

Challenge TM

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LOST IN LIES, FOUND IN THE TRUTH

BY MARC PAMPLONA

I rejected Christ at a young age. I grew up in the Philippines, in a very legalistic, hypocritical religious family. My parents followed the Bible, but never lived it out. The love and selflessness just wasn't there. When I recognised my family's hypocrisy, I began doubting their faith. In middle school, when my parents divorced, I turned from God altogether.

Around this time, I noticed that I was attracted to other boys. When I acted on my desires, I felt a conviction of sorts — but, because of my family's hypocrisy and my own distance from God, I was able to ignore it. As I rebelled, I fell deeper and deeper into a dark spiritual and mental place.

In ninth grade, my mom left for America. I eventually obtained a visa and followed her to the middle of nowhere in Oklahoma, where my mother met and married a drunkard. I witnessed his verbal abuse of her regularly. I'd already been in a dark place, but now that I'd left my comfortable life in the Philippines for a horrible life in America, I was totally depressed. The peak of my depression came during the last two years

of high school. To cope, I sought satisfaction wherever I thought I could find it; I was consumed by lust. When I wasn't involved in sexual sin, I was gossiping. I didn't merely engage with rumours — I started them. As a result, I gradually began losing friends one-by-one, and then senior year, I lost them all. This loss came alongside the expiration of my visa, which prohibited me from getting a driver's license, a job, or doing much of anything else. In my eyes, I had nothing to live for. I wanted to end my life, but for my mom's sake, I didn't. Instead, I graduated and left for college.

On the first day of college, a pretty girl named Savannah sat next to me. When I later found her on Instagram, I learned that she was a Christian. I quickly came up with a plan: I'd pretend to be one, too. I followed a bunch of Christian accounts on Instagram and made up stories about my "faith." I told so many lies to grow close to her, while secretly thinking her faith was foolish.

Then, in 2018, I came across a Bible verse on Instagram that struck me as true. I was so moved by the words; it freaked me out. I remember trying to backtrack and remind myself that God wasn't real and that the words were just words. But, as much as I tried, something stuck with me. Soon after, one of my new Christian friends played me the song *One Thing Remains* by Passion. Again, I was struck. I'd only ever heard traditional hymns; it had never occurred to me that worship music could be so enjoyable.

Thereafter, my friend invited me to a fellowship meeting at a large church. I'll never forget the day. As soon as I stepped into the auditorium, I was overwhelmed by the presence of the Holy Spirit. I don't know how I knew it was the Holy Spirit, but I knew. Midway through the service, the leader invited anyone who wanted to surrender their life to Christ to stand up. Distracted, I only heard the "stand up" part. As everyone turned to look at me, I realised what I'd done — and I also knew I meant it. God had been chasing me down and, in that moment, He finally caught me. When I heard the

song *Reckless Love* at service a week later, I was moved to tears. The lyrics rang true: "There's no shadow you won't light up, mountain you won't climb up coming after me" — God was doing exactly that. The Lord had never left my side. He'd been with me through all of my sin and had even used my lust — and my deception — to bring me back to Him. He left the 99 to find the one (Matthew 18:12).

I went home that night and shared my new faith to my mother. Overjoyed, she exclaimed that she'd spent years earnestly praying for the Lord to touch my heart and lead me back to Him. Clearly, He heard her!

Shortly after, I was baptised. When I stepped into the water, I knew my life would never be the same. Sure enough, when I came up out of the water, I felt totally new. Transformed. My faith in the freedom bought by Christ on the cross was solidified. The pain, the depression, and the anxiety was gone and in their place was the unexplainable peace of God. Later on, I felt Him embrace me and I so clearly heard Him say, "Thank you for coming back. I'm never ever going to let you go." I remember just sobbing; in Him, I



Marc Pamplona

had finally found the satisfaction that I'd been seeking for so long. Nothing — no boy or girl — could ever take His place.

I'm now walking in my purpose with full confidence that God is with me. Even in the middle of storms like the one we're in right now, we as believers can find total peace. God is sovereign and His love for us is unchanging. From the beginning of the world, He knew the troubles

that would befall us. We should never lose hope, for Christ has said, "In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world" (John 16:33).

As told to and edited by Adira Polite and originally published on Then God Moved

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SURVIVING SCARS
WAYNE SIMMONS

HOW TO EXPRESS ANGER WELL

BY ROB FURLONG

I USED to think the best way to deal with my anger was to push it down deep inside of me where it had no chance of escaping, say nothing at all and give the appearance of being calm and collected.

I learned painfully, however, that this is just as unhealthy a behaviour as expressing anger inappropriately. "Be angry, and yet do not sin," the Apostle Paul tells the Ephesians.

"That is easier said than done!" I hear you say. "I mean, is it reasonable to think you can express anger without hurting people or damaging relationships?" Paul certainly believed it was.

Think carefully about what he is saying. **Firstly**, it is ok to express anger. Anger is a valid emotion, and we should not avoid it. Failing to feel or even acknowledge our anger only leads to greater personal frustration and emotional unhealth.

Peter Scazzero put it this way: "To feel is to be human. To minimise or deny what we feel is a distortion of what it means to be image bearers of God.

To the degree that we are unable to express our



Stock photo

emotions, we remain impaired in our ability to love God, others, and ourselves well." John Grisham highlights the danger of failing to feel and acknowledge anger in his recent novel, *The Judge's List*.

Although a work of fiction, it tells the story of a successful Judge who outwardly was a pillar of society, but inwardly was a raging storm.

● Kontinye nan paj la 2

HOW TO EXPRESS ANGER WELL

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Over several years, he systematically hunted down anyone who had slighted him and then murdered them. Instead of learning how to deal with his anger in a mature way, he fell into extremely unhealthy behaviour.

We can easily conclude that this is just a book, but the reason Grisham's story hits home is because it accurately mirrors what we see happening in our own communities. Just watch the Six O'clock News if you need convincing on this point.

Secondly, anger is to be expressed in healthy ways.

What are unhealthy expressions of anger? Paul made a list:

Talking behind a person's back to defame them.

Holding on to grudges.

Using foul language.

Using abusive put downs – verbal abuse.

Telling lies about someone or slandering them.

Hateful speech.

Yelling.

Any speech which is vicious in character and brings grief to another.

It's not a comprehensive list, but it's a good place to start.

Thankfully, such behaviours can be put aside and replaced with positive attitudes and expressions of anger:

Acknowledge to yourself that you are angry with the person or the situation and explore the reason or reasons for your anger.

