

Dragged down by addiction

Isaiah Ramos was only three years old when his father was sent to prison for 15 years, forcing his mother to raise four children on her own in the Bronx, New York.

"We went from shelter to shelter," Isaiah recalls in a Delafé Testimonies video. "There was no stability."

At a young age Isaiah was exposed to masturbation and pornography. He remembers going to church with his mother but at the same time "messing around with the young girls in the church and just living a life of lust and secret sin".

"Once I hit an age where I could tell my mom, 'I don't want to go to church this Sunday', she let me stay home ... I began looking up to all the wrong men because my dad wasn't in my life.

"I started just chasing money and fame, caring about my clothes, idolising what I put on my body, trying to seek purpose in different sports, living a life of fornication, sleeping around with different women."

After graduating high school, Isaiah started pursuing a boxing career, which led him to a new obsession: gambling. "When I got involved with gambling, it affected me so much. It just made me depressed. It made me angry."

Isaiah also started smoking weed and before long, it became a daily habit – as did the gambling. When

his gambling began affecting his career, Isaiah knew he had to stop.

He resolved to quit gambling as his New Year's resolution.

He managed to kick the habit – but found he replaced it with smoking weed more and sleeping around.

One night Isaiah was driving with a friend and they were popping pills to get high.

"I got into an accident and the car was totaled," Isaiah recalls. "I remember I got out of the car and just fell on the highway. I woke up in the hospital with IVs in my arm."

After that, Isaiah's lifestyle didn't change – he went right back to selling drugs, smoking weed, drinking and partying.

"But I started thinking differently. I started having thoughts like, 'Is God real?' 'If God is real [and I died], would I be in hell right now?'"

After a discussion with his grandmother about these thoughts, three words stood out to him: Relationship with God.

"I knew that I needed a relationship with God, I just didn't know how to do it."

One day Isaiah's aunt invited him to stay with her in North Carolina so he could get away. He agreed, but before he left, he popped pills and smoked weed continuously.

● Turn to page 2



BACK PAGE



A SOLID FOUNDATION

JAMIE JONES-BUCHANAN

ARE YOU READY FOR THE AFTERLIFE?

BY GREG LAURIE

FULL House actor Bob Saget, 65, was found dead in his hotel room in Florida following a show on his comedy tour. This tragic event happened right on the heels of the death of beloved comedic actress Betty White, who died at 99.

Bob made this statement on Instagram after Betty passed: "I don't know what happens when we die, but if Betty says you get to be with the love of your life, then I happily defer to Betty on this."

He honestly added, "I don't know what happens when we die."

Death is something we all think about almost every day — some more than others. We should

think deeply about death, but more importantly, the afterlife.

In older times, people commonly wrote a Latin phrase on the top of documents: "Memento Mori." It means "Think of death."

The phrase sounds morbid on the surface, but it's not. It served as a reminder to be aware that life ends, eternity is close and there is an afterlife.

I am not an expert on the afterlife, but I am a student, not only because I am a Christian and a pastor, but also because my son, Christopher, died in 2008. I have thought deeply about what happens when we leave this life and enter the next one. Here is what has brought endless comfort to me: There is a Heaven, and Jesus has made a way for us all to go there.

Jesus said, "I am the resurrection and the life. Anyone who believes in me will live, even after dying" (John 11:25).

My son believed in Jesus as I do. He is now in Heaven. For the Christian, the moment we take our last breath on earth, we take our next breath in Heaven. Because Jesus died on the cross for my sins and rose again, I have hope for the afterlife. And I know that I will see my son again.

King David, who also lost a son too soon, wrote, "I will go to him, but he will not return to me" (2 Samuel 12:23).

My son is not just a part of my past; he is also a part of my future. Jesus promised me that.

● Turn to page 2

I COULDN'T LIVE WITH MY SECRET

BY BILLY HALLOWELL

A Mississippi man shocked authorities when he walked into a police station on a Tuesday and admitted, of his own volition, to killing a person three years prior.

Monroe County Sheriff Kevin Crook, a more than 20-year police veteran, told WCBI-TV he hasn't seen anything like 37-year-old James Eric Crisp's confession.

"James Eric Crisp walked into my office, of his own free will, and confessed to having killed [Roger Loyd] Taylor," Cook told the outlet. Taylor, 48, was reportedly killed March 10, 2019, and Crisp's purported admission could help finally close the longstanding cold case.

One of the most notable and difficult facts in the case is that Crisp, who once struggled with drugs and past legal issues, reportedly became a Christian after his life of crime. He now teaches and preaches at a recovery program called God's House of Hope to help others facing similar struggles.

Crisp was an addict at the time of the killing, according to The Christian Post. "By his own testimony, he got saved three years ago. He was in a recovery center - we sent him there," Crook said. "He is now a teacher and preacher in that program."

Despite his life change, Crisp reportedly couldn't live with his secret. According to the sheriff's office, he sought to regain "spiritual freedom" by telling the truth he had long concealed.

"He made the decision to risk his physical freedom in order to regain his spiritual freedom and hopefully help bring closure to this case for the sake of himself and the Taylor family," Crook's office said in a statement, according to The Daily Beast. "We are glad for Mr. Crisp to get this off his chest so that he might be able to continue to do ministry wherever the Lord has planned for him, but this does not close the case for us."

Authorities plan to look at the evidence to determine if there should be other charges or any other suspects. Amy Coyle of God's House of Hope and others appeared at a bond hearing to speak about Crisp and his dramatic life change. "We know that God is a just God. He forgives," she told WCBI-TV. "But we also have to take action for our responsibilities."

Crisp has been charged with manslaughter and is being held on \$150,000 bond.



James Eric Crisp

Dragged down by addiction

● From page 1

"When I got there I was so anxious," Isaiah remembers. "This was my first time in two or three years that I was about to go to sleep without smoking [weed]... that night I prayed.

"It was my first time in a long time that I prayed. I cried out to God, 'Lord let me sleep. Let me fall asleep without having to smoke, without having to have sex, without having to pop pills.' And He answered my prayer. I didn't just fall asleep, I slept like a baby."

In North Carolina, Isaiah attended church with his aunt. He recalls tears streaming from his face as he watched people worshipping God. The pastor preached about all the questions Isaiah had about God and how to have a relationship with Him.

