I knew I was a different man. God worked mightily in my life to lead me into ministry after I finished my university studies and I'm now of all things a pastor.

"And I've had great adventures where I have not tried to save the planet. I've tried to save people and see people saved through what Jesus Christ has done for us. And I've had wonderful adventures with that, more than I would have ever had in my career path that I had laid out for me as a boy." All without needing to wrestle a crocodile. •

Watch Jono's story at: youtube.com/watch?v=47_SsOitqVY&t=280s

Finding light in the dark

Fourteen years ago, in 2012, Singaporean Kai Ming Lai woke up with a large, dark shadow in his left eye that literally robbed him of 30 percent vision in that eye overnight.

That was the start; by 2014 he was completely blind in one eye. He was 43, doing well in his career and had three children. Life was full of potential. But now it brimmed with dismay, shock, and fear.

Test upon test followed with no conclusion. Doctors were baffled and could only guess at the cause – glaucoma, a stroke, autoimmune disease?

To Kai Ming, who by 2023 had only five percent of his vision left, the diagnosis made no difference. The light was gone and he agonised over why God allowed it to be so. Because Kai Ming was, and still is, a pastor.

Speaking to Sook Ting Leong of Singapore Christian digital media platform *Salt & Light*, the 55-year-old told her he cried out: "God, why is this happening to me? Did I look at things I should not be looking at? Jesus healed the blind – what about me?

Kai Ming with his wife Lesley (in pink) and their three daughters, at their eldest daughter Lois' wedding on September 24, 2022.

"As a pastor you pray for healing for others but you yourself have this problem, so you have self-doubt sometimes. What will people think about me? Would they think this pastor is not worthy?"

These were tough, soul-searching questions which Kai Ming used to like grappling with. In fact, he became a Christian after his questions about the existence of God were answered by a book he read.

Kai Ming committed his life to Christ when he was 18 while on an engineering scholarship in London.

He had had some exposure to God and the Bible through his father, a Seventh-Day Adventist, but, he told *Challenge News*: "I wasn't very interested then. I didn't pay much attention to my dad.

"It was more the influence of my close friends in London. There were one or two who were very fervent for the Lord."

He said that his one burning question about Christianity was – "God may have created us, but who created God?"

One of his Christian friends gave him the book *True & Reasonable*, in which author Douglas Jacoby tackles the big philosophical questions such as the existence of God, the reliability and accuracy of the Bible and the thorny issue of science versus Christianity.

"The author spells out the fact that God doesn't need to be created. He always just was and in fact, if God has to be created then God can't be God anymore.

"That was the intellectual breakthrough that I needed. I took a step of faith and committed my life to Him."

The change that becoming a Christian triggered in him was not so much about turning over a new leaf as it was about finding direction for his life.

"I was always quite a moral person," he elaborated.

"But now I had meaning and purpose in my life. More than that, realising I had eternal life was a great assurance."

Kai Ming said he felt the call into full-time ministry in London after several years of feeding his faith in his newfound Christian family.

"In church I found out what being in a community of love really means. This is why the church is so important. I felt I should give my life to it and become a full-time minister of the Gospel [the good news that Jesus Christ came to Earth to die for our sins]."

Finding a way to accept the gradual but unstoppable loss of his vision in both eyes – and all the other setbacks that came with it – was not as quick or easy as finding the answers to the existence of God.

"After losing one eye, I still had one. Many people actually live normally with one eye. But then that the good eye started losing vision, too. That's when it got really scary."

At 50, he was no longer able to drive. He lost the ability to play basketball and crucially, much of his independence.

He leans on his wife, Lesley, to shoulder much of the myriad other responsibilities he used to carry such as buying food, driving and running the household.

"Even the strongest person in the world is dependent on someone," he mused. "The thing to do is to accept and adapt.

"For example, I have to walk slowly now but it's not a bad thing to move slower. Sometimes we rush too much.

"The number one thing that I am constantly reminded of is that even though I cannot see, I'm still alive and I should give thanks for having life.

"The majority of the world has struggles in their lives – not enough to eat, to drink. So I think I should be thankful for what I have, not what I don't have.

"Having eternal hope is important because I know this will not be forever. I don't focus on what I've lost. But maybe that is the personality that God has given me – I like challenges. I like to think about how I can overcome them."

He also feels thankful that his disability puts him in a unique position to care for his flock at church, where he is one of six pastors.

It helps him to identify with others who face physical and other challenges. "Christ identifies with our weaknesses and I hope I can do the same with others like me. I hope it has made me a better pastor and minister of grace and comfort.

"His grace is sufficient for me," said Kai Ming, quoting from 2 Corinthians 12:9. "This is my daily encouragement." •

Some of the content in this story is used with the kind permission of Salt&Light, a Singapore-based platform for digital outreach and discipleship on faith@work and other Kingdom issues.

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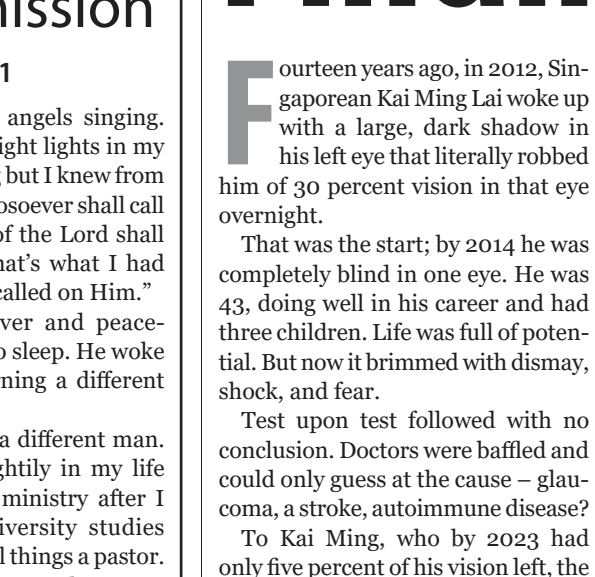
Coffee Break CROSSWORD & SUDOKU

ACROSS
1 Surgical sutures
7 Caesar's nationality
9 Very relevant
11 Aces, in some games
12 Fairy tale bears count
14 Trouser accessories
16 Goes with fro
17 Same as per
18 People aged 13-19
20 Medical therapy
25 Opposite of p.m.
26 You and I
27 Puts into piles
29 Grow mature for eating
31 Hide-and-____
32 Darjeeling or oolong
33 Indicates wealth
34 Containing most sugar

DOWN
1 Refine, as metal
2 Tongue sense
3 India (abbrv)
4 Rural dwellings
5 Unit of corn
6 Broccoli stalks
7 Toga, basically
8 A fifth of five
10 Top diving scores
13 Male pig, boar
15 Courtroom punishment
19 Ant hordes
20 Acid sweet
21 Amazement
22 Fronts of airplanes
23 Help medically
24 Seeks advice
28 Half a score
30 Foot of a dog
33 Do, re, ____



SOLUTIONS PAGE 11

Smile files...

young emperor penguin / gettyimages

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Ask Y: Answers to tough questions about God

QUESTION: DON'T ATHEISTS JUST BELIEVE IN ONE LESS GOD THAN CHRISTIANS DO?

SOME ATHEISTS CHALLENGE Christians with this statement: "Atheists just believe in one less God than you Christians do." And if Christians understood why they themselves reject other gods, the argument goes on, they would understand why atheists reject their God.

After all, Christians reject all the other millions of gods that people have believed in – whether Roman and Greek gods like Jupiter and Zeus, the ancestor gods of Asia or the animal gods of Africa. Atheists – and everyone else – have good reasons to disbelieve in gods like these. So atheists ask the question, "Why do Christians insist on clinging to an irrational belief in their own deity?"