Tell the other person you are angry! Respectfully!

I have found it helpful to say something like, "I am really angry with what you just did or what happened, but I want to work it through with you." There may even be times where you express a little "heat" about it – that is ok – so long as you don't cross the line into the unhealthy behaviours listed above. If you are struggling with this thought, think about Jesus overturning tables in the Temple and using a whip of cords in the process. Something tells me this was not a casual stroll through a park on a Sunday afternoon, but a healthy display of anger.

Be encouraged as you read this. It's ok to be angry. It is a valid emotion.

The challenge for all of us is to learn to express it in healthy ways!

Paul's list of healthy and unhealthy expressions of anger is found in Ephesians 4:25-32. Read this through thoughtfully and try to identify the negative behaviours you are most prone to when angry. If you are brave enough, speak with a person you trust and who will be honest in helping you identify what they are. Then bring your behaviours to God and ask Him to help you change them. •



Lara Silva (centre) as Eden, with Mary Magdalene (played by Elizabeth Tabish, left) and Tamar (played by Amber Shana Williams) in *The Chosen*, series 3.

Choice role in Chosen series

Actress Lara Silva (33) has come a long way from skipping along dirt roads as a child growing up in Brazil to now acting in the award-winning and record-breaking *The Chosen* television series. She says she owes it all to a series of life-changing decisions she made in her early 20s.

Lara never knew her biological father and her mother left her in the care of her grandmother and moved to America when she was three, promising to return for Lara when she had a stable home for her to grow up in. Three years later she returned. In that time, she had met the man Lara now considers her father, though her parents divorced when Lara was 10.

"Because my mum became a single mum she struggled between jobs to get food and a roof over our heads," Lara tells students at The King's Academy. "I remember sometimes having to search around the house for some spare change when we didn't have food to eat... I had to grow up really fast."

Lara started working at 14 at a hamburger place so she could pay for her phone and extracurricular activities.

After high school, Lara went to college for science so she could become a nurse, but "after two semesters I really felt lost and confused and completely drained... I was so unhappy and felt so misplaced... I just made my own decision abruptly to leave which eventually led me to feel like I was a loser and a quitter and it made me feel even worse about myself."

Lara started working in restaurants but depression plagued her.

"One of my best friends and roommate at the time asked me one of the most important questions which is: 'What were you doing when you last felt truly happy?'"

She eventually realised it was when she was at a performing arts school in elementary school. Her friend encouraged her to try and get back into it. Lara searched online for local acting classes but doubts soon crept in.

"I thought, 'What am I doing? I'm too old to start. I'm not going to make it! This is crazy!'"

Despite the doubts, Lara showed up for her first acting class and immediately knew she was in the right place.

Around the same time, Lara was dating a man who was a Christian and invited her to attend church with his

family. The relationship didn't work out but when it was time for Lara to move away to pursue her acting career, he came to see her and say goodbye.

"He asked me another one of the most important questions of my life: 'You're moving to another state by yourself, going after what seems an impossible dream for some, don't you want God's guidance and peace in all of this uncertainty?'... With tears rolling down my face I said, 'Yes, I do want that!' and I said the most important prayer of my life (similar to the one on page 11) and I was saved."

Lara got a Bible and says it and her relationship with God became her compass and roadmap for life.

Two years later, when Lara was 26, she packed up everything she owned and drove to Atlanta, where she started working in a restaurant and met her future husband. She also met a Christian girl who was filming a movie in Atlanta. When the movie wrapped, Lara's friend moved to LA, where she found work in a casting office. She learnt about a new series about the life of Jesus and His disciples called *The Chosen* and encouraged Lara to audition.

She auditioned for the role of Mary Magdalene, but when director, Dallas Jenkins saw it, he decided Lara would better fit the role of Eden. Eden is the

wife of one of Jesus' disciples, Simon Peter. She doesn't appear in the Bible but has been created for the series.

"Eden is an incredible woman of faith," Lara explains. "She loves her husband Simon Peter and the Lord fiercely. She's standing by Simon, encouraging him to trust in the Lord, all while exuding grace, strength and sometimes a little sass... she has inspired so many women and men around the world."

"I've gotten so many messages

“I was so unhappy and felt so misplaced.”

telling me how Simon and Eden depict how a marriage should be and that I'm '#wifegoals'! I never ever expected that and I never expected that the role that I was playing would mean so much to people... it feels amazing to be a part of a faith-based show, especially being a Christian myself... I'm using my

talents to tell a story. Sometimes I find myself getting on my knees and praying before I have an emotional scene because sometimes, take after take, you feel tired and your eyes are dry and you don't know if you can get there but with God's strength that's how I've been able to get through these emotions. I realised I cannot pursue this and I cannot do this without the help of God."

The Chosen, the third series of which has recently been released, is available to watch for free on the *The Chosen* app. •

Coffee Break CROSSWORD & SUDOKU

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- 7 Dust ____ allergy
- 8 Area dense with trees
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- 13 Shipwreck litter
- 16 Fruit and colour
- 17 Pond resident
- 18 July 1, 2017, for one
- 19 Car radiator covering

DOWN

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- 2 Catch with a ruse
- 4 Coral formation
- 5 Bible queen
- 6 Put pages in correct order
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- 11 University location
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- 14 Blowgun missile
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ATIN ASIA

(ATIN is Filipino/Tagalog for "ours")



Why ATIN exists:

- to share the Gospel of Jesus Christ
- to assist the disadvantaged and vulnerable with food parcels and aide
- to distribute Bibles

What the logo means:

The logo represents a person between a cross and a heart, representing faith in Jesus combined with service to others out of love. The font represents bamboo, symbolising strength, flexibility, endurance and grace.

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LIFE IS MORE THAN A CONQUEST

Paul Lim was a happy-go-lucky nine-year-old living in Korea when one day his dad didn't come home from work. He didn't come home the next day, or the next.

His father, who was an entrepreneur with some political connections, had been imprisoned.

It was a pivotal experience in Paul's life, he shares in a YouTube video on the Dig and Delve channel.

"My mom told us that our dad was in prison and he was incarcerated under some trumped-up charges and that we didn't know when he was coming home," Paul remembers.

Paul and his siblings were raised in a non-religious home but he prayed for his father's release.

"I remember this very distinct moment saying to God, 'God if You're around, please send my dad home,'" Paul says. And, when his father wasn't released, he prayed again.

