

TRAPPED IN GROG AND GUNJA

"THIS is my place, my house," says Douglas, pointing at his home in Alice Springs, Australia.

"I always [used to] drink here, smoke here," he tells the WhyJesus channel on YouTube.

"All I wanted to do was smoke marijuana. I was selfish, all my money I carried for myself. I was very lost; didn't know where to go. I feel emptiness inside. I tried to straighten my life but I couldn't."

It wasn't always like this. Douglas used to attend church but says he gave into the temptation to go back to his old life of drinking and drugs.

"I knew Jesus but I fell away. I wanted to follow Him but I didn't want to give up what I was doing in the world. I wanted to do my own thing."

But then, one day after smoking marijuana in his backyard, Douglas went into his bedroom to charge his phone — and it was then that he saw three words that would give him his life back.

"A piece of paper fell near my feet and it said: 'Remember the time.'"

Douglas instantly felt a tug in his heart, as though God was telling him to remember the time he followed Jesus.

He says it wasn't his writing on the paper and that till today he has no idea where it came from.

"But I believe God was calling me and I realised 'God you are here, You're real, and maybe You're calling me back.'"

Choking back tears, he shares that he knelt down immediately. "I said I'm sorry Lord for what I have done and immediately God gave me this scripture from John 14: 'Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in Me.'"

His life, Douglas says, changed dramatically after he re-committed himself to Jesus.

"I'm really happy and different after I received Jesus back. And my house has changed — no alcohol is coming into this house anymore."

Douglas now preaches to his community sharing the message of John 3:16 - "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son that whosoever believes in Him shall have eternal life."

As he wipes more tears from his eyes, he smiles and says: "I am really thankful to the Lord Jesus. He's the Saviour of the world and He saved my life."

I WAS DEAD INSIDE

Pastor used to be a vile and rebellious young man

If there was one thing Grant Robertson hated being called, it was unique.

While some may find it complimentary, to Grant it simply meant he stood out for all the wrong reasons and emphasised everything that was wrong with him.

Born with severe kidney problems he required surgery to remove one kidney before he could walk. On medical advice, he had to stay away from all contact sports - something the footy and soccer fan chafed at.

He was also embarrassingly incontinent. "Why me?" he fumed. "Why am I so different? It was hard growing up so different."

Shackled by so many restrictions, the young Australian drifted first into resentment and then into rebellion. He smoked his first cigarette at seven, hit the drinks at 12 and moved into marijuana at 13.

"I quickly turned from friends who aspired to be lawyers and engineers to a group that had no vision, no goals; I became part of the 'druggie' group at school," he tells *Challenge News*.

"But I want to say that I was not the one who was being influenced; I was in fact the instigator."

He regrets how much his choices hurt his parents, who he says were "great parents" and made sure all their children attended catechism classes at their local Catholic church.



Grant Robertson and his family

When he was 12, he felt a sudden inexplicable desire to read the Bible but was only able to find a comic book version in his house. The eagerness left as quickly as it came and, within months, the teenager was heavily into smoking and drinking.

Even worse, he began dabbling in the occult. "I got involved with witchcraft and ouija boards," he admits. "I started talking regularly to what I thought were angels but were actually demons."

Three years later, Grant dropped out of school. Pot, by now a daily habit, wasn't giving him the satisfaction he craved, so Grant moved

onto hallucinogenic drugs, amphetamines and opioids.

Unexpectedly, Grant tried church again when he was 19.

"I can only think that God began something in me then," he muses. "I went to church irregularly and even attended a youth group sporadically."

But instead of welcoming Grant, some of the kids made fun of him instead.

"Don't forget, I had a mohawk, I wore baggy clothes and I had chains hanging off me," Grant reveals. "I probably spoke funny too."

"They pointed at me and laughed at me. That was the point that I left

and vowed never to return to church."

He continued bouncing from one bad decision to another. He stole from his friends and from drug dealers and sank deeper into addiction and the occult. "I was dead inside," he sighs. "As dead as they come. I had gone from being a sweet sensitive young boy to being a vile young man."

He moved back home with his parents, but "as my drug habit became intolerable and uncontrollable, they told me I had to get sober or leave".

The ultimatum pushed Grant into choose rehab. And that's when he met Donna Knee, the woman who enrolled him in the program that would change his life.

"My plan was to go to rehab and get off the drugs, come out and become a drug kingpin in New South Wales," he laughs, rolling his eyes at how ludicrous that sounds now.

"And then I realised Donna had actually sent me to Teen Challenge, which is a Christian rehab place. When I realised that, I lost the plot. I cried so hard because I hated Christians maybe even God at this time!"

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Youth truth

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Fun for Kids

Pages 5,6,7



Jazz and the joy of having limits

NUDGE WITH KARL FAASE

JAZZ music is not everyone's first choice — it is a unique style of music. In many concerts, you may actually be treated to music that no one has ever heard before because within many jazz pieces, there is the opportunity for free expression.

It is very important to realise that this is within limits.

