



Once a top gangster in his community, Ronald Abels now runs an organization for children from marginalized communities.

# GANGSTER SURPRISED BY LOVE

**R**onald Abels was only 16 when he committed his first armed robbery and started selling drugs. He was intent on being the top gangster in his community of Capricorn Park, Cape Town. But when he met some people who surprised him with their love, affection and trust, he started to realize there might be more to life. Now he runs an organization for children from marginalized communities and his life has drastically changed.

In an interview with Thislife Online, Ronald shares that he was raised by his grandparents and as a child he dreamt of becoming a policeman.

“But when my hormones kicked in, I noticed the gangsters attracted the coolest girls and I decided to become the greatest gangster of all,” he recalls. “So at the age of 15 I started fighting with the oldest boys in my school.”

He made a name for himself as a gangster and took over an existing

gang.

Although Ronald wasn't taking drugs at the time, he started selling them to make money. After he finished school, he thought he was living the gangster high life.

“Then the first white missionaries came to Capricorn. I'd never seen a white person up close before and suddenly this white English woman walked right up to me and just hugged me. I didn't understand why! Later, when I got to know Julie, she told me when she

noticed me standing there in my fake leather jacket and gangster attitude, she simply saw someone who needed love.

“That was the first time someone had hugged me. I loved my grandparents. They were good to us and looked after us well, providing everything we needed, but they weren't affectionate people.”

Ronald began attending the Christian home group that Julie and her husband Mike ran.

One night they invited him for

supper but when he arrived, they told him they had to go away for the weekend.

“They handed me their house keys and said I should spend the weekend there. Again, they'd taken me by surprise and I didn't understand how they could trust me. My first thought was that I'd steal everything of value, but I was so completely captivated by their love and trust that I didn't even smoke cigarettes in their yard.”

Ronald decided to convert to Christianity and tried to be a “good guy”.

It was a big change from the gangster life where he was always fighting, living in fear, running from the law and sure he would be murdered.

“Twice I escaped plots to kill me,” he remembers.

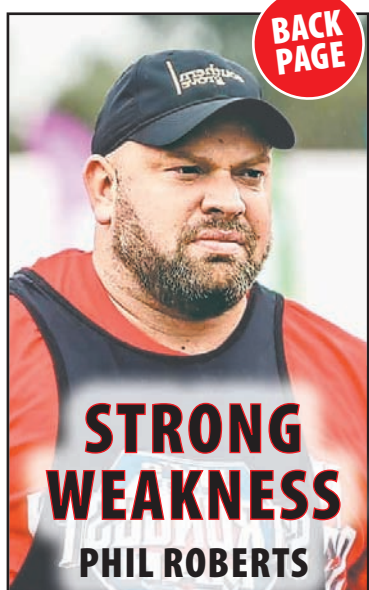
“The first time I was hijacked and held captive over a weekend while I was made to dig my own grave. I persuaded them to let me join them when they were smoking tik [methamphetamine, or crystal meth] and they started to see me as one of them. The second time, I refused to go somewhere I was supposed to be and someone else was mistaken for me and shot dead.” Ronald's attempt to be a “good guy” didn't last.

“Eventually I took up alcohol again and started living a double life. I realize now that I was just subscribing to a set of religious rules at this stage and Jesus had not yet become real to me.”

He started smoking tik again and withdrew from his Christian friends.

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**STRONG WEAKNESS**  
PHIL ROBERTS

## The blind men and the elephant

ADAPTED FROM DAVID A. HORNER

**THERE** is a popular analogy used to show that all religions are valid ways to describe God. Religion professors especially love this philosophic analogy, because it equalises all religions, making all religions equally “true” in their description of God. The analogy is this: there are four blind men who discover an elephant. Since the men have never encountered an elephant, they grope about, seeking to understand and describe this new phenomenon. One grasps the trunk and concludes it is a snake. Another explores one of the elephant's legs and describes it as a tree. A third finds the elephant's tail and announces that it is a rope. And the fourth blind man, after discovering the elephant's side, concludes that it is, after all, a wall.

Each in his blindness is describing the same thing: an elephant. Yet each describes the same thing in a



radically different way.

According to many, this is analogous to the different religions of the world – they are describing the same thing in radically different ways. Thus one should conclude that no individual religion has a corner on truth, but that all should be viewed as essentially equally valid.

This is a powerful and provocative image, and it certainly seems to capture something of the truth.

If God is infinite and we are finite, it is reasonable to believe that none of us can fully capture His nature. But does this philosophic analogy demonstrate the truth that all religions lead to God? To conclude that it does would ignore several points...

First, there is a fact of the matter: the elephant. What the blind men are attempting to describe is, in fact, an elephant, not something else. Just so, there are factual questions regarding God.

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• Turn to page 2

# Gangster surprised by love

• From page 1

"I reconnected with my old gang for protection and went back to selling drugs. I made money but smoked all the profit and couldn't buy drugs to sell... I became homeless, hanging around drug houses and sleeping wherever I could."

Hopeless and lonely, Ronald recalls sitting in front of a rubbish pile thinking there must be more to life. He no longer wanted to be part of the gangster life.

"In that moment of utter despair I heard a voice softly say, 'Ronald, it's time to go home'. I believe it was the voice of Jesus."

Ronald obeyed the voice and returned to his childhood home.

"I was filthy, had lice, stank and was exhausted. It took about three baths to get me clean. I slept for days. As I recovered, I joined a local church. The first time I'd converted it had been to the idea of Christianity. This time I included Jesus. Now I was in an active relationship with Him. That's when it got real for me... I've never felt lonely since. I realize I was always looking for love. Jesus fills me completely. He's the one I count on. He always has my best interests at heart."

Ronald started attending church, and quickly became an intern. The church helped him attend Bible College and in 2016 he became the church's full-time Missions Developer.

