

Ex-Marine Jim Glynn with his wife Laura.

Ex-Marine assigned new mission

BY MARK ELLIS (ABRIDGED)

Jim Glynn grew up in Iowa and dropped out of a Catholic college to join the Marines. During the Marines' boot camp, Jim tested so highly on a written exam they offered to send him to Annapolis, but he wasn't ready to make that commitment, so he ended up as a basic rifleman at Camp Pendleton.

His battalion legal officer was looking for someone to be his clerk, and Jim fit the bill. It turned out the legal officer, Captain Joseph Long, was also the minister of

music at a church in San Clemente.

"He was trying to get me to come to church for probably 10 months, telling me he didn't have enough male voices for the choir. He asked me so many times I finally said 'okay' to get him off my back."

Before the choir practice, Captain Long persuaded Jim to attend the evening service, where a young woman named Laura shared about her short-term mission trip in Europe. "After the church service, I went to the choir practice and it just so happened, she's in the choir. So I thought, well, maybe I do want to be in the choir." At

the encouragement of the pastor to invite a Marine for Thanksgiving dinner, Laura invited Jim. Soon, the two were engaged and some months later, married on the one-year anniversary of their first date. Even though Jim had attended church in his youth, he did not have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ.

One day a fellow Marine cornered him about his faith. After a conversation about what it means to follow Jesus wholeheartedly, his buddy said, "Jimmy, are you ready to completely surrender your life to Christ?"

● Turn to page 4

Sea change: Near drowning turned the tide

Navy diver found new purpose

It was a beautiful winter morning when South African Navy captain Piet De Beer Strydom stepped onto the boat for the day's diving exercise.

The water was crystal clear, pristine.

But Piet couldn't spend too much time appreciating its beauty; diving can be dangerous and precision preparation is always essential. As he puts it: "The sea is a beautiful but fickle mistress. If you don't do your work properly she will punish the unwary maritime traveller."

Little did he know she was about to do just that to him.

He and his diving partner descended rapidly. Without warning, and long before he was due to surface, Piet lost his air supply from the boat.

"Having swum down so fast, my arterial oxygen was becoming exhausted – in the lungs as well as in the blood and tissues," the 73-year-old tells *Challenge News*.

"I heard my mask flooding. I felt the water bubbling around my face, inside the mask. I had no air to clear the mask. I became anoxic and lost consciousness.

"I realised that I was drowning. I thought of my fiancée Mary Elliott and it occurred to me that I would not see her again.

"That was a sad thought, but I do recall that

I didn't want to go back to the place I once called home. If I was dying, I wanted to see what was going on at that future place... I had a sense that I was on the brink of a new home.

"And then a fearful thought hit me: *I'm not ready to meet my Maker*".

His Maker. God. Piet hadn't thought about Him for years even though he attended an Anglican school and belonged to a church.

He even goes so far as to say he felt a call to preach as early as 1964, when he was about 12 and once preached a full service – to the dogs and cattle on the family farm.

"But to me the call was just a game and I ignored it."

By his own admission, he was a "flippant" Christian and would tease believers he met in the Navy, which he joined in 1975.

"However, after the accident I became a dismayed Christian," he shares. "But I kept my mouth shut for 21 years, fearing that others would consider me a liar."

Piet's apprehension was well founded – his story is literally out of this world.

He details what happened when he blacked out underwater.

"It was as if the sea disappeared. There was light all around me. It was the brightest light ever, yet there was no need to close or shield one's eyes.



MAIN PICTURE: Former Navy captain Piet de Beer Strydom getting into a decompression chamber.



LEFT: Piet at the commissioning of the ship SAS UMZIMKULU.

"It was soft and it shone over everyone.

"There were many people around me. I don't remember walking... but I was moving forward. There was an ambience of sympathy, a mood of empathy; people looking after each other"

He remembers he felt no panic or fear; instead he wanted to stay where he was, in the light. Thoughts of leaving his parents and fiancée behind saddened him for a moment but he didn't want to go back to them either.

"And then I saw her – a woman moving towards me, about my age. Her smile was radiant.

She spoke to me in Afrikaans and said: *'It's not your time. You need to go back'*.

Her words seemed like a death sentence. 'But I don't want to go back,' I pleaded.

'I want to stay here with you. Please'.

● Turn to page 2

BACK PAGE

A LIFE OR DEATH CALL

DARRYL STRAWBERRY

Sea change: Near drowning turned the tide

● From page 1

But she repeated: 'You need to go back.'

Piet awoke to someone bashing on his chest. "I felt as though that sternum collided with the front side of my spine! That was definitely not spiritual or supernatural."

That was Lt Commander (Doctor) Andre Lotter, the medical officer, saving his life after he was pulled unconscious from the ocean.

The incident changed him forever. "I realised that God was not a phantom; He was real and was calling me. He told me to wait on Him and He would show me what He wanted me to do." In an unexpected turn of events, he also discovered who the woman in his near-death experience was.

Several weeks after the incident, while visiting his parents, he saw an old family photograph and was stunned to see her in the picture, standing in the back row.

It turned out that she was his father's older sister and her name



Piet de Beer Strydom.

was Isi Strydom.

She died in a concentration camp in 1902, just before his father was born.

Piet became involved in church ministries, leading Bible study groups, a prison ministry and facilitated Alpha, a program for people to explore Christianity.

He studied theology, was accredited as a Methodist preacher in 2011 and retired from the Navy in 2013.

Piet doesn't see himself as having arrived - far from it.

In his words: "I am a continuing work in progress in the Lord." ●

"I realised God was not a phantom - He was real."

