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DABBLING IN THE DARK

New Age and African spirituality opens dark door for teen

Raquel was in high school when she discovered astrology. She was fascinated with the idea that the positions of celestial bodies influenced people and the world around her. Every day she would read her horoscope and compare her and her friends' zodiac signs. It wasn't always this way though. Raquel shares in a video on her YouTube channel, Raquel's Regal, that she grew up in a Christian home and attended church regularly.

"As a little kid I knew a lot about the Christian faith and I chose to give my life to Christ at a young age," she recalls. "At a young age I was really devoted – I loved Jesus. As I grew older my relationship with God began to be less and less of a priority for me and I put Him on the back burner."

In high school things progressed to where Raquel wanted to live her life her own way.

"God was not something I was really thinking about," she admits.

So she explored New Age ideas and practices and became familiar with moon phases and "setting intentions".

"At this point I began to see all the darkness in the world and I just was not really interested in Christianity," Raquel explains.

She also had questions about Christianity, which only multiplied as she went on to college.

"I was starting to believe that Christianity was, like some people say, 'the white man's religion' and it was not

something that I really wanted to be connected to anymore. I felt like Christianity was forced on us as black people and I didn't want anything to do with it at that point."

So Raquel delved deeper into the New Age and began meditating and aligning her chakras.

"I remember seeing something that connected astrology to African spirituality and it was saying your zodiac sign is this or that goddess. That was the entryway for me getting involved in African spirituality. In a separate part of my life things began to fall apart, and I was in such a low place in life and I felt like I really had no one to turn to."

Raquel tried to use her New Age and African spirituality practices to help free her from this dark place.

"It was not helping at all," she admits. "I remember feeling so alone and I was crying. A scripture from the Bible popped into my mind: *You will seek Me and find Me when you seek Me with your whole heart*' (Jeremiah 29:13). I was like, 'Okay I'm gonna do this.' I prayed to God and I told Him to just show Himself to me. I wanted to know what the truth was. I wanted to seek Him with my whole heart."

God answered Raquel's prayer. "He started to just show me [the truth] more and more and I started to read my Bible... Everything started to make more sense to me but I still wasn't sure about the Jesus part."

Raquel prayed that God would show her the truth about Jesus.



Raquel

opened the door for the devil to be in my life and until I renounced those things and completely cut ties with it, it was still an opening for the enemy. So I renounced everything and I asked for forgiveness and after that I was completely free and I'm just so grateful to God."

Raquel warns that on the surface the New Age appears to be something it's not.

"It really seems like something that is super innocent and you're just doing something to become a better person and be good and reach your higher self [but] the devil is going to come as an angel of light (2 Corinthians

11:14). He's never going to come looking scary or like a goblin... The devil will present himself as something that you desire – he's deceptive."

"I remember God meeting me in that moment and He showed Himself and I remember feeling this peace that I had never felt in my entire life and His love and it was undeniably Him in that room with me at that moment. I could do nothing but just cry and just say sorry. I was asking for forgiveness and I realised – 'This is it! Jesus is the truth! I can't deny it anymore.'"

Raquel was overwhelmed with gratitude that despite the fact that she turned her back on Jesus, He

never turned His back on her. She sees that moment as a turning point in her life.

"From that moment on I just wanted to give my life to Christ and I really wanted to just change my life and be better for God. I started to change a lot and God started to mold me in a way that represents who He is."

Raquel asked God for forgiveness for the New Age practices she had been involved in.

"I realised that I had opened myself up spiritually... I had

Lessons from a sick bed

BY JODY BENNETT

I HAVE recently been suffering with prolonged ill health, during which I spent several weeks mostly in bed and feeling rotten. Illness naturally makes one morbid and introspective, but I don't like self-pity and as a Christian I believe that everything happens for a reason, so I sought to use the time not to ask the tempting question "Why, Lord?" but instead "What are you trying to teach me, Lord?"

Here are some insights I had.

1. Patients are aptly named! It takes a lot of patience to be sick for an extended period. And patience is a virtue that is hard to develop and takes – by definition – a long time to learn! When ill one has to have patience to wait for appointments, and results, and a correct diagnosis, and the pain to abate, and the medications to take

effect. Waiting for an explanation, while worrying about one's symptoms, is particularly hard in a day and age where we expect to be able to get answers to just about any question with a quick Google search. The Bible uses a very descriptive word as a synonym for patient – "longsuffering".

The book of Psalms has a lot to say about waiting patiently on and for God. I have found that He often replies "wait" in answer to my prayers, and it is always a difficult answer to accept. I have to learn to be longsuffering.

2. While one is waiting for the answers to bigger prayers, like "Please heal me!" it is good to acknowledge the answers to many other prayers that might have been prayed along the way.

For instance, for me nausea was a real problem for a while, and nausea tablets are no longer sold over the counter (in Australia). Then I happened

to watch a YouTube nursing skit where they talked about natural cures and home



remedies to help combat nausea. After that I got great relief from using one of the methods, until I could get a script for tablets. Small mercies...

3. As I have put aside my impatience and embraced the journey, it has been really nice to have a proper rest. Life is so busy! There are so many small chores, and then there is work and exercise and commitments. It was really lovely to break the routine, to do nothing but lie on the couch listening to a book or watching TV or sleeping, and not feeling guilty because I was too sick to care! If we can put aside our impatience and alter our expectations, rest can be a great blessing and a precious time.