"There was a man there that was sharing his testimony about how the Lord delivered him from his life of sin and that was a message of hope for me. It brought me peace. It was the truth, the good news that God was offering me a relationship with Him - a new life ... that day I made the decision, I said, 'God, I'm gonna give You my life.'"

When the pastor invited anyone who wanted to get baptized (submerged in water as an outward display of dedication to God) to come forward, Isaiah walked to the front of the church. "I laid my life down and I knew it was a very major decision. I was ready. I wanted a new life. I wanted to change ... in that moment I knew there was hope. I knew that God was gonna set me free."

After that Isaiah began praying and reading the Bible every day. "God began cleaning out my heart little by little, stripping away sins. He set me free from my pornography addiction ... He just began working in my heart; like I had no desire for it. I remember the same thing [happened] with weed. I wouldn't smoke because God was that peace that I needed."

Isaiah admits it wasn't a perfect journey and some sins were easier to give up than others. "I said, 'God I am gonna stop doing everything else but I'm not gonna stop having sex.'"

But he became so convicted that sex outside of marriage was wrong, he prayed to God to help him to change.

"I didn't know how to do it, but I told God I was willing. God began working in my life and I began walking in purity." Isaiah now shares his story in the hope it will help other people who are struggling.

"Jesus is the only way," he attests. "He's the only way to true peace. He's the only way to true love. He's the only way to find your purpose. He is the only way to heaven."



Isaiah Ramos

Wise words on suffering

YUVAL Noah Harari in his bestseller, *Sapiens*. "Happiness is not the surplus of pleasant over unpleasant moments. Rather, happiness consists in seeing one's life in its entirety as meaningful and worthwhile. ... A meaningful life can be extremely satisfying even in the midst of hardship, whereas a meaningless life is a terrible ordeal no matter how comfortable it is."

TRAILS and subsequent suffering in life are inevitable, unpredictable and variable. And while never pleasant, they become purposeful and profitable when responded to correctly [by using them as an opportunity to draw closer to God].

- David E. Stevens

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

- Benjamin Windle

WARREN Wiersbe states: "Our faith is not really tested until God asks us to bear what seems unbearable, do what seems unreasonable, and expect what seems impossible."

I'VE lately been reminded that when it's cloudy and you can't see the sun, we still trust that the sun is there. It's the same with God. He's still there, even when it feels brutal.

- Megan

"LIFE with God is not immunity from difficulties, but peace in difficulties."

- C.S. Lewis

"GOD allows us to experience the low points of life in order to teach us lessons that we could learn in no other way."

- C.S. Lewis

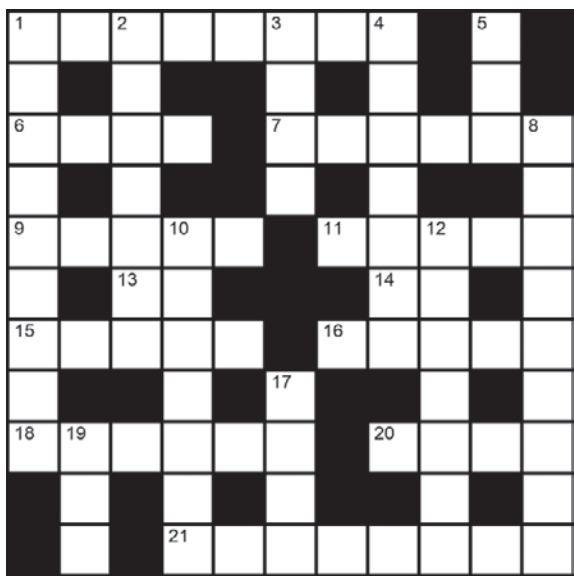
"LIFE is hard. Life is going to be hard if it's not already really, really hard. But I believe we can live so well in the hard. ... You have a stunning capacity to endure incredibly hard because of Jesus in your story. You are actually anti-fragile.

"With Jesus in your corner, you are so much stronger than you think; you can endure very, very hard things. You can stay in the hard, you don't have to leave. You can do it. You can do this, because of Jesus."

- paraplegic Katherine Wolf

Coffee Break CROSSWORD & SUDOKU

- ACROSS**
- 1 Subordinate set
 - 6 Shaved part of the neck, perhaps
 - 7 Albania's capital
 - 9 Open-mouthed
 - 11 Type in data
 - 13 Mexico's continent: abbr.
 - 14 "Catch Me ___ You Can"
 - 15 Follows an order
 - 16 Asparagus stalk
 - 18 Inter, as a pharaoh
 - 20 Plank imperfection
 - 21 US casino capital (3,5)

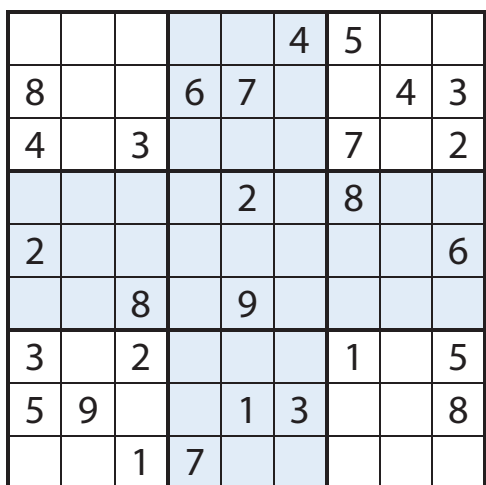


- DOWN**
- 1 Island nation in SE Asia
 - 2 Double-winged aircraft
 - 3 Horse feed
 - 4 Vegetable that looks like a white carrot
 - 5 Money in Japan
 - 8 Joint inflammation
 - 10 Employees' due
 - 12 Old German monetary unit
 - 17 Bird seen in hieroglyphics
 - 19 Granny, to a Brit.

SOLUTIONS PAGE 7



"Do you two have a history?"



ARE YOU READY FOR THE AFTERLIFE?

● From page 1

It is not a bad thing to think about these things deeply. Renowned author and theologian C.S. Lewis said, "A continual looking forward to the eternal world is not ... a form of escapism or wishful thinking, but one of the things a Christian is meant to do."

Think about death, eternity, and the afterlife. But think on it with the knowledge that death is not the end. There is an afterlife, but you need to be ready for it. Heaven is a prepared place for prepared people.