"[I said], 'You can't possibly exist,' because He threw my dad into prison and threw away the key," he shares.

Paul's father was released three years later but life in Korea became very difficult for the family. So, when Paul was 15, they emigrated to America. His parents decided to start attending church and Paul found himself in the Friday night youth group.

"The youth pastor called it BBB because we had a Bible study, then we'd go to Burger King and then we'd go bowling," Paul explains. "Something happened to my personality when I came to America. I was a really happy-go-lucky guy, I was athletic... but coming to America was a traumatic experience. What was more traumatic yet was going to church. I felt the sense of alienation even more... I wasn't wearing the right clothes, I certainly didn't speak the language, I didn't have the right haircut, and I didn't play the right sports. So I wasn't part of the cool crowd, I was part of the loser crowd."

He said no one sat with him at Bible study or Burger King. And when they went bowling – he was also on his own. He felt rejected and alienated. When the time came for him to attend college, he was excited about getting away from church and the youth group. He was accepted to Yale University and as he left, his mum encouraged him to find wisdom from God. But Paul wasn't interested.

"I was so excited that I was leaving and that I was going to plunge headlong into this intellectual pursuit," he recalls.

His college professors opened his eyes to some new ideas. One professor talked about errors and manuscript issues in the Bible. Paul respected the professor's air of authority and was keen to embrace any ideas that helped him to reject Christianity and justify some of the lifestyle choices he was pursuing.

"At that time in my life people were just objects of conquest," he admits.

"I shall pass through this world but once. Any good thing therefore that I can do, or any kindness that I can show to any human being, let me do it now. Let me not defer it or neglect it, for I shall not pass this way again."

— Scottish evangelist Henry Drummond

"Life was about conquest. I had to get a degree, get a job, get hammered, get this, and get that. It was a pathway toward conquest."

Each week Paul's mum would call and ask whether he went to church. One Sunday morning, hung over as he was, he decided to attend the Korean church.

"There are a couple of reasons that I went," Paul explains. "One – because of my mum, and two – it was the only place you could get Korean food."

Meanwhile, Paul's sister became engaged to marry a man who was studying to become a church pastor. He was running a Christian retreat and Paul's mum asked him to go along. He didn't want to go. It was his Christmas break and he had plans with his friends. But his mum was persistent, so he went – and hated it.

"Everything about the retreat was terrible," he says. "The food was bad, I didn't like the kind of people that were there." He also didn't like the Christian music the band played, but

on the last night of the retreat they played a song Paul had never heard before. When he heard the lyrics, "To obey is better than sacrifice, I don't need your money I want your life," tears began to stream from his eyes.

"I heard it as if it was God speaking to me," he attests. "At that moment all the defences that I'd built up just broke down."

That was the night Paul became a Christian. He recalls feeling a mixture of joy and confusion.

"Since age nine I was always trying to get to the next stage – I was jumping through all these hoops," Paul says. "I came to understand that God was saying, 'You belong to Me.' There was a sense of joy and security as if God was saying, 'I've got you, you don't have to try anymore.'"

Paul's brother-in-law gave him a Bible and he read it seven times in one semester. He still had a lot of questions and began studying philosophy of religion as his second major.

"God answered a lot of the questions I had in my heart," Paul explains. "I still didn't quite understand everything, but what began to emerge for me was the answer in the person of Jesus Christ."

After graduating from Yale, Paul

decided to attend Bible College. His intellectual curiosity impressed his professors and they encouraged him to get his PhD and come back and teach with them.

As a professor of church history at Vanderbilt University Divinity School, Paul is now paid to ask his questions and explore the answers with his students. He has also published books and won major fellowships – but his accolades mean nothing to him in comparison to his joy in knowing Jesus.



Paul Lim

Natagpuan sa ang katotohanan

ISINULAT NI MARK MARC PAMPLONA

Tinanggihang ko si Kristo sa murang edad. Lumaki ako sa Pilipinas, sa isang napakalegalistic, mapagkunwari na relihiyosong pamilya. Nagbabasa ang aking mga magulang ng Bibliya, ngunit hindi nila ito isinasabuhay. Ang pagmamahal ay hindi ko nadama sa kanila. Noong naging malinaw ang pagiging ipokrito ng aking pamilya, nagsimula akong magduda sa kanilang pananampalataya. Nasa middle school ako noong maghiwalay ang aking mga magulang, at doon na rin akong lubusan na tumalikod sa Diyos.

Sa mga panahong iyon, napansin kong naaakit ako sa kapwa ko lalaki. Noong sinunod ko ang aking mga pagnanasa, binalawala ko ang aking pamilya at lalo akong dumistansya sa Diyos. Habang nagrebelde ako, lalo akong nahulog sa isang madilim na espirituwal at mental na lugar.

Noong ako ay nasa ika-siyam na baitang, umalis ang aking ina papuntang Amerika. Kinalaunan ay nakakuha ako ng visa at sinundan ko siya sa gitna ng kawalan sa Oklahoma kung saan may nakilala ang aking ina na isang lasengero. Kahit ganun ang pagkatao ng lalake, nagpakasal pa rin sila. Regular kong naririnig ang mga salitang pangaabuso sa aking ina ng kanyang asawa. Noong iniwan ko ang komportableng buhay ko sa Pilipinas ay nasa madilim na estado na ako ng aking buhay. Ang buong akala ko ay maiiba iyon pagdating ko sa Amerika; ngunit mas kakila-kilabot ang naging buhay ko, mas lalo akong nanglumo.

Ang rurok ng aking depresyon ay dumating sa huling dalawang taon ko sa high school. Upang makayanan ko ito, naghahanap ako ng kasiyahan kung saan-saan; nilamon ako ng sekswal na pagnanasa. Kapag hindi ako nasasangkot sa sekswal na kasalanan, ako ay nagtatahi ng mga istorya para makasira ng ibang tao. Bilang resulta, unti-unti akong nawalan ng mga kaibigan nang paisa-isa, at pagkatapos ko ng senior year, nawala silang lahat. Ang pagkawala ng mga kaibigan kong ito ay sinabayan ng pag-expire ng aking visa, na nagbabawal sa akin sa pagkuha ng lisensya sa pagmamaneho, pagtrabaho, o paggawa ng iba pang

bagay. Sa paningin ko, wala na akong saysay na mabuhay. Gusto kong wakasan ang aking buhay, pero naisip ko ang kapakanan ng aking nanay at hindi ko iyon ginawa. Sa halip, nagtapos ako at umalis para mag-kolehiyo.

