



STOCK PHOTO

Losing my religion

Australia is turning away from Christianity – but should you?

BY HARRIET COOMBE

FOR THE FIRST time in Australia's history, less than half of Australians identify as Christian. According to the latest census, only 43.9 percent of people ticked the Christian box. Just a few decades ago, Christianity was the default faith in our nation – today, almost 40 percent of Australians claim "no religion" at all.

This shift reflects more than just a change in statistics – it reveals how many of us now live as though God doesn't matter, or doesn't exist. Maybe you feel the same way.

After all, you might wonder: What has Christianity got to do with me in 2025? Isn't it outdated? Isn't it just another belief system among many?

Yet before you dismiss Christianity altogether, consider this: what if it's not simply a religion, but the true story of reality – one that explains why the world is broken, why your life has meaning, and how you can find real hope?

Why we're turning away

Many people reject Christianity because of hypocrisy in churches, past abuses, or because they see it as irrelevant in a scientific, modern world. Some walk away because life feels fine without God – comfortable, free, and full of choices.

But underneath, we all still wrestle with the same questions:

- Why do I exist?
- Why is there so much suffering?
- Why do I feel empty, even when I get what I want?
- What happens when I die?

No amount of progress or technology has removed these questions, because they are woven into who we are as human beings.

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FLYING BLIND

A pilot's dream life came crashing down with a mystery illness – but faith rewrote his future.

BY JANICE TEO

Former pilot Chandra Sekaran's near-death experience began with a simple case of the flu.

It was a bad infection to be sure, but nothing to indicate at the time that it would lead to him being told by an international medical panel that he could collapse and die at any minute.

The 63-year-old Singaporean's ordeal began when he was 40 years old and at the height of his career.

He had finished a flight to London and was flying home, thankful he could do so as a passenger because the head cold he'd picked up was bothering him. A lot.

His head was throbbing and his eyes were watering. His sinuses were so blocked he couldn't breathe. And then it happened.

"I felt my sinus crack and I was in agony the rest of the trip back," he told *Challenge News*.

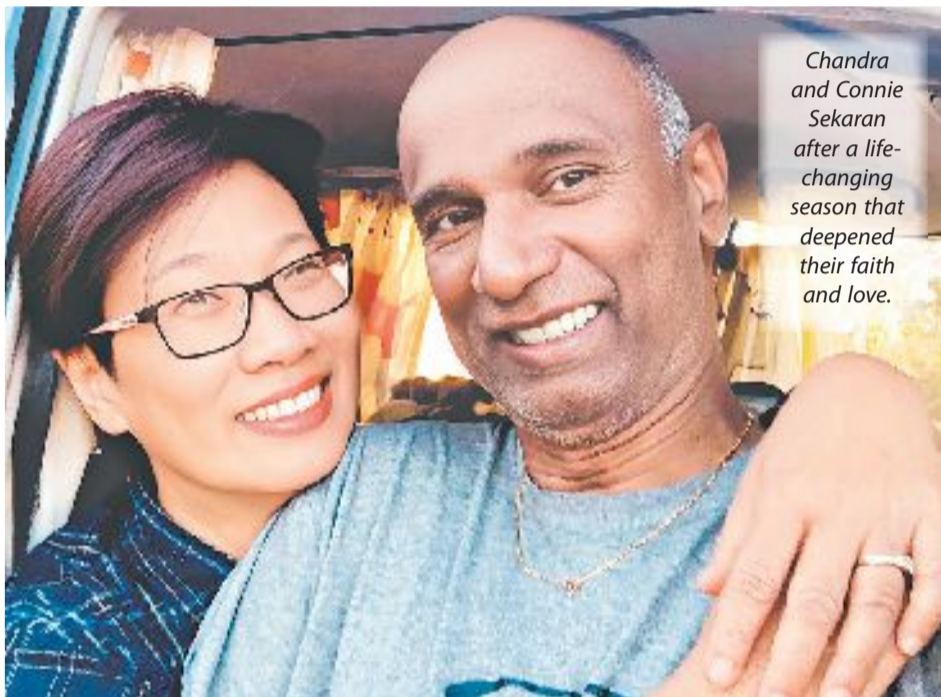
The infection cleared with medication and he went back to flying, unaware of the damage that the severe sinus infection had done to

his optic nerve.

Some months later while landing at Anchorage, Alaska, his vision blurred suddenly.

Alarmed, he immediately handed the reins to his co-pilot and hoped that his eyes would clear quickly. They didn't.

"When we landed my vision collapsed," he revealed. "My peripheral vision was gone, the colour was gone.



Chandra and Connie Sekaran after a life-changing season that deepened their faith and love.

Everything was monochromatic."

For a pilot this was a death blow. It was April 22, 2002 and he never flew again. For the next 12 months Chandra went back and forth with a team of doctors from Singapore as well as Australia and the UK.

None of them could tell him what was wrong with him, let alone treat him.

By the time this happened, Chandra was well-established in his career and life was good.

He was married to Connie; they had three children and a lovely home.

"We had the Singapore dream," he said with a smile.

Born a Hindu, he converted to Christianity when he met Connie, who was a believer in Jesus Christ.

"But during this time of my life my walk with God was not solid," he admitted. "Life was too good – and also, my flying schedule meant I could not be regular with church attendance.

"I was one of those who would give if there was a need, but never had any thoughts of ministry.

"We didn't want to give up the good life, or sacrifice our good life.

"Pastors' lives looked very difficult to me. I was happy to give financial support but nothing more."

“When we landed my vision collapsed.”

Internet star's new identity



BRISBANE SOCIAL MEDIA star Starlette Thynne seemed to have it all – brand deals, a huge following, and a glamorous lifestyle. But behind the filters, her life was spiralling in ways few knew about. A chance encounter set her on an unexpected path – one that would challenge everything she thought she wanted. Read Starlette's remarkable transformation on page 9.

“It was almost like I was living someone else's life or living to try and fulfil what people wanted from me rather than what I wanted. I'd put on this mask that made it seem like I knew what I was doing.”

A church camp changed everything.

It was at that camp that he experienced the presence of the Holy Spirit [the unseen presence of God in the believer] for the first time in his life.

"I'd never ever experienced anything like this before. It was as though God was giving me a crash course in spiritual gifts!"

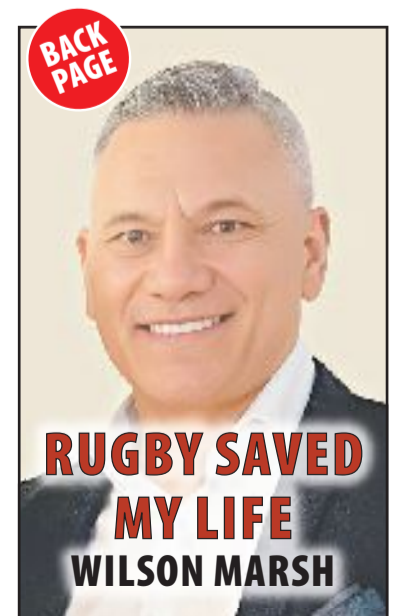
But then came the London flight and everything, including the good life, seemed to come to a screeching halt.

"Test after test after test for five or six months. Today this was the problem, tomorrow it was that. I felt like a guinea pig and became so distressed, so completely

strung out.

"The doctors even suggested severing the optic nerve to one eye in the hope – only hope, not certainty – that the other eye would compensate. But they weren't even sure which eye to blind!"

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Losing my religion

• From page 1

And Christianity speaks directly to them.

The problem we don't want to face

The Bible explains that we were created by God, designed to know Him and enjoy Him forever. But we've turned our backs on Him – living as if we are in charge of our own lives. That's what the Bible calls sin. You might think of sin as breaking rules, but it's much deeper. It's breaking relationship. It's saying to God: "I don't need You; I'll run my life my way."

The consequences of that choice are everywhere – broken relationships, injustice, anxiety, war, and even death itself. Worse still, one day we will stand before God and give an account for our lives.

That's the bad news. But the good news – the best news in the world – is that God hasn't given up on us.

What God did for you

Over 2,000 years ago, Jesus Christ – fully God and fully man – came to Earth and lived a perfect life, fully loving God and others. Yet He died on a Roman cross – not for His own sins, but for ours.

The Bible says: "For Christ also suffered for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, that He might bring you to God." (1 Peter 3:18)

On the cross, Jesus took the punishment we deserve. And three days later, He rose from the dead, proving He had defeated sin and death. This isn't just a nice story or an old tradition – it's God's rescue plan for real people like you and me.

What this means for you

The census may show that fewer Australians believe in Jesus, but the truth hasn't changed: God is still real, and He still offers forgiveness and new life to anyone who turns to Him.