If all the musicians playing at that moment did exactly what they wanted, you would not have music, it would just be a conglomeration of sounds. The ability



of jazz musicians to play extemporaneously is in fact within strict limits. The freedom to play and experiment with the music is freedom within the bounds of the moment, the band and the music.

Freedom in this life is just the same. We have the freedom to live in a relationship with God, but God does not say that our freedom has no boundaries. Life with no boundaries is like music with no boundaries. It's a disaster.

Discover the freedom God has for you.

A life lived to its maximum potential, but within the boundaries of God's Word to us.

BACK PAGE



LASTING LEGACY
CHRISTIAN ATSU

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I was dead inside

• From page 1

Four weeks into his treatment there, Grant attended a Men's Conference attended by about 2000 men.

"It was as if the speaker was speaking only to me," he recalls.

"To be honest I don't know what happened, but I remember going to the front and praying for Jesus to come into my life. Somehow, I realised that not only was Jesus real, but that He wanted me, a sly fox of a man, and He could change my life!"

That has certainly happened. "I remember the first thing I did the next morning was go straight from my bed to my knees. How do I even make a comparison between my life then and now?" Grant says with wonder.

Today Grant pastors a church in New South Wales. He is married and has two children. He calls them his miracle children because he had been told that someone with his health problems would never be able to father any.

"I can honestly say that I do not struggle with drugs, alcohol, gambling or any other vices that were issues in my past," he says gratefully.

"I now preach the Gospel of Jesus, not the gospel of chaos! I can say truthfully that I do not recognise who I was in the past, I do not recognise what I did in the past, God has transformed my life!"

"It is impossible to live the Christian walk by just saying 'I will give Jesus a go'. It must be a life that says 'I will go and give my all to Him!'"

Kindness picked up a prostitute

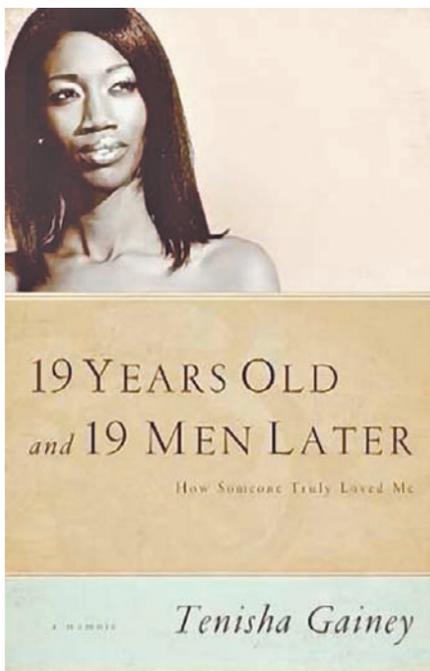
BY TENISHA GAINEY

When I graduated high school and went off to college, I would have never believed I would become a prostitute. But that's exactly what ended up happening.

I was excited to go away to school because it seemed more interesting than staying home and going to community college. While there I enjoyed the college scene: the parties, the freedom, and the opportunity to get a higher education. Going away to college was one of my greatest accomplishments and graduating was my number one goal.

But somehow I was ill-prepared for what was about to happen. My first semester I found out I was pregnant. My second semester I started to party wildly all the time. By my third semester I figured I really just wanted three things: to make money, have nice things, and be "happy." After talking to some guys on campus who worked at a local strip club, I figured becoming an exotic dancer was the easiest way to get all three.

One of the guys' fathers owned the strip club. He was driving a nice BMW and had all the latest electronics: flat-screen TVs, state-of-the-art computers, everything I could have ever dreamed of. Soon I was at the club checking it out. Once I looked around and thought about all the things I could buy with the money I said, "I'll try it out".



I could not afford it so I returned it to the dealer. I cut all ties with working at the strip club so I didn't have a job.

And after a couple of weekends, I got the hang of it. But that was only the beginning, because I kept talking to people and got in deeper and deeper into making fast money. Not long after I started, I began "taking dates" which is prostituting.

But about nine months later, my life was about to take an unexpected 180-degree turn when Jesus stepped in.

One of my guys put a down payment on a car for me, but I had to get money for the car payment and the down payment for the insurance. I was returning to my car when a pearl-coloured, late-model Lincoln Town Car pulled next to me. There was a white guy nearly twice my age in the car. We made small talk and he invited me to have lunch with him.

I got into his car and we went to a diner around the corner. We talked, laughed, and ate. At the end of the meal, he invited me to join him at his church's Wednesday Night Bible Study. I felt like I just got caught selling drugs to an undercover cop, but I agreed to go.

That night at church God dealt with me about all that I had been doing. And I always stood on the excuses, "God knows my heart. I'm a good person. I have to eat." But I knew that enough was enough. I went to the altar and gave my life to Jesus Christ. That was July 2003.

I was very excited by the choice I made and I told all my friends and my family. I also told the guys who would call me for dates that I was no longer into that because I was living my life as a Christian.

I did my best to figure out how I was going to pay for the car, but

On a daily basis I read my Bible, prayed, and believed that God would work it out. And eventually God did.

I returned to go to a local community college near home. I completed one semester there and then was unable to get to the campus because I did not have a car.

