

THIS NEWSPAPER IS NOT FOR RESALE

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ART WITH A MESSAGE

BY JANICE TEO

Patrick Bezael Lee's idea of patience used to be having to wait three minutes instead of two for his instant noodles.

The graphic artist and advertising executive worked in Singapore's competitive marketing industry, where projects had to be completed at breakneck speed and sleep was often a luxury. But, the 51-year-old tells *Challenge News* that suited him.

"I had ADHD and I would go three or four nights without sleep so I could finish my work as quickly as possible.

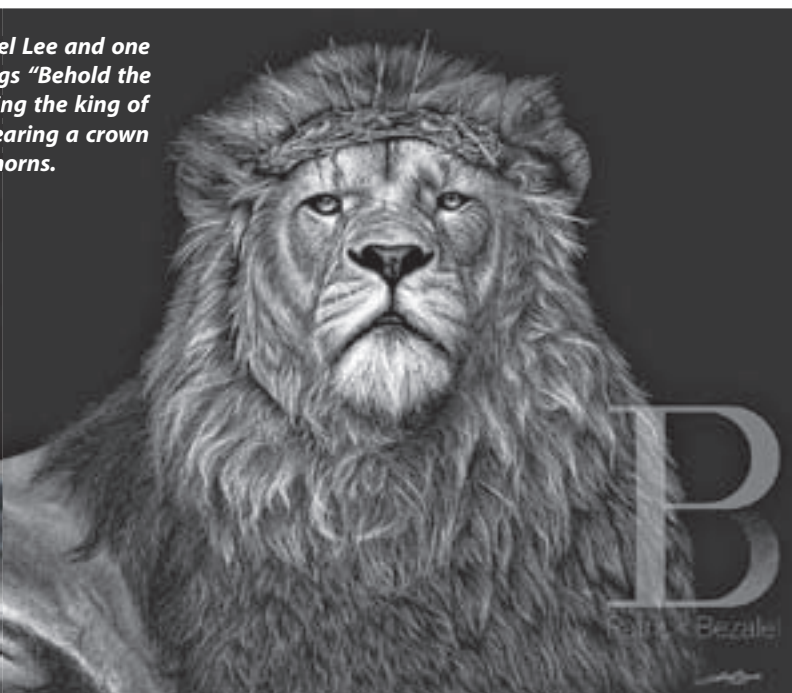
"My commercial success depended on that." Then about six years ago, he moved into the painstakingly slow world of hyper-realistic art, a field that features work so exhaustively detailed that one piece can take up to four months and 300,000 strokes.

This new direction was completely unexpected – but then, Patrick's life had taken some unforeseen twists already, the most surprising being his conversion to Christianity in 2002. Patrick says he was a bit of a "weird case" – on the surface he was a sceptic but at a deeper level, he says somehow he always knew he would become a Christian one day.

"I was very busy with work then, no time to think about God," he continues "but God used my work



Patrick Bezael Lee and one of his drawings "Behold the King", depicting the king of the jungle wearing a crown of thorns.



to reach out to me when a local church contracted me to work on their rebranding project.

"They advised me that the best way to understand their vision and ethos would be to attend services and Bible study classes so I did."

Although it was initially purely for work that he attended church, the messages and the worship soon impacted Patrick.

"I had always judged God by the bad behaviour of some Christians I knew, but what I learned about God at the services and Bible studies blew me away; He was nothing like what I imagined Him to be."

The crunch came during a business meeting with the church's leadership team when the pastor told him: "Patrick, becoming a Christian is like deciding whether or not to jump into a pool.

"You're hot and sweaty but you're reluctant because you're afraid the water might be too cold.

"But once you take the plunge, you realize the water is just right and you never want to come out again. Brother, it's time for you to take the plunge and ask Jesus into your heart." Patrick shares that he said yes immediately. "When he said that everything 'clicked' and fell into place. I had no hesitation in saying yes."

Five years later, in 2007, he left his job at the agency and became the church's creative director and part of its youth and missions teams.

But God had even more on the drawing board for Patrick.

"One day I felt Him say to me 'son I'm going to train you in patience. Start drawing.'

"Draw what?" Patrick responded. "Anything you like," he heard God say.

Unsure where this was going, Patrick cheekily drew a human skull.

As he looked at the picture the first thought that came to him was a verse from the Bible "O Death, where is your sting?" (1 Corinthians 15:55) Suddenly he stopped smiling,

"That was the moment God led me into what I am doing now because I saw how powerful the Word of God is; it transformed that picture of death into a picture of life. After that I started to work on pictures of lions to depict Jesus."

One of these paintings is "Behold the King", which depicts the king of the jungle in regal repose wear-

ing a crown of thorns. "The lion symbolises Jesus Christ, whom the Bible calls the Lion of Judah; the crown of thorns brings to mind His death on the cross when those who crucified Him placed thorns around his head."

Today Patrick has his own gallery and uses his art to evangelise. He names his works after Biblical

verses. A pair of old and well-used boxing gloves is named "The Fight of Faith" (from 1 Timothy 6:12); a plump sparrow on a tree branch is called "Birds Do Not Worry About Tomorrow" (Matthew 6:25-26).

"I want to be a useful artist – useful to God and useful to man," he says. "I want to preach the gospel through my art and bring His love, joy and hope to Christian, secular and digital spaces."

He has also adopted the middle name "Bezael", whom the Bible says was a master craftsman because "I would like to be an artisan for God too," he explains. His vision seems to be coming true. Over the last five years Patrick has sold over 1000 pieces. About 15 per cent of his buyers were non-Christians.

In fact, "Behold the King", was bought by non-believers.

When he asked them why they were buying it, they told him there was "something about the peace and kindness you've drawn in the lion's eyes".

Visitors to the gallery often sit and cry, he says. There have even been people who have become Christians. "This is what I feel God wants. He wants every piece to have a message, to carry His message of salvation." •

Running the race with grace

BY JANICE TEO

CHARIOTS of Fire, the 1981 movie about two British athletes at the 1923 Paris Olympics, is a show for the ages. It's more than 40 years old but its impact on me is undiminished, not just because of its iconic theme song or its sublime performances but because it brought to life for me one of the trickiest themes of the Bible – law and grace.

The film tells the true story of two runners as different as night and day: Jewish Cambridge student Harold Abrahams and Scottish missionary Eric Liddell. Abrahams, who battled anti-Semitism throughout his life, is a man with a chip the size of Mount Everest on his shoulder.

When asked if he loves running, he replies: "I'm more of an addict. It's a compulsion with me, a weapon... against being Jewish."

His desire to win for personal glory, driven by the discrimination he faces as a Jew, is everything; when he loses a race the shame crushes him completely. "If I can't win I won't run!" he declares.

Contrast that to Liddell's reason for running. In one scene he reassures his sister he hasn't forgotten his calling to be a missionary to China. "I believe God made me for a purpose – for China," he says, "but He also made me fast. And when I run, I feel His pleasure."

When he agonises over whether his running honours



Eric Liddell wins the 1-mile relay at an International Athletics Meeting in 1924. Photo from Getty Images.

God, his father – himself a missionary to China – tells him: "run in God's name. And let the world stand back in wonder."

Abrahams judged himself by his performance and felt a failure; Liddell by the pleasure he gave God and felt empowered.

This sums up for me the difference between what is commonly referred to in Christianity as "living under law" or "living under grace".

The Bible says that today, thanks to Jesus Christ, Christians are no longer "under law but under grace" (Romans 6:14). But what does that mean? What does it look like?

The "law" refers to the demanding moral standard God set with the Ten Commandments. In and of itself the law is good, but keeping it perfectly is an impossible burden. Many have tried; all but one have failed.

Living under law describes a person who thinks he has to earn his salvation by doing good works and never breaking the rules. He fears any infraction will cost him his salvation.

Only Jesus Christ, the Son of God, perfectly satisfied the requirements of the law. In dying on the cross, He suffered the punishment meant for us so that we could have His righteousness.