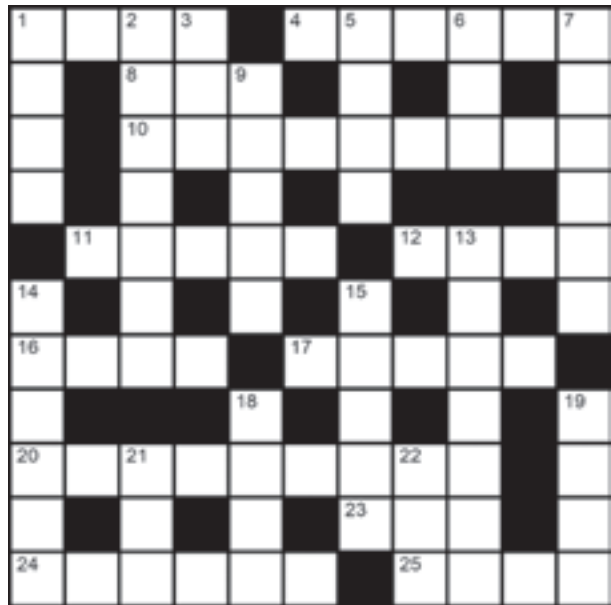
Coffee Break CROSSWORD & SUDOKU

ACROSS

- 1. Fall sound
- 4. Went after
- 8. More than undercooked
- 10. People of the US
- 11. Christian scriptures
- 12. Twosome
- 16. Military body
- 17. Number of spider legs
- 20. Pilot's bail-out gear
- 23. Used a bench
- 24. Mister in Brazil
- 25. Rind

DOWN

- 1. Metered vehicle
- 2. Nuclear ore
- 3. Three Gorges project
- 5. Locks
- 6. Ocean

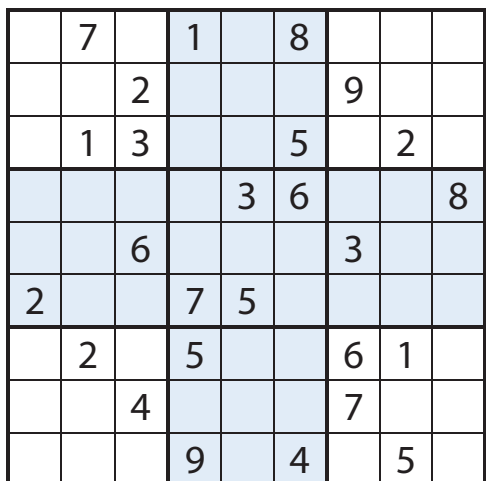


- 7. Arid place
- 9. Water holes
- 13. Sports contestant
- 14. University ground
- 15. Computer woe
- 18. Canyon sound
- 19. Ringing thing
- 21. Faster than a walk
- 22. Spigot

SOLUTIONS PAGE 7



"Hold that insightful legal point until we're back from commercial!"



ARMY OFFICER HITS THE MARK

BY JIMMIE KEPLER

On Sunday, July 11, 1977, my life changed. It was the watershed event in my life.

July 1977 found me on active duty as a lieutenant in the United States Army at Fort Lewis in Washington.

Life was good. I had a beautiful, intelligent wife. I had a new son born in January that same year. My career was going great.

I had just received a commendable rating during an Annual General Inspection in maintenance and Department of the Army General Inspection (DAIG). It was the first commendable rating since the division had returned from Vietnam.

Because of the DAIG commendable rating, I received a special officer evaluation report. I was named an Outstanding Junior Officer of the Ninth Infantry Division because of the commendable rating. I received an offer of a regular army commission and asked to be assistant division commander for support's aide.

I always tried being the best I could be and doing what was right. I was a perfectionist, high-achieving, and a workaholic.

However, after all of this, I still had an empty, unsatisfied, void, and alone feeling.

Beginning in my college years I tried drinking, women, materialism, partying, and hanging out with the right crowd to fill this unexplained need I had. I knew something was missing from my life.

I was attending a church where I noticed a group of men that seemed to have what I was missing. I attended a Bible study with them.

Here I found that God has given us an essential manual for life — the Bible. He has the answers to the problems and emptiness we may face. I found out I was here for a purpose, and not by accident.

I learned Jesus loves me and desires to have a personal relationship with me. However, sin separated me from Him.

I realized I had a sin problem.

The Bible says, "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." (Romans 3:23). But no one is perfect!

We have all sinned and therefore cannot save ourselves by just living a good life. Why?

I learned there was a penalty to be paid for my sin.

The Bible says, "For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God



Author and former US Army officer Jimmie Kepler.

is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord." (Romans 6:23).

I learned God gives us a promise.

The Bible says, "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him shall not perish, but have everlasting life." (John 3: 16)

I learned that God made a provision for me.

The Bible says, "If you confess with your mouth, 'Jesus is Lord,' and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved." (Romans 10: 9-10).

I prayed to accept the gift of eternal life through Jesus. I prayed, "Jesus, I know that I am a sinner."

"I believe that You died for my sins and rose from the grave so that I might have eternal life in Heaven with You. I willingly repent of my sins and ask You to come into my heart and life. Take control of my words, thoughts, and actions.

"I place all of my trust in You for my salvation. I accept You as my Lord and Saviour, and this free gift of eternal life. Amen."

Since then my life has not been perfect. It's been far from it. I've messed up from time to time, sometimes failing miserably in my decisions and choices. However, I have had direction and purpose in my life. I know where I am headed. I have the Bible to give me the principles for daily living. I am never alone. I have had real peace for the last 40 years.