However, what the "one less God" statement reveals is that those making it have little understanding about the God Christians believe in and how different that God is from all the others they and atheists reject.

First and foremost, the God Christians believe in is the "first cause" – the One who created all things out of nothing. This first cause – and there can only be one first cause – is, by definition, God. This alone sets the Christian God apart from the myriad of ancient deities.

But there is much more than that. The God Christians believe in has characteristics that set Him apart from all other contenders. To give just a few examples, He is eternal – He was not created but has always existed, with no beginning and no end. He is omniscient – He knows everything there is to know. He is omnipresent – He is everywhere at one and the same time.

He is unchanging – He does not have mood swings or go back on His promises, but is always true to who and what He is. He is all-powerful – He can do anything He chooses that is in line with His character. He is self-existent – complete in Himself and needing nothing from us or the rest of creation.

He is spirit – not physical and so not made of the stuff He created. He is good – His character and actions are moral and virtuous. He is love – His character is displayed by always seeking the best for His creation.

Contrast that with the substance and behaviour of Apollo, Zeus, Ra, Mithras, Wotan, Baal, Thor and the like. Or Eastern deities like Vishnu, Sri, Shiva, Brahma and the rest. If they were a rough equivalent of what Christians believe in, then the atheists would have nailed it. But that is not the way it is. At first sight the "one less God" claim may look like a clincher. If those who make it knew what the God Christians believe in is like they'd know it is anything but. •

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.

SAVED FROM THE BRINK

Walking down the street in Chicago's west side on a hot summer's day several years ago trying to stay cool, 19-year-old Demetrius Smith had no idea he would soon be close to death.

He walked past a group of about 16 teens but, caught up in his own problems, he didn't really notice them. He was drunk. He hated his life.

His parents had dropped him off at his grandmother's home one day and never came back.

So he never saw the gang coming. One minute he was standing outside his friend's house and the next he was locked in a full wrestling chokehold. He was attacked for no other reason than he lived in the "wrong" government housing building.

"I remember it like it was yesterday," he told *Challenge News*. "One of the gang members asked me, 'What did you say about my friends?' But I hadn't said anything. I have never felt fear hit me so fast in all my life.

"I closed my eyes and I began to swing, to fight my way out of the horrific attack but they were too many."

AI-generated image

Caught in the chokehold, Demetrius was dragged down the steps and onto the road, where the beating continued in earnest. "I was being beaten to death – they hit my stomach and my face repeatedly." He said it felt like his spirit was leaving his body.

"My friend who was there didn't help me. The people in their cars didn't stop to help; they stopped to watch. The people who were walking turned around and walked away. Nobody called the police.

"When someone is being beaten to death there isn't much pain, just vibration. At least that's how I felt."

Then something happened. As he slipped away he remembered a name he said was "locked in my spirit. Way, way, way deep down. It was the name of Jesus."

Gasping for breath, he cried out: "King Jesus save me! They're killing me!"

The beating stopped immediately. Not another punch was thrown.

"The guy who had me in the chokehold pushed me onto the grass and then something I've never seen before happened – the gang all turned around and walked away.

> **"The gang all turned around and walked away."**

"God saved me. I had an appointment with death but God turned it into a demonstration of His heavenly Presence. It was as if the name of Jesus paralysed them."

Up until that point in his life Demetrius was a lost soul. He did not know much, if anything, about Christianity or the Bible.

"I wasn't praying or reading the Bible. I had no relationship with Jesus. I was a 19-year-old kid who had never known love and He saved me. Now I serve Him with all my heart. My life verse is Romans 10:13, '*For whosoever shall call upon the name of the lord shall be saved.*'"

Demetrius now tells others about Jesus as much as he can.

He tells others to cry out to King Jesus Christ in the midst of their troubles.

"He saved me; He will rescue you too. He is the one and only true God and it is only right that I should testify of what He has done for me." •

Ten reasons to think about Christianity

Did all of creation create itself? Is there a God? Do I have a soul? Is there life after death? Is there a true purpose and meaning to life?

These 10 reasons to consider Christianity are simple illustrations to give Biblical answers to life's big questions. We hope they get you thinking and start you on an incredible journey.

Reason 5: Christianity is judged unfairly

A MAN THAT was honest, dynamic and hardworking was rejected at every job interview he attended. It wasn't because of his qualifications – his resume was impeccable. He was rejected because of his twin brother's criminal reputation and was judged untrustworthy by association.

Does Jesus Christ endorse the evil done in the name of religion?

Many people reject Christianity on the basis of the horrible things done in the name of religion. However, we forget that Jesus Christ was not impressed with religion either. In fact, it was religious people that conspired to nail Him to the cross. The Bible states that Jesus Christ is the Son of God – the manifestation of God in human flesh (John 10:30). We can see through Christ's life that God is very much against violent attacks, suicide bombings, human sacrifice, suppression of women and abuse of children.

When Christ was on Earth, He took a firm stand against hypocritical religious leaders; He tossed spiritual swindlers out of the temple for fleecing the public. He courageously stood between religious zealots ready to execute a woman charged with adultery.

Sadly, religion has given Christianity a reputation it doesn't deserve. If we reject Christianity on the basis of the despicable things done and said by religious people, we have judged Christianity and God unfairly.

Religion may wrong you, condemn you, malign you or nail you to a cross – but God certainly doesn't want this.

He desires to have an eternal, loving relationship with each of us no matter who we are or how we have failed Him.

Christianity is not about a set of meaningless rituals, feeling guilty and trying to be good.

Christianity is a restoration of a family relationship with our Heavenly Father through the saving work of Jesus Christ on the cross. God greatly desires we accept His gift of Salvation so we can be reconciled with Him for eternity. The choice is now individually up to us if we wish to be reconciled with Him.

John 3:16 states, "*For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son (Jesus Christ), that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.*" •

Check out next month's *Challenge News* for Reason six: We are what we believe.

Text and illustrations by Ian Coate of freechristianillustrations.com.

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I was almost crushed to death

● From page 1

Sam recovers in hospital after the accident. INSET: The flipped quad bike.

"But when I was seven," she recalled, "God showed up in the form of a classmate who invited me to Sunday school and introduced me to a loving family."

Thanks to that early exposure, she committed her life to Jesus Christ when she was seven and was baptised (a public declaration of faith in Jesus Christ) at 16. But home life grew unbearable.

At 18, suffering constant harassment from her mother, Sam fled to Melbourne on the advice of her pastor, who connected her with a church there.

In Melbourne she met Peter. Because of the abuse she had endured, Sam vowed she would marry the first man she kissed, because "my lips were the only part of me that hadn't been violated." When she and Peter kissed, she believed he was the one.

Despite intending to save sex for marriage, some months later they became intimate. They immediately confessed the transgression to their church leaders and took their advice to take a break for a while.

During their time apart, Sam convinced herself she was pregnant. She told Peter, and the couple married quickly. Just before the wedding, she told Peter she had miscarried – but the truth was she had never been pregnant at all. "I lied to get married," she admitted.

The marriage struggled from the start. "I was angry, insecure and unstable," she said. It collapsed within a year – Peter walked out after Sam told him that she had lied about the pregnancy and miscarriage.

Sam spiralled into despair and self-harm, but God came through for her yet again. About nine months later, Peter read the Bible story of Israel being tricked into making a covenant with the Gibeonites (Joshua 9).

Though deceived, Israel was commanded by God to honour the covenant made in His name. Peter felt God tell him to do the same and honour his covenant of marriage despite Sam's lies. He went home, forgave her and prayed earnestly for his deeply troubled wife's healing.