Sa unang araw ng aking kolehiyo, may isang magandang babae na naggangalang Savannah ang umupo sa aking tabi. Noong matagpuan ko siya sa Instagram, nalaman ko na isa siyang Kristiyano. Mabilis akong nakaisip ng isang plano: magpapanggap din akong isang Kristiyano. Sinundan ko ang isang grupo ng mga Kristiyanong account sa Instagram at gumawa ng mga kuwento tungkol sa aking "pananampalataya." Napakaraming kasi-nungalingan ang sinabi ko upang maging malapit sa kanya, habang lihim na iniisip na ang kanyang pananampalataya ay hangal.

Noong 2018, nakatagpo ako ng isang talata sa Bibliya sa Instagram na tumatak sa akin. Sobrang naantig ako sa mga salitang iyon. Naaalala kong sinusubukan kong i-backtrack at kumbinsihin ang aking sarili na ang Diyos ay hindi totoo at ang mga salita ay pawang mga salita lamang. Pero sa dami ng sinubukan ko, may nanatili sa akin. Hindi nagtagal, nagpatugtog ang isang bago kong kaibigang Kristiyano ng kantang "One Thing Remains" ng Passion. Muli, tinamaan ako. Nakakarinig na ako ng mga tradisyonal na himno; ngunit hindi kailanman sumagi sa isip ko na ang worship music ay nakaka-enjoy din pala.

Pagkatapos noon, inanyayahan ako ng kaibigan ko sa isang fellowship meeting sa isang malaking simbahan. Hindi ko makakalimutan ang araw na iyon. Pagpasok ko pa lang sa auditorium, nabigla ako sa presensya ng Banal na Espiritu. Hindi ko alam kung paano ko nalaman na ito ang Banal na Espiritu, ngunit ramdam ko.

Sa kalagitnaan ng service, inanyayahan ng pinuno ang sinumang gustong isuko ang kanilang buhay kay Kristo na tumayo. Ako ay nataranta at tanging narinig ko lang ang bahaging "tumayo." Habang nakatingin sa akin ang lahat ng tao sa simbahan, napagtanto ko kung ano ang ginawa ko - at alam ko rin na sinadya ko ito. Hinahabol ako ng Diyos at sa sandaling iyon, sa wakas ay nahuli Niya ako.

Noong marinig ko ang kantang Reckless Love sa

service makalipas ang isang linggo, napaiyak ako. Totoo ang mga liriko: "Walang anino na hindi mo paliliwanagin, bundok na hindi mo aakyat para sunduin ako" – Ganyan talaga ang ginagawa ng Diyos. Ang Panginoon ay hindi kailanman umalis sa aking tabi. Siya ay kasama ko sa lahat ng aking kasalanan at ginamit pa niya ang aking pagnanasa - at ang aking panlililang - upang ibalik ako sa Kanya. Iniwan niya ang 99 upang hanapin ang isa (Mateo 18:12). Umuwi ako nang gabing iyon at ibinahagi ang aking bagong pananampalataya sa aking ina. Tuwang-tuwa siya, ibinulalas niya na maraming taon siyang taimtim na nagdarasal sa Panginoon na hipuin ang puso ko at akayin ako pabalik sa Kanya. Malinaw, narinig Niya ang nanay ko!

Di nagtagal, ako ay nabinyagan. Nang lumusong ako sa tubig, alam kong magiging iba na ang buhay ko. Totoo nga, nang umahon ako sa tubig, nakaramdam ako ng ganap na pagbabago. Ang aking pananampalataya sa kalayaang binigay ni Kristo sa krus ay naging matatag. Ang sakit, ang depresyon, at ang pagkabalisa ay nawala. Hindi maipaliwanag ang kapayapaan ng Diyos. Mayamaya, naramdaman kong niyakap Niya ako at narinig kong sinabi Niya, "Salamat sa pagbabalik, hindang-hindi kita bibitawan." Naaalala ko lang na ako ay humihikbi; sa wakas ay natagpuan ko na ang kasiyahan matagal ko nang hinahanap. Walang ano pa man—hindi lalaki o babae—ang maaaring pumalit sa Kanya.

Tinatahak ko ang landas ngayon na may buong pagtitiwala na kasama ko ang Diyos. Kahit na sa gitna ng mga unos tulad ng nararanasan natin ngayon, bilang mga mananampalataya ay makakatagpo ng kabuuang kapayapaan. Ang Diyos ay may kapangyarihan at ang Kanyang pag-ibig sa atin ay hindi nagbabago. Sa simula pa lang ng mundo, alam na Niya ang mga kaguluhang darating sa atin. Hindi tayo dapat mawalan ng pag-asa, dahil sinabi ni Kristo, "Magdaranas kayo ng kapighatian sa mundong ito, ngunit tibayan ninyo ang inyong loob! Napagtagumpayan ko na ang sanlibutan!" (Juan 16:33).

Isinalaysay ni Marc Pamplona kay Adira Polite at siya rin ang nag edit. Ang kwentong ito ay orihinal na inilathala sa "Then God Moved."

Ang kwentong ito ay isinalin sa Tagalog sa pahina 2.

WALA NANG GALIT AT KAHIHIYAN

Naging ateista si Ahn nang iwan ng kanyang ama na isang debotong Buddhist. Ang kanyang ina ay isang nominal na Katoliko at walang diyos-dyosan na sumagot sa kanyang panalangin na manatiling buo ang kanyang pamilya.

“Nakaramdam ako ng pagkataranta,” sabi ni Ahn sa isang video ng Fishers of Men Halifax. “Sinabi ko sa isip ko, tingnan mo itong mga relihiyoso, kahit na ang mga relihiyoso ay hindi makakapagsama-sama.”

Sumigaw pa nga siya: “Kung may Diyos, pakiusap itigil n’yo na ito ngayon!”

Samantala sa paaralan, natutunan ni Ahn ang tungkol sa “survival of the fittest,” isang prinsipyo ng ebolusyon. “Nagustuhan ko ang ideyang ito,” naaalala niya. “Ang mensaheng iyon ay sumasalamin sa akin: Magiging matigas ako, hindi na ako muling mapupunta sa posisyong ito kung saan ako iniwan, kung saan ito masisira.”

