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SNIPER TO SERVANT

BY IAN WHITE

A former suicidal Army sniper filled with hatred and anger has found peace and purpose in a new mission – under God’s command!

Adopted and abused growing up, Neil Obbard joined the British Army to escape, becoming a sniper and top infantryman, but developed serious drinking problems, post-traumatic stress disorder and depression.

He was set free from all that after a life-changing spiritual experience – and pioneered a successful bicycle repair programme on the estate where he lived in Leeds.

It’s ironic for someone whose father was always mending Neil’s punctures: Neil used to copy Barry Sheen in ‘skidding’ off building site scaffolding on his second-hand Raleigh in Bridgnorth!

In 2022 Neil opened his garage for Geared For Life, a start-up

enterprise for young people, which has continued even after he moved to Lincolnshire.

But the programme isn’t just about repairing bikes; it’s repairing hearts, helping young people suffering similar traumas to those Neil experienced as a youngster.

“They are just young people weathering family breakups, witnessing and experiencing the impact of drug addiction, violence, abuse and chaotic lives at home,” Neil explained.

He says they deserve dignity and respect to help stop them descending into a life of crime.

His ambitious project grew to



Neil (right) doing laser tag with Warren Furman. Warren was Ace in the original Gladiators TV series and now speaks about how Jesus changed his life.

around 50 youngsters learning valuable engineering and electrical skills: “They can fix bicycles, motor-bikes and scooters, enabling greater social mobility as they develop marketable skills.”

They even have a cycle engineer training young people to repair bicycles to an internationally recognised standard, and have developed basic accounting, customer service and business development training.

While these young people are investing in the green economy, Neil ultimately hopes they will invest in a life-changing relationship with Jesus, just like him!

Poverty stricken kids as young as nine, forced to run drugs for their families, have asked Neil for prayer; a remarkable twist for someone who used to regard Christianity as “all a load of ****!”

Neil fully relates to kids roaming the streets after being excluded from school and banned from youth clubs himself – he’s been there and worn the t-shirt!

He finally escaped from his troubled childhood on enlisting in 1990 aged 19, serving in Bosnia, Kosovo, Northern Ireland and Iraq.

He was no stranger to bloodshed during special operations.

Serving a vital and enduring role on the battlefield – intelligence-gathering, target identification and eliminating high-value targets – Neil was also attached to the SAS in a supporting role for combat missions.

But it was Neil who was tortured

– mentally.

“The nightmares played out in my mind even when I was awake, punctuated by new episodes...”

“Piles of headless bodies... flying petrol bombs, the grimaces of rioting men, the sense of starvation, whole dialogues where I was battered into submission, the feel of burning on my head.

“The intimate noise of street fighting,

questions about death on board an old tractor, the sound of gunshots mixed in with shattering bone and spattered blood, the apparent threat of strangers on your side in a warzone.”

The words ‘Remember,

we know where you live’ played in Neil’s mind on a loop.

Wife Tina, who’d been praying for

him, saw the shell Neil had become and helped get him home.

He eventually found faith in Jesus back in 2006 at a YMCA holiday camp on the Isle of Wight.

Although Neil didn’t want to associate with “a bunch of religious nuts” he eventually agreed to go.

Arrogant Neil wasn’t going to let any of these “hypocritical dogooders” con him: “They might believe in all that mumbo-jumbo God [stuff], but I did not.”

However, Neil found a stone inscribed with a Bible verse which sparked a spiritual transformation.

The words of Jesus, “Come to me, all you who are weary, and I will give you rest” (The Bible, Matthew 11:28), changed his life.

“It was just a small pebble that fitted in the palm of my hand, but for some reason, initially, it felt so heavy that I couldn’t lift it.

“But by focussing on the cross of Jesus and reflecting on my past mistakes, it felt like a burden was lifted from me.”

Supernaturally God stepped in for suicidal Neil.

“I gave my life to the Lord and, afterwards, it was as though I had woken up feeling like a completely different person.”

That transformation led to Neil starting Geared For Life, and he aims to do something similar in his new home in Lincolnshire.

You can read more of Neil’s story in One Shot, One Kill, One Mission (Great Commission Society).

This story was first printed in Good News newspaper and is used with kind permission.

Why is life so hard?

HOW DO WE explain what we see in this world? Terrorist attacks, sex slavery, racism, world hunger?

What about closer to home? Our parents get divorced. The girl down the street gets abducted. A relative gets cancer. We’re likely to think, “Something isn’t right here. Something is really, really wrong. This isn’t how life’s supposed to be!”

So, WHY do bad things happen? There is an answer to the WHY question, found in the Bible. But it’s not an answer that most people like to hear: the world is the way it is because it’s the world that we, in a sense, have asked for. What or who could make this world different than the way it is? What

or who could guarantee that life is pain-free, for everyone, all the time?

God could. God could accomplish that. But He doesn’t. At least not right now. And we’re angry with Him as a result.

We say, “God can’t be all-powerful and all-loving. If he were, this world wouldn’t be the way it is!” We say this hoping that putting a guilt trip on Him will make Him change the way He’s doing things. But He doesn’t seem to budge. WHY doesn’t He?

God doesn’t change things right now because He’s giving us what we asked for: a world where we get to treat Him as though He is absent and unnecessary.

Remember the story of Adam and Eve? They ate the “forbidden fruit.” That fruit was the idea that they could ignore what God said or gave them, and strike out on life apart from God. For Adam and Eve sort of hoped that they could become like God, without God.

They believed there was something more valuable in existence than God Himself, something more valuable than having a personal relationship with God. And this world system – with all of its faults – came as a result of the choice they made. Their story is the story of all of us, isn’t it? Who hasn’t said – if not audibly at least in their hearts – “God, I think I can do this without you. I’ll just go this one alone. But thanks for the offer.”