> **"I will never be the same again."**

"Three days later God miraculously set me free," Sam shared. "His love and mercy transformed me completely. From that point, everything changed. Our marriage grew stronger, our faith deeper. We began a family, became pastors and built our lives on Christ."

In the years that followed, the woman once defined by trauma became known for hope.

She shared her story in her book *My Purple Pants* which chronicles her journey through abuse and into God's restoration.

In 2014, she was named Barnardos Australia Victorian Mother of the Year, recognised for raising more than $1 million for orphans in Uganda.

Speaking at the ceremony, she declared: "Your past doesn't say who you are. No matter how you've been mothered yourself, you can turn that around and be the best mother."

In 2020, Sam and Peter left city life for the small farm. Three years later, on April 20, 2023, came that fateful quad bike accident.

Terror gave her strength while pinned. She managed to rock the bike enough to crawl out. Using her uninjured arm, she phoned Peter.

He found her and raced her to hospital. Six hours later, Sam walked out with a broken wrist, damaged fingers and deep bruises, but alive.

She knew it was a miracle she was alive. That week alone, three other Australians died in quad bike rollovers.

During recovery, she sensed God's presence as never before – comforting, speaking through Scripture and small miracles, giving her a peace beyond words. But one question lingered: "Why me?"

"The Lord's reply was quiet but unmistakable: 'Why not you?' That moment opened my eyes. I'd chosen to ride into a secluded area before learning properly. It was only His grace that kept me alive."

Sam with Shep, her sheepdog.

Today, Sam and Peter lead a quiet life with their five children. They no longer pastor a church but minister to a small community near their farm.

"I know without a shadow of a doubt that Jesus saved my life that day – not just physically but spiritually and emotionally too," she said.

"His voice, His light and His mercy brought me back, and I will never be the same again." •

COVID led us towards peace

Marc and Ade Papineau were struggling. When the COVID-19 pandemic reached Ottawa, Canada, strict lockdowns, mask mandates, and mandatory vaccination policies were enforced. Marc publicly voiced concerns but the backlash intensified.

This pressure pushed the couple to search more deeply for spiritual grounding. At that time, this meant praying to Allah, the god of Islam.

Ade grew up in Sumatra, Indonesia, where Islam was woven into the fabric of her identity. Marc, a Canadian, converted to Islam before they married so he could be fully accepted by Ade's family.

Marc shared with Mohamad Faridi on his YouTube channel that while he grew up going to church as a child, he "didn't connect with the Gospel message [the good news of salvation through Jesus Christ].

"I actually knew nothing about the Gospel."

He told *Challenge News*, "When I asked to marry Ade, I learned that reciting the *Shahadah* [the central declaration of Islamic faith] was culturally expected so I could be welcomed into her family. Ade's family had always treated me with deep love, honour, and respect. I chose to [convert to Islam] out of love for Ade and respect for her family, who I genuinely admired.

"At the time I was lukewarm in my own faith and uneducated in both Christianity and Islam, so I converted in ignorance – wanting only to honour the people receiving me."

> **"We didn't understand what we were feeling."**

Speaking to CBN News, Ade added, "We were Muslims, and I was a proud Indonesian. Our faith was part of our identity, our culture, and our values. It was more about doing what was expected, following traditions, and being a good person."

Ade continued praying five times a day in her youth, but when her parents divorced, bitterness settled in and her devotion faded. Marc, raising two children from a previous marriage, began searching for deeper meaning as uncertainty grew during the pandemic.

"We were looking for more structure in our home about where we stood in the [Muslim] faith. So we began to pray as a family to Allah," said Marc.

Yet as he memorised Arabic prayers, something unsettled him.

"I'm talking about Ibrahim and when the Antichrist comes," he thought, "but when do I get to talk to God about what I'm struggling with?"

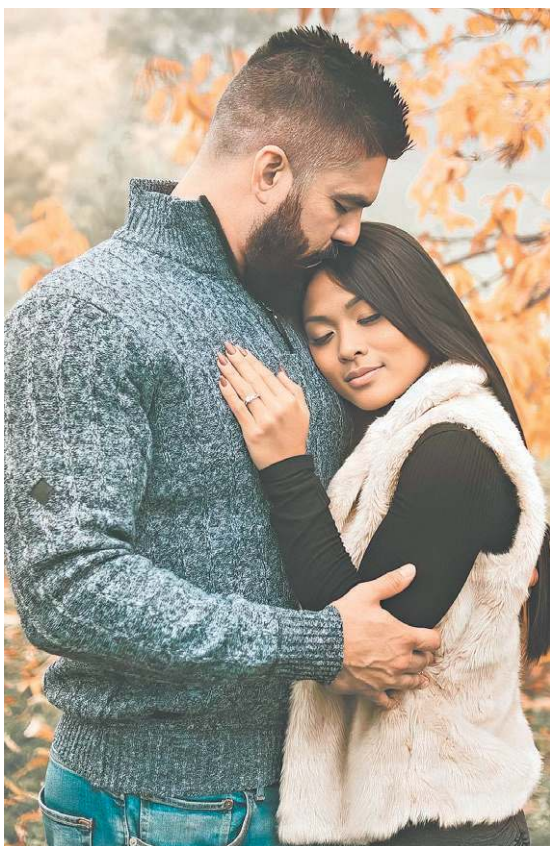
He asked Ade whether she understood what she was reciting.

"At that time, I thought, 'Nobody ever asked me that question,'" said Ade. "If I asked that growing up, I would have been condemned or rebuked."

The couple sought guidance from Imams, but doors remained closed. Surprisingly, it was Christian pastors who welcomed them into conversation. Curious, they purchased both a children's Qur'an and a children's Bible.

"We decided we were going to read the children's Bible every night and then the children's Qur'an after," Marc added.

"We bonded so closely as a family reading the Gospels and the story of Israel."



Marc and Ade Papineau

Before they began the Qur'an, Marc received a message from a stranger on Facebook: "Mark, you seem like a great family guy. I don't know where you stand in your faith but I feel compelled to invite you to church. We have a great church and would love to see you come."

What happened next changed everything. The moment they arrived at the church carpark, Marc and Ade both encountered the presence of God at the exact same time.

"We sat in the truck and wept silently out of embarrassment. We didn't understand what we were feeling, and we hid our faces from each other," Marc recounted.

But when they stepped inside, the presence of God intensified.

"It amplified, and so did our sobbing. I felt like I had been received into the arms of my Father who had waited 40 years to hold me in His presence."

Ade said, "I felt a presence I had never felt before. In that moment, I knew Jesus was God and truly my Saviour – even though I was raised being told that saying His name would lead me to hell. But I knew He was God, and I wanted Him."

When the pastor invited people to give their lives to Jesus, Ade raised her hand immediately.

"I said, 'Jesus, I will follow You. Whatever You want me to do, I will listen and follow.'"

Marc's acceptance unfolded more slowly. "When I raised my hand that first visit, I hadn't fully accepted Jesus," Marc admitted.

"I thought, 'God, You and I are good – but does Jesus really have to be part of this?' I didn't have the framework yet. I just knew I wanted God back in my life."

As Marc continued reading the Bible, he prayed an honest prayer: "God, if Jesus needs to be part of this, then You need to help me understand. Bring me people who will teach me."

Soon after, a pastor named Shawn – and a group of Christian men – entered Marc's life. That same week, Marc had a dream. The next day, Pastor Shawn, unaware of the struggle, interpreted it.

"He said, 'Mark, God is telling you it's time to make a choice. Do you choose the god of Islam or do you choose Jesus? God is extending a branch to you to decide.'"