He also founded Future Life Ministries, which helps young people from marginalized communities in Cape Town.

Ronald is now married to Sydney, an American missionary. He also spends time with his two daughters from a previous relationship.

"One of the greatest gifts Jesus has given me is a restored relationship with them, and I love being able to offer them a secure home when they're with me," he shares.

"I read, watch television, go to movies, normal things. I'm never afraid. I've been told that I'm regarded as a symbol of hope in Lavender Hill now. They say that if God could change me, He can change anyone. I agree!" •



Ronald Abels with his wife Sydney.

# FREEDOM FROM ADDICTION

To everyone else, South African Margaret Van Rooyen's family seemed happy. But behind closed doors Margaret and her mother lived in fear of her rigid and emotionally abusive father, whom she says was also manipulative and very strict.

She rebelled when she hit her teens and tells *Challenge News* she "went deep into worldly behaviour. I drank heavily, smoked, did drugs and became sexually immoral."

All the while she continued to attend church, but admits she did it "purely out of habit" and not because God meant anything to her. It wasn't always like that though. Margaret shares that she had grown up in church and Sunday School and had committed her life to Jesus Christ when she was seven. "My mother was deeply involved in church activities and I followed in her footsteps."

However, all that early learning fell by the wayside as she entered adulthood and continued her self-destructive lifestyle - which brought her nothing but bouts of depression and severe panic attacks.

All that changed when Margaret was 26. She was living with her boyfriend at that time and says she "encountered the Holy Spirit" quite suddenly and unexpectedly. "God pressed my heart and called me to come back to Him."

She began to read the Bible and says, "He showed me in His Word that the life I was leading was not what He wanted for me. I could feel the Holy Spirit come heavily on me and I started to cry."



Margaret Van Rooyen

"I cried out all the pain and then the Lord strengthened me to do the right thing."

That "right thing" was to leave her boyfriend and move back to her parents' house for a fresh start. "It was a hard thing to do but because I honoured God and chose Him above the life I was living, He in turn honoured me and later gave me a husband - He even allowed me to meet him exactly the way I wanted!"

She says God also provided the funds for her to go to Bible college, where she graduated and became a preacher.

Margaret says she is now a completely different person.

"In the past four years I have, with the help of the Holy Spirit, stopped smoking, sexual immorality and drinking. Even the way I speak has changed. "Freedom from the addictions that ruled my life is the best part of becoming a Christian."

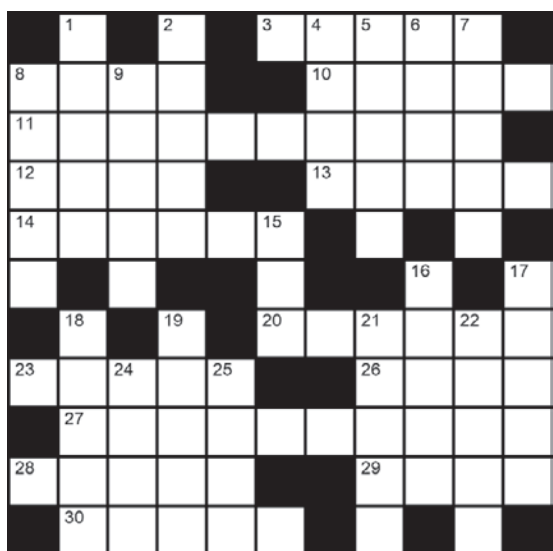
The hardest part, she sighs, is seeing people rejecting God. "It breaks His heart."

Today Margaret is a student preacher and is happily married to a Christian man. She says she is a successful businesswoman whose purpose is to mentor and guide other young women. She shares her life story as one of hope and encouragement that the Word of God, planted in a young heart, never goes to waste.

"Being raised in church gave me a foundation of truth. Even when you wander away from God you will return and the Lord will receive and restore you with open arms. My story is not just one of salvation but of restoration. I am the prodigal daughter." •

## Coffee Break CROSSWORD & SUDOKU

- ACROSS**
- 3 Speak, talk
  - 8 Brewed beverages
  - 10 To quarrel
  - 11 Sewage disposal
  - 12 Battery fluid
  - 13 Fable writer
  - 14 Harbor a grudge
  - 20 Clerical assistant
  - 23 Event you usually sleep through
  - 26 Australian gem
  - 27 Temporary camp, often for troops
  - 28 Relating to ships
  - 29 Boats like Noah's
  - 30 Former capital of Japan
- DOWN**
- 1 Tranquility
  - 2 Onstage whisper
  - 4 "Cheerio!" (2-2)
  - 5 Gave one's best shot
  - 6 These puff up easily
  - 7 Speak at length (3-2)
  - 8 Pre-Soviet rulers
  - 9 Licorice-like flavor
  - 15 Facial twitch, eg
  - 16 Pickled bud used in cooking
  - 17 Boadicea's subjects
  - 18 Opening shot in billiards
  - 19 Chocolate source
  - 21 Julius, for one
  - 22 War machines
  - 24 Grudging resentment
  - 25 Distilling grain



BY ILSE FRIIS

IN 2006 I had the privilege to climb Mount Kilimanjaro. Part of our preparation was to hear the account of and receive some valuable tips from a man who had done the climb the year before. Even though it gave us a better picture of what to expect, the experience at the end of the day far outweighed just talking and dreaming about this adventure. In the same way, we can grow up hearing about other people's experiences of faith and God, but until we set out ourselves to find God, we will never really understand what they are describing.



Ilse Friis climbing Mount Kilimanjaro

We can grow up in a Christian

home, go to church, and hear about other people's relationship with Jesus, but it is not the same as having the life changing experience ourselves when we surrender our lives to Christ, ask His forgiveness for our sins and make Him the Lord of our lives.

Then we will start to understand what Christians mean when they

say they: feel washed clean and new; have unquenchable joy; experience inexplicable peace; and feel that everything is suddenly more beautiful.