But I kept the faith that better days were ahead and everything would be okay. Even with my newly acquired trust in God I still found myself confused, depressed, and worried.

I was confused because I thought that if I just prayed and believed everything would be a bed of roses, but that was not the case. I felt depressed about the circumstances in my life, not having some of the material things I felt I needed. And I was worried because I had no idea how things were going to get back on track.

The end of August rolled around and I did not have a car so I did not enrol in college. I got a job in the dining hall at the Naval base in the next town over but I had a hard time finding a ride to work so after a month or so I quit. I felt confident that things were going to get better so I continued to go to church, kept reading the Word, kept praying and trusting Him.

In February of the next year, I got an inheritance cheque in the mail from the death of my grandmother so I was able to buy a car and return to school. In May 2007 I graduated with a Bachelor of Science degree in Accounting. I now work in the healthcare industry and my car is running fine!

I was also able to publish my personal story in a book entitled, *19 Men*

Later: How Someone Truly Loved Me.

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

More than remorse

BY GREG LAURIE

If I were to get in my car and go down the freeway at 140 miles per hour, I would be remorseful if the highway patrol pulled me over. Why? Because I'd pay a penalty for my choices. I'd get a ticket and maybe even spend the night in jail. And my insurance rates would go up significantly.

But if I were to get in my car and do the same thing the next day, it would show that I was not repentant, not willing to turn away from my wrongdoing.

There's a difference between remorse and repentance. Sometimes we confuse the two. We're remorseful when we're sorry for getting caught. But we're repentant when we're sorry enough to stop doing the same thing.

A lot of people feel remorse. Maybe someone traps them in a lie or catches them stealing. Or maybe they sin in some other way, and it catches up with them eventually. Thus, they're remorseful. But do they change their behaviour?

If they simply plot a little more carefully the next time and hope they won't get caught, that's not repentance; that's just remorse.

The Bible says, "For the kind of sorrow God wants us to experience leads us away from sin and results in salvation. There's no regret for that kind of sorrow. But worldly sorrow, which lacks repentance, results in spiritual death" (2 Corinthians 7:10 NLT).

If you can continue on a course of sin despite feeling guilty about it; that tells me you don't know God.

Maybe you've never given your life to Jesus. Maybe there has never been a moment in your life when you said, "Lord, I'm sorry for my sin, sorry enough to turn away from it." Perhaps you've been sorry because you've been found out, but are you willing to turn away from that sin and put your faith in Jesus?

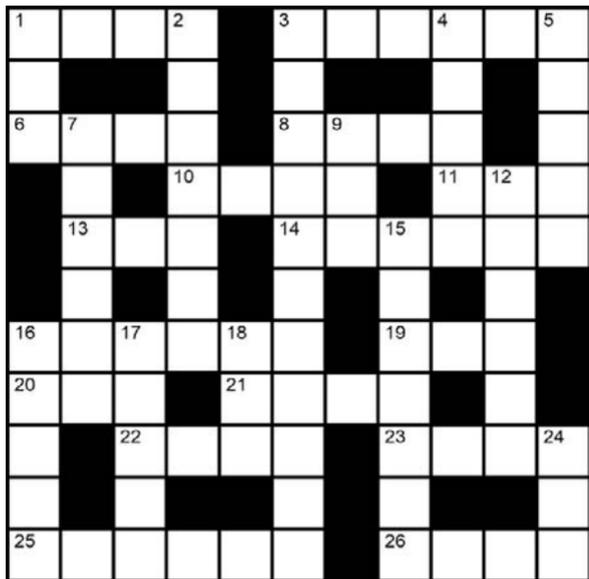
Jesus is telling us, "Friend, I love you, and I'm reaching out to you." But you must reach out as well and take His hand. Have you done that yet? Today is as good a day as any to grasp the hand of salvation.

Coffee Break

CROSSWORD & SUDOKU

ACROSS

- 1. Himalayan legend
- 3. (Dog) cried in pain
- 6. Kin's partner
- 8. Flightless South American bird
- 10. Thailand's continent
- 11. Postgrad. degree
- 13. Do poorly
- 14. Source of plaster
- 16. Offshore platform
- 19. Cry at fireworks
- 20. Tyre pressure
- 21. Storm preceder
- 22. Platform for coffin
- 23. Without purpose
- 25. River in South America
- 26. Genesis garden



DOWN

- 1. Tibetan ox
- 2. Asthmatic's device
- 3. Cosmonaut
- 4. Infant carriages
- 5. Sleeper's thoughts
- 7. Basra residents
- 9. Cow chow
- 12. Old grain measure
- 15. Oath
- 16. Where to hear an aria
- 17. North African country
- 18. Rink base
- 24. Asian money

SOLUTIONS PAGE 11



"Both of our readers seem to like the magazine."

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8	4		7					
	7	6				4		

DON'T STAY IN THE SEWER

A Joyful 'toon by Mike Waters



What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? By no means! We are those who have died to sin; how can we live in it any longer?

— ROMANS 6:1-2 NIV

From porn to pulpit

Joshua was called by name out of the hell his life had become.