Jesus said, "I go to prepare a place for you, that where I am, you may be also" (John 14.2). Only those who are prepared to die are genuinely ready to live.

Now Betty, and Bob are in the afterlife. And one day, you will be too. You decide in this life where you will spend the afterlife. Choose well.

Greg Laurie is the pastor and founder of the Harvest churches in California and Hawaii and of Harvest Crusades. He is an evangelist, best-selling author and movie producer.

STAR ATHLETE COMES HOME

BY JOANNA BREault

Some might say sports are in Stephen Barbee's blood. His father was recruited by several professional baseball teams. He refused to play games on Sundays and became a preacher instead. But for Stephen, growing up in Kansas in the 1970s, football, track, and baseball were everything.

Athletic achievement gave Stephen – a pastor's kid who was more often associated with his dad's name than his own – a chance to establish an identity of his choosing. It felt good to be admired, but this world also brought new temptations such as alcohol, marijuana, and then harder drugs.

"It was kind of like a split personality: the athlete, the drunk, the student," Stephen recalls. "I had all of these different masks I was living out."

Stephen attended college on a full scholarship for baseball and was an All-American football player. Then one day, it all came crashing down. Stephen got blackout drunk, and his behaviour was so bad that he was expelled. In that moment, his athletic career was over.

The roller coaster of addiction

In the spring of 1986, Stephen came home depressed and discouraged. Sometimes he prayed, but his childhood faith didn't hold much meaning for him. Stephen jumped at the opportunity to coach college football nearby – but when he was caught partying with the players, he was fired.

"My addiction always overshadowed my dreams," he says. This truth continued to play out in his life. In pursuit of a woman, Stephen moved to Chicago. The relationship fizzled and Stephen started using crack.

"I lost everything. I was walking the streets, literally eating dry cereal for two days straight," he remembers. During that time, he would pray, "God, deliver me ... don't let me die in my addiction." He eventually ended up at a homeless shelter where he found safe housing, got sober, and rededicated his life to Christ.

In August of 1991, Stephen gave a Gospel tract to a young woman – and she eventually became his wife. The couple had two children and bought a four-bedroom house in the suburbs. Stephen earned his bachelor's degree in communication and got a job as a chaplain at a health clinic. He went on to become the men's division director at the homeless shelter he once lived at. Though Stephen was busy with ministry, not everything was right at home. The marriage was suffering – and one day, Stephen's wife told him she was leaving.

Alone in his house, Stephen decided – after 10 years of sobriety – to have a beer. And then two. The voice of temptation was loud and clear.

"The voice says, 'You haven't had a hit of crack in over 10 years. You deserve one,'" Stephen recalls. "And so that night, I went out and smoked about \$700 worth of crack cocaine."

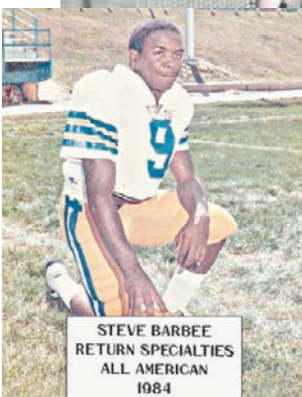
Hard consequences

Immediately, Stephen was back in the grip of addiction. He lost his job and his house; he returned to Kansas in 2001 with only the clothes he was wearing.

For the next six years, Stephen cycled through addiction – going to treatment, getting back into church, and then relapsing. At one point, Stephen's father – who was firm on his boundary that Stephen could not live under his



Stephen Barbee. INSET: Stephen in his playing days.



roof while using – drove him to a homeless shelter.

"He opened the car door and he said, 'Son, I love you, but you have to go,'" Stephen says.

Stephen could live at home if he gave up his drug use – but instead he "chose to live a life of homelessness." He shoplifted, wrote bad checks, and

sold drugs to fund his addiction.

Without realizing it, Stephen was getting high with a confidential informant. Before long, he was arrested and facing federal prison time for the sale of a controlled substance. Between his time in federal detention and his actual sentence, Stephen spent 44 months behind bars.

Unmasking the lies

Almost immediately, Stephen realized he needed to get right with God. He also needed to be rid of drugs and alcohol for good.

"I asked myself one simple question," he said. "How many times were you arrested sober?" It was never. And so that day, I just told myself, 'If I just stay off the drugs and alcohol – if that's all I did for the rest of my life – I would never have to wear the silver handcuffs.'"

But Stephen's life change did not stop there. His in-prison work assignment was to help with religious services. He prayed with prisoners and guards alike.

But the most powerful display of God's power came in the form of inner transformation. Stephen realized he had compartmentalized his life since his youth, taking on different masks based on his behavior and surroundings.

"I came face to face with my mask," he explains. "The enemy would trick me to say, 'When you're in church, He loves you, but when you are in the crack house, He doesn't.'"

Stephen realized that God's love doesn't work that way. He says, "The Holy Spirit dealt with me, and He told me, 'I'm still the God that loves you when you're in your family. I'm still the God that loves you when you're in church. I'm still the God that loves you when you have a career. And I still love you when you're out there in the drug world. You built those walls. You have to tear them down, because I'm the God that loves all of you.'"

Second chances

In January 2012, Stephen left prison as a free man. Today, Stephen works as a field director for Prison Fellowship.

Stephen has close relationships with his grown children.

He says they have forgiven him for his mistakes, and they love spending time together. •

The original of this story can be found at www.prison-fellowship.org and it is used with kind permission.

The love of a father

ANOTHER great blessing in Stephen's life is his relationship with his father. Stephen's dad worked as a chaplain for the championship-winning University of Kansas basketball team, and now he pastors a church. Sometimes he invites Stephen to come preach there.

Stephen will never forget the day he was a guest speaker at a missions conference in Kansas City. That morning, he read the story of the prodigal son in his devotions and was moved by the love of the father in the parable, by his forgiveness and lavish expressions of love.

The story of the prodigal son is found in Luke 15:11–32 and is about a father with two sons. The younger impatient and greedy son asks his father for his inheritance. The father agrees, but the son wastes his money, eventually becoming homeless. He decides to return to his father as a servant but when his father sees him, he runs towards him and puts a robe around him and gives him his ring – welcoming him back into the family.

"That father was looking out daily for his

son to come home. We don't know how long, but it could have been 44 months," Stephen says. He thought of his own story of coming home.