In Jeremiah 29: 13 God says, "You will seek Me and find Me, when you search for Me with all your heart." What a wonderful promise! We do not have to be satisfied with "hearsay" of

what other people experience, but when we look for God we WILL find Him and experience Him ourselves.

Christianity is not a set of rules and Bible stories, but a relationship with a living and loving God. Don't you want to make that choice today, to invite Him into your life and experience an intimacy with Him for yourself? See how on page 7. •

## The blind men and the elephant

• From page 1

"Does God even exist?" is a question of fact, much like, "Was Abraham Lincoln ever President of the United States?" If so, it would be true whether anyone believes it or not, and to deny it, one would be mistaken. Thus, not all opinions, whether concerning elephants or the nature of God, are equally true.

Second, all four blind men are, in fact, mistaken. It is an elephant and not a wall or a rope or a tree or a snake. Their opinions are not equally true - they are equally, and actually false. At best, such an analogy of religious pluralism would show that all religions are false, not true.

Third, and most importantly, the philosophic analogy does not take into account any kind of special revelation.

If a fifth man were to arrive on the scene, one who could see (and who was able to demonstrate his credentials of having sight), and he was to describe

the elephant as an elephant, then it would change the analogy entirely.

Jesus Christ, unique among all religious leaders of history, claimed to be such a "fifth man," a definitive revelation of God. Many of the people who watched Jesus' miracles and heard Him speak were offended by His clear statements about His deity. "This was why [they] sought all the more to kill Him, because He not only broke the Sabbath but also called God His own Father, making Himself equal with God" (John 5:18).

Jesus however, invited us to believe in Him if we want our search for God satisfied... "I am the bread of life; he who comes to Me shall not hunger, and he who believes in Me shall never thirst" (John 6:35).

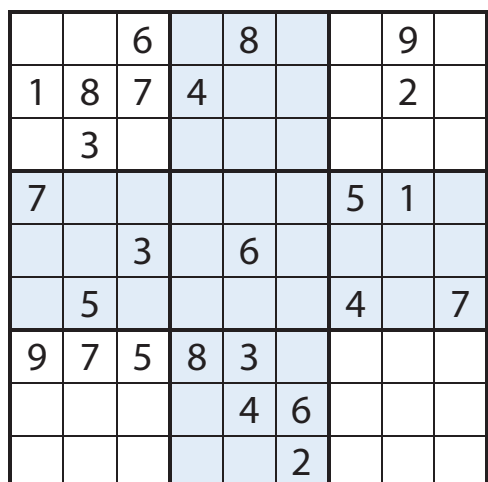
Want to check out Jesus' reliability to be this "fifth man"? Read Lee Strobel's book *A Case for Christ*. •

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SOLUTIONS PAGE 7



"I'm putting out an alert. Our innovative spirit has been reported missing."



# Saving kids with a song

From poor rural Irish beginnings, dyslexic and raised by foster parents during WW2, Ray Barnett has made lifting children out of poverty his life's mission. And he has done it with a song in his heart!

Now in his eighties, Ray has been all over the world intervening in dangerous situations to rescue orphans, feed the hungry and intercede for the release of hostages.

His autobiography *Don't Tell Me it Can't be Done*, tells his exhilarating story that takes place in areas of the world that most people would avoid, negotiating with powerful people.

In the early 1980s, after Ray had already successfully brokered some difficult situations, he read in *Life* magazine about the "lost boys" of Sudan. Five thousand orphans were sent to Ethiopia, but were not accepted and turned back. One thousand were lost, but the rest ended up in Southern Sudan.

Ray decided he wanted to find them and help them, which he did. His humanitarian organisation, called Friends in the West, set up a school, and got food and support from over the border in Kenya. All the boys eventually got immigration status to leave for America and Canada.

"I'd been involved in Idi Amin's Uganda, when half a million Christians were put to death. I went back during the Ethiopian famine which was impacting Uganda, which was in a civil war. The Ugandan prime minister asked me to go to Lueuro, the killing fields of Uganda, to help there," he recounts.

While there Ray was so discouraged by the pictures of the emaciated Ethiopian and Ugandan children, but he



Ray Barnett founder of the African Children's Choir, his daughter Julia Barnett Tracy, Choir Operations Director and members of the choir attend the 5th Annual African Children's Choir Gala in 2013 in New York City. (Photo by Brian Killian/WireImage)

wanted to showcase their potential. The idea just came: why not start an African children's choir?

In 1981, two years before, while driving in Uganda, Ray's group had given a little boy a lift in the car, and asked him if he could sing.

"The child sang a beautiful chorus to us, and we recorded it. The image of this bright, beautiful, articulate child is what people needed to see. I said to the prime minister: 'You're in a civil war and a famine. How can we get passports and visas for these orphans to come to Western countries?' He said: 'I'll get the passports; you get the visas.'

"In 1984, our first tour came to the UK and Canada. There's never been a day since when there hasn't been one of our choirs touring somewhere in the world," Ray smiles.

The break the children get in life from being in the choirs – the health care, regular food, education, travel and life experience, and love and nurturing – have led to many wonderful success stories.

"I'm proud to say that one boy is now a specialist doctor at Yale. His brother became a teaching consultant in Kampala, and the other is one of East Africa's leading civil engineers. Another of our children

is the top anchorman in Kenya, and another baby, the sole survivor in a Rwandan massacre, is now a nurse in the American air force. If I need a doctor, a lawyer, I can call up one of my children!" Ray jokes.

He has been the legal guardian for every child.

"We put them through university as far as they can go. Now we're working with a major-general in the Marines to provide an ongoing mentorship program for them. Every one of our children has performed for queens, presidents and at major events and on prestigious stages."

Music was Ray's lifesaver too. It was a music teacher who first realised that he was dyslexic and got him the help he needed, showing the little boy the first kindness he had ever known.