Nangako siya na hahanapin ang kanyang kaligayahan, kumite, at bilhin ang mga bagay na gusto niya.

Hindi nagtagal, natuklasan niya ang pornograpiya, una muna ay sa mga magazine at pagkatapos ay online noong 1990s. “Nang matagpuan ko ang mga magasing ito, para itong medisina,” sabi niya.

Ang pornograpiya ay nagdulot ng kahihyan kay Ahn at nagbigay sa



kanya ng mababang tiwala sa sarili. Ayon sa kanya, ang mga babae ay parang naging mga diyosa, hindi siya makapagsalita sa paligid nila. Nakatingin lamang s’ya ng malayo na may pagnanasa.

Samantala, nagkunwari si Ahn at nagpakita ng imahe ng pagiging isang mabuting tao.

Sa kolehiyo, nalampasan niya ang kanyang pagkamahiyain at sa huli ay lumipat sa isang bahay kasama ang isang babae. “Nawasak ng aking pagnanasa ang moralidad ng babaeng iyon,” pag-amin niya. “Siya ay isang Kristiyano. Kinumb insi ko siyang huwag makinig sa kanyang ina.

Nakumbinsi ko siyang lumayo sa kanyang simbahan. Napakabuti niyang babae, noong nagsama kami ay nasira ko ang kanyang buhay, pinanghinaan siya ng loob.”

Dahil nagiging wala kang kakontentohan sa pornograpiya, iniwan ni Ahn ang babaeng iyon. “Kinuha ko ang lahat ng dalisay mula sa kanya, para kong siyan nginuya ito at inilawa,” pag-amin niya.

“Ginamit ko siya. Dinurog ko ang kanyang puso.”

Hindi niya binigyan halaga ang promise ring na binigay nito sa kanya. “Para sa akin, hindi siya sapat,” pag-amin niya. “Ang aking pagnanasa ay

higit na aking tinugunan.”

Pumasok si Ahn sa pagka-clubbing at one-night stand. “Hindi ito naging sapat,” sabi niya. “Nauwi ito sa depresyon. Nakaramdam ako ng depresyon, ngunit hindi ko ito iniugnay sa aking mga adiksyon.”

Sa kalaunan, napagtanto ni Ahn na ang ibig sabihin ng ateismo ay hindi na kailangang magpakita ng imahe ng pagiging isang mabuting tao. Pwede kang gumawa ng sarili mong mga paniniwala at katotohanan. Nasabi rin niya na ang lahat ng ito ay pananaw lamang. Ang lahat ng ito ay magka-kaugnay. Walang totoong mabuti, at walang totoong masama.

Ngunit lumalim ang kanyang depresyon. “Kung walang layunin sa buhay, bakit ako nagsusumikap sa kolehiyo?”

Isang araw habang dumadaan sa simbahan, napaisip ni Ahn: “Kung may Diyos, tiyak na malayo Siya sa akin at hindi Niya ako gusto at wala Siyang pakialam sa akin. Pero kung may Diyos, igagalang ko Siya.” Ang pagbisita niya sa simbahan ay naging madalas at humantong sa isang young people’s retreat kung saan naging mas maliwanag sa kanya ang malaking pagkakaiba sa pagitan ng mga tapat na Kristiyang lalaki

at ni Ahn. Iba ang kanilang musika, nagbabatuhan sila ng mga inosenteng biro na hindi man lang naintindihan ni Ahn; ang mga bastos niyang biro ay hindi pinagtawanan.

Sa isip niya, parang siyang hinuhugahan na kaagad.

Nagsimula siyang magalit sa mga Kristiyang ito kahit na wala silang sinasabi sa kanya. Dito na rin nagsimula sumagi sa kanyang isipan kung mayroong ngang langit ay sigurado sila ay papunta roon; ngunit paano na siya?

“**Pero kung may Diyos, igagalang ko Siya.**”

Isang gabi habang nasa retreat, nagkataon niyang nabuksan ang kanyang Bibliya sa Juan 1:12: “Subalit ang lahat ng tumanggap at sumampalataya sa kanya ay binigyan niya ng karapatang maging mga anak ng Diyos.”

Naisip ni Ahn na tila madali iyon kaya binibigkas niya ang isang panalangin upang tanggapin si Jesus, ngunit hindi siya tunay na taos-puso. Gayunpaman, sa gitna ng kanyang panunuya at pagnanais na masaktan ang mga Kristiyano sa pamamagitan ng panunuya sa panalangin ng kaligtasan, narinig niya ang isang umuusbong na tinig.

“Kilala kita.” Ang lahat ng galit at poot ay humupa sa ilalim ng napakalaking presensya ng Diyos.

Tumindig ang mga balahibo sa batok niya.

Sambit ni Ahn, “Nadama kong labis na naiintindihan ako, na lubos akong minamahal.” “Alam mo kung sino ako.”

Tumingala siya sa Langit at sinabi: “Jesus, totoo ka. Ipakita mo sa akin kung ano ang pakiramdam ng maging isang Kristiyano.”

Habang nagsisimba siya at nagbabasa ng banal na kasulatan, nauawaan ni Ahn na ang pornograpiya ay hindi maganda at natural na bagay. Nakaramdam siya ng Presensya sa tabi niya isang araw habang tumitingin siya ng porn, at ikinintal ni Jesus sa kanyang puso: “Iyan ay aking mga anak na babae.”

“Panginoon, pasensya na po. Hindi po marangal,” dasal niya. “Hindi ko namalayan.” Habang nagbabasa siya ng Bibliya, natanto ni Ahn na hindi lang niya sinasaktan ang Diyos.

“Sinasaktan ko ang sarili ko,” sabi niya.

“Ginagawa kong isang mahinang tao ang aking sarili sa pamamagitan ng pagbibigay sa aking pagnanasa, sa pamamagitan ng hindi pagsasanay sa pagpipigil sa sarili. Nagiging mahina akong tao.”

Nangako ang Diyos sa kanya ng isang magandang asawa, ngunit kailangan niyang matutong maghintay, sabi ni Ahn.

“Unti-unti, nagsimula akong mapalaya mula sa pornograpiya,” dagdag niya.

Sa paglala mula sa pornograpiya, napalaya rin si Ahn mula sa galit na natanim sa kanyang puso noong araw na iwan ng kanyang ama ang pamilya.

Nag-aral si Ahn ng molecular biology at ngayon ay nagho-host ng isang palabas sa radyo sa Orlando.