We’ve all tried to make life work without God. Why do we do that? Probably because we’ve all bought the notion that there’s something more valuable, more important, than God. For different people its different things, but the mindset is the same: God isn’t what’s most important in life. In fact, I’d just as soon do it without Him altogether.


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Neil at a Remembrance service with his medals.

“Nightmares played out in my mind even when I was awake.”

BACK PAGE



VOICE OF COURAGE
HENRY LONGA

IDENTITY RESTORED

BY CAROL ROUND

IF YOU WERE asked to identify yourself, what would your answer be? Would you reply with your name? Maybe your answer would be more detailed. Would you add your vocation or some other title?

For example, before I discovered my identity in Jesus, I identified myself as one of the following: Carol Round – wife, mother, high school teacher. But what if those titles change during your lifetime? Marriages end. Retirement or job changes happen. Would that leave you feeling lost? I've been there.

How would you reply if someone randomly asked you, "Who does Jesus say you are?" In other words, have you discovered the real you? The "you" created by God to be the best version of yourself. To become a new creation. Become a follower of Jesus Christ?

Understanding your identity in Christ

If you're lost because you've let others define you, then it's time to discover who Jesus says you are. I was in my late 40s when I reached out to God. Oh yes, I was lost. I'd spent most of my life letting others define me. As a people pleaser, I was addicted to pleasing others, not God.

Although I was a believer, I wasn't His follower. And I didn't find my identity through His Son. Oh, the release I felt when I became a new creation in Christ. Jesus set me free



to look in the mirror to see the person He sees and not as the world does. It's humbling and comforting.

John 1:12 says, "Yet to all who did receive Him, to those who believed in His name, He gave the right to become children of God..." Becoming a child of God gives us rights. We have an inheritance more precious than gold.

More precious than gold

Once you become a dedicated follower of Jesus Christ, material things cease to matter. It doesn't happen overnight, but as you grow in your identity as a child of God, possessions lose their glitter. I recall selling or giving away all my gold jewellery. Eventually, because I also had a large collection of costume jewellery, I started paring down, giving much of it away. It simplified my life.

Scriptures abound in the Bible to help us grow into our identity. Look up the following: John 15:15, Romans 3:24, Romans 6:6, Romans 8:1, Romans 8:17, Romans 15:7, 2 Corinthians 5:21, Galatians 3:28, Galatians 4:7, Galatians 5:1, Ephesians 1:11, and Ephesians 2:4-5. This is just a partial list, but they affirm our new identity.

If you're lost or not completely convinced who you are in Jesus, seek Him in the pages of scripture. Ask Him to reveal Himself to you. Grab a notebook or a lined journal and write down the scriptures above.

Look up more scriptures to help you understand how much God loves you. He sacrificed His Son so you can have eternal life. Meditate on the scriptures. Let them settle into your spirit as you seek to fully understand who you are in Christ.

"Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!" (2 Corinthians 5:17)

Please feel free to share your comments by emailing me at carol@carolaround.com.

Verses for encouragement

"Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanks-giving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus." *Philippians 4:6-7*

"And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to His purpose." *Romans 8:28*

"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." *Joshua 1:9*

"Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways submit to Him, and He will make your paths straight." *Proverbs 3:5-6*

"The Lord Himself goes before you and will be with you; He will never leave you nor forsake you. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged." *Deuteronomy 31:8*

"Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I will fear no evil, for You are with me; Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me." *Psalms 23:4*

"The Lord is near to all who call on Him, to all who call on Him in truth." *Psalms 145:18*

"So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with My righteous right hand." *Isaiah 41:10*

"Out of my distress I called on the Lord; the Lord answered me and set me free." *Psalms 118:5*

Why is life so hard?

From page 1

What is God's response to that? He allows it. Many people experience the painful results of others' or their own choices that run contrary to God's ways...murder, sexual abuse, greed, lying/fraud, slander, adultery, kidnapping, etc.

All of these can be explained by people who have refused to give God access and influence over their lives. They are going about their lives as they see fit, and they and others suffer.

What's God view on all of this?

He's not smug. He's compassionate, hoping we will turn to Him so that He can bring real life to us.

Jesus said, "Come to me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest." (Matthew 11:28). But not all are willing to go to Him.

But what about when life is unfair, when bad things happen to us? What about those horrible circumstances that hit us in life, caused by someone other than ourselves? When we are feeling victimised, it's useful to realise that God Himself, in the form of Jesus, endured horrendous treatment from others. God more than understands what you are going through.

There is nothing in life that could be more painful than what Jesus endured on our behalf, when He was deserted by his friends, ridiculed by those who would not believe in Him, beaten and tortured before His crucifixion, then nailed to a cross, in a shameful public display and then dying of slow suffocation.

This was no surprise to Jesus. He was aware of what was coming, foreknowing all the details, all the pain, all the humiliation.