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FANIE VD MERWE

BRUSH WITH DEATH

The hospital told Elize Banks that it was medically impossible for her husband to survive his injuries. His bakkie had been hit head-on by a coal truck, which had come to a halt with the weight of its load on top of his much smaller vehicle.

The year was 2010 and it took two cranes and four hours to free Jimmy.

During that terrible time, and in the 12 years of rehab that followed her husband's miraculous survival, Elize's faith in a sovereign and loving God pulled her through.

"God told me that He is in control of life and death and that He will never leave me. He gave me supernatural faith and peace at the accident scene. I decided to trust in the Lord and not the opinion of humans or science," she remembers.

That conviction of a loving, trustworthy God was very different from the image of God Elize grew up with. Growing up in a strict household with a legalistic religion in the 1960s and 70s, God was not a friendly figure to her – He was a tyrant!

"My dad would always say to me: 'God is watching you! You will go to hell if you sin!'"

This is a common unbalanced view of God that many people raised with legalistic religion have and, not surprisingly, Elize did not love the God she was introduced to!

The over-protective control and fearful rule-keeping she was raised with caused her to become rebellious.

"My dad was very over-protective," she relates. "I was not allowed to make decisions for myself. Even when my boyfriend came for a visit, he had to chat with my dad the whole evening. I could not wait to finish school and leave home."

Then, when she was 26, Elize went to a Bible study group. The subject for the morning was "Who is God, the Holy Spirit?"

"That morning I realised that although

I lived like a Christian, it was all my own works, under my own steam. My life was not controlled and led by the Holy Spirit. There and then I surrendered to God completely," she recounts.

In 2012 Elize earned her Master's Degree in Biblical Counselling and is now the executive director for Xtreme Buddies, a non-profit that uses Biblical therapy to lead addicts and their families into a relationship with Jesus Christ and teach them how to live their lives under the control of the Holy Spirit.

She loves to see how God heals broken and addicted people, when He becomes the centre of their lives.

She tells them: "The Lord Jesus loves you so much that He was willing to die for you on the cross. Jesus wants a loving relationship with you. He is the only solution to all your problems."

The verse that sums up her faith is Galatians 2:20, "I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me."

Elize has also seen incredible ongoing healing and miracles for her husband, although the road to recovery has been long and hard. Jimmy has had numerous infections over the years, several operations on his legs, including, eventually, the amputation of his left leg. He also lost his job due to his ill health, but God has provided for the couple and also provided a prosthesis for Jimmy to be able to walk again.

Then, in April 2022 and October 2022, Jimmy suffered two massive heart

attacks. Yet again, God miraculously preserved his life.

Elize declares gratefully, "Yahweh! [the Hebrew name for God.] He is our provider; He is our healer; He is Almighty; He is our saviour; He is our strength; He is Abba, our heavenly Father. To Him be all the honour and glory!"

For her and Jimmy, Isaiah 40:31 has proved true: "Those who hope in the Lord, will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not faint." •



Jimmy Banks (above) with his prosthetic leg and positive attitude. (Bottom left) Jimmy's bakkie mangled under the lorry and barely visible. (Top left) Elize Banks sharing of God's goodness through the tragedy.

Coffee Break CROSSWORD & SUDOKU

- ACROSS**
 1 Winged angels
 7 Dog's sharp bark
 8 Causes wheat allergies
 10 Cathedral alcove
 11 Ruble fractions
 13 Too awful for words
 16 Canal site
 18 Apartment
 20 Thyroid enlargement
 21 Continental money
 22 Staying alive
- DOWN**
 2 What '50S' means
 3 Interest amount
 4 Teller's boss (4,7)
 5 Shortness of sight
 6 Criticism

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- 8 Unfairly raise a house price
 9 Takes habitually
 12 Slender
 14 'Grand' instruments
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 17 Shade of blue
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"Acorns or chocolate cake?"

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From envious to enviable

When Gava Julian was growing up she hated seeing that others had things she didn't have, so she just stole what she wanted.

"I was very, very young at this time and I was so jealous of other people's lives and their possessions," she admits to *Challenge News*.

"I was also a very unforgiving person. If anyone did anything to offend me I wanted revenge. I used to be very emotional and had a big temper."

It's not that Gava didn't know any better. She had been raised by a Christian family and went regularly to church.

"I enjoyed the music and the services but I didn't realise who God is until later. However, my parents kept on teaching me about God and His importance in my life."

Like a plant that grows with regular watering, the teaching and the lessons from church began to feed Gava's heart and she recalls she "started following God fully when I was 10 years old".

"I decided to become a Christian because I heard so much about Jesus and what He has done for so many people," says Gava, now a 49-year-old teacher in Zimbabwe.

"He healed people and also changed so many lives for the better. I also liked the idea of having everlasting life. I began to enjoy church gatherings and church music more and more."

She has had her share of diffi-

culties though, telling *Challenge News* that she has had to fight off temptations while in prayer. "At such times, temptations can flood your mind and you start to think of quitting Christianity."

"It's also hard when you are desperately in need of God's response and you keep on praying but see no change."

It is at such times that she draws on her favourite Bible verse, 1 Samuel 2:1 – *Then Hannah prayed and said: 'My heart rejoices in the Lord; in the Lord my horn is lifted high. My mouth boasts over my enemies, for I delight in your deliverance.'*

Gava now has the life she always wanted. She thanks God that she has a Christian husband, that they both have jobs and are able to provide for their family.