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COCO GAUFF

Running the race with grace

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This then, is grace – the unconditional, unmerited favour, forgiveness and kindness of God bought for us by Jesus’ sacrifice. To receive it, all we have to do to be saved now is to accept Him, by faith, as our Lord and Savior. But does that mean the rule book goes out the window and now there is no requirement for obedience or reverence? As the apostle Paul says, “Surely not!” (Romans 6:15) Grace may be free, but it cost Jesus Christ His life; Christians have a responsibility to conduct our lives in a manner worthy of that sacrifice. Again, Liddell provides the perfect example of the submitted life of the Christian – for all the right reasons. Not out of fear of losing his salvation, but because he lived for a higher purpose. Upon discovering the heats for his event were to be held on a Sunday and he would have to miss church, the devout Christian flatly refused to run. When pressured by the British Olympic Association and the Prince of Wales to change his mind for King and country, Liddell replies: “God made countries; God makes kings and the rules by which they govern... those rules say that the Sabbath is His. I, for one, intend to keep it that way.” When challenged not to be “impertinent” he retorts: “The impertinence lies, sir, with those who seek to influence a man to deny his beliefs!” Contrast that to Abrahams, whose

entire self-worth depended on victory on the track. Talking to a friend just before the race, he says: “I will... look down that (100m) corridor... with 10 lonely seconds to justify my whole existence. But will I?” Liddell’s words – “when I run, I feel His pleasure!” – are to me at the heart of the Christian’s relationship with Jesus. We are so happy when we please our earthly parents just because we love them and they love us; how much more magnified is that joy when Christians experience the same delight with their heavenly Father. As Liddell preaches: “So who am I to say, ‘Believe, have faith,’ in the face of life’s realities?... I have no formula for winning the race. Everyone runs in her own way, or his own way. “And where does the power come from, to see the race to its end? From within. “Jesus said, ‘Behold, the Kingdom of God is within you. If with all your hearts, you truly seek Me, you shall ever surely find Me.’ “If you commit yourself to the love of Christ, then that is how you run a straight race.” I shall not tell you how the movie ends. Suffice it to say that there is a twist worthy of any blockbuster at the end. Give yourselves a treat and watch it sometime. • *The Eric Liddell 100, a celebration of the iconic Scotsman’s life and achievements, is slated to be held in Scotland this year, the centenary of Liddell’s historic success at the 1924 Olympic Games in Paris.*

“**Grace may be free but it cost Jesus Christ His life.**”

No longer divided

Katarina Graf’s self-portrait that she painted in an art therapy class was a picture of a woman divided – the right side of her body was a colorful meadow of flowers, the left side a black skeleton. “Most people recognized the colorful side – my creativity, my humor, my sharp mind, my motherliness and enthusiasm,” Katarina explains. “Only a few knew about my abysses, the longing for death, the pain that this dividedness had caused.” Katarina was born in the mid-60s in a small town in Switzerland. She has fragmented memories of suffering abuse as a young child and grew up longing to love and be loved. “When I had a boyfriend for the first time at the age of 15, this longing seemed to be fulfilled. The friendship lasted three months and after he told me through a friend that it was over, I just wanted to die.” When Katarina was 17 she had a new boyfriend and they lived as hippies – their days filled with rock music, campfire romance, marijuana and alcohol. “When I was 18, we spent the summer holidays with friends by the sea, two weeks in the open air, living hand to mouth,” she recalls. “I became pregnant there. My daughter was born in April, 1984. I felt grown up and mature.” Four weeks later, Katarina resumed her training as a primary school teacher. The year after she completed her training, her son was born. The family lived in a shared flat and Katarina studied New Age concepts such as astrology and anthroposophy.

love for me personally. “On June 29, 2004, I gave my life to Jesus and a day later I was baptized in a lake. I had a lot of things to repent of, which made my forgiveness all the richer and the love I felt for Jesus all the deeper. “The feeling of being divided was instantly gone. It was an overwhelming healing experience for me.” “On June 29, 2004, I gave my life to Jesus and a day later I was baptized in a lake. I had a lot of things to repent of, which made my forgiveness all the richer and the love I felt

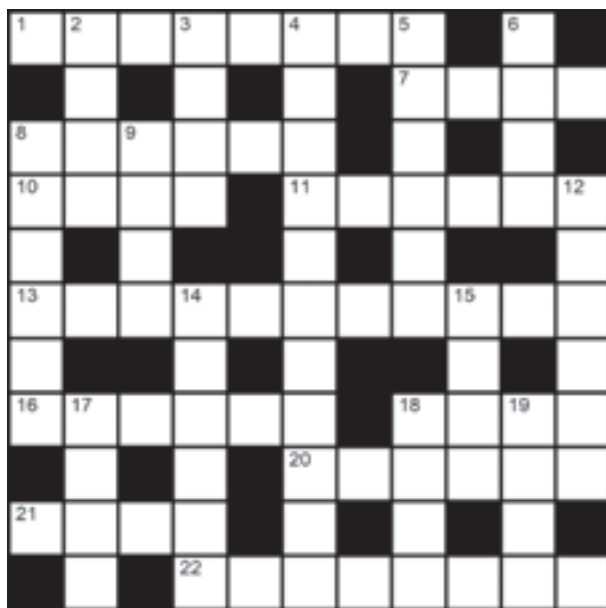
for Jesus all the deeper. “The feeling of being divided was instantly gone. It was an overwhelming healing experience for me.” In the 20 years Katarina has been a Christian she has still endured times of suffering but also lot of joy with her new siblings in the ‘church-family’. Her faith has grown and she knew God was always with her. “I was able to experience many of the wonderful and comforting promises from the Word of God as irrefutably true in my own life. The love of our Lord Jesus Christ is the strongest power. God loved the world (that means every single person in this world, including you!) so much that He gave His only Son for us.” Katarina shares that, like many people do today, she used to elevate her feelings to the all-dominant reality and authority. “Feelings are a wonderful gift from our Creator. But they are as changeable as the weather. That is why they must not exclusively influence our decisions and actions. That ends in chaos. When feelings are subordinate to the Holy Spirit (the presence of God within the believer), order, calm and peace emerge. The Spirit-filled mind is like an umbrella or shield and under it we can feel protected and secure with our thoughts and feelings.” •



Katarina Graf

Coffee Break CROSSWORD & SUDOKU

- ACROSS**
 1 Trickster, scammer
 7 Microscopic amount
 8 Slow graceful dance
 10 Situated atop
 11 Socialise upwardly
 13 Quick beginning (6,5)
 16 Carsick feeling
 18 Big shiny car, in short
 20 Electron opposite
 21 Small sheltered valley
 22 Engine part (3,5)
DOWN
 2 Indiana Jones prop
 3 “Thing” word
 4 A printing process
 5 Warren maker
 6 Olympic water sport
 8 Small domed sponge cake
 9 Very inquisitive

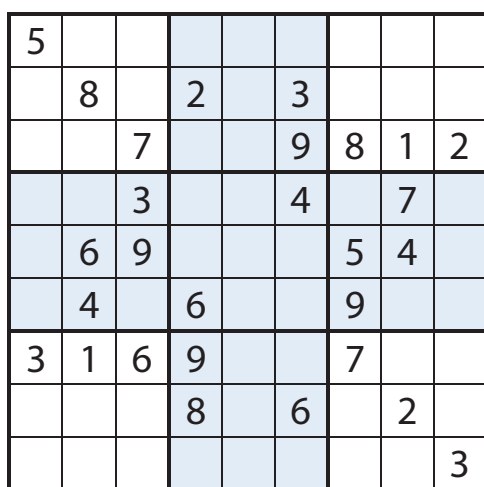


- 12 Jacket fastener
 14 What history repeats
 15 ‘That didn’t hurt ___’ (1,3)
 17 Sunday finale
 18 Ness is one
 19 Sulk aimlessly

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“Like I’m going to give up this to migrate.”



Ask Y: Peter Meadows answers your questions about God

QUESTION: I’M AN ATHEIST – WHAT DO YOU SAY TO THAT?



THANKS for even asking what I think. And for giving me the opportunity to ask you a few questions myself. So you are an atheist – a word taken from the Greek and which roughly translates as ‘no God’. And you are not alone. There is no shortage of highly intelligent people who have the same conviction. Which brings me to my first question if I may. Out of all the vast knowledge existing in the universe, how much of it do you personally possess? What do you reckon - five percent, one percent, perhaps only 0.001 percent? Or even less? One thing seems sure. However much you know can only be the merest fraction of all there is to be known. Which leads me to other question. Is it remotely possible for God to exist somewhere in that vast area of knowledge that is not yet yours? Let me put it another way, is there a spider in your room right now? I assume you can’t see one, hear one, or smell one. But despite all that, who would be so bold as to say, with absolute certainty, ‘This room has no spider?’ Because there might just be one outside the limited knowledge they have. In the same way could, just possibly, God exist beyond your present understanding, knowledge, and experience? What you don’t

know is vastly bigger than what you do know – and isn’t it just possible God could be there too? If you are honest to say ‘yes’ then you are not actually an atheist at all but an agnostic – a word that comes from the Greek and simply means ‘not knowing’. And it’s a highly respectable name for anyone to have. There is nothing wrong with saying ‘I don’t know’ – unless you are a man driving and needing directions. So here’s my final question – what kind of agnostic are you? I ask because there are two kinds. There’s the ornery agnostic who says, ‘Not only do I not know if there is a God, neither do you or anyone. And nor will you know, now or for ever.’ It’s a kind of open mouth and closed mind approach. In contrast, the ordinary agnostic says ‘I don’t know – but I’m open to knowing, should the right information come my way.’ If that’s you then keep asking the questions – and reading this column month by month – to see what clues there might be. • Peter Meadows is the co-author with Joseph Steinberg of The Book of Y the basis for the eight week Y Course that explores life’s biggest questions. If you have a Y Question relating to issues of faith and God Peter or Joseph will do their best to answer it. Send your question to: challenge@veritecm.com Subject: Y Course. We hope to publish their responses in future edition.