The second thing that revolutionised Ray's life was when he was asked at 13 if he was a Christian. He answered that he had always gone to Sunday School.

"To which they replied that I needed to be born again, and told me the story of Nicodemus. [A Bible story about a religious man who had a late night talk with Jesus, who explained that being born again did not mean a second natural birth but a spiritual birth into new life with God. (John chapter 3.)]

"I went home to my bedroom and asked the Lord Jesus to come into my life. I was inspired by the story of David Livingstone [a missionary explorer into Africa], but while I aspired to be like him, I never dreamed I'd work in Africa and help others."

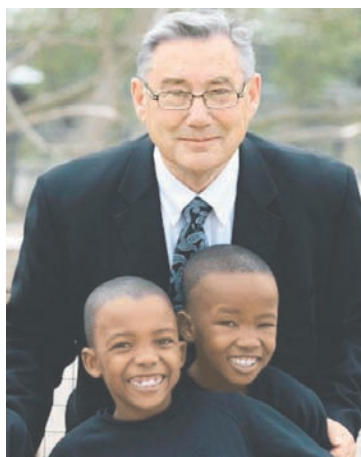
Through his work with the choir, Ray has been able to raise millions of pounds to establish numerous schools throughout Africa that serve children who would otherwise have no chance at an education.

He has also been able to raise significant money for emergency relief and development programs in Somalia, Sudan and Rwanda, and more recently to help orphaned children in South Africa who are battling hunger and disease.

Ray, whose wife died a few years ago, lives with his children and grandchildren in Vancouver.

"I am happiest when someone finds faith in Christ," he says.

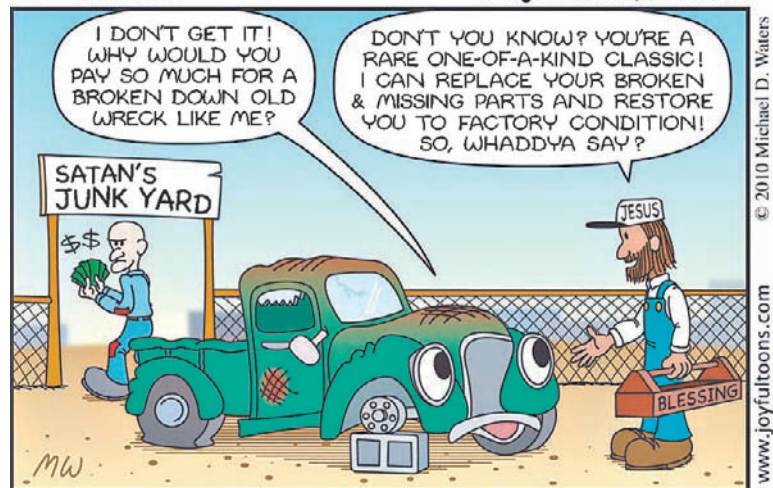
"A motto that changed my thinking is: Worship is not just when we are on our knees. Worship is every action we take during the day." •



Ray Barnett with some of the children who have been in the choirs he started.

## SALVAGER

A Joyful 'toon by Mike Waters



For the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost.—LUKE 19:10 NIV

# I FOUND LOVE AND HOPE



Judeit Baadjies

A tough childhood left Judeit Baadjies feeling unloved and hopeless. Her family was abandoned by her father, leaving them homeless, and Judeit couldn't see a way out. But that changed 21 years ago and her hope was restored. Now Judeit's life is drastically different and she gives her children the life she couldn't even dream of.

"I grew up very poor," Judeit shares with *Challenge News*. "I'm the third of five children. My parents weren't married and my father left my mother after the fifth child."

Judeit's father's only involvement with her family was the small amount he paid in child support. "The child support was R300 and our only income and we had to survive with only that money."

Judeit's mother didn't work and began drinking a lot.

"We had to sometimes sit with her at shebeens until 2-3am," she recalls. "We never had our own home so we stayed with other people, either in a room or a hut in the backyard. Once my mother and three brothers stayed in the car for a few months."

At around the age of 10 or 11, Judeit began drinking alcohol and smoking. "I sometimes smoked weed also," she admits. "I then later did all of this with my mother." As Judeit grew older, she felt hopeless and unloved.

"When I was a teenager, I struggled a lot with low self-esteem. I never had any dream for myself and my future."

She would lay awake in bed at night, wondering, "Why us? Why do we have to go through this?"

Everything changed for Judeit in 2001 when she visited a Christian church. "That's where I heard the good news about Jesus," Judeit recalls.

Before this she had heard of church and Jesus – "but I didn't understand what it all meant," she says.

Now, hearing about Jesus and the sacrifice He made for her on the cross, Judeit saw hope for her life for the first time.

"I was so lost and desperate and hungry for change that I had no other option but to give my life to God," she remembers. "I was in church on a Sunday morning, and the altar call was made. Then I decided enough is enough. And I stepped out and gave my life to Jesus... Since becoming a Christian, I've overcome a lot of my issues, like the low self-esteem. I know now that I'm loved, because Jesus died for me."

Despite not finishing school, Judeit now works as an administration manager and is responsible for two stores. She also trained administration staff for two other stores. She and her husband own their own home.

"I have two daughters aged 18 and 11 and a husband and all of us serve the Lord," Judeit shares. "The best part about being Christian is knowing that my life is in God's hands and I can do all things through Jesus, who gives me strength; and just to know Him and serve Him."

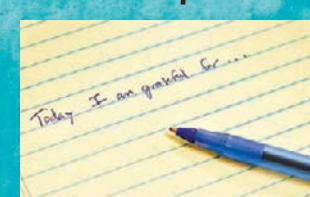
Judeit's message for those who are struggling with feelings of hopelessness is that, "Jesus is alive and He wants to give us a good life."