"I want to share the goodness of the Lord in my life," she adds.

"For a long time there was no progress in my children's lives but through continuous prayer we see a great change and believe there is success ahead of them."

She is also very grateful for her health. Diagnosed with various illnesses, she had been told she required surgery. "But many people prayed for me and till today I have not had to have a single operation. I am so relieved and grateful for His grace."

"I am very happy with the life I am leading now. God has provided for all our needs and has done a lot in my family. We are grateful for His guidance and protection." •



Gava Julian

Ladies man now a new man



Brian

things of this world.”

Brian and his brothers were brought up by God-fearing parents who talked about God and read the Bible to them as soon as they were old enough to understand.

Those early conversations laid the foundations for October 10, 1994 — the day the Gospel message (the good news that Jesus Christ came to Earth to die for humanity’s sins) sank into Brian’s heart.

“From the pastor’s preaching that day I came to know that I am a sinner and that I needed Jesus in my life. I also learned that Hell is a place of eternal punishment for people who live in sin.

“When the pastor gave an altar call and asked who wanted to give their lives to God, I went to the front and prayed and repented (turned away from my sin). That was the day I gave my life to Jesus because He is the Christ, the Son of the living God.” Brian says his life changed

remarkably after that.

“From that day I was a changed person. The Holy Spirit (the unseen presence of God) came into my heart and my life started changing.

“I grew in my faith and today I am a new person because of what Christ did in my life on that great day.”

Today, Brian is the pastor of a Baptist church in Zambia and takes every opportunity to share his story with those who are looking for a fresh start. He tells them the best part of being a Christian is just that — the chance to be free from sin and the past.

“This is what I want to tell others — that Jesus loved us so much that when we were sinners He died for us, He paid the price for our sins.

“My desire is to see more people come to the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ so He can set them free from the power of sin,” Brian concludes.

Brian (surname withheld) admits to a weakness for women. “I was sexually immoral,” he tells *Challenge News*.

“I went to church but I loved the

Help for my marriage

Elizabeth Gwaticho knew how to hide her feelings. “I wouldn’t say anything if someone hurt me but in my heart I would harbour bitterness,” she tells *Challenge News*.

“I called myself a quiet person but I didn’t have a gentle and quiet spirit.”

Born into a Christian family, Elizabeth had attended church for as long as she could remember but the sermons and teaching meant nothing to her.

In fact, it wasn’t until she got married that she realised she needed outside help.

“I faced challenges with my husband — I couldn’t stand the marriage. But then one day I heard a sermon about how we should die to ourselves and talk to God about our problems.”

That was the moment Elizabeth turned to God and “immediately I started having an inner peace that I could not comprehend”.

She turned her life over to God and says that since that time she is “no longer worried about anything. I take everything to God in prayer now.”



Elizabeth Gwaticho

Letting go of bitter feelings

Businesswoman Doria Chanda’s parents died when she was 18. She had relatives but says none were able or willing to look after her and her siblings. And so Doria took on the role of single parent. “I couldn’t forgive them for that,” she tells *Challenge News*. “I couldn’t forgive them for not wanting to take care of us after my parents died. I struggled with resentment for years.”

She was also desperately lonely after losing both parents and longed for a special relationship “but I couldn’t find any”.

Five years after her parents died, when Doria was 23, she attended a church service and there she heard the gospel (the good news that Jesus Christ came to Earth to die for humanity’s sins) for what seemed like the first time.

Doria’s parents were Christians but they were not regular church-goers so her own background in the faith was patchy at best.

But everything changed at that service. The message that day was based on the Bible passage of Mark 10: 46-52, which recounts how Jesus healed the blind beggar named Bartimaeus.

Something in the message touched Doria deeply. “I became convicted that I needed God and I prayed to receive Him into my life.”

In the 23 years since that day, Doria has gotten married and now has a fulfilling life. In addition to running a business, she also serves in her church’s children’s ministry as a teacher.

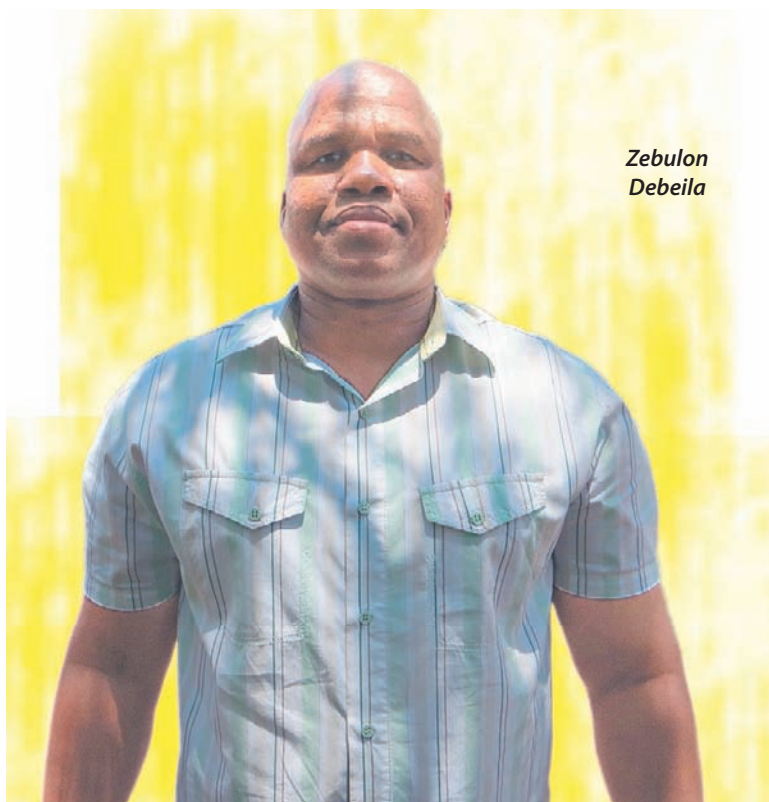
She is also involved with Child Evangelism Fellowship, a Bible-centered organisation whose purpose is to evangelise children and establish them in local churches.