Joshua Broome, 39, spent six years as one of the world's most popular male porn stars. He is now a pastor who travels around the country preaching his faith.

Joshua Broome hardly knew his own name any more. One of the top porn movie stars in America, with more than 1000 films and a top industry award under his belt, he was so used to being called by his stage name it was pretty much the only one he recognised.

So when the bank teller said: "Joshua, is there anything else I can help you with today?" he looked blankly at her for a second before realising she was talking to him. It had been years since anyone had called him that.

He was so stunned he was surprised he didn't get hit by a car while he was walking home, he says in an interview with churchleaders.com. "When I got back to my apartment I looked in the mirror and I didn't recognise the person that I saw," he murmurs. "There was just something about hearing my name."

That was the day Joshua decided to turn his back on the lucrative but dehumanising world of adult films. "When that bank teller said my name

it shattered what was my reality and it just freaked me out."

Guilt and shame hit at the same time and Joshua broke down as he realised all the ways he had abandoned his family and loved ones.

"I wept and wept and wept, then I picked up the phone and called everyone I needed to call and said, 'I'm out,'" he said. "Within days, I was gone."

Joshua's five-year stint in the adult film industry began when a group of girls at the restaurant he was working in said he should do porn films. By this time, Joshua was already hooked on pornography and this seemed like an exciting next step. He agreed and was signed up straight away.

When he left the industry, Joshua had made more than \$1 million, had been crowned Male Performer of the Year, and had broken into the even more lucrative world of gay porn. But "it was just a transaction to me.

A handshake was sometimes more personal."

All the while, his soul was slowly dying. Mortified to discover his family and friends had watched him host an awards show for the adult video industry, he retreated into a shell.

During his last year in the business, he never left his apartment and estimates he spent \$14,000 on take-out food so he wouldn't have to go shopping and interact with people. He also felt completely trapped and believed he had no future outside the industry.

Soon thoughts of suicide surfaced. "The last scene that I did, I'm laying in bed," Broome recently said on the Let's Talk Purity podcast. "And I'm thinking, 'I want to die. I don't have the guts to kill myself. ... There's no future, there's no one who's going to marry me, there's no employer who's going to hire me ... I'm absolutely useless.'" He didn't believe in God at the time, so "I was just asking out into thin air, can I please die?"

And then he had that encounter with the bank teller, who actually had no reason to ask if she could help him with anything else. Joshua had already completed his business there and had turned to leave.

After turning his back on his career, Joshua called his mother. "I was afraid to hug her," he confesses. But hug they did. "She didn't ask me a lot of questions because she didn't care," Joshua beams. "She was just glad that I was there."

Rebuilding his life was no easy task. He struggled to keep his jobs and relationships. Then he met a woman named Hope at the gym and asked her to go on a run with him.

During their run, Joshua told her all about his past. Her response, he says, "changed my life".

She said, "I understand that you did all those things, but that's not who you are." That reaction was "so loving," says Joshua.

"She approached me with such grace and elevated me at a time when I thought I deserved to be on the ground." She also asked him, "Do you know who God is? Do you have a relationship with Him?" Joshua wasn't sure what she meant but agreed to go to church with her.

It was on Easter Sunday five years ago that Joshua walked into church a broken man - and left it a healed man.

"I heard a sermon about a God who loved me despite my failures. He loved me, yes, a filthy sinner, so much that He wrapped Himself in flesh and came to earth to live a perfect life and then die a death that I deserved. He took on my sins and then defeated sin and death when He rose on the third day. Because of this, I have been given a new life! I am a new creation because Christ died for me."

Joshua and Hope are married and have two sons. A year ago, Joshua moved into full-time ministry as the pastor of a church in Iowa.

"I've shown people how to move past their past and live a shame-free life. The freedom that is available through a relationship with Jesus." •

“ You did all those things, but that's not who you are. ”

Lesbian's life totally CHANGED

BY ELIZABETH WONING

Throughout most of my life, I never belonged. I always felt excluded, and I questioned my sexuality and my gender. I hated the idea of being feminine because it was so foreign. I didn't feel like a girl, but I also didn't identify as a boy. I made my first meaningful connection with another woman when I was in my mid-teens. We had such deep intimacy and love that our bond set a standard for my other relationships for several years. Though I occasionally dated men, and briefly in my early 20s was married to a man, I never developed fulfilling or lasting relationships with them.

I "came out" when I was in my early twenties after my brief marriage fell apart. I felt lesbianism explained my childhood and young adult experiences. I thought I was finally being authentic and true to myself. As a lesbian, I felt powerful and asserted myself in stereotypically masculine ways. I adopted men's attire and a crewcut.

During those years, I found family and support as a lesbian living within the gay communities of large cities. I decided I wanted to attend seminary, and I did so as one of just a handful of openly gay students. As a student between 2000 and 2003 I lobbied for marriage and ordination of LGBTQ individuals and ministered among gay youth, espousing a theology that embraced homosexuality. After seminary, I began working with youth in a small rural community but questioned my faith.