MY MIRACULOUS 9/11 SURVIVAL

BY MARK ELLIS (ABRIDGED)

Stanley Praisnath stared out the window as the plane grew closer and closer. It was September 11, 2001 and he was standing in his office in one of the World Trade Center towers. He is now credited as one of the only survivors of the impact zone.

"The Lord saw fit for me to live," says Stanley. His riveting tale of survival is chronicled in *Plucked from the Fire*, co-authored with William Hennessey.

Stanley was born in Guyana and came to America with little money in his pockets in 1981.

Growing up in Guyana, his mother insisted he attend church, but he

rebelled and drifted away during high school.

Then later, in the US, a friend called and invited him to church.

"The more I went, the more I liked what I saw," Stanley says. He says he put his faith in Jesus and followed Him in 1983.

A few years later he married and started a new career with Fuji Bank. On the side, he helped his father-in-law plant a church in a rough neighborhood of Queens, New York.

Within five years Stanley advanced to assistant vice-president, running all of Fuji Bank's operations on the 81st floor of the World Trade Center, Tower Two. That floor was immense – approximately one acre square, and almost completely soundproof from

the outside.

On the morning of September 11, he was riding up the elevator to his office when Tower One was hit by the first plane. Stanley didn't see or hear a thing.

At his desk, Stanley glanced out his window and was stunned to see huge chunks of fiery debris – "fireballs" – falling from Tower One. Stanley wanted to leave, so he headed down to the lobby but a security guard stopped him and told him to go back to his office.

Soon an intercom was piping in the same message: "Building Two is secure. There is no need to evacuate Building Two."

Back at his desk, he looked out the window. Suddenly he saw a huge

plane flying straight towards him.

"It was coming at me at eye-level contact," he notes. Stanley could make out the letter 'U' on the tail. It was United flight 175.

"As the plane was getting nearer I could hear a revving sound the engine was making, like the sound a plane makes when it's about to take off," Stanley says.

"Quadruple that sound, and that's the sound I could hear, even in this soundproof building. I can still hear that sound in my head," he says. "That sound will never go away."

As he watched the plane getting bigger and nearer, he cried out to God: "Lord, I can't do this – You take over," and he dove under his desk. Stanley's Bible, which he read while eating his lunch at his desk, sat on top of the desk.

The plane slammed into the building with immense force. The bottom of the wing sliced through his office and stuck in his office door 20 feet away from where he huddled.

"There was a massive fireball as the major part of the plane blew up," Stanley says. "The only desk that stood firm was the one I was hiding under." Every wall was flattened as if a demolition crew had passed through. Other than his desk, every other piece of office furniture was smashed like match boxes.

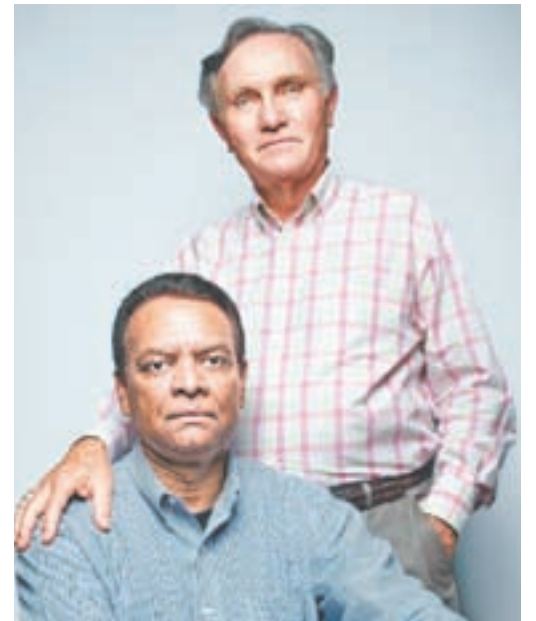
Part of the floor above his head collapsed downward, and all the cables in the ceiling were dangling, falling and short-circuiting, because the sprinklers came on.

"I thought if the floor doesn't completely collapse and kill me, I'll be electrocuted or the plane's wing is going to blow up and I'm going to die."

Above Stanley, a fiery inferno was raging. Fire had also broken out on his floor, some distance away.

There was no way out of his office, because the plane's wing blocked the only exit door.

Stanley let out an anguished cry to the Lord with every fiber of his being: "Lord, send somebody to help me... I



Stanley Praisnath and Brian Clark (standing) remain friends.

don't want to die. What will happen to my wife and two kids?"

At that moment, Brian Clark was walking down the only passable staircase from the 84th floor. Brian happened to be the fire warden on his floor, so he had a flashlight.

At that moment Brian heard Stanley screaming and he felt compelled to stay and help him.

Through the rubble, Stanley saw Brian's flashlight in the distance.

"I started crawling as fast as possible toward the light, because I knew if that man left me I would die," Stanley recalls.

Brian helped Stanley through the rubble and the pair ran downstairs and out of the building, moments before the

building imploded.

Stanley now attributes his survival to God.

"My survival is all about God and His grace, because I'm not a hero," Stanley says.

"The Lord is the hero. If you call on Him with all your heart and soul He will intervene on your behalf and deliver you," he says.

"I may never know why some people prayed and God didn't answer them or why I prayed and He answered me at the same time," he adds.

"But I can tell you this, my God lives!"

Stanley and Brian, who had never met before 9/11, remain friends and have appeared on numerous shows and documentaries telling their story.

Harvard Law student speaks out

BY HARVARD LAW SCHOOL STUDENT MARIANNA MARQUES

I followed an unconventional path to Harvard Law School (HLS). I'm the first in my family to be born in the United States, I studied pre-med in undergrad, I only applied to one law school, and I never even took the LSAT. My time at HLS was not only divinely ordained, but also, simply, a miracle.

At a young age, I gave my life to Jesus Christ. At age 13, while I was reflecting on my life plans, I heard God's voice (in my spirit) for the first time: Those are your plans for yourself, not Mine. Although God says in Scripture that He has a plan for each of us, I hadn't consulted Him as I had developed my own. I hadn't trusted that His plans would bring me satisfaction—I lacked faith and wanted control. But in that instance, I decided to trust Him and to surrender my plans.

But when I was 16, I gradually started to stray off His path for me. Still, He never left. At age 21, I got on my knees and repented (turned away from sin), and God began to restore me.

He revealed that it was only by His strength and by abiding in His Word that I could be free from sin and hurt, not on my own strength. I thought I was a "good person" and "free" during the past five years, but I realized that true freedom in Jesus meant that I did not have to live captive to sin.

These sins were the roots of the mental and spiritual health struggles I had been experiencing. He freed me—I started experiencing love, joy, and peace every day.

Although I had completed the pre-medical track in undergrad, I began to consider career alternatives while on a Fulbright fellowship in Spain.

Given my prior experience working with legal documents, I felt drawn to law school. By that time, I had learned my lesson and surrendered the decision to God.

I was thrilled upon receiving admission to HLS.

While I felt God wanted to use me to advocate for those who lack a voice, I didn't know the extent to



Marianna Marques

which my own voice would be challenged during my time at HLS. To elevate the voice of others, I first needed to fight for my own.

[Marianna then goes on to explain how she was able to do this at Harvard.]

... Finding our voice is powerful. My voice in particular does not come from me, from the news I watch, from the people I follow, or even from my friends or family. My life belongs to Jesus Christ, so I choose to allow Him to speak through me.

When Jesus walked the Earth, many tried to silence Him and to stop Him from denouncing the corrupt religious leaders. They even killed Him, thinking that death would quench His voice.

But when He resurrected three days later, He proved that His voice would never die. Instead, His innocent blood was spilled in the place of our guilty blood.

He paid the price for our sins so that we could be free. Free from anxiety, depression, vices, anger, pain, trauma, pride, greed, and on and on. By asking Jesus to forgive us for all we've done wrong and by continually seeking Him, we are saved. We are set free from the pain of our past and worries of our present and future. We live forever (John 3). This good news is what my voice now proclaims.

While Harvard has challenged me to develop my voice, it has also given me abundant resources to do so. Now, there is no way I will be silent.

Marianna is a Brazilian American who graduated from Tufts University with a BA summa cum laude at age 20. At Tufts, she assembled and led a team to establish a tuition-free auxiliary nursing school in Honduras.

She spent 2017-2018 as a Fulbright fellow at Universidad Camilo Jose Cela in Madrid, Spain.