Right before Stephen went on stage to speak, his dad pulled him to one side. He had a gift for him: a huge 2006 Big 12 Basketball Championship ring.

He placed it on Stephen's finger and said, "Son, this ring is yours and I'm proud that you're my son."

Immediately Stephen remembered the parable with the wayward son who was given a ring and a robe. His eyes filled with tears as he stared at the diamond-studded ring on his finger.

He was the recipient of great grace (undeserved love of God) – from both his Father in heaven and his earthly family.

"My family don't talk about my incarceration," Stephen says. "They don't talk about my drug addiction. They don't talk about my homelessness – but they do thank God that the son, the brother, the father is home."



Stephen with his father.

World Hope Ministries Mzansi

"Making known Jesus - The Hope of the world"

Physical Address:
106 Nurney Ave.
Crosby
Johannesburg
2092

Contact Numbers:
Tel: 011 837 3437
Fax: 011 837 9104

The World Hope Ministries Spiritual Care Programme consists of the following courses:

BIBLICAL DISCIPLESHIP 1

The lessons in this course will help the student engage the scriptures. This course consists of 4 books: Relationship with God, Fellowship with God, Responsibility to God and Accountability to God. Upon completion of all 4 books, one is issued with a bible in a language of his/her choice, and a certificate.

THE JESUS FILM

This film which is based on the biography of our Lord Jesus Christ, from birth to His ascension, is screened by a World Hope facilitator as part of our course.

BIBLICAL DISCIPLESHIP 2

This course builds on the foundation laid by Discipleship 1 and provides a deeper understanding of the word of God in the Christian walk. This course consists of two books A and B, each 13 lessons. A certificate is awarded upon completion of each of the books.

GODS ANSWER TO AIDS

The purpose of this course is to enlighten and educate individuals of how to overcome the scourge of HIV/AIDS, based on what the Word of God says. This course consists of six lessons six weeks, engaging a DVD and a resource workbook. It is taught by a World Hope Ministries facilitator.

ALL OUR COURSES ARE QUALITY ASSURED AND OUTCOMES BASED
HOPE MAKES ALIVE

I HEREBY APPLY TO ENROL WITH WORLD HOPE MINISTRIES TO COMPLETE THE SPIRITUAL PROGRAMME FOR PRISONS

NAME..... PRISON NUMBER.....

PRISON..... SECTION..... CELL.....

Post to: PO Box 96176, Brixton 2019

I was a workman for the devil

BY MARK ELLIS

Shane “Little Mike” Reese grew up in Orange County, California, with mixed messages from two sides of his family. His mother’s side of the family were “solid”, but his father’s side had a felonious past.

“My dad’s side was pretty much all crime, biker lifestyle, drug deals, and questionable women,” he told God Reports.

Shane’s early life seemed promising, as he excelled in high school athletics.

“I was a super jock and I ended up with a full-ride scholarship for shot-put, discus, and powerlifting. I was going to the Nationals in Arizona and I was a shoo-in to win.”



However, a school official made a serious error with respect to Shane.

“My athletic director gave me the wrong time to show up for the meet. I was unable to throw or compete or do anything,” he recounts.

When he returned home from Arizona, there were numerous messages on his answering machine, apologizing for the terrible mistake, but the damage was done.

“My scholarships were athletic, and I failed to place in a national meet, so I got dropped from all my scholarships.”

He went to the last party of his senior year in high school feeling dejected. “I was in give-up mode, and there was some cocaine at the party. I thought, what the heck, I have nothing else to lose. So that’s where it started. That kicked off my career as a habitual drug user.”

He found an escape from the painful emotions connected with the sudden loss of a promising athletic future, and a downward spiral ensued.

At 19, he was arrested in a Tower Records store for shoplifting and during the arrest, officers found drugs in his possession.

“I went to jail for the first time at age 19, which was a major

Shane “Little Mike” Reese’s life has completely transformed.

shock to my family because I’d always been the jock, the athletic guy.

They had really no idea what was going on behind the scenes after high school.”

From the age of 19 to 36 Shane was addicted and locked up, either in a penitentiary or county jail, for sales, multiple possessions, parole violations, weapons charges, and even an explosives charge.

“I was a workman for the devil, doing things that go along with the drug life and the people related to it: robbing, stealing, and hurting people. I was definitely working, and it wasn’t for God.”

Shane stayed high whether he was in jail or out of jail.

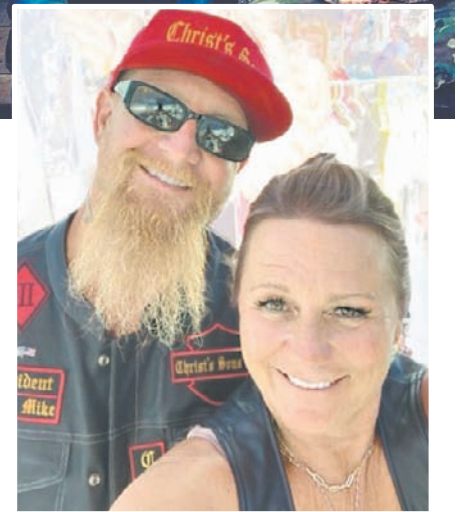
He says drugs were readily available when he was incarcerated.

“I was an IV drug user. So when you get to that level, there’s nothing off limits as far as what your conscience will let you do. I destroyed families, not only my own, but other people’s,” he admits.

One of his greatest regrets is that he injected a pregnant girl with drugs. “She was just like me, an IV drug user. Everything came second to the drug and getting high.



Shane Reese (second from right) with some other members of Christ’s Sons Motorcycle Club. INSET: Shane with his wife, Tina.



“The devil is strong,” he adds. “He lives in the lives of people that are out there on the streets and doing drugs, because it’s an easy place for him to land.”

At 36, Shane appeared before a judge who offered him the choice of another nine years in prison, or a 90-day rehab program.

“That was an easy choice, so I went to the 90-day program, just to get parole and my family off my back and appease them for a little while. I had no real goal in mind of getting sober or getting clean or anything like that. It was just to get everybody off my back.”

In the rehab program in Santa Ana, California, Shane began a 12-step program, albeit half-heartedly. One day he attended a meeting with 200 people, and he felt the guest speaker skewer him with these words:

“Hey, stupid, you want to be happy? Go do what the happy people do.”