In that season I re-evaluated what I believed about God, what I believed about the Bible, and what I believed about myself. Through that process, I realised it was possible that some of my ideology had been wrong. I resolved to follow my faith sac-

rificially, which required re-evaluating what I understood the Christian sexual ethic to be.

Up to that point, I believed I was born gay and that God had created me that way. As I further studied Christian teaching, eventually I no longer believed I was born a lesbian. My experience of God's love, the Christian community around me, and my desire to pursue a life of prayer had a dramatic influence on my life.

I came to terms with the impact a hatred for women had on my self-perception, and pursued pastoral care and counselling that addressed childhood hurts and perceptions. Above all, I acknowledged I had rejected myself as a woman, and repented (turned away from).

I did not specifically seek change in my sexuality; nevertheless, I began experiencing changes in my sexual desires. I became attracted to a man, which was one of the most unexpected and humiliating experiences of my life, since I had so fully identified as a lesbian. He and I got married and have had a strong marriage of 13 years thus far. Today I am



Elizabeth Woning (left) and with her husband Doug (right).



“ I resolved to follow my faith sacrificially. ”

happy, joyful, and feminine—all things that I never was while living as a lesbian. I am no longer sexually attracted to women. Rather, I am a strong advocate for their empowerment to overcome the effects of injustices against them.

Originally published on elizabethwoning.com.

Elizabeth Woning is co-founder of the CHANGED Movement, an international network of men and women who have left the LGBT subculture and identity to follow Jesus; and co-founder of Equipped to Love, a ministry seeking to serve and equip those impacted by homosexuality. She is a licensed pastor at Bethel Church in Redding, California, where she lives with her husband, Doug.

Our greatest need and God's greatest gift are the same thing: forgiveness of sins. And to receive it we have only to ask and pass it on. But to ask for it we must first admit that we need it. Instinctively, we wriggle. - Pete Greig

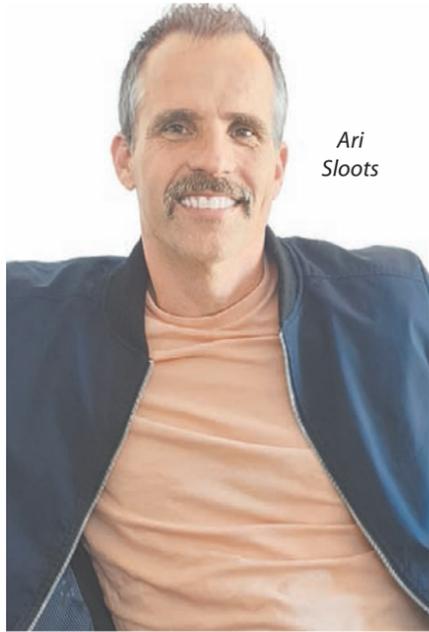
Taken by drugs into deep despair

BY JANICE TEO

ARI Sloots was at a party when someone spiked his drink with LSD.

The young Dutchman had already taken other drugs that night, and the addition of LSD had a very bad effect on him.

Ari had struggles growing up. Some early childhood experiences fostered a deep distrust and resentment in him that exploded to the surface in his mid-teens.



Ari Sloots

Drugs and drinks followed. Loneliness and rejection became his closest — and most hated — companions.

After the drink spiking episode, he consumed ecstasy — and that sent him on a harrowing mind trip that scared the life out of him.

“It was like I got stuck in my trip and when I woke up it was like something shifted in me,” the 50-year-old tells *Challenge News*. “I’d had bad drug trips before, but this was something much worse.”

“I felt I was in a television looking out at the world and I felt emotionally cut off. There was a tremendous sense of isolation.”

“The drugs really messed with my body chemistry. It felt like I was losing my mind.”

Ari’s behaviour changed drastically. Depression took hold of him. The former party animal now walked around with his hat pulled over his eyes. He withdrew from everyone.

He had grown up in a church-going family. “I loved Jesus as a kid, but lost that love as I grew up. There were family issues.”

“I always said I would never drink because of my dad, but I ended up doing just that; I occasionally got high, and drank too much on a regular basis. I was well on my way to becoming an alcoholic.”

Ari says he knew what he was doing was not good but felt powerless to change. Looking back, he now recognises the driving force behind his spiral was rejection and a deep loneliness.

He also struggled with bad relationships which he says never satisfied his deeper needs. “If anything, the guilt and shame piled up.”

The experience with Ecstasy scared him off taking any more. He tried marijuana one more time but he instantly threw up.

“As I’m throwing up I hear this voice saying: ‘If you do this one more time it will kill you’.”

“That voice had such authority it almost sounded audible. I stopped and I’ve never had the desire since.”

But the empty lifestyle continued.

Finally, one particularly difficult night when Ari entertained suicidal thoughts, he turned back to the God of his youth.

“I said ‘God if You’re real, please reveal Yourself to me’. This was the lowest point of my life. I didn’t know who I was any more.”

That was a Saturday night. The next morning he jumped on his bike and went to church. “Nothing happened. No thunderbolts and lightning. But I had started to open my heart to God.”

