

RUNNER'S LEGACY

I'm 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 colourful meadow of flowers, the left side a black skeleton.

"Most people recognised the colourful side – my creativity, my humour, 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 relationship 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.

When she fell in love with a much younger man, a refugee from Sri Lanka, Katarina separated from her children's father, moved in with the new man and soon became pregnant by him.

"During the pregnancy, I realised that living together with him and my two children from the first relationship was not possible. I was in a deep crisis and really only wanted to leave my life. But the thought of my children, including my unborn child, stopped me.

"This man brought porn videos of a harder kind into my life. After initial disgust and revulsion, I developed more and more of a sex addiction." Katarina's addiction combined with the Hindu doctrine of the deification of sexuality (Kamasutra) and the consumption of marijuana to "expand her consciousness" led her into deeper darkness.

"With a completely numbed conscience, I didn't even shy away from aborting my fourth child," she admits.

When she finally separated from her youngest daughter's father, Katarina was physically

and emotionally devastated.

"A Christian friend persuaded me to attend a 'Healing like Jesus' seminar. "At the time, I was also studying spiritual healing and hoped to gain additional techniques and insights. I actually heard the Gospel (the good news that Jesus came to Earth to die for our sins) there for the first time.

“The feeling of being divided was instantly gone.”

"My eyes were opened to the fact that [Jesus' crucifixion] was not simply a bloody massacre, but an act of love and that it was also done out of love for me personally.

"On June 29, 2004, I gave my life to Jesus and a day later I was baptised 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'.

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Katarina Graf

How Olympian Eric Liddell's legacy transcended his sporting career



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 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



Eric Liddell crosses the finish line in 1924. Photo from Getty Images.

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.

This then, is grace – the unconditional, unmerited favour, forgiveness and kindness of God bought for us by Jesus' sacrifice.

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BACK PAGE

EYES ON THE PRIZE
COCO GAUFF

Running his race

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To receive it, all we have to do to be saved now is to accept Him, by faith, as our Lord and Saviour. 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.



REASONABLE DOUBT

In the courtroom of life, Jeff Owenby thought he had reached a verdict. But reasonable doubt created weak spots in his beliefs until he eventually had no choice but to overturn his convictions.

BY JEFF OWENBY

A criminal lawyer making his closing arguments to a jury might use the term 'reasonable doubt'. If there's a shred of belief, or a nagging question about guilt, or innocence, then there exists such a doubt. If you've never believed in God, or any of the stories you've heard, but there is a tiny weak spot in your beliefs, then you're no doubt being called by the Holy Spirit (the unseen presence of God). It is the Holy Spirit who provides the unbeliever with reasonable doubt in his own belief system.

I had my own courtroom; I remember the day I sat in a church learning about how Jesus calmed a storm. At the time I didn't know Jesus; I knew of Him, but I didn't truly know Him. I'd heard the same message preached in churches before and took it as pure fairy tale; the world had made me a very hard man, and I didn't believe in fairy tales or what sounded like science fiction.

I married into a Christian family, but didn't want anything to do with religion. When I met my wife she was walking away from her faith and lived the same sinful life I was living. I loved my in-laws truly, but I didn't want their lifestyle at all. Religion radically interfered with my agenda, therefore I had no room for it.

My childhood upbringing was difficult; our family moved from house to house every year, and I attended a different school each time. I had no lasting relationships and my father was an alcoholic which was the cause of our many moves. God was never really a part of our household. I was in my 20s before I realized that Easter wasn't about a bunny. I knew absolutely nothing about God or the Bible. All of this trickled upward into my adult life, and I had no faith whatsoever.

I had a very successful career in advertising. I started at the very bottom, but was eventually promoted to executive. I was able to buy a house and live fairly comfortably. My wife and I dreamed of moving to a small town in Oregon called Troutdale near the beautiful Sandy River. We'd both worked hard to be able to buy our own house there, and once we'd settled into our new home we were very happy.

I shrugged off God, thinking there was plenty of time.

"Maybe later," I told myself. "If I accept God into my heart, my entire life as I know it has to stop. There'll be nothing to look forward to!"

These were the lies I told myself. I had a weakness for sin. Whenever my in-laws vis-

ited, they left copies of Christian literature for us to read. I was irritated by the fact that they did this. Not once did I ever read one, and they usually became convenient coasters for my beer cans.

Then one day the bottom fell out: My company closed its doors and I was not only out of a job, but out of a career. Because of this and other future job failures, I finally ended up losing just about everything. I had other jobs, but couldn't manage to make anything work.

I'd been an alcoholic since my early 20s and the drinking only got worse. Eventually we lost our house, and were forced to leave the city we so loved. We were forced to move into a 300 square-foot studio apartment. That tiny studio was in a not-so-pleasant neighborhood where drugs were widespread, and break-ins happened quite often. At this point I'd entered into a depression that was almost overpowering.

One day, while visiting our in-laws, we went with them to church on a Sunday morning. While listening to a sermon on the book of Mark, the Holy Spirit struck my heart. I'd heard this preaching before; the message wasn't new to me at all, and I'd heard in other sermons about Jesus as He calmed a storm. The question that Jesus had for

His disciples in the boat was the question the pastor emphasised: "Why are you so afraid?"