Currently, she is a JD Candidate at Harvard Law School, the editor in chief of the Harvard Latin American Law Review, and the Chief Operating Officer of Action for Education.

Read Marianna's inspiring testimony on Harvard's website at hls.harvard.edu/admissions/student-voices-mariannas-journey-to-hls/

nudge

WITH KARL FASSE

More choice is not always better

WE LIVE in a community with an exploding number of choices. Did you know that the average US supermarket has 38,000 different items? There are 285 varieties of cookies which include 21 different types of chocolate chip cookies!

Having some variety of choice improves our quality of life. It allows us to direct our lives and express our individuality. However, it does not follow that, while some choice is good, more choice must be better. Our choices are multiplying in every area of life and it is very confusing; shopping,



entertainment, services and even spirituality.

We have a growing number of choices in how we express our spirituality if indeed we believe in it at all.

From Eastern mysticism, and New Age philosophy to the growing interest in atheism, the question we need to ask ourselves though is not which one do I like, but which is trustworthy?

Jesus didn't say He was just another choice but rather that He was "the way, truth and life".

This is not just another choice, but a statement of truth and belief. Be sure you make spiritual choices on foundations of belief, not lifestyle.



Hijacked United Airlines Flight 175 from Boston crashes into the south tower of the World Trade Center on September 11, 2001 in New York City. (Photo by Spencer Platt/Getty Images)

WAS JOAN OF ARC NOAH'S WIFE?

BY NICO BOUGAS

THE phrase, "God helps those that help themselves", is often quoted as a favourite Bible verse (especially amongst pickpockets and shoplifters.)

If you thought that this non-Biblical verse comes from the Bible you are in good company. According to an official survey, 82 percent of Americans thought so as well.

We get a sense of the widespread Biblical ignorance when we find that fewer than half of all adults can name the four gospels. Many Christians cannot identify more than two or three of the disciples. According to data from the Barna Research Group, 60 percent of the population can't name even five of the Ten Commandments.

And at least 12 percent of adults believe that Joan of Arc was Noah's wife. Another survey of students graduating from high school revealed that over 50 percent thought that Sodom and Gomorrah were husband and wife. And many thought that the Sermon on the Mount was preached by Billy Graham. Truly although the Bible is still a best seller, we have become a generation of biblical illiterates.

Early on in his ministry, evangelist Billy Graham said, "When the Bible goes down anarchy and confusion will take its place. This will be followed by a condition such as the world has never known. This generation has to face the appalling fact that it is either back to the Bible or back to the jungle."

We neglect the study of the Bible at our peril.

The Bible makes it clear that the way to progress and develop your spiritual life is to spend time studying and meditating on the Word of God. When Joshua took over from Moses to lead the Children of Israel into the Promised Land, he was given this advice: "Study this Book of Instruction continually. Meditate on it day and night so you will be sure to obey everything written in it. Only then will you prosper and succeed in all you do." (Joshua 1:8 NLT)

No book has had so much impact on the world as the Bible. George Washington said, "It is impossible to rightly govern the world without God and the Bible."

Former British Prime Minister, William Gladstone said, "I have known 95 great men of the world in my time and of these 87 were followers of the Bible."

Abraham Lincoln said, "This book is God's greatest gift to mankind. All the good things we know about God are communicated to us through this book."

Napoleon Bonaparte said, "This is no mere book but a living creature with a power to conquer all that would oppose it."

And then there were the doubters. Voltaire said, "Within 100 years you will only find the Bible in museums – today his own house is the office for the Geneva Bible Society."

The American agnostic, Robert Ingersoll, predicted that within 15 years the Bible would be in a morgue – not long afterwards he was in a morgue and the Bible is still a best seller.

It is time for us to get back to the Bible or back to the jungle. It is time for us to read, study and meditate on the Word of God.

It is sharper than any two edged sword; it is alive and powerful; it is like a hammer that breaks the rock in pieces, a fire that burnt up the chaff, and a sword that pierces into your inmost soul until you are no longer reading the Bible but the Bible is reading you.

Why not make a goal of reading through the Bible in a year? It could just be the most life-changing thing you ever do.



AI GENERATED IMAGE

A Father's unconditional love

BY JENNIFER

As a highly productive twenty-something-year-old, I had a house, a boat, lots of friends, a loving family, and a great job. Then in the blink of an eye my life fell apart.

Always the risk-taker looking for fun, I saw no reason not to experiment with drugs.

I progressed from a recreational drug and alcohol user for 13 years to a daily user of methamphetamine for another six years. Somewhere along the way, it became a necessity and a living hell. In my years as a drug addict, I lost my home, my cars, and honest relationships with my family.

After a few years as a functional drug addict, I began to cry out to God. Exhausted and guilty, I hated being dependent on a drug for my happiness. I wanted my life back, but every time I tried to quit the depression became so extreme I would go back to the drug for relief.

My entire life I gained significance as an overachiever, feeling accepted because of my performance. I wrongly believed God expected me just to try harder and clean myself up.

In my attempt to clean myself up I sold my assets. I also fell in love with a musician named Steve who lived in another state, convincing him that if I just left my environment I could get clean.

I thought the move would not only clean me up but make me acceptable to God. I also thought the love I had for Steve would satisfy me. It didn't work. Three weeks in my new locale I went right back to the drugs, which led to our break up. After a year and a half, I returned home broken and homeless. I decided my next move would be to confess to my dad and ask for help. I just had to muster up the courage. But before I could, my dad unexpectedly died of heart failure at 54 years old. When I received the call it seemed as if my heart was ripped out of my chest. As daddy's little girl, he loved me unconditionally and I couldn't fathom life without him.

I told God I would NEVER get clean, knowing it would be too painful to live drug-free with the loss and regret. If I couldn't get clean when life's problems didn't include death, there seemed no way I could do so now. So I quit trying. And it turned out to be exactly what God wanted.

A wonderful Christian friend whom I had done drugs with, loved me without judgment. She comforted me in my grief and talked about Jesus. Thirsty for God's mercy



I soaked in her words. She invited me to church but I assumed the people who went to church were perfect and certainly wouldn't accept me as a drug user. Jesus-yes; church-no. My friend told me about a Christian radio station and I began to listen.

Without making promises to God or feeling like I needed to perform, I approached God with a meth pipe in one hand and a Bible in the other. I did so for over a year and an amazing thing happened.

I realized God loved me unconditionally just like my dad. I recognised addiction not as a disease or something I had to live with, but instead sin which Jesus paid for on the cross and no longer needed to rule my life.

With the freedom to come to Him while entangled in my addiction, He healed me from the inside out. He was bringing me to freedom and building in my heart a new life.

I saturated my mind in His word (the Bible), learning the truth about God. I began to think about my life differently and how to trust Him. I fell so in love with Jesus and my faith grew. He began to transform me, giving me new desires and new power over weak areas in my life.

Deep into my addiction, the Lord delivered me from hopelessness to a life of great joy! I have been free from drugs for over 12 years and have no desire for them. God restored all I lost, including my marriage to Steve.

My mother and I are closer than ever and I rejoice that one day I will see my dad again. I have seen others, helped others, in the same situation fall in love with Jesus and find freedom. It is the relationship with God that changes everything.

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

“
He healed me from the inside out.
”

No such word for Rafael

BY JOHN HUTCHINSON

RAFAEL Nadal, one of the all-time tennis greats and winner of 22 Grand Slam men's singles titles, including a record 14 French Open titles, was asked one of those "What if" questions about his game. To which he responded, "There's no such word as 'if' in tennis."

But how do you avoid the 'if' word? Sometimes it's like a slap in the face. We find ourselves saying, "If only I hadn't said that. If only I hadn't done that. If only I wasn't there at that particular time."

The 'if' word can throw up possibilities. It presents us with alternatives and consequences. What will happen if I invest in this? What if I take her advice? Will I be better off if I say nothing? I find it hard to believe there's no such word as 'if' in tennis.

There's a lot of 'if' words in the Bible and, if we're smart, we'll take note of them. Jesus said, "What will it profit a man if he should gain the whole world and then lose his soul?" (Mark 8:36)

The craving for wealth can take us over and dominate everything we think about. Some have amassed incredible amounts of money and real estate. But, how much can they take with them when they die? Not a cent! Gaining the world and losing our soul is the enterprise of fools. Our soul is eternal and should be high priority. We need to ask ourselves: Where will I spend eternity?

Jesus asked, "Which of you, if his son asks for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a snake?" (Matthew 7:9)

Unfortunately there are too many children who've been given

a stone instead of bread or a snake instead of fish. There's a lot of angry children out there – disillusioned by selfish and indifferent parents.

Jesus added these words: "If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask Him!" (Matthew 7:11)

The good gifts we can give our children are not necessarily material. Gifts of example, goodness, love, and commitment may be among the best.