Pagpapatunay ni Ahn, “Kapag naranasan mo ang kaharian ng Diyos, ito ay may napakaraming benepisyong buhay, kagalakan, pag-ibig, kapayapaan.”

“Nang lumapit ako kay Kristo, natuklasan ko ang kapayapaan ng Diyos. Ito ay isang bagay na maaari mong tikman at maramdaman.”

I found strength for the storms

Dante Federicos’s childhood seemed perfect. “My family lived peacefully and we had good relationships with each other. Our family, like most Filipino families, is ‘Sagrado Catolico.’ Dante admits that he had his share of being a careless teenager too, trying out alcohol and marijuana.

Dante’s normal and good family life continued when he got married during the ‘80s. “I met my wife while we were on a bus. It was love at first sight. I charmed her with my flowery language. We got married in 1985 and were blessed with five children.”

To support his growing family, Dante landed a job as a traffic enforcer. “Since I started my job as a traffic enforcer, my life went spiraling downwards. I had no time for my family. I remember that I stayed at my friend’s house for three days forgetting about my family. I became addicted to liquor. I was also committing corruption at work. I accepted bribes from motorists so they didn’t get a traffic ticket from me. I enjoyed it because I had so much money. I can’t even count how much money I had then. The money I collected would just go to alcohol and women with my friends. It was nine years full of sin.”

But it was not all smooth sailing for Dante, one day his team apprehended a man for a traffic violation, who became furious to them and accused them of extortion. They were surprised to find out that the man they caught was a popular radio and TV personality. “The truth is he committed a violation and we never asked for money from him, but being the powerful media man that he is, he convinced our management that we bribed him. We were immediately sacked and were never given a chance to explain our side. Our superiors told us that there are only two things that could happen to us if we complained – we’d be behind bars or six feet under.”

The setback saw Dante getting into odd jobs like hopping from one bus to another selling cigarettes, to fend for his family. To help her husband, Dante’s wife cooked

rice cakes and sold them on the streets. But Dante’s sales dropped when more vendors stepped in. Feeling discouraged, he went to see an old friend to catch up on their lives. They met near a hospital with a blood bank and his friend encouraged Dante to sell his blood to earn money. In desperation, Dante sold his blood for 60 pesos per 500 cc. “I sold my blood every week for one year in the mid-’90s. It was a difficult time for us, I was ashamed that my wife was the only one working for us, so I had to do something. I was already skin and bones back then.”

All through their trials, Dante’s wife was his strength. He later found out that she had been attending a Christian church. “Our struggle paved the way for me to know the Lord. It was my wife’s conviction. I followed suit and surrendered my life to God. I started attending church services with my wife and studied the Bible with her. I came to acknowledge all my sins, especially being selfish and ungrateful. My wife comforted me and told me it was not too late to change.”

Dante’s wife was very patient with him. He says, “I am so grateful to my wife because she encouraged me so much by sharing the word of



Dante Federico

God with me regularly and, because of her guidance, I accepted the Lord in 1995. But I was not as committed as she is. My heart was not 100% on Him.”

Through thick and thin, Dante and his wife were always there for each other. Little did Dante know that there was another storm brewing after accepting Jesus as his Lord. “The greatest challenge I had was in 2009 when my wife, who was the reason why I became a believer, got really sick. She had diabetes and heart complications. It was very difficult but I knew I had to be strong.”

After three weeks in hospital, Dante’s wife died. Dante held on firmly to God’s words for strength. “After my wife died, I became really serious with my faith. I studied hard and became intentional. By the grace of God, I was ordained as

a pastor in 2015. I am proud that I helped grow my first church in Zambales. I was re-assigned in Manila and became a head pastor in three different churches, where I was fortunate to reach more members and continue to thrive.”

Dante is now back on the streets but not selling cigarettes or his blood. He shares the good news in buses and train stations. “I never solicit for donation when I do my evangelism on the streets. I believe in what the Bible tells us in Matthew 10:8, Freely you have received, freely give. My wife gave her love, time, patience, acceptance, and understanding to me generously for me to know the Lord. I know God used her for His glory, and I want to freely give it back to Him for other’s spiritual benefit,” Dante concludes.

“**My life went spiraling downwards.**”

Youth Truth



Faith says she has found something stronger than any fear, doubt or trial.

FAITH FINDS FREEDOM

BY FAITH

I was born in South Korea, but at five months old, I was adopted by a family in Alaska. A few months later, I was diagnosed with a traumatic brain injury.

The physical effects are similar to the effects of a stroke: I have very little control over the right side of my body, so I move differently. I also struggle to pronounce some sounds and words. But despite the difficulties, I grew up happy and full of laughter. I always had a strong sense that God had a plan and purpose for my life. I trusted that He would use me, just in a different way.

But once I entered high school, my faith wavered.

I was left out, left behind, mocked, and betrayed so many times that my heart hardened.

The emotional and physical pain was overwhelming — and the more I suffered, the angrier I got.

Quite honestly, I thought that God was cruel. I couldn't see a future, I couldn't see a purpose, and I certainly didn't feel any hope.

With time, I became depressed and began battling suicidal thoughts.

But when I turned 16, God brought me back to Him.

One day, I opened up my Bible to Psalm 139:13-14, which reads, *"For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb. I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well."*

As I read this, I realized that my pain was not going unseen or unheard. God had been with me since the very beginning!

My life wasn't by chance or a mistake — all of it, even my pain, was a part of a bigger plan that I could not see. Through me, God was revealing His glory!

Finally, I let Him have the pen and I trusted Him to write my story. With that surrender came so much freedom, as well as the joy that had been missing.

Hard days still come, but God is stronger than any fear, doubt, or trial I ever face. I never walk alone!

With every step, God is right there, guiding me and holding my hand.

As believers, we can trust that no matter what comes, we can trust in Him. God isn't just good, He's PERFECT!

So, trust in His plan for your life... whatever He has for you will be a thousand times better than anything you've planned for yourself.

As told to and edited by Adira Polite and originally published on Then God Moved

PANANAMPALATAYA

Pinanganak ako sa South Korea, ngunit noong limang buwang gulang pa lamang ako, inampon ako ng isang pamilya sa Alaska. Pagkalipas ng ilang buwan, na-diagnose akong may traumatic brain injury. Ang mga pisikal na epekto ay katulad ng mga epekto ng isang stroke: Mayroon akong napakaliit na kontrol sa kanang bahagi ng aking katawan, kaya iba ang aking paggalaw.