"It is the best decision anyone can ever make to choose Jesus. I'm not saying that this road is easy, but I can say it is worth it. My life is a living testimony of what God can do with a girl who didn't have any dreams. He took me out of my situation, polished me and showed me that He is God. He gave me a life that I never could imagine. God worked with me on my emotional scars. I now can say I've overcome a lot of my issues. God heals the broken – ask me – I know!"

Judeit says her church leaders guided her on the path to healing. "I thank God for placing them in my life," she says. •

“I've overcome a lot of my issues.”

## Develop an attitude of gratitude



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



# Rescue channel

BY MARGARET CURRAN

**MY HUSBAND** was fishing and I decided to wander further along the beach. As I rounded the corner I came upon a small stream which meandered through the coasthills and finally flowed into the sea. The water was brown and appeared devoid of life but as I watched I began to see that there was much activity.

Various bugs were busy on the surface and several dragonflies, with a blue streak down their backs, were resting on a reed or flitting to the next spot.

Suddenly I noticed a moving shadow on the bottom of the stream, as a yabbie slowly wended his way along, daintily tucking morsels of food into his mouth as he went. Yes, it certainly was a stream of life and the day all around was full of life with bird calls filling the ear and sunshine and flowers delighting the eye.

But to my right, a disturbance was distracting my attention. Separated from the stream was a shallow pool and as I moved closer I saw it was filled with a frantic, heaving mass of tiny tadpoles. There they were, cut off from the life giving stream, with their water supply getting hotter and shallower every minute as it evaporated in the warm sun. Their doom was certain unless they could be re-connected somehow to the cool waters of the main stream.

I began to burrow in the sand and before long had created a channel between the pool and the stream. As I cut deeper and deeper into the sand, the stream water rushed in and formed a passage between the two, enabling the desperate tadpoles to cross to the safety of the stream. The channel had rescued them from certain death and opened up the way for them to their source of life.

In the Bible God explains to us that the troubles of mankind are caused by the fact that we are living lives that are cut off from our main source of life. Our source of real life – which the Bible calls eternal life – is God Himself. Man became separated from God because of disobedience to Him. The story of Adam and Eve tells us about that and every soul has disobeyed God in some way or another since; except one.

That one perfect person was Jesus Christ, the Son of God. Because He was the perfect Son of God, He was able to offer Himself to God as a substitute for every helpless sinner.

He became our channel to God when He died on the cross for us. He took the penalty for mankind's sin and died in our place. Now no man need live in a state of separation from God. Christ's sacrifice for us has been accepted by God, who raised Him from the dead to prove it. Now through Him we can return to God.

We are already forgiven.

The channel is already open. We just have to cross over and join that life giving stream of fellowship with God.

Let us thank Him for the wonderful channel He provided in our Lord Jesus Christ and make known to those who still remain separated from, and unaware of it, the life giving love and grace of our great God, and Saviour in Jesus Christ our Lord. ●

Mercy Muzeza



## Afrikaans translation

**M**ercy Muzeza's se lewe was alles oor voorgee. Hierdie 68 jarige Zimbabwiese bloemis onthou hoe sy haar ouers probeer gelukkig hou het deur rol te speel gedurende haar kinderjare.

“My ouers het kerk toe gegaan en hulle het my en my suster forseer om Christene te wees, en ek het net gemaak asof ek een is,” vertel sy vir Challenge.

“Ek was omtrent 10 jaar oud toe ek eers van God hoor, maar dit het vir my niks beteken nie. My kinderdae was nie sleg nie, maar ek was stout.”

Mercy het nie die lewe as gelukkig ervaar nie. Sy sê sy is deur jaloesie, kort humeurigheid, leuens en onvergifnis geteister. Dit was eers nadat sy getroud is en 4 kinders gehad het dat die geloof wat sy vervals het, eers vir haar 'n werklikheid geword het.

Vyf jaar terug het sy “n gelowige van God geword,” deel sy. “Nou wil ek hê dat Jesus in my moet bly en my nooit verlaat nie, en ek wil ook in Hom bly.”

Sy sê dat vandat sy haar lewe aan God toegewy het, is sy “nie meer aan

daardie gewoontes gekoppel nie,” en al haar kinders en haar man het ook hulle lewens aan Jesus Christus toegewy. “Ons sien die hand van God in ons gesin en ons is so gelukkig om Sy kinders te wees.”

Sy deel dat daar groot veranderinge in haar lewe plaasgevind het sedertdien, en sy jubel in Christus. “Ek is veilig in Hom in my daaglikse lewe en ook in die lewe wat nog kom. Ek jubel want ek het die ewige lewe.”

Na sy 'n Christen geword het, het Mercy vir haar plaaslike kerk begin werk, en sy sê dis nie altyd maklik nie. “Mense spot my baie keer en lag agter my rug. Hulle noem my ook name.”

Haar gunsteling Bybelgedeelte, Psalm 23, troos haar gedurende moeilike tye en bevestig dat “die Here is my Herder, en Hy laat my rus in groen weivelde.”

Mercy, 'n Covid-19 oorlewende, vertel dat dit is net deur die genade van God dat sy nog leef. “Jesus het vir my nog 'n kans gegee om te lewe. Ek prys God want meeste van my familie is oorlede.” ●

## Zulu translation

**W**ayephila ngokuzenzisa u Mercy Muzeza. Uneminyaka ewu 68 waseZimbabwe, uthengisa imbali wayephilela ukujabulisa abazali bakhe.

“Abazali bami babesonta besingenakuzikhethela nodadewethu sifanele siye esontweni, ngazenza ikholwa,” etshela iChallenge.

“Ngangineminyaka elishumi uma ngiqala ukuzwa ngoNkulunkulu okwakungasho lutho kimi. Angikhulanga kabi kodwa nganginalunganga.”