I don’t know any happy people, Shane thought, and he began to ponder the man’s words in his heart.

“On Sundays, we were able to leave for a couple of hours to go see family or go to church. And I ran into a girlfriend of mine who said that this guy had beat her up and broke her finger and he goes to this church.”

“So I went to this church, not necessarily to find God, but to find this guy and give him what for. I wasn’t thinking that God is present at this place and there’s Christian people at this place. I was going there to hurt this guy.”

As Shane sat back in his seat and began to listen, Pastor “Freeway Pete” Cropsey, a former leader of the Vagos Motorcycle Club, delivered a message that penetrated Shane’s calloused heart.

When Freeway Pete gave the invitation to follow Jesus, Shane came forward and surrendered his life to Jesus as his Lord and Savior and was born again.

“My dad was a biker and I wanted

to be like my dad my whole life. And I got my wish. But one of the guys that he hung out with was this guy named Freeway Pete, who was the national Sergeant at Arms, for the Vagos 1% Outlaw Motorcycle Club. That means he was a real heavy hitter. If there’s any issues within the

club, he’s the one that goes and handles it, however he needs to handle it, nationally, which is a very big deal.

“So lo and behold I go to this church, and there’s Freeway Pete — 30 years later — as a pastor of this church.

His message landed home because he looked

like me, he talked like me, was covered in tattoos, a biker, and he got his life right.

“From that day, in 2013, I have been saved and serving the Lord, living this amazing Christian life.”

Shane met his wife, Tina, in rehab. She got saved at the same church, and they were baptized together, “We’re still happily married today, seven years later.”

He marvels at the way his life has been transformed. “The most measurable change for me is the peace, the serenity, the true joy of this new life in Christ.”

Shane is currently the president of Christ’s Sons Motorcycle Club. “Ninety-eight percent of us have walked the prison yards in Southern California, have been addicted, homeless, violent — we even have a former bomb maker.

“But we all did one thing different in our lives that changed our lives, and that was submit to God. That’s the only thing different we did that changed our entire lives.”

OVERWHELMED BY TRUTH

BY HAROLD

Before October 19, 2005, I was an atheist, believing that when you died, it was over. In September 2005, I was convicted and placed in the Allegan County Jail until sentencing in October.

I was in a cell with four others for 30 days, listening to them say that the Lord would get them out of their mess.

My opinion was, if they had the Lord in their life, they wouldn’t be in here in the first place.

On October 18, 2005, I arrived at Jackson Prison and was placed in a one-man cell. The only contact I had with anyone else came at a one-hour yard time and 20-minute chow time three times a day.

My second day at Jackson, I went out to the yard not knowing anyone and sat with two guys my age at a picnic table. We introduced ourselves and made small talk. They were talking religion and tried getting me in on the conversation.

I explained that I didn’t believe, and they accepted that and continued talking with each other.

The announcement came over the loud speaker that it was time to return to our cells. At that time, I realised one of the guys I was with at the picnic table was in the cell right next to mine.

About 7pm that night I was terribly bored. I knocked on the wall and asked Tim, my neighbour, if he had anything I could read. Around the corner came a Bible. He said that was all he had. I thought, what the heck, I need something to read. I spent three hours that night reading.

I woke up the next morning praying and in tears.



Stock photo

The Holy Spirit consumed me like I can’t explain. I was extremely overwhelmed by His presence.

By November, I had read the Bible from beginning to end.

I’ve read it four plus times since then. I’m a devout Christian today thanks to the Lord putting me next to Tim when I got to Jackson.

The Lord has totally changed my life.

I look at life and people differently. I love everybody, regardless of how bad their attitude is or the way they choose to walk in life.

I have stopped swearing, I pray multiple times a day, and talk to the Lord continuously.

My prayers are being answered and my life is blessed.

Used with permission from Alpha Prison Ministries. Originally published in November 2006

Zulutranslation

UKHOLO
ENKINGENI
YOMKHAYA

Ngo 2012 umhlengikazi wamazinyo waseZimbabwe uFaith Mkwena wabhekana nenkinga yomndeni.

Ngendlela engaqondakali umtwana wakhe wavele wehlewela imiphumela esikoleni etshela I *Challenge News*.

“Sasididekile” kusho u Faith oneminyaka ewu 50. “Wayengumfundi ohlabanayo kodwa amamaki akhe ehla ngalendlela yokuthi wayengaxoshwa.”

UFaith wayedinga usizo oluvela phezulu, ebusheni bakhe wayezobheka emasikweni esizwe sakubo, kodwa eminyakeni eyishumi waba umKristu, waphendukela kuJesu.

“Ngazila ukudla ngathandaza ngamcela uNkulunkulu usizo Waphendula imikhuleko yami. Indodakazi yami yaphasa ngamalengiso, yaze yazuzwa nomklomelo wokuba umfundi ohlabeneyo!”

Lokho kwamqinisekisa ukuthi wenza isinqumo esihle sokushiya indlela zakudala.

Inkoleloze akhula ngazo azimenelisi uFaith. Lentokazi yayidinga into ebambekayo ukukholwa kuyo. Ekufuneni kwayo yaholeleka kumacrusade amakholwa ayebanjwa ngakubo.

Utshela i Challenge, “ngangingaqondi amasiko akithi, okwangiholela ekufuneni uNkulunkulu wangempela.”

Wamthola kuma crusade, lapho athola khona ivangeli(indaba ezimnandi zokuthi uJesu Kristu wenza emhlabeni ezofela izono zabantu) zishumayelwa okokuqala.

“Ngakhetha ukuba umKristu ngoba ngangifuna ukulandela uJesu. Ngangazi ukuthi ngidinga ubudlelwano naye, ukuze angisize ngihlule ukwenza kwami okubi, njengokukhuluma amanga, ukungabongi nokuziphatha kabi.”

“Umehluko omkhulu owenzeka kimina emveni kokuba umKristu ukuthi ngaba nokuthula emqondweni. Ngiyazama ngakho konke ukuphilisana ngokuthula nabanye abantu.”

Ivesi alithandayo kwabaseRoma 8:28 *Siyazi ukuthi kukho konke uNkulunkulu usebenzela ebuhleni kwalabo abamthandayo, ababizwe ukuya ngenjongo Yakhe.*

Emveni kokuthi abone ukuthi uNkulunkulu umsiza kangakanani, uFaith uthi isiluleko esikhulu angasinikezela abanye, “Zinikeleni kuJesu, unguMsizi, noMhlangi.”