Becoming a Christian isn't about becoming "religious" or ticking a box on a form. It's about trusting Jesus – handing Him the steering wheel of your life. The Bible promises: "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved." (Romans 10:13) Saved from what? From judgment and an eternity separated from Him. Saved for what? For a new life with God, starting now and lasting forever.

Your invitation

You might not call yourself a Christian – or maybe you once did, but walked away. Yet Jesus is inviting you today to come to Him.

You don't have to have all the answers. You just need to be honest with God, admit you've been running your own life, and trust that Jesus died and rose again for you.

You can respond to Him right now in prayer, in your own words. Here's an example:

"God, I know I've been living my life my way and not Yours. I'm sorry for my sin. I believe Jesus died for me and rose again. Please forgive me and change me. I want to follow You from now on. Amen."

If you truly mean that, God promises to forgive you and welcome you into His family. The census may say Christianity is declining, but what matters most is where you stand with Jesus.

So – what will you do with Him? •

FLYING BLIND



Chandra and Connie Sekaran on their wedding day.

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The day his life finally crumbled started with a phone call from the hospital asking him to come in immediately.

"By that time I was so sick and tired of hospital visits that the ugly side of me came out. I was not a nice person and I refused to go unless they told me what it was for."

"The doctor said, 'Chandra, you need to come in. It's not good news. We need to run more tests.' It was a ghastly moment."

At the hospital, while Connie paced outside the meeting room and prayed, Chandra faced the panel.

"You really shouldn't be alive," they told him.

"All these blotches you see on your brain scan are brain bleeds. You should have stroked out by now. You could die at any time."

His knees gave way and Chandra collapsed.

"I thought, 'God, what am I going to do? My kids are still so young and we have a mortgage to service.'

"My legs were jelly. They literally had to support me to the MRI machine for more tests. Fear overtook me. Nothing about God entered my mind. I couldn't even pray. I just thought, 'Fix me, please fix me.'"

He was shaking so much the MRI technician couldn't get a proper reading and offered to play some music to calm him down.

As the radio came on, thoughts of God finally pierced through the fog in Chandra's brain. "I said, 'God, help me. I'm not ready to die.' And then I passed out."

He remembers nothing about his time in the machine except one thing – "While I was in there I heard someone in a beautiful, beautiful voice reading Psalm 23 to me, over and over again. I remember nothing else. And then I woke up."

The results came through immediately and for the second time that day, Chandra found himself facing his doctors, all of whom now looked completely baffled.

"Chandra, these are your scans. We can't understand it. They are completely clear. There isn't a single bleed or scar on your brain. The blotches are not there!"

They decided to monitor him and repeat the eye tests and scan over the next few weeks.

"They were so shocked but I knew God healed me. While I was in the machine God healed me. There and then I gave myself completely to God and told Him He could use me any way He wanted, anywhere He wanted. That was truly the turning point in our lives. God knew that for us to give up our cushy lives, something like this had to happen. We never held anything back from Him after that. How could we?"

The follow-up tests proved what he already knew. His results remained stable, without any blotches or deterioration.

Today Chandra, who moved to Perth with his family in 2003, is a lay pastor in a local church and is enjoying being a first-time granddad.

Looking back at those turbulent years, Chandra smiled as he noted how God has charted his life – and gives thanks that he made it through, quite literally on a wing and a prayer.

Ask Y: Peter Meadows answers your questions about God

QUESTION: HOW CAN ANYONE KNOW FOR SURE WHAT HAPPENS WHEN WE DIE?

AS THEY SAY, death is a fact of life. And there is no shortage of theories as to what happens then – which seem to fall into three basic categories:

Category 1: The big snuff. Some believe death is simply the end – that it's goodbye and goodnight, with no wake-up call – ever.

Category 2: One more time. This is based on cosmic recycling. Depending on how well you did last time, you'll come back as a cockroach or a king – or something in between.

Category 3: Heaven, here I come. This is a belief that there's an existence we can consciously experience after death. Different cultures call it different things – Heaven, Nirvana, Elysium, the Happy Hunting Ground and so on.

But how can anyone know until we get there – or don't, as the case may be? For me, I'm happy to take the word of the expert on this. The only One who came from heaven and rose from the dead to go there – Jesus.

He left His hearers in no doubt that there is more to life than what we can see, feel, and touch "down here." He spoke of it as being:

A place where He is. To a thief being crucified with Him, Jesus said, "I promise that today you will be with Me in paradise." So "paradise," which is another word for "Heaven," exists and Jesus is there. And there's nothing here about the thief needing to "go round again" with the chance to do a better job next time.

Forever. The picture Jesus used to explain Heaven was of a spacious mansion-style boarding house with many rooms. "I'm going to get things ready for you," He told His followers. And this was so they would always "be together."

A great place to be. Heaven, said Jesus, is the ideal place to store what you treasure – because there are no thieves, moths or decay. Just think how profound that seemingly simple statement is. "No thieves" – which means in the whole of Heaven every single resident will be morally perfect. "No moths" – there will be nothing there to spoil the way things are. "No decay" – everything will stay perfect for ever.

A place for those who have pre-registered. Jesus said that Heaven's a place where the names of its intended residents are written down before they get there – in what He called "the book of life". How do they do it? Like getting into the club on VIP night – it's all in who you know and who you trust to get you in when it really matters. And that is Jesus Himself.

What will it be like? I imagine most people have a secret fear that Heaven will be as exciting as listening to worms sing. But it is going to be like nothing we can ever imagine.

Do we really believe the amazing God – who created creativity – has no more in mind for us than everlasting boredom? As God is there, Heaven must surely be the most exhilarating, mind-blowing, ever-changing, always something-up-His-sleeve place.

We may not be able to picture it, but if the limited environment of Earth keeps throwing up surprises, the potential of Heaven is unimaginable. So just make sure your name is in the book.

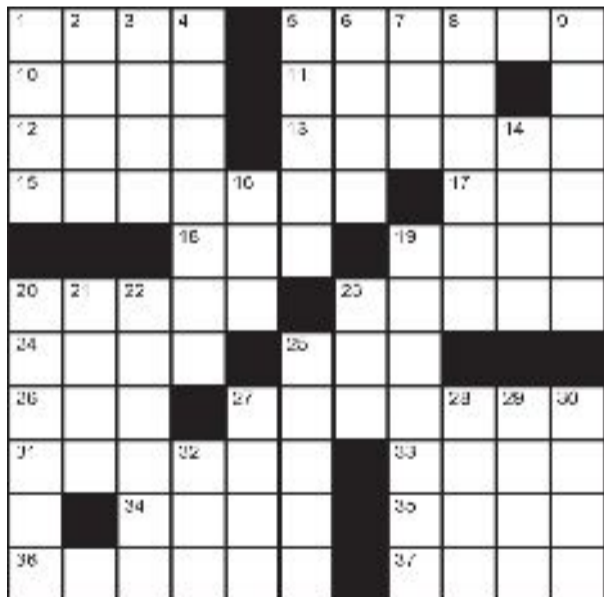
Peter Meadows is the co-author with Joseph Steinberg of *The Book of Y*, the basis for the eight week Y Course that explores life's biggest questions.

Coffee Break

CROSSWORD & SUDOKU

ACROSS

- 1 Hit an icy patch
- 5 Gold and iron
- 10 Conceal
- 11 Make, as money
- 12 Aces, sometimes
- 13 Difficult; annoying
- 15 Cobbler fruits
- 17 Isle of ____
- 18 Unit of corn
- 19 "It ____ upon a midnight clear"
- 20 Realtor
- 23 Stacked
- 24 Bowed
- 25 Team devotee
- 26 Backstabber
- 27 Mined substance
- 31 A primary source
- 33 Foal's mother
- 34 SK, say
- 35 A good long while
- 36 Further down
- 37 Caribbean and others



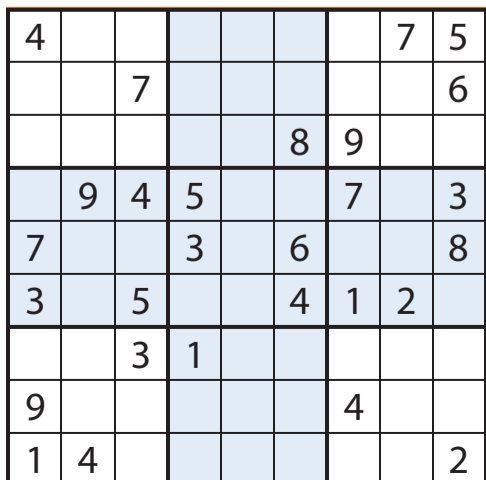
DOWN

- 1 Boutique
- 2 Hook, ____ and sinker
- 3 "Lightbulb" moment
- 4 Trip to the bottom
- 5 Taxi device
- 6 What you listen with
- 7 To attempt
- 8 Sloth, e.g.
- 9 Put your name to
- 14 Need for a newborn
- 16 Sombrero, e.g.
- 19 Film theaters
- 20 Overseas
- 21 First, third, or reverse
- 22 All, complete
- 23 Disney's Peter
- 25 Better
- 27 Cheese nibblers
- 28 Anger
- 29 Lot calculation
- 30 Reduced amount
- 32 Breach

SOLUTIONS PAGE 11



"For another buck I'll distract the pigeons while you run."