God's great gift to us was His only Son, the Lord Jesus Christ and through Him a life-changing experience and beyond that – eternal life.

Here's an important 'if': "If you confess with your mouth, 'Jesus is Lord,' and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved." (Romans 10:9) It's a big thing to say, "Jesus is Lord." It's to acknowledge Him as the highest authority.

To "believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead" is also to believe He was dead. Jesus lived and died. He died violently. He died by crucifixion. He gave His life for us. He died for our sins. But, God raised Him from the dead in the same body which was nailed to the cross. People stared at the crucifixion wounds. A disciple wanted to touch them. This was the greatest event in the

history of mankind – the crowning point in the ministry of Jesus on earth.

"If you believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead – you will be saved" – what a promise! What an assurance! You will be saved from your sins, you will be saved from judgment to come and be raised from death to live eternally in the presence of God.

Rafael Nadal during a practice session recently. (Photo by Dan Istitene/Getty Images)



nudge

WITH KARL FAASE

Humans are like broken pots

IF YOU have ever come across a broken pot or plate, you will know that you can actually still see what it was before it was smashed.

If you look closely and reconstruct some of the pieces of the original pot, its shape, color and form are apparent. This is not a bad way of thinking about humanity.

God's original purpose for humanity was to live unbroken lives. But history demonstrates that humanity has not been able to live like this. Like a smashed pot, we are a poor reflection of our original state.

Looking closely though and you can see our original state. Humanity is spiritual. We long for more in life.

It is not enough for us just to go through the motions of living. We ask questions about purpose and meaning and the future. Why do we do this? Because this is how we were designed.

Like a broken pot, we struggle to hold life together and we wonder why it's so hard. Turn to God today and discover afresh the life you were designed for.



STOCK PHOTO

Professor affirms Genesis is history

BY JONATHAN SAFARTI, CMI

Like many others in America, going to church was just a routine activity for Dr Stephen Schrader.

It wasn't until a close friend confronted him with the Bible verse 1 John 5:12: "Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life" that in his words, "the lights came on instantly".

He says he confessed his sin and unbelief and the need for Jesus Christ to be his Savior from sin. "I have had a strong desire to live for Him and know His word ever since being saved."

The erudite doctor is a staunch defender of Biblical creation.

He studied under Dr John C Whitcomb Jr, co-author of the famous *The Genesis Flood* (1961).

His subjects included archaeology and languages of the ancient Near East, and in particular, the study of words that only occur once in the text (hapax legomena).

Dr Schrader points out, "The 39 books of the Old Testament are important to master because they provide the foundation for accurately interpreting the New Testament text."

He says he is convinced the creation account is a genuine historical narrative.

"A poetic account would show parallelism, while Genesis is full of a certain verb type called the 'waw consecutive' that makes it clear that it was written as a historical account," he says.

"It is interesting that the waw consecutive appears 55 times in just 34 verses in Genesis 1:1-2:3. The



Dr Stephen R Schrader

use of this verbal form is therefore significant and consistent with the narrative material found in the rest of the book of Genesis."

Many think the meaning of 'day' is hard to understand but Dr Schrader argues that "the pattern was set by God's testimony in Exodus 20:11: 'For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day.'"

He further points out that Genesis 1 is clear enough even without that: "Yom (day) is modified in Genesis 1:1-2:3 by a numerical qualifier, so each day must be a literal day. When yom appears with a numerical qualifier in the Old Testament, it is never used in a figurative sense.

"I love how the phrase 'evening and morning' ends days one to six and ties each successive day together, but it is not repeated at the end of

the seventh day as God had finished his work of creation in six days and rested on the seventh day to set a pattern for mankind."

Sceptics often mock the first 11 chapters of Genesis, which detail creation, the fall, the flood and the confusion of languages at Babel. And some in the church think that these are side issues.

Why is a proper understanding of Genesis important?

"The most important thing," Dr Schrader says "is the Sovereign God, who created the whole world in six literal consecutive 24-hour days by just speaking his Word, who John reveals to be our Jesus Christ (John 1:1-3).

"And no human being was present. So all men have had to take His written word concerning His awesomeness in creating this world. Man did not evolve but was directly and supernaturally created by God on day six.

"Genesis refutes the concept of evolution and tells us that the earth is a relatively recent creation, and that man is not the result of millions of years of evolution. Genesis also reveals that God saw that everything He had created in the six days was 'exceedingly good'. There was no physical or spiritual death up to this point.

"Then there was the literal temptation by Satan to destroy man's innocence. Adam and Eve ate and disobeyed God's clear command not to eat of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

"There was a literal judgement scene in Genesis 3:8-19 in which God interrogated Adam (3:9-12) and then Eve (3:16) and pronounced



Dr Stephen R Schrader with his family.

judgement upon Satan (3:14-15) before Eve (3:16) and Adam (3:17-19)."

This event, Dr Schrader adds, was the origin of death and suffering. "All views that try to marry millions of years with the Bible always place human and animal death before sin.

"In chapters 6-9 God destroys the whole world by a global flood. So things have not always been the same ('since the beginning of creation') as the scoffers during the last days assert (2 Peter 3:4-7). Things have only been the same since the end of the flood, as Genesis 8:21-22 reveals."

Dr Schrader points out that even though God pronounced judgement, He also promised a Redeemer:

"In Genesis 3:15, God gave the promise of the Messiah, Jesus Christ, the seed of the woman Eve, who would ultimately defeat Satan at the cross of through His death and resurrection.

"The contrast between the 'first man, Adam' and 'the last Adam'

(Jesus Christ) is conveyed in 1 Corinthians 15:45-49 providing the contrast between 'earthly' and 'heavenly' in origin.

"Earlier, Paul had explained that the whole reason for Jesus coming to die physically for our sins, then rise physically from the dead, comes from the fact that our ancestor Adam sinned and brought physical death into the world (1 Corinthians 15:21-22). The long-age views put physical death of both humans and animals before Adam's sin. But then if death is not related to sin, how could Jesus's death pay for our sin?"

Can you hear the cicadas?

PETER'S CORNER WITH PETER MIKULA

AS A young child in my home town of Canberra, many years ago, during the warm summer evenings I enjoyed listening to the cicadas chirping or singing loudly in the bushland trees surrounding our home. I thought cicadas were fascinating small insects, with their transparent wings and prominent eyes.

For me today, the cicada memory lives on. I still hear the chirping sound, but now it is inside my head 24/7, and is called tinnitus. That brings its own set of challenges that can be difficult to live with. I did not care well for my hearing in my younger years, with the cicada result I live with now. Yet despite that, my hearing basically functions adequately after an amazing 70 years, with no maintenance at all during that time.

Alongside the tinnitus, I can still hear normal conversation, noise, music and singing. I now deeply appreciate the ability to hear, and in my heart I mourn alongside those who cannot hear at all.

The tinnitus leads me to marvel at how well designed and planned is our ability to hear. Just look at this diagram of the hammer, anvil and stirrup – three tiny bones essential for the ability to hear, doing their job in each side of your head, on duty 24/7.

When I consider this, I ask myself how could it ever be possible for blind evolution to come up with this design, plus the process to manufacture it?

These are deep questions. How did those bones get to the precise places where they are, and in the precise order and alignment needed?

Who told them they would be needed so that our ears can hear? What use are they without all the other parts of the ear? For that matter, what is the point of having ears unless they are linked to a brain that can "listen" to the vibrations, analyse them, turn them into what we call "sounds," and give them meaning?

Who told the brain that there were ears nearby waiting to be connected? Who told the ears that there was a mouth and tongue nearby just waiting to get a word in? What use is a speaker without a listener? What use is the song of a bird without a hearer?

Evolutionary thinking suggests the answers involve



random accident, with no design and no purpose. That the bones invented themselves without knowing what they were supposed to be doing.

That ears and brains, speakers and listeners, just came to be by chance. That the hammer, anvil and stirrup came to be through millions of random steps from an original one-celled organism.

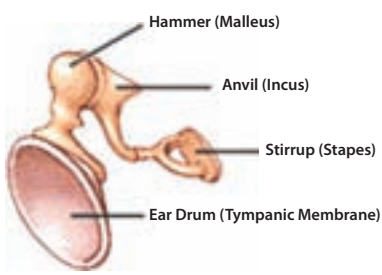
Evolution requires that mutations (which are essentially accidental or chance damage to or reorganisation of pre-existing genes) caused these things, and all without knowing anything about the purpose that the "accidental damage" was going to achieve.

In recent times, I have heard people say "the universe – or the galaxy, or the sun – did it," perhaps finally recognising that evolution could not have done so?

However the Bible book of Job 38:2 gives us cause to hear something else, namely a deep question from God: "Who is this that obscures my plans with words without knowledge?"