Doria says she has learned to be a more committed Christian and to trust God in all situations.

“For those who like me have a passion to reach children for Christ, I hope they will partner with me and together we can win many souls to the Kingdom of God.”



Doria Chanda



Zebulon Debeila

Angry man tamed

A hair-trigger temper and a thieving habit were the two things Zebulon Debeila struggled with most while growing up in South Africa. “I was always fighting, especially when I got drunk,” he admits to *Challenge News*. “And my habit of stealing tainted my family name. I also smoked dagga.”

Zebulon, one of three children, tended his uncle’s flock, a job which he says “was not easy”. His childhood was difficult as his mother was single and did not work.

Despite these difficulties, however, he graduated from school and qualified for college but hinted that he still had some bad habits.

There was a church in his village and the pastor would hold open-air meetings. It was at these meetings that Zebulon heard about God sending His Son Jesus Christ to be the saviour of humanity.

He also had a friend who was a Christian. “This friend would visit me at home and share the gospel (the good news about Jesus) with me.

“I can’t say I decided to become a Christian. In fact I hated Christianity with all my heart but on Tuesday, July 21, 1999 grace finally found me and I had no power to resist it.

“At that time one of my closest friends was shot and killed. I think that’s why I ran to that friend’s house as though someone was behind me wanting to kill me!

“That was when Jesus came into my life.”

Today Zebulon is a pastor, and though he says sometimes it is difficult providing for his family on a pastor’s salary, he wouldn’t change his job for the world.

“My bad behaviour has changed,” he explains. “I am a better person; no more warring with others. Now I love people. I am fully committed to Christ and the ministry of His word.

“Hearing and studying God’s Word changed my life for the better. I now live for God.”

He says one of the best things about being a Christian is the fact that he now thinks about what he can do for others and not just himself.

“Life without Christ is like being a dead man walking. No Christ, no life,” says Zebulon, whose favourite verse is John 3: 16 - “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life.”

LONGING FOR LOVE

Growing up with a stepmother was difficult for Zimbabwean teacher **Edith Mushonga (left)**, now 50. She tells *Challenge News* that she “yearned for motherly love all the time”.

Unfortunately that longing for love took her to all the wrong places. She had several boyfriends and fell into sexual immorality. She also battled with anger, she adds.

When she was 25, Edith decided she wanted a different life and turned back to God. She had first heard the gospel (the good news that Jesus Christ came to earth to die for mankind’s sins) when she was about 10, during a crusade in her hometown.

“I am so glad I gave my life to Jesus,” she says. “It has been a joy and a blessing, even though my relatives have shunned me.

“I would like them to see Christ in me by my testimony and the example I set. I want to say that God has been good despite the challenges in life and I am happy to experience His grace (undeserved love of God) each day.”



Abasontayo nabo bangalahleka

Zulutranslation

FRANCOIS JOUBERT

Ngakhulela ekhaya elikhulwayo. Sa siya esontweni njalo ngesonto. Sakhulela eplazini ngangikuthanda ukulima nendalo. Ukulima, ukugibela ammahashi, ukuzingela nokudweba bekuyizitha into engizithandayo lezo. Ngangingomncane ngingenkani nekhandla elilikhuni.

Kusukela ekukhuleni kwami nganginothando lokumkhonza uNkulunkulu. Kodwa ngangingazi lutho ngokuzalwa kabusha. Kwathi sengisemabangeni aphezulu, lesithupha omele I csv (student Christian association) wavakashela iskole sethu. Ngahamba ngayokhuluma naye ngomunye engangikhathazekile ngaye. Wangibheka wayesethi. "Uthini ngawe?"

Wayesengibuza ukuthi ngiyaya yini ezulwini.

Nganingafuni ukukhukhumeza ngaphendula ngathi: "Ngithemba kanjalo, kodwa angiqinisekanga." Wayesengibonisa u Johane 1:12, engichazela ukuthi ngingaba nesiqiniseko kanjani.

Ngonyaka olandela lowo ngamaholide ka April, i CSV yayine camp ya bafana eWinkelspruit.

Sasibaningi singabafana, cishe 300. Kodwa kwakunokuganga okuningi, kwakubhenywa kanti nempahla yasekhishini yalahleka. Ngakubona kuphume endleleni kakhulu lokho futhi ngangingavumelani nakho. Ivangeli lashumayelwa ngobuqotho okwakuyigugu.

Ngobunye ubusuku abafana abaningi basukumela phambili, uma bemenywa ukuthi bezolungisa izinto noNkulunkulu. Ngangicabangela, kuhle ukuthi bayaphenduka bayakudinga lokho!