Impilo yayingajabulisi eyaMercy, owakhula enomona, nolaka, amanga kanye nokungathetheleli.

Kwathi eseshadile enezingane ezine lokukholwa ayezenzisa kubo kwaba iqiniso manje.

Eminyakeni emihlanu edlule “waba ikholwa langempela” esitshela. Manje sengifuna uJesus ahlale kimina nami nginamathela kuye.”

Uthi solokhu abuyela kuJesus “akasayiphethe naleyamithwalo”

nabantwana bakhe nomyeni wakhe nabo bazinikele kuJesusu Kristu.

“Sibona isandla sikaNkulunkulu emndenini wethu futhi sijabule ukuba abantwana bakhe.”

Usixoxela ukuthi kube “nenguquko enkulu” empilweni yakhe, uthokozile ngoKristu.” Ngiphephile kuYena empilweni yami yonke nakulena ezayo. Ngiyajabula futhi ngoba nginokuphila okungunaphakade.

UMercy, osebenzela ibandla lakubo solokhu aphenduka, uthi akulula neze. “Uba yinhle kisa abantu bahlale bekuhleka. Bekubize nangamagama futhi.”

Kodwa ivesi lakhe alithandayo, iHubo 23 liyamduza kulezonkathi ezinzima, lisho lutho, “UJehova ungumelusi wami, ungilalisa emadlelweni aluhlaza.”

UMercy, osinde ku Covid 19, uthi kungenxa yo musa kaNkulunkulu ephila. UJesus ungiphe elinye ithuba lokuphila. Ngiyambonga uNkulunkulu ngoba izihlobo eziningi zidlulile. ●

## English translation

**M**ercy Muzeza's life was all about pretence. The 68-year-old Zimbabwean florist recalls how her childhood was spent playing a part to keep her parents happy.

“My parents went to church and they forced my sister and me to be Christians, so I just pretended to be,” she tells Challenge News.

“I was about 10 years old when I first heard about God but it did not mean anything to me. My childhood was not bad but I was not good.”

Life was not happy for Mercy, who says she grew up dogged by jealousy, short-temperedness, lying and unforgiveness.

It wasn't until after she got married and had four children that the faith she had faked as a child became real to her.

Five years ago she “became a true believer in God,” she shares. “Now I want Jesus to stay in me and never leave me and I want to stay in Him as well.”

She says that since re-dedicating her life to God she is “no longer connected to those other habits” and that all her children and her husband have also committed their lives to Jesus Christ. “We see God's hand in our family and we are so happy to be His children.”

Sharing that there have been “big changes” in her life since then, she says she rejoices in Christ. “I am safe in Him in my daily life and also in the life to come. I rejoice because I have eternal life.”

Mercy, who worked for her local church after becoming a Christian, says it's not a bed of roses though. “You are always mocked and you have people laughing about you. They call you names as well.”

But her favourite Bible passage, which is Psalm 23, gives her comfort during those tough times, affirming that “the Lord is my Shepherd and He makes me to lie down in green pastures.”

Mercy, a Covid-19 survivor, says it's only by the grace of God that she is still alive. “Jesus gave me another chance to live. I praise God because most of my relatives passed on.” ●

“ —  
I rejoice because I have eternal life.  
— ”

## Small beginnings

BY JERRY WILES

**WE HEAR** a lot these days about the need for more fairness and equality. People often get the idea that their worth or value is based on their salary, possessions, title or position in society. However, God's Kingdom principles are very different.

It is interesting to observe how some of the least educated people often become some of the most fruitful and productive followers of Jesus and agents of change. There certainly is much inequality in the world today. However, it is encouraging to realize that God is an equal opportunity employer. He is no respecter of persons. He uses all of those who come to and believe on Him. As when Jesus multiplied the little boy's loaves and fishes in the story of the feeding of the 5000, so Jesus will multiply your small offering.

Throughout Scripture and history, God has and is using weak and flawed individuals. Samuel Chadwick, late principal of Cliff College in England, has said, “It is this mystery that has filled the history of the Church with anomalies. Inadequate men (and women) are always doing impossible things, and ordinary men achieve extraordinary results. God's biggest things seem to be done by the most unlikely people.”

The Good News of Jesus really is the power of God unto salvation to all who believe. If you feel like you have not much to offer God – take heart! He has all you need to do all He calls you to. ●

“The only love that won't disappoint you is one that can't change, that can't be lost, that is not based on the ups and downs of life – or of how well you live. It is something that not even death can take away from you. God's love is the only thing like that.” – Tim Keller

# I KNOW WHO I AM

**T**hamzell Sampson's childhood is split into two parts – the happy early years, and the years after her parents' marriage ended.

She describes her childhood growing up in Worcester, Western Cape, as normal until the day her mother discovered her father had been unfaithful.

"When that came to light, everything changed drastically," she tells *Challenge News*. "Fights between my mother and father were very traumatising. Alcohol played a big role in these fights."

Thamzell's father abandoned his family when she was 11. While her mother was present physically, the pain of rejection changed her.

"This basically forced me to grow up," Thamzell recalls. "I was a very shy girl. I dealt with a lot of anger and rejection because of my father walking out. I had a very low self-esteem as well."

She attended church with her aunt, who was a Sunday School teacher.

"The first time I really heard about God was when my cousin committed her life to Jesus and she introduced God to me," Thamzell remembers. "They had regular home group meeting at my grandmother's home."

Thamzell recalls the moment she became a Christian as a 12-year-old girl.

"I prayed the Sinner's Prayer [see page 7 for an example] and committed my life to Jesus," she shares. Thamzell knew God had chosen her.

Sixteen years on, she says many things have changed since then.

"My biggest change I would say is the way I see myself. Where I had low self-esteem, looking down at myself, I now have so much boldness and confidence in myself. I know who I belong to, and who my Father is. I'm a child of God. Knowing who I am gave me a lot of assurance and boldness."