How about you? Have you ever been "saved"? You can do like I did.

Romans 10:9-10, 13 tells us, "That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation. ... For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved."

Why not pray this simple prayer and accept Jesus Christ today? ●

THIS EDITION BROUGHT TO YOU BY SOUTH AFRICAN MILITARY CHRISTIAN FELLOWSHIP



Why SAMCF exists

- To actively support the ministry of the SANDF chaplains;
- To help build up the individual member to spiritual maturity in his/her relationship with God, family and associates;
- 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.

If you would like more information about SAMCF please contact your unit or area representative or post to:

**SA Military Christian Fellowship (SAMCF)
PO Box 1545, Sun Valley, 7985, Cape Town**

Website: www.samcf.org.za - Email address: samcf3@gmail.com

Tell us your story of coming to Jesus and encourage other soldiers for Christ!

**SEND TO:
Capt Lourens:
samcf3@gmail.com**

Survivor: the moment that changed my life

BY JANICE TEO

Thursday, November 29, 1973 was a beautiful day in Papua New Guinea. Military man Colin Darch, then 23, squinted at the bright blue skies as he climbed into a helicopter.

Colin, an Australian Army surveyor on assignment to PNG, was being flown to Mount Wilhelm, the country's highest mountain.

As pilot Kevin Shoppee prepared to land, Colin noticed that the terrain appeared very foreboding, steep and was covered in snow.

As if on cue, the helicopter started shaking and spinning violently. "We're going down!" yelled Kevin.

Colin's first thought as the aircraft fell like a rock from the sky was: "I'm a dead man." Then he felt an arm going around his shoulder, and heard a quiet voice saying: "Colin,

don't worry. You're going to be alright."

"With that little inner voice came a peace that I cannot describe in words," says Colin, now 75 and retired, and living in Perth, Western Australia.

The aircraft hit the ground and disintegrated. Colin blacked out.

When he came to, he saw Kevin, the pilot, hanging from his safety harness. Colin called out to him. He lifted his head, looked at Colin, rolled his eyes and died.

Colin was rescued the next day.

As traumatic as this event was though, it did not define his life. Colin's life-changing moment had actually happened three months before – on the day he committed his life to Jesus Christ.

Colin grew up on a farm in Western Australia. He was four when his father left his family, setting the

young boy on a lifelong search for the father he never had.

In 1967 he enlisted in the Army, became a land surveyor and lived according to the motto "eat, drink, and be merry".

While doing his sergeant's training he met Philip, a man who – unlike many other married men on the base – was faithful to his wife.

"Philip spoke very highly of his wife and children," Colin shares. "He was devoted to them. His life was a living testimony of what God could do in a man devoted to Him."

After the sergeant's course, Colin and Phil were posted to Papua New Guinea, where they were billeted together.

At first Colin refused Philip's invitations to church. "I was not going to have anything to do with religion. I was simply not a church sort of person."

But camp life was so boring he accepted Phil's invitation the following week.

"At the service I listened to the beautiful singing, to the preaching from the Bible, which I had never



Colin Darch.

INSET BEHIND and LEFT: The wreckage of Colin's helicopter.



The blinding fog at the landing site the day of the crash.

heard before, and thought what a beautiful thing these people have.

"The preaching made sense for the first time in my life. After the service I saw the natives of PNG, Australians, Americans, and other nationalities together in fellowship, having fun, and in a mutual bond of love.

"I could not understand what they had but knew it was something I did not have."

A girl named Pattie asked him how he found the service. "I thoroughly enjoyed it," he replied.

Then she asked: "Would you like to get saved?" Colin had no idea what that meant, "but when I looked at the joy on the people's faces, I knew that was what I wanted and I said yes."

Pattie's father, a missionary, showed Colin from the Bible that he was a sinner on the way to hell unless he accepted Jesus Christ as his Lord and Saviour.

"After seeing how evil and filthy my life really was before a perfect God, and then seeing what Jesus Christ had done for me personally, I could only bow my head and ask the Lord Jesus to forgive me for all my sins. I asked Him to save me, to be my Lord and Saviour, and my God.

"From that moment on my life changed forever."

It was God, says Colin, who whispered, "Don't be afraid" and filled him with inexplicable peace while the helicopter was crashing.

"Any fear I had was washed away with the feeling of pure love I was later to understand from the Bible was 'the peace of God that surpasses all understanding'.

"For the first time in my life, I felt the arms around me of a Father who deeply loved me and would protect me.

"There is a moment in time in everyone's life where a crucial decision changes their life entirely, either for the worse or for the better.

"Committing my life to Jesus is the greatest decision I ever made. It was my wonderful 'moment in time'.

Colin now spends his days conducting Bible studies at his local church.

Three years ago, he lost Ester, his beloved wife of

47 years.

"God gave me a wonderful wife of 47 years, two wonderful children who deeply love the Lord, and I can only praise Him for them, a wonderful family.

"The Lord has never left me. Every promise He has made to me from His Word He has kept to the full.

"I am the one who has failed Him, and yet He forgives me, He picks me up, restores me, and continues to guide my daily steps through life.

"I praise Him for everything and everyone in my life."

"I could not understand what they had but knew it was something I did not have."

Belief despite living in a broken world

BY KELLY LADD BISHOP

THERE IS A lot of bad news. I often hear people lament; how can you possibly believe in God when bad things happen?

I look at it from the opposite angle. When bad things happen, how can you possibly not believe in God?

The news is just one frustrating story after another, from American politics to world news, it can feel overwhelming. It is overwhelming. Sometimes I think it is more than the human soul can handle.