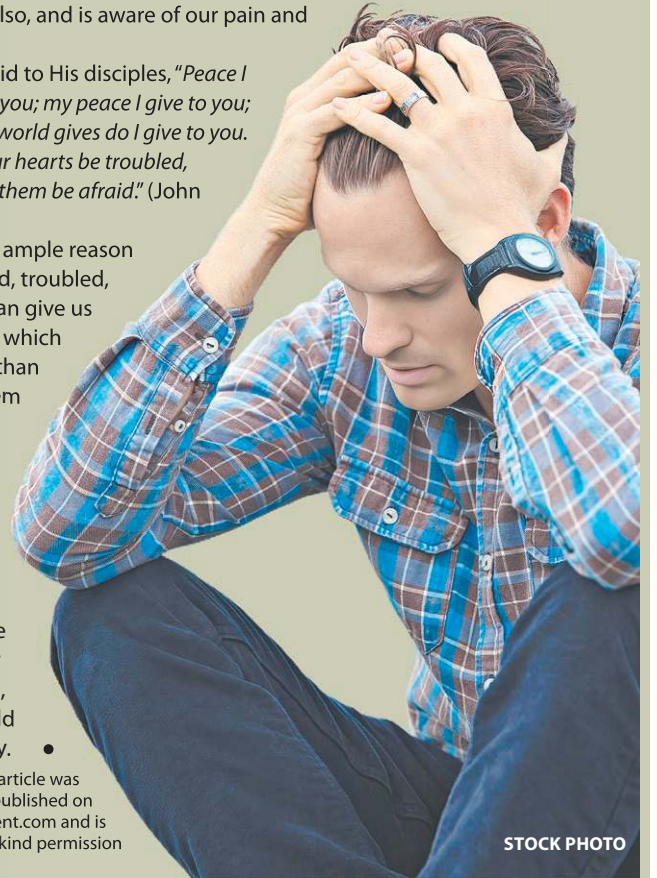
There is no question that there is pain and intense suffering in this world. Some of it is explained by selfish, hateful actions on the part of others. Some of it defies an explanation in this life. But God offers us Himself.

God gives us the knowledge that He has endured also, and is aware of our pain and needs.

Jesus said to His disciples, "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid." (John 14:27).

There is ample reason to be afraid, troubled, but God can give us His peace, which is greater than the problem before us. And if we will trust Him with our lives, relying on Him, though we encounter difficulties, He will hold us securely.

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



STOCK PHOTO

Coffee Break CROSSWORD & SUDOKU

- ACROSS**
- 1 Surgical sutures
 - 7 Sign of boredom
 - 8 Soak up
 - 10 Blow the whistle
 - 11 Make larger
 - 13 Meeting with a doctor, say
 - 16 Round Table warrior
 - 18 Painting, dance, etc.
 - 20 Bring into country
 - 21 Soft, fluffy feathers
 - 22 Ominous; eerie
- DOWN**
- 2 Toothpaste holder
 - 3 Shed item
 - 4 Winter sleep
 - 5 Solar ____
 - 6 Romulus or Remus
 - 8 Launch an assault
 - 9 Open-palm hit

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- 12 Very much dislike
- 14 Heart and kidney
- 15 Money in Madrid
- 17 When shadows are short
- 18 Chimps and bonobos
- 19 "That's accurate"

SOLUTIONS PAGE 7

Smile files...



Elephant Seal. Vicki Jauron, Babylon and Beyond Photography / gettyimages

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

SEND TO:
Capt Lourens:
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THIS EDITION BROUGHT TO YOU BY SOUTH AFRICAN MILITARY CHRISTIAN FELLOWSHIP



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- 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:

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 PO Box 1545, Sun Valley, 7985, Cape Town

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

INCARCERATION LEADS TO NEW MISSION

BY AMY CAIN

Matthew slumped in his cell. He was on suicide watch, feeling the weight of everything his crime had cost him: family, possessions, career. He couldn't fathom how he had reached such a low point. Suddenly, he heard God speaking to him: "Do I have your attention now?"

"And He did," Matthew says. When Matthew was a child, his family's public persona was vastly different from the reality of their private life.

"On the outside, we were a happy family with nothing wrong," he remembers. "Yet, behind closed doors, I had a workaholic, anger-driven, closet-drinking father, a mother who was bipolar, schizophrenic, depressed, and suicidal, and a sister who was a control freak, demanding, straight-A student. As for me, I was the pin cushion everyone poked at."

Matthew struggled in school and felt like he consistently failed his father.

Their relationship was rocky and included physical and verbal abuse. He learned to hide in his closet for safety.

"Living in a household that did not nurture good understanding of relationships assisted my desire to close off from the rest of the world," he recalls.

Church became another escape for Matthew. At church, "no one spoke of our problems or emotions and instead acted as if everything was amazing," he remembers.

Although he busied himself with many church-related activities, his relationship with Christ was superficial.

In addition to the abuse from his father, he also endured sexual abuse from others, and when he was 12, he discovered his mother after her suicide attempt.

All this trauma led to a lifelong struggle with depression and addictions to sex and alcohol.

At 20, still dealing with his addictions, he decided to enlist in the Marines.

"It is kind of ironic that I ran not to the [Heavenly] Father, who loved me and had great plans, but instead to a group of men who could be more harsh and demanding than my [earthly] father," Matthew admits.

Throughout his military career, Matthew's alcoholism held a steady grip on him, but he managed to keep it a secret. Then, he received an interesting assignment.

"Don't ever say God doesn't have a sense of humor, because He put an alcoholic as a substance abuse control officer (SACO) who worked in the adjoining office with the chaplain!" Matthew says.

"This turned into a year and a half of in-depth work with substance abuse counselors, and none of them knew I was an alcoholic. But I gave my heart to helping others overcome their struggles."

Despite this new opportunity,

he was unable to address his own addiction.

"I saw the real mentality the military has towards any weakness," he explains.

"Anyone who was an alcoholic, depressed, suicidal, or suffering from anything or any addiction was a burden, a joke, worthless."

Nevertheless, Matthew's life appeared to be on the right track. His daughter, whose mother was a Wiccan, showed interest in Christianity, so he began bringing her to church while he was home from his former station in Japan. He started taking college classes and excelled in them, planning to use his degree to become a chaplain.

"This is when my life should have changed its focus," he states. "It is the point in which everything could have changed."