I heard those words many years ago, and I now recognise that no, it was neither evolution nor the universe that did it. The ear and everything else in creation is God's great design and plan. Who can equal it? We close our ears to Him at our great peril. I hope these words help you, as they have me, in your journey to surely trust the Creator.

Peter Mikula is a mining engineer in Kalgoorlie who loves stargazing and talking with others about Jesus.



"LOOK UP ON A *starry night* and you will see THE MAJESTY AND POWER of an *infinite Creator*."
- Billy Graham

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Youth Truth

Drugs, witchcraft nearly killed me

When he was a teenager, Pat stood out in a crowd. He was a punk with a big mohawk. His school was opposite a church and one day he saw the pastor holding a Bible up in the air as he called out for people to turn away from their sins and accept Jesus as their Savior. Pat went over to the pastor and laughed as he knocked the Bible out of his hands.

"I had no respect for anyone who had a religious view," Pat says in a video on his YouTube channel, A Martyr's Oath. "My mindset back then was that you are stupid if you believe in any form of religion."

It was around this time that Pat and his friends started using drugs.

"We all got drunk a lot, we all smoked marijuana a lot, we got high at school during school fairly regularly, but that eventually turned into more than just that," he admits. "I started doing LSD or acid. It's a hallucinogen that causes you to see things that aren't actually there... The way that LSD works, the more of it you take the longer it lasts, the higher the peak."

One time after using LSD for three or four days in a row, Pat couldn't drive to school because he was hallucinating too much.

Pat discovered a group called the Rainbow Gathering, and it was there that he started to use LSD combined with meditation and was introduced to the spiritual realm.

"I recognised that there was more to life than just what I could see, but I lost control," he remembers. "I got to where I had no control over my mental capacities. I got to where I didn't even know what was real anymore."

One day Pat woke up in a therapists' office with no knowledge of how he got there. The therapist told him he had been coming to his office for a while.

"Apparently I had lost control so much that my mother had to put me in therapy," he says.

He had stopped taking LSD but he still felt out of control.

"No matter how much I talked with this guy, he could not make the flashbacks (hallucinating without being on the substance) go away," he says.

The therapist encouraged him to occupy his thoughts by focusing on something else. He asked Pat what he enjoyed. Pat said he enjoyed nature, as he often sat in the woods or in a park with the Rainbow Gathering. The therapist encouraged him to look into Wicca (a form of witchcraft that involves nature worship).

"I just went for it," Pat says. "I was like, I'll try anything."

He was struggling to hold down his job at McDonald's, where he was hallucinating that the grill was turning into a dragon and trying to eat him.

"I was tired of not having control and would try anything if it made me gain control so that I could get on with my life despite the poor decisions I'd made," Pat recalls. "So I became a Wiccan and I consumed it with a fervent passion. Within a month I'd probably read 15 books."

He set up an altar with statues, crystals and incense.

"But it was making the problem worse," he says. "The more I med-



Pat

said about Jesus being able to make him a new person. He was willing to try. So when the pastor invited people to become Christians, Pat went to the front of the church and accepted Jesus as his Lord and Savior.

Not long after this, Pat was cycling to work when he started to feel unwell. When he got to work, he fell to the ground.

"Apparently one of my lungs had collapsed," Pat explains. "I ended up at the hospital because I wasn't breathing. The next week after I had healed up in the hospital, my friend was like, 'We can pray over that, God can heal that.' And I said, 'Fine, I'll try it.'"

So that Sunday he stood up in church and received prayer for healing.

"I felt God's grace overwhelm my entire being," Pat attests. "It felt like all the weight, all the baggage that had ever been on top of my soul for my entire life was pulled off of my body. And that experience was so real that it freaked me out."

Pat's life changed forever that day. "The next day I picked up the Bible and I've never put it down since," he shares.

"The more I studied and the more I read, the more I recognised that the Bible is true. How do I know it's true? Because I've taken the time to study it. I've taken the time to compare the content to history."

Pat said reading the Bible has renewed his mind as it says in Romans 12:2, "Do not conform

to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is – His good, pleasing and perfect will."

"Since then, I have control. The impossible happened." After I had that conversion experience, my life did a 180-degree turnaround. I quit smoking and I quit cussing. And I did it all overnight without me recognising that I was doing it, because it wasn't me. It was the Holy Spirit." •

itated, the more I studied, and the more I did the mantras, all it was doing was opening up my mind to see a realm that was unseeable, so it was causing my flashbacks to get worse, not better."

At work people questioned Pat about his new life-style. One of his co-workers introduced Pat to his friend Jeff, who was a Christian. Jeff told Pat that Jesus could wash him and make him clean and a new person.

"I did not believe him," Pat admits. But when Jeff invited him to come to church, he decided to give it a go.

He sat in the service but felt nothing. He went again the next week, and the next week, and still felt nothing.

But he thought about what Jeff had

"I had no respect for anyone who had a religious view."

nudge WITH KARL FAASE

Trashy magazines

HAVE you ever wondered why so many people read trashy magazines? These magazines focus most of their articles on celebrity gossip.

Critics say that this focus on celebrity lifestyles is damaging in everything from body image to the general dumbing down of our community.

Those who endorse these magazines believe that they give us something to talk about other than the weather and give us the opportunity to discuss social issues like divorce, drug use and parenthood. The danger is that these celebrities become our role models.

We get our entertainment from watching their lives and our values from their behaviour. We can be fooled into thinking that a revolving door of relationships, endless partying and self-obsessed living is justified, even ideal. We need a role model who gives us positive values and encourages life-enhancing behaviour. For 2000 years Jesus has done this and still does. Why not take some time to read in the Bible how Jesus is a role model for you? •

MY BROKEN HEART IS NOW HEALED

Two years ago, when Mia van Rooyen was just 17, she was struggling with depression and didn't see a point in living any more.

When she was hospitalised in a mental health facility she felt she had hit rock bottom. She saw that she had two options and the one she took transformed her life forever.

Mia does not have fond memories of her childhood growing up in Pretoria. She was abused from a young age and didn't have a good relationship with either of her parents.

Looking back now, Mia says the abuse affected how she viewed people as well as God. "I grew up in a Christian environment but I didn't want to get close to God or get to know Him," she admits.

"My view of God was distorted by people who were Christian. But it wasn't God who hurt me, it was people."

Nevertheless, Mia says she closed off her heart and self-isolated.

"I carried a lot of anger and bitterness in my heart toward people and God. I never pursued a relationship with God, instead I ran away, hid away from Him, because I also struggled a lot with shame about my life and what had happened to me.

"I couldn't fathom God, the Creator of the universe, loving me and wanting a relationship with me. I developed eating disorders in high school, it became an idol in my life."

When she was hospitalised, she saw two options before her – continue on the destructive path she was on or give God a chance. She took the second option and prayed to God to commit her life to Him.

"Looking back I realize God was there all along, standing with open arms and a patient and gentle heart, waiting for me to run into His arms."

As Mia looks back on her life she recognises that God sent people into her life, to show her His love and help her with the healing journey.

Mia says now that God has changed her life.

"God revealed Himself to me in such a gentle way, slowly piecing together all the broken pieces of my heart.

"He freed me from the mindset I was in – self-hatred, bitterness, eating disorders, depression, unforgiveness – and the journey still continues.

"The biggest, most freeing thing I learned and now understand is God's unfailing love. I don't think I will ever be able to fully comprehend it. But I've tasted the sweetness of His love and I just want more."

In the two years since becoming a Christian Mia says, "I've learned He is a loving Father, always has been and always will be standing with open arms. His plans for me are good.

"Choosing God doesn't mean life will suddenly be easy and without problems but I have a loving Father, Who died on the cross for me, to lead me and guide me and comfort me through this life."

Her favourite Bible verse is Romans 5:8-11: "But God shows His love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Since, therefore, we have now been justified by His blood, much more shall we be saved by Him from the wrath of God. For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of His Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by His life." •



Mia van Rooyen

Contact Challenge!

Do you have a story to tell, a tricky question to ask or want to let us know how Challenge has impacted you?
Email harriet@challengenews.org



PUNK ROCK BROWNIES

ALL too often brownies are dry, crumbly, and boring. These brownies are different. They turn the volume up to 11, spike their hair, and don't conform. Qualities that you might dread in a teenager, but are great in a dessert.

Prep: 30 min
Cook: 30 min
Total: 1 hour
Yields 24 brownies

Ingredients:

1 ¼ cups all-purpose flour
2 tablespoons dark cocoa powder
1 teaspoon salt
1 teaspoon cayenne red pepper
1 teaspoon cinnamon
11 oz dark chocolate (60 to 72% cacao), coarsely chopped
1 cup (2 sticks) butter, cut into pieces
2 teaspoons instant espresso powder
1 ½ cups sugar
½ cup firmly packed light brown sugar
5 large eggs, at room temperature
2 teaspoons pure vanilla extract

Method:

Preheat the oven to 350°F. Butter the sides and bottom of a 9x13 glass or light-colored metal baking pan.