Ngalesosikhathi ngangizishaya isfuba.

Busuku bumbela inkonzo iphakathi, iNkosi yangibonisa ukweduka kwami. Ngabona ngizihlalele ukuthi uma iNkosi ibuya emafini, ngangilahlekile. Kwakuwumuzwa onamandla engangingakwazi ukuwugwema.

Emva kwenkonzo ngagijimela kumshumayeli wathan-daza nami.

Ngavuma izono zami ngalungisa izinto neNkosi.

Ngezwa ngathi ngithulwe umthwalo obewuse-mahlombe ami. Ngangingazi ukuthi abantu abal-

ungile abalihambayo isonto nabo bangalahleka. Kwakungasibona abanye abafana ababedinga ukusindiswa, nami uqobo! Ngalesosikhathi iNkosi yanginika lelivesi, ngokukaJohane 10:28 "Ngibanika ukuphila okungunaphakade, angeke basabhubha. Akekho oyobahlwatha ezandleni zami."

Uma ngiqeda amabanga aphakeme ngaya eTechnikon yasePitoli lapho ngahlangana khona nonkosikazi wami esineminyaka ewu 31 sishadile.

Kwaba khona isikhathi lapho ngakhohliseka khona, ngaqala ukugxeka wonke umuntu ose-duze kwami, ngilandela imithetho eyenziwe ngabantu. Umoya wokwahlulela wangenza itshe elikhuni elingajabulisi uNkulunkulu. Ngangibukhali ngingathandi.

Ngomusa kaNkulunkulu, uMoya Oyingcwele wangikhombisa ukuthi lendlela ayimkhazimulisi uThixo. UMoya oyiNgcwele wangikhombisa ngokucacile kusuka kuJohane 15 ukuthi kufanele ngithele izithelo zikaMoya oyiNgcwele (uthando, intokozo, ukuthula, ukubekeze la, nesihe, nokulunga, ukuthem beka, ubumnene nokuzilawula). NgokukaJohane 15:16 "Aningikethanga, kodwa nganiketha mina ukuba nithele izithelo, eziyingunaphakade."

Lashintsha Impilo yami, nalabo engibathandayo kanye nawo wonke umuntu owayengizungezile. INkosi ihlala ingikhumbuzela njalo ukuthi kumele ngithele izithelo ukuze ikhazimuliswe, uthando isona esikhulu kuzo zonke.

Impilo yami yokukholwa ikhuliswa isikhathi engihlala ngaso emkhulekweni nasezwini Lakhe.

Ngingayibonga ngani iNkosi ngomusa Wayo ongaka! •



Francois and Mariette Joubert on their farm.

Goeie kerkmense kan ook verlore gaan

Afrikaantranslation

DEUR FRANCOIS JOUBERT

Ek het in 'n christelike huis groot geword. Ons was elke Sondag in die kerk. My pa was ouderling en my ma was orrelis in ons gemeente. Ons het op 'n plaas gebly en ek was lief vir die boerdery en die natuur. Om te boer, perdry, jag en visvang was my plesier. Ek was 'n laatlam en baie kere hardkoppig en moedswillig.

Van kleins af was daar 'n begeerte in my hart om die Here te dien. Ek het egter nie geweet van wedergeboorte nie.

Toe ek in die hoërskool was, standerd 6, het 'n reisende sekretaris van die CSV (Christelike Studente Vereniging) ons skool kom besoek. Ek het met hom gaan praat oor iemand wat ek oor bekommerd was. Hy het na my gekyk en gesê: maar wat van jou. Hy vra toe vir my of ek hemel toe gaan. Ek wou nie voor op die wa klink nie en sê dat ek so hoop, maar is nie seker daarvoor nie. Hy wys toe Johannes 1:12 aan my, en verduidelik aan my dat ek wel sekerheid kan hê.

Die volgende jaar was daar tydens die April vakansie 'n CSV Kamp vir seuns by Winkelspruit aangebied. Ons was 'n hele klomp seuns omtrent 300. Daar het maar baie verkeerde dinge ook gebeur, daar is skelm gerook en items is uit die kombuis gesteel. Dit was vir my heeltemal verkeerd en ek het nie daarmee saamgestem nie. Die boodskappe was kosbaar en dit was die evangelie. Een aand het 'n hele klomp seuns na vore gegaan op uitnodiging om met die Here reg te maak. Ek het by myself gedink: dit is goed dat hulle regmaak, hulle het dit nodig.

Op die stadium was ek heeltemal tevrede met myself.

Op een aand tydens 'n diens het die Here my skielik oortuig van my verlorenheid. Ek het daar gesit en besef as die Here nou op die wolke kom, dan is ek verlore. Dit was 'n

baie sterk en radikale oortuiging.

Na die diens het ek na die prediker gehardloop en hy het saam met my gebid. Ek kon my sonde bely en met die Here regmaak. Toe ek daar opstaan, het dit letterlik vir my gevoel asof daar 'n las van my skouers afval. Ek het nie besef goeie kerkmense gaan ook verlore nie. Dis was toe nie net die ander wat redding nodig gehad het nie, maar juis ek! In die tyd het die Here vir my Joh. 10: 28 gegee. "En Ek gee hulle die Ewige Lewe, en hulle sal nooit verlore gaan tot in ewigheid nie. Niemand sal hulle uit My hand ruk nie."