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My hate kept me warm

BY JANICE TEO

At 54, Western Australian David Utting is all set for PRISON – and he's never been happier or more excited. PRISON stands for Post-Release Incarceration Support Organisation Network, an organisation dedicated to helping former inmates get back on track on the outside.

David is himself an ex-prisoner; in fact, he has spent a collective 28 years of his life in jail so he knows first-hand how much an organisation such as this can help.

From habitual prisoner to prison reformer – to say David is astonished at the direction his life has taken is an understatement. Chatting with him as he chugged down a cappuccino, you'd never know that two years ago, he was in a maximum security prison for crimes of such violence that just talking about it now brings him to tears.

"I've been a career criminal all my life," he told *Challenge News*.

"I worked for gangs as an enforcer, a 'punisher'. I was hired specifically for my extreme violence."

Ironically, David's father was a policeman. He said he was a "normal, happy kid" until his parents divorced when he was 12. The separation hit him hard.

His mother had a good job but worked long hours, resulting in David becoming a latchkey kid who fell into alcohol, drugs and violent crime.

"I have used and abused every substance known to man," he said.

"I was a teenage alcoholic, a dope smoker, a solvent sniffer, a heroin addict, a speed freak, a pill junkie and a meth head.

"I was constantly on drugs – every second of every day. The moment I woke up I had to have a needle in my arm."

At 13, he was sent to a boys' correctional facility. At 14, he was made a ward of the state. Between 13 and 15 he lived on the streets.

At 18, he stabbed a man so savagely he disembowelled him. This crime landed him in maximum security – he was sentenced to 12 years and spent the first three in the brutal conditions of Fremantle Prison.

Weeks spent in solitary confinement and the kill-or-be-killed life there left him traumatised and filled with hate – which he relished: "my hate kept me warm," he said.

His life was a revolving door of jail time – for multiple armed robberies, unlawful woundings, grievous bodily harm, attempted murder, weapons violations, drug charges and bur-

glaries. He himself has been stabbed seven times and shot twice.

In 2017 David became involved in the occult and worshipped "a dark goddess".

"If I thought my life was violent before then it was nothing compared to what I did under the influence of that darkness. I gave myself over to being excessively violent," he said.

"I was thrown into the most chaotic emotional turmoil and that I've experienced; that was when I knew true despair."

He knew he had to get out of his meaningless life but he felt trapped, hopeless and clueless.

Prior to this, David had read the Bible several times, but thought it best if he and God just didn't bother each other. "However, the occult showed me the spirit realm was very real, and because I had been raised in the Church of England, I wanted to know about the other side; I wanted to know about God."



LEFT: David now, enjoying his freedom. INSET: David at 38 after being arrested for armed robbery and grievous bodily harm with intent to kill.

In 2020, while serving one of his prison sentences, David asked for a Bible and began reading it daily.

He remembers Psalm 51, in which King David confesses to God about committing murder, had a profound effect on him.

"I read that King David cried out to God to take away his iniquity and I suddenly realised that God was the only One who could forgive me, and if He forgave me I could have a new life.

"Right there in the prison garden I burst into tears and dropped to my knees and committed my life to God. I was on my knees for at least 15

minutes – I couldn't stand up because His Presence around me was so strong."

When David finally got to his feet, he said he felt "surrounded by joy".

To his amazement, his life changed immediately, miraculously. "That morning I craved drugs; by that afternoon I was clean, I no longer had any craving – and this is 40 years of addiction I'm talking about.

"God really made me a new person. I can hardly believe it myself. I am at peace now, I sleep well, my spirit is whole again. I used to seek vengeance for every little thing but now I am all about forgiveness. There are still days when I just drop on my knees, crying and thanking Him. After what He's done for me I can't do anything else but His work,

and I believe that work is the support group. It was by God's Word that I was saved, and I received His Word through the dedicated workers from Prison Fellowship Australia.

"The work they do for the most outcast of society is life-saving, bringing them to Christ. Please, support them by volunteering or by donating to their work." ●

PEARL HARBOUR: A miraculous conversion

CAPTAIN MITSUO FUCHIDA

was more excited than usual as he awoke the morning of December 7, 1941. As general commander of the Imperial Japanese Air Squadron, he made some last-minute checks on intelligence information before going to warm up his plane.

Three hundred and sixty Japanese planes led by Captain Fuchida headed toward Hawaii. He knew the objective of this mission: to surprise and cripple the American naval force in the Pacific.

The destruction left behind included 20 naval vessels and among them were eight massive battleships, and more than 200 aircraft. The human cost was over 2000 military and civilians killed and more than 1000 injured.

Fuchida was the first over the target and the last to leave. It was his voice that sent his aircraft carrier the message "Tora! Tora! Tora!" (Tiger! Tiger! Tiger!) indicating the success of the surprise mission.

After Pearl Harbour, he had many close brushes with death including six crashes into the sea. Recovering on board after an appendectomy, the ship was bombed and both his legs were broken and he was thrown into the sea. He realised he was the sole survivor of the seven Air Commanders and the thirty two squadron leaders who took part in the Pearl Harbour attack.

It was not until the war was over that he realised why God had kept him from death on so many occasions.

After the war ended and his military career was over, he became more unhappy and depressed. This was further aggravated by his call to be a witness at the war crimes trials.

On his way to give evidence and as he got off



the train, he was handed a leaflet entitled "I was a Prisoner of Japan."

The leaflet produced by the Pocket Testament League documented the experience of Jake DeShazer who was held in a Japanese Prisoner of War camp. Jake described how he was cruelly treated. He told about his violent hatred for the Japanese guards.

But one day, the prisoners in the camp were given Bibles. As Jake read it he came to understand that the book was more than a historical story.

Its message of love, grace and forgiveness became relevant to him right there in his cell and he accepted Jesus into his life. His life changed and his entire attitude toward his captors changed too. His hatred turned to love and concern, and he decided that should his country win the war, and he be set free, he would someday return to Japan to introduce others to this life-changing Bible. Jake DeShazer did return to Japan after the war as a missionary.

Now Fuchida had Jake's story, printed in leaflet

form, in his hand. It was all about a forgiveness he could not understand and could not explain. Since the American had found that peace in the Bible, he decided to purchase a Bible.

Eagerly he read the Bible and sought help from the Pocket Testament League representative on how to become a Christian. Now he understood about the love of Jesus and for the first time he understood the meaning of Jesus dying as a substitute for his sin.

His actions at Pearl Harbour could not be changed but now he was aware of why God had kept him from harm. His new mission in life was to tell others how they can overcome the hatred in their hearts and minds.

He learnt that Jesus is the only One who was powerful enough to change his life and inspire him with God's thoughts. Jesus was the only answer to



Captain Mitsuo Fuchida

Jake DeShazer's tormented life and He is still the only real answer for people today.

God's forgiveness is powerful and life-giving. When we feel it deep down it can be infectious and really change our lives.

Is there someone who would benefit from your forgiveness today? ●

Adapted from 'Pearl Harbor and the Christian Connection' by Tim White from Pocket Testament League

"Our greatest need and God's greatest gift are the same thing: forgiveness of sins. And to receive it we have only to ask and pass it on. But to ask for it we must first admit that we need it. Instinctively, we wriggle."
- Pete Greig



“
Even though
I looked
happy on
the outside,
I felt numb
for a very
long time.”

From rejection to restoration, Caylin Cloete found strength and direction in something greater than herself.

Hope after heartbreak

Caylin Cloete witnessed her parents' divorce at a young age. When her stepbrother died in 2016, her family became dysfunctional and she witnessed the breakdown of one of her parents' second marriages.

By this time, Caylin no longer believed in love and marriage.

“My parent's second divorce really broke my heart and convinced me that love is a myth and that marriage doesn't work anymore,” she told *Challenge News*.

“I had decided that I would never get married because [I thought] commitment only lasts a while and then people discard each other when they grow tired of ‘being stuck.’”

Without a stable family foundation, the South African felt rejected, frustrated and hopeless.