I believe in God for many reasons. To me, there is enough historical evidence to make a convincing case. To me, there is enough documentary and historical evidence around the Bible and the life of Jesus, that it certainly deserves serious consideration. To me, that serious consideration leads to solid evidence that the Scripture is true.

But faith is more than just being convinced of facts. Faith is a matter of heart. It comes from experiencing repentance, knowing our own brokenness and experiencing forgiveness.

We call it salvation. It's real. I believe in God for all of these reasons and more. And I believe in God because the world is a difficult place. Some people say that Christians and people of faith just need to believe in God to make them feel better.

The idea of God brings them comfort. It helps them deal with anxiety, and that's fine.

It's like we are taking some kind of supernatural pill to relax our nerves or buying into a fairy tale because it makes us feel good.

But to those who believe, it's not just about feeling

good. And walking with God is certainly not always relaxing. But it does bring us hope.

God brings hope because nothing makes sense without God. Without God we live in a difficult world that will just continue to be difficult forever, or until we destroy it, or it destroys us. Without God, the problems are insurmountable, and the struggle is meaningless.

But for Christians there is the promise of redemption. The Bible says, "the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the freedom and glory of the children of God" (Romans 8:21).

God promises us that this is temporary. The world won't be difficult forever.

The world will be "liberated from its bondage to decay." That's powerful imagery. And it's a promise.

Just as we experience redemption in our souls now through salvation, all of creation will one day be redeemed. In the meantime, we are to live in that

promise. We are to make the world better wherever we can, bringing in glimpses of redemption, working with God, loving God's world and people.

The world is difficult. But God hears our cries. God answers prayers.

And God has not forsaken us. God is doing a greater work, and because of God, one day bad things will no longer happen. Thank God.

"He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death, or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away" (Revelation 21:4).

Kelly holds an M.Div. and a B.A. in Biology. She spent seven years working in youth ministry, and has most recently worked as an associate pastor. She is passionate about exploring God's word and issues of faith and culture. You can read more at www.kellyladdbishop.com



STOCK PHOTO

Colin Darch with his wife Ester, who died of cancer in 2022.



Sacrifice and salvation in the face of death

BY HARRIET COOMBE

THE TRAGEDY OF the sinking of the Titanic on April 14, 1912 is well-known across the world but you may not have heard about another ship, the Empress of Ireland, which sank two years later, on May 29, 1914.

The 1477 passengers on board were on their way from Canada to London in foggy conditions when it was struck by a Norwegian coal ship, creating a large hole in the middle of the ship.

The Empress of Ireland sank rapidly, taking just 14 minutes to disappear beneath the water. Because of this, only a few lifeboats could be launched.

Sadly, many passengers were trapped below deck, asleep in their cabins, and had little chance to escape. Only 465 people survived, making it one of the worst peacetime maritime disasters.

Among the Empress of Ireland's passengers were 167 members of the Canadian Salvation Army, who were on their way to a conference in London.

Their cabins were near where the lifejackets were stored so they were among the few who were able to quickly put them on.

But once they were in the water and saw so many people struggling to survive, they quickly gave up their lifejackets.

It is understood that they swam through the freezing water, asking distressed passengers, "Do you believe in Jesus?"

If they said "No", then, in an act of selfless love and sacrifice, the Salvation Army member would remove their lifejacket and give it to the other person.

This came at a great cost – only eight of the Salvation Army members survived. But they chose to die so that others could live and have the chance to find eternal salvation through Jesus.

The heart of Easter

I think this story mirrors the heart of Easter perfectly. Just as the Salvation Army members



The Empress of Ireland. Photo: Getty Images.

sacrificed their lives for others, Jesus Christ willingly laid down His life for humanity.

His death on the cross was the ultimate act of selfless love and sacrifice, ensuring that all who believe in Him could be saved from the consequences of sin [wrongdoing against God].

The Bible says in 1 John 1:9, "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness."

Good Friday is the day we remember Jesus' death.

The reason it is called "Good" is because of what it means for us – His death bought our forgiveness and eternal life. Three days later He rose again, demonstrating His victory over sin, death, and the grave, proving He is the Son of God and the Saviour of the world. Our response to Jesus' sacrifice is simple.

Romans 10:9 says: "If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved."

Answering the question

The question posed by those Salvation Army members in freezing waters in 1914 is as important today as it was over a century ago: "Do you know Jesus?"

If you have not yet made the decision to follow Christ, today can be your moment of salvation. See the box on page 7 entitled *How do I Become a Christian* for more information.

“
They chose
to die so
that others
could live.”

Ask Y: Peter Meadows answers your questions about God

QUESTION: IF JESUS WAS SUCH A GOOD PERSON HOW COME HE ENDED UP BEING EXECUTED?



YOU ARE RIGHT – no one could ever say Jesus was anything other than 'good'. And that has to be the greatest understatement of all time.

So how come He died strung up like a common criminal?

The answer – amazing as it must sound – is that this was God's plan from the start.

The significance of Jesus' death is ultimately wrapped up in who He was and what He came to do. You see Jesus didn't stumble onto the stage of history. The script had already been written – with Him as the central character.

Jesus was to be the kingpin of God's rescue plan. The one who would deliver us all from the mess we've created.

The Jewish scriptures had been promising such a deliverer for hundreds of years.

They made clear statements – prophecies – recorded centuries before Jesus was ever born.

This included specific details about the One who would come as the deliverer, such as –

- He would be born in Bethlehem and of a virgin
- He would be betrayed by a friend and sold for 30 pieces of silver
- He would be struck and spat on
- His hands and feet would be pierced – and so would His side
- The soldiers would throw dice for His clothes but would not break even a bone of his body
- He would be buried in a rich man's grave – and would rise again from the dead
- Imagine the odds for any one person living a life that matched

even a few of these prophecies. Yet Jesus fulfilled them all. Without doubt He was THE One.

And God took all that trouble because of what the death of Jesus was designed to accomplish.

He was to die as a sacrifice to pay the debt all of us owe to God for failing to live His way.

The picture comes clear when you take account of what happened at the time Jesus died. The record shows that at midday the sky went black – as black as midnight.

Again this had been foretold. Over 800 years before a Jewish prophet, Amos, wrote, "In that day," declares the Sovereign LORD, "I will make the sun go down at noon and make the earth dark in broad daylight." (Amos 8:9)

That darkness points to the magnitude of what was taking place.

It was a picture of the way Jesus had been abandoned due to our sin – and for the first time separated from his Father as He called out "My God, my God why have you forsaken me?"

As Jesus became the curse of the world he drowned in our sin on a midnight afternoon.

And it was all for us – to make our forgiveness possible and so we can be clean and comfortable in God's presence.

But, of course, that calls for a response from us – one that calls for us to trust God with our life. •

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.



SAMCF - AT EASE RADIO PROGRAM

Please be advised of a new Military Radio Program - AT EASE, presented by the South African Military Christian Fellowship (SAMCF) and hosted by the Durban-based Good News Community Radio (GNCR) located in La Merci, KwaZulu Natal.

The 30 min **AT EASE** program is aired every Tuesday evening @ 18:00 / 6pm on the KZN radio frequency 93.6FM.

For those not living in the Durban area who cannot tune in to listen live, the broadcast is live streamed on the GNCR website (www.gncr.org.za).

The program can also be listened to or downloaded any time from the GNCR Podcast found on their website under Podcast, Local Program and under **AT EASE**.

Typically the following slots are aired during the 30 min program:

- Weekly Devotional.
- SA Navy Band music.
- Weekly Christian Testimony from the Challenge Newspaper.
- Interviews with SAMCF and AMCF (Association of Military Christian Fellowships) members and other AMCF Support Organisations.
- Presenter: Pastor Chris Meyer.

For further information please contact:

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E-Mail: samcl3@gmail.com

GNCRAdmin

032 533 3215

www.gncr.org.za

"The Lord gave the word; Great was the company of those who proclaimed it" Psalms 68:11 NKJV

EX-MARINE ASSIGNED NEW MISSION

• From page 1

"I said, 'Yes,' and... he led me in the prayer to commit my life to Christ."

After attending a men's retreat in 1980, Jim felt God was calling him full-time Christian ministry. Jim became a youth pastor and later, he became the part-time administrator of a church in San Juan Capistrano, California, initially earning \$500 a month. Recognizing his gift of administration, he eventually became the executive pastor of the church.

Nine years later, he founded a church in San Clemente. After 14 years at the helm of what became a thriving church, Jim and Laura both felt God was telling them their season at the church was complete.

It wasn't long before Jim ran into JP Spitz, who operated a Christian drug rehab ranch in Lake Elsinore, California. Jim volunteered to teach a Bible study at the ranch and later they went to breakfast.

Jim shared with JP his heart for discipleship, which had led him to buy a duplex in San Clemente, with four men living upstairs and four young women downstairs.

JP told Jim about a thrift store that had vacated its space in San Clemente. "We could open up a thrift store there and you could continue to do your discipleship ministry," JP said. "The thrift store could help fund what we're doing. I can send guys over from the ranch to work in the store. So we negotiated a lease and that was that."

They rented a house near the thrift store that became Joshua House. "It was a two-bedroom house. And then

there was a room that was never permitted, a converted garage. We had two sets of bunk beds in each room, with eight guys. Then I went on vacation and I came back and JP put three sets of bunk beds in the extra room. So we had 14 guys living in this house."

Jim faced opposition from new laws which impacted recovery homes but he learned that he had to apply for a conditional use permit in order to remain open.

The final hurdle in applying for the permit was for Jim to appear at a planning commission meeting and face any objections from neighbors living within 300 feet of Joshua House. "Everyone hated recovery houses in 2017," he notes.

Jim was stunned at the meeting. "All these people spoke and there was not one negative thing. Every single thing was positive – that's a miracle!"

A doctor stood up and said, "I deal with people who are in recovery. Some recovery programs use other drugs to get people off a drug and it doesn't work. I've watched eight years what they've done at Joshua house and how successful they are. As a medical doctor, I'm saying what they're doing is working!"

With this overwhelmingly positive feedback, the planning commission voted unanimously to approve Joshua House.

Because of the success of the program and a rising demand for their services, Jim hopes to open another house.

This original of this article was first published on Godreports.com and is used with kind permission.

Rifle range revelation was his magic bullet

In 2016, Troy Craigie was deployed to Kabul, Afghanistan, as a soldier in the Australian Army. There, he witnessed scenes of extreme violence and the horrors of war.

"There was always this spiritual feeling that I had, kind of like a heavy presence of evil," he tells Deliverance Down Under.

Thankfully, the team returned home safely. But after his return, Troy sensed that something had changed. He no longer felt like the man he used to be.

"I felt like there was this darkness inside of me. My behaviour had changed radically, so it was a vulnerable time in my life, trying to figure out what was happening." Troy was

later diagnosed with depression and Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD).

"I went down the route of trying to seek healing and treatment. But it felt like no matter what I did, I couldn't shake this darkness inside me that came about from my trip to Afghanistan."

For years, he sought help and was prescribed a range of antidepressants. He even went through a form of therapy called Transcranial Magnetic Stimulation, a non-invasive therapy that uses electromagnetic coils to stimulate brain activity. However, even that didn't work. Soon, Troy began to develop suicidal thoughts.

"These voices or thoughts that came into my head felt very foreign, like they weren't my own, because even though I didn't have the best upbringing, I was never suicidal."

Growing up, Troy had a tumultuous childhood. His parents separated and fought for custody of him and his siblings.

"My mum tried her best to raise us, but I didn't generally feel that sort of love and connection to her or even to my father."

At 18, he left home to join the Australian Army.

"It felt really inviting and welcoming being told that I had value and purpose," he recounts. For the first time, I was given an identity."

Despite growing up in an atheistic household, he often won-

dered if God was real. "I always kind of thought to myself that if there is a Creator and God does exist, I don't want to be in that position where I grow up mocking Him."

The first time that Troy heard the Gospel message (the good news that Jesus died for the sins of mankind and resurrected) was not in a church but at a rifle range.

"Most people have heard about Jesus dying on a cross, but to truly understand what it meant was like a lightbulb moment for me.

"I was convicted that Jesus was Lord and Saviour, but I hadn't fully given my life to Him and submitted to Him."

When Troy met his wife's family, he experienced the warmth of a family's unconditional love, which felt foreign to him.

"I could see that it was very sincere, and a lot of that came from their faith in God."

Then when he joined his wife's family for church, he was struck by the sense of peace and love he felt from the people, something he had never experienced before.

"[I was] thinking to myself, 'How do I obtain this level of peace, love, and stillness?'"



Troy Craigie during his tour of duty.



Troy Craigie being baptised.

However, his faith took a backseat when he became a father. Then, when his brother died, Troy went into a dark place, which was further exacerbated by his transition out of the military.

"For me, even though I was a husband and a father, I still felt this lack of self-identity because I was still attached to being a soldier."

The turning point came when Troy attended a fellow veteran's funeral.

"I remember just thinking, 'What is happening to me and all my friends that are veterans? What is forcing us to go against our instinct for survival and take our own lives?'"

By this time, his wife had started attending church, and Troy saw how she had found peace and community. So when she invited him to come with her, he agreed.

"The moment I walked through

the doors of the church, I just felt the Holy Spirit (the unseen presence of God) just whack me, and I could really feel God properly for the first time." That same night, Troy accepted Jesus into his life.

"For the first time in this journey, I just remember feeling like I was healed.

"The voices had completely gone." Since then, Troy's life began to change.

"My wife and I just feel this overwhelming amount of peace and love and even just forgiveness towards each other. The resentment and bitterness that had grown in our marriage just kind of fell away.

"I don't struggle with my self-identity now. I know that we're all called to be sons and daughters of God, and my identity is with the Lord and serving Him."



"Almost" isn't quite the same as a hole in one! Stock photo.

DON'T SETTLE FOR ALMOST

BY JOHN HUTCHINSON

THE young driver hit a tree. His car was a write off. Adding to the dilemma, it was his mother's car.

I couldn't believe his words. He said, "I almost made it around that bend." Swimming champion Kyle Chalmers almost made it at the Tokyo Olympics. He came second place to Caeleb Dressel in the 100m freestyle – finishing just 0.06 seconds behind the American winner.

But almost making it doesn't make it! If you miss by a millimetre you miss by a mile. To miss by a millisecond is to miss by a minute. Those who almost make it don't!

In 1911 Australian geologist Sir Douglas Mawson led a three-man expedition in Antarctica.

His two companions died and over 30 days and 160km, Mawson made his way back to base. He almost made it back in time but not quite! When he arrived back at base, he saw the expedition's ship leaving for Australia – leaving him another year in the freezing Antarctica.

Almost got him

An assassin's attempt on the life of Adolf Hitler almost succeeded. He had carefully studied Hitler's routine and set up a bomb in a wooden pillar near to where the dictator made regular speeches.

Hitler's address, however, was shorter than usual and he left before the bomb went off.

The would-be assassin almost made it to freedom but was intercepted by a curious border guard. How different the world would be if the assassin succeeded!

Almost certain

I was intrigued by the word

"almost" in the chapter headings of *The God Delusion* – a book written by atheist Richard Dawkins. The heading in chapter four said, *Why there almost certainly is no God.*

What an admission!

Dawkins couldn't say for certain that God doesn't exist. He would know, as many should know, the evidence tells us God does exist.

Believing in the existence of God is the all important step in coming to know God. The Bible says: "...for those who come to God must believe that He is, and that He rewards those who diligently seek him."

Almost persuaded

I read a quotation in a secular magazine which said, "to be almost saved is to be totally lost."

It reminded me of King Agrippa in the New Testament before whom the imprisoned apostle Paul appeared. After hearing about Paul's faith Agrippa said, "You have almost persuaded me to be a Christian." (Acts 26:28)

To which the prisoner said, "I would to God, that not only you, but also all who hear me this day, were both almost, and altogether such as I am, except for these chains."

Paul had once been as anti-Christian as any man but, having met the risen Christ on the Damascus Road was so persuaded himself, that all the opposition and persecution thrown at him couldn't shake him. Jesus Christ gave His all to save you from your sins – even suffering on a Roman cross. There was no almost with Jesus.

Don't settle for almost in the issue of faith – eternity is at stake!

See the box on page 7 for assistance in how to be fully committed to Christ and saved for all of eternity.

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BUILDING BETTER RELATIONSHIPS

Are you in a Mexican standoff?

BY ROB FURLONG

BACK IN THE late 19th century two Mexican noblemen were out for an afternoon ride in their horse and carriage.

Unfortunately, the two carriages, travelling in opposite directions, met halfway in a narrow back street. Both men refused to back up, each insisting that they were there first and had right of way.

The impasse lasted for days, with both men sending servants to fetch food and water from home while waiting for the other person to back down! Eventually the problem was resolved by the local authorities who ordered both carriages to back out of the street so that the rest of the town could get on with their lives!

Thus, was born the term "Mexican standoff" which is often portrayed in movies as two or more people

who each have their weapon of choice trained on the other with no one making a move for fear that it may be their last.

The Urban Dictionary defines the Mexican standoff as "a situation in which no one emerges as a clear winner. A poor man's mutually assured destruction." The description goes on to say that the standoff can only be resolved by "diplomacy, a pre-emptive strike or surrender."

Relationships are often caught in Mexican standoffs – perhaps you are in one right now.

You know what I mean.

You and another person have had a heated exchange, and angry words have been said.

You both feel the other person is wrong and that you haven't been listened to. The argument hasn't been resolved and each of you has



STOCK PHOTO

They have breathed in God's grace into their lives and as a result of that, they freely breathe that same grace into their relationships with other people.

How sad it is when people are caught in a standoff, waiting for the other person to admit they are wrong before resolving anything.

Sadly, my grandmother lived out her relationships in this way, and her life was filled with much sadness and remorse as a result.

retreated into an angry silence, waiting for the other person to back down – welcome to the relational version of the Mexican standoff!

Sadly, many people feel that the only way they can resolve these types of impasses is to initiate, as the definition says above, a pre-emptive strike: get in quickly and blow the other person out of the water with an angry outburst before they try to do the same to you!

You may succeed in forcing them to back down, but the problem will not be resolved – the next time an issue arises the scene will be well set for another standoff and this time you may be the one who is pre-emptively struck down!

A statement from the book *The Peacemaker* is worth considering. It simply says, "Peacemakers breathe grace." What a wonderful, uplifting thought!

When you reflect on it carefully you come to realise that peacemakers really do breathe grace.

Over the years of my marriage there have been many times when I have had to surrender my right to be right to bring a resolution to whatever the issue was between Karen and me at that time.

This isn't easy, but true peace and harmony never is – sometimes you must be willing to back down, even if you are right, in order to open up the kind of dialogue that will ultimately lead to true resolution in the relationship.

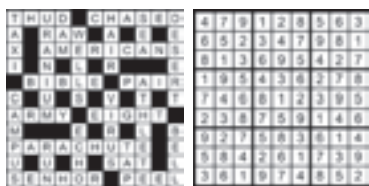
“
Peacemakers
breathe grace.
”

What is the alternative?

The definition referred to earlier describes it well: to paraphrase, the destruction of the relationship is mutually assured – no one will win because no one can win!

Jesus said that peacemakers are "blessed" – they are people who breathe grace, God's grace, into their relationships.

Where in your relationships do you need to surrender your right to be right and breathe God's grace into them?



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)

OUR PROBLEM:	<p>Separation from God "Everyone has sinned. Nobody is good enough because God's standards are perfect" (Romans 3:23)</p>	ADMIT
GOD'S REMEDY / SOLUTION:	<p>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)</p>	BELIEVE
OUR RESPONSE:	<p>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)</p>	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.

AS A NEXT STEP :

If you prayed the above prayer, tick this box

If you have not prayed the prayer at this stage, tick this box

I have prayed this prayer.

I would like to think about this.

- Please send me:
- Bible portion
 - Some 'starting off' literature
 - Information on a helpful church

- Please send me:
- Bible portion
 - More information as I am inquiring about being a Christian.
 - I have a problem (see attached letter)

*** Please tick and write clearly ***

Name _____

Address _____

Phone _____

Age and occupation (it helps) _____

Mail to: Capt (SAN Rtd) Peter Louwrens
PO Box 1545, Sun Valley, 7985
Cape Town, South Africa

WHATSAPP: 083 786 3640

Want to explore more?

Here are some **free**, helpful, online Christian 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 station - CBN radio app (different channels for all genres of music)	
Christian podcasts and sermons - Edifi app	
Christian movies/TV shows - Good. app	
Daily thoughts and inspiration - Our Daily Bread app	
Advice on specific issues, Bible reading plans and studies for new believers - Youversion Bible app .	
The Bible explained with visual aides - the Bible Project on YouTube .	
Alpha Film Series on Youtube - an online introduction to Christianity.	
For kids - Superbook Kids Bible, videos and games app	
Comic book Bible online- goodandevilbook.com	
More inspiring faith stories - back issues of Challenge News at challengenews.online	



From opium fields to top tourist village

A VIETNAMESE VILLAGE has undergone a dramatic transformation. Where there were once opium fields, there are now picturesque rice terraces and manicured vegetable plots.

Once made up of almost all drug addicts, Sin Suối Hồ village is now one of the top tourist attractions in Southeast Asia.

Pastor Hang A Xa describes the bleak period in the village's history to CBN News.

"We were selling opium like selling chickens. Everyone was addicted so no one worked in the fields. We did not have food, just leaves from the jungle. People were fighting. It was a very messy time," Pastor Xa says.

Pastor Xa's father, Hang A Lung, was an opium addict and the village chairman.