Faith Mkwena

English
translationFaith in the
face of a
family crisis

In 2012, Zimbabwean dental nurse Faith Mkwena faced a family crisis.

She tells *Challenge News* her daughter's grades at school mysteriously began dropping.

“We couldn't understand,” says the 50-year-old Faith. “She was a good student but then her performance dropped dramatically and she was on the verge of being expelled.”

Faith needed divine help. In her younger days she may have sought it from the traditions and ceremonies of her culture, but since becoming a Christian decades ago, she turned to Jesus Christ instead.

“I fasted and prayed and asked God for help and He answered my prayers. My daughter passed her exams with flying colours and even won the Best Student award!”

It was just another confirmation that she made the right decision many years ago to leave the old ways behind.

The beliefs that she had grown up with never satisfied Faith. The young woman needed something more tangible to believe in. Her search led her to attend Christian crusades that used to be held in her hometown.

She tells *Challenge*, “I couldn't understand some of my culture and traditions, so I searched for the real God.”

She found Him at the crusades, where she heard the gospel (the good news that Jesus Christ came to Earth to die for humanity's sins) preached for the first time.

“I decided to become a Christian because I wanted to follow Jesus. I knew I had to have a relationship with Him; I needed His help to overcome my bad habits like lying, ungratefulness and a bad attitude.”

“The biggest and best change that happened to me after believing in Jesus Christ has been that I now have peace of mind. I also now do my best to live peacefully with others.”

Her favourite verse is Romans 8: 28 “*And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love Him, who have been called according to His purpose.*”

Having experienced how much God has helped her, Faith says the best advice she can give to others is “to surrender their lives to Jesus. He is our Helper, our Redeemer.”

Afrikaantranslation

Geloof in 'n gesinskrisis

In 2012 het die Zimbabwe tandeheelkundige verpleegster Faith Mkwena 'n gesinskrisis in die gesig gestaar.

Sy vertel aan *Challenge News* dat haar dogter se punte by die skool geheimsinnig begin daal het.

“Ons kon dit nie verstaan nie,” sê die 50-jarige Faith. “Sy was 'n goeie student, maar toe het haar prestasie dramaties gedaal en sy was op die punt om geskors te word.”

Geloof het goddelike hulp nodig. In haar jonger dae het sy dit dalk uit die tradisies en seremonies van haar kultuur gesoek, maar sedert sy dekades gelede 'n Christen geword het, het sy haar eerder na Jesus Christus gewend.

“Ek het gevas en gebid en God om hulp gevra en Hy het my gebede verhoor. My dogter het haar eksamens met vlieënde vaandels geslaag en selfs die Beste Student-toekenning gewen!”

Dit was net nog 'n bevestiging dat Faith baie jare gelede die regte besluit geneem het om die ou maniere agter te laat.

Die oortuigings waarmee sy grootgeword het, het Faith nooit bevredig nie. Die jong vrou het iets meer tasbaar nodig gehad om in te glo. Haar soektog het daartoe gelei dat sy Christelike kruistogte bygewoon het wat

vroeër in haar tuisdorp gehou is.

Sy vertel aan *Challenge*, “Ek kon sommige van my kultuur en tradisies nie verstaan nie, so ek het na die ware God gesoek.”

Sy het Hom by die kruistogte gevind, waar sy die evangelie (die goeie nuus dat Jesus Christus aarde toe gekom het om vir die mensdom se sondes te sterf) vir die eerste keer gehoor het.

“Ek het besluit om 'n Christen te word omdat ek Jesus wou volg. Ek het geweet ek moes 'n verhouding met Hom hê; Ek het Sy hulp nodig gehad om my slegte gewoontes soos leuens, ondankbaarheid en 'n slegte gesindheid te oorkom.

“Die grootste en beste verandering wat met my gebeur het nadat ek in Jesus Christus begin glo het, was dat ek nou gemoedsrus het. Ek doen ook nou my bes om vreedsaam met ander te leef.”

Haar gunstelingvers is Romeine 8:28 “*En ons weet dat God in alles ten goede meewerk vir dié wat Hom liefhet, wat volgens sy voorneme geroep is.*”

Nadat sy ervaar het hoeveel God haar gehelp het, sê Faith die beste raad wat sy aan ander kan gee, is “om hul lewens aan Jesus oor te gee. Hy is ons Helper, ons Verlosser.”

SEVEN APPEALS
OF JESUS

Come to Me
Matthew 11:28

Learn of Me
Matthew 11:29

Abide in Me
John 15:7

Follow Me
John 21:22

Walk before Me
Genesis 17:1

Do you love Me
John 21:15

Remember Me
Luke 23:42

“Christ is all and in all”

'Bewitched' man set free from lust

Pastor Chikumba was involved in an outreach in Zomba, Malawi when he met a man named Michael who seemed to be in distress.

The pastor struck up a conversation with Michael and discovered the source of his distress, according to a report by African Enterprise.

Michael was married but had been having an affair with a woman who was causing him great psychological and financial distress.

His mistress was demanding more money from him, but he was broke. He knew his duplicity was hurting his family. He wanted to end the affair but felt powerless to do so.

Michael's conclusion was that his mistress had bewitched him with a love potion, making him unable to quit even when he wanted to.

“Do you know a witch doctor who could break the spell that is controlling me?” Michael asked.

Grateful for the opportunity, Pastor Chikumba shared the Gospel (the good news story of the Bible) with Michael and introduced him to the Lord Jesus Christ — the One who has the power to break every bondage.

Michael accepted Christ as his personal Lord and Saviour and prayed for deliverance from his sins.

Praise be to God! Michael was delivered from his lustful desires for the other woman.

Michael's wife is grateful for the miracle God performed.

“I had no hope for our marriage,” she recounted.

“He would stay out late at night until eventually he stopped coming home altogether. He stopped

supporting the family and cut contact with us. I had to sustain my family by farming and doing small businesses.

“I moved from church to church in a search for solutions but my husband was nowhere to be seen. After a while, he would occasionally come back home but was very impolite to the point that we used to fight a lot. All his clothes were at the mistress' place.