But after heading back to Japan, his addictions overtook him, eventually leading to his crime. Upon the discovery, he was asked to meet with the Naval Criminal Investigative Service.

"Instead of going, I began walking with all intentions of going to what is known as the Suicide Cliffs in Okinawa," Matthew says. "The next thing I know, I am in a cell on suicide watch with one pair of drawers and a suicide blanket, and the guard hands me a Bible."

After detoxing from all the alcohol in his system, Matthew decided to begin reading the Bible.

"I had been running for so long,"

he says. "Yet, as the psalmist writes, 'Where shall I go from your Spirit? Or where shall I flee from your presence?' (Psalm 139:7). In that cell, when I read those words, I began to see how God had been trying to get my attention."

That day, Matthew gave his life to Christ and dedicated his time to serving Him by ministering to others.

"This new journey... is nothing like I expected, and He is using me in some unique ways," Matthew says. "Six months after I arrived [at this facility], I found myself appointed as the music director, and for five years, I have filled this position. It has been a true blessing."

Matthew decided to continue his college courses, working toward a master's degree in theological studies. In 2017, he signed up as a Crossroads student.

"Crossroads allows me the opportunity to reflect on the foundation of what it means to be a believer," he says. "If a new believer were to ask for a correspondence course or for a way to grow, then I want to point them to something trustworthy. This is something I have found within Crossroads. It is relational. It isn't just about your answers. It is about your thoughts, opinions, convictions, and heart. [Crossroads] gives hope to those who need it the most."

Matthew said he prays for Crossroads and its staff and volunteers



Stock photo

“I had been running for so long.”

often, grateful for the mentorship program and the Bible studies, which he uses to lead discussions with others around him.

"There are days where a simple question asked in a lesson can lead to a four-hour discussion among some of us here. These are not 'filler' conversations to pass the time but deep, thought-provoking discussions that can take days to digest."

Most of all, Matthew is grateful to God for redeeming his life and giv-

ing him a new mission. "This is the verse in which I try to live each and every day, by the grace of God: 'Be watchful, stand firm in the faith, act like men, be strong. Let all that you do be done in love' (1 Corinthians 16:13-14, ESV)," he shares.

Used with kind permission of Crossroad Prison Ministries (CPM).

CPM instructors from churches across the world guide students in their walks with Christ through correspondence Bible studies and letters of encouragement. For more information, visit cpministries.org.

Ask Y: Peter Meadows answers your questions about God

QUESTION: ISN'T IT A BIT TOO FAR-FETCHED TO BELIEVE JESUS WAS GOD?



IT DOES SOUND far-fetched to believe the son of a carpenter born 2000 years ago was any more than just an exceptional person. But weigh the evidence and you face a different possibility. If you have read previous Ask Y columns you would have already heard about the massive impact Jesus made on history – leagues above all others. And the miracles – healing people, raising dead people to life and more – that mark Him as more than just 'human'. And there are more reasons to believe his claim to be true.

If God walked the Earth, what would you want Him to be like? And does Jesus match it? Let me try a few examples on you:

- Jesus was compassionate. Faced with a widowed mother whose only son – and her sole means of support – had died, Jesus raised him to life. Face to face with lepers, the AIDS victims of the day, He did the unthinkable and touched them.
- Jesus left no one out. Prostitutes, people who lived on the edge of society, and social outcasts were all welcomed by Him. And women, the underclass of the day, received special affirmation and dignity from the way He treated them.
- Jesus made ordinary people feel comfortable in his presence. There was nothing super-religious or standoffish about Him. Children swarmed round His feet, He was a welcome guest at a wedding; He enjoyed a normal social life.
- Jesus detested religious hypocrisy. He spoke out against those with a holier-than-thou attitude. Religion for the show of it stuck in His throat – and he said so.
- Jesus never wrote people off. He welcomed those ready for a new start. For example, a prostitute, a thief, and collaborator with the occupying enemy all received the chance to start again. His life expressed what you hope God would be like – that no one is too far gone to be loved by Him.

So Jesus stands out from the crowd by more than a few head and shoulders. He did the things you'd expect God to do. He behaved the way you'd expect God to behave. But, for me, the clincher is what those closest to Him had to say.

Those closest to us know the truth about us. They can bring us down to Earth should we lose track of reality. Jesus too had his "nearest and dearest" – those who lived cheek by jowl with Him for three years listening, watching, and evaluating.

Their verdict? They came to believe Him to be God – with many giving their lives out of a conviction this was true. One, Thomas, actually knelt at Jesus' feet and declared, "My Lord and my God!" Jesus freely allowed Thomas to worship Him. And Jesus invites us to do the same.

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.



Photo by Staff Sgt. Kate Thornton

WHAT THE STARS DECLARE

SOME PEOPLE ask, "Well if God exists why doesn't He show Himself to us?"

In Psalm chapter 19 verses 1 to 4 in the Bible we read, "The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands. Day after day they pour forth speech; night after night they reveal knowledge. They have no speech, they use no words; no sound is heard from them. Yet their voice goes out into all the earth, their words to the ends of the world."

Next time you are outside in the evening take a moment to look up to the sky and consider how vast and amazing our Milky Way Galaxy is with its millions of stars. Take time to reflect on this. Did the universe

create itself or are the stars shouting out to us that God exists and He is bigger and greater than we can ever imagine?

It is an important question to ask because Romans chapter 1 verse 20 says, "For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities – his eternal power and divine nature – have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that people are without excuse."

The beauty of the night sky is God revealing Himself to us so that we can never say to Him one day "I had no idea You even existed". Turn to Him today because He cares for you and wants you to know Him personally.