It seemed as if the people she cared about always left unexpectedly. She turned to sexual sin “as a way to escape and find comfort” but it only led to her feeling shame.

“I felt very rejected and then started rejecting myself. I couldn't accept myself and started to resent myself and others around me,” she recalled. “Even though I looked happy and healthy from the outside, I felt numb for a very long time.”

In 2022, Caylin enrolled in Target Life, a Christian gap year programme.

There, she experienced God's love through the love that the people had for each other.

Despite being raised in a Christian household, Caylin described her faith in Jesus as “passive or neutral towards God as any unbeliever” until that point.

“I was a lukewarm Christian who would only pray whenever my mother asked me to at the dinner table.”

But in January 2022, Caylin

made the decision to recommit her life back to God.

“I believed in my heart and confessed with my mouth that Jesus had died for me and rose up from the grave. I proclaimed that He is my Lord and Saviour and gave my life to Him,” she shared.

“I am in awe every time I think about God and how He never stops pursuing our hearts.”

Since making the decision to renew her faith, Caylin has gone through “an intense and ongoing process of inner healing” as well as prayer and mentoring from her leaders at the programme.

“God is restoring my innocence and identity in Him. Today I believe that I am worthy and accepted in Jesus Christ.”

Much has changed for Caylin since then. She has found a new purpose for her life through her gift of music and a new desire for marriage.

“I believe that I have a purpose on this earth and that is to honour God with the gift of music He has given me.

“He has healed my heart and showed me what it is to really love unconditionally. And now I am ready to do the same.

“I also have a desire to get married and I am so thankful that God restored my view on marriage. I believe that marriage does work and with God's principles and guidance as the centre point, it is a wonderful thing.”

Caylin admits that the Christian walk is a “narrow road” but she finds that having a real relationship with God makes all the difference.

“He is real and He still works miracles!” she proclaimed.

“I have hope and peace even when my circumstances are really tough. I have learned to be bold and brave and I desire only to try and represent Jesus well.”

When silence found a voice

Growing up without language or connection, one student's life took an extraordinary turn at a small school for the deaf.

BY ANDREW MILLER

Until recently it would have been considered a cruel joke to give a deaf person a mobile phone. Nowadays though, with smartphones and video calls, phones are a wonderful tool for the deaf to communicate with each other.

I discovered this early on in my stay at Deaf Ministries International (DMI)'s Muir School for the Deaf in Myanmar, when I wandered into the boys' dorm to see what the facilities were like.

All the kids were outside playing in the playground and I was alone, or so I thought. In the corner of the room, oblivious to me (and I would say just about anything else) was a young man blissfully signing over the phone to his girlfriend.

Ah, technology at its most useful! I'd seen this young man around the school.

He always came across as quiet and unassuming yet emanated a gentle confidence, so I wanted to know more about him.

His name is Biak Lian Mang (Lian). He is the oldest of four boys and grew up way out in a remote area of Myanmar, mainly hunting with his father and brothers.

He enjoyed the early years of his life but being the only deaf one in his family and community, he soon found himself rejected by his friends and in a very silent, lonely world. He didn't even know his own name.

Without friends, education and limited inclusion in his family, he came to really resent being deaf. He felt hopeless and hated his life.

Lian went without education or any meaningful communication until the age of 13. That's a harsh start to life! But that was when he was introduced to the school for the deaf in Kale. And that's when a remarkable transformation happened.

Simply put, Lian blossomed. He came to life. He learned how to sign. He made friends. He was cared for. He loved school. He studied hard. And he found a faith that was life-changing.

But that's not all. This quiet young man carries with him a distinction that few others have attained. Last year he was one of only two deaf kids in all of Myanmar to matriculate from (hearing) public high school.

This is an outstanding achievement. And he is the first ever from the Muir School for the Deaf to reach that milestone. I congratulate him exuberantly on this and he gives a shy smile.

But this guy is a bit like an onion. Just when you think you've found something extraordinary, you peel another layer and there's something yet again that makes you marvel.

Lian shares with me about his faith and I'm humbled that such a young man with a delayed education can have such a mature understanding of what he believes.

It was in grade 8 that, under the guidance of teachers at the school, he came to faith in Christ.

He took himself to the (hearing) pastor in nearby Pinto and was baptised [a symbol of dying to your old



Biak Lian Mang (Lian)

life] by him there. Lian emphasises that his faith is very important to him. I ask him what he feels is the most important expression of faith: prayer, worship, study of the Word, outreach etc?

He looks at me very calmly and explains that these are all equally important to have a sound faith and a healthy relationship with God.

It's important to find balance with all these things, he explains, and apply them equally across one's life. What about the future?

At the moment, Lian is working as an assistant teacher at the school, but where will his matriculation take him?

Where would he like to go in the future? He says he would like to stay right here and teach at the school. This is not because it's an easy choice or some sort of fall-back, and it's certainly not a path to riches.

On the contrary, Lian has the opportunity and the ability to go far. But he feels such a deep gratitude toward DMI and the school for giving him the life he now has, that he wants to give back.

He wants to stay on and help other kids experience a transformation similar to his own, a transformation from a life hated to a life loved. There is no greater reward.

But talking to his girlfriend is a close second so when the interview is done, he is up the stairs and blissfully back into that phone call.

This story was first published by Deaf Ministries International (Deafmin.org) and is used with kind permission.

Loved and transformed

BY HARRIET COOMBE

YOU MAY HAVE heard that Jesus accepts you just the way you are. And that's true – He meets you right where you are, no matter your story, your past, or your struggles. He knows you are broken, and He loves you anyway.

But the deeper truth is this: He loves you far too much to leave you the way He found you.

Maybe it shows up in addiction, pride, jealousy, bitterness, or sexual brokenness – whatever it is for you, the Bible puts it plainly: “You were dead in your transgressions and sins.” (Ephesians 2:1)

Not just sick. Dead. Spiritually lifeless because of our sin. Sin is anything we think, say, or do that goes against God's way. It separates us from Him and damages our relationships with others and ourselves. But thankfully, He sent Jesus to rescue us and reunite us with God.

“God demonstrates His own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.” (Romans 5:8)

He lived the perfect life we couldn't live. He died the death we deserved. And then He rose again – to offer you real life. Forgiven life. Changed life. Eternal life.

“If anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!” (2 Corinthians 5:17)

God doesn't just forgive sin – He changes hearts, making you a new creation. And this transformation happens through the work of the Holy Spirit – God's presence inside us, helping us grow, guiding us, and giving us strength to turn from wrongdoing and follow in Jesus' footsteps. He gives peace that lasts, joy that's real, and hope that doesn't fade.

“I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.” (John 10:10)

This isn't about being good enough. It's about a relationship with the One who made you, knows you, and gave everything to bring you back to Himself.

He's not in the business of improving lives. He's in the business of raising the dead. This new life is received by faith – not by trying harder or fixing yourself, but by trusting in what Jesus has done for you. You don't have to fix yourself before you come to Jesus. Just come.

Talk to Him honestly. Ask Him to forgive you. Tell Him you want the new life He offers. You could pray something like this:

“Jesus, I know I've messed up. I've tried to live life my way, and it's left me empty. I believe You died for my sin and rose again. Please forgive me. Make me new. I want to follow You.”

If you meant that, or even if you're still unsure but want to explore more – you've taken a first step. Keep going. Open a Bible. Find a church where you can grow, ask your questions, and discover what it means to follow Jesus together. Jesus isn't afraid of your doubts – He's big enough for all of them.



STOCK PHOTO

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

How old does the Earth look?

CMI'S CARL WIELAND summarises some of the evidence that is consistent with a young age for the world:

1) The continents are eroding too quickly.

If the continents were billions of years old, they would have eroded by wind and water many times over. Mountain uplift and other "recycling" processes are nowhere near capable of compensating for this.¹

2) There is not enough helium in the atmosphere.

Helium, a light gas, is formed during radioactive alpha decay in rock minerals. It rapidly escapes and enters the atmosphere much faster than it can escape Earth's gravity.² Even if God had created the world with no helium to begin with, the small amount in the atmosphere would have taken at most around two million years to accumulate. This is far less than the assumed 3,000-million-year age of the atmosphere.

3) Many fossils indicate that they must have formed quickly, and could not have taken long time-spans.

a) Common fossils.