From that day forward, I had an overwhelming desire to seek Christ. I turned away from booze, denial and sin and gave my heart to Jesus about two weeks later. As I put my faith in Jesus Christ, He blessed me with His gift of eternal life.

I have never regretted a single minute of my Christian walk, but instead wonder why it took me so long to want to come to Him.

I am a living testimony to what Christ promises in His Holy Word.

Thanks to God's infinite grace and mercy I've been clean and sober and smoke-free for 17 years. Miraculously, God also brought me and my wife home to Troutdale.

Belief in Jesus Christ doesn't come because somebody talks us into it; true belief comes when we realize that He is real. This is the complete work of the Holy Spirit. If there's a shred of belief that some or part of this could be true, you're being called by the Holy Spirit.

As Jesus tells us in John 14:6: "I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man comes to the Father except through me."



Jeff Owenby with wife Terry and dog Sophie.

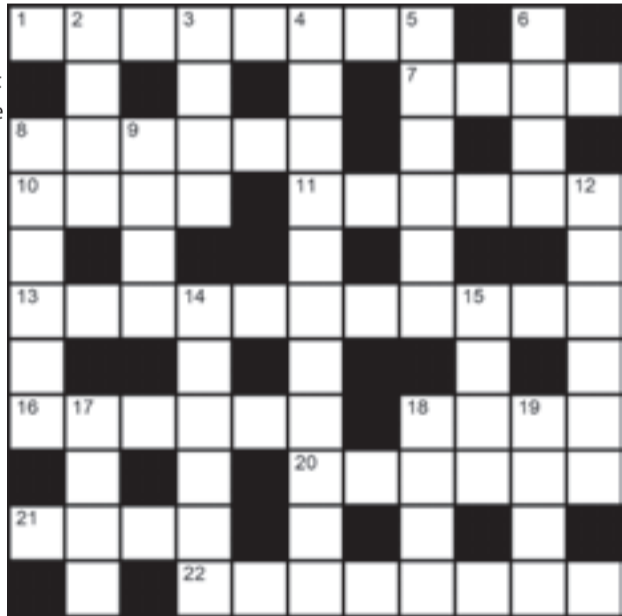
Coffee Break CROSSWORD & SUDOKU

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

SOLUTIONS PAGE 11



"Can't take my dog? I don't even know HOW to run without my dog."

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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."

No longer divided



Why a Reiki master renounced her craft

After experiencing sexual abuse as a child, Nicole Watt was searching for an escape and empowerment. She had always been interested in the supernatural realm and that fascination only grew as she got older, eventually leading her to work as a Reiki master. She thought she had found the peace and power she was searching for – so why did she leave it all behind?

Nicole writes in an article for *Christianity Today* that from an early age she experienced visions and physical sensations when she visited locations where witchcraft had been practiced. As a teenager she began to satisfy her curiosity with books on the occult.

“Even though the subject matter was frightening, I found myself gradually lured in,” she recalls. “I bought an Ouija board and became interested in clairvoyance – the ability to know things about people and places, present or future, based on heightened perception.”

As Nicole dove deeper into the New Age, she started to experience frightening incidents.

“At one point, I slept with a Bible because I believed I was hearing demons in my room,” she shares.

“Another night, unable to sleep, I kept watching my bedroom door, sensing that someone was standing just outside. Another time, I woke up in a cold sweat after feeling a tug at my nightgown and hearing a low, menacing growl in my ear.”

Despite this, Nicole was attracted to the prospect of being able to harness supernatural powers. As she grew older, she was also drawn to the idea of being able to heal herself and others.

In her mid-20s Nicole became involved in a New Age energy healing technique called Reiki which uses different symbols and hand positions to channel “universal life energy” from the universe. Reiki claims to work by removing obstructions to the flow of universal life energy.

“I was desperate for peace and longing for spiritual awakening,” Nicole shares.

“Wanting to belong, I eagerly accepted the idea that Satan was a manmade myth contrived to keep people in religious bondage. I committed myself to relinquishing the negativity within me – a bundle of old wounds, limiting beliefs, and fear – so that the universe’s healing powers might flow unimpeded.”

Soon Nicole became a Reiki master. At the time, she was also a single mother.

“As so many new parents can attest, the anxious and awestruck feelings of parenthood have a way of awakening interest in religion,” Nicole explains. “I went to church now and again but couldn’t seem to settle in anywhere. Next door to me lived an elderly couple raising their young granddaughter. She invited me to her church, where I finally found a home for my soul. I went through Beth Moore’s Breaking Free Bible study and was baptised.”

Nicole’s weekends were a mixed bag. On Saturdays she would offer Reiki sessions and teach classes and on Sundays she would attend church.

But she gradually became more and more uncomfortable with practicing Reiki and longed to tell her customers that Jesus was the answer to their questions, problems,

and longings. “Yet saying this was forbidden,” Nicole says. “New Age philosophy treats this world as an illusion, a school for our spiritual mastery where many gods, spirits, and guides are honoured. To speak of Jesus as one deity among many, equal in power and authority, is permitted. But to speak of him as the Way, the Truth, and the Life is out of the question.”