Na my hoërskool loopbaan is ek na Technikon Pretoria toe. Daar het ek my vrou ontmoet, met wie ek vandag nog gelukkig getroud is na 31 jaar.

Op 'n stadium in my lewe het ek verval in 'n misleiding. Ek het almal om my begin veroordeel en mensgemaakte wette begin najaag. Die gees van veroordeling het my 'n moeilike mens gemaak wat God nie behaag het nie. Ek was hard en liefdeloos. Deur die genade van God het die Heilige Gees my oortuig dat hierdie lewe nie strek tot eer van God nie. Die Here Jesus het my duidelik gewys uit Johannes 15 dat ek vrug moet dra [liefde, vreugde, vrede, verdraagsaamheid, vriendelikheid, goedheid, getrouheid, sagmoedigheid en selfbeheersing. Die vrug van die Heilige Gees. Johannes 15: 16: "Julle het My nie uitverkies nie, maar Ek het julle uitverkies en julle aangestel om vrug te gaan dra en dat julle vrug kan bly." Dit het my lewe kom verander, my verhouding met my geliefdes en almal om my. Die Here het dit weer en weer vir my kom bevestig dat ek vrug moet dra tot Sy eer waarvan die liefde die grootste is.

My Christelike lewe en groei hang af van my persoonlike tyd met God. Sy Woord en gebed.

Hoe kan 'n mens ooit die Here genoeg dankie sê vir Sy onuitspreeklike genade. •

Churchgoers can be lost too

Englishtranslation

BY FRANCOIS JOUBERT

I grew up in a Christian home. We went to church every Sunday. We lived on a farm and I loved farming and nature. Farming, horse riding, hunting and fishing were my pleasures. I was the youngest, and often stubborn and willful.

From childhood there was a desire in my heart to serve the Lord. However, I did not know about being born again.

When I was in high school, standard six, a representative from the CSV (Christian Students Association) came to visit our school. I went to talk to him about someone I was worried about. He looked at me and said: "But what about you?"

He then asked me if I was going to heaven.

I didn't want to seem arrogant, so I said: "I hope so, but I'm not sure about it." He then showed me John 1:12, and explained to me that I could have certainty.

The following year, during the April holidays, a CSV Camp for boys was offered at Winkelspruit.

We were a whole bunch of boys, about 300. But a lot of naughty things also happened, there was sneaky smoking and items were stolen from the kitchen. I thought it was completely wrong and I didn't approve. The messages were precious and they were the gospel.

One evening a whole bunch of boys went forward, when invited, to make amends with the Lord. I thought to myself: It is good that they are repenting. They need it!

At the time I was completely satisfied with myself.

One night during a service, the Lord suddenly convinced me of my lostness. I sat there and realized that if the Lord returned on the clouds, then I was in trouble. It was a very strong and radical conviction.

After the service I ran to the preacher and he prayed with me.

I confessed my sin and made things right with the Lord. It literally felt as if a burden had been lifted from my shoulders. I did not realize that good churchgoers could also be lost.

It was not only the other boys who needed saving, but me! At that time, the Lord gave me the verse John 10: 28. "And I give them Eternal Life, and they shall never perish forever. No one will snatch them out of My hand."

After my high school career I went to Technikon Pretoria. There I met my wife, with whom I am still happily married after 31 years.

At some point in my life I fell into a deception. I began to condemn everyone around me and chase after man-made laws. The spirit of condemnation made me a difficult person, who did not please God. I was harsh and unloving.

By the grace of God, the Holy Spirit convicted me that this way of living does not show forth to the glory of God. The Lord Jesus clearly showed me from John 15 that I must bear the fruit of the Holy Spirit [love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control]. John 15: 16: "You did not choose Me, but I chose you and appointed you to bear fruit and that your fruit may remain."

It changed my life, my relationships with my loved ones and everyone around me. The Lord has confirmed it to me again and again that I must bear fruit for His glory, of which love is the greatest.

My Christian life and growth depend on my personal time with God, through His Word and prayer. How can one ever thank the Lord enough for His unspeakable grace! •

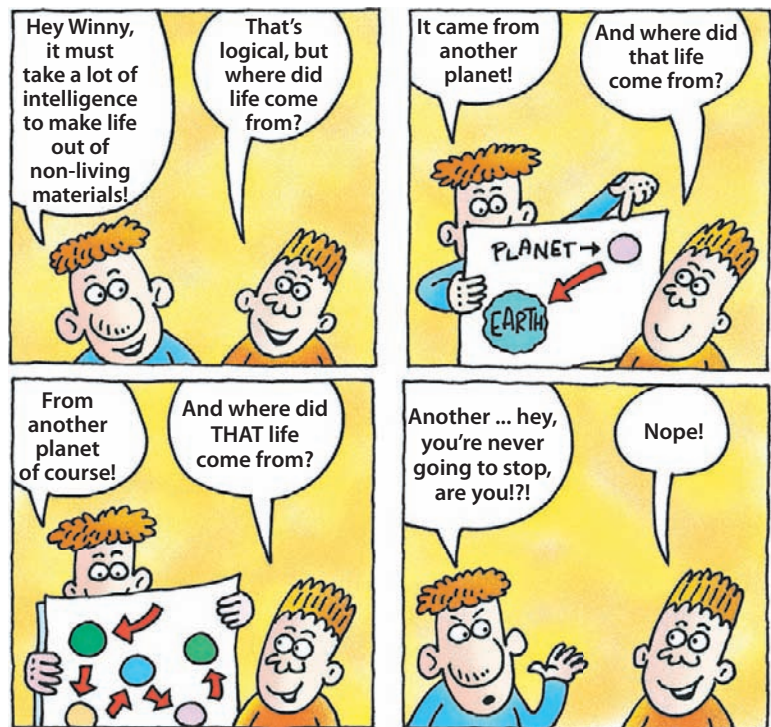
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Dar and Winny

by Richard Gunther 49



THERE is faith that God spoke and everything came into being as a result. There is also a faith that a big bang happened, and billions of years later, there are millions of different plants, animals and people. It takes faith to believe either of these scenarios. — Jeff Rhoades