“Since he gave his life to Christ and we began praying and being counselled together, I have seen tremendous change in his behaviour.

A sangoma making potions.



His eating habits have improved, he sleeps better, we pray together and he is providing for his family again. I thank God for leading the Pastor to meet and share the gospel with him. We have now committed to be members of Pastor Chikumba's church so that as a family we may be rooted and grow in Christ.”

By African Enterprise, from godreports.org

WORDS FOR THE HEART

STUDIES IN THE GOSPEL OF JOHN

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

John 19:34-20:17

INTRODUCTION

WE have been reading of the death of Jesus. His suffering was greater than we can understand. Amazing things accompanied His crucifixion; the darkness for three hours, the earthquake that broke rocks and the fear that came over many people.

We saw that Jesus died after six hours of agony. John, who was there, tells us of his observations. We take up the story at:

John 19: 34- 37 *“One of the soldiers pierced Jesus’ side with a spear, bringing a sudden flow of blood and water. The man who saw it has given testimony, and his testimony is true. He knows that he tells the truth, and he testifies so that you may also have faith. These things happened so that*

the scripture would be fulfilled. ‘Not one of his bones will be broken,’ and as another scripture says, ‘they will look on the one they have pierced.’”

It is John himself who is the one telling what he saw. It is the way he refers to himself throughout his book. He understands the importance of the shed blood and he wants us to know that he saw it and stands by the truth.

Also, he wants us to see that another Old Testament forecast came true—that His bones were not broken.

John was watching one of the most important events in all of history. The blood proved His death and His power to save us from sin.

Verses 38, 39 *“Later, Joseph of Arimathea asked Pilate for the body of Jesus. Now Joseph was a disciple of Jesus, but secretly because he feared the Jews. With Pilate’s permission he came and took the body. He was accompanied by Nicodemus, the man who earlier had visited Jesus by night. Nicodemus brought a mixture of myrrh*



and aloes, about 75 pounds (approx 40kg).”

We are told that Joseph was a rich man who had a tomb made for himself. It was a cave cut out of rock. He was a secret disciple because he would have been cut off by the Jewish leaders had they known of it.

Nicodemus was a Pharisee and also a secret disciple. They wished to see that the body was given a respectable burial.

Verses 40-42 *“Taking Jesus’ body, the two of them wrapped it, with the spices, in strips of linen. This was in accordance with Jewish burial customs. At the place where Jesus was crucified, there was a garden, and in the garden a new tomb, in which no-one had ever been laid. Because it was the Jewish day of Preparation and since the tomb was nearby, they laid Jesus there.”*

The burial was significant for a number of reasons. As with His death, it was public, accessible, not hidden.

This then made the resurrection, when it happened, plain to all involved. No-one could claim that the body was secreted away. Especially as other Gospels tells of the Roman guard that was set to make sure no-one could open the tomb. The Roman guard was a band of soldiers under strict command.

Chapter 20 verse 1 *“Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary of Magdala went to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the entrance.”*

The crucifixion took place on Friday. The first day of the week was Sunday. By this time the guard knew that the tomb was empty and they had gone away to report it. Mary Magdalene was a disciple of Jesus and had wished to visit the tomb as she and other women had hoped to anoint the body. We are not sure how they hoped to move the stone from the entrance to the tomb as it would have been quite heavy. It would have been a large, flat, rock which was rolled into place. Such tombs are visible in Israel to this day. To her surprise, as she looked into the tomb, it was obvious there was no



body there.

Verse 2 *“So she came running to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one Jesus loved, and said, ‘They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we don’t know where they have put Him!’”*

This the beginning the spread of the good news that Jesus rose from death. Mary broke the news, not yet understanding what had happened. But it was startling and amazing news. On this truth, the whole of the plan of salvation for mankind rested. It displayed the mighty victory which Christ had won, a victory over sin and death, the twin enemies of mankind.

Verses 3-9 *“So Peter and the other disciple started for the tomb. Both were running, but the other disciple outran Peter, and reached the tomb first. He bent over and looked at the strips of linen lying there, but did not go in. Then Simon Peter who was behind him, arrived and went into the tomb. He saw the strips of linen lying there as well as the burial cloth that had been around Jesus’ head. The cloth was folded up by itself, separate from the linen. Finally the other disciple, who had reached the tomb first, also went inside. He saw and believed. (They still did not understand from Scripture that Jesus had to rise from the dead.)”*

It may seem surprising that this description is so detailed. But the Gospel writers knew that the truth of Jesus’ resurrection had to be shown with strong evidence in order to convince the world. See how John

was convinced. He saw the burial clothing lying there with no body in them. Had the body been stolen (which would have meant breaking through the Roman guard), the body and the burial clothes would have gone together. They were made one by the mass of ointment encasing the body.

People of Bible days didn’t believe in people rising from death any more than people of today do. But proof undeniable has been left for us to ponder. We will see more of it as we go on.

Verses 10-14 *“Then the disciples went back to their homes, but Mary stood outside the tomb crying. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb and saw two angels in white, seated where Jesus’ body had been, one at the head, the other at the foot. They asked her, ‘Woman, why are you crying?’ ‘They have taken my Lord away,’ she said, ‘and I don’t know where they have put Him.’ At this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not realize that it was Jesus.”*

This was the first of many appearance of the risen Christ. Each time He appeared He made it clear who He was so there could be no mistake. It did not take long for her tears to turn into joy when she realized who was speaking to her.

Verses 15-17 *“Woman,’ He said, ‘why are you crying? Who is it you are looking for?’ Thinking He was the gardener, she said, ‘Sir, if you have carried Him away, tell me where you have put Him, and I will get Him.’ Jesus said to her, ‘Mary.’ She turned toward Him and cried out in Aramaic, ‘Rabboni’ (which means Teacher). Jesus said ‘Do not hold on to me, I have not yet returned to the Father. Go instead to my brothers and tell them, ‘I am returning to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.’”*

This is a rather touching scene where a disciple meets her Lord as a risen conqueror. How thrilled she must have been to be in the presence of one she had loved but now worshipped as the Lord of Lords. Others were to have such experiences and we will see them as we move on. Meanwhile, let us think seriously about the one who died to be our Savior. Then to bow before Him.

CONCLUSION

The story of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ is the center piece of history. But how relevant it is to us today! There is no other Savior, no other way to God the Father. All other supposed ways are false. God has made it plain to us that Jesus is Lord.