Nicole wanted to keep helping people and Reiki seemed to do just that. So she decided to compromise.

“I quit teaching Reiki methods and told my students about my faith in Jesus, but I continued offering Reiki sessions for my clients, asking the Holy Spirit to operate underneath the surface. Soon enough, I came face to face with the foolishness of serving two masters.”

Nicole’s friend asked her teach Reiki to her and another woman and she agreed, thinking she would be able to use the opportunity to talk

about Jesus to the women.

“The first session went smoothly enough, but that night I had a terrible dream of two witches attacking me. I yelled out the name of Jesus, and immediately they disappeared.

I awoke from the dream scared but in awe of a name so powerful that satanic forces fled at its mention.”

The next day, Nicole told the women she wouldn’t be able to teach the class and that what they really needed was Jesus.

The women were furious and called her arrogant and stupid.

“For a week thereafter, I endured their insults, along with the expected exclusion from certain formerly friendly circles. But I also felt an incredible relief. I ripped up all my Reiki books and asked God to forgive me. That was over 15 years ago, and I haven’t practiced Reiki since.”

• Nicole is now a freelance writer and homeschooling mother and lives in Northern Ireland.

“
I was desperate for peace and longing for spiritual awakening.”

LADIES’ MAN IS NOW A NEW MAN

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

“I went to church but I loved the things of this world.”

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

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

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

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

Brian says his life changed remarkably after that.

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

“I grew in my faith and today I am



Brian

a new person because of what Christ did in my life on that great day.”

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

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

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



Nicole Watt

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 another 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 forever’. 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.

The cosmic kingdom

BY ROB SKEWES

DURING a 1986 church family camp in the Adelaide Hills, Halley's Comet passed overhead. Many of us, including my wife and children, watched the comet from a hilltop where the night sky was free of city light interference.

Six years later, the breakup of comet Shoemaker-Levy 9 made prime time news. Thanks to an amazing stroke of good timing, the space probe Galileo had captured images of the comet smashing into the planet Jupiter.

In 1997, comet Hale-Bopp appeared above Adelaide's summer holiday skies. Easily seen with the naked eye, my wife and I spent a fun night chasing the best views of this bright and intriguing object.

My own love of rockets and all things outer space began as a child of the 1950s and 60s. My early interests were fanned by comics and sci-fi books like *Simon Black and the Spacemen* by South Australian author Ivan Southall and movies like the 1964 movie adaptation of HG Wells' novel, *The First Men in the Moon*.

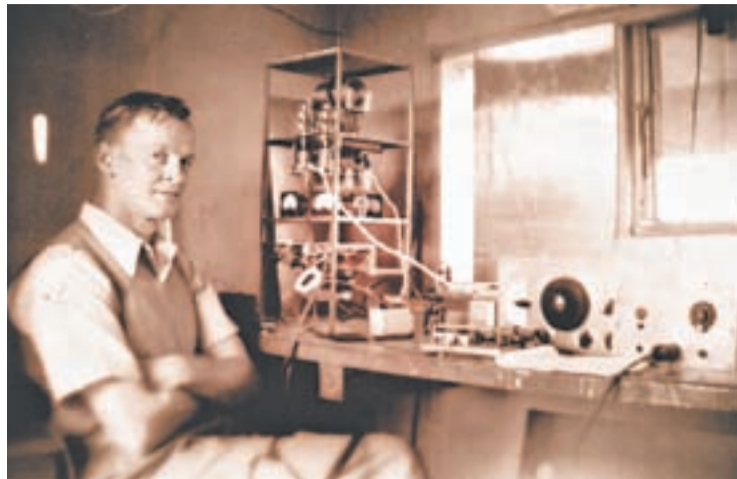
All this was light-hearted fun, but events happening in the background were far more serious. The atomic age had led to fears of nuclear annihilation. The 1962 American blockade of Cuba and the Russian missile crisis had the world on a knife edge.

Many observers of modern culture now recognise that the 1950s and 60s sci-fi books and films of the time were in part an outward expression of inner public fears and anxieties.

For a youngster like myself, such insights were far too sophisticated.

It was an age of invention and new possibilities. In 1957 the arrival of the USSR's satellite, Sputnik, had been tracked by my friend's father, John Watson, using his ham radio and huge backyard antenna. Well-intentioned information on the satellite's signal strength and appearances over Adelaide was relayed to the Russian government, who later responded to John with a written acknowledgement.

Meanwhile, local friends and I, including John Watson Junior, began designing rockets and projectiles. Some were tested recklessly in backyards, one was launched in Adelaide's nearby countryside. Interestingly, the American book *Rocket Boys* and subsequent film *October Sky* tells the true story of Homer Hickman Jr and his friends. Inspired by Sputnik, they actually



John Watson senior, Woodville South SA, backyard shed radio set up used for tracking Sputnik, 1956. Image circa, late 1950s.

built and launched sophisticated homemade rockets. Homer went on to work for NASA.

As a Christian, my faith celebrates the fact that science, mathematics, technology and the like demonstrate that God's universe is founded upon reliable and predictable laws – underlining the Biblical premise that God is not capricious. His fundamental laws are predictable, reliable and unchangeable.