In a medium bowl, whisk the flour, salt, cocoa powder and spices.

Melt chocolate, butter, and espresso powder in a double boiler, stirring occasionally, until the

chocolate and butter are completely melted and smooth.

Turn off the heat, but keep the bowl over the water and add the sugars. Whisk until completely combined, then remove the bowl from the pan. The mixture should be room temperature.

Add 3 eggs to the chocolate mixture and whisk until combined. Repeat with remaining eggs.

Add the vanilla extract to the chocolate mixture and stir until just combined.

Pour the chocolate mixture into the bowl with the flour. Using a spatula (not a whisk), fold the flour mixture into the chocolate until just a bit of the flour mixture is visible.

Pour the batter into the prepared pan and smooth the top.

Bake in the center of the oven for 30 minutes, rotating the pan halfway through the baking time, until a toothpick inserted into the centre of the brownies comes out with a few moist crumbs sticking to it.

Let the brownies cool completely, then cut them into squares and serve with milk or ice cream.

Recipe and photo from MakeBetterFood.com

Actor loses everything over one audition

Award-winning actor and producer Cameron Arnett was at the height of his career, climbing the Hollywood ladder and landing big roles in blockbuster movies like *Star Trek: The Next Generation* and *Miami Vice* when one audition ruined everything.

"I ended up evicted, divorced, alone. No agent, no acting jobs, nothing," he said.

What happened to have caused such a change of fortunes? Turns out Cameron had just been about to sign on the dotted line after his successful audition, when he was told one of the scenes required partial nudity.

He hesitated. Nudity did not sit well with Cameron's value system and he told the studio executives that. They said 'no problem', they would use a body double instead. Again Cameron refused. "Even with the body double, I felt God telling me people would still think it was me. It put a halt on everything. I felt God tap me on the shoulder and say, 'You know, it's time to get out of the system.'"

Born in Haiti in 1960, Cameron moved to California in the 90's to pursue a career in acting and modeling. "Things were moving right along there," he said. "Then, I found myself in Toronto, Canada doing a movie for a week. When I got back to L.A., they called me in by name, to audition for a TV series, which I ended up getting. It would have been my first lead in my own series."

It was for this series that Cameron



Cameron Arnett (left) with his *I Still Believe* co-star KJ Apa. (Photo Michael Buckner/Variety/Penske Media via Getty Images)

was told about the need for him to be partially nude.

Partial nudity would not seem to be that high a hurdle for a male actor in Hollywood, but Cameron was different. He is a Christian and had learned to listen to God's voice and follow His directions.

"It's all about God and not about us, no matter what platform He puts us on," Cameron said. "I want to be able to let people know that He's still Lord and He's still to be respected and honoured."

But obeying God had unpleasant consequences "The agency dropped me," Cameron recalled. "I lost everything – big house, cars, even family. I had nothing and no one," he said of those grim days, which also included a period of bankruptcy.

Later, Cameron felt God calling him to be a preacher. He moved to Atlanta and started a church. "I thought I would never act again and I was completely fine with it," he said. But God had other plans in store. Ten years on Cameron was able to step into a movie role again, this time in the Christian movie industry, and later start his own film production company.

Cameron now sees the production company as his ministry, and media and entertainment as his primary means of reaching people with the message of Jesus. His desire is to exalt God and the Bible through the shows and films he makes.

"One of my greatest joys in this is being able to collaborate with like-minded Christian filmmakers and artists. I love helping people be and do what they were ordained to by God. And as an actor, it is a joy to use the talent He gave me to honour Him within these various projects."

Cameron's recent faith-based movies include *Overcomer* and *I Still Believe*.

Today, he is happily married to BJ and they have a blended family of five children. He continues to run his production company, CAPS, with great success and founded Saving Destinies, an organisation dedicated to supporting and protecting young people.

He has published a series of children's books, is a public speaker, and continues to travel and shoot family-friendly films and other projects.

Talking about his decision to stick by his principals at that one audition years ago, Cameron said he has never looked back: "God sends everyone here for a reason, with a purpose, on a mission," he declares.

"He leads and guides us in the way we should go. My life is a testimony of that. Our part is to obey, and as we do, He uses us to fulfil His will upon the earth."

Cameron urges others: "If you are a Christian, don't compromise God's integrity for man-made success. Be true to Him and to you. Honour Him and He will honour you."

One of Cameron's favourite Bible verses is Proverbs 19:21: 'Many are the plans in a person's heart, but it is the Lord's purpose that prevails.' This verse gives me the most comfort. It allows you to realize that as long as I am falling forward towards God, He's going to cause what He intended, to prevail."

Deeply touching emotional dilemmas

BY RUSTY WRIGHT

EVER fear rejection in romance? Concerned about family members you love experiencing troubled relationships? Been tempted to stray? Wondering whether or how faith and God fit into life's complicated messes?

If so, you'll probably connect right away with MGM/Amazon's new deeply moving TV series, *The Baxters*.

The Baxters is based on a best-selling book series by popular novelist Karen Kingsbury. Actor/producer Roma Downey (*Touched by an Angel*, *The Bible*, *Ben Hur*) produced and stars. Kathy Lee Gifford also appears.

Surprising discovery

Although romance novels like Kingsbury's are not my personal interest, some of her works have become record-setting Hallmark movies.

So, I decided to view the pilot. I came away gripped by the storyline with its emotional dilemmas, ethical choices, and relationship struggles. I felt like someone had been reading my mail, or my diary.

Elizabeth Baxter (Roma Downey) with her husband, John (Ted McGinley), and their four adult children seek to navigate life's complexities together.

An attractive, successful, and happy family, their joy turns to grief when daughter Kari discovers from a tipster that her husband, college professor Tim, has been having an affair with one of his students. Crushed, Kari feels angry, betrayed, confused, afraid, and desperate. But, through her tears, she's determined to seek a divine remedy.

When confronted, Tim argues that their once-hope-filled marriage is dead, that his new lover



fulfills him. Kari's dad recommends a divorce attorney; her sister Ashley thinks she's crazy to hold on to hope.

Tim's student paramour, Angela, seems smitten but wishes Tim would be more public about their relationship. Complicating things for Kari, Ryan, a former love interest, is back in town.

Relationship struggles

Anyone who's experienced a rocky marriage or divorce (as I have) likely will appreciate the pain and heartfelt struggles the couple exhibits.

Even strong relationships can experience rejection fears. Family and friends of troubled

partners will understand the worry and uncertainty about how to advise: "Dump him; he doesn't deserve you"? "Pray and hold on; God will find a way"? *The Baxters* portrays both perspectives.

Faith's relevance?

For many like the Baxters, faith and God play a part in their daily lives.

In mine, anger with God for allowing the mess I helped create clouded my life for about two years. In retrospect, I was blaming Him for my own poor choices.

Eventually, some fellow university students helped me understand how God's love deals with my shortcomings, and my option to accept His gift of forgiveness. Which I did.

Divine friendship has helped manage life's curves since then.

Some Baxter family members pray together amid life's challenges. Others question faith's relevance. All seek to support the hurting.

Emotional intelligence

Roma and her husband, producer Mark Burnett, have dedicated their lives to producing inspirational content for mainstream media. Nearly 30 million copies of Karen Kingsbury's books are in print.

The series is available on Prime Video. Episode 1, the pilot, left me curious for more, and the remainder of season 1 did not disappoint.

I especially appreciated the focus on emotional intelligence and managing feelings, essential in today's world. Well worth watching.

Rusty Wright is an author and lecturer who has spoken on six continents. He holds Bachelor of Science (psychology) and Master of Theology degrees from Duke and Oxford universities, respectively. www.RustyWright.com

Building better relationships

What it means to love your neighbor

BY ROB FURLONG

"JESUS gets us." This was the message which appeared on millions of TV screens in the USA during this year's Super Bowl playoff between the Kansas City Chiefs and the San Francisco 49ers. By advertising standards, it was a simple ad depicting people, regardless of who they were, having their feet washed by another, while INXS's hit, "Never tear us apart" played in the background. The ad concludes with some simple, but poignant statements:

"Jesus didn't teach hate. He washed feet. He gets us. All of us. Jesus. Love thy neighbor."

Not surprisingly, the ad has been heavily criticised by some, with many claiming it says Jesus condones sin and that He challenged us to love our enemies, not just our neighbor.

Personally, I think it's an overreaction and much of the criticism misses the point about what it means to "love your neighbor."

One day, a religious leader came to Jesus and asked Him what the greatest commandment of all was. Jesus summarised it in two statements: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and love your neighbor as yourself."