Marc recalled, "When he said that, I felt His presence again – but this time as Jesus. The hairs on my arms stood up. I knew He was there. I professed Him as Lord and surrendered my soul to Him.

"After that, God began the work of changing us – struggle by struggle – yet His grace and His presence was always with us. He gave us a peace that surpasses understanding.

"We struggled as God took away the things we didn't want to let go of," Ade added.

"But thank God He did. Through that refining, our love for Him grew deeper every day.

"We started seeing the value of generosity – giving our time, money, and worship," Marc said. "We began volunteering in our community, loving people we once judged, and serving faithfully at our church." •

THE END OF MY ANGER

BY SIMEON NEO

By the age of 25, Ryuma Suzuki – who prefers to be known as "Leeuma" – had developed a stomach ulcer linked to years of unresolved anger issues.

Ryuma Suzuki

"I was a very angry person," he told *Challenge News*. "I was angry at society, my workplace, school, the people around me, and even my family. I complained constantly and stored up anger inside myself, becoming like a land mine."

Born in Tokyo, Leeuma first developed a stomach ulcer during junior high school and lived in pain for years.

"Although I appeared calm, I would explode when triggered," said Leeuma, now 60. "This negative attitude affected my health and led to developing a stomach ulcer."

The condition became so severe that he eventually underwent surgery to remove two-thirds of his stomach.

"Looking back, I cannot recall any good memories from that time," he said.

After his surgery, Leeuma went to the United States in search of life's meaning. While studying at an English school for international students, he met Christians who regularly visited to share the Gospel (the good news about salvation through Jesus Christ).

"Their kindness and consistency touched my heart. Although my English was very limited at the time, through spending time with them, I began to learn about Jesus and understand what true love means.

"The first time I heard the Gospel, I was deeply impressed by it.

"But at that time, I couldn't accept Jesus, who proclaimed Himself to be the truth and the way, yet was rejected," he explained.

A turning point came during a hiking trip with some of the Christians where an argument broke out among the group.

"At that time, it seemed to me that reconciliation was impossible.

"But suddenly, they stopped arguing. Instead, they held hands and prayed together. Afterwards, they hugged each other and smiled.

"It was something I never imagined could happen. I had never seen anything like that before, and I thought it was truly beautiful.

"In that moment, I felt the power of Jesus at work. That experience deeply moved my heart."

In that same year, Leeuma committed his life to Jesus and became a Christian, a decision that was expressed publicly through water baptism (a public declaration of faith in Jesus Christ).

"My fear of death was completely gone." However, Leeuma admitted that he didn't understand the depth of his sin (any thought or action that goes against God). He saw himself as a good person and didn't understand why Jesus had to die for him.

"To be honest, I used the name of Jesus simply to feel happy. I did not truly understand what sin was or what it meant. As a result, I lived as a wandering Christian for seven years.

"During that period, painful things happened. My father and I began to quarrel, and my anger grew so intense that I lashed out at him. Through these experiences, I came to realise how deeply rooted sin was in my heart."

Coming face to face with his own sin, Leeuma realised his need for Jesus's forgiveness.

"I recommitted my life to Jesus Christ in Japan and as a public expression of that commitment, I received my second water baptism in front of the congregation.

"Two years later, God began to work in me in a new way. He changed my heart and gave me the courage to apologise to my father. Through God's grace, my father and I were reconciled. In the end, God Himself brought healing and restoration to our relationship.

> **"I feel at ease, relaxed and joyful."**

These days, Leeuma lives with his wife and children in Miyazaki, a city in the south of Japan. Once anger-filled in his youth, Leeuma now speaks with a wide grin across his face. "I have become a more peaceful person and more caring toward others. I feel at ease, relaxed and joyful. When I'm facing problems, I believe that God is giving me new testimonies. His words and His promises give me hope at all times."

He added, "It is worth giving up everything for Jesus – even my life. After all, I will see Him in heaven."

Leeuma and his wife are currently homeschooling their teenage children and hope to invite other families in Japan to join them. •

NUDGE

WITH KARL FAASE

Ordinary people

ONE OF THE most instructive aspects of reading the Bible is discovering that its characters are ordinary people, most of whom we can relate to.

The Bible is not full of people whose lives were morally upright and perfect in every way. The characters who feature throughout its pages lived messy lives. They often made mistakes, poor choices and had bad attitudes. They let others down and failed to live up to expectations.

Yet many were still heroic and faithful: they lived out God's values in the midst of their failures.

They remind us that following Jesus is not about getting it right all the time, but about living in the knowledge that we are forgiven. God offers us a fresh start every day. •

How was the moon formed?

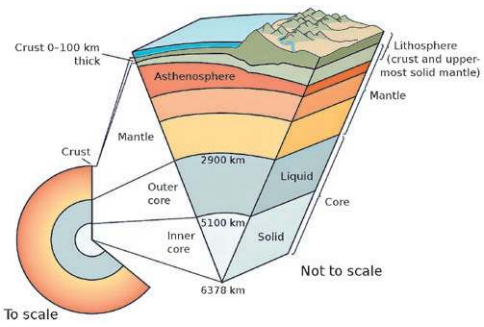
BY DOMINIC STATHAM, CREATION MINISTRIES

EVOLUTIONISTS CLAIM THAT our moon was formed by natural processes without the need for a creator. This view, however, is not supported by science, as all the explanations they propose have major problems.

Explanation 1: from dust

Evolutionists say that our sun and its orbiting planets (i.e. our 'solar system') arose from a rotating gas/dust cloud approximately 4.5 billion years ago. This is known as the 'nebular hypothesis', from Latin, nebula meaning 'cloud'. Some have suggested that the moon simply formed at the same time and sufficiently close to the earth to end up in orbit around it. This is known as the 'condensation theory'. Just as a water droplet condenses from steam as it cools, so the moon is said to have 'condensed' from dust as gravity pulled tiny dust particles together into a big lump.

If this explanation were correct, however, we would expect the moon to be akin to a mini-Earth, being made up of essentially the same materials. The moon, however, is significantly less dense than the earth, and hence must be made up of different materials. Scientists believe that the primary difference lies in the amount of iron in their cores.



A partial section through the earth showing the core, mantle and crust. The core is made up mainly of iron. If the moon formed according to the 'condensation theory', we would expect it to have a significantly larger iron core than it does.

Explanation 2: a 'spin-off'

Another suggestion is that an originally molten earth spun so fast that part of it flew off and became the moon. This is known as the 'fission theory', from Latin, fissio meaning 'splitting', proposed by George Darwin, son of Charles.

Calculations, however, indicate that the earth's rotational speed would never have been great enough for this to happen. Another problem is the marked differences between rocks found on the moon and those on the earth. If the moon were once part of the earth, we would expect moon and earth rocks to contain elements in similar amounts; but this is not so. For example, potassium and sodium are found in abundance in Earth's rocks, but not in those on the moon. Conversely, moon rocks contain significantly more aluminium, calcium and thorium. This is also a problem for the 'condensation theory'.

Another good reason for rejecting the 'fission theory' arises from a consideration of the moon's orbital path. If the theory were correct, we would expect the moon to orbit around the earth's equator but it does not!

Explanation 3: from outer space

Some have argued that the moon must have formed elsewhere and, as it flew through the galaxy, it just happened to pass close enough to the earth to be captured by its gravity. If this were so, then we would expect the moon to follow an elongated orbit around the earth, similar to that of Halley's comet around the sun. The moon's orbit, however, is essentially circular; hence the 'capture theory' fails.