STOCK PHOTO

Making the most of time

IMAGINE THERE IS a bank that credits your account each morning with US\$86,400, then at the end of every day the bank deletes whatever remaining balance you failed to use during the day.

What would you do with the money?

There is a bank called 'Time'. Each morning you are credited with 86,400 seconds (24 hours) to spend however you please, and each night whatever amount is not invested in a good purpose is written off.

This means we must use our time wisely.

You can't draw more time out for 'tomorrow'; you can only live in the present on today's deposit. Invest it wisely. The clock is running, make the most of every day.

What is a wise investment?

In a lifetime the average person will spend 25 years sleeping, 10.3 years at work, 9.1 years watching TV, 1.1 years cleaning and 92 days on the toilet, according to calculations done by wikibrains.com.

It is crazy to think that we could spend more time cleaning and sitting on the toilet than we do thinking about our purpose in life and what happens after we die.

Most people spend a considerable amount of years working to earn money to buy nice things but when we die what do we take with us?

If a heaven and hell exists, have you really considered where you will end up for eternity?

God is the One who sees and knows all that we do, whether good or bad. "Teach us to number our days," says Psalm 90, verse 12, "that we may gain a heart of wisdom."

God doesn't give us time so we can earn His favour, or use it to secure a place in heaven – the gift of salvation by faith in Jesus Christ is free.

Using time wisely means pursuing God, believing in Jesus and understanding His will and purpose for our lives. It will involve loving and serving others like Jesus does. It will involve living lives which give glory to God.

I encourage you not to take time for granted. Remember the clock is ticking ... make the most of your time!



Boats full of US troops wait to leave Weymouth to take part in Operation Overlord.

ARMED WITH FAITH

BY MARK ELLIS

He was the only man on his landing craft to come ashore at Omaha Beach with no visible weapons to protect himself. But that didn't stop this chaplain from being the first man out of his boat.

"I had the sword of the Spirit," said Lt. Col. George Russell Barber, USAF (Ret.), who started his career with the horse cavalry along the Mexican border before World War II. "We were all afraid," he explained, as the men came ashore June 6, 1944, amidst a hail of bullets and fiery explosions. "If a man says he's not afraid, he's lying—but we had our faith."

My last visit with Colonel Barber was six months before his passing on December 17, 2004 at age 90. He wanted to attend the dedication of the World War II Memorial in Washington D.C. in 2004, but health concerns kept him away. Although the strength in his legs was failing, his mind was sharp and his grip still strong.

Boats full of US troops wait to leave Weymouth to take part in Operation Overlord. 5 April 2014

He served his country in four wars, and one of his most powerful memories was the D-Day invasion on Omaha Beach. "On the Sunday before D-Day I held services on 11 different ships in Weymouth Harbor for thousands and thousands of soldiers," he said. "I gave away a lot of pocket Gideon's Bibles—there are no atheists in foxholes."

On the fateful morning of the invasion, he went over the side of his ship on a rope ladder into a flat-bottomed landing craft that held 30 soldiers.

"When we hit the shore they let down the ramp I stood in front and led my men off," Chaplain Barber recalled. "They were shooting at us all around."

To the right, Barber witnessed a horrible sight. "Just before we landed I saw a landing ship hit a mine," he said. "It blew up and killed all 30 men. They were floating in the water and on the beach."

Without hesitation, Barber rushed to the sides of the wounded. "I talked to as many as I could and prayed with them. I said, 'Trust in God.'" As men died in his arms he recited John 14: "Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me. In my Father's house are many mansions..."

"Men were being killed all around me," Barber said. "We were all trying to dodge the bullets. Thank God I wasn't hit." Miraculously, none of



Russell Barber

the four chaplains landing on the Normandy Beaches that day were killed, according to Barber.

If they survived the barrage of hostile fire, the next challenge for Barber and his men was to climb over steep cliffs just beyond the shore. "I couldn't get over the 100 foot cliff so I had to dig my own foxhole that night on the beach," he noted. "I prayed as if everything depended on the Lord, and I dug as if everything depended on me."

"The Lord and me got that foxhole pretty deep."

Unable to sleep, Barber crouched in his crude shelter amidst the storm of battle. Through the night, he stared up at a frightening display. "I watched the sky lit up by tracer bullets. Every fifth bullet is a tracer bullet, so you can see it go up and come down."

"The next morning I got over that

cliff and I met Ernie Pyle, the famous war correspondent for Stars and Stripes," Barber recalled. "We split a can of Spam together." Later that day, the two men walked Omaha Beach together, past the bodies of over 1500 who had fallen in battle. "We saw all the carnage and death and destruction."

Chaplain Barber also survived the Battle of the Bulge, and was at the Remagen Bridge spanning the Rhine River immediately before it collapsed. Later, he and his men visited a concentration camp at Nordhausen, Germany. Before Allied troops arrived, Germans crowded 200 Jewish men into a building and set it afire. No one survived the flames. "War is ugly. War is hell," Barber said.

After the war, Chaplain Barber met two members of the Polish underground while he stayed at a hotel in Germany. One day, the three men decided they would climb one of the highest mountains in Germany. "It was a windy and snowy day," Barber noted. They pulled themselves up some of the steep faces using a steel cable someone had left behind.

As a bitterly cold wind stung their faces, they reached the summit, and Barber found something surprising. "There on top of one of the highest mountains in Germany we found a large white cross," he says. The wind at that elevation made it hard for the three men to keep their balance. "We held on to the cross as we looked over the edge."

"What better thing to hold on to in the storms of life than the cross of Christ," he said.

Russell Barber in his later years.