CHRISTIANS believe in the virgin birth of Jesus. Materialists believe in the virgin birth of the cosmos. Choose your miracle. —Glen Scrivener

“THE God who created, names, and numbers the stars in the heavens also numbers the hairs of my head. He pays attention to very big things and to very small ones. What matters to me matters to Him, and that changes my life.” — Elisabeth Elliot

Lessons from a sick bed

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4. Living in the present while sick is very important if we are to appreciate the time. I'm a catastrophist by nature, always living in the future "what ifs?" Especially on bad days, it took all my self-control to bring my focus back to the present. Today. I can do today. Today, work can cope without me. Today my family is fine. Today I can cope with this pain. The Lord taught His disciples to ask for daily bread. As His child, I live hand to mouth – right now I have grace sufficient for this circumstance. What I don't have is grace to cope with every worry of the future and all the might be's that one can think of.

The Psalmist, David, described this as quieting his soul within him like a weaned child (Psalm 131:2). I have to be as trusting as a little kid before God. As a poster in my loo says: Lord, I don't understand, I don't need to; I know You've a plan, You will see through; It is in Your hands, I believe You.

5. Illness is not only trying but humbling: the waiting and helplessness and realisation that we are not indispensable reminds us that we are puny and our lives are fleeting. The world goes on without us. Sickness (like disaster) reminds us that everything we plan could be instantly changed by forces outside our control. We arrogantly think we are masters of our own destiny and captains of our fate but even the common cold can destroy our lofty plans and pretensions of invincibility. The Bible writer James admonishes us to prefix our plans with "If the Lord wills" or "Lord willing" because we really have no idea what tomorrow holds (James 4:15).

6. Another hard lesson is that pain is very lonely. No one else can feel our pain or understand our feelings of sickness. It is hard to explain or quantify. In hospital one is asked to rate pain on a scale of 1-10 or describe it as stabbing or crampy or sharp. But one person's level 6 pain

may be very different from another's. Wouldn't it be fantastic if there was a machine that could give the doctor the exact pain you were feeling? However, our pain is ours alone. The only one who feels it with us is God Himself. I found great comfort in knowing He understands my suffering precisely and completely.

O Lord, You have searched me and known me. You know my sitting down and my rising up; You understand my thought afar off. You comprehend my path and my lying down, And are acquainted with all my ways. (Psalm 139:1-3)

7. But while pain is in one sense isolating, in another way it made me think of all the people I know who have had cancer or suffered with ongoing sickness, and realise how many of us deal with pain on a near-constant basis, especially as we age. If pain gave people a visible aura, I think we would be astonished at how prevalent it is. How many old people are cantankerous just because they are dealing with chronic pain? My suffering gave me new respect for the elderly and chronically ill, each day they bear a great weight that very few acknowledge, let alone appreciate. I hope that insight will make me kinder in my dealings with others.

8. Sometimes in all the waiting and pain of a long illness, one can have days of despair where it all becomes too much. That is when I had to remind myself that feelings are not reliable – they lie. Feelings are influenced by how much sleep I've had, my digestion, what others have done or said, what I've watched or Googled, by my pain or discomfort. Feelings are fickle and transitory, they cannot be relied on. I feel God is far away and has abandoned me. Lo, I



I am with you always, even to the end of the age. (Matt 28:20) I feel like my prayers hit the ceiling. For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous, and His ears are open to their prayers. (1 Peter 3:12) The Bible reminds me that feelings change but the Word of God is a solid foundation.

9. One way to tackle bad days, I found, was to remember people worse off than myself. While I was sick, there was a terrible earthquake in Syria and Turkey, and I thought about those poor people trapped under the rubble. Here am I on my comfy couch, with my tea and my headphones, and my dachshund at my feet. Millions of people would trade places with me, sick as I am. And that would inevitably lead to thanksgiving. Thank you God for our home, for my dog, for the opportunity to rest, for this comfy pillow etc. etc. That would turn my thoughts from despair to gratitude. The Bible even commands us to do this: 1 Thessalonians 5:18 says, "In everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you."

10. The second way to tackle bad days is to remember this too will pass. Things change, the tunnel ends, the pain eases, the sun comes out. It will not be like this forever. Bad situations improve. Most illnesses and wounds heal. And, as a Christian, even if the situation doesn't improve and worst comes to worst and I die, there is hope even then because heaven awaits. God has promised that I will live eternally in perfection in His presence – a forever without any sorrow or crying or death or pain!

God Himself will be with them and be their God. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away. (Revelations 21:3-4)

So, if you are a fellow sufferer, going through an illness or a dark time, may I encourage you: God can "work all things for good" as Romans 8:28 says, if you are of those "who love Him and are called according to His purpose" i.e. a Christian. To become one you need to love and trust Him enough to turn away from your sins, and give your circumstances and life into His hands.