STOCK PHOTO

Explanation 4: a great impact

This view, currently the most popular among evolutionists, holds that a hypothetical planet (called Theia) collided with the earth and the resulting debris formed the moon. This is said to explain the differences between Earth rocks and moon rocks discussed above. The high temperatures generated by the collision would have boiled away volatile elements such as potassium and sodium, but more heat-resistant materials such as aluminium, calcium and thorium would have remained and condensed to form the moon's crust.[1]

Here, however, it is the similarities between rocks that cannot be explained. With the impact theory, part of the moon would have formed from the earth and part from the impacting planet. So the chemistry of moon rocks would be expected to be different to that of Earth rocks. While it is true that the moon is deficient in some Earth elements, those that are shared can have very similar properties.

Elements come in different forms, known as 'isotopes' and different rocks contain isotopes in different amounts, giving each an 'isotope signature'. Remarkably, the isotope ratios of oxygen, iron, hydrogen, silica, magnesium, titanium, potassium, tungsten and chromium are almost identical in moon and Earth rocks. At the same time, they are different from other solar system bodies. This is such a problem for the impact theory that, according to some researchers, it is now in crisis.[2,3] These near-identical isotope signatures are also a problem for the 'capture theory'.

Another headache for the impact theory is the growing evidence of significant amounts of water in the moon's interior.

It would be expected that the heat from the impact would have caused this to evaporate.[4]

Given these difficulties for evolutionists, it is hardly surprising that a paper, co-written by planetary scientist Professor Oded Aharonson, began with the admission, "The moon's origin remains enigmatic."[5]

The real explanation

Of course, the moon is no mystery to those who believe the Bible. According to the book of Genesis, this heavenly body was specially created by God on day four of creation week: "*And God made the two great lights – the greater light to rule the day and the lesser light to rule the night – and the stars. And God set them in the expanse of the heavens to give light on the earth, to rule over the day and over the night, and to separate the light from the darkness. And God saw that it was good.*" (Genesis 1:16-19)

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Dinosaurs, humans and the fossil record

BY DANIEL ANDERSON

Tuatara – endemic to New Zealand. Photo by Sid Mosdell from New Zealand, CC BY 2.0, via Wikimedia Commons

ACCORDING TO THE Bible, God created land animals and human beings on the sixth day about 6,000 years ago. This means that dinosaurs, Adam and Eve coexisted in the Garden of Eden at the very beginning of creation. However, evolutionists often mock and ridicule the biblical account because of an absence of evidence in the fossil record. In other words, because human and dinosaur bones have never been discovered together in the same sedimentary strata, they could not have lived contemporaneously. However, three specific examples illustrate the error of this logic, and provide positive evidence for the credibility of the biblical account.

Coelacanth

Paleontologists believed that coelacanths became extinct about 65 million years ago. However, in 1938, fishermen off the coast of South Africa found them alive and well. By evolutionary logic, coelacanths have coexisted with a multitude of other sea creatures for the last 65 million years; yet, the fossil record is silent. In addition, coelacanths and humans continue to coexist even though their fossil bones have never been discovered together.

Tuatara

Native to New Zealand, this beakhead lizard supposedly became extinct about 135 million years ago. For the last 135 million years on the evolutionary timeline, not a single Tuatara fossil has ever been discovered.[1] Therefore, for the last 135 million years the Tuatara has coexisted with a number of other animals, yet the fossil record bears no record. Tuataras and humans continue to coexist even though their fossil bones have never been discovered together.

Laonastes aenigmamus or Laotian rock rat. Photo by Jean-Pierre Hugot, CC BY 2.5, via Wikimedia Commons.

Rock rat

Just recently, scientists were shocked to discover that the Laotian rock rat was alive and well in the jungles of Laos. Based on the fossil record, this type of rodent was believed to have become extinct about 11 million years ago.[2] Once again, the rock rat has coexisted with many other creatures without the fossil record bearing witness. In addition, this small rodent lives with humans today, yet their fossil bones have never been discovered next to human bones.

Conclusion

These are just a few examples of creature coexistence not being documented by the fossil record. Although human and dinosaur fossils have never been discovered together, this in no way refutes the biblical account. Fossilisation is a rare event in which vertebrates such as dinosaurs and humans comprise less than 0.0125% of the entire fossil record.[3] In the case of the coelacanth, tuatara, and rock rat, observational evidence demonstrates that creatures can easily coexist without leaving a record of such coexistence in the fossil record.

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YOUTH TRUTH

MILLIONS COULDN'T FILL THE EMPTINESS

Nala Ray was living her best life. She was living alone in a mansion, driving a Porsche and had a collection of luxury designer bags.

As an OnlyFans model, she made $14 million in four years. The online platform is known for hosting adult content creators who produce explicit content on a pay-per-view basis.

However, despite the riches and success, she felt numb.

"I was making millions and I didn't feel any different. I could buy anything that I wanted and I still felt exactly the same," she told Michael Knowles on his YouTube channel.

"I was feeling empty."

Growing up in church as a pastor's child, Nala felt like she had to put on a front. After she was molested by a teenage boy at 13, she started acting out.

"I had no idea what any of that was. I didn't know what I was feeling," she shared with Lecrae about the assault.

"My parents knew something was wrong. I was sneaking out of the window at two in the morning coming back at four or five."

The first time she had sex, she was 15.

"I needed that attention. I craved it. I didn't even know what I craved but I knew I needed love."

Nala says her journey towards creating explicit content started when she was posting bikini photos on Instagram and sending provocative pictures to her boyfriend.

"I was like, 'Oh I'm comfortable with this.'

"I got so comfortable that some random guy messages me on Instagram, 'You would kill it on OnlyFans.'"

The man turned out to be an OnlyFans recruiter. Nala had been growing restless as an orthopaedic surgery scheduler and the message offered an alternative.

"I'm doing a real big girl job [but] I'm not making any money.

"I'm trying to make more money, I'm trying to escalate but I've been in that job for two-and-a-half years and going nowhere."

She decided to try it out and started posting content on OnlyFans.

"I noticed that showing more skin got me more money and people started making more requests."

In her first month on OnlyFans, she made $87,000.

"Every month I was thinking, 'How can I top last month?' That was my brain. I fed off that thought."

When her parents found out, her mother cut off contact with her. "We didn't speak for three years.

"My dad, however, encouraged me to stay on OnlyFans since I was giving him money every month.

"I was like, 'Oh, at least one person in my family is speaking to me.'"

She eventually moved to LA and became one of the highest earning OnlyFans creators.

"I'm living the life. I can pay for all of my hobbies and I get to stay at home and it just felt good.

"I was [getting] high every day. I felt a lot of things but I needed to be numb to focus on my work."

Things took a turn when she met Jordan on TikTok. The first time they chatted on the phone, the conversation went on for seven hours.

"He had no idea who I was since he was not on that side of the internet.

"I felt very comfortable opening up about my feelings and what I was going through."

As their friendship grew, Jordan would send her Bible verses and prayers.

When he found out about her OnlyFans account, he texted her: "I know you may not want to hear this but God loves you so much and you are so worth it. What you're doing is not right."

"I got so defensive. I'm like, 'How dare you judge me?'" Nala admitted.

"That's what it felt like but he was not judging me in the least. He was loving me."

One night, Nala was at home when she felt her emotions stirring. When she saw an old Bible that her parents had given her on the counter, she started crying.

"I was just flipping through it. I had highlighted so much stuff in there from my past.

Nala prayed, "God, nothing is filling this void. Everything I'm trying is failing, it's all slipping through my fingers like sand and I don't know what to do."

As she sat in her living room sobbing, Nala heard the words, "I was all you ever needed."

"So all I ever needed was [God]. I just kept thinking that over and over again."

In the days after, Nala started asking for forgiveness for her sins [rejection of God] and she accepted Jesus into her life.