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 fellow prisoner who is a Christian, or your Prison Chaplain.
2. Ask a friend or family member to bring you a Bible. Ask the Prison Chaplain to sign you up to a correspondence discipleship program.
3. Keep praying. Talk to God anywhere, about anything. He is always listening, and you don’t need a formula.
4. Find out if your prison has church services and attend them regularly.

AS A NEXT STEP:

I have prayed this prayer.

Please send me:

- Bible portion
 Some ‘starting off’ literature
 Information on a helpful church

* Please tick and write clearly *

Name _____ Age _____

Address _____

Send to: **World Hope Ministries, PO Box 96176, Brixton, 2019**

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

The power of gratitude

IN his article, “Gratitude: The Brain’s Amazing Fertilizer,” author Charles Stone documents scientifically-proven physical, mental, and spiritual benefits of practicing gratitude. His research in neuroscience is fascinating. He writes that there’s a tonne of research that says having an attitude of gratitude gives you more energy. For example, in a research study one group of participants kept a journal listing things for which they were grateful. A second group recorded what annoyed them. People in the first group reported feeling more energetic and happier than the second group.

Charles lists other benefits. Grateful people are more other-centered and willing to help people, and that gives them a greater sense of significance and completeness. They sleep more deeply. They feel better physically. They have less anxiety.

All that’s pretty amazing, isn’t it? Then there’s the fact about how our brains are wired. Did you know the human brain has five times more negative circuits than positive ones? It’s called “negative bias”. That’s why it’s much easier to be negative than positive. Or perhaps we should say, it’s much harder to be positive.

Practicing gratitude forces our minds to focus on the positive, which actually rewires our brains. Maybe that’s why the apostle Paul wrote in Philippians 4:8: *“Finally brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is honourable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable – if there is any moral excellence and if there is anything praiseworthy – dwell on these things.”* He also encouraged the Thessalonians: *“in everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.”*

From author, CEO and pastor Chip Ingram in an article from Joy! Magazine, October 2022

Jamie Jones-Buchanan of Leeds Rhinos tackled by Rémi Casty of Catalans Dragons during Betfred Super League regular season match. (Photo by Tim Clayton/Corbis via Getty Images)



A SOLID FOUNDATION

With a string of accomplishments under his belt — and the physical and mental scars that go with it — rugby union player Jamie Jones-Buchanan is every bit the tough go-getter you would imagine. The imposing 41-year-old, who was born in Leeds, has won seven Super League Grand Finals, three World Cup Challenges and has played at international level for England and Great Britain. In 2022 he was awarded a Member of the Order of the British Empire (MBE) for services to rugby league football and the community in Leeds. Not bad for the lad who dreamt of becoming a professional rugby player while growing up in

working-class Leeds. Yet there is much more to him than meets the eye. He may hold aloft his cups and trophies with undisguised glee, but just as quickly he points to them and says “these things are perishable; they don’t last. Don’t build your life on these.” So what then does Jamie build his life on? It turns out he builds his life on the gospel of Jesus Christ. He spends much of his down time at his local church and various speaking engagements for organisations such as the Full Gospel Businessmen’s Association.



Jamie Jones-Buchanan poses with his MBE, awarded by the Princess Royal during an investiture ceremony at Buckingham Palace on October 12, 2022. (Photo by Kirsty O’Connor-Pool/Getty Images)

“I always believed in something when I was younger, but I didn’t really know what it was,” he shares. “How could I really? I’m just a lad from Bramley who wanted to make it and realise his dreams as a rugby player.” His involvement with church was only at funerals and weddings — and a short stint trying to make head or tail of the book of Revelation in the New Testament section of the Bible when he was about 10. “As you can imagine, I didn’t get very far! Yet


sometimes when I was younger I would go numb with fear at the thought of dying, wondering ‘is this all there is?’” Then in 2004, his club signed on Samoan Ali Lauiti’iti. Jamie describes him as someone who had a “different feel about him.” “He was this burly bloke who carried the ball like a peanut — but he was different away from the game.” Ali was a committed Christian so Jamie asked him about death. Ali invited him to a service and Jamie jumped at the chance — even though at that time he thought people who attended church were like Ned Flanders, the flaky Christian character in the Simpsons cartoons. But he found out “nothing is further from the truth. Churches are made up of people all just trying to love Jesus and live like Him as best they can. “I didn’t know at the time, but it was a life-changing opportunity when Ali offered to take me to church for the first time. “I always had Christianity close to me; my nana would say her prayers on a night and I’d do school Nativities and things like that, but theologically speaking, I had no idea what the Bible stood for until that day. “Ali took me under his wing and we started to go through the

“**All the accolades in the world aren’t enough.**”

gospels. Before long I had accepted Christ. The day I got baptised in 2009 was the most emotional day of my life.” It is not an easy life though, being a professional rugby player. The sheer physicality of the game as well as the mental strain of having to be at peak fitness puts a tremendous pressure on Jamie. He has also struggled with injuries. However, he says “when I go through adverse periods, that trust and belief in Christ is truly what keeps me believing and gets me ready to go again. “You can draw meaningful links to biblical figures who have endured hardships and times of toughness.” At a talk Jamie gave to a meeting in Ireland, he held up one of his many trophies then said: “I’ve won countless trophies and achieved a lot, but it counts for nothing really,

does it? Nothing lasts forever, everything is finite, and that directly relates to sport. Whatever I achieve in sport is limited and I refer often to building treasure in heaven. Only that lasts eternally.” Sharing his life story is high on Jamie’s list of pursuits for the church. “I’ve done testimonies everywhere,” he says, “even on a barge in Canary Wharf once.” His singular message in all his addresses is this: “All the accolades in the world aren’t enough to fill that God-shaped space at the centre of our hearts and minds. “We can chase things in life and even when you achieve them, it’s meaningless without God at the centre of it. That’s what I want to try and really impress upon people I speak to. God has to be at the centre of everything.”

DISTRIBUTED BY:



WORLD HOPE MINISTRIES
SOUTH AFRICA

106 NURNEY AVE, CROSBY, JHB
P.O. BOX 96176
BRIXTON 2019

(T) 2711 837 3437
(F) 2711 837 9104

Rev. Willie Dengler
E-mail: mbcchurch@icon.co.za