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

— Author Benjamin Windle



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



BUILDING BETTER RELATIONSHIPS

The priceless gift of listening

BY ROB FURLONG

WHAT DOES IT mean to give another person the gift of quality time? Gary Chapman, author of *The Five Love Languages* describes quality time as “giving someone your undivided attention” and that it is a “powerful emotional communicator of love.”

Giving people our attention communicates that we are interested in them and that we are also treating them with respect. But for some people, it is the primary way in which they both show and receive love.

This idea is borne out by the following two quotes, the first by author Douglas Steere and the second by well-known counsellor, David Augsburger: “To listen to another’s soul... may be almost the greatest service that any human being ever performs for another.”

“Being heard is so close to being loved that for the average person they are almost indistinguishable.”

The similarity between the quotes is obvious because they both identify listening to another person as a key concept in giving someone quality time. An ancient proverb also illustrates this by stating, “*The purposes of a person’s heart are deep waters, but one who has insight draws them out*” (Proverbs 20:5). I have found in my own experience that the development of good listening skills is a journey that takes a lifetime.

So, what are some simple skills that can assist us along the way?

Good listeners make good eye contact. When they listen to you, they look you in the eye.

They do not constantly glance at their watch, look over the top of your head when you are speaking, text on

STOCK PHOTO



their phone or look disinterestedly around the room.

Good listeners engage with you by making eye contact with you, seeking to connect with you personally.

Looking someone in the eyes is risky because it makes both you and the other person vulnerable to each other’s emotions. When you look into another’s eyes you see their pain, sorrow, laughter and joy. When we look into each other’s eyes when listening we develop empathy for and with the other person and this naturally progresses to greater intimacy. Looking a person in the eyes also conveys acceptance. It’s a powerful, non-verbal way of saying, “I see you and I accept you!”

A word of warning, however – eye contact does not mean boring a hole into the person’s eyes!

Good eye contact is made naturally and from time to time it needs to be broken otherwise you run the risk of looking like an unblinking robot, completely oblivious of everything else!

Good listeners repeat back what they have heard. It need not be a verbatim report but reflecting back at appropriate times in the conversation what you have heard the other person say is an

excellent way to communicate that you are listening to them. Good listeners do not interrupt. This one needs no explanation – it is pretty straightforward. Proverbs declares that the wise person “uses words with restraint.”

Good listeners do not make quick assumptions or judgements about the other person.

How easy it is to fall into the trap of assuming that we know precisely why a person is feeling a certain way without listening to them fully. Equally damaging is our propensity to judge a person’s motives without fully listening to their story.

Wrong assumptions and unfair judgements have led to the breakdown of many a relationship when a simple, well thought out question would have clarified the matter and most likely have preserved the marriage or friendship.

These skills are simple and straightforward, but as I said earlier, they take a lifetime to develop and master. Giving someone your undivided attention is a great way to communicate love and value to them.

We all love to be heard – but what a priceless gift we bestow when we truly listen to the heart of another! •

ECHOES OF CREATION

A regular column with Creation Ministries International

Master compass builders

BY DAVID THOMAS

COMPASSES HAVE PLAYED a pivotal role in the history of navigation. However, for thousands of years before humans invented them, compass needles were manufactured and used for navigation by microscopic bacteria. These bacteria live in almost all aquatic environments around the world. In his renowned book *On the Origin of Species*, Darwin stated: “If it could be demonstrated that any complex organ existed which could not possibly have been formed by numerous, successive, slight modifications, my theory would absolutely break down.”¹

In line with this, famous evolutionist J.B.S. Haldane claimed that evolution could never produce “various mechanisms, such as the wheel and magnet, which would be useless till fairly perfect.”² Yet, since then, both magnets and wheels (circular components of machines that rotate around axles) have been discovered in many species of bacteria, along with many other living things.

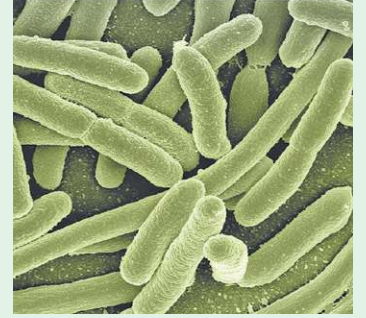
How bacteria navigate

It appears that the compass needles passively turn the cells towards north or south, in the same way that man-made compass needles passively turn towards north. However, there is evidence that some species also measure changes in magnetic field strength to optimise magnetic navigation. This makes the system more complex than previously thought.

Why do these bacteria need to know which direction is north?

In the water column and sediments there is a layer above which there is oxygen and below which there is almost no oxygen. Magnetotactic bacteria (those that can detect Earth’s magnetic field) like to live in this layer where oxygen concentration is low. If a bacterium swam above this level, the oxygen concentration would be too high and it would need to swim back down. This is where the compass needles come in.

Magnetic field lines are best known to travel from the earth’s magnetic South Pole to the North Pole. But they also come up out of the earth in the Southern



Micro photograph of bacteria.

Hemisphere and bend back down into the earth in the Northern Hemisphere. Thus, bacteria wanting to travel downwards travel towards magnetic north in the Northern Hemisphere, and towards magnetic south in the Southern Hemisphere. If these bacteria are moved between hemispheres, they soon learn that the downwards direction is now in the opposite direction relative to the magnetic field. The bacteria can also find optimal growth conditions more quickly because they only travel forwards and backwards along the magnetic field lines, rather than in a random three-dimensional swim.

Such compasses are just one component of these microbes’ complex navigation system.