"Jesus covered everyone's sins in His blood. So it was like this veil had torn and everything looked different. When I go outside, the sun is brighter and the trees are greener and I was crying."

Since then, she has removed her old content from OnlyFans and is working with a lawyer to remove her old pictures from the internet. •

Nala Ray speaks at the 2025 Young Women's Leadership Summit in Texas. Photo: Gage Skidmore, CC BY-SA 4.0 via Wikimedia Commons.

> **"I was all you ever needed."**

Do you know who you are?

YOU MAY SAY you are too bad but God says you can be forgiven.

"I am writing to you who are God's children because your sins have been forgiven through Jesus." (1 John 2:12)

You may say you were abandoned, but God says you are adopted.

"God decided in advance to adopt us into His own family by bringing us to Himself through Jesus Christ. This is what He wanted to do, and it gave Him great pleasure." (Ephesians 1:5)

You may say you are broken, but God says He makes you whole.

"So you also are complete through your union with Christ, who is the head over every ruler and authority." (Colossians 2:10)

You may say you have been rejected, but God says you are His!

"Do not fear. I have redeemed you. I have summoned you. You are mine." (Isaiah 43:1)

You may say you are alone, but God says He is always with you.

"…Do not be afraid or discouraged. For the Lord your God is with you wherever you go." (Joshua 1:9)

You may say you are a lost cause, but God says you were created with purpose.

"Perhaps this is the moment for which you've been created." (Esther 4:14)

You may say you have failed, but God says you are victorious in Christ.

"But thank God! He gives us victory over sin and death through our Lord Jesus Christ." (1 Corinthians 15:57) •

Set free by the truth

At 17 years old, Keziah Morisson hated her body. Struggling with depression and an eating disorder, she turned to alcohol to find respite. "I was also in a very toxic relationship that almost led to suicide," she told *Challenge News*.

As a child, Keziah was estranged from her father and lived with her mother and grandmother. Even though she grew up attending church with her family and hearing about who Jesus is, she shared that at the time, she was not interested in Christianity or Jesus.

"At my grandma's house I heard a lot about Jesus but I didn't see God's love because they were constantly talking about how bad my dad was and all I saw was hatred."

> **"I love my body more and more every day."**

In 2025, Keziah was kicked out of her home. So she went to live with her father, who is a pastor. "[My dad] told me about Jesus and answered all my questions. [He] led me through the process of repenting and believing in Jesus. He showed me who Jesus really is. I felt a huge weight lifted off my shoulders and I felt excited to live for the God who saved my life and forgave all my sins [any thought or action that goes against God's will]."

Since then, Keziah saw how her life has changed. "I stopped cursing and I left my drinking habits behind. I started dressing modestly [because] I love my body more and more every day and I am eating balanced [meals] now.

"I overcome challenges through the love I have for Jesus.

"God has been my hope [because] of what He has done for me and how He saved me and protected me from suicide."

Her favourite verse is John 8:32, "*You will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.*"

"When you realise who Jesus is and what He has done for you," she said. "There is no way you cannot love Him and give your life for Him." •

Keziah Morisson

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lifestyle and entertainment

SINGER NOW KNOWS WHAT LOVE IS

Recipe of the month

Lamb with cumin and sweet chilli

THE COMBINATION OF great quality meat, and some of lamb's best buddies – cumin, chilli, hummus and loads of fresh herbs, makes this recipe a delight to prepare and eat. The secret is to have the pan or grill really hot and to cook the lamb for only a couple of minutes each side, brushing on the sweet chilli sauce in the last minute of cooking and then liberally sprinkling with fresh herbs. I used homemade sweet chilli sauce, because we have been inundated with chillis in the vegetable garden, but good quality store-bought sauce will also give an excellent result. Serves 4.

Ingredients

1.2 kg lamb cutlets
1 teaspoon ground cumin
sea salt and freshly ground black pepper
olive oil
2 tablespoons good quality sweet chilli sauce
4 tablespoons roughly chopped herbs – oregano, mint, chives and flat leaf parsley work well
hummus, flat bread, and salad greens, to serve

Method

Heat a large frying pan or grill until it is very hot.

Meanwhile drizzle a little olive oil over the lamb and rub it in with your fingers. Sprinkle with the cumin and season well with salt and pepper. Cook in the hot pan or on the grill for two minutes per side, brushing with the sweet chilli sauce in the last minute of cooking.

Place on a serving platter and sprinkle over the herbs. Serve with hummus, flat bread and a green salad for a delicious lunch or dinner. •

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

"I want to know what love is – I want you to show me." So sings Lou Gramm on Foreigner's hit song, aptly named *I Want to Know What Love Is*.

Released 42 years ago, the power ballad reached number one on both the United Kingdom singles chart and the United States Billboard Hot 100. It has stood the test of time, charting in the top 25 in 2000, 2001, and 2002 on the Billboard Hot Adult Contemporary Recurrents chart. And it was listed as one of Rolling Stone magazine's greatest songs of all time in 2004 and 2010.

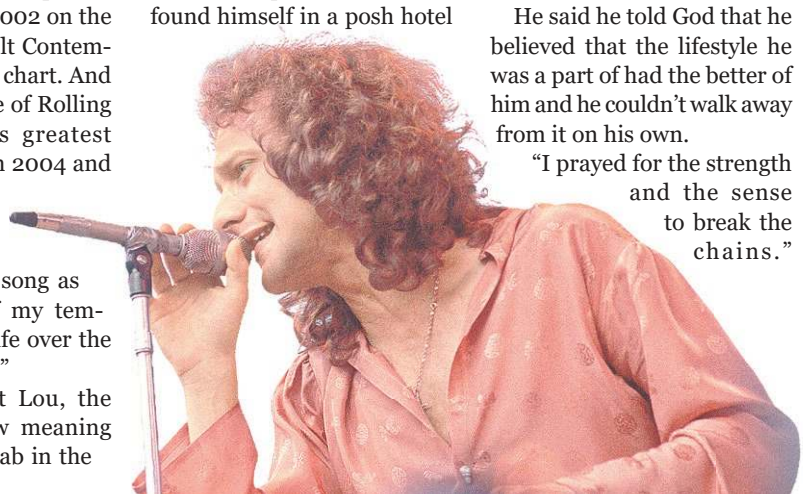
Foreigner guitarist Mick Jones said he wrote the song as an "expression of my tempestuous private life over the three years before."

But for vocalist Lou, the song took on new meaning after a stint in rehab in the early 90s.

He told CBN News that despite his upbringing in a "good solid family," he had fallen into heavy drug use when Foreigner began in 1976. By 1991 he had hit rock bottom.

"Drugs and alcohol were changing me into a person – or had changed me into a person – that I didn't recognise anymore," he said.

One night, after playing at Madison Square Garden, he found himself in a posh hotel room facing the possibility of his own demise.



Foreigner vocalist Lou Gramm at Summerfest in 1978. (Photo by Paul Natkin/Getty Images)

"I got down on my knees asking for God's help to heal me and help me to get rid of this horrible addiction. I just started praying, because I knew there wasn't anybody in the world that could help me. I think I just started talking to God, it wasn't necessary a prayer in a prefabricated form. It was a conversation."

He said he told God that he believed that the lifestyle he was a part of had the better of him and he couldn't walk away from it on his own.

"I prayed for the strength and the sense to break the chains."

The next morning, Lou checked himself into rehab and was soon praying with the staff pastor to surrender himself to God.

"I spent the best 30 days of my life there and today I'm a devout 'born again' Christian," Lou told Fox News. "God plays a role in everything I do. I know He gave me my life and saved my life. I serve Him."