Soon he was attending three services every Sunday and a youth group.

He immersed himself in church but by the following Friday and Saturday he was back partying. “I had opened my heart to Jesus but I hadn’t surrendered. This went on for two years.”

He came to Perth as a backpacker with a friend when he was 25. His friend had been on missionary trips before and wanted to visit the Youth With a Mission office there.

While at the YWAM office, the same voice spoke to Ari again.

“This is why you’re here,” it said with the same power as before. “Again the authority was what got me,” Ari says. “I knew I had to apply for YWAM’s Disciple Training School. “I know now that voice was the voice of God.”

The first few weeks at school were difficult. He was only a few weeks into his YWAM training when he felt it was too much for him and planned to leave after morning class.

He never made it out the door. “How are you doing, Ari?” asked his lecturer during class.

“I’m fine,” Ari said.

“So what’s wrong?” his lecturer persisted. Ari describes what happened next.

“I was going to say again ‘I am fine’ but my mouth froze. I realised I was not doing fine and moments of pain in my life ran through my mind.

“And then suddenly it was like a dam broke inside of me and the tears that I should have cried years ago just flowed and wouldn’t stop.

“That was the moment I knew I had to surrender everything to Jesus — all the pain, the sin, the guilt, everything. So at about 10 past 10 on July 31, 1998 I surrendered to God.

“When I stopped crying and looked up again, I felt a tremendous sense of purpose. It was my life-changing moment.”

After this, Ari’s life changed drastically. There was deep repentance and a real commitment to follow Christ as both Saviour and Lord.

He reconciled with his parents and asked people he had hurt for forgiveness. He says he fully opened his heart to God and was healed from the pain of the past. God also called him to be a full-time missionary.

From that day till now, Ari, who still lives in Perth, has worked with YWAM. He married Kimberley, a fellow YWAM missionary with whom he has three children, and is now a co-director of the Perth mission.

Desperately seeking a destiny

BY JANICE TEO

In the long search for her destiny, Kimberley Sloots went down more rabbit holes than you could poke a stick at.

Experimenting with spiritual practices like ouija boards, horoscope readings, witchcraft and spells, she searched for meaning and truth, even backpacking across Europe to spiritual hubs like Stonehenge.

These “dabblings” as she calls them, opened the door to some strange experiences: things falling on the floor again and again for no reason, an eerie presence in her home, the pointer on her ouija board moving without anyone pushing it.

“Looking back, I realise what I was looking for was a sense of purpose; I wanted to know my fate,” the 37-year-old Australian tells *Challenge News*.

“That’s what I would ask the ouija board, and why I was into horoscopes. Now I know that was counterfeit guidance.”

Kimberley’s parents moved from New Zealand to Australia in their early 20’s so Kimberley was born and raised in Australia.

Home life was far from spiritual. “We celebrated Santa at Christmas and the Easter bunny at Easter, not Jesus,” she reveals.

Describing herself as a “typical young person”, she says she felt restless, lost and unfulfilled no matter what she did.

“There was this big hole inside of me that told me there had to be more to life.

“I was always searching for truth and trying to ‘find myself’. I was very open to everything that promised some kind of revelation.”

She started drinking when she was about 13 and occasionally smoked marijuana with her friends during her teen years.

“I looked happy on the outside but inside I was in turmoil and I had times of feeling very hopeless and depressed between 18 and 21.”

She tried to find fulfilment in relationships but again, they were houses built on sand



Kimberley Sloots (nee Walker)

and didn’t last.

As for a career, while she knew she wanted to help people, she was such a rolling stone she could never stay long at any job. “I wanted my career to be my passion but I just didn’t know how to attain that kind of life.

When she turned 19, she went to New Zealand for a winter job working at the ski slopes and met a cousin who was a Christian.

The two girls had a few deep conversations about God that opened Kimberley’s heart and gave her more understanding of who He was.

“The seeds of my faith were well and truly watered by my cousin,” Kimberley shares. “I remember saying to her ‘I just know I’ll be a Christian one day’.

“What she told me about

God was so appealing, so life-giving and life-affirming. She talked about the character and goodness of God and the fact that He would never leave me; I would never be alone again.”

She went to church with her cousin and during worship she began weeping. “I was touched into my very being; I’d never felt anything like that before and while it touched me it also kind of scared me.

“I didn’t know why I was crying — at that time I knew nothing of the Holy Spirit’s effect on people!”

In fact it was so overwhelming Kimberley says she freaked out. “I said ‘ohhh that’s just too much Jesus’ then went and got a six-pack of beer and got drunk after church!”

Kimberley continued to resist God because, she says, “I knew that being a Christian meant I had to not live a certain way, like with boys and drinking. That’s what stopped me committing to God.”

Nevertheless, when she returned to Australia, she felt inexplicably pulled towards the faith. She hung out with newfound Christian friends and watched Christian television.

She began to change on the inside, feeling happier and less restless. She even stopped partying and drinking to the point that she became the default designated driver for her friends.

“I simply lost the desire. I didn’t want to drink to have fun any more. I wanted to find my true self and my true self was not my drunk self.”