I rest too in the knowledge that the universe, being vast beyond measure, better serves to give us all an insight into our awesome God. His grace is boundless and His forgiveness inexhaustible.

In his book *The Element*, Ken Robinson shares the story of a six-year-old girl, head-down and drawing a picture. When asked what she was drawing, without looking up, the young child replied, "I'm drawing a picture of God." Surprised, the teacher said, "But nobody knows what God

looks like," to which the child said, "They will in a minute."

What a child-like example of sincere certainty to us all. Living on the 'third rock from our sun' – the sun being one of some 100 billion stars within our local Milky Way Galaxy alone – is not for me a theological problem. God's

the artist. And if He chooses to draw the vastness of His creation in this way, that's fine by me. Besides, I know the picture is not yet finished.

Nor am I surprised. After all, obscure people in obscure places doing seemingly obscure things seems to be God's way. Readers might be familiar with the story of Joseph – a story brought to the stage in the musical by Tim Rice and Andrew Lloyd Webber, *Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat*. This modern adaptation draws upon the Biblical narrative where Joseph is sold into slavery by his jealous brothers. Over time, Joseph rose to become the second most powerful person in Egypt.

Then there is Christ himself. Born into a stable, the only recorded locals to acknowledge his birth were a few rough-cut shepherd outcasts.

As for that star seen by the wise men from the East in the Biblical narrative, might it have been a comet? Perhaps it is even one you or I might have witnessed in recent times. Who can say?

In Genesis 26:4 we read of God revealing to Abraham that his descendants would be as numerous as the stars in the sky. And with the aid of the Hubble and the James Webb Telescope, we know now that to be an astronomical number. So, it's good to know that no one need miss out on His cosmic kingdom. So perhaps it's time to aside any doubts, anxieties, lack of self-worth or stubborn resistance to His call. After all, the adventure is only just beginning!

Rob Skewes is a retired primary school teacher and the author of a local history memoir. He has also written several feature articles that have been published in the Adelaide Advertiser and has been interviewed on ABC radio.



John Watson Jr, Woodville South SA, homemade rocket test, Second Valley, near Adelaide, circa 1963.



Simon Black and the Spacemen, Ivan Southall, published by Angus and Robertson, 1958 edition

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.



STOCKPHOTO

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 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 realised 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

I found the way of love

Roy Chitwila was pursuing a woman when he heard the truth that transformed his life from uncertainty and hopelessness to peace, joy and love.

The 30-year-old Zambian business man tells *Challenge News* that he grew up with a single mother, who was always busy working to provide for him and his siblings.

As he grew up, feelings of hopelessness, fear and misery began to build within him. "I had some addictions like stealing and gluttony. I was rude, got into fights and was proud."

Everything changed when he met a woman and asked her out on a date.

"She asked me if I could meet her at church," Roy recalls.

"In pursuit of a lady I heard about Jesus. What led me to follow Christ is the love I experienced and peace when I was among Christians. I asked Jesus to be Lord over all my life and asked God to

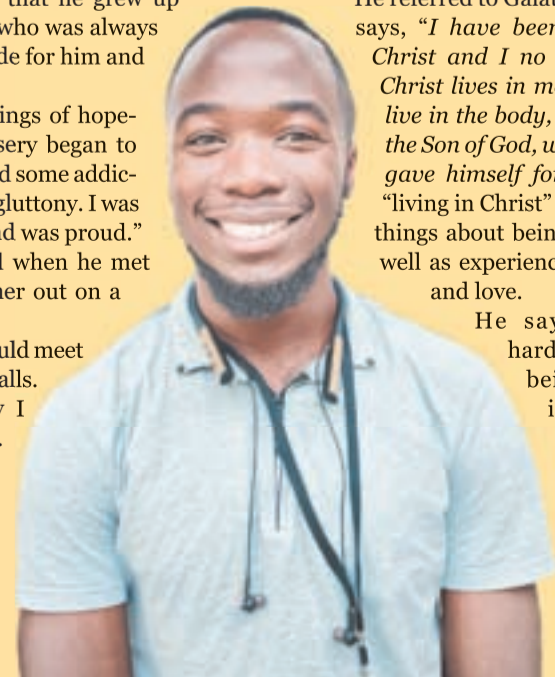
forgive my sins and save me." Since becoming a Christian, Roy's life has changed.

"The Holy Spirit [the inner presence of God in the believer] showed me the way of love, peace, forgiveness and joy."

He referred to Galatians 2:20, which says, "I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me." Roy says "living in Christ" is one of the best things about being a Christian, as well as experiencing Jesus' peace and love.

He says one of the hardest parts about being a Christian is temptation to sin [wrongdoing against God] but he says, "Hope and strength come every time I pray." •

Roy Chitwila



Nuclear engineer has creation down to a science

BY JONATHAN SARFATI, CMI

Dr Jonathan Corrado, a nuclear engineer and senior officer in the US Navy Reserve, says he wanted to be a scientist from the time he was in preschool.

"In preschool I said that when I grew up I wanted to be a scientist because they looked impressive in a white lab coat!" he tells *Creation Magazine*.

But it wasn't just the outfit that attracted him – he found the subject fascinating too.

"I enjoyed science classes because I enjoyed learning how things worked," he shares.