Nahihirapan din akong bigkasin ang ilang mga tunog at salita. Pero sa kabila ng kahirapan, lumaki akong puno ng kasiyahan. Palagi akong nagkaroon ng malakas na pakiramdam na ang Diyos ay may plano at layunin para sa aking buhay. Nagtiwala ako na gagamitin Niya ako, sa ibang paraan lang.

Ngunit noong pumasok ako sa high school, unti-unting nabawasan ang aking pananampalataya.

Ako ay iniwan, kinutya, at pinagtaksilan ng maraming beses, at ang aking puso ay tumigas. Ang aking emosyonal at pisikal na sakit ay napakalaki — at habang ako ay nagdurusa, lalo akong nagagalit. Sa totoo lang, naisip ko na malupit ang Diyos.

Wala akong makitang hinaharap, wala akong makitang layunin, at tiyak na wala akong naramdamang pag-asa. Sa paglipas ng panahon, ako ay nanlumo at nagsimula akong mag isip na magpaliwala.

Ngunit noong ako ay naging 16-taong gulang, ibinalik ako ng Diyos sa Kanya. Isang araw, binuksan ko ang aking Bibliya sa Awit 139:13-14, na nagsasabing, *"Sapagka't iyong inanyo ang aking mga lamang loob: iyo akong tinakpan sa bahay-bata ng aking ina. Ako'y magpapasalamat sa iyo; sapagka't nilalang ako na kakilakilabot at kagilagilalas: kagilagilalas ang iyong mga gawa; at nalalamang mabuti ng aking kaluluwa."*

Habang binabasa ko ito, napagtanto ko na ang aking sakit ay hindi pala binabale-wala ng Diyos. Nakikita at naririnig n'ya ako.

Naintidihan ko na ang Diyos pala ay kasama ko mula pa noong simula! Ang aking buhay ay hindi nagkataon o isang pagkakamali — lahat ng ito, maging ang aking sakit, ay bahagi ng isang mas malaking plano na hindi ko makita.

Sa pamamagitan ko, inihahayag ng Diyos ang Kanyang kaluwalhatian!

Sa wakas, hinayaan ko Siya na isulat ang aking kuwento. Sa pagsuko na iyon ay dumating ang napakaraming kalayaan, gayundin ang kagalakang nawala ng matagal. Dumarating pa rin ang mahihirap na araw, ngunit mas malakas ang Diyos kaysa sa anumang takot, pagdududa, o pagsubok na nararanasan ko. Hindi ako lumalakad mag-isa! Sa bawat hakbang, nariyan ang Diyos, ginagabayan ako at hinahawakan ang aking kamay.

Bilang mga mananampalataya, maaari tayong magtiwala na anuman ang dumating, maaari tayong magtiwala sa Kanya. Ang Diyos ay hindi lamang mabuti, Siya ay PERPEKTO!

Kaya, magtiwala sa Kanyang plano para sa iyong buhay ... anuman ang mayroon Siya para sa iyo ay magiging isang libong beses na mas mahusay kaysa sa anumang bagay na iyong binalak para sa iyong sarili.

“
Magtiwala sa Kanyang plano para sa iyong buhay.”

SELF-HELP WAS NO HELP

BY JOSH SWANSON

Though I was raised in the church, I never believed. No one around me had answers to the tough questions I asked, so in middle school, I left the church entirely. I became not only an atheist, but an anti-theist. In my mind, religion was simply a means of comfort, Christianity was just another religion, and believers were brain-washed sheep.

I was certain that this earthly life was all there was, so I aimed to make the most of it. In high school, I got pretty heavy into partying. This continued into college, but there, the partying was accompanied by severe homesickness, loneliness, and depression. My new friendships felt empty; we often just smoked weed, then parted ways.

I spent a lot of time alone and it was during these times that I'd do my "self-help" thinking. I'd spent hours meditating on my flaws and coming up with improvement plans. Looking back, recognizing that I was flawed was a key turning point; I was onto something, but my efforts were futile. Something was missing.

One night, like usual, my friends and I got high, then went our separate ways. I was alone in my dorm room, thinking about life, when I heard commotion downstairs. It sounded like the police were present, yet, for some reason, I felt pushed to throw on my jacket and go scope it out.

I expected to find a chaotic scene, but when I got downstairs, I found nothing but silence. I was weirded out and didn't want to return to my room, so



Josh Swanson

I went for a walk.

I eventually settled in at a picnic table. There, I realized that it was freezing outside, but because of my coat, I wasn't the least bit cold. I didn't have much growing up, so this coat, which was gifted to me by an uncle, really meant a lot to me. I was sitting there, expressing gratitude, from a totally secular standpoint, when I was suddenly enveloped in this overpowering, indescribable feeling of warmth, comfort, love, and total acceptance. In that moment, God revealed Himself to me, an anti-theist.

I felt Him say "I'm here" and that I didn't have to try so hard to fix myself. I immediately and suddenly believed that my own efforts were in vain, but that this Person I had encountered could and would help me.

Then, as crazy confirmation, this beautiful leaf fell before me. It was a curled, slightly broken maple leaf. By the influence of the Holy Spirit, I understood that this leaf was me; whereas I saw myself as a broken thing, worthless unless fixed, God — who knew every detail of every one of my flaws — cherished me nonetheless.

Closeness to Him did not require that I first be fixed; rather, He says, "My grace is sufficient for you, for My power is made perfect in weakness" [2 Corinthians 12:9]. All of the answers I'd been searching for became crystal clear in that moment. I was so insanely overwhelmed; I sat there for a while, bawling my eyes out. By the time I headed back to my dorm room, it was about one o'clock in the morning.

As I approached my building, I ran into two of my friends. When they asked what I was up to, it all became very, very real. I knew that this was a crossroads. Would I be ashamed or would I proclaim my newfound faith? "I just became a Christian," I said.

They were almost as shocked as I was!

I now knew that God was real and, though I used the term "Christian," I wasn't really sure which faith tradition, if any, was true. I didn't want to just default to Christianity. After reading everything I could get my hands on about a variety of faiths, I relaxed into what I knew was true: Jesus was Lord. The historical evidence, especially as it relates to the resurrection, was overwhelming.

On top of that, all of the other traditions depended on man's own ability to overcome sin and gain spiritual enlightenment — something that human brokenness simply doesn't allow. Christianity is the only tradition predicated upon grace alone. It was obvious... Jesus was the only way.