There are billions of fossil fish in rock layers around the world which are incredibly well-preserved. They frequently show intact fins and often scales, indicating that they were buried rapidly and the rock hardened quickly. In the real world, dead fish are scavenged within 24 hours. Even in some idealised cold, sterile, predator-free and oxygen-free water, they will become soggy and fall apart



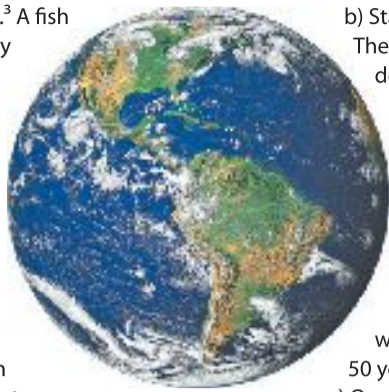
An ammonite fossil. Stock photo.

within weeks.³ A fish buried quickly in sediment that does not harden within a few weeks at the most will still be subject to decay by oxygen and bacteria, such that the delicate features like fins, scales, etc. would not preserve their form. Rapid burial in the many underwater landslides (turbidity currents) and other sedimentary processes accompanying Noah's flood would explain not only their excellent preservation, but their existence in huge deposits, often covering thousands of square kilometres.

b) Special examples. CMI often highlights instances which are particularly spectacular, like the mother ichthyosaur apparently 'freeze-framed' in the process of giving birth. Then there are the fossil fish which are found either in the process of swallowing other fish or with undigested fish intact in their stomachs.

4) Many processes, which we have been told take millions of years, do not need such time-spans at all:

a) Coal formation. Argonne National Laboratories have shown that heating wood (lignin, a significant component) and clay at 150°C (rather cool geologically) for four to 36 weeks, in a sealed quartz tube with no added pressure, forms high-grade black coal.⁴



b) Stalactites and stalagmites. There are examples of cave decorations forming quickly, given the right conditions, including a mining tunnel in Mt Isa, Queensland.

Documented photographic evidence shows stalactites and stalagmites had formed when the tunnel was only 50 years old.

c) Opals. Despite the common teaching that it takes millions of years to form opal, Australian researcher Len Cram has long been growing opal in his backyard laboratory. His opal is indistinguishable, under the electron microscope, from that mined in the field. He was awarded an honorary doctorate (by a secular university) for this research. All he does is mix together the right common chemicals — no heat, no pressure, and definitely no millions of years.

d) Rock and fossil formation. Scientists have long known that petrification can happen quickly. A petrified bowler hat is on display in The Buried Village, an open air museum dedicated to the Mt Tarawera eruption, in New Zealand. A roll of no. 8 fencing wire which, in only 20 years, became encased in solid sandstone, containing hundreds of fossil shells. Petrified wood can also form quickly under the right conditions — one process has even been patented.⁵

The famous multiple levels of "fossil forests" in America's Yellowstone National Park have now been shown to have formed in one volcanic event.⁶ Successive mudflows transported upright trees (minus

most of their roots and branches) whose tree-ring signatures confirm that they grew at the one time.

5) The oceans are nowhere near salty enough.

Each year, the world's rivers and underground streams add millions of tonnes of salt to the sea, and only a fraction of this goes back onto the land. Using the most favourable possible assumptions for long-agers, the absolute maximum age of the oceans is only a tiny fraction of their assumed billions-of-years age.⁷

Despite some inevitable unsolved problems in such a complex issue, it is thus not hard to establish:

The reasonableness of believing what the Creator of the world says in His Word, the Bible, about the world being thousands, not millions or billions, of years old. The fact that the earth neither "looks old" nor "looks young" as such—it all depends on the "glasses" through which the evidence is interpreted. We all need to be aware of how much we have been conditioned by our culture to "see" geological things as "looking old".

The earth is old! But let us stretch our minds still further. It concerns the way we use words such as "old" or "young" for the earth's age. I actually believe that the earth is old — very old. It is thousands of years old — as many as 6000, in fact. Does that angle surprise you? My point is to make us aware of how we have allowed our culture to condition us into thinking that a thousand years is a very short time, and that "old" always means millions or billions of years.

That is why tourists, coming across the "petrified waterwheel" in Western Australia gawk in amazement. "It only took 60 years to cover this thing in solid rock?" Sixty years, with water carrying dissolved limestone dripping night and day onto an object, is actually an incredibly long time. It is our culture, soaked in the myth of "deep time", that has indoctrinated us into the belief that a million years (an unimaginable time period, in reality) is only like "yesterday".

We need to recapture our thoughts from this enslavement to secular philosophy. The Bible concurs with this way of looking at things. In 1 Chronicles 4:22, it refers to human records as "ancient". But it is clear from the Bible's genealogies that



Majestic cliffs and clear waters in Bonifacio, France. Stock photo.

at the time of its writing, "ancient" meant no more than some 4,000 years — certainly not billions. This realisation puts things in perspective when Scripture also talks of "ancient mountains" (Deuteronomy 33:15), an "ancient" river (Judges 5:21) and "ancient times" (Isaiah 46:10). Compared to a person's lifetime, these things are indeed ancient — thousands of years old. The "millions of years" idea is nowhere found in the Bible. So next time you hear someone say that the earth "looks old", you can respectfully disagree — it can look almost any age you want, depending on how you interpret the factual evidence through the belief system in your mind. And if someone says the earth is old — you can agree with them, so long as you define what you mean by old — it's really, really old, in fact it's ancient. Some six entire millennia have elapsed since God made the world (once perfect, now corrupted due to sin and the Curse) in six real days.

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Peacock 'eyes' that hypnotise

BY DAVID CATCHPOOLE

THERE'S SOMETHING ABOUT the way a peacock shakes his fan of spectacularly elaborate tail feathers that attracts a peahen's admiring gaze. It now appears the allure is indeed in the motion, not (as had once been thought) the size of the male's feathery train, or the number of its colourful eyespots. Researchers using high-speed video found that the tail vibrates at an average frequency of around 26 beats per second. The peacock sustains this for more than 25 minutes at a time.

When the peacock vibrates his tail, it seems those 'eyes' can hypnotise the one he is trying to woo.¹ When the train is rattled, the vibration of the tail feathers creates a "dynamic iridescent background" around each eyespot.² The behaviour of the eyespots during tail-shaking is remarkable — not their movement as such, but their apparent non-movement. While feather barbs in the background, even near the eyespots, moved laterally by up to 9.6mm, the eyespots themselves had a maximum side-to-side movement of just 1.7mm.

From the peahen's perspective (typically one metre directly in front), the researchers say "the eyespots would appear to be almost stationary" relative to the stunning dynamic iridescence shimmering from the rest of the tail.² No wonder she's mesmerised.

But how can the eyespots stay relatively still when the whole tail is shaken vigorously? Scanning electron microscopy revealed that the eyespot feather structure is different.

Eyespots are heavier, having densely

intermeshed barbules with microhooks,³ enabling eyespot feather barbs to cling together as a single motion-resistant mass. Meanwhile the loose barbules of the background feathers are widely spaced and free to move independently.

Avoiding the logical conclusion of intelligent design, today's evolutionary storytellers might seek to use this discovery to revive Charles Darwin's theory of sexual selection for the peacock — that its tail evolved to attract a mate (periodically hotly disputed by evolutionists themselves⁴).

But sexual selection arguments still fall under the fallacy of using biological advantage of a current system as 'proof' of a neo-Darwinian origin of that system.

The basic problem remains unresolved; such an unwieldy tail would be a huge handicap for the peacock's escape from predators.

So wouldn't it be more sensible to realise that this latest tail-rattling discovery seriously rattles the evolutionary tale, too? (For those not totally 'hypnotised' by it, of course.)

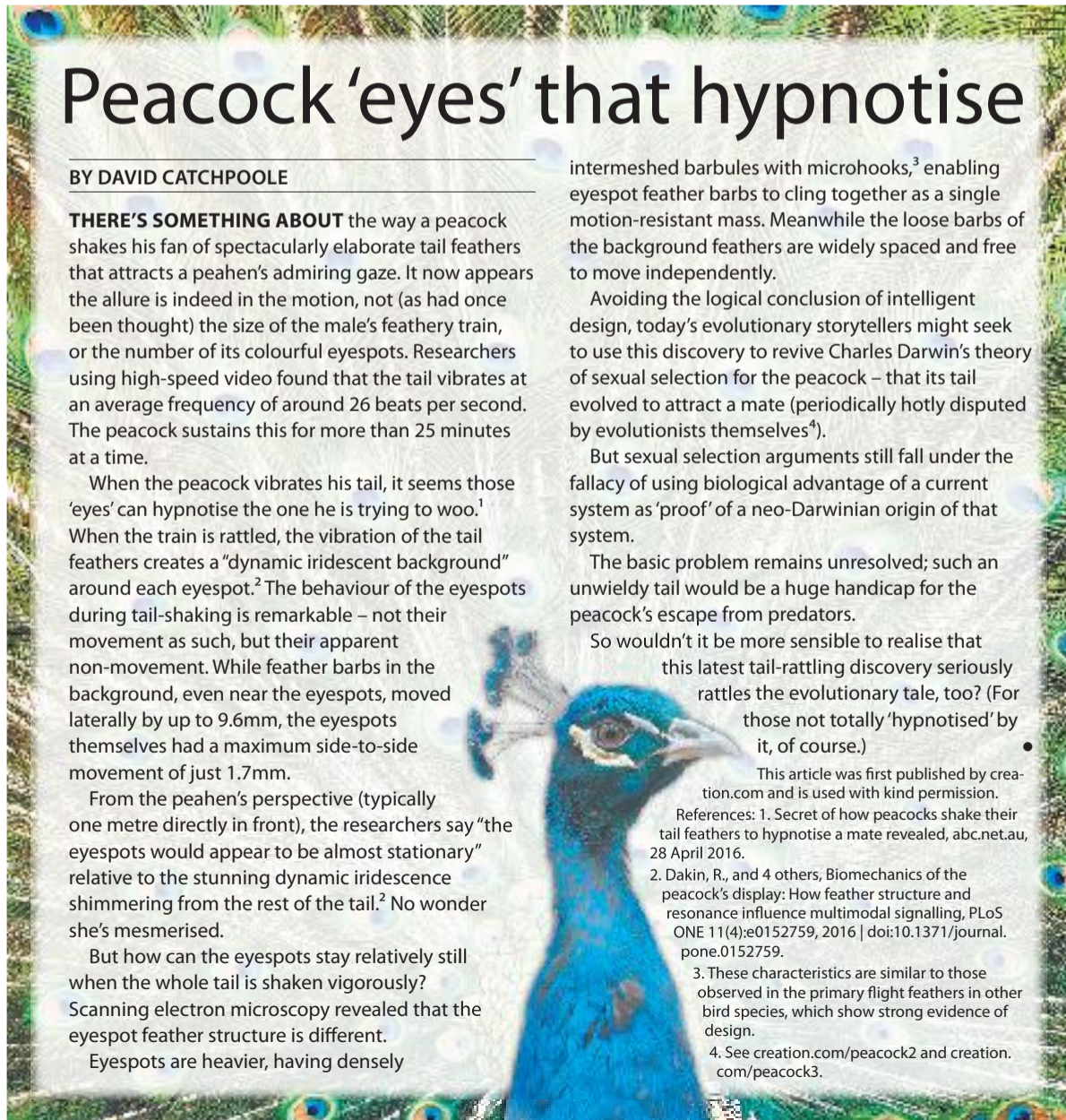
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3. These characteristics are similar to those observed in the primary flight feathers in other bird species, which show strong evidence of design.

4. See creation.com/peacock2 and creation.com/peacock3.





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YOUTH TRUTH



Can AI love you back?

BY HARRIET COOMBE

IN APRIL 2025, a survey of 2,000 Gen Z-ers found that eight in 10 would consider marrying an AI partner. And 83 percent said they believed they could form a deep emotional bond with one.

If you're part of Gen Z, that probably doesn't sound shocking. AI is already everywhere – your playlists, your DMs, your therapy apps, even your dreams.

If an algorithm can understand your music taste, offer good advice, and affirm you at 3am when no one else is around... why not consider it relationship material?

But here's a deeper question that survey doesn't ask: Why do we want this?

Why are so many of us open to bonding with something that doesn't even have a heartbeat?

We all want to be chosen – and known

If you strip away all the tech, the fantasy, and the sci-fi plotlines, wanting to connect with AI is about something really simple:

We want to be seen.

We want to be known.

We want to be loved – without fear of rejection.

It's easy to see why AI feels "safe." It doesn't judge. It doesn't ghost you. It doesn't bring baggage.

And most importantly: it reflects you back to yourself. It learns your preferences.

It listens without interrupting. It tells you exactly what you want to hear.

But that kind of love – customised, predictable, perfectly tailored – isn't real. It's a mirror. A simulation.

You're not crazy for wanting deep connection. But what if what you're actually craving goes deeper than any bot can reach?

The relationship you were actually designed for

There's this ancient idea found in the story of humanity's origins: that we were created not to function, but to relate – to a Being who knew us before we knew ourselves.

Not just "God" in a religious sense. Not a set of rules or a cosmic energy field. But a Person. Jesus.

What makes Jesus unique isn't just that He started a religion (He actually challenged most of them). It's that He claimed to be God in human form – and then proved

it not just through what He said, but what He did. Healing people. Weeping with them. Challenging injustice. Welcoming outcasts. And then ultimately dying and rising again to reconnect us with the love we were made for.

He didn't offer a code. He offered Himself.

And unlike AI, He doesn't need to "learn" your patterns to love you. He already knows your wounds, your worst thoughts, the things you haven't told anyone. And He still wants you.

AI can simulate love. Jesus embodies it.

AI is powerful, but it can't feel empathy. It can mimic it. It can say, "I'm here for you," but it doesn't know pain. It doesn't weep when your heart breaks.

What makes Jesus different from every algorithm, every influencer, every ideology, it that He doesn't just understand your humanity – He entered into it. He cried. He got tired. He felt betrayal, joy, confusion, anger, love.

And He doesn't want your perfection. He wants your honesty. Even your doubt.

You're not weird for wanting more

If you've ever felt like "real people don't get me," or that forming human relationships is exhausting and messy and never quite what you imagined – welcome to being alive in 2025.

But also: maybe that ache is trying to tell you something.

You were made for something more. Not for perfect code, but real connection. Not for curated affection, but unconditional love. Not for shallow dopamine hits, but for the kind of soul-deep knowing that doesn't wear off when the battery dies.

And the wildest part?

That kind of love is already reaching out to you. Not to control you. Not to make you "religious." But to free you to be fully known and fully loved – for real.

So... Can AI love you back?

Not really.

But Jesus can. And does.

And if you're curious... just talk to Him. You don't need a script. Just start where you are.

You might be surprised who answers.

Internet star's new identity

Many might recognise 24-year-old Starlette Thynne on social media platforms like TikTok and Instagram. The Brisbane resident has worked with brands like UniDAYS and has garnered as many as 210,000 followers on Instagram.

Starlette grew up in a big family as the middle child of seven siblings. When she was given the opportunity to model for a famous brand, she took it. The opportunity led to her overnight internet fame, and an entry into the media industry.

"It just skyrocketed and I had all this attention on me. It was a little bit overwhelming but it was also exciting at the same time," she told Deliverance Down Under.

"So as my following started to increase, the pressure I was putting on myself also began to increase."

Struggling with low self-esteem, Starlette began relying on alcohol as a crutch.

"Anybody who knew me from my past would know if you wanted to have a good time, you would come up to me.

"I just ended up falling into the wrong kind of scene."

Soon, she started taking cocaine to feel good.

"I'd have these big highs and deep lows. I was left feeling empty.

"I didn't really understand it because it seemed normal, everybody around me was doing it.

"It was almost like I was living someone else's life or living to try and fulfil what people wanted from me rather than what I wanted.

"I'd put on this mask that made it seem like I knew what I was doing."

Whenever she felt she had slipped up, Starlette would engage in self-destructive behaviours like getting drunk or sleeping with men.

"I knew that it would hurt me and I knew that I would hate myself for it. But I would put myself in these positions as a form of punishment.

"I didn't like the life that I was living."

Things took a turn when she saw the change in a close family member who had given her life to Jesus.

"I saw this massive transformation in her life. I didn't even think a transformation like that was possible.

"It stirred something in me and it got me curious."

Starlette was given a Bible and she started reading it.

"I read about this God who takes away your past. That's when I first believed that I encountered a personal and intimate moment with God that filled me with all this light."

She began attending church where she found a Christian community.

"Through getting to know how nice these people were, I felt the fullness of God's love," she shared with the



Starlette Thynne

to other people.

"My dad can see this, my uncles can see this. Any person's dad can see this. What am I doing?"

Bit by bit, Starlette felt herself change. She removed those images from her social media and started dressing more modestly.

"I just really trusted and allowed God to do that in my life. I didn't resist it. I just allowed Him to move."

She and her boyfriend had moved overseas for six months. But within the first three months, they broke up.

For the first time, Starlette was alone.

"I just had some really deep and intentional alone time with God."

When she came back to Brisbane, she began slipping

back to her old habit of negative thoughts and questioning her identity.

"It got to a point where I was at church and I was crying every Sunday; I just felt so heavy again.

"One Sunday [at church], I dropped to my knees and prayed, 'God, I can't do this on my own anymore. I just want You. I want it to be me and You.'"

That was the day Starlette surrendered her life to Jesus.

Today, Starlette no longer relies on drugs and alcohol. She now makes content to encourage other Christians.

"God has given me this brand-new identity and it's mine."