"I gained an appreciation from an early age of how integrated, complex and well-designed the natural world is."

From his observations, he realised there must be an intelligent Creator.

However, as Romans 1:18 says, such general revelation is enough to deny atheists any excuses but is insufficient for salvation.

For that, we need special revelation: "When I was saved, the identity of this intelligent designer was made clear."

He is grateful for Christian parents who laid the foundation for his faith and prioritised church attendance. He was baptised (a public declaration of a commitment to Jesus) at 12 but thinks he didn't really comprehend salvation at the time, "so was not actually saved."

He admits he "fell away from his Christian upbringing in college, focusing solely on academic and professional pursuits and my marriage."

But his life and pursuits changed drastically during military service in the Middle East when, he says, "I was exposed to a side of humanity no-one should have to see."

"A theme emerged that exposed a common, powerful enemy: Satan, giving credence to the spiritual world's reality (Ephesians 6:12) and, thus, the reality of God. This experience caused me to dive deeply and



Jonathan and Erin Corrado and their children (L to R) Vince, Naomi, Scarlett, and Bentley.

gain an unfiltered understanding of what the Bible says.

"The Bible discusses the beginning, the end, our purpose, and our destiny. I have discovered that the Bible is a unified whole, the product of engineered design by a perfect Creator.

"The Bible, down to the smallest letter and part of a letter (Matthew 5:18), is there for our learning, discovery, and amazement. Truly, our God is an awesome God!"

"This deep study brought me to Christ and an understanding of salvation and its implications. Since I've been saved, I can't stop studying the Bible and discovering the complexity and integrity of this perfect book.

"God never gave up on me through my years of disobedience, and now I will not give up on Him."

The Bible teaches that the world is a little over 6000 years old. This is often called a 'young' earth creation model, but it's young only in relation to the dogma of billions of years. In reality, 6000 years is very old.

Jonathan agrees with CMI that one doesn't need to believe in a 'young' earth to be saved. However, there are still huge problems with trying to mix long ages with Scripture.

He points out that long-age views don't come from the biblical text, but must be imposed from outside. This includes the day-age theory, theistic evolution, progressive creationism, and gap theory. However, this affects how one interprets the early chapters of Genesis and spills over into the rest of Scripture.

"If these obviously historical chapters are interpreted as symbolic and/or poetic, then the question becomes: when should Genesis (and really the Bible at large) no longer be interpreted this way? This becomes a subjective determination."

He explains that the grammatical-historical method is the right way

claim."

He also pointed out a key problem with trying to mix long ages with the Bible: "God created everything 'very good' (Gen 1:31), and there was initially no death.

“Death does not occur until Genesis 3 when Adam sinned. But evolution requires the death of countless creatures for today's living world to have arisen. And even non-evolutionary long-age views must have death before sin because fossils of both humans and animals are 'dated' long before Adam.”

Jonathan thinks the best scientific evidence for a 'young' earth is its decaying magnetic field:

“Historical measurements indicate that Earth's magnetic field experiences a loss of approximately 50 per cent of its energy every 1400 years. “Even if past reversals of the field are disregarded, which would have further depleted its energy, the maximum age of the Earth's magnetic field is about 20,000 years. “Any older, the electrical current needed for such a strong field would have been large enough to melt the whole earth.”

But a decaying field is consistent with God creating the earth about

to understand Scripture. This method considers all figures of speech and literary forms in the text as the writer expressed it and how its original readers would have understood it.

"God intended such exegesis, which is why He instructs us to handle the word of truth correctly (2 Tim 2:15).

"When the Lord Jesus quoted the Old Testament, He clearly held to a grammatical-historical interpretation. For example, in Luke 4, when Satan tempted Jesus, He responded by quoting from the Old Testament.

"The Bible, taken in the grammatical-historical sense, clearly indicates a young Earth. I also believe that unbiased scientific inquiry supports this

6000 years ago, with an electrical current that generates magnetism. And this current decays exponentially as per standard electrical theory.

Evolutionary geophysicists must claim that Earth has maintained a magnetic field for billions of years. However, they lack a comprehensive understanding of how this could happen.

"To sustain such a current, an electrical generator – a dynamo – operating within the interior of the Earth would be necessary. But how could such a generator spontaneously form? Despite a century of investigation, conventional scientists continue to be unable to develop a functional dynamo theory."¹

Some Christians mistakenly think quantum mechanics (QM) is problematic for Christianity. I disagree, but wanted Jonathan's take on the issue as a nuclear scientist.

In reply, he quoted one of the world's leading experts, physicist (and atheist) Richard Feynman (1918-1988). Feynman shared the 1965 Nobel Prize for physics for his discoveries in quantum electrodynamics but even he admitted that "nobody really understands quantum mechanics".

"QM's influence on one's perception of God is primarily determined by personal motivations and worldview rather than physics," Jonathan says. "The scientific method has proven to be a highly effective approach for uncovering the mechanisms by which God achieved specific aspects of His creative endeavours.

"In my opinion, quantum physics... is entirely consistent with God's biblical teachings." •

Reference: 1. Humphreys, D. R., Planetary magnetic dynamo theories: a century of failure, Proc. ICC 7(1):9, 2013; digitalcommons.cedarville.edu/icc_proceedings.