Due to this position, the government gave him a radio so he could listen and stay informed about its policies.

But Lung only knew the Hmong language, not Vietnamese. The only radio program he could understand was a Christian broadcast which shared the good news about Jesus and excerpts from the Bible in Hmong.

"My father heard the Gospel [the good news about Jesus coming to Earth to die for mankind's sins] and became the first believer," Pastor Xa shares.

"He wanted our whole family to receive Jesus. He summoned my brother who was studying in another town to come home right away. He said, 'You need to receive Jesus. If He comes, we all go to Heaven, and you go to hell.'"

Lung found a Bible in his language and read it and shared it with other villages.

Through their study, they felt convicted to quit drugs and live a life pleasing to God.

Instead of opium, they planted orchids which became a source of income.

They also started running various other businesses.

Ten years later, Sin Suối Hồ village was recognised by the government as a top tourist destination and in 2023 ASEAN recognised it as a top tourist attraction in Southeast Asia.



Darryl Strawberry of the New York Mets bats against the Pittsburgh Pirates during a Major League Baseball game at Three Rivers Stadium in 1987 in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. (Photo by George Gojkovich/Getty Images)

A LIFE OR DEATH CALL

Throughout his 17-year-career, Darryl Strawberry has made eight consecutive All-Star game appearances and captured four World Series championships.

Yet, the Mets and Yankees star was suspended three times throughout his career which was overshadowed by controversies, drugs and incarceration. Growing up in a home that was filled with abuse and violence, the former athlete struggled with anger and brokenness.

“My early years were a real struggle because I grew up in a very broken, dysfunctional home,” he tells the *Jesus Calling Podcast*.

“My dad was a raging alcoholic and he would come home night after night, drinking and disturbing the whole house and waking us up in the middle of the night.” One night, his father had come home drunk.

“My older brother Michael said, ‘Why don’t you just get out of here and leave us alone?’ And [my father] actually pulled out a shotgun and said he was going to kill the whole family at that particular time.”

Darryl’s older brother grabbed a butcher’s knife while Darryl got hold of a frying pan. Though only 15 and 14 at that time, Darryl and his brother were determined to protect their mother. “And had it not been for Mom getting us out of that house that night, it would have been a tragedy in my life,” he recounts.

After that day, his parents divorced and his mother was left alone to raise five children. Though

peace had finally come to the household, the anger and brokenness from growing up with abuse had remained. Baseball was an outlet that he could use to channel his anger and hurt. His talent got noticed and he was drafted as the first pick into the New York Mets in 1980. That was the beginning of his life as a star baseball player.

But despite his achievements, Darryl could not escape from the pain from his childhood. Eventually, the pressure to do well drove him towards alcohol and drugs.

“I did everything to make me feel good,” says Darryl in an interview with *CBN News*.

“I drank alcohol, took amphetamines. Later down the line, I got introduced heavily into cocaine, which was my outlet and my escape.



Darryl in October 2024. (Photo by Daniel Shirey/MLB Photos via Getty Images)

That was the biggest escape for me. When I found that, I can escape away from everybody and everything.” His struggle with addiction soon led to his suspension from baseball. Darryl’s career was hitting rock bottom.

“My mom passed away. I wasn’t going to play any more baseball, because I had been suspended from the league for drugs. I went through that battle, and I just kind of like had had enough.”

It was at this point when he got invited to a convention by evangelist Morris Cerello. This was his first encounter with God.

“That weekend, all I did was cry when I heard him up there preaching,” he says.

Darryl’s career got back on track after he got out of rehab. He was asked to play for the Yankees in New York and he helped his team win the ‘96 and ‘98 World Series championships. He also married his second wife, Charisse. However, his drug habit resurfaced which affected his marriage.

Things took a turn for the worse when Darryl was diagnosed with colon cancer. Though he was miraculously back on the field again after six months of treatment, he got arrested for soliciting a prostitute and drug possession. Once again, his life had hit rock bottom. Over the next few years, Darryl lost everything, including his career and his marriage.

It was at a drug convention centre where he met Tracy, whose influence as a Christian had encouraged Darryl to turn to God once again.

“I just had to surrender. I had to

get with God myself.

“I had to separate myself from everything and everybody. God was calling me, and it was either I was going to answer this call or I was going to die.”

Darryl made the decision to come back to God. In 2006, Darryl and Tracy got married and they founded the Darryl Strawberry Foundation, which is dedicated to children and adults with autism.

Though Tracy had a direct influence on his faith journey, Darryl also credits his late mother. Darryl and his siblings had found their mother’s journal under the bed where she wrote prayers for all five of her children to be saved.

“Her faith is probably why I am who I am today, where I sit today,” says Darryl. “Because her prayers were, ‘God, knock him off his throne, save him. I don’t care what you do. I’m not concerned about his celebrity lifestyle, his fame, and his

fortune. Do what only You can do: save him.” Since rededicating his life to God, Darryl has been used in powerful ways to reach out to the rest of his family – including his estranged father. “God... speaks to me: ‘How dare you not forgive him when I forgave you.’

“I asked my father to forgive me, and he did. A tear came out of his eye and he said, ‘Yes.’ And I just lost it. I just laid in his lap and cried so hard.”

Darryl led his father in a prayer of repentance and acceptance of Jesus Christ as Lord.

Reflecting on his faith journey, Darryl says that, “I had every earthly thing. I had money, I had fame, fortune, women, whatever it was. But at the end of the day, I’m so glad that He found me where I was in a pit and brought me to a pulpit.”

Today, Darryl is an ordained preacher, sharing the hope of Jesus Christ.

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