What does it mean to love your neighbor? For Jewish people, living in the days of Jesus, "neighbor" was interpreted to mean only other Jews.

If you were not a Jew, you were not a neighbor, and therefore a Jewish person was not obligated to love you or do anything for you. Jesus turned this understanding completely on its head when He used this commandment as the basis for His story of the Good Samaritan.

Perhaps you're not familiar with the story?

It concerns a Jewish man who is travelling along a dusty road when he is set upon by violent thugs who rob him, beat him up, and leave him for dead. Two men – both Jews and active in the service of the Temple – come across the man but offer no assistance.

Finally, along comes a Samaritan traveller who, when he sees the desperate plight of the man immediately tends to his wounds and then takes him to the next inn where he also pays for whatever care the innkeeper provides for the wounded man.

Samaritans and Jews loathed and despised each other in the days of Jesus. Think of the hatred that exists between many people in the Middle East today and you will have some idea of the animosity that existed between these people.

But in making the despised Samaritan the hero of the story, Jesus' message is clear – the person who needs our help, regardless of their status or racial background, even an enemy – he or she is our neighbor and we are to love them.



What I find especially interesting is that Jesus based His story on the commandment to "love your neighbor." It is unmistakably clear then that to "love your neighbor" is not just a call to love people who are like us, or that we get along with.

It is a call to love our enemies as well. It's what Jesus taught, and it's also what He lived out.

A man named Paul – himself a devout and proud Jew – said, "While we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son." (Romans 5:10)

Did you hear that?

Even though the world was shaking its fist in the face of God, Jesus knew our need for forgiveness and still died for us. This is the greatest example ever of "loving your neighbor."

And it's through His example and power working in us that we can gain the strength to love our enemies as well, in spite of what they have done to us. Jesus gets us. It's why He died for us. And understanding our own weakness, it's why we can "get" others as well.

Love your neighbor... •



IN THE DARK ABOUT DEATH?

BY PETER BRAIN

THERE are many humorous graveyard inscriptions. Recently I came across one that said, "Here lies my wife: here let her lie!

Now she's at rest, and so am I." Another said, "I told you I was sick."

Humor is one way of handling death, which we all know is anything but funny.

There are other ways of coping with death, and all the uncertainty and fear it engenders.

Some say there is nothing after death; what we see is all there is. Others rely on reincarnation as an explanation for death.

Still others trivialise the awfulness of death by saying that death is just a natural part of life. And others, that everyone will go to Heaven or that God will give us a second chance after we die.

It's all fairly confusing, and sad, don't you think?

Especially since God would neither have us fearful nor living in the dark about death and eternity.

There are some who would say that the Christian faith is escapism – but what if, as Dr I. Howard Marshall writes, "it is the only ultimate realism"?

Now, to make a claim like that there must be some clear public domain evidence. Wonderfully, there is.

Marshall reminds us that "it rests foursquare on the fact that Jesus has defeated death, and anybody who can defeat death can defeat anything."

The coming of Jesus into our world gives us a new way of looking at things.

He offers life eternal to all who trust Him now and will honour the choice of all who refuse Him with death eternal.

There is no reincarnation or second chance.

The choice of eternity hangs on the decision we make about Jesus now.

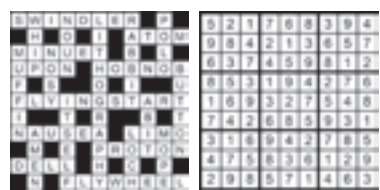
One man said that "at death I shall change my place, but not my company", and another that "death has been described as the old family servant who opens the door to welcome the children home."

For those trusting in Jesus, death holds no more fear than going to sleep at night.

And it is all because of Jesus.

We see this confidence in John Newton, who gave us the hymn *Amazing Grace*, when he said to one of his visitors toward the end of his life, "I am like a person going on a journey in a stage coach, who expects its arrival every hour and is frequently looking out of the window for it."

And the reason for his confidence was revealed by his friend who heard his final words, "My memory is nearly gone but I remember two things: that I am a great sinner and that Christ is a great Savior." •



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We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life. – ROMANS 6:4 NIV

Want to explore more?

Here are some free, helpful, Christian online 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, serials and kids' 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 - 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	Manga Messiah app Christian comic with free games app, illustrated in Japanese-style art
YMI (meant to be read as "Why am I?") Christian news outlet for young adults with various content, devotionals and resources. ymi.today	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 Savior 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 usaoffice@challengenews.org
2. Use the resources in the green box on this page to find a Bible to read and more information regarding Christianity.
3. Keep praying. Talk to God anywhere, about anything. He is always listening and you don't need a formula.
4. Find a Bible-teaching church to attend.

AS A NEXT STEP:

I have prayed the prayer [ABOVE] Please send me: Bible Some 'starting off' literature Information on a helpful church

* Please check and write clearly *

Name _____ Phone _____

Address _____

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All overseas inquiries are referred onto someone in their own country

Coco Gauff plays a backhand against Jaqueline Cristian of Romania during the Internazionali BNL D'Italia 2024 at Foro Italico on May 11, 2024 in Rome, Italy. (Photo by Mike Hewitt/Getty Images)



EYES ON THE PRIZE

Coco Gauff was the first US tennis player to clinch a spot for the women's singles in the 2024 Paris Olympics, according to the WDSU News.

It's the start of making her Olympic dreams come true after seeing them dashed in 2021, when she qualified for the Olympics the first time.

At just 17, she had made the Olympic team for Tokyo but had to withdraw five days later when she caught COVID.

Olympics.com reports that Coco hopes to win several medals in Paris this year.

"One of the goals I wrote down on my vision thing, vision note, in my phone, was to win a medal in the Olympics," Coco told reports after defeating Anna Karolína Schmiedlová in the opening round at the Australian Open in Melbourne.

"I'll be completely honest; I don't really care what event it is in. I feel like gold, silver, or bronze, whatever medal it is, is one of those things; it doesn't matter.

"Well, it does matter. Obviously, I want to win in singles. I feel like I would appreciate it just as much, whether it was in singles or doubles.

"It's not the same to me as a Slam, I guess, in a way. I just put 'I

want a medal at any of the events." Coco first picked up a tennis racket when she was six.

She had just seen Serena Williams winning the Australian Open and wanted to follow in her footsteps.

It was 2009 and marked the start of a remarkable career.

At 14, Coco won the prestigious Orange Bowl under-18 singles championship, the youngest player to win in 15 years.

In June 2023, that early promise was fulfilled when Coco won the US Open singles – her first Grand Slam title. She was 19, the youngest American to win a US Open since Serena Williams in 1999.

The win would grant her world No. 3 in the rankings.

Already a standout talent, what makes the 19-year-old even more

distinctive is her Christian faith.

After her US Open win against Belarusian Aryna Sabalenka, she dropped to her knees, clasped her hands together and stayed like that for about 10 seconds.

When asked what she was doing by the *Today* show, she replied: "I was just saying thank You to God."

In an interview with *New York Times*, Coco, who has been a Christian since she was eight and sings in the church choir, said she and her father pray together before every match.

They don't pray that she will win, but rather, "it's an expression of thanks to God and of dependence on Him. We pray that my opponent and I stay safe."

An *ESPN* commentator who saw Coco on her knees after winning the US Open asked: "We saw you say a prayer, get on your knees, you have a lot of faith... how important has that been on this journey for you?"

"You know, it's been so important," Coco replied.

"I don't pray for results. I just ask that I get the strength to give it my all and whatever happens, happens," she added.

"I'm so blessed in this life. So I'm so thankful for this moment. I don't have any words for it, to be honest."

When she won the

Cincinnati Open – the youngest player ever to do so – Coco said: "I'd like to thank my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

"I spent a lot of nights alone crying trying to figure it out. I still have a lot to figure out, but I thank Him for covering me."

Her social media pages are also filled with prayers and acknowledgements of her faith.

At the end of the 2022 season she posted: "2022 season is officially over and definitely one I'll never forget. Thank you God for strengthening me at my lowest and highest points this season."

Her faith has also helped her chart a steady course through the

pressures that come with being a tennis star on the tough professional circuit.

She told *Stylist* magazine: "My faith helps me stay focused on my goals and what I want to achieve."

“
My faith helps
me stay focused.
”

The American's faith has also helped her stay grounded and humble.

In an interview with *Because of Them We Can*, she mentioned that her faith helps her

remember where she came from and stay true to herself.

"I try to stay humble and remember that I'm just a girl from Florida who loves to play tennis," she said. "My faith helps me stay grounded and remember what's important." •



Coco Gauff during Kids Day on Day One of the Internazionali BNL D'Italia at Foro Italico on May 6, 2024 in Rome, Italy. (Photo by Robert Prange/Getty Images)

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