Dr Jonathan Corrado (B.S., M.S., M.S. (hons.), M.Div., Th.M., Ph.D.) has degrees in science, engineering, and theology. He has extensive experience in systems engineering and nuclear science. Dr Corrado has authored both secular and creationist scientific papers, theological papers, and a book in his field and one on spiritual deception. He currently works in both the defence and nuclear industries as a manager and engineer and is a senior officer in the U.S. Navy Reserve.

Bird tracks before birds existed?

BY DON BATTEN, CMI

TRACKWAYS preserved in stone in South Africa look very much like those from modern birds. However, deep time 'dating' puts them at 215 million years ago, over 60 million years older than the oldest bird fossil (Archaeopteryx, 150 Ma).¹

The evolutionary story that birds evolved from dinosaurs already had problems – for example, Archaeopteryx, clearly a flying bird, predates any of its supposed ancestors. How could a grandson be older than his grandfather?

The researchers identified six characteristics of the prints that were consistent with birds making them. However, bird tracks that put birds back another 65 million years would compound the problem for the evolutionary story.

Thus, the authors try to downplay the similarity to modern birds: "[the foot type] is not distinctly avian, as it lacks a well-developed digit III metatarsophalangeal pad and preserves no direct evidence of associated hallux [hind toe] impressions."

However, there are modern birds with a three-toe foot design (i.e. no hallux), such as cassowaries, emus, rheas, and bustards.

Also, at least the lesser rhea tends to leave prints without evidence of a "metatarsophalangeal pad"²

Although turkeys have a small hallux, they can leave prints in mud with little evidence for it.³ Furthermore, some of these birds have rather thick digits, which resemble the "morphotype I" prints that the authors don't associate with birds.

The authors speculate that "it is likely that morphotype II tracks were made by a yet-to-be-found tridactyl archosaur." In other words, bird-like feet evolved on a dinosaur-type of creature a long time before birds evolved!

These prints would have formed about 4,500 years ago, during the inundatory phase of Noah's Flood, when the waters were rising, during the first 150 days. The birds made the footprints on sediments already laid down, as they were briefly exposed with the ebb and flow of tides and tsunamis.

This model predicts that we will find footprints lower than any animal that could have made them, thus 'dated' in the evolutionary system as millions of years


older. The fossil record follows this prediction for many types of creatures; these bird tracks are just the latest example.

References and notes:

1. Abrahams, M. and Bordy, E.M., The oldest fossil bird-like footprints from the upper Triassic of southern Africa, PLoS ONE 18(11): e0293021, 2023.
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YOUTH TRUTH

Ninja turtle's transformation

BY MICHAEL ASHCRAFT

His double life as a Christian father and drug user collapsed when Jeff Durbin overdosed on ecstasy.

"I realize I'm dying. I'm dying. This is where it ends, and I recognised that there's no way to control this," Jeff says on a CBN video. "At this point, I have probably limited moments left before I'm gonna pass out."

How did Jeff get tangled up in drugs out of a childhood of discipline and training as a martial arts competitor?

Jeff trained in martial arts from age four to 16.

"I was on a national karate team. I was competing in World Championships, International Championships, National Championships," he says. "That was my whole life."

With five black belts, Jeff played Michelangelo and Donatello for the *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* franchise as well as Johnny Cage in *Mortal Combat*.

Flipping through the TV channels one night, he listened to Billy Graham and accepted Jesus into his heart. He wasn't raised in a Christian home.

"I remember that something had completely changed," he says.

"In my mind, in terms of how I thought about Jesus and the Bible, and I immediately became the person that was interested in reading the Bible and telling people about Jesus."

But the life transformation was only partial. Along with competing in karate, he liked to flirt with girls and indulge his lusts.

"If you would have seen me on a Friday or Saturday night, many times you wouldn't have known I was a Christian because I was living with one foot in the Christian world and one foot in the world," he recalls.

Jeff married his high school sweetheart, but he continued partying and clubbing.

When he tried ecstasy, he liked it and tried it again and again.

He told his wife he was working, but he would take drugs and disappear for a day or two.

"I would do ecstasy, cocaine, alcohol, pills and, whatever was available," he recounts.

He hid his drug use from his wife by telling lots of lies, as she tried to nurture their one-year-old.

Despite the partying life, Jeff was a successful financial planner.

One night while on an ecstasy trip, his heart started racing wildly and his body overheated. Death was coming and he could sense it.

"It was the one moment in that year where there was some clarity about who I was and what was happening, and I remember that I said to God, 'Please, don't kill me yet. Let me come out of this...bring me out of this.'"

Suddenly, his heart slowed.

"It was like I snapped completely out of the most horrible physical experience in my life, where I'm about to die and instantly like it never happened," he says.

But Jeff did straighten up.

Change came when he lost every-



Jeff Durbin. Photo: Facebook/Apoloia Studios

thing in one day: his car got repossessed, his electricity was shut off, an eviction notice was on the door and he was dismissed from his work.

Sitting at home with his wife and young child, he soberly assessed his life.

"All I had in that moment was to listen to God," he says.

God spoke to his heart and Jeff finally listened.