Thamzell says she endeavours to daily renew her mind as it says in Romans 12:2, "Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is – His good, pleasing and

perfect will." She says sometimes this is hard to do with everything going on in the world.

"However, the best part is that the grace (undeserved love) of God is sufficient for us each and every day," Thamzell says.

She tells others, "Jesus will meet you right where you are. Jesus loves us just the way we are. I have found that you do not have to be at a certain point in your life to be good enough for Jesus."

Her favourite Bible verse 1 Corinthians 16:13-14, "Be on your guard; stand firm in the faith; be courageous; be strong. Do everything in love."

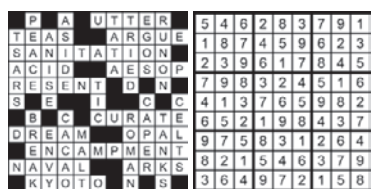
"Jesus loves you," she shares. "Many times in life we seek for something or someone to belong to. But we are created in God's image.



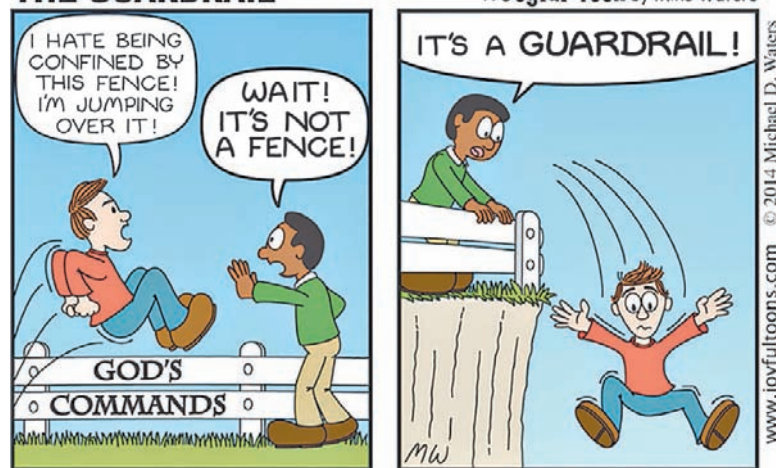
Thamzell Sampson

Therefore you are His creation and you belong to Him. If you have tried everything and you're out of options, just try Jesus - your life will never be the same."

Thamzell is now 28, married and works as a human resources benefits specialist.



## THE GUARDRAIL



Whoever keeps commandments keeps their life, but whoever shows contempt for their ways will die. – PROVERBS 19:16 NIV

### Want to explore more?

Here are some **free**, helpful, online Christian resources:

Online Bible - <b>Olive Tree app</b> (we recommend that you start with an easy-to-read version like the ESV)	
Audio Bible - <b>Bible.is app</b> , or <b>Youversion Bible app</b>	
Christian radio station - <b>CBN radio app</b> (different channels for all genres of music)	
Christian podcasts and sermons - <b>Edifi app</b>	
Christian movies/TV shows - <b>Good. app</b>	
Daily thoughts and inspiration - <b>Our Daily Bread app</b>	
Advice on specific issues, Bible reading plans and studies for new believers - <b>Youversion Bible app</b> .	
The Bible explained with visual aides - <b>the Bible Project on YouTube</b> .	
<b>Alpha Film Series on Youtube</b> - an online introduction to Christianity.	
For kids - <b>Superbook Kids Bible, videos and games app</b>	
Comic book Bible online- <b>goodandevilbook.com</b>	
More inspiring faith stories - <b>back issues of Challenge News at challengenews.online</b>	

## HOW DO I BECOME A CHRISTIAN?

**What?** Salvation is an eternal relationship with God – now on Earth and, after we die, in Heaven.

The Lord Jesus says: "I tell you the truth. Everyone who believes in Me has eternal life." John 6:47

"In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world." John 16:33

**Who?** Anyone can gain the eternal life offered through Jesus Christ, regardless of how you have previously lived or what you have previously believed.

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

**Why?** Because sin separates us from a holy God. Sin is all the wrong things we do, say and think, as well as our desire to be our own boss.

For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. Roman 3:23

**How?** The Bible says you become a Christian by confessing with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believing in your heart that God raised Him from the dead.

If you declare with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you profess your faith and are saved. Romans 10:8b-10

**Ready to change your life forever?** Here is a prayer you can pray, but you can also use your own words. The words are not as important as the heart attitude – which only God can see.

Almighty God, Creator of Heaven and Earth,

I acknowledge that I am a sinner. Please forgive me for all the ways I have disobeyed and defied You.

Thank You for sending Your Son, Jesus Christ, to earth to live the perfect life I couldn't, and die on the cross for my sins. Thank You that His blood was sufficient to pay my debt to You, and His resurrection proves that there is life beyond death. I accept that His sacrifice is all I need to get right with You – I bring nothing I have done but I give you everything I am. Help me to live for You. Please be my Saviour and my Master. Amen.

### What now?

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

### AS A NEXT STEP:

I have prayed this prayer.

Please send me:

- A Bible portion
- Some 'starting off' literature
- Information on a helpful church

\* Please tick and write clearly \*

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Phone \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

Email address \_\_\_\_\_

**Email to:**  
christabritz@challnews.onmicrosoft.com  
OR icfriis@gmail.com

Out of South Africa enquiries are referred onto someone in their own country

# Holiness

BY JODY BENNETT

**HOLINESS** is not really a concept bandied about much in our culture today. If the term is used, it would most likely be negatively, as in "Stop being so holier-than-thou!" Meaning, "stop being so self-righteous," or "stop judging me for my bad behaviour".

'Holiness', as far as our culture understands it, is something we think we ought to avoid in order to make others feel better about themselves. Even exercising a free choice, like not drinking alcohol, not swearing or not sleeping with someone can be construed as some sort of super-spiritual behaviour depending on the company, and elicit an accusation of being too 'holy'.