"Suffering is part of the human condition," as the late Billy Graham once said, "and it comes to us all. The key is how we react to it, either turning away from God in anger and bitterness or growing closer to Him in trust and confidence."

May you find God in your dark times.

Remember this too will pass.

Want to explore more?

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

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

HOW DO I BECOME A CHRISTIAN?

Anyone can gain the eternal life offered through Jesus Christ

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

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

Here is an example of how you can pray.

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

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

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

I have prayed the prayer [ABOVE]

* Please tick and write clearly *

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Address _____

Email address _____

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

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Fanie van der Merwe of South Africa (centre) crosses the line to win gold ahead of silver medalist Charl du Toit of South Africa (left) in the Men's T37 100 metres final at Hampden Park during day five of the Glasgow 2014 Commonwealth Games. (Photo by Cameron Spencer/Getty Images)

Fanie with the gold medal for the 100m T37 Mens event. (Photo by Julian Finney/Getty Images)

DESPITE DISABILITY

Very few people get to compete in one Olympics but South African Fanie van der Merwe has been to three. He won double gold at his debut at the Beijing Summer Paralympics in 2008, in the 100m and 200m sprint. And went on to win gold again at London in 2012 for the 100m and bronze at the 2016 Rio Games. He also won gold at the All-Africa Games in 2011 and 2015, and at the 2014 Commonwealth Games.

Growing up, Fanie had tried all sorts of sports and had big expectations but found it difficult and disappointing with his cerebral palsy, so he realised that he probably would never excel. However, he decided he would compete because he loved it and not care too much if he didn't get anywhere.

"That was so crazy for me. When I had that attitude, God came and He turned what I thought of as my disability and something that is holding me back, God turned it around into a blessing," Fanie told Christians in Sport.

Of his cerebral palsy, Fanie says "I knew as a child that there was something wrong with me but I never saw it as a disability." He had always competed with able-bodied children up until grade 11 (aged 17), when he finally made the school's abled-bodied athletic team. Then his coach suggested that he compete in para athletics.

Fanie saw this new opportunity as a beautiful gift from God and from there a lot of doors opened

for him. He began competing in disabled sports in 2003, in 2004 he competed in his first national championships. Being considered for the 2004 Athens games inspired him to try harder. In 2006, he began studying at Stellenbosch University, where he began training in earnest to compete in Beijing in 2008.

There he won his first two gold medals. "I almost got anxiety just thinking about the race and then when I went out onto the track I had peace. God pushed the anxiety away and I could really relax," he says.

As a young boy, Fanie wanted to be a child of God but didn't know how to do that. He thought maybe if he could just live a good life God would accept him, but he kept failing in his own strength. He also had spiritual pride, he confesses, in that he would look at others and think "well at least I'm not that bad" or "at least I'm not doing that".

"Even when I had opportunities to give my life to the Lord, I was never sure [it had worked], until I was about 16-17, I remember, telling someone that I don't know why but I always feel like I need to commit my life to the Lord at every opportunity. He told me it is not about your works, it is about what Christ has done for you on the cross, and it is His blood that sets you free

and gives you salvation. And I knew then I don't have to ever [try to] earn my salvation again, it is what God has done for me.

"That was the first step of the salvation process but although I didn't doubt anymore, no one really showed me how to walk with Christ. Then when I went to university I got disciplined, where someone took the responsibility to mentor me and explain to me that God's love disciplines us.

“**I experienced God as very near to me.**”

"That changed a lot of my understanding about Christianity and God as a father," Fanie says. He said when people corrected him, he could not see it as loving behaviour. Now he realised that God's correcting discipline was an act of love,

wanting the best for him.

From the Bible passage in Hebrews 12:6 (... *the Lord disciplines the one He loves, and He chastens everyone He accepts as His son*) Fanie realised in fact that the discipline he was feeling was proof that he was in fact God's son, not evidence that he was far from God.

"After that I experienced God as very near to me. He would walk with me through the highs and the lows. He was never distancing Himself when times got tough, He was right there in the thick of it with me. I could really run to Him in those

times when I felt a lot of despair," Fanie relates.

Even right from the start at the 2008 Beijing Games, he remembers God intervening for him when, during the 200m, his legs started going into spasm, and God gave him the strength to carry on and get over the line first.

At the London Games in 2012, Fanie went into the 200m race very confident with a lot of expectation resting on him as the world record holder at the time. Up until the last 50 metres he was in front but then five people passed him before the finish line and it felt as if his whole world had imploded. "I went back to my room that night and I felt God say to me, 'Fanie, I love you because you are my son, and not because you can win medals. And I'm proud of you.' All my years I had tried to

perform to get acceptance and to be someone, and now I didn't have anything to give to give God except my worship. And I spent the next three days just worshipping Him and God really restored me through that."

On the final day, when Fanie ran the 100m, he successfully defended his title, knowing that his identity and God's love for him did not rest on the race's outcome.

"My first identity is as a son of God," he declares, "then is my identity as a sportsman. I start everything with Jesus."

Fanie and his brother Chris now run a Christian non-profit called Inspired 2 Become, focusing on alternative action sports and athletes with disabilities, and Fanie also coaches visually and intellectually impaired children. ●

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