"I just remember being completely broken," he says. "I saw myself for who I was, just a mess — a rebel and, a mess, a liar."

His words of prayer — if there were any at all — were few, according to what he recalls.

"Please save me, save me," he thinks he prayed. "You're the boss. You tell me what to do. Save me from my sin."

That was the beginning of transformation.

"I would have kept going until I was dead in the dirt," he says. "There's no question about that. Why am I not getting drunk today? Because my passions were totally transformed."

Today Jeff is a pastor at the Apoloia Church in Phoenix. He and his wife have been married for 20 years and have a large family.

He's worked as a chaplain in a drug treatment facility.

"It's the good news that I get God," he says. "It's the good news that I have peace with God. It's good news that I have His presence. It's good news that He's fulfilled all His promises."

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

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 anymore.

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 realised 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 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

I carried a lot of anger and bitterness in my heart.

nudge WITH KARL FAASE

More choice is not 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 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, the Truth and the 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.

lifestyle and entertainment



ONE POT ZUCCHINI/MUSHROOM PASTA

THIS is the perfect weeknight recipe. In 25 minutes you get a fresh, homemade meal that's delicious, healthy, and your kids will gladly eat. As an added bonus, there's only a handful of dishes to wash when you're done.

Prep: 10 min
Cook: 15 min
Serves 6

Ingredients

- 4 ½ cups water
- 450g spaghetti
- 450g cremini mushrooms, thinly sliced
- 2 zucchini, thinly sliced and quartered
- 100g ⅔ cup peas
- 2 cloves garlic, thinly sliced
- 2 sprigs thyme

Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper, to taste
½ cup grated Parmesan
¼ cup heavy cream

Method

Pour water into a large stock pot and heat over medium heat. While water is heating up, add spaghetti, mushrooms, zucchini, peas, garlic, thyme, salt, and pepper. Bring mixture to a boil and stir. Reduce heat and simmer, uncovered, until pasta is al dente and liquid has reduced, about 10 minutes. Stir in cheese and heavy cream. Serve immediately. ●

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 modelling. "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 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 bank-



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

ruptcy. 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 principles 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 realise that as long as I am falling forward towards God, He's going to cause what He intended, to prevail." ●



Candace Cameron-Bure.

Faith snippets

Actress Candace Cameron-Bure says her brother, actor Kirk Cameron, gave her a book, *The Way of the Master* by Ray Comfort, that explained why Jesus died on the cross.

"I learned God was going to judge me by His (perfect) standard, not the world's standard.

"It was then that I truly recognised what Jesus had done for me. I had broken the Law and He had paid my fine." ●

THE CHOICE IS YOURS – CHOOSE LOVE!

BY JAMES BURNS

"ALL THE world's a stage, and all the men and women merely players." Many people will know William Shakespeare wrote those words, but did you know that they were spoken by Jacques in *As You Like It*?

In the Netflix film *Choose Love*, it's the viewer who can decide the ending. And it's not just one decision towards the end of the film but a series of decisions throughout the film that you are invited to make that will determine what happens to the characters. And if you decide not to answer, the choice is made for you.

So just like real life, not making a decision actually is the decision, which leads to planned or unintended consequences.

For some people, their idea of God is



Choose Love is available to stream on Netflix.

that if they choose to become a Christian, they will no longer be free to make their own choices in life. That they will be handing control over to Him, with no say in how their life progresses. That He will take over their life like a puppet master.

But that's the exact opposite of what God wants from us. He could have made humans pre-programmed to love

Him – robots living in a world without trouble.

Instead, God left the decision to us, hoping that we would choose to love Him of our own free will, because we don't get genuine love from someone by forcing them to love us.

How good it is to know that it was God who made the first move: "We love Him because He first loved us." (1 John 4:19) It has been said that each one of us has been put on this earth for a purpose. If you're not following the path you know you ought to take, it's not too late to change direction.

But how tragic it would be to have to admit to the words of John Greenleaf Whittier, "For of all sad words of tongue or pen, the saddest are these: 'It might have been!'" Choose love? Choose God's love! ●

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BUILDING BETTER RELATIONSHIPS

Sacred moments over a shared meal

BY ROB FURLONG

AT A recent family gathering honouring a milestone in my life, Karen asked our children and grandchildren if they would like to share something about me. My eight-year-old grandson shot his hand up quickly and exclaimed, "I will!"

He then proceeded to tell us all, with great enthusiasm, about his trip to Adventure World the previous day!

We all howled with laughter at his missing the point, but absolutely loved and delighted in his contribution!

Good things – sacred moments – happen around the meal table.

Eugene Peterson has suggested that the main setting Jesus used for teaching people was not the synagogue or the open air, but around the meal table.

Think about the lives transformed when people spent time with Jesus over a meal!

- An immoral woman received forgiveness when she tenderly wiped the Lord's feet with her tears and hair.
- Zaccheus – shunned by the

community because he was a tax-collector – found salvation and grace when Jesus invited Himself to dinner.

- After saying yes to following Jesus, Matthew threw a party for his fellow tax-collectors with Jesus as the guest of honour. Jesus used it as an opportunity to call them back to God!

Good things – sacred moments – happen around the meal table.