He said on the next Foreigner tour, "After a show, as usual, we were driving on the bus to the next city, and the cocaine lines and the joints came out, and I let them know that I wouldn't be doing that with them anymore."

But that wasn't the only change. Now a Christian who knew what love truly was, Lou said the band's hit song took on new meaning for him.

In the song's pre-chorus, he sings, "In my life, there's been heartache and pain / I don't know if I can face it again / Can't stop now, I've travelled so far / To change this lonely life." But Lou had made a change that would impact him for eternity. In 1996, he performed backing vocals on a cover version of *I Want to Know What Love Is* by Australian singer Tina Arena and the song went on to become a major hit again throughout Europe. The following year Lou sang on Christian rock band Petra's album titled *Petra Praise 2: We Need Jesus*.

Then in April 1997 Lou was diagnosed with a benign brain tumour called a craniopharyngioma and underwent surgery, which damaged his pituitary gland as well as his stamina and voice. "After my operation, which there was a very good chance I might have died on that operating table, I had thought long and hard about making a Christian rock album."

Lou stayed with Foreigner until 2003, and then formed the Lou Gramm Band (also known as the Lou Gramm All Stars), featuring his brother Ben Gramm on drums. In 2009 they released a Christian rock album.

Now 75, Lou continues to sing. In 2024, he was inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame as a member of Foreigner. In 2025 he performed on selected dates of Foreigner's farewell tour. And in January of this year, Lou released a new single, *Young Love*, ahead of his new album, called *Released* – his first full length album since 1989.

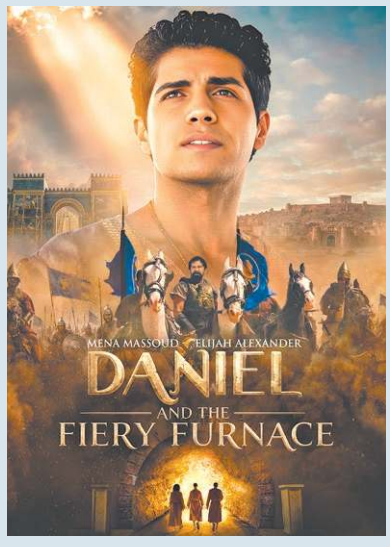
"I think about the years wasted before I knew the Lord," Lou told CBN. "Everybody has to go through something different. I don't mourn those years, because I am where I am now and that's the best news ever." •

Challenge at the movies

Daniel and the Fiery Furnace

Standing up to corrupt elites will get you burned – here's why you should do it anyway

BY RUSTY WRIGHT



MODERN WORKPLACES, POLITICS, and international relations can be complex: impossible tasks, conflict, unreasonable demands, temperamental leaders, and moral dilemmas.

You work hard to advance your employers' mission: sacrificing, caring, succeeding. Then you observe some leaders acting unethically. You approach them personally, but they disregard you. So, you blow the whistle and report their activity to superiors, who retaliate and fire you. How do you respond?

Doing the right thing sometimes brings personal suffering.

An ancient Israeli found himself highly placed in a foreign government with some political and personal minefields to navigate. Should he and his colleagues cave to government pressure and do something unethical? Or should they stand for what they believed was right and suffer?

The movie *Daniel and the Fiery Furnace* tells this classic story that has a modern application. Stars include Mena Massoud (*Aladdin*) and Elijah Alexander (*The Chosen*).

King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon ruled much of the ancient Near East. In 605 B.C., he conquered Jerusalem, taking Jews captive. He ordered his chief of staff to select especially strong, learned, wise young Jewish men to train for royal service. Among those were Daniel and his friends Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. Nebuchadnezzar was temperamental. Troubled by disturbing dreams hindering his sleep, he demanded his "magicians, enchanters, sorcerers, and astrologers" tell him both what he had dreamt and its meaning. When they could not, he ordered their execution. Daniel urged his three friends to pray for divine wisdom and lobbied for the wise men's safety. He then both told and interpreted Nebuchadnezzar's dream.

For more detail, read the first four chapters of Daniel in the Old Testament. Ever the egotistical controller, Nebuchadnezzar built a huge gold statue, ordering everyone to worship it. Death in a flaming furnace was the penalty for refusing to worship the statue. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego refused.

Furious, Nebuchadnezzar ordered the furnace heat increased sevenfold. The flames killed the soldiers who threw the three bound prisoners into the furnace.

But then, (spoiler alert), astounded, the king shouted, "I see four men, unbound, walking around in the fire unharmed! And the fourth looks like a god!"

The three men emerged unscathed: no singed hair, no scorched clothing, no smoke odour. Nebuchadnezzar recognised divine involvement: "There is no other god who can rescue like this!" Nebuchadnezzar himself praised and worshipped the biblical God.

This entertaining film has many wise reminders for today's leaders and followers. Choose God's ways, and he will take care of you, in time and eternity. •

Rusty Wright is an author and lecturer who has spoken on six continents. He holds a bachelor's degree in psychology and a master's degree in theology from Duke University and the University of Oxford, respectively.

BUILDING BETTER RELATIONSHIPS

You don't have to be Jell-o

BY ROB FURLONG

REMEMBER THE MOVIE *My Best Friend's Wedding*?

The key characters are Jules, Mike and Kim. Jules and Mike were once lovers but are now best friends and Mike calls Jules to announce his plans to marry Kim. Jules is horrified because she realises that she really does love Mike and starts to undermine Mike's relationship with Kim in a doomed effort to get Mike to marry her instead.

One scene in the movie really gets you thinking though. Jules and Kim are at a restaurant, and Jules is trying, not so subtly, to help Kim see that a relationship with Mike will not work. "Kim," says Jules, "You are crème brûlée and Mike, well… he likes Jell-o!" With an impassioned look on her face Kim cries out, "But I can be Jell-o!" So often relationships go like this! One person (usually the girl) will do anything and be anything to try and please the other person so they can hold on to them at all costs. The thinking is that by being everything your partner wants you to be they will remain happy and never leave. The problem with this kind of reasoning is that many people lose their identity along the way and end up not really knowing who they are at all.

I am not saying that couples should never try and please each other.

An essential component of a healthy relationship requires that each person takes into consideration the likes and dislikes of the other and seeks to adjust their behaviour accordingly.

For example, I would be a selfish and uncaring husband if I disregarded my wife Karen's wishes and simply deposited my dirty washing wherever I pleased! (It is also highly unlikely that if I persisted in such a manner that I would ever get my washing done!!) So, I choose to please her and place my dirty washing where it belongs – in the clothes basket.

A good marriage is made up of countless things like this.

The pressure to conform to the other person's thinking, preferences and opinions is not just confined to a couple's relationship either. Our world bombards us constantly with its ideas and values, particularly in the area of how we should look!

STOCK PHOTO

Ten to 15 years ago the problem was "airbrushing" but with the dawn of AI, a whole new world has opened. Because I fall within a certain age bracket, I regularly have ads promoting healthcare or superannuation complete with photos of so-called ordinary people.

The problem is, the 60-somethings in the photo – there, I've given my age away! – look more like 30-year-olds!

Ah, the wonders of AI! Create a photo, and then simply wipe your wrinkles and flabby bits away! The trouble is we don't have the same advantage in real life. Yet the constant message is that this is how we should be – forever young and beautiful.

If you buy into this lie, then you set yourself up for years of inner pain and frustration and you may well lose your identity. Whether we're a man or a woman, when we take on someone else's ideas about how we should be and how we should act and slavishly follow them, then we sacrifice our individuality and that means the death of our personal growth and discovery. People who expect their partner to conform to their every idea and wish end up not with a responsive lover but with a person devoid of life, passion and vitality.