In the Bible, however, the word 'holy' in the Hebrew language means 'things belonging to God'.

Things and people are 'made holy' by dedicating them for use by and for God.

When God shows up somewhere, like in the Jewish temple or at Moses' burning bush, He transforms that space into a holy place. Even coal shovels and candlesticks can be holy, because they are set aside for use in God's service.

Other words that convey that special use for God's purposes are 'sanctified' or 'consecrated'.

The New Testament calls Christians "a holy people".

Looking around at those who follow Jesus that you know, you might disagree. But the point is that they are not holy because of what they do, they are holy because they belong to God and God is using them for His purposes.

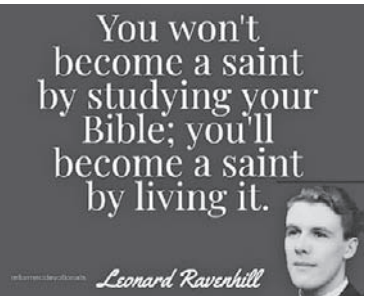
Christians should indeed act in a manner that is upright and sin-free, but that comes out of the identity of holiness that God has already given them by forgiving their sin and accepting them as His children, not out of a striving on their part to become 'good enough' for God.

The Christian God, Yahweh, is perfect, sinless and all good. God's standards are high and holy. Apart from Jesus' atoning [paying the debt] sacrifice on the cross there is no way humans could meet them.

However, with Jesus as both Saviour and Lord of their lives, Christians are empowered to live holy lives — not sanctimonious lives, but lives full of humility, love, kindness, patience and self-control.

You too can be holy and live holy, no matter how you have lived up to this point. You can change the script of your life by committing yourself to God by means of a simple prayer such as the one on this page.

"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



Phil Roberts competing in the Strongman Champions League in Romania in 2017.



# STRENGTH IN WEAKNESS

In 2017, Sheffield policeman Phil Roberts was crowned Britain's Strongest Man.

Winning this competition was no mean feat. The 32-year-old had to beat his opponents in events such as flipping a 400 kg tractor tyre, lifting a car and pulling a plane. At 1.9 metres tall and weighing 133 kg, he was built like a mountain.

Yet while he was as physically as strong as they came, emotionally Phil was as weak as a child.

"It looked on the outside that I had everything, but I didn't feel fulfilled," he says on the YouTube channel Life Stories. "I felt empty."

Emptiness had plagued him ever since he was 22, when his best friend hanged himself. Until then Phil had been a casual churchgoer, but this tragedy caused him to turn his back on God.

"I couldn't understand how a good God could allow that to happen and that's when I decided I was done with God and would live my life my way to the full — or at least what I thought was to the full," he says. "I can't say I'm proud of the next 13 years."

Those were the party years, the hard drugs (cocaine, heroin, lots of steroids) and hard drinking years. He even got engaged and bought a house with his fiancée but was unfaithful to her and they broke up.

By this time Phil was a police officer, but had become disillusioned with the job and chalked up the most complaints of anyone in

the South Yorkshire Police Force.

Where did it go wrong, he asked himself? "I went from wanting to help and protect the vulnerable to being one of the most violent men in the force. I left a trail of disaster behind me and slipped into depression."

Phil tried to pick himself up by throwing himself into weight training and competing in novice strongman competitions.

Bolstered by some early victories, he went all out to win the major titles, which resulted in his 2017 win. This launched him into the glamorous world of women, sports cars, penthouse apartments and lucrative sponsorship deals.

But still this brought him no lasting joy — instead he describes his success as hollow. His use of hard drugs, which included copious amounts of steroids, continued.

In 2019, Phil decided to defend his title. By this time, he weighed 152 kg.

"I was having the worst competition I've ever had. I was so big and so uncomfortable because I put on that weight very quickly.

"The steroids and recreational drugs I was taking put my body under huge pressure — it's by the grace of God that I didn't just pop."

The last event of the competition rolled around — the Atlas stone lift, in which competitors have to lift five huge round stones, increasing in weight from 100 to 160 kg, and place them on five high platforms.

He got through the first four but

slipped while lifting the final and heaviest stone. It dropped. The 160 kg rock crashed onto Phil's shin bone, which broke with a sickening crack.

"I knew instantly it was bad," he says. "It sounded like a massive branch breaking off a tree."

When surgeons told him his injuries were so severe he could lose his leg, Phil's world disintegrated.

"I went from being one of the strongest people on earth to the vulnerable little boy I was growing up. I was terrified," he shares.

"All I could think of was that I would lose my business and my livelihood. I realised everything I'd built my life on, things that never gave me real happiness or joy in the first place, could vanish overnight."

However, Phil had some friends who were Christians. They reached out to him during this time and invited him to a Christian men's retreat.

"At that point I was so desperate I said I'd take anything, so I went, but this time I wasn't my confident cocky self. I was in pain; my leg was being held together by this massive cage. I was miserable."

While he was there, one of the speakers approached Phil and said to him: "Why don't you give this God thing a go? Give Jesus a chance."

Willing to try anything, he said to himself: "Yeah, why not give Jesus a go?" It really was as casual as that!

He says slowly but surely things started to change. "I didn't know

much about God at all. I thought He was cruel and Jesus was just some kind of nice guy.

"I knew I had to change — I wanted to change — but I was kind of straddling the Christian life and the old life. But God was so gracious; He was so patient. He gave me grace [undeserved love]. He is a loving father, the best Father ever.

"I can genuinely say today that on reflection the day of the accident was the best day of my life, though not at the time, of course. But it was when I realised that all these things that you've spent so much time and effort on can be taken away from you in an instant.

"God has given me the purpose and meaning I've always looked for."

Right: Phil Roberts doing the Atlas stone lift.



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