The 21-year-old began attending church regularly. When she finally responded to the altar call and gave her life to Christ, it was not with tears or fireworks but with a quiet conviction.

“It’s time. God has been after me for a very long while,” she said to the person who took her details. “I knew this meant my life had to change in some ways, but now I was ready.”

She soon heard about Youth With A Mission, an international Christian training organisation. The following year, Kimberley became a missionary. Today she is a full-time volunteer and ministry leader at YWAM Perth.

“When I learned about missions I knew immediately that was what I had always wanted to do — the chance to love and help people.

“Jesus has completely filled the hole in my life. My Father in heaven was the One I was looking for the whole time and I just never knew it.

“Now I have peace like a river flowing through me. I’m not restless anymore. That hole inside has been filled with God’s unconditional love for me. I realised finding myself didn’t need me to go places or meet people. It was just knowing my Creator.”



Ari and Kimberley Sloots

Long ages breeds some strange ideas

BY CARL WIELAND AND GARY BATES OF CREATION MINISTRIES INTERNATIONAL

The late Dr Albert Mills had a B.S. and an M.S. (in zoology and reproductive physiology) from Louisiana State University, and a Ph.D. (in reproductive physiology) from the Animal Science Department of the University of Florida.

He was involved in some world-first science and technology in his lifetime, before succumbing to prostate cancer on June 18, 2011.

In the 1970s, he developed a completely new procedure for the non-surgical collection of bovine (cow) embryos. This was a breakthrough in cattle farming and breeding. The first centre in the world to apply this procedure was the Saskatoon Embryo Transplant Centre in Saskatchewan, Canada, where Dr Mills trained all the technical staff. At that stage, the embryos still had to be surgically transferred to the recipients.

After that, he developed another world-first refinement of the technique, such that the total transfer of these microscopic embryos from one cow to another could take place non-surgically.

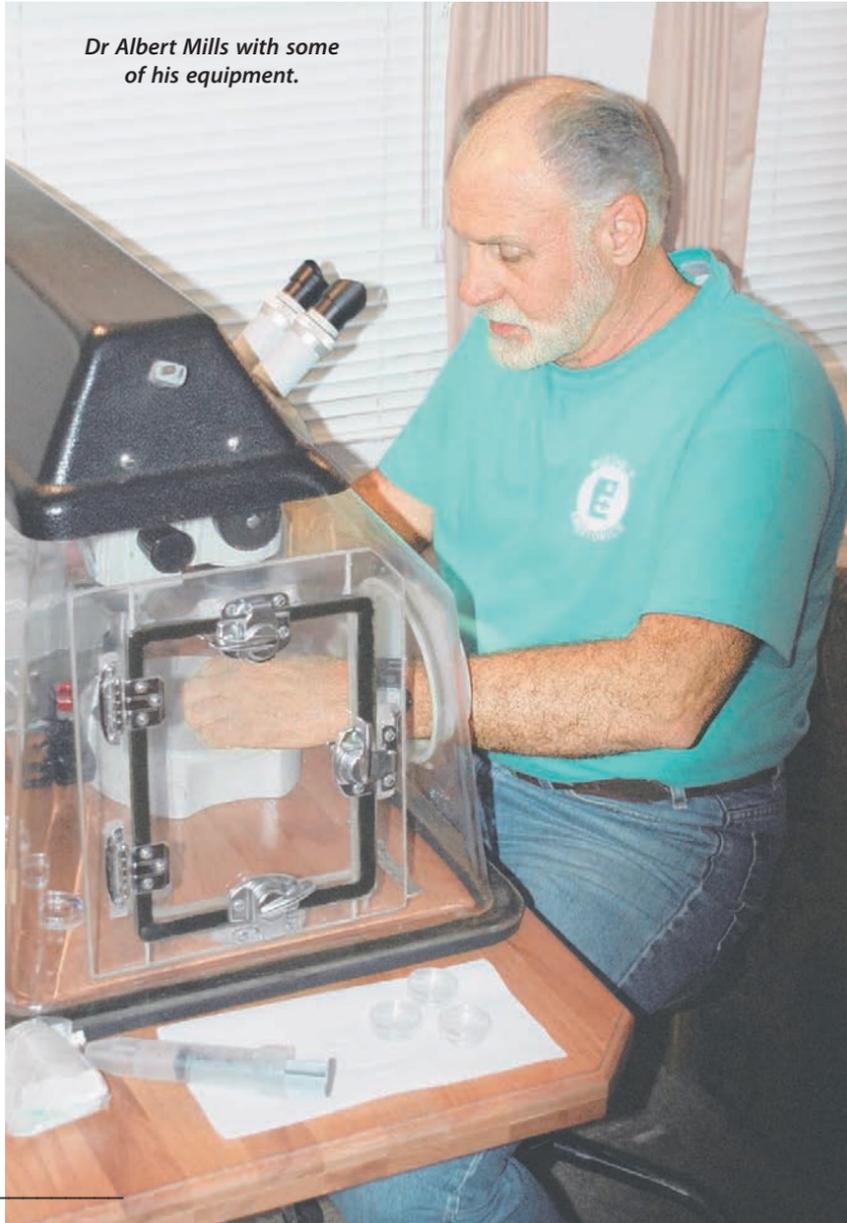
The company he started to do this, called Portable Embryonics, was able to carry out the entire procedure 'on-farm', with a mobile laboratory.