Compass construction

Building the compass needles within the bacteria is no small engineering feat. It requires an exceptionally high level of control and coordination by a number of molecular machines. The needles are made of magnetic crystals of the mineral magnetite (iron oxide Fe₃O₄), or sometimes greigite (iron sulfide Fe₃S₄). Different species make crystals of different sizes and shapes. [They are] “increasingly sought after ... for industrial and medical applications”³ [but] humans have struggled to produce magnetic nanocrystals of such high quality. We can thus conclude that bacteria are far from ‘primitive’ [and could not have evolved step by step]. •

References and notes

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This article has been abridged, for the original please see Creation.com.



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Love makes you live longer

AN AUSTRALIAN RESEARCHER believes that love may be able to slow the biological clock.

Mark Cohen, a professor at RMIT University in Melbourne said: “Having love in your life will improve your chances of living a long life.”

A study of 1000 married Israeli men with heart conditions found “the men who felt that they were loved by their wives had a 50

percent reduction in their angina and cardiac disease.”

We are created to be loved and we need to know that we are loved. This is not just about romantic love, but the knowledge that there are others who deeply care for us. I

God created us to know and love Him and each other. Experiencing the love of God is a key foundation in life. It allows us to love others and experience love in return. •

WORDS FOR THE HEART

STUDIES IN THE GOSPEL OF MARK

Welcome to this Bible Study. Read slowly what I have written. If you have a Bible, look up the reference verses given, and allow the Holy Spirit to minister to your soul through them. – ALAN BAILEY

Mark 1:1-20

INTRODUCTION

OUR studies in the Gospel of John have ended so we take up another Gospel which has a different approach to the telling of the story of Christ's life. Mark's Gospel focuses on events, the happenings of Jesus' life without a great deal of teaching being added. It is a fast-moving narrative. One of his most-used words is "immediately" as he moves from one event to the next. In this way we learn more and more about the nature of Jesus and who He is. Perhaps the greatest impression we gain is that Christ is Lord over all things and Lord in every circumstance.

It is believed that Mark knew Peter the disciple well, and that he received much of his information from him.

Chapter 1:1-3 *The beginning of the Gospel about Jesus Christ, the Son of*

God. It is written in Isaiah the prophet:

"I will send my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way – a voice of one calling in the desert, 'Prepare the way of the Lord, make straight paths for Him.'"

We see that Mark does not commence his record with the birth of Jesus. He starts back a little to the preparation that was made for Christ's coming. In the Old Testament the prophet Isaiah spoke about a future messenger who would announce to the world the coming of the Messiah, Jesus. That messenger was John the Baptist.

Verses 4, 5 *And so John came, baptising in the desert region and preaching repentance and baptism for the forgiveness of sins. The whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem went out to him. Confessing their sins, they were baptized by him in the Jordan river.*

It seems surprising that there would be such a mass movement of people, especially seeing they were admitting their sinfulness. But this was God's plan.

The people needed to realise that



they needed a Savior. In this way the door was being opened for Christ and His saving work. So the masses responded, though we learn later that some of the leaders didn't. The ritual of baptism was to mark the occasion of a change of attitude.

Verse 6 *John wore clothing made of camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey.*

Perhaps the description of this man and his strange appearance caught the attention of the people. He would remind them of the very famous prophet of older times, Elijah. Maybe some even thought it was Elijah coming back. But reincarnation was not accepted by the majority.

Verses 7, 8 *And this was his message: "After me will come one more powerful than I, the thongs of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie. I baptise you with water, but He will baptise you with the Holy Spirit."*

Now we see how John introduces the ministry of Jesus. He takes a lower place and tells that Jesus is superior to him.

The water baptism had its importance but what Jesus would do was far more important. In contrast to the ministry of Jesus, John the Baptist did no miracles. He was "a voice crying in the wilderness."

Verses 9-11 *At that time Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. As Jesus was coming up out of the water, He saw heaven torn open and the Spirit descend on Him like a dove. And a voice came from heaven: "You are my Son, whom I love; with You I am well pleased."*

The question comes to mind concerning why Jesus would need to be baptized. After all, He had no sins to confess. Indeed, John hesitated about baptising Him according to Matthew's Gospel.

But Jesus was identifying with the human race which He had entered, acting in obedience before all observers. The approval from heaven would have been a startling event for those who witnessed it. God speaking from heaven is recorded only three times in the Gospels.

Verses 12, 13 *At once the Spirit sent Him out into the desert, and He was in the desert 40 days, being tempted by Satan. He was with the wild animals and angels attended Him.*

We can't fully understand the relationship of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit but we know they work in complete unity. The Son has become man and now is tested to prepare Him to be Savior of the world. The enemy of God and man, Satan,

needed to be confronted and Jesus needed to get the better of him. So a battle was fought.

Mark is very brief in his report but Matthew and Luke tell us more detail. It was not a matter of Jesus being inclined to do wrong but a decisive refusal, on His part to do anything but the will of His Father in heaven.

It was Satan's hope to turn Him off course. It is interesting to note that Jesus was with wild animals yet was not hurt.

Verses 14, 15 *After John was put in prison, Jesus went into Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God. "The time has come," He said. "The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news!"*

We note that the ministry of John the Baptist came to a sudden end. The great man was imprisoned and later executed by Herod the King. Jesus moved from the desert to Galilee where He was to spend the majority of His ministry. He followed on from John the Baptist in what He said. It was a call to people to realise that God was dealing with them-- that He was making an offer to them. The term "kingdom of God" is used throughout the Gospels and in brief, means the rule of God over the hearts of His people.

The fulfillment of this is through Jesus, making a way for us to be saved from sin and to be brought into fellowship with God.

