

# Mercenary confronts his demons

**E**lite soldier, mercenary, terrorist-hunter. This was Dave Hodgson, a man who killed terrorists for a living. A member of the SAS and then the highly trained Selous Scouts, a special forces regiment of the Rhodesian Army, he was trained to infiltrate terrorist organisations and kill rebels. This was how Dave earned his living in Rhodesia's politically turbulent 60s and 70s. The job paid well - \$1000 for a kill, \$5000 for a capture and smaller amounts for munitions recovery.



Dave Hodgson

He was so competent at what he called his 'day job' he made enough money to fund his own commercial fishing company. "We were at war," he says grimly. "In the minds of my enemies they were freedom fighters, fighting for their people and their country.

As a mercenary I was no longer fighting for king and country; I was fighting to fund my fishing company.

"Later on, I struggled with this."

As the turmoil intensified, Dave moved to South-east Asia and Japan, where he became a saturation diver, a job that required him to work 400 feet below the ocean for 35 days at a time.

The risk was high, but the money was good - Dave was earning \$1000 a day in the 1980s.

In 1985 Dave and his family moved to Perth, Australia, where he bought a motorcycle business for \$80,000 and turned it into a multi-million-dollar enterprise.

In all of this, the battle-hardened and self-reliant man had no time for God.

If he did feel any twinges of conscience from his mercenary days, he ignored them.

Merlene, his wife of 37 years, was different. She was a Christian and was as determined to get Dave into church as he was to avoid it at all costs. "I never believed anything being taught from the pulpit - I only went with her to stop her whingeing," he chuckles.

A visit from the

well-known German/African evangelist Reinhard Bonnke to Perth changed all that.

"My wife hounded me to attend his crusade," Dave recalls.

Eventually he agreed to go - provided they didn't drive there in one of their instantly recognisable company cars. His reason was simple - "I didn't want the motorcycle community to see me mixing with limp-wristed Christians."

The couple stood as far back from the stage as Dave could manage. But he couldn't hide.

During his sermon, Bonnke looked up, pointed in Dave's direction and said: "Up there, there's an executive in the motor industry - you're here under duress tonight. The Lord has knocked on your door many times and tonight could be the last time, so come now."

Dave remembers that night vividly. "The lights came on and I went down. I forgot that I was supposed to be clandestine. I went down and gave my life to Jesus Christ."

But after that the memories he had buried for so many years came back to haunt him. "I was always troubled," he confides. "I'd never accepted forgiveness for the stuff I had done. Shooting people to fund your business is not Christian, even if they were armed terrorists who were shooting back.

"I'd heard pastors saying 'God can forgive the liar and the cheat'. I thought: 'everyone lies and cheats but how could God forgive me?' - I mean, I shot people - but

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## Set free of addiction



**G**eneral Army Brigadier Elijah Lubuzo's love for his country led him to join the military after school.

During his second year of service though, Elijah began to feel peer pressure and temptation to be sexually immoral.

"This sin was not a problem at all with me during my school years but it cropped up two years after I joined the military," he explains.

Elijah had grown up in a very religious home, where his parents taught him about God from a young age and he attended Sunday church services regularly.

His family attended large Christian conferences, giving him the opportunity to hear the Gospel message, which is the good news that Jesus died to pay the debt for our sins, so that we can be free.

However, despite all this exposure to Christianity, Elijah had not accepted the forgiveness and lordship of Jesus for himself.

When faced with sexual temptation in the military, however, he knew he needed God's help and Elijah decided to dedicate his life to God and declare Jesus as his Lord and Saviour.

He prayed, "Lord Jesus, I accept you as my Lord and Saviour. I surrender my life to you Lord. Come and dwell in my heart. Control and guide my life at all times. I pray Lord that I follow your footsteps always."

After he had done so, he began to hate sexual sin.

"After I confessed with my mouth that Jesus is my Lord and Saviour, I became free from that sin of sexual immorality," Elijah says. "Since then I learned that there is power

in confessing with your mouth that Jesus is your Lord and Saviour."

Elijah said, following this he felt joy and happiness in his life.

"I have peace in my mind," he says. "I started to experience that when you fear God there is nothing else to be afraid of."

At work, people started calling him "pastor" even before he became an ordained pastor.

"I was doing my military work with honesty because I did not want to disappoint my God whom I serve," Elijah says.

"Through the reading of the scriptures and prayer my life began to conform to God's standard as prescribed in the Bible."

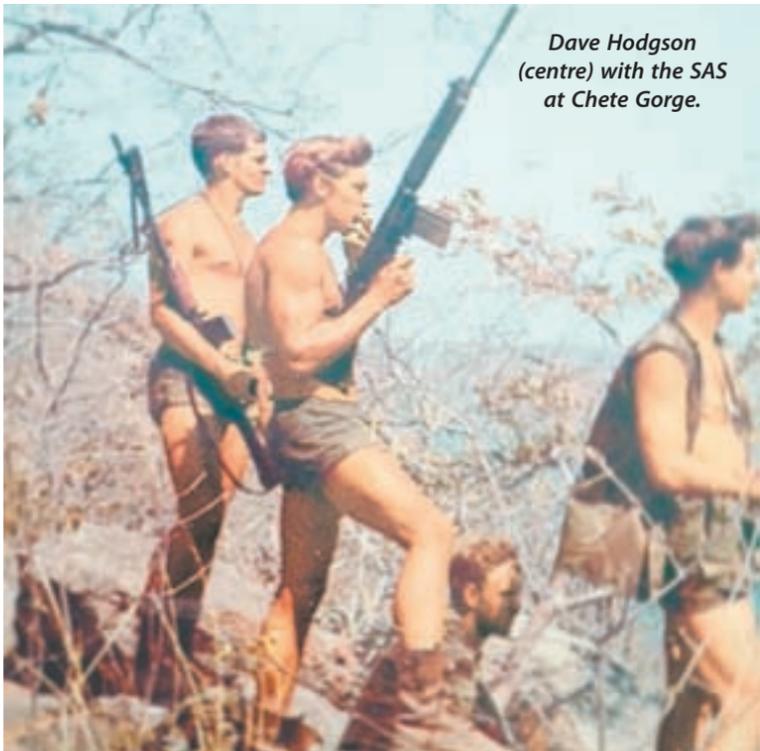
Elijah said there were some challenges that came his way at work.

"Through putting my trust in God, the very same challenges were becoming the opportunity for me to see God's power in saving me," Elijah remembers. "There was a time the devil closed all the chances for me to do the senior staff course but through prayer I went for that course being promoted to a rank of a full colonel in 2003.

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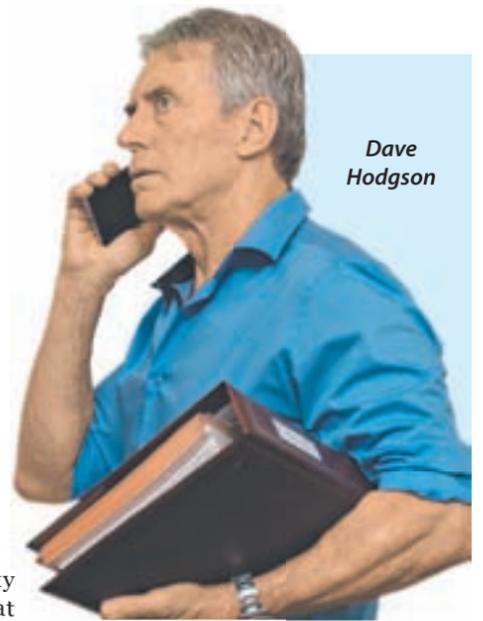
**BACK PAGE**

**WINNING DESPITE LOSS**  
**CHARLES FERNANDEZ**



Dave Hodgson (centre) with the SAS at Chete Gorge.

# Mercenary confronts his demons



Dave Hodgson

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“When I realised Paul hunted and killed Christians but had been forgiven and then wrote half the New Testament, it was like having a hot shower after coming out of the cold. When I understood that, Christianity suddenly had meaning.”

By this time Dave and his family had moved to Far North Queensland, where he had a thriving business selling mobile phone plans. But as the market changed, so did Dave’s fortunes and over the next two years he lost everything and ended up with no money, no assets, and a credit card debt of \$76,000.

He moved to Brisbane and applied for a job as a finance broker, and was so intimidated by the other applicants he walked out of the interview room. “I had no qualifications - I knew how to shoot people, that was it.

“I was terrified. Me - a tough SAS soldier and mercenary, frightened of civilians.

“Actually, I was frightened of their clothes because they were so much nicer than mine. I went to the loo and the most profound thing happened – I heard the voice of God - but not audibly, more like He was inside my head with a hammer.

“He was saying ‘Where have you learnt this fear?’ I never taught you fear.’ My whole life flashed before me in the mirror. It was like the Lord said: ‘These strands of adversity are the threads of your life that I have woven into

a mighty rope that no one can break – if only you would be obedient and engage what I want you to do. Now get back out there and take control.”

More afraid of God than the fancy suits, Dave returned to the interview. Against all odds he landed the job and went on to break sales records month after month. “I’m not a salesman, that was God. God built a hundred million dollar business in two years and seven months.”

Today Dave is CEO of his own company, a diversified acquisitions group that is valued at more than \$1 billion and has branches in nine countries.

“I believe God’s purpose for me is to be an entrepreneur in His kingdom. I have the gift of finance and I’m meant to use it to bring the Kingdom of God into the marketplace.”

In 2007 he turned his formidable business skills to another project and founded Kingdom Investors, an international organisation that trains Christian businesspeople.

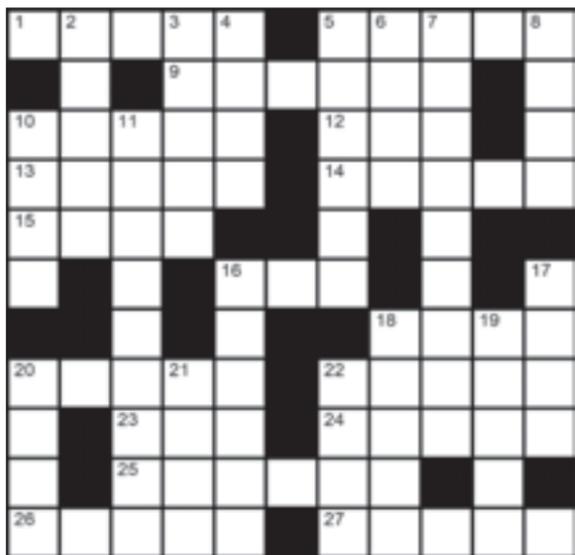
Dave’s desire is to see Christians become successful following Biblical principles “so they can impact the world for Christ in the marketplace. God’s principles work, they really do. I’m living proof of that.”



Military Christian Fellowship Australia’s Chairman Lieutenant Colonel Jamie Van Heel presenting Dave Hodgson (left) a Bible Society Gallipoli Bible in thanks for sharing at the 2016 MCF Seminar.

## Coffee Break CROSSWORD & SUDOKU

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  - 9 Quickly assembled building
  - 10 Collectible
  - 12 Hoover’s agency
  - 13 Put up, as a statue
  - 14 Speck of land in a river
  - 15 Meadows
  - 16 Place for fitness buffs
  - 18 Nip with your teeth
  - 20 Tooth edges
  - 22 Say “hi”
  - 23 Restaurant gratuity
  - 24 Airplane’s walkway
  - 25 Cold old time (3,3)
  - 26 Person from around here
  - 27 A shaft from a bow
- DOWN**
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  - 3 Long stories
  - 4 Quick jogging pace
  - 5 Certify as true
  - 6 Chem class rooms
  - 7 Skills
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  - 10 Jailroom
  - 11 Sensible, practical
  - 16 Religious music
  - 17 Local fair
  - 18 Bramble
  - 19 Phone company
  - 20 Hip, groovy
  - 21 12-point type size
  - 22 Infatuated, doting



## Set free of addiction

• From page 1

“There was a time the devil closed all the chances for me to get promoted to a rank of brigadier general but through prayer to God and through hard work loyalty and faithfulness to my work as a soldier the very same people who told me that I will never become a general in the South African National Defense Force promoted me because God opened the doors for me to be promoted. If God opens the door, there is nobody who can close it.”

Elijah has served 38 years in the military and now encourages people to put their trust in God in

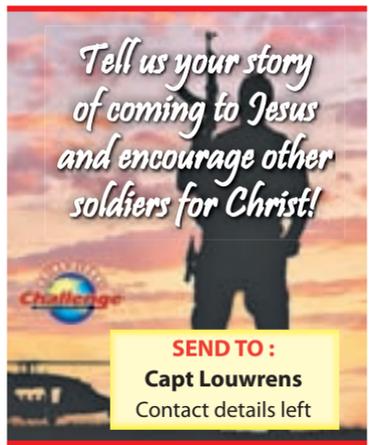
every situation they find themselves in.

“I have experienced that when you put your trust in God in any difficult situation, the very difficult situation becomes a bridge for you to cross over to a better situation,” he says. “To serve in the military being Born Again [a Christ-follower] is really a peace of mind. The hand of God is always upon you. When you are under that Mighty Hand, others don’t see you but they see the owner of the hand you are under. When you speak they don’t hear you but they hear the One whose hand is upon you.”



Elijah Lubuzo in his younger days.

*“When it comes to life the critical thing is whether you take things for granted or take them with gratitude.”*  
- G. K. Chesterton



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- To actively support the ministry of the SANDF chaplains;
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- To stimulate and encourage SAMCF members to meet regularly for Bible study, prayer and fellowship;
- To stimulate and encourage each SAMCF member to give witness to his/her faith in word and deed, and to give active support to the Church of his/her own denomination; and
- To be an instrument through which others in the SANDF are led to commit their lives to Christ.

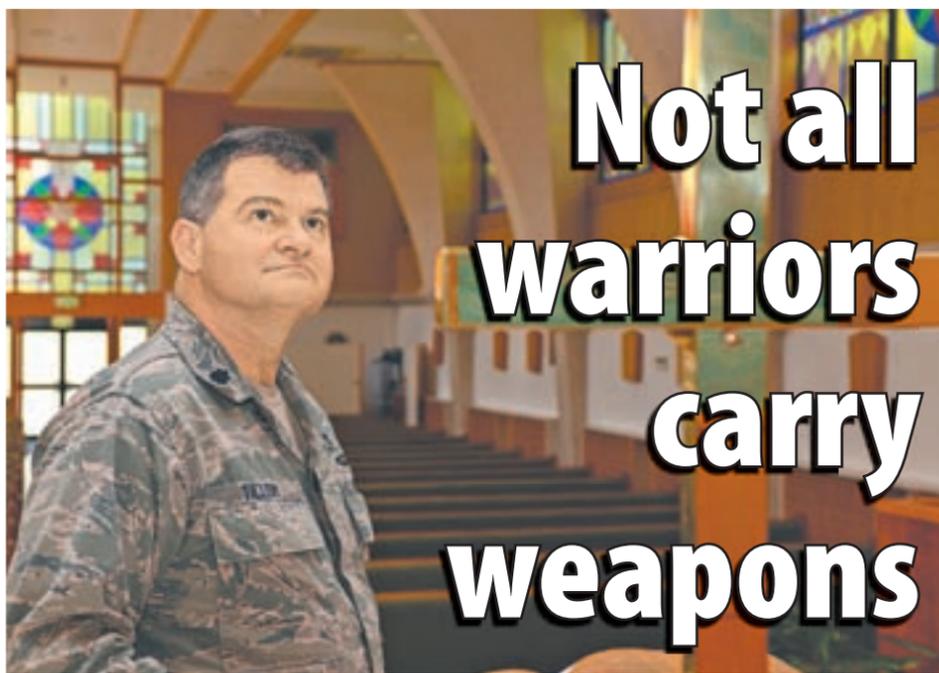
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**SOLUTIONS PAGE 7**

*“I hope none of you are feeling stress about this test. It’s only 50% of your grade, 60% of your future and 100% of your self-esteem.”*

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While Tillery is a successful man now, he had a difficult upbringing as a child and didn't learn to read until he was in the third grade. (U.S. Air Force photo/Staff Sgt. Katherine Tereyama)

BY STAFF SGT. KATHERINE TEREYAMA,  
31<sup>ST</sup> FIGHTER WING PUBLIC AFFAIRS

As the proud owner of three master's degrees and a doctorate, among others, Lt. Col. John Tillery has dedicated his life to service as a chaplain in the U.S. Air Force. While it may seem to be a rule that only the elite and privileged can attain a doctorate, Chaplain Tillery is the exception to that rule.

"People would think that with my educational background, that I had been groomed for academia," he said. "In fact, nothing could be further from the truth."

Growing up in a violent and chaotic home, education was not prioritized. Throughout John's childhood, his young mother struggled to raise him and his brothers, often with the help of violent men.

"I've been tied up, I've been beaten, I've been burned with cigarettes," John recalled with pain and difficulty. "One [of my mom's boyfriend's] was particularly violent. He would use a cattle prod just to watch us jerk around." Similar to a stun gun, a cattle prod is meant to usher animals with jolts of electricity, but the man used the prod to shock the feet of John and his brothers while they slept.

"To this day, I can't sleep with my feet uncovered."

The violence in the house was so overwhelming that at times, John would seek out even the darkest of places in order to escape the brutality.

"There was this little place I would go, built into the wall there was a little door, it was our dirty clothes hamper," John said. "You know that man never looked there? Not once. It was a perfect little hiding place for me. When I hid there he never found me - ever. It was a place that was safe."

Because of the chaos in his home life, John moved to two or three different schools every year and never learned how to read until the third grade. During that time, he was placed into the lowest reading group in his class because he was still working at a kindergarten level.

"I had never heard, 'good job,' I had never heard, 'good boy'. I had never heard 'you can do it, try harder, I'm with you'. Those are words I had never heard," John said. "And so, in addition to those words, the most important thing my third-grade teacher gave me was a smile."

With her support, he moved up to the best reading group and became one of the strongest readers in his class during the four months he was at that school, he said.

The violence and upheaval continued throughout his childhood and into his teens, but thanks to his third grade teacher, he now had a place to retreat to during difficult times, when he couldn't escape to his hiding place in the wall - books.

"One of the fixed features of our home was fear," John explained. "With reading, I could go to a safe place in my own mind. For me, reading is not just a pastime and it's not merely an escape either. It puts me in a place where all is right with the world, no matter what is going on around me."

Because of his upbringing, John was fearful he would also grow into a cruel man like the ones he had known all his life.

"But I remember very clearly deciding when I was 11 years old that I would not be a violent man."

When John was 15, his resolution was put to the ultimate test.

"My stepfather got a branch, not a switch, a branch, and he beat my younger brother and me," he said. "We were literally bloodied on the floor."

**ONE OF THE FIXED FEATURES OF OUR HOME WAS FEAR**



After that, John and his brothers left home. His older brother joined the Army and John went to live with his girlfriend's family. They had a child and married. Shortly after his daughter was born, John's wife left him, and he was left homeless and impoverished at the age of 17.

"During the draft, in 1972, I joined the Army," said John. "I wanted to go to Vietnam

because, as far as I was concerned, there was nothing worse than what I was already going through."

Even though he had never attended high school or even earned his GED diploma, John was selected to be a Russian linguist. However, during his first several months in training, he drank heavily and was considered to be unreliable. He was booted out of the program and moved to the artillery career field.

While in the unit, John began to turn his life around. He stopped drinking, made friends and began attending church.

"I came to believe in God. I began to gain a larger, greater sense of purpose and hope and meaning, and most importantly, forgiveness," John said. "I was able to forgive others, and ultimately, I was able to forgive myself."

John had never understood the value of chaplains until he visited one for grief counseling after a shooting death in his unit.

"It was then that I realized, you don't have to carry a weapon to be a warrior," John said. He once again found solace in reading, this time in the Bible. "I have read the Bible numerous times, I have learned Hebrew and I have learned Greek," John said. "The Bible gets embedded in your heart in such a way that it controls your life so that you do the right thing as a way of existing, as a way of being. It's my guide."

After his enlistment in the Army was over, the boy who had never stepped foot in a high school earned an associate's degree, a bachelor's degree, three masters' degrees and a doctorate. He has since risen to the rank of lieutenant colonel and has spent 17 years serving his country as a chaplain.

# Male fellowship in the church helped vet overcome PTSD

BY MICHAEL ASHCRAFT

One of the hardest transitions for Wesley Pinnick from hunting terrorists in Iraq to civilian life in America was the loss of brotherhood he felt in the military.

"A lot of guys who enter the military have blood brothers, and they say, 'You're closer to me than a blood brother,' because you literally spend a year or years of your time together," Wesley says. "Those guys I went to combat with know everything about my life. You have nothing else to do but play dominoes and talk. It's an emotional bond that you have with these guys."

Of course there is always the problem of post-traumatic stress disorder. Of course the shift from adrenaline jolts while dodging bullets to the drudgery of a day job was difficult. But it was the bond that was formed with those brothers — and then was broken when he returned to America — that hit him hard.

"When I got home, I realised, I'm never going to be as close with anybody ever again as I was with these guys — even to the point of when I get married, will I ever be this close to my wife?" he wondered.

"How do I live a life when I've already done potentially the greatest things I will ever do with my life, and I'm 21?" he remembers thinking. "What I really needed were people I could depend on and who could depend on me. I needed that camaraderie."

Wesley is fortunate. He found a church and friendship with Christian brothers that, if not as close, was a decent approximation. He ran a discipleship house with new converts to help them break free from drugs, alcohol and other habitual sins as they learned to follow Jesus at the Door Church in Tucson.

As the U.S. war on terror extends itself with no end in sight, the U.S. is seeing increasing numbers of soldiers who struggle with traumas. Wesley's story points the way to one great help for these soldiers — Jesus and the bond of brotherhood that can form in the church.

Today, Wesley is a pastor in Long Beach, CA. But how he left his childhood church and enlisted to raise hell in Iraq is a story similar to that of the prodigal son in the Bible.

Wesley knew nothing but church as a kid and teen. His dad was a minister in the Door Church, and he never had a friend outside the church. He felt burned out on the "unreasonable expectations" imposed on church kids.

"The reason I joined the military was to get away from church," he says. "I turned away from my faith because I didn't see any reason for me to stay faithful. I didn't want to mark out the next 30, 40 years in the church."

So he bolted. Instead of fighting the devil, he fought terrorists. He and his buddies blasted open doors with C-4 plastic explosive and hauled off suspected Al Qaeda and Taliban terrorists in 2004 at the start of the war in Mosul.

"It was a very traumatic experience in a lot

of ways," says Wesley, who fast-tracked to sergeant in two years. "I still don't know how to talk about that."

He was in the middle of the desert drifting in his relationship with God. Between the deaths of two buddies, he suddenly decided to re-start his relationship with Jesus by praying at night in bed.

"One day I just said, 'God, I don't know how to do this. I don't know how to have a relationship with You, but I want to have a relationship with



Terrorist hunter Wesley Pinnick in 2005.

You," he remembers. "I don't have a church, a pastor or a Bible. I don't know how this is going to work, but I'm willing to do it.' But looking back, those six months were some of the most intense moments I had with God in my whole relationship with Him over the course of my entire life."

Surprisingly, it wasn't the constant brushes with death that drove him to Jesus, he says. In fact, the exact opposite happens: soldiers who have escaped unscathed from conflict wrongly believe they are invulnerable.

"You think you have a power, that you are wielding something that has been tested," he says. "You feel you've overcome it."

One day as he was thinking, Wesley just had a simple thought: God had left him. His next thought was that he didn't care.

Then it struck him as alarming that he didn't care.

"That was the first pivotal moment when I started to go back and re-engage my relationship with Jesus," he says.

Two years after enlisting, Wesley was released from the Army and returned to his hometown. He was diagnosed with mild to strong PTSD, for which doctors prescribed psych drugs.

"I did not go on medicine. I went to church," he says. "It took me five years to feel like I had a hold of myself. But I still have flashbacks today. They're not as strong as they used to be. It's a wound but more like a scar."

The church and Veterans Administration courses helped him.

Now 35, Wesley is married with three children. He has been pastoring the start-up church in Long Beach for two years. It's been 15 years since his release from the Army, and he still struggles — though to a lesser degree — with putting the past fully behind him.

"I take the Bible verses about being a good soldier and apply it to what I'm doing today for the gospel," he says. "I think I'm always going to be transitioning. I'm a work in progress." •

This article first appeared on godreports.com and is used with kind permission.

# Drug stupor gave him a wake-up call

**T**WENTY-YEAR-OLD naval Rating Eddie Cloete had just spent a day at sea and was glad to return to harbour. He went straight to a friend's place where they indulged in weed and meth till Eddie was so far gone he thought he was going to die.

But even in his drugged state, he says that "so many things went through my mind. I didn't want to go to hell."

This wasn't the first time Eddie had been with the wrong crowd. At high school he did drugs with gang members, drank alcohol, got arrested, and considered joining a gang himself.

His addictions and knack for trouble followed him into the South African National Defence Force. He would drink and party with his shipmates frequently. Once, after drinking non-stop for hours, Eddie attempted to drive home but ended up crashing into a police road block.

"I was still in my uniform when they arrested me," he admits.

This was humiliating for the proud soldier whose job fulfilled a childhood dream.

"As a young lad, the Navy stood out to me because my mum liked to dress me in sailor's outfits," he chuckles. "I've always loved the Navy."

It was only when he was high on drugs and convinced his life was about to end that Eddie finally grappled with his self-destructive habits.

"I called out to God to save me," he recalls. "I said, 'Lord, I am preparing to die, but I don't want to go to hell, I want to be with You'. Immediately, I came out of my drugged state and walked home."

Eddie, who was raised in a Christian family and attended church



Eddie Cloete

INSET: Eddie as a young naval officer

every week, knew he had to change.

"My young mind had been nurtured and geared towards believing and thinking about God and His creation at an early age," he says.

"Having made a conscious decision to accept Christ as a teenager, I backslid many times. When I would think back on my experiences and the lessons learnt I noticed a pattern and it was that God had been protecting my life ever since I was born. How could I ever deny His existence and protection on my life?" Eddie knelt and prayed. "I asked

for my sins to be forgiven. I know I have the assurance that I am forgiven as the Bible verse 1 John 1:9 states, 'If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.'"

Soon Eddie saw changes in his life. "The Holy Spirit (the invisible presence of God) has helped me in all areas of my life. I have noted that I listen to others more intently - it's not my way or the highway anymore. I am very calm and not overbearing.

"My subordinates are not afraid

to approach me with their problems. The fruits of the Spirit, which are love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness and faithfulness, are definitely evident in my life."

His shipmates saw these traits in Eddie when the first thing he did on a risky mission was to open his Bible and spend time with God.

"I was part of a team that had to recover a barge our ship was towing," he explains. "The barge was full of explosives and it was a very stormy night with extremely high swells. I went between decks, grabbed my Bible, and opened it. The passage I read was Hebrews 13:5-7 which speaks of God never leaving or forsaking us.

"I was so excited about what I had read. We manned the boat and recovered the barge. This entire event strengthened my walk with the Lord in the military and I was able to share that Scripture with my mates."

Eddie has now served in the military for 25 years; all the while he has shared the love of Jesus with a big smile.

"Jesus, who lives inside of me, has strengthened and comforted me during the toughest periods in my life," he affirms. "When I wanted to give up and throw in the towel, I clung to the hem of His garment in faith. His strength has carried me through in my weakness."

The 59-year-old has confidence that God has always been with him, even in the darkest of days - such as when he was diagnosed with end stage kidney failure in 2010. "God's grace on my life these last 11 years has been amazing considering on many occasions the doctors gave up on me. They were calling my wife and telling her that I wouldn't make it, but God in His wisdom decided



differently.

"This Christian walk is not a bed of roses, there are thorns and storms but this is what makes us stronger. Know that God does not abandon us in these storms, He is there with us every step of the way. If you have not made a decision to follow Jesus yet you can do so by just acknowledging Him and asking Him to forgive your sins. He is faithful and just to forgive you from all your sins. (1 John 1:9).

"I am so grateful that I am able to share a bit of my story with you. Know that whatever you may face and however bleak the outlook, God is on the throne and will take you through it."

## Soldier thinks faith is weak

"In the military it's very easy to indulge in sexual immorality and alcohol," Colonel Igor Sawicki tells *Challenge News*.

"Social meetings, frequent business trips away from home gave us many opportunities to be with women who were also looking for 'entertainment'.

"This was my main problem and I didn't look at it as sin but as having adventures."

At that time he shunned anything that smacked of weakness. Which is why when his daughter first began talking to him about God he wouldn't have a bar of it.

"I believed I should be responsible for myself, my actions," he says. "I had weapons, soldiers under my command, and I could not entrust them to someone to whom weak people pray", which is how he thought of God.

But the more he observed his daughter, then 17, the more he saw the changes in her - and though he was far from seeking God, the Polish soldier liked what he saw.

In March 1993 he and his wife attended a Billy Graham crusade with her. His wife committed her life to Jesus Christ straight away but Igor, still shackled by his belief that it was weakness to lean on God, remained stoically unmoved.

Until, like his daughter, his wife began to change. "I could not deny I liked the changes," he laughs. "I finally wanted to know what is this Christianity that changes people so much.

"So I invited my wife's and daughter's new friends from church and started asking them questions."

He also began noticing that his wife and daughter would often lock themselves in a room. "I was intrigued; what secrets did they have?"

If it's true that behind every great man is a woman in prayer, then Igor was doubly blessed because he found out later that their 'secret business' was praying for him.

Still he skirted the issue and spent more time discussing and asking questions until one day his wife told him: "If you want to

understand Christianity, if you want to understand God, this is not the way! You don't understand it with the human mind, you have to believe it."

He was taken aback. "Hearing something like that from my wife, and wanting to be close to her, I thought 'If God loves people as Christians say He does, and I can see the changes in my relatives, why don't I try? After all, I'm an officer. I'm brave, so why not try?'"

So in August 1993, Igor took a walk by the lake and did a brave thing. He surrendered to God.

"God, if You are so great and so love people, including me, here I am open to Your action," he prayed. "I will not do anything on my part, but I will also not do anything to disturb You."

Within weeks he says he felt the need to pray with his family and attend church. Three months later, at the age of 43, he was baptised.

Today, after more than 20 years of walking in his faith, he says he understands sin for what it is.

"What I was doing was sinful and I hurt the people around me as well as myself.

"As soon as I trusted Jesus, I stopped being a slave to my addiction and stopped cheating on my wife.

"I also changed my attitude towards my military service. I stopped seeing it in terms of power and control but more of being a leader and serving others with my experience and knowledge."

He has learned the peace that comes from trusting God, saying he has confidence things will turn out for good. "It is not always so simple but God has shown me so many times that relying on my own strength will lead to me falling very quickly," he admits.

Colonel Sawicki, who retired in 2002, is 70 today.

"Looking at my whole life and where I am now, I am sure that



I was under God's special protection all the time," he remarks. "I have been in so many different situations that could have ended tragically for my career. But God protected me from them.

"It was only when I became a Christian that I truly understood that my profession with all its challenges, was my opportunity to serve others."

His favourite verses are Joshua 1: 8-9:

"Be strong and very courageous. Be careful to obey all the law my servant Moses gave you; do not turn from it to the right or to the left, that you may be successful wherever you go.

Keep this Book of the Law always on your lips; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful. Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged, for the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go."

# Top Gun's life changed by lightning strike

BY KAREN L. WILLOUGHBY  
FROM BAPTIST PRESS

Southern Baptist "Top Gun" Richard Toliver found freedom in the cockpit, from which he had dodged missiles and anti-aircraft fire while flying 446 combat missions in Southeast Asia during his 26-year Air Force career. He also battled racism. Toliver's idyllic childhood was spent in multi-racial California—"paradise," as he remembers it—during the early 1940s. He dreamed of flying airplanes like those that flew overhead from nearby Oxnard Naval Training Base. That dream shattered when his family returned to his seg-

regated birthplace in the South after wartime jobs ended.

"I hated the next ten years living in the South," Toliver told SBC Life. "I was trapped in a prison. Everywhere there were barriers of poverty, color, hopelessness, despair, and vicious name-calling."

Today, Toliver at eighty-two years old has held key positions at his church in Glendale, Arizona. He also is president of the local chapter of the Tuskegee Airmen, active in the Red River Valley Fighter Pilots Association, and a nationally known motivational speaker.

In his nearly five-hundred-page memoir—*An Uncaged Eagle: True Freedom*—Toliver gives credit to the many people who encouraged him throughout his life. He writes of his courageous mother, family relatives, and a white man who was a "ray of light" in the darkness of racism.

That man provided Toliver, a Black high school graduate, with a scholarship to study at Alabama's Tuskegee Institute, now University. There he met and

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More than anyone else apart from God, Toliver credits his wife Peggy's Christian life for his success. Married fifty-eight years, she dazzled Toliver and the Air Force community with her gracious attitude, warmth, and servant's attitude while successfully parenting the family's three biological and five fostered or adopted children.

"The most important part of my life's experience was discovering that God is in control of everything," Toliver said. "He allowed me to become all that I am today."

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After safely landing the crippled jet, Toliver heard a voice that said, "How long are you going to keep up this charade? How long are you going to refuse to settle your debt with me?"

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He found himself spiritually and mentally on trial. There was a "Prosecutor," who listed even his sins from childhood and declared him "guilty." However, an abiding "Presence" stood in Toliver's defense, and "the hand of Jesus reached down and grasped my outstretched hands," Toliver writes of his gripping salvation experience in his book.

Toliver, the first fully qualified African American F-15 pilot and successful in hundreds of combat missions, once acquired the nickname "Black Baron." This was in deference to the acclaimed German "Red Baron" of WWI. After Toliver's conversion, others started using "Preacher" as his call sign, as a recognition of the pilot's frequent scripture-based remarks and lifestyle void of previous colorful language and behavior.

Working out his salvation took much longer than his initial capitulation to Christ, Toliver said. He had to deal



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with the incessant anger that burned within him whenever faced with adversity, setbacks, and real or perceived racism. "I was committed to allowing the Lord to guide my path, but 'self' kept getting in the way," he said.

Through Bible study and prayer, Toliver eventually came to realize that achieving success in the Air Force had become an idol for him. Ultimately it was in the

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"Only then did the healing begin for past hurts caused by racial prejudice, slights, disappointments, and other emotional barriers," Toliver wrote. "I finally found my

freedom. The cage of despair had to be opened from the inside, and the path to freedom was through the door of forgiveness."

Toliver's bottom line: "True freedom ... enables us to act selflessly, forgive all injuries, love unconditionally and humbly serve without expectation of rewards. It is the spiritual state that reaches the very presence of our Creator."



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We may know about the Christian faith. We may respect Jesus and agree that what He did on the Cross is the answer to our deepest needs, but until we ask for His help and commit our lives to Him, it is like falling with a closed parachute. We need to take urgent action. We need to pull the ripcord while there is still time. The ripcord is this, "Whoever calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved" – Romans 10:13.

There is nothing else we can do. We cannot save ourselves – we can only throw ourselves on what Jesus achieved for us on the Cross, He has done everything that we need. Let's act on it, or else we will free fall into hell.



– Reinhard Bonnke



Richard Toliver's pilot training at Craig AFB, 1965.

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Area Military Health Unit (AMHU) KZN during the launch of a healthcare clinic in Phoenix in May 2020 in Durban, South Africa. The program is aimed at boosting the testing capacity for Covid-19 in the province, and is part of an effort to curb the spread of the deadly virus. (Photo by Darren Stewart/Gallo Images via Getty Images)

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# BUILDING BETTER RELATIONSHIPS

## More strategies for dealing with anxiety

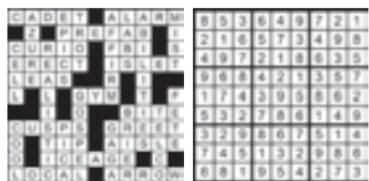
BY ROB FURLONG

Last month we began looking at ways of dealing with anxiety or helping support someone through it. Let's consider some more helpful principles:

**Music:** It has been shown repeatedly that music has the power to alter the patterns of our brains as well as enhancing our ability to experience rest, serenity and peace.

During one particularly difficult time in my life I found myself returning to many of the old hymns I had sung in worship services at church as a young man. Listening to them just before going to sleep at night became a great source of comfort and helped me to cope with the panic attacks I was experiencing at the time.

A piece of advice – select the music you listen to carefully. I would suggest that full on “head-banging rock and roll” is not likely



to decrease your stress levels but rather, increase them!

**Rest:** Christian psychologist, Arch Hart has written extensively on the importance of regular rest as an important means of dealing with anxiety. (I recommend reading his books: *The anxiety cure* and *Adrenaline and stress*.) As he succinctly states, “we live our lives at a high octane pace but our bodies are built for camel pace.”

In other words, we need regular times where we take a break from our work and super-charged lives. This is an extremely counter-cultural concept but incredibly needed in today's world.

It has become my practice to take what I call a weekly Sabbath where I spend 24 hours away from my work – I do not read my emails or deal with work related issues *unless it is an absolute emergency*. I also try to take regular holidays and I am grateful to Karen who keeps me accountable with this!

I am beginning to try and incorporate “mini-Sabbaths” into my day as well. For example, not looking at Facebook first thing in the morning, disciplining my exposure to social

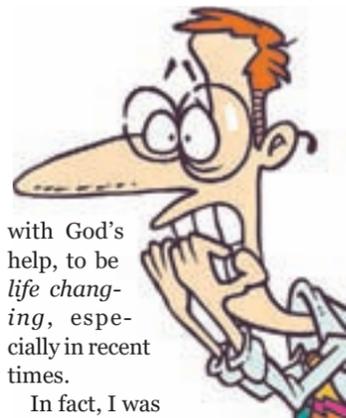
media and even turning the news off from time to time. I find it to be an excellent way to disconnect from the constant flow of information we are *bombarded* with and it also gives my mind a much needed *rest*.

Sitting quietly on the bench at the front of our house for 30 minutes from time to time, just watching the world go by, is also becoming a source of healing and refreshment for me.

**Cultivate the habit of realistic optimism:** There is no doubt that a positive or optimistic outlook assists us in coping with the worries and cares of life. But this does not mean that you deny reality. Genuine optimism is not afraid of the truth – it embraces it – and it is also able to rest in another great truth: that God really does “work all things for the good of those who love Him and are the called according to His purpose.” (Romans 8:28).

Arch Hart says that “once we appreciate life for what it really is, we discover a new thrill in being alive.”

Through personal experience I have discovered the above principles, diligently applied by me and



with God's help, to be life changing, especially in recent times.

In fact, I was asked just a little while back if it is possible to really know God's peace and my answer was unequivocal – “Yes, for I have found it to be true in my own life.”

This is where faith comes in. Arch Hart has said: “Faith (in God) will seek the right solution. Faith is our helper and healer because it puts us and keeps us in touch with God.”

When we diligently apply the principles God gives us, *with faith in Him*, He will do what He has promised to do!

My sincere prayer for all of you reading this is that as you apply these principles in your own life, you will come to know the help and healing of God and above all, His peace, which starts with surrendering your life fully to Him. ●

# Ask Y:

**Peter Meadows answers your questions about God**

**QUESTION: WHAT IS ACTUALLY INVOLVED IN 'FOLLOWING JESUS'?**



**THE** British army once used the slogan “Join the army and see the world.” Their message was about what was in it for recruits. It would have been more honest to use the headline “Come and die for Queen and country.”

The difference between those two approaches sums up what is on offer to those who Jesus invites to follow Him. Unlike that army advert, Jesus wants us to know exactly what we are getting into. Which is why, for a start, He calls those who would follow Him, His ‘disciples’.

OK, so ‘disciple’ is not a word we use much today. But the word ‘apprentice’ is. And that’s what a disciple is. Jesus is after those who, like an apprentice, will spend their time learning, observing and following instructions.

And Jesus spelt out the implications with clarity. For a start, He said, “Anyone who does not carry his cross and follow me cannot be my disciple.”

People then knew exactly what Jesus had in mind. It was a common sight to see those branded as criminals making their journey toward death with the equipment for their execution on their back.

Those who carried their cross counted themselves as already dead. They had no plans for anything else. In the same way, Jesus calls us to die to our own selfishness, vain ambitions, and personal priorities.

To His would-be apprentices Jesus also said, “If you love me, you will do as I command.” So being His follower involves obeying Him. That probably evokes an image of dog training and obedience classes—and Jesus demanding we stop at the curb and respond to the command “leap.” But it’s a far from accurate picture.

It means a disciple of Jesus salutes Jesus’ flag, marches to His commands and checks out His orders of the day—and then does them.

That involves the many things Jesus spoke about. Like forgiving those who wrong us; praying for those who are unkind to us; not fretting about how things will work out, and avoiding public display when we help others. He spoke of our need to be meek, merciful, pure in heart, and people who seek after peace. And a lot more besides.

Jesus also said that no one should think about following Him unless they were ready to do so publicly. That often means being seen to be at odds with the values and attitudes of a selfish me-centered society, where most people are swimming in the opposite direction.

Don’t follow Jesus to find fulfillment — though I guarantee you’ll find it. Don’t follow Jesus for excitement — yet it will never be in short supply. Instead follow Jesus because He is ‘the way, the truth and the life’.

## How can 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)

<b>OUR PROBLEM:</b>	<b>Separation from God</b> “Everyone has sinned. Nobody is good enough because God's standards are perfect” (Romans 3:23)	<b>ADMIT</b>
<b>GOD'S REMEDY / SOLUTION:</b>	<b>Jesus died on the cross</b> “God demonstrates His own love for us in this; while we were still sinners, Christ died for us” (Romans 5:8)	<b>BELIEVE</b>
<b>OUR RESPONSE:</b>	<b>Trust Jesus by receiving Him</b> “To all who received Him, to those who believed in His name, He gave the right to become children of God” (John 1:12)	<b>COMMIT</b>

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.

**AS A NEXT STEP :**

<p><b>If you prayed the above prayer, tick this box</b> </p> <p><b>I have prayed this prayer.</b> <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>Please send me:</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Bible portion</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Some 'starting off' literature</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Information on a helpful church</p>	<p><b>If you have not prayed the prayer at this stage, tick this box</b> </p> <p><b>I would like to think about this.</b> <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>Please send me:</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Bible portion</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> More information as I am inquiring about being a Christian.</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> I have a problem (see attached letter)</p>
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**\* Please tick and write clearly \***

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## In the dark about death?