Raised in a conservative Christian home, Albert began following Jesus at an early age and joined his local Protestant church.

He said in high school he was "bombarded" with evolution and the idea of an old earth, which continued throughout university and his later studies.

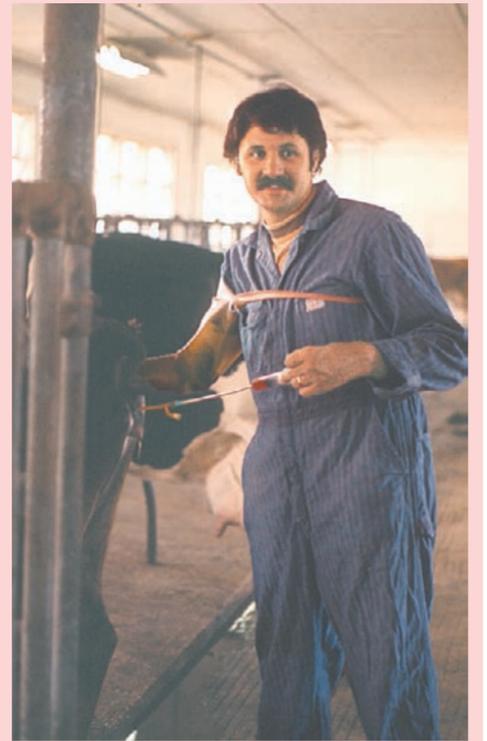
"I never questioned any of the science," he said, "so I bought into the non-literal interpretation of Genesis and came to believe that this was just how God had created everything."

However, this began to have corrosive effects on Albert's entire Chris-



Dr Albert Mills with some of his equipment.

The totally non-surgical transfer of seven-day-old microscopic fertilised embryos from one cow (which can then generate more) to another (which does not have to have the same genetics) was pioneered by Dr Albert Mills. It has revolutionised cattle breeding and farming. Human reproductive technologies such as IVF have also borrowed from some of this work. Photos by Albert Mills



“For me [there is] no possibility of evolution or ‘long ages’ being real.”

tian walk. Because of what he had been taught in school, he felt that he could not really hold that all of the Bible was true.

Ignoring the issues

Church and family had not equipped him to deal with the issues.

"These things just weren't addressed," he said. "God made things in six days, rested on the seventh – everyone just believed it, but didn't arm us with reasons or answers. So I just ended up making

all sorts of compromises with what the Bible taught."

Soon, even though he always believed in God, he had, in his words, "drifted an awful long distance. I couldn't put it together exactly, but it was because I couldn't trust all the Bible. Sort of like Jesus says in John 3:12, 'If you don't believe Him on earthly things, how can you do so on heavenly things?' So I gradually stopped praying, reading my Bible, all of that."

The UFO twist

The evolution-inspired drift even extended to, as he put it, "getting hung up on the possibility of alien life, UFOs, Von Däniken and all that stuff. I even sort of hoped I'd meet one of those ETs on the road."

He found many of the people he met, even highly educated ones including scientists and a medical doctor, had the same beliefs. He was fascinated to find Creation Ministries International (CMI) CEO Gary Bates had not long released a book, *Alien Intrusion*, dealing with those topics, and in particular analysing the "evolution connection" missed by so many.

He then went on to read more CMI material, particularly *Creation* magazine.

"I personally don't see how any scientist who is prepared to forget all his presuppositions and read *Creation* for one to two years with an open mind, and be willing to think, could still believe in evolution or 'long ages,'" Albert said.

When asked why so many of his colleagues in scientific fields are unwilling to even consider that Genesis might be true, he said, "I think that many are 'willingly ignorant',

as the Bible puts it [2 Peter 3:5] – they have blinders on, choosing to believe that things took millions of years. And anything that doesn't fit, well, they're just not going to think about it."

Albert said it became "so clear" to him that Genesis is literal, real history and that the global flood explains everything much better than what is being taught as "science". He had already

noticed how many of the geological features of the world looked as if large amounts of water had been involved in their formation. It "clicked" later, he said, "when I started getting into *Creation* magazine."

They need to know

"There is now for me no possibility of evolution or 'long ages' being real," Albert shares. "I'm disturbed that there are so many ministers who just accept these things, changing their ideas about the Bible to fit the secular views. Many of them are devout Christians, but they need to know how vitally important it is for them not to compromise – how compromise erodes the Christian lives of so many believers, especially scientifically-trained ones like myself." •

CREATION QUOTE

ATHEIST scientist Paul Davies (one of the top physicists in the world) says: Scientists are slowly waking up to an inconvenient truth — the universe looks suspiciously like a fix. The issue concerns the very laws of nature themselves. For 40 years, physicists and cosmologists have been quietