

OUT TO FIND ANSWERS

Atheist's pages of questions about faith led to unexpected movie project.

When film director Michael Ray Lewis' wife Kristina started attending church, he challenged her with tough questions about Christianity in order to show her that her beliefs were unscientific. Eventually he compiled a three-page



Michael Ray Lewis

list of questions he had about God, suffering, evolution versus creation, and the Bible, and began to research the answers for himself. He's now making a documentary detailing what he discovered.

In an interview with Reasons to Believe, Michael shares that he previously identified as an atheist.

"I grew up as an unbeliever, never really thinking there was evidence for God and never even really caring to look because I would always see the Christians on the street corners with megaphones that would say, 'You're going to hell,'" Michael explains.

"[That was] my perspective on Christians – what they believed was false because how can Christianity be compatible with science?"

But when Kristina, who attended Sunday School as a child, felt a pull to go back to church, he decided to go along with her – "just to be nice".

As he looked around at the congregation he understood why people attended church but he just didn't believe it could be true. Kristina pressed him on it, asking him why he didn't believe.

"I hit her with the difficult questions – really hard questions that she wasn't able to answer," Michael admits.

He asked questions about evil and suffering, whether evolution was compatible with Christianity, whether the Bible could be trusted and if it was actually inspired by God, and how she knew Christianity was the one true religion.

Kristina wasn't able to answer all his questions and encouraged him to research the answers himself.

One day, Michael was watching videos on YouTube when he came across a video by a Christian astrophysicist.

"It was a video of him going over the creation days and his perspective on the creation days and ... I thought okay, this may have a little bit of merit behind it.

"From there on it was about a three-year journey of me just studying and trying to find answers – trying more so to prove my wife wrong and in the process ended up proving her right."

Michael watched more of the Christian astrophysicist's videos and also read his and other Christian apologists' books.

The deeper he dug, the more he found compelling evidence for Christianity and creationism.

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Meseret Cohen then and now. Photo: supplied

ORPHAN FINDS NEW HOME

BY JANICE TEO

Ethiopian Meseret Cohen was nine when she and her three siblings became orphans.

The death of her parents – her mother from tuberculosis and her father from malaria – were unexpected, sudden and happened within months of each other. The young children, who were living in Addis Ababa at the time, were thrown into chaos.

"My parents' death turned my life and my world upside down," says Meseret, or Messie as she likes to be known. "I suddenly lost hope, security and belief in a future. I was the eldest and so, at the age of nine, I took on the role of motherhood."

In a YouTube video entitled "The Walk" on the Gifted by Grace site, she says that being an orphan hit her hard. "My mother played such a huge role in taking care of us, so there was this sense of hopelessness."

She also found she had some

big questions for God. Messie had grown up in a practising Christian home – her father was an orthodox priest and their family attended church regularly. "But now I couldn't understand what kind of God would let these things happen to me and my siblings," she relates.

"I began questioning the moment my mom passed away and I said I would never step into a church – I said 'God I want to see You do something.'"

The children were sent to an orphanage and lived there for four years, always hoping they would be adopted. But chances were slim; the orphanage preferred to keep families together, and very few people would take on four children.

The orphanage was Catholic and the children were required to attend church every day.

"I didn't want to go to church but I didn't have a choice," Messie shares. "After a while I started to talk to God again. Then the same

questions came up again, why did God let this happen to us, to all the children in the orphanage, and to me?

"God didn't seem to be answering my questions. But with no other choice, I decided to trust Him and prayed that He would bring a great family into my life again."

Four years later, her prayers were answered. The Cohen family, from Busselton in Western Australia, who had a long history of missionary work in Ethiopia, met Messie and her siblings during a volunteer trip, fell in love with them and adopted all four.

Fifteen months later, in June 2009, the children and their adoptive parents landed in Perth.

Messie was 14. "To me it was a miracle," she says. "All praise to Jesus for pulling this off!"

They lived in the town of Dunsborough, where her adoptive parents led a small church.

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Fun for Kids

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OSCAR TSHIEBWE

Out for answers

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Kristina introduced Michael to a theologian (an expert in the study of God). One night, armed with three pages of questions about Christianity, Michael sat down with the theologian and listened as he answered every one of them.

“I got to the end of the page and he looks at me and he’s like, ‘Do you believe it?’ I said, ‘I think I do.’”

On the car ride home, Michael prayed to God: “I’m giving my life to You. I’m going to put my trust in You. I do believe this is true.”

Michael refers to his conversion from atheism to Christianity as not “blind faith” but the result of “a lot of research and a lot of work actually investigating the truth of Christianity.”

“The moment that I gave my life to Christ, I was no longer looking for the evidence to just prove that Christianity was true, but I got excited and I actually wanted to know more about God. So I studied and studied and I would take apologetic courses online and anything I could do to just get as much information in my head as I could because I wanted to know God.



DIRECTOR
MICHAEL RAY LEWIS

I wanted to know attributes of Him and I wanted to know everything that I could.”

He also had a desire to share with people what he had discovered.

Michael is currently directing a documentary called *Universe Designed*, which will explore some of the evidences for God’s existence. He says most Christians and unbelievers do not know the arguments and evidences for the God of the Bible and the film will help summarise this and offer resources for further study and exploration. For the film, Michael has interviewed

Christian theologians, apologists and scientists, including the astrophysicist who played such an instrumental role in Michael’s conversion to Christianity.

“
I’m going to put my trust in You. I do believe this is true.”
”

Coffee Break CROSSWORD & SUDOKU

- ACROSS**
- 1 Winged angels
 - 7 Dog’s sharp bark
 - 8 Causes wheat allergies
 - 10 Cathedral alcove
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 - 13 Too awful for words
 - 16 Canal site
 - 18 Apartment
 - 20 Thyroid enlargement
 - 21 Continental money
 - 22 Staying alive
- DOWN**
- 2 What ‘SOS’ means
 - 3 Interest amount
 - 4 Teller’s boss (4,7)
 - 5 Shortness of sight
 - 6 Criticism
 - 8 Unfairly raise a house price
 - 9 Takes habitually
 - 12 Slender
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 - 15 Boxing prize
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 - 19 Diva’s solo

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“Acorns or chocolate cake?”

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Casandra Diamond. Photo: still from Tedx Toronto video

Saved out of sex trafficking

For nine years, Canadian woman Casandra Diamond was involved in a sex trafficking hell that almost took her life.

“I was trapped,” she tells the 100huntley channel on YouTube.

“I was no more than ‘girl number four,’ valued only for my outward appearance and ability to please customers.

“I regularly saw 12 to 14 men per night. My customers wanted things that they wouldn’t do with someone they loved or respected.”

Casandra says her story is not uncommon. She was neglected and abused as a child, left to roam the streets of her hometown of Scarborough in Canada, leaving her vulnerable to predators.

When she first met the man who would traffic her, he lied and made it seem that he was everything she desired — safety, financial security and finally, someone who loved her. Nothing could have been further from the truth.

“He listened to me, made me feel important and protected.”

Telling her it would only be “for the short term” Casandra’s trafficker persuaded her to sleep with other men and get paid for it. He told her the money was to build herself the future she longed for.

It began in massage parlours, which are legal and licensed in Canada but soon the demands on Casandra went further and further. All through, the only thing that kept her going was her belief in the lies her pimp spun.

But as the years added up, so did her hopelessness. Her captor’s story

changed too. He went from building her up to tearing her down, telling her she was now worthless and unimportant.

Violence was always part of the mix, but Casandra says “violence was so much part of my life that I normalised it and accepted it.

“It wasn’t that my arms or legs were chained but he had me believing that I wouldn’t amount to anything and that I hadn’t a future away from him or outside of the industry.”

She was also terrified that he would come after her or her family if she dared to leave him. Eventually, Casandra found her way out when her trafficker took up with another girl and paid her no more attention.

“But even after leaving him I still had to work at the spas; it took me about eight or nine months to be able to actually get away.”

When she finally had the resources to leave that work behind, Casandra turned to “the one couple in my life... who had always welcomed me into their home.”

Kath and Jim were Christians and it was while she was living with them that she started to explore their faith.

One night she says she “turned her head to heaven” and started talking to God.

“I said, ‘Don’t You see I’m broken and got nowhere else to go? I know who You are, Jesus. I know that You work in the lives of others and I know You love and I need You.’”

She began thumbing through the Bible and stopped at Psalm 102, which is titled: ‘A Prayer of the afflicted, when he is overwhelmed and pours out his complaint before

the Lord’ which summed up perfectly how Casandra felt.

“That psalm was the story of my life and I literally dropped to my knees — but I asked God to kill me!

“I said, ‘Kill me right now or save me right now but, whatever You do, You have to do it right now because I can’t breathe another breath.’”

“I told Jesus that I made my life a mess and that ... I knew He was the only one that could get me out of this situation.

“And it was in that moment — no fireworks — but a nice calm peace came over me and I sat down. That was the start of about four years of reading the Bible for about four to eight hours a day. I couldn’t put it down.

“With God’s help I was able to finally start to explore the meaning of life, what I was missing and what my purpose was.”

That purpose turned out to be founding Bridgenorth, an organisation that advocates for the service and protection of trafficking survivors and aims to end sex trafficking around the world.

Speaking of her new life in Christ, Casandra talks about how hard it was for her to understand the meaning of grace — the unmerited favour of God that requires nothing in return.

“Understanding God’s grace was like a grenade to me. Everything in my life had been so reciprocal — you did not get something without having to give something back and often you had to pay back 10 times more than what was given to you.

“It’s not like that with God’s grace or His church.”

ORPHAN FINDS NEW HOME

• From page 1

“One of the best things that God did was bring me to a Christian family again,” she beams.

She struggled initially with assimilating into a new country — “people would stare at us because we were literally the only four African people in the town!” — but overcame those early challenges and has achieved much. She graduated from Perth Bible College with a Bachelor’s degree in Ministry and launched an organisation called Life After Adoption.

Inspired by mission trips with organisations like Perth Bible College, Messie has gone on to complete a Graduate Certificate in Social Change and Development.

Looking back, the 31-year-old says: “I don’t really know how I did it at the time, and my faith was up and down, but I can now say God was there every minute to provide good friends, an amazing Christian school, great parents and extended family, and a great country.

“I know now that it was God who brought me to this

place and through all the different things that have happened to me. He was looking after me and my siblings through it all.”

Messie remembers one church service in particular that restored her faith.

“It was one of my most memorable experiences with God, the beginning of healing from some past hurts and fears.

“On that night I met God personally, one-on-one. It was a moment of revelation that He truly is a God of hope, faith and love. I now had a new hope and future, so I decided to pursue Him.

“I have a heart and a passion to go back to Ethiopia and share with others who God is and what He has done for me. I am still not sure where God is taking me,” Messie admits, “but I have started on this journey of following Him. I just want to say yes to Him and His work. God has a plan and a purpose for everyone. Don’t give up when you’re facing tough stuff.”

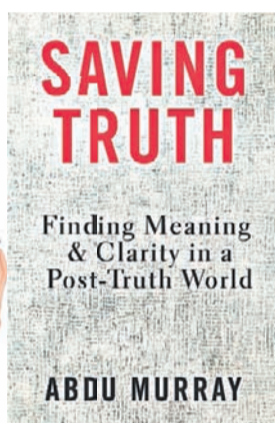
Challenged out of traditional faith

Abdu Murray was proud to be a Muslim. He was convinced Islam was the truth and loved to be able to share his faith with others and challenge what they believed.

He especially loved to challenge people who called themselves Christians because of their family tradition, rather than a decision they had made for themselves. They would attend church at Christmas and Easter but didn't really know what they believed, or why.

"I would often start by asking them, 'Why are you a Christian?'" Abdu explains in an interview with 100 Huntley Street.

"I don't know," was the common reply. He explains that in his experience, many people of all religions had not thought through their worldview.



Christians because of tradition, no one had challenged him for being a Muslim for the same reason!

"John the Baptist did though," Abdu says. He wanted to ensure he believed the truth, not just because of tradition.

"Fully confident that Islam would be true and Christianity would be proven false, I began this journey of trying to understand objectively speaking as much as I possibly could, what's right and what's wrong."

He recalls sitting at his desk surrounded by stacks of books with evidence for both sides. The journey ended up taking him nine years. Looking back now, he says he realised the truth earlier than that but though the answers weren't hard to find, they were hard to accept.

"I honestly believed that, yes, the Bible is the Word of God, that Jesus in that Word said He was the Saviour of the world, Who came to die for the sins of the world and that He rose from the dead — as a matter of history, not opinion ... I had intellectually assented to all of it but I didn't embrace it as true because the consequences would be too much."

Abdu realised that letting go of his Muslim faith would be letting go of his sense of identity.

"In other countries in the world you can lose your life," he shares. "In fact I know of somebody who had to flee to the United States when she became a Christian because of the honour killing that might happen and the threats that were there. There's a tremendous price to pay and for me among the many prices was identity."

Abdu explains that to Muslims, God's greatness is the most important thing.

"I began to see the truth of the Gospel (the Good News about Jesus Christ) and I saw something — God is great because God is a Trinity (the Father, the Son Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit). God is great because He became a man and God is great because He went to the cross and rose from the dead ..."

"The greatest possible being would express the greatest possible ethic — which is love — in the greatest possible way and the greatest possible way we know of to express love is self-sacrifice."

"If you and I can do that, ought not the Creator of all things be able to do that? That's when I realised something — everything I would lose — including my identity — was nothing compared to the One I would gain and that was Christ."

He refers to Romans 5:8, which says: "But God demonstrates His own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us."

"That's when I finally said, 'That's worth believing and that's worth embracing no matter the cost,' but the good news is that it's been a blessing ever since."

Abdu Murray is the author of *Saving Truth*, which provides arguments from a Christian perspective for the foundations of truth and how those foundations apply to sexuality, identity, morality, and spirituality. •

MY FATHER WAS A SERIAL KILLER

When the FBI arrived at Kerri Rawson's house and informed her that her father, Dennis Rader, was the notorious serial killer known as BTK, she felt like the room was spinning.

"I was shaking all over," she writes in her book, *A Serial Killer's daughter: My story of hope, love and overcoming*. "The room turned red, dark splotches came into view. I was falling into a black hole with no idea of how I was ever going to get out."

The father Kerri had grown up with was very different to the man the police were now telling her he was.

In an interview with the Jesus Calling podcast, Kerri describes growing up in a typical American family.

"We went on a lot of family vacations. We went fishing and camping a lot with my dad. We went to church every Sunday with my family... We just didn't know until my father was arrested that he had been living a double life from the mid-70s on."

She says her father was a solid, decent, good husband and father — about 95 percent of the time.

"There were times where he could be emotionally abusive, and there were two times he was physically abusive with my brother. And when you're little and your dad's being a brute, you just learn to adapt around him or follow what your mom is doing. In hindsight, you look back and you realise you were just seeing the very tip of a very deep, insane iceberg."

Dennis committed his first murders in 1974 when he killed a family of four. He took six more lives between then and 1991. During that time Dennis taunted the police and media and claimed responsibility for the murders, calling himself "BTK" for bind, torture and kill. He also claimed to be motivated to kill by a supernatural element he called "factor X".

One of Dennis' victims was Marine Hedge, a grandmother and widow who lived down the street from the Raders.

"Mom and I would wave hello to her on our way to my grandparents," Kerri writes. After the murder, Kerri remembers feeling frightened and wondering if she and her family were safe.

"At the time dad had reassured me: 'Don't worry, we're safe,'" she says.

In 1996 tragedy struck Kerri's own family when her cousin died in an accident. Although she had been raised attending the church where her father served as an usher, she walked away from her childhood faith.

"I couldn't reconcile what happened down the street with God, who I wasn't sure even existed," Kerri admits. Kerri's anger towards God was further fuelled after watching her grandfather die of cancer. At the same time she was facing the stress of university life, difficulties in friendships and struggles with depression and anxiety.

On a camping trip with her father, brother and cousin, Kerri was emotionally and physically exhausted when faced with the dangers of not having enough water, dangerous terrain and being separated from her brother for a time.

"I started praying to God, which is



Kerri Rawson and her father Dennis Rader.
Photo: YouTube

probably the first time in my life I had actually prayed to Him... I said I would accept His Son and asked for forgiveness. And I said I would come back."

When she returned home from the trip, Kerri started reading her Bible and attending Bible studies with her College Campus Crusade for Christ. In college she met Darian and the couple married in 2003 after they graduated.

The following year, Kerri read that BTK had resurfaced after ceasing communication with the police and media in 1979. Now he was taunting them again, claiming responsibility for a murder from 1986. This led to a massive manhunt.

Dennis was arrested while driving home from work on February 25, 2005.

He had been on the lam for 31 years. Kerri told the FBI they must have the wrong man and ran through his credentials: military service, church president, Boy Scout leader, dutiful son.

Later that night the FBI informed Kerri that DNA evidence had led them to her father and that he had confessed to the murders.

A psychologist for Dennis' legal team diagnosed him with narcissistic, antisocial and obsessive-compulsive personality disorders.

Kerri was swept up in a media circus and her identity was ripped from her.

She was no longer Kerri Rawson — she was BTK's Daughter.

In the months following Dennis' arrest, Kerri clung to the hope she found in repeating Bible verses such as Psalm 18:2: "The Lord is my rock, my fortress and my deliverer; my God is my rock, in whom I take refuge, my shield and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold."

Dennis pled guilty and was sentenced to 175 years in prison.

In a letter Dennis wrote to Kerri, he said he spent his time in prison studying the Bible and "working toward Christian light". He shared remorse for his victims and that he sought God for forgiveness.

Kerri was diagnosed with PTSD and started therapy, but even after the worst of her PTSD had been dealt with, Kerri shares that her anger still festered, preventing her wounds from fully healing. But with God's help, she has been able to forgive her father.

"My identity didn't belong to my broken father on earth," Kerri writes. "My identity was meant to rest in the arms of God — my heavenly Father. Who never fails and never gives up." •

“My identity didn't belong to my broken father on earth.”

“When people encounter the true God, they experience a selfquake. That's one way you can tell if you've met Israel's God or simply a figment of your imagination. A made-up God will leave your world undisturbed, conveniently aligning with your priorities without displacing anything, because ultimately you are more glorious than it is. The real God, however, will land in the middle of your life like an elephant crashing through the ceiling, displacing your sin, changing all your priorities, and forcing you to reorient yourself around the weight of glory.” — Andrew Wilson, from *The God of All Things*

Dream instrument amazes tribe

BY MARK ELLIS

In 2013 Caleb Byerly woke up with a start and began to furiously write in his journal everything he saw in a rather unusual dream. For the previous five years, the small-town North Carolina resident had been engaged in sharing the message of the Bible with indigenous people and tribal areas in Southeast Asia and the Pacific Islands.

"In the dream, I was standing on top of this mountain. I was looking out across the mountain, and I saw a tribe of people," he told God Reports.

"We're the Tinananon tribe," they told him. Caleb had never heard of this people group and he began to carefully observe their actions in his dream.

A tribal chief walked to the front carrying a musical instrument. Caleb happens to be an instrument maker by profession, so his eyes "zoomed in" to study the distinctive design of an instrument unlike anything he had ever seen.

It had 30 strings going all the way around the top of a golden bowl, from the outside, crisscrossing in the middle of the instrument. "I suddenly got a full download of everything about this instrument.

"This tribal chief took the instrument and put it on the table. He took two small sticks, and he began to play this instrument. As he played the whole tribe started to dance and worship. It was as if heaven and earth just collided. After that I woke up from the dream."

God has spoken to Caleb through dreams previously, so he meticulously recorded in his journal the name of the Tinananon tribe. He made detailed drawings of the bowl, its dimensions and materials.

"I feel like when God speaks to you, it's an invitation to partner and walk with God. It's not just God commanding you to do things or God just saying do this, do that. But it's the Holy Spirit inviting you into some new journey that He's calling you into. I thought that this would be a really exciting thing to follow with the Lord."

Caleb tried to find out about the Tinananon people group but no one he asked had ever heard of them. He also tried to make the instrument he had seen in the dream but couldn't figure out a process that would work.

"So, I kind of gave up on the whole dream. I felt like I had done my part. I wasn't getting anywhere. So I just kind of gave it up."

About six months later, he saw a man staring at him on a bus on the island of Mindanao in the southern Philippines. They began talking. Caleb felt the Lord urge him to ask the man about the Tinananon.

The man, Manigos, explained that he was born in the Tinananon tribe. He left as a young



(Left) Caleb Byerly and his family and the instrument he made, (right) Caleb with Chief Datu Lipatuan Suhat of the Tinananon tribe and the Salimbaa and (below) Caleb with the Tinananon people.



man and went to Davao City, the largest city on the island of Mindanao. He came to know Jesus while he lived in the city, then God called him back to his tribe through a dream.

In the dream, Manigos had gone back to evangelise his people – with Caleb!

"He saw me in his dream," Caleb said, "and I came and joined him. He and I began to minister and bring the good news of Jesus to his people."

They were filled with wonder and awe at the way God brought them together. Manigos invited Caleb to visit his tribe, which Caleb agreed to do, but first he wanted to make the instrument he had seen in the dream.

"The Lord gave me divine wisdom, gave me insight on the process of what to do ... with the help of the Holy Spirit and my wife, we were able to get it. I finally made this instrument!"

He put the strings on it for the first time. "I tuned it up the way I heard it in the dream. I got the two little sticks and I started to play it. It was that same sound I heard in the dream."

Although his wife was eight months pregnant, she and Caleb felt that he should return to the Philippines immediately, and take the instrument with him.

There Manigos took him by motorbike and on foot to the undeveloped mountainous area where the Tinananon lived.

When the chief saw the instrument he was absolutely astonished. He summoned other elders and they walked around it incredulously, pointing at it, saying "salimbaa."

The chief informed Caleb there were different musical instruments for each of their gods. "They have the god of the tree, the god of the stone, god of the

river. And they're not necessarily gods, but they believe that the one true God or the Creator has sent down angels to guard these different things."

The tribe worshipped each god with a different musical instrument but somewhere between 100 and 150 years ago, there was a tribal war and their most valuable musical instrument that

worshipped the God of all gods was taken away from them – the salimbaa.

"And when that instrument is redeemed back to them, that is going to be the sign that God is coming back again. Because God is going to come down from heaven, and He's going to call all the righteous people to Him," Caleb explained.

Their name for the God above all gods is Manama.

"They started praying to Manama...and they dedicated this instrument back to God."

Caleb and Manigos stayed with the chief, Datu Lipatuan Suhat, for three days, praying with him and telling him about Jesus.

Not much changed, Caleb told God Reports. "After we left, we didn't return for a few months, but during that time, within a month or two, the chief had an encounter with Jesus, and the Lord spoke to him and he wrote everything out. That is when he gave his heart to Jesus."

On the second visit, Caleb asked Chief Suhat how he could help the tribe. "I want you to help us translate the Bible into our language," he replied.

In January 2015, Caleb arranged for Translators Association of the Philippines to meet all 50 chiefs of the Tinananon tribe; and they agreed to let the translators begin their project.

Chief Suhat passed away in 2015, after the translation project began, only a year after Caleb arrived with the salimbaa.

"It was amazing to see that the last year of his life, that he got to see this, and that he led a lot of his people to a place of receiving Jesus ... I saw that he was a lover of Jesus. And he led his tribe to receive Jesus. And he gave us the complete open door to bring the gospel [the good news of God's salvation]."

Since then, there have been many churches planted among the Tinananon.

"I felt like the Lord had arranged everything," Caleb says, "in such a perfect way of organising everything, just perfect timing. It was such an amazing series of events that took place that I couldn't take any kind of credit for it."

Caleb and Gladys Byerly are the founders of Evergreen Missions.

Their focus is mostly on mentoring and discipling indigenous leaders to bring the good news of Jesus to their own people.

“It was such an amazing series of events.”

LEAP OF FAITH

A Joyful 'toon by Mike Waters



Salvation is found in no-one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we much be saved.

– ACTS 4:12 NIV

nudge

WITH KARL FAASE

Christianity is unique

THERE are many religious practices and beliefs around the world that overlap with the Christian faith at several points. The unique features are often only understood by those who are searching and seeking after the divine, and comparing and contrasting different approaches to belief.

American pastor and author Erin McManus was one of those who was seeking spiritual answers.

In the end, he said of this process: "Every religion was me chasing after God, and the message of Jesus was God chasing after me."

Here is a unique feature of Christian belief. It is not so much us striving to find God, but rather God reaching into history, humanity and our lives, and drawing us to Himself. This, combined with grace (the undeserved kindness of God) freely given to all who respond, are Christianity's unique features.

Nature's patterns point to God

Jonathan Safarti speaks to geography expert Dr Sarah Buckland

Those who think geography is just about finding places on an atlas or memorising longitude and latitude haven't met Dr Sarah Buckland.

Sarah, a lecturer and researcher at the University of West Indies, says geography has helped her understand both human and natural environments.

She strongly disagrees that science and the Bible conflict.

She explains: "As I study science, geography is just the world's complexity. All we scientists can do is discover what has already been created — or manipulate, synthesise, or channel aspects of creation in order to problem-solve and propose theories on how things work.

"As Psalm 111:2 implies, scientific study should naturally bring any honest person closer to God. Without God, there could be no scientific exploration."

Furthermore, scientific discoveries point to nature's underlying regularity, created by the Divine Lawmaker (Psalm 119:91).

Sarah elaborates: "In my research on historical drought patterns in some of Jamaica's micro-climates, I found that very distinct inter-annual signals were evident even at the micro-climate scale (rainfall fluctuations with interspersed drought occurrences). These patterns closely reflected larger-scale climate variability modes (eg. El Niño/ La Niña Southern Oscillations), along with variations caused by local conditions.

"The existence of distinct patterns that persist across different scales is a testament to our natural world's very precise order and balance. It could never have arisen by chance.

"Finding any precise pattern in nature is a loud testament to the God of order who upholds the world with His Word (1 Corinthians 14:33, Colossians 1:17)," Sarah says.

Sarah points out other geographical discoveries that support the Bible's accuracy.

"In Job 38:16, God asks Job: 'Have you entered the springs of the sea? Or have you walked in search of the depths?'"

"The historical date of Job's writings is about 1400 BC. At that time, human imagination could never fathom today's oceanic exploration. Even before 1930, little was known about the ocean floor. It was not until 1973—over 3000 years after Job was written—that under-sea springs were directly observed."

This example is one of Sarah's favourites as it exemplifies the Bible's robustness as a basis for further scientific discovery:

Matthew Fontaine Maury, the author of the first modern oceanography textbook, used the Bible for scientific hypotheses. After reading



Dr Sarah Fey Buckland. Photo: Supplied

Psalm 8:8's 'paths of the seas', he discovered ocean and air currents, which revolutionised travel.

The Bible's geographical accuracy is so overwhelming it turned Scottish archaeologist Sir William Mitchell Ramsay (1851–1939), from an atheist and a sceptic to a believer in Christ.

Sir William had tried disproving the Bible's account of the Apostle Paul's travels in the book of Acts. But his research showed every detail was so accurate that he ended up concluding

Luke (who wrote Acts) was one of the greatest ancient world historians.

Eventually he converted to Christianity, shocking the intellectual world by doing so.

Sarah, however, was born into a Christian home with both parents active in Christian work.

"My family cultivated a prayer and Bible study environment with nightly devotions. I quickly grew in my love for God. By the age of four, I desired to be baptised [immersed in water as a symbol of dying to one's old life]."

"But it was not until age eight that my parents felt I was old enough to understand what I was doing. I vividly recall that Sunday, 2 December 2001, when I received Jesus as my Lord through faith. I experienced a peace and joy I knew to be God's presence. Since that moment, I have experienced many lessons in my spiritual journey."

Many people, misled into thinking that evolution is a proven fact, attempt to 'pretzelize' Scripture to fit. But Sarah warns that evolution undermines three fundamental Christian teachings: "The salvation message, the Bible's historical accuracy explaining this message, and Jesus'

omniscience and sovereignty."

First, she points out that the Gospel message of "salvation from sins is only through Jesus dying on the cross and His Resurrection. But in evolutionary theory, death pre-existed original sin in creation, dictating that death could not be sin's penalty. Evolution steeply undermines the reason for Jesus' suffering and death in our place."

Second, evolution undermines the reliability of biblical history: "Evolutionary theory posits that human ancestry cannot be traced directly to only one man, contrasting with the biblical account of a literal Adam and Eve.

"This compromised belief undermines Jesus' entire genealogy... Jesus' human ancestry traces back to Adam and the patriarchs."

Finally, evolution undermines Jesus' authority, omniscience, and thus His deity:

"In several Bible passages, Jesus specifically referenced patriarchs and events, including the murder of Adam's son Abel (Luke 11:51), Noah and the flood and ark (Luke 17:26-27), and how man was created at 'the beginning of creation' (Mark 10:5-9).

"If the Genesis account were fictional, one would conclude that Jesus was deceiving His listeners or had limited knowledge."

Sarah points out that only the true history of the world can solve racial problems; evolution, on the other hand, exacerbates them:

"Genesis clearly states that all human beings were created in God's image. All persons being created equal and endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights has formed the foundation for most positive anti-racial campaigns, including those by William Wilberforce and Dr Martin Luther King Jr.

"The Bible clearly teaches that God created humanity from 'one man' (Acts 17:26). While many secular movements depict Christianity as racist, the evolutionary worldview inherently has the most racist roots, both philosophically and in practice," Sarah explains.

"Biological evolution requires an evolutionary 'progression' from the first 'primitive' humans to modern man. Unfortunately, Darwin and the early Darwinians point to an African origin of the most 'primitive' humans.

"Conversely, Europeans were considered the highest-evolved race. This philosophy influenced some of the most racist movements, including Hitler's Nazism.

"Once again, the Bible's unchanging doctrines always provide the most ethical basis for all aspects of life, in contrast to ever-changing evolutionary 'science'," Sarah concludes.

“Without God there would be no scientific exploration.”

Not so bird brained after all!

PETER'S CORNER

HOW is your memory? Did you forget where you put your car keys or phone this week? Or like me, forget that your cup of tea was in the microwave?

Do you know that there is a creature that can remember where it hid 30,000 items, up to nine months ago? There is a bird, the Clark's nutcracker, which does exactly that.

The bird is native to the Rocky Mountains area of North America, and has the beak size and shape to extract seeds from pine cones



Clark's Nutcracker

of the white bark pine. It can carry up to 150 seeds at a time in an expanding pouch just under its tongue.

But what happens next is amazing. The nutcracker buries them 3 cm deep (perfect depth for germination) in soil, in bundles of about 10, in 3,000 places all over an area of about 15 kilometres in size. This process is repeated over and over thousands of times, to store the seeds that will sustain the bird through the long winters. But oh no! Problem! The ground and the seeds become covered by a blanket of snow for months during the winter!

It's no problem. The bird can still find them! In the winter, when it needs to remember the 3,000 locations, the bird's brain physically swells as it works to recall the exact locations. The brain later returns to normal "summer size."

Think about how this bird could evolve to do such mental feats. It needs truly amazing memory up front in order to stay alive. There is not much value in "evolving" a brain that can remember where only the first seed store is, while winter has four months to run! That brain will not survive, and the alleged evolution has to start all over again.

It is not evolution. God told us how it happened in the Bible. Truly all creatures – including humans – are fearfully and wonderfully made (Psalm 139:14) and we are grateful to be able to say to Him, thank You!

I hope these words help you, as they have me, in your journey to surely trust the Bible and the Creator. I gratefully acknowledge the below references for background information for this article. •

Masters of Memory. Article by D. Blount, Creation Magazine 43(3) 2021, pp 12-14.

Leonard, P. How Clark's Nutcrackers find buried seeds under a blanket of snow. allaboutbirds.org, 14 Apr 2016.

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

Dar and Winny

by Richard Gunther

16

LIFE'S BIG QUESTIONS ACCORDING TO DAR AND WINNY:

1. Who am I?
A monkey. Intelligent pond scum.

2. Why am I here?
To eat, reproduce and die. No reason at all.

3. What is the purpose of my life?
It has no purpose. What a stupid question!

4. Where do I go after death?
Who knows! Who cares!

FOSSIL FAIRYTALES

"Once upon a time, there was a fish. One day it died, and sank to the sea floor, where it was gradually covered by sand and dirt, and soon it became a fossil."

Reality check! When a fish dies, it floats. It starts to decay and it floats. Then bacteria and scavengers destroy it.

So it is nonsense to claim that dead fish sink to the sea floor. So how can a fish become a fossil? Here's the reality.

There has to be a disaster. Waves and waves of water full of sediment and sand and dirt, suddenly overwhelming the fish, and burying it very quickly, and sealing it from air, so it cannot rot.

Most fossils are the result of a global flood, which buried billions of creatures and plants, and this flood is described in Genesis.

GET ANSWERS FOR YOUR FAMILY

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YOUTH TRUTH

DRAGGED DOWN BY MY ADDICTION

Isaiah Ramos

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

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

At a young age Isaiah was exposed to masturbation and pornography. He remembers going to church with his mother but at the same time “messing around with the young girls

in the church and just living a life of lust and secret sin”.

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

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

After graduating high school, Isaiah started pursuing a boxing career, which led him to a new obsession: gambling.

“When I got involved with gambling, it affected me so much. It just made me depressed. It made me angry.”

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

“I knew that I needed a relationship with God, I just didn’t know how to do it.”

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

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

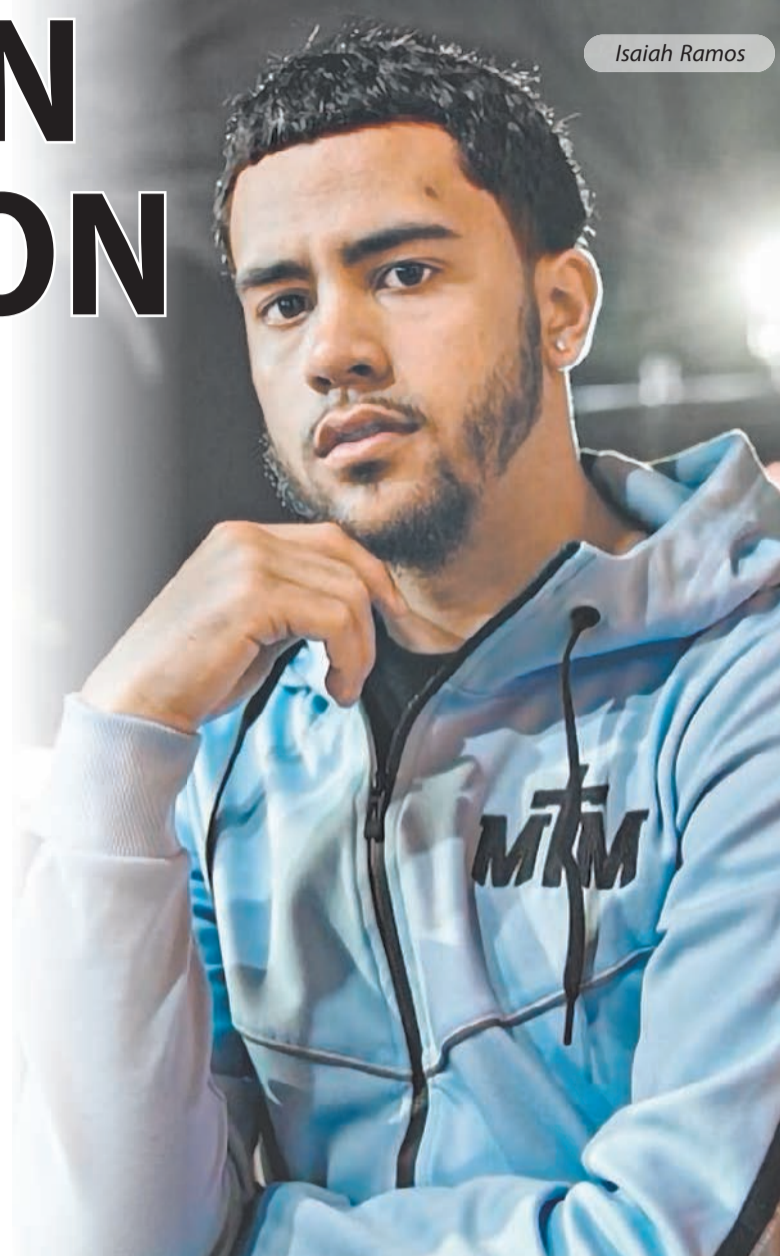
“It was my first time in a long time that I prayed. I cried out to God, ‘Lord let me sleep. Let me fall asleep without having to smoke, without having to have sex, without having to pop pills.’ And He answered my prayer. I didn’t just fall asleep, I slept like a baby.”

In North Carolina, Isaiah attended church with his aunt. He recalls tears streaming from his face as he watched people worshipping God.

The pastor preached about all the questions Isaiah had about God and how to have a relationship with Him.

“There was a man there that was sharing his testimony about how the Lord delivered him from his life of sin and that was a message of hope for me.

“It brought me peace. It was the



Help available for youth mental health

ACCORDING to a study by Springtide Research Institute*, Gen-Zers are more likely to report mental health concerns such as anxiety and depression than other generations. However, it also shows that faith could be part of the remedy.

In the study, 57 percent of all 13-25 year olds and 73 percent of religious young people agree that their religious or spiritual practices positively impact their mental health. Almost three quarters of those surveyed who pray daily say they are flourishing, compared to 57 percent who never pray. Of the young people who identify as “very religious”, 74 percent say they agree or strongly agree that they are “in good physical and emotional condition,” compared to less than half (42 percent) of non-religious young people.

Seventy percent of those who are currently connected to a spiritual or religious community say they have “discovered a satisfying life purpose,” compared to 55 percent of those who no longer connected to such a community.

Of those who feel highly connected to a higher power, 42 percent say they are “flourishing a lot” in their emotional and mental health, compared to 16 percent of those who say they do not feel at all connected to a higher power.

However, the report says, “Young people make it clear that religion feels toxic when it is primarily presented as a pressure to live up to difficult expectations.”

Thankfully, that is not the purpose of Christianity. In fact it is precisely because we can’t live up to difficult expectations that Jesus came to earth. God’s standards are impossibly high because He is holy and perfect. But instead of punishing us for all the ways we miss the mark (sin), His Son Jesus took the punishment. He was crucified on the cross to pay the penalty, then resurrected three days later, defeating the power of sin and death.

Why would He do that? Because He loves you.

Maybe it is in understanding and receiving this love that young people are flourishing and finding a satisfying life purpose.

When you accept Jesus’ sacrifice, ask for forgiveness for your sins and choose to follow Him, God sends His Spirit to live inside you. The Holy Spirit is also known as the Comforter. He gives us wisdom, strength and peace and helps us to resist the temptation of sin. Anxiety and depression and other mental health issues are overwhelming, exhausting and scary. Wouldn’t it help to know you are never alone and that you have a Comforter strengthening you? If you would like this comfort right now, turn to the *How do I Become a Christian?* box on page 11.

* Springtide’s findings come from a survey of nearly 10,000 young people in the U.S. ages 13–25 conducted between November 2021 and March 2022 and contain a margin of error of plus or minus 3%. The report also includes qualitative data from interviews with over 100 young people.



Stock photo

“**In that moment I knew there was hope.**”

truth, the good news that God was offering me a relationship with Him – a new life ... that day I made the decision, I said, ‘God, I’m gonna give You my life.’”

When the pastor invited anyone who wanted to get baptised (submerged in water as an outward display of dedication to God) to come forward, Isaiah walked to the front of the church.

“I laid my life down and I knew it was a very major decision. I was ready. I wanted a new life. I wanted to change ... in that moment I knew there was hope. I knew that God was gonna set me free.”

After that Isaiah began praying and reading the Bible every day.

“God began cleaning out my heart little by little, stripping away sins. He set me free from my pornography addiction ... He just began working

in my heart; like I had no desire for it. I remember the same thing [happened] with weed. I wouldn’t smoke because God was that peace that I needed.”

Isaiah admits it wasn’t a perfect journey and some sins were easier to give up than others.

“I said, ‘God I am gonna stop doing everything else but I’m not gonna stop having sex.’”

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

“I didn’t know how to do it, but I told God I was willing. God began working in my life and I began walking in purity.”

Isaiah now shares his story in the hope it will help other people who are struggling.

“Jesus is the only way,” he attests.

“He’s the only way to true peace. He’s the only way to true love. He’s the only way to find your purpose. He is the only way to heaven.”

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

YOUTH TRUTH

LOOKS CAN BE DECEIVING

When Natalia Lavaggi faced multiple health issues, she looked for natural and alternative ways to heal herself. Eventually she turned to practices that at first appeared innocent, but she soon discovered that looks can be deceiving.

In a video on Sarah Nowbloom's YouTube channel, Natalia says she had always been a "spiritually sensitive" person. Her search for healing led her to the Law of Attraction and New Age practices like tarot card reading, channelling and energy healing like reiki.

Natalia also started using marijuana for pain relief, but became addicted to it.

As she progressed deeper into the New Age movement, she also started practicing as an energy body worker.

Natalia met other people who were also involved in these practices. One time her mother, who is a Christian, asked her whether she involved Jesus in these meetings. But Natalia brushed off her mother's words.

When Natalia was a child she had found comfort in praying to Jesus when her home life was chaotic.

"I would speak to God openly. (I knew) that He was there and that I wasn't alone," she remembers.

But as a teenager Natalia no longer felt a personal connection to God and drifted away from Him. She had never been able to fully reject the



and different gurus and seeking advice and doing the tarot card readings and smudging my home and doing affirmations, but nothing was working... I felt so emotionally and mentally and physically and spiritually exhausted."

None of the healers could give her an answer as to why she was being choked in her sleep or why she never felt at peace.

Natalia began have a recurring dream. In the dream, she and her husband were being chased by a demonic entity, which kept growing bigger and bigger. When

they reached a dead end, her husband asked her, "Why is it that you're not afraid? What do we do?"

"I would say, 'This thing can't touch us – just watch.' And I would turn and I would look at this demonic entity, which was the most horrible-looking thing anyone could imagine, and I would put my hand out and a beam of light would come out and I said at the same time, 'You cannot pass and you cannot touch me in the name of Jesus Christ.' And a light beam would shoot out of my hand and shatter the demon into billions of pieces."

When Natalia shared the dream with her mother, she encouraged her daughter to return to Jesus.

The next day, Natalia found her old Bible that she had not read for 13 years.

She cried out to God and asked Him to reveal the truth about Himself.

"In that moment I felt such a personal love come into the room and envelop me. It wasn't anything like the meditations that I did, because meditating would allow for me to feel empty and void... this love was so personal, so tangible. It felt like a blanket and the loving arms of a Father just wrapped around me."

Natalia then watched a video on YouTube about an ex-New Age healer who now follows Jesus as his Lord and Saviour. He had experienced similar sleep paralysis and nightmares to Natalia and when he called on the name of Jesus, they stopped.

He said Jesus is the answer and the Bible is the truth. As he said that, Natalia felt instantly convinced.

"In that moment I fell on my knees and I thanked God so much for being so bold and so loving and for answering my prayer instantly in such a personal way ... I gave my life to Jesus Christ that night and I've never looked back since."

existence of Jesus, however, and thought of Him as an "ascended master."

After Natalia married and had a baby, she experienced post-natal depression and had

no desire to use the New Age practices she had before. She had also stopped smoking marijuana while pregnant and breastfeeding but, after weaning the baby, she began smoking again. This time, she felt overwhelming anxiety.

In an attempt to heal the anxiety, she started using the New Age tools again. But nothing alleviated her anxious thoughts. She also began experiencing sleep paralysis.

"I would be in a half-awake half-sleep state, lying in bed and I could feel a weight on my body and I would be choking in my sleep," Natalia recalls.

"I was meditating, I was going to see different healers and different shamans

“
This love was so personal.”



Miss Germany's focus of faith

Kira Geiss, reigning Miss Germany, sits on a pew in the Collegiate Church.
Photo: Marijan Murat/dpa (Photo by Marijan Murat/picture alliance via Getty Images)

On March 5, 20-year-old Kira Geiss was named the new Miss Germany, in a pageant that has traded in its sexist focus on swimsuits and modeling careers for a much more empowering emphasis on leadership, responsibility and community engagement.

Kira, who won 25,000 euros towards a project of her choice, is also atypical, in that she is an outspoken Christian who describes Jesus as the centre of her life and wants to use her platform to "serve God and my neighbours".

The Evangelical Missionary School student's response to her win on Instagram was: "Thank you Jesus for many new doors and such great people by my side."

Kira is passionate about reaching her fellow Gen-Zers with the gospel [good news that Jesus saves us from our sins] because it has made such a difference in her own life.

She grew up in a loving home, in Ravensburg, Swabia, with no interest in Christianity or much exposure to it, except through an annual Christmas shoebox collection, through Samaritan's Purse; and the occasional visit to church.

However, when she was a young teenager, Kira got into some bad company and began experimenting with drugs and alcohol.

Things went downhill for her. "Until I was 16, I was in groups of friends that were difficult," she explained to German website Jesus.de. In an environment that glorified alcohol and drugs, she lived in relationships "that also left scars in the heart".

After graduating from school, she decided to break with her former circle of friends. Then two girls invited Kira to a Christian youth group, which she initially went to just for the fun and friendship, but then found a mentor and embraced the Christian faith.

"When I was at the bottom, youth group built me up. Today I see it as a treasure to know what it is like not to be a Christian, to be able to interact with those who do not have a faith," she told Evangelical Focus Europe.

"For a very long time I didn't want to have anything to do with the whole Christian faith. I even found it rather strange. And I think a lot of people feel that way, just like I did back then.

"This image of the church: cold, outdated,

dreary, stuffy, serious and boring is deeply rooted in us. And I never thought that my mindset would change so much. But when I started to get involved with the faith and the church, I was surprised by the opposite," Kira shared on Instagram.

"Church is multicultural and colourful, I can dress wildly, dance and be crazy!"

She also attended evangelical youth camps with friends, where she learned to appreciate nature, face-to-face socialising and warm friendships. In her adopted home of Magdeburg, Kira then helped found a youth church, which works to ensure that young people are supported spiritually, socially and creatively.

Today, for her, "Only Jesus is the centre of my life", as she declares on Instagram, and belief in God is "a great treasure, my source from which I draw energy when I'm feeling bad."

"I would like to be a voice for the church. I love her more than anything and she is my home. I want to say to young people, 'It's cool to be a Christian. Church can also be fancy.'"

During her reign the new Miss Germany wants to focus on youth work and the healthy use of social media.

"I actually want to work towards young people spending less time in digital media. It's dangerous if we spend more time with friends in the digital world than in the real world. Our emotional nervous system just dies down over time," she believes. She also wants to represent women and young people in policy making.

On the Miss Germany website, the aspiring deaconess describes herself as a person for whom it is "incredibly important" to "do good things for my fellow human beings and to integrate positivity and forbearance into my everyday life".

Instead of a beauty pageant crown, she received the "Female Leader Award" and access to resources and contacts to make her dream of a Germany-wide platform for her youth work a reality.

The Bible verse 1 Timothy 4 verse 12 could become Kira's motto: "Let no one despise you for your youth, but set the believers an example in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith, in purity."



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"To be a Christian means to forgive the inexcusable because God has forgiven the inexcusable in you." – C.S. Lewis

BUILDING BETTER RELATIONSHIPS

We are not wired for loneliness

BY ROB FURLONG

THE 2018 Australian Loneliness Report revealed that one in four Australians said they felt “lonely at least once a week” with one doctor commenting that “chronic loneliness is on the rise in Australia.”

Five years on, nothing has changed – a recent news report I listened to again confirmed the one in four figures.

As this column is about building better relationships, for the next couple of months I want to talk about the importance and benefits of friends and friendships.

Why do we need friends?

My simple answer is, we are not wired for loneliness.

The Bible states that when God created men and women, He “made them in His image.” What that means is that like God, we are creative, moral, and personal beings. He made us with the capacity for relationships with other human beings!

You may not be a believer in God but before you dismiss the idea that

we are relational beings, the report I mentioned above stated in its opening lines that, “our need to connect with others is deeply hardwired (and goes right back to when we’d hang out in groups so we could survive).”

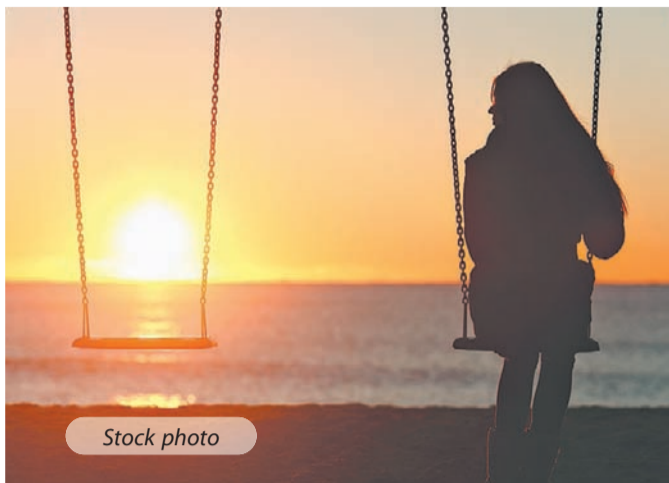
Whether you factor God into the equation or not, it is pretty much universally recognised that to be human is to connect with and love other people.

Put more bluntly – you are not an island – you need other people in your life.

The next thing I would say in answer to the question, “why do we need friends?” is that loneliness is not a good thing.

King Solomon put it very succinctly when he said, “Two are better than one.”

In Solomon’s day it was common



Stock photo

Australians per day die by their own hand, so let me ask you a question – who is there in your life that you can call on when you “fall face down into a ditch” in life?

If you can’t answer that question, please do everything you can to try and find a friend.

More importantly, I believe many of us can make positive steps by reaching out to someone we know

to travel at night to escape the heat of the harsh, Middle Eastern sun. But travelling at night, especially alone, held some serious dangers.

Deep ditches were dotted here and there along the roads and extremely difficult to spot in the dark. It was not uncommon for the unwary traveler to fall face down into one of them. Fall into one of those on your own and you were in serious trouble – you may not be able to get yourself out! But as Solomon observed, travelling with a friend gave you the security of knowing there was someone there who could pull you out should you come to grief.

Robbers were another danger. Facing one alone was a serious challenge, but travel with a friend and together, “two can resist them.”

Loneliness is not a good thing – in fact, it’s downright dangerous. 8.6

is lonely, or who we are concerned about.

A great initiative with this is the “RUOK Day” which encourages those of us who know people who are lonely, or we are concerned about to reach out to them and just ask, “Are you ok?” By the time you read this, the annual “RUOK Day” will have passed, but it is never too late to reach out to someone in friendship or to check on them.

Asking someone if they are ok can feel awkward and challenging, but all it requires is that you care enough to approach the person, and a willingness to listen if they open up to you. Some tips on how to do this can be found at the RUOK website: ruok.org.au

We are not wired for loneliness – it’s not a good thing – so reach out to someone today. Don’t do life alone! •



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

I have prayed the prayer [ABOVE]

* Please tick and write clearly *

Name _____ Phone _____

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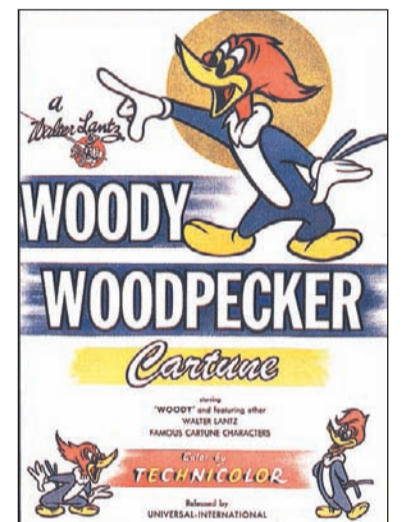
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All overseas enquiries are referred onto someone in their own country

Turning lemons into lemonade

DO you ever run into roadblocks on your life journey? Do you ever get frustrated when things go wrong and your plans don’t work out as anticipated? What seems like a detour can lead you straight to your destination.

Grace and Walter Lantz rented a rustic wooden cabin in the forest for their honeymoon. At the first dawn there, a woodpecker started its pounding on the roof. The newlyweds couldn’t sleep for the noise. But by the time they returned from their honeymoon, they were inspired to create a cartoon character, “Woody Woodpecker.” Walter drew the pictures. Grace became Woody’s voice. Years later, at their 50th wedding anniversary, Grace remembered the problem of the noisy woodpecker and said, “It was the best thing that ever happened to us.”



(Photo by LMPC via Getty Images)

In 1859, a New York chemist travelled to Pennsylvania, to watch the drilling for oil. He was Robert Chesebrough who watched as the oil drillers cursed a colourless oily residue that stuck to their drills. Though it was a problem that gummed up the works, the oil workers smeared this stuff on their cuts and burns. It helped to heal. Chesebrough took this oily residue back to New York. By 1870, he was manufacturing what he had developed from that oily problem. He called it Vaseline Petroleum Jelly.

A violent storm posed a problem for the captain of a slave ship. He was John Newton, born in London on July 24, 1725. He transported slaves from Africa to America. On March 10, 1748, a storm frightened him so badly that he called out to God for mercy. The problem of the storm started a storm in his heart. He remembered his childhood faith. Finally, that inner storm gave him the opportunity to give up the slave trade. At age 39, he became a priest of the Church of England. He wrote a hymn called *Amazing Grace* to tell how God’s love changed his life. Two hundred and fifty years later people are still singing it. That storm provided showers of blessing in his life and for many others in the years to come.

In each of these instances, a negative was turned into a positive.

Whatever difficult situation or trial you are facing at the moment can become an opportunity to learn and grow, give the problem to God and see what amazing things He can do with it!

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 - the Bible Project on YouTube .	
Alpha Film Series on Youtube - an online introduction to Christianity.	
For kids - Superbook Kids Bible, videos and games app	
Comic book Bible online- goodandevilbook.com	
More inspiring faith stories - back issues of Challenge News at challengenews.online	

Oscar Tshiebwe #34 of the Kentucky Wildcats lays the ball in against Nae'Qwan Tomlin #35 of the Kansas State Wildcats during the first half in the second round of the NCAA Men's Basketball Tournament at The Fieldhouse at Greensboro Coliseum on March 19, 2023 in Greensboro, North Carolina. (Photo by Jared C. Tilton/Getty Images)



INSPIRED BY HIS DAD

When Oscar Tshiebwe moved to the USA from the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) to play basketball, his high school coach ridiculed him.

"You are the worst player we ever had," he told him.

But Oscar had faith he would succeed. His coach laughed when he told him he would one day play for Kentucky.

But he did from 2021 and last year he was the consensus National College Player of the year.

Oscar grew up in Lubumbashi, in the DRC, where he started out playing soccer. Because he was so tall, he was encouraged

to play basketball. He attended a basketball camp led by Congolese National Basketball Association (NBA) player Bismack Biyombo and a new course was set for his life.

However, when he was 13, tragedy struck Oscar's family when his father died after being poisoned. His killer was never brought to justice.

Oscar told the Christian Broadcasting Network what he remembered about the day his father died: "Thirty minutes before he passed he said, 'Grab a chair.' I grab a chair and I sit right there and he started talking to me. He said, 'Don't ever forget about God no matter where you go. Don't lose God because when you lose God, you lose your life. Always listen to what I'm telling you. You gotta take care of your family.'"

Oscar had been raised in a Christian home but his father's death caused him to be angry at God. He cried out to God in anger, "Why did this have to happen?" But the more Oscar spent time with God, the more he realised he needed Him.

"I said, 'No, maybe I need to give my heart to God. Maybe I need to pay attention,' because my daddy always told me, 'No matter what happens in your life, don't let that thing affect your relationship with God, because God has great plans for your life and your dream.'"

Oscar put his faith and trust in

Jesus. He worked hard at basketball and at 15, he moved to the United States.

"I had no family, I could not speak any English," Oscar told CBN. "We could not communicate with anybody. Most of the people think like I was going to fail; I was going to go back home. People making fun of me, I don't even know what they say. My coach never wanted to play me in high school my first two years, he told me, 'You are the worst player we ever had. Like good luck with that.' I told him, 'I will play for Kentucky one day.' They laughed. They made a joke. But I went back in the scriptures, read, but the scripture told us anything is possible to those who work hard and believe in God. [Editor's note: *The Bible in fact says "with God all things are possible".*] I say, 'Why the Bible says, anything is possible, but everybody here told me it's impossible for me to get there?' I say, 'I will stick with the Word of God. I don't care what people say. I'm going to stick with the Word of God. If I'm going to fail, I'm going to fail with the Word of God.'"

Oscar initially played college basketball for the West Virginia Mountaineers and in his second game he was named the Newcomer of the Week. At the end of the season he had averaged 11.2 points and 9.3 rebounds per game as a freshman while shooting 55 percent from the field and was named to the Second Team All-Big 12 and the All-

Newcomer Team.

As a sophomore, he averaged 8.5 points and 7.8 rebounds through 10 games.

In 2021 Oscar transferred to the Kentucky Wildcats – his goal achieved. At 6'9" (205 metres) and nearly 260 pounds (118 kilograms), Oscar is an imposing presence on the court. In his first game he tallied 17 points and 20 rebounds in a 79–71 loss to Duke. At the end of the season he was named the Sporting News National Player of the Year and the unanimous Southeastern Conference Player of the Year.

Then Oscar had a new goal – to play for the NBA.

"I told [God], 'I want to be an NBA player. I want to get there. I want to help my family. But I cannot get

there by myself.'"

Even this goal has already been achieved, when earlier this year the 23-year-old centre was signed by the NBA's Indiana Pacers, on a two-way contract with the Fort Wayne Mad Ants of the NBA G League.

Oscar also dreams of becoming a public speaker one day.

"I want to speak for God. I want to stand up and help a lot of different people. I want to go back home and help. I want to be the example of what my daddy did. My daddy did [without] having a lot of money, but if I have money, I think I can do better. I'm going to help somebody else. I want people to know that God is everything. I want people to know that God has changed my life, He can change their life too." ●



Oscar Tshiebwe after accepting the Jersey Mike's Naismith Men's College Player of the Year trophy on April 03, 2022 in New Orleans, Louisiana. (Photo by Jonathan Bachman/Getty Images)

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