Marriage is about two people becoming one. They bring their gifts, talents, ideas and passions to the relationship and they are forged together as one as they allow each other the freedom to express these wonderful attributes. To not follow this path is to court the death of the relationship and the result is not "one flesh" but two people who simply live together under one roof. •

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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 - **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**

It pays to compare

BY JOHN HUTCHINSON

AN INSURANCE COMPANY once advertised: "It pays to compare." It sure does. If you want the best deal – and to get somewhere in life – you need to compare.

We compare things without thinking about it: one meal, one car, one road, even one person to another.

Comparisons can bring out the best or worst in us – envy, or deep appreciation.

Comparing planets

Our planet is unique: rivers and lakes, mountains and forests, alive with marine and animal life. Its atmosphere of nitrogen, oxygen, and carbon dioxide, shielded by a thin ozone layer, protects us from deadly radiation. It's like a giant distillery – drawing water from the oceans, pouring it back as rainfall and snow to water the continents, grow plants, and feed us. No other planet supports life. And our world runs with split-second accuracy: if Earth's rotation sped up by 10 km/h, we would freeze; if it slowed by that much, we'd fry like an egg in a pan.

Compared to the galaxies

Do you ever gaze up at the stars? The more we learn about the vastness of the universe, the smaller we seem. It says in Psalm 8:3-4, "*When I look at the sky, which You have made, at the moon and the stars, which You set in their places – what are human beings, that You think of them; mere mortals, that You care for them?*"

He recognised that God created it all – and, astonishingly, that He cares for us.

Comparing people

We're all so different, yet we all think we're normal – and compare others to ourselves. The Bible warns: "*Don't think of yourself more highly than you ought to.*"

In Luke 10, Jesus told a story about this: "*Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee prayed about himself: 'God, I thank You that I am not like other men – robbers, evildoers, adulterers – or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get.' But the tax collector stood at a distance, would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, 'God, have mercy on me, a sinner.' I tell you that this man, rather than the other, went home justified before God. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.*"

The Pharisee thought he was better than everyone else, but God wasn't impressed. The Bible says plainly: "*There is no difference, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God*" (Romans 3:23). The tax collector knew he was a sinner who needed mercy. Jesus said he went home forgiven.

It pays to compare – eternally

That same prayer can be ours today. We can be right with God if we come humbly, admitting our sin: "*God, have mercy on me, a sinner.*" The Pharisee compared himself to others and thought he was doing fine. The tax collector compared himself to God's holiness and realised how desperately he needed forgiveness.

Which comparison will you make? It pays to compare – your eternity depends on it. •

New Zealand's Ardie Savea (centre) tackles South Africa's Siya Kolisi (second from the left) during the Rugby Championship Test match between South Africa and New Zealand in Johannesburg in August, 2024. (Photo by PHILL MAGAKOE / AFP via Getty Images)

MORE THAN RIVALS

BY ROD LAMPARD

All Blacks captain Ardie Savea marked the start of the Rugby's Greatest Rivalry tour in August 2026 by going to church with the Springboks' Siya Kolisi in South Africa.

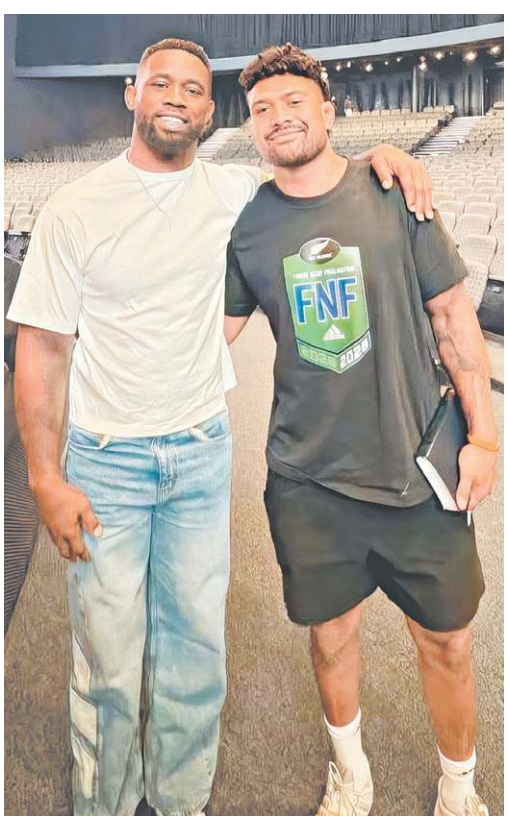
New Zealand's All Blacks were in South Africa to face the Springboks in a series of next-level test matches.

The competition, which is scheduled to occur every four years alternating between NZ and SA, is marketed as "a tour like no other." Both the current All Blacks and Springboks captains are close friends, and firmly committed Christians.

So much so that Savea shared a message and a picture on Instagram, stating, "Nothing better than being in the presence of the Lord with my brother in Christ. A powerful word today on staying faithful in unexpected places. Acts 28:1-11."

Finding his identity

For Savea, his family and faith in Christ are central to keeping life grounded.



Siya Kolisi and Ardie Savea attending church together in South Africa.

In a July 2024 podcast, Savea said going back to the Bible was essential to that process. Specifically, when he's hit with a flood of people's opinions. "Once I found my identity in Christ, and who I actually was, [I] didn't really care about what other people thought of me. I knew who I was through the Lord," he noted.

"Every time I get to a point where I start believing people, listening to their opinions that are not good for me, I just get back to the Word and pray.

"Then I get out of it and talk to people that are like-minded."

He also credited his wife for her support and sacrifices.

One year before this, the All Black dedicated a 2023 Rugby World Cup quarter-final win to the glory of God.

As reported by Premier Christian News, Savea told reporters, "All glory to the Man above."

He did the same on social media, stating, "ALL GLORY TO YOU! THANK YOU, JESUS," wrote Savea, with All Blacks teammate Neo Laulala replying: "JESUS IS THE ONLY WAY!!!"

In August, Savea dropped two live devotional walk-throughs on his YouTube channel from a hotel in Johannesburg.

From the ghetto to grace

While Siya Kolisi doesn't have the same prolific presence online, the Springbok captain is prolific when it comes to sharing his story.

In a 2019 piece for *SportGoMag*, Kolisi wrote candidly about his past, saying, "I was raised by my grandmother because my mother and father were too young to look after me."

Explaining that he lived with seven others and slept on the floor, Kolisi added, "Living in the ghetto, we struggled to get by."

"We couldn't afford to pay for my school and all the fees that went along with it, but I went to school every day because it was where I received my one meal for the day."

Kolisi said rugby "seemed to keep me away from a lot of the bad things going on around me. I lost a lot of friends because while I was focusing on being the best I could be in my sport, they were falling prey to the struggles and temptations of life in the hood."

He went pro-ball in 2012, rose through the ranks and now captains one of the world's top Rugby teams.

"God has been preparing me for such a time as this," he stated.

"While I grew up going to church with my grandmother, and went off and on in the past few years, it wasn't until [2019] that I truly gave my life to Christ."

"I realised," Kolisi recalled, that "I wasn't living according to what I was calling myself: a follower of Christ. I was getting by, but I hadn't decided to fully commit myself to Jesus Christ and start living according to His way.

"I don't have to understand everything in life, and there are so many things I don't, but I know God is in control of it all.

"My job is to do the best I can and leave the rest in His hands."

Kolisi then concluded, "If God can come through for countless people throughout history who had their backs against the world, He can do the same for me."

Although rivals on the field, both Kolisi and Savea have repeatedly said they're brothers in Christ off it.

These new test matches between South Africa and New Zealand help to further seal that deal. •

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