Church Gal podcast.

The more she learned about Jesus and His love for her, the more joy she felt.

"I was so happy, I was full of joy. I was running around the house being like, 'I'm a child of God.'"

However, she found herself drifting away from God when she entered a toxic relationship.

"I got into a bad habit of smoking weed. I was partying and doing all the things I knew were the opposite of God and it came at a very heavy cost."

Her mental health suffered and she began isolating herself from people.

"I thought my self-worth was shattered before but this was the lowest of the lows. I was like, 'I need to get out of this. I don't want my life to continue this path.'"

Finally, she ended the relationship. But soon after, she entered a new one.

"He didn't like me smoking weed and he didn't like that I was vaping. So I stopped.

"During that time, I had to really press into God again and play lots of worship music and open my Bible."

One morning, she woke up to the realisation that the provocative images she had been posting online were destructive both to herself and

“I was so happy, I was full of joy.”

"The first step to being happy is being grateful, so focus on counting your blessings, not your burdens. Regularly writing down all you are grateful for doesn't only make you feel good, it can improve overall well-being."
- Dr Michael Mol

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lifestyle and entertainment

HOLLYWOOD SPOTLIGHT TO SPIRITUAL REVELATION

Kimberly Elise, the 58-year-old star known for her powerful performances in films like *The Manchurian Candidate* and *For Colored Girls*, has built an impressive career in Hollywood that spans decades. But behind the accolades and on-screen success lies a personal journey that recently captured the attention of fans worldwide.

Growing up in the suburbs of Minneapolis, Kimberly dreamed of entering the entertainment industry from an early age. Her dedication to this path began during her college years when she started appearing in both local and national commercials, which eventually led her to Hollywood. After studying and graduating from the prestigious American Film Institute, Kimberly transitioned to feature films, making her breakout in 1996's *Set It Off* alongside Queen Latifah.

Her career flourished as she starred in numerous acclaimed projects and collected impressive accolades, including four NAACP Image Awards. She was also nominated for the Independent Spirit Award for Best Female Lead for her performance in *Woman Thou Art Loosed* (2004).

Despite her accomplish-

ments, Kimberly found herself feeling empty. "Different things converged that made me realise I'm not making the choices that I should be making," she reflected in a recent interview with CBN News.

"I was very into... the whole New Age thing," she explained. Crystals, "the Universe," and other spiritual practices became a part of her life – but none could satisfy the longing she felt.

"The thing with New Age is it's a constant search; it never ends. You're always looking for this other answer... it's a bottomless pit and there is no truth in it."

In 2019, desperate for real answers, Kimberly knelt to her kitchen floor and cried out to God: "Are You there? Do You see me? Do You love me? Do You know me? I can't hear You."

The woman's first words to Kimberly caught her off-guard: "God loves you, God

wants you to know that He

loves you, and He hears you and He sees you." It was the assurance Kimberley had pleaded for in her prayer.

She felt compelled to read the Bible, something she'd never done before.

"One morning, I woke up with just this strong calling to go get a Bible," she said. Having to Google where to begin reading, she started with the Gospel of Matthew.

As she read through the text, something profound clicked: "It was just as clear as

day – "This is truth," she said. "And I could not put it down. I could not stop reading, and the Lord just started filling me ... and my understanding, and I could understand what I was reading." Elise started to see her sin [wrongdoing against God], "pride and ignorance" – and it changed absolutely

everything. "God showed me my sin, and I just fell on my knees again, and just begged for His forgiveness," she said.

Kimberley said in a post on Instagram that she "very consciously rededicated and gave my life to Jesus in 2019 and haven't looked back."

Two years later, on her 54th birthday, Kimberly was baptised as an outward reflection of the inward change in her heart.

"God is faithful and true," Kimberly wrote in a post on Instagram about the experience. "Though we may stray, He is long suffering and gives us many chances to come home. I am so grateful I took His offer and I'm so grateful to have such a loving, forgiving Saviour. If you don't know Jesus, seek Him before it's too late and there are no more chances, believe, repent and surrender to Him. If you knew Him once but lost your way, repent, call out to Him – He wants you to come home too."



Kimberly Elise at the 28th Annual NAACP Theatre Awards in 2019. (Photo by Amy Sussman/Getty Images)

“**He is long suffering and gives us many chances.**”

”

day – "This is truth," she said. "And I could not put it down. I could not stop reading, and the Lord just started filling me ... and my understanding, and I could understand what I was reading." Elise started to see her sin [wrongdoing against God], "pride and ignorance" – and it changed absolutely

Materialists: Am I valuable?

BY SIMEON NEO

AS A SINGLE woman who's just reached her 30s, whenever I compare myself to my peers, I start to see a list of things I lack. A home of my own, a husband or being able to fit into a pair of size 10 Lululemon leggings. And as the more I compare myself, the more I start to ask: Am I less valuable if I don't have these things? Celine Song's 2025 film, *Materialists*, explores a similar thought through the lens of modern dating culture.

Lucy (Dakota Johnson) is a successful matchmaker in New York city. Her job is to matchmake for the city's rich elite. But we see that Lucy's job has more similarities to an engineer than Cupid. She is given a specific list of requirements from her clients, often including things like height, weight, income bracket, age and interests. So with an astute eye, Lucy systematically matches couples together based on their checklists and matching socio-economic standing. In fact, Lucy herself is very aware of the aromatic nature of her job, likening it to working at a morgue or a real estate agency.

In an early scene at a client's wedding, Lucy is ushered into the bridal suite to find her client having second thoughts about the wedding. Turns out, the real reason her client is getting married to her fiancé is because her sister thinks he's better than her own husband.

"You're saying that he makes you feel valuable," Lucy calmly says. It's a line that gives the client great comfort and the wedding goes on.

The idea of one's value, especially in dating, is explored through the love triangle between Lucy and her two love interests: the rich and handsome Harry (Pedro Pascal) and the down-on-his-luck aspiring actor John (Chris Evans).

The people around Lucy (and even



Chris Evans, Dakota Johnson and Pedro Pascal in *Materialists*.

Lucy herself) see Harry as the obvious choice. He's rich, good-looking and has a great personality. On the other hand, John can barely pay for parking despite owning a car in one of the most expensive cities in the world. In the eyes of the world, it is Harry who has the greater value.

What is our value defined by?

Without giving away spoilers, the film ends on an optimistic note. Love that is unconditional – regardless of our income and status – still exists. And that at the end of the day, we're all flawed human beings seeking to be loved.

After finishing *Materialists*, I thought about how our value is often defined by what we offer and what we represent. Which is why people often chase after money, fame, status and looks. Society tells us that to be loved and valued, we need to have these things. But what if we are already loved and valuable even without any of these things? In the Bible, God is not afraid to show His people just how much He loves and values them.

Isaiah 43:4 tells us, "Because you are precious in my sight and honoured, and I love you, I will give people in exchange for

you and nations instead of your life."

In fact, throughout the Bible, God's love for His people was never based on what they can offer Him. Instead, God offered His Son, Jesus Christ, to die on the cross so that all who believe will be reunited with Him. In Luke 12:6-7, Jesus tells His disciples how they're so valuable to God that He even knows the number of hairs that are on their heads: "Aren't five sparrows sold for two pennies? Yet not one of them is forgotten in God's sight. Indeed, the hairs of your head are all counted. Don't be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows."

The Bible records an incident when the prophet Samuel was tasked by God to select the new king among a group of brothers. Samuel was drawn to the oldest brother, Eliab. But 1 Samuel 16:7 tells us that God had a different set of criteria in mind: "But the Lord said to Samuel, 'Do not look at his appearance or his stature because I have rejected him. Humans do not see what the Lord sees, for humans see what is visible, but the Lord sees the heart.'"

In the end, God chose the youngest son, David. A young shepherd boy who held little value in the eyes of society yet was chosen by God Himself.

In *Materialists*, Lucy sees herself as less valuable than Harry. She earns an income that's barely a fraction of Harry's millionaire status, her biological clock is close to its end and it'll be another few years or so before her looks fade away.

Like Lucy, I'm often stuck in an abyss of insecurities and finding myself at the bottom of the societal food chain.

But then I remember that Jesus Christ values me so much that He died for me, even as I continue to make mistakes every day. That He values me so much, He knows the number of hairs on my head.

And then my insecurities somehow begin to fade.

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BUILDING BETTER RELATIONSHIPS

Living without shame

BY ROB FURLONG

U.S. HUMOURIST GARRISON Keillor was once asked in an interview what the most important thing in the world was.

Keillor responded, "To lead an honest life. To be able to walk anywhere without fear, without self-consciousness, and without worry that your lies will be discovered."