BY PETER BRAIN

**THERE** are many humorous graveyard inscriptions. Recently I came across one that said, “Here lies my wife: here let her lie! Now she’s at rest, and so am I.” Another said, “I told you I was sick,” and another: “Here lies the atheist, all dressed up and no place to go.”

Humour is one way of handling death, which we all know is anything but funny. In these days of Covid, one is aware that even the young may face it sooner than expected. There are other ways of coping with death, and all the uncertainty and fear it engenders. Some say there is nothing after death; what we see is all there is. Others rely on reincarnation as an explanation for what happens after death. Still others trivialize the awfulness of death by saying that it is just a natural part of life. And others, that everyone will go to Heaven or that God will give us a second chance after we die.

However, God would neither have us fearful nor living in the dark about death and eternity.

There are some who would say that the Christian faith is escapism – but what if, as Dr I. Howard Marshall writes, “it is the only ultimate realism”? Now, to make a claim like that there must be some clear public domain evidence. Wonderfully, there is. Marshall reminds us that “it rests foursquare on the fact that Jesus has defeated death, and anybody who can defeat death can defeat anything.”

Jesus rose from the grave, as



attested to by over 500 eye witnesses, the lack of a body, and the complete turn around of His

disciples from heartbroken friends to bold martyrs.

The coming of Jesus into our world gives us a new way of looking at things. He offers life eternal to all who trust Him now and will honor the choice of all who refuse Him with death eternal.

There is no reincarnation or second chance.

The choice of eternity hangs on the decision we make about Jesus now. For those trusting in Jesus, death holds no more fear than going to sleep at night.

And it is all because of Jesus. We see this confidence in John Newton, who gave us the hymn *Amazing Grace*, when he said to one of his visitors toward the end of his life, “I am like a person going on a journey in a stage coach, who expects its arrival every hour and is frequently looking out of the window for it.”

And the reason for his confidence was revealed by his final words, “My memory is nearly gone but I remember two things: that I am a great sinner and that Christ is a great Savior”.

The Biblical book of Ecclesiastes says: “No one has power over the spirit to retain the spirit, and no one has power in the day of death”. We don’t know when, so best we know where. ●

Guatemala's Charles Fernandez falls off his horse Fluoriet as he competes in the men's individual riding show jumping of the modern pentathlon during the Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games at the Tokyo Stadium in Tokyo in August 2021. (Photo by Pedro PARDO / AFP) (Photo by PEDRO PARDO/AFP via Getty Images)

**INSET:** Charles Fernandez celebrates during the Fencing Ranked Round of the Men's Modern Pentathlon at the Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games in Chofu, Japan. (Photo by Leon Neal/Getty Images)



# Loser is a winner

**O**n August 8, as the 2020 Olympics came to a close, Charles Fernandez, Guatemala's last remaining athlete at the Olympic village carried his country's flag with pride at the closing ceremony.

The 25-year-old modern pentathlete did not win any medals at these Games, but he has a winning attitude – and a higher purpose for his sport.

“The people of Guatemala are the reason I do what I do in sports,” he told *Tokyo 2020*.

“I am an athlete for this country. I don't compete for myself but for the people. When I am on the podium... I just think of the smiles of these people who suffer every day, who work every day to achieve a better life.

“However, sometimes it is hard for them to develop as human beings due to the violence and corruption in the country.”

Charles was born in Dayton, Ohio in the United States to Christian parents, Carlos – who was originally from Guatemala – and Heidi. When he was seven, his parents answered the call to become full-time missionaries in Guatemala and the whole family moved there.

Carlos, himself a modern pentathlete, founded a mission called Welcome to My Father's House. For the past 17 years, this evangelistic ministry that provides education and medical care as well as sports

and construction projects for the Mayan population.

“We help them build churches, houses, schools and community centres,” explains Charles, who has been a Christian from the time he was a child and is passionate about being a role model for the community.

Although he has not been as hands-on since turning professional, his heart is still for the mission field. Once, when he was travelling in Europe, he learned that the Fuego volcano, just 10 miles from his hometown, had erupted. Charles had actually been planning to climb Fuego when he got home that same week.

“We decided to shift our focus from it being a vacation to being a ministry opportunity,” he continued. He and his girlfriend Kristen started a GoFundMe page and raised \$2000, which they used to buy food, water and other essential items which were distributed through Father's House.

“It was definitely a huge blessing to be able to help people who were

victims of the volcano in any way we could,” Charles noted. “These people had literally lost everything.”

He was also one of five athletes recruited by the Olympic Committee in Guatemala last summer to build three houses in one of the villages destroyed by the eruption.

“As a Guatemalan, as a Christian, and as a public figure, I wanted to try to create awareness for the people of Guatemala,” he said. “This is not a process that will heal itself overnight.”

The modern pentathlon is a gruelling one-day endurance competition over five disciplines – fencing, swimming, horse jumping, shooting and running – a skillset that must seem bizarre to anyone who didn't grow up with Tarzan or Erroll Flynn movies.

It is Charles work as a missionary that inspires him in his role as an athlete.

“My aim as an athlete is to bring hope to them, showing them that anything is possible when you work hard. The two ways I support the country are different but thank God they fit together in a very special way. This is the reason and motiva-

tion for what I do at the Olympics.

“I ask God to give me strength every single day. I know for a fact that without the renewal of my strength through my faith and because of God I would not be the athlete that I am today. That is why I do what I do, to be a light of Christ unto the nations in this sport.”

Charles said a personal relationship with Jesus Christ was not something religious but genuine.

“It is not a religious experience. God is not a God who looks for the best of the best, but someone who looks for the broken-hearted in need of a saviour, regardless of your sins and faults.

“My faith in God has always been surrounded by the love and grace

He has shown to His children even though we don't deserve it.

“My purpose in life has been to always reflect the love that Christ gave us and serve others selflessly. Being an example of Christ's love on earth through actions has helped me use the platform that I have to inspire others and be a positive change to my country and the people around me.

“The difference is about how you treat others, how you look at adversity, and how you respond to everything that happens around you. This allows me to live a happy life as an athlete knowing that it is not about what you do inside sport but how are you doing it that matters.”



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