Recently, Karen and I caught up with some old friends over a shared meal. We have known each other for well over 30 years, but because of distance (we live on the other side of the country!) we only get together every six or seven years.

In the three hours or so we shared, we caught up on each other's lives, how our children are doing, listened to the health challenges some are facing, and even discussed our views on a controversial topic!

It was a special time, and I took the



STOCK PHOTO

eating via an online post than enjoying the food and company of the people we're sitting with!

When we live life this way, we miss many good things, and sacred moments, which enrich our lives and relationships.

It was in the context of a meal that Jesus taught His disciples to remember His death for the sins of the world by breaking bread and drinking wine.

The meal was the

Passover, the Jewish commemoration of God's deliverance of Israel from slavery in Egypt.

At various points during the meal, bread was broken and distributed by hand from person to person. "Breaking bread" with another person was regarded as a sacred act. For Jews, it was more than simply the sharing of food – it signified that those sharing the meal were in relationship together and that the guest was under the protection of the host.

What I find really appealing is the meal is conducted in the context of a family who have gathered to celebrate good things and sacred moments, without distraction, together.

Perhaps it's time for you to put aside your phones or other distractions and rediscover the joy of connection around the meal table!

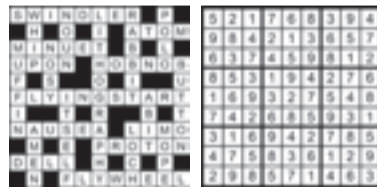
Good things – sacred moments – happen there.

opportunity at the end to thank them for their friendship over many years, and to simply say how special each of them were to us.

Good things – sacred moments – happen around the meal table. Far too many of us believe that our lives are divided into two parts: the "important" and the "unimportant."

We define the "important" as our job, our career, making money, and ensuring we have enough to live a comfortable life whereas the "unimportant" we deem to be "the stuff we need to do to get through life" – things like cleaning the house, preparing meals, etc.

It's sad to see the number of people – when out for coffee, a meal, or gathered around the family table – glued to their phones because they must answer that pressing text or read their friend's post about what they're having for dinner tonight. (I'm amused by that thought – we're more interested in what someone else is



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HOW DO I BECOME A CHRISTIAN?

Anyone can gain the eternal life offered through Jesus Christ

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

OUR PROBLEM: **Separation from God**
"Everyone has sinned. Nobody is good enough because God's standards are perfect" (Romans 3:23) **ADMIT**

GOD'S REMEDY / SOLUTION: **Jesus died on the cross**
"God demonstrates His own love for us in this; while we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8) **BELIEVE**

OUR RESPONSE: **Trust Jesus by receiving Him**
"To all who received Him, to those who believed in His name, He gave the right to become children of God" (John 1:12) **COMMIT**

Here is an example of how you can pray.

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

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

What now?

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

AS A NEXT STEP :

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

* Please tick and write clearly *

Name _____ Phone _____

Address _____

Email address _____

Challenge Literature Fellowship, PO Box 978, Cloverdale WA 6985
info@challengenews.org

All overseas enquiries are referred onto someone in their own country

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 | |



A surprising source of inspiration

BY MAL DAVIES

FOR 2000 years, Christianity has had a huge influence on various parts of our culture, including the arts, literature and music. Not surprisingly, this includes an influence on what could be classed broadly as "popular music" – the music that has "hit the charts" since the arrival of rock 'n' roll in the late 1950s.

Sometimes this is blatantly obvious, especially in songs that either use Bible text directly (such as Boney M's *Rivers of Babylon* based on Psalm 137, or Pete Seeger's *Turn! Turn! Turn!* based on Ecclesiastes 3); or refer to God or Jesus directly (such as Norman Greenbaum's *Spirit in the Sky* or Joan Osborne's *One of Us*).

Other songs, however, are more subtle; sometimes using a phrase from the Bible or alluding to something related to Christianity or the church.

A good example is Van Morrison's *Bright Side of the Road*, in which he sings: "And time seems to go by so fast/ In the twinkling of an eye."

Most listeners wouldn't, I assume, pick up on it, but as he sings this, Van Morrison quotes the Bible.

In 1 Corinthians 15:51-52, the apostle Paul is writing prophetically about the last days and eternal life and he says, "We will all be changed, in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye."

A few other examples of artists referring to the Bible would be Mumford & Sons' *Babel* (referencing Genesis 11), Sia's *Eye of the Needle* (Matthew 19), Hozier's *Movement* (Jonah 2) and Bon Jovi's *Blaze of Glory* (Genesis 4) just for starters.

It's hard to imagine what the world would look like if all the Bible references suddenly disappeared.

Every time you sing about the "broken-hearted", you're quoting Psalm 34:18; "A sign of the times" is from Matthew 16:3; to "harden your heart" is from Exodus 4:21 and the "apple of your eye" comes from Deuteronomy 32:10.

So pay attention when you next sing along to a song – you might be quoting the Bible!

Major Mal Davies is a Salvation Army officer (pastor) in South Australia.

This article was first published in *Salvos Magazine* and is used with kind permission.

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

Just 17 at the time, 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 reporters 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 make her world No. 3 in the rankings.

Already a standout talent, what makes the 20-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 Saviour 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."

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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