And this truth couldn't be reconciled with any other faith system. I began to walk with Christ. That was seven years ago.

Since, my faith has only continued to grow. This growth has nothing to do with my own righteousness or my own efforts; like every other child of God, I am dependent on God's grace — the same grace that chased me down and brought me out of darkness and into His marvellous light.

As told to and edited by Adira Polite and originally published on Then God Moved

MY SCARS Don't define ME



Wayne's competitive days are behind him but he stays in the game as a youth basketball coach and activity development officer.

It doesn't take much to remind 64-year-old American basketball player Wayne Simmons that he's cheated death more times than he's comfortable with. All he has to do is start walking or look in the mirror.

The limp when he walks reminds him of the bullet that missed his forehead by a whisker and hit him in the hip instead during his tour of duty as a Marine in Beirut in 1983 when he was 25.

The deep scar on his right leg brings back memories of the night he was at a party at the Sari Nightclub in Bali on October 12, 2002.

At 10.30 pm, in the middle of the celebrations, Wayne says he had "a strange feeling in my gut" and went back to his hotel.

Half an hour later the bombs that would kill 202 people ripped through the club.

He has that scar because the explosion was so powerful it shook his hotel and sent him catapulting into the bedpost in his room.

Then there was the time he was 14 and at a friend's house. While they were chatting on the front porch, a car slowed down and drove past several times.

When his friend, who was a gang member, ducked into the house and re-emerged with a baseball bat, Wayne knew it was time to go home.

Forty-five minutes later that friend was dead, shot by the gang in that car. While Wayne has no physical scars from this incident, it made an impression on him that will never be erased.

Wayne grew up in a ghetto neighborhood in New York, but managed to stay out of the gangs and drugs culture that many fell prey to.

A talented basketball player, he was spotted by the Spanish basketball team FC Barcelona and played for them from 1980-1983.

He visited Perth, Western Australia on a holiday in 1987, fell in love with the place and has been here ever since.

Within weeks of arriving in WA, he contacted basketball team the Perth Wildcats and signed on with them from 1987-1989. Not bad for someone who was told he would never walk again after the Beirut shooting four years before.

Wayne's competitive days are behind him but his love for the game remains and he is now a youth basketball coach and activity development officer for a city council in Perth.

Life has been good for Wayne in WA, but he carried scars on the inside from his life in New York, scars that were invisible but just as real as his physical injuries.

His father was an alcoholic and his mother struggled with mental illness. She would often "hear voices". Neither parent was very present for Wayne and his siblings — it was their grandmother who took care of them.

"I remember my grandma would buy groceries for us and walk five kilometres carrying those bags to our place," he shares. "We lived in a ghetto, yet she was never robbed

or troubled by anyone.

"I know God protected her. Without her, we would have eaten a lot more sugar sandwiches. Even today, every time I get tired in life, I think about what she did and I suck it up and keep going.

"I know she prayed for us. She would read the Bible to us and teach us about Jesus. She was an amazing Christian woman."

Wayne had grown up going to church, but, in his own words, "went off the rails later on".

"I had some things happen to me that made me question my faith," he admits. "There were a lot of family dramas and I asked myself if this whole church thing was really working for me. "I was getting racist treatment at work too.

So all in all, I wasn't in a good place."

Yet through his work as a youth basketball coach Wayne realised he needed to live the values he was teaching his students — that life would always throw tests at you but not to give up.

It was at these training

sessions that one of the mothers invited him to her church. That Sunday, after an absence of 20 years, Wayne went to church.

"I can't describe what happened when I got there," Wayne says.

"All I know is that God met me there and all the stuff the pastor said made sense and really touched me on the inside.

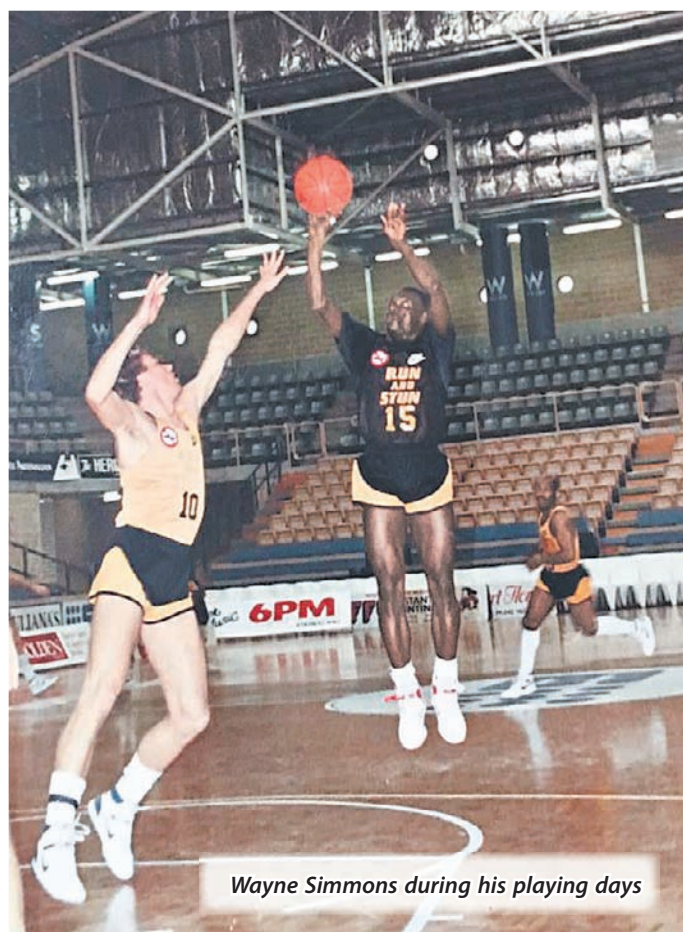
"I started to question how I was living and my attitude on certain things. The messages made me see the flip side of how I should have reacted to those situations.

"I saw that over the years I was wallowing in self-pity. I knew I had to clean up my life and get back to God. I had to be all in, not just ask God to put out one fire here and one fire there, so I re-committed my life to Him.

"Now on Sundays I reserve time for church whereas in the past I'd be at basketball training."

Wayne says he has found it such a relief to be able to hand over his challenges and pressures to God.

"Being able to pray and give everything to God takes the pressure off myself. It's a great release to realise I don't have to do it everything myself and that I have His divine help to get through life." •



Wayne Simmons during his playing days

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