Verses 16-18 *As Jesus walked beside the Sea of Galilee, He saw Simon and his brother Andrew casting a net into the lake, for they were fishermen. "Come, follow me," Jesus said, "and I will make you fishers of men." At once they left their nets and followed Him.*

This is how the calling of the first disciples began. Though this was not the first acquaintance they had with Jesus, (according to other Gospels), it is surprising that they were willing to drop what they were doing and follow Jesus wherever He went. We can only think that the Lord had a magnetic attraction about Him, and that they felt compelled to obey His call. The expression "fishers of men" refers to the winning of others to loyalty to Christ.

Verses 19, 20 *When He had gone a little farther, He saw James son of Zebedee and his brother John in a boat, preparing their nets. Without delay He called them, and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired men and followed Him.*

We can't help but wonder what Zebedee thought about his sons walking off the job. But they joined the others making four future disciples. Little did they know what was in front of them – just what an amazing calling it was. The first steps were taken.

CONCLUSION

Mark has given us a quick introduction to his narrative of the life of Christ. Already we see how this man, Jesus, is different to all others. Yes, He is truly man. But He is a man without sin. He has come from another place (heaven) on a mission. His mission is to do the Father's will which concerns a great plan of salvation for mankind. A heavenly man joins with some earthly fishermen on a journey which is to change history.

This is no small matter. It is life-changing. Let's keep looking at this amazing life!

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A	P	P	O	I	N	T	M	E	N	4	1	6	3	2	7	8	9	5
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How can I become a Christian?

Anyone can gain the eternal life offered though Jesus Christ

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

OUR PROBLEM:

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

ADMIT

GOD'S REMEDY / SOLUTION:

Jesus died on the cross
"God demonstrates His own love for us in this; while we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8)

BELIEVE

OUR RESPONSE:

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

COMMIT

Here is an example of how you can pray.

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

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

AS A NEXT STEP :

If you prayed the above prayer, tick this box

I have prayed this prayer.

Please send me:

Bible portion

Some 'starting off' literature

Information on a helpful church

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

I would like to think about this.

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) _____

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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	

VOICE OF COURAGE

Whether on stage or on a cricket pitch, Zimbabwean fast bowler Henry Olonga has a voice and isn't afraid to use it.

The 48-year-old Test cricketer was Zimbabwe's first black cricketer and the youngest to play Test cricket for the country.

But his sporting career ended when he and a teammate wore black armbands during an international competition in 2003 to protest against the rule of dictator Robert Mugabe, saying the armbands were to "mourn the death of democracy in Zimbabwe".

"Scripture spoke to me," he tells Anne Lim from Eternity News. "I remember reading Isaiah 1:17, which says contend for the widow and the orphan, rebuke the oppressor."

That act resulted in Henry being dropped from the team and accused of being a British spy. Then came the death threats. These were no

idle threats; Henry knew his life was in real danger.

The only way to escape would be if Zimbabwe won or drew against the World Champions Pakistan after which the team could fly to the next match in South Africa.

"Before that final match I knew my life was hanging in the balance, potentially," he says.

"Long story short, I said a prayer the night before we got to the ground.

"It was very theologically complicated," he jokes. "I said 'God, help!'

"Perhaps the fact that my life was preserved on that occasion was a sign that God was with me."

With the help of a match that ended in a draw, a cyclone and heavy rain, Henry escaped to South Africa and then to the safety of exile in Britain.

Henry became a Christian during a youth camp when he was 16.

Although he had often heard the Gospel [the good news of how Jesus' death and resurrection reconciles us to God] while growing up, one of the sermons at the camp really got through to him.

The pastor preached from the central message of the book of Romans – that all have sinned [committed wrongdoing against God] and fall short of the glory of God.

Speaking to Tony Davenport on Vision Christian Media, he says: "You can get anaesthetised to the message if you hear it often... but I was always intrigued by the story of the creation, of the Creator and Jesus coming to Earth as a baby, and Him living a sinless life and dying for my sins on a cruel Roman cross – I got that, I understood God's justice, I understood God's love, I understood God's mercy, His



ABOVE: Test Match Special commentator Henry Olonga during day three of the Rothesay Test Match between England and Zimbabwe at Trent Bridge on May 24, 2025 in Nottingham, England. Photo by Gareth Copley/Getty Images.

RIGHT: Henry Olonga during the 11 nation International Cricket Council (ICC) tournament in October 2000 in Nairobi. Henry bowled out two of New Zealand's batsmen. Photo by ALEXANDER JOE / AFP via Getty Images.



Henry Olonga wears a black armband in protest at the 2003 Cricket World Cup opener in Harare, denouncing the 'death of democracy' in Zimbabwe. Photo: ALEXANDER JOE/AFP via Getty Images.

grace. "On that occasion, I was ready, and I understood what was at stake," he recalls.

"Ultimately, I just got it on that day, and I converted.

"From that moment on, I'd always wanted to live a life that reflected what I said I believed.

Henry left Britain for Adelaide in 2015, where he is now a commentator, musician, and public speaker, advocating for justice and human rights.

Just in case you think he's all work and no play, Henry showed his artistic side when he competed on *The Voice*, where his beautiful tenor voice turned three judges' chairs and got him past the blind auditions.

Unfortunately, he failed to progress to the next round, but he is philosophical about the disappointment and lives for higher ground.

"I try to live my life in the wonder of the adventure of living with a God who wants to do things through you... I'm very mindful of that.

"If I can live a life that I can look back over and say, in spite of my clangers, in spite of my failings, I still have woven a tapestry of a life that counted, that made a differ-

ence, and that people can look back over and say good things about...

"I know that we're saved by grace, but [the biblical book of] James says faith without works is dead and so,

I want the work of my life to have Jesus shining through it. I know I do that imperfectly; I know that I'll fail in the future, but that's where my heart is."

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