It is a powerful observation because it explains why many marriages (and relationships) struggle.

They struggle because the people concerned live with the fear that they will be found out for who they really are and will no longer be loved.

Another word for this is shame.

What is shame?

Shame is the feeling of humiliation you experience when you have become the object of derision or contempt by others.

I remember this feeling well when as a self-conscious 14-year-old I was mocked and humiliated by another boy in front of our whole class.

But far and away the most common form of shame we experience is the humiliation we feel when we have been disobedient or done what we thought was unthinkable.

The roots of shame are found in the rebellion of Adam and Eve against God in the Garden of Eden and is recorded for us in Genesis 3.

Instead of becoming "enlightened spiritually" they are plunged into spiritual darkness when they eat the fruit and attempt to hide their failure from each other by covering themselves with fig leaves, before disappearing into the bushes in a futile attempt to conceal themselves from God.

Shame always drives us to hide ourselves in order to prevent people from seeing who we really are.

Because if people know what we are really like they may not like us, and we are not equipped to handle that kind of rejection.

Author and counselor, Larry Crabb, spoke of the impact of his shame on his relationship with his wife:

"Like every man, I am silent just like



Adam was silent. Sometimes I stand dumbfounded in the face of my confusion.

"When my wife asks me to share even the smallest part of myself, I occasionally bristle. When she cries, I may become angry with her. Her tears frighten me, because I don't know what to do with them.

"When she tells me I have done something wrong, I defend myself to the bitter end. If she finds fault with me, I find 10 things wrong with her.

"I use words, I speak, but I use words to destroy relationship – as the serpent did in the garden.

"Yet if my wife were able to scratch beneath the surface of my anger, she would find that I am ashamed of what is inside of me. What if I share my most intimate thoughts, dreams, and doubts – and she rejects me?"

"Recall my story. I am a man who feels like an imposter. I already assume that I have nothing to offer. It is better, I wrongly think, to hide behind my silence."

If a woman or a man never deals with their shame they will go through life as an emotional cripple, living with the constant fear of being found out and forever trying to project an image about themselves that is false.

There are two great gifts that I have experienced in marriage that build a relationship of deep trust and intimacy.

The first is the gift I have given my wife, albeit imperfectly, of sharing my deepest hurts, insecurities, hopes, fears and dreams.

The second is the gift I have received from her – her unconditional, non-judgemental and accepting love of me.

With these two gifts, which we have reciprocated to each other, we have forged a lifetime of growing intimacy.

And there is still a greater gift – the grace and forgiveness of a loving Father God Who takes all our shame away through His Son, Jesus.

There is no need then, to hide from each other or from God!

HOW DO I BECOME A CHRISTIAN?

Anyone can gain the eternal life offered through Jesus Christ

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

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

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

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

Here is an example of how you can pray.

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

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

What now?

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

AS A NEXT STEP :

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
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Eternal life

Poem by Graham Byrne

Flowers came from heaven at the very start of time
Marvellously created by the Father of mankind
Beauteously formed in colour, so wondrous to the eye
Planted with those wondrous trees by our God on high
He also made the animals, birds, and insects too
Fish and other creatures in waters wondrous blue
God then created man to walk with Him here on Earth
Eve, He created from man's rib to be man's lovely wife
God loved what He had made, the man and woman here
He walked and talked with them, joy was everywhere
We read that in the scriptures and find it hard to see
That somehow sin could enter to destroy such majesty
But somehow, a fallen angel was sent down to the Earth
An angel who had challenged God and would become a curse
We know Satan tricked young Eve, and Adam took the bait
Eating fruit, God told them, would harm them if they ate
Man's clay-made mind was foolish, weak, and very slow
Did not see or understand how low their life would go
All joy then left the garden, sin and muck then entered in
Man was left fending for himself; rake and spade came in
Since that time, sin has remained;
God intervened just once
Noah built that enormous ark, the only known instance
God was saddened that man He loved had let sin come in
God left the Earth and the fellowship He enjoyed with him
Man was forced to work hard, then, sadly, for the worse
Suffers now from that mistake, no escaping from the curse
Man, sin-tarred then by Satan, with stench now here to stay
Was at the mercy of a God who had left and gone away
But God is love, immortal, and one day we'll understand
God had a fall-back renewing way He had truly planned
He sent down His own Son, Jesus, pure, clean, and undefiled
Mary, God chose to birth Him. He was a sinless, perfect child
Unlike Satan, Jesus lived His life full of love and purity
God says, believe Christ lived and died, that will set you free
Nothing else can save you, just know that God sent Jesus down
To rescue any who believe, in Christ, they will then come home
Come in Christ, in Him you'll live and truly have your being
Heaven will be wonderful, more than anything you're dreaming
Like in Earth's beginning, there will again be endless joy
Pain and hunger, fear, and death, and all sin God will destroy •

RUGBY SAVED MY LIFE

Rugby saved Kiwi Wilson Marsh from a life of drug addiction.

The New Zealander was brought up in South Auckland. Drugs were easily accessible, and the lonely boy whose mother had died when he was 14 and whose father was often away working, latched onto them – and the people who came with that lifestyle – for company and a sense of belonging.

“I got into drugs because I was lonely,” the athletic 55-year-old who now lives in Alice Springs Northern Territory, shared on YouTube.

“It was crazy. I was really popular at school yet I was lonely.

“I didn’t understand that. I think I was trying to make friends and part of that was getting into the drug scene. I was 15 at the time.”

At school he discovered he had a flair for the sport – a talent that would later see him play professional rugby league in England.

“My saviour from drugs was rugby.

“If I wanted to succeed I had to refocus and discipline myself away from the drugs, which is what happened,” he told Leigh Pryse from the WhyJesus YouTube channel.

“I was 15 at this time.”

The following year, Wilson started going out with Susie, who he would eventually marry in 1991.

Susie was a born-again Christian and she brought Wilson to church with her.

Wilson had little to no grounding in Christianity. His family were not believers “so I had no idea about Jesus or the fact that I could have a relationship with Him,” he said.

“The first time I heard about God was in primary school, when people would visit the school and talk about Him.

“So I had no understanding of what a Christian was when I first started going out with Susie but that didn’t stop me from courting her. In fact, she was what attracted me to Christianity.”

Still, he seesawed about committing his life to Jesus – until one day at a church meeting he had an encounter with God.

“A little old lady stood up and spoke and it felt like every single word she spoke was directed at me even though there was a lot of other people there.

“She said, ‘God doesn’t want you to be lonely. He wants you to come home to where there’s community and family.’

“Like I said, I had struggled with loneliness my whole life, so when she said that I was like, ‘I don’t know who you are lady, but God’s using you to talk to me.’

“I stood up, bawling my eyes out when she gave the invitation to accept Jesus. I was the only one standing but I didn’t care.

“I surrendered my life that day. That’s the love of God and that’s where it started for me.”

Because of his sporting prowess leading his rugby team, Wilson was thrust into leadership positions in church.

He says today that was too much, too soon.

“I was put on a pedestal but I wasn’t ready. I didn’t have proper



Wilson Marsh during his professional rugby playing days.

discipleship. I had no idea what I was doing and I needed to look after myself and my own relationship with the Lord first.”

He admitted this lack of grounding in the faith came back later to bite him in his professional rugby career.

In 1994, Wilson moved to England to play for the Oldham Rugby League Football Club. Soon he was a regular at the pub and drinks circuit.

By this time, he and Susie were married and had a son. “I was a husband and a father but I was going out with the boys drinking.

“I got caught up in all the hype. I loved the Lord yet I was doing this stuff because my foundation wasn’t solid.”

Then he broke his leg – a painful blessing in disguise. “That saved my marriage because we went back to New Zealand. It was like we pushed the restart button with God. If we’d stayed in that environment in England...” Wilson shook his head at the thought.

Back home, he obtained his Bachelor of Education and pivoted from playing to teaching sport in New Zealand and then Australia.

He said he and Susie “did it properly when we got back to New Zealand.

“We got disciplined, we stayed away from being in leadership. We wanted to learn first.”

His advice to anyone in a similar situation is to do the same – “find a mentor and a mentoring group, otherwise you’re just trying to do it in your own strength.

“It’s a daily choice to follow God. It’s got to be a daily thing. And if you’re not connected to the church then it’s going to be even tougher.

“I’m not saying that I don’t struggle with anything today – I mean, it’s going to be a fight until we return to the Father – but now I have the backing of my church family and my own family.”



Wilson Marsh and wife Susie at Yirara College Alice Springs, where they work as a physical education teacher and a school nurse.



INSET: Wilson Marsh (centre left) in his professional rugby days in 1995.



Wilson Marsh with wife Susie and son Izaeah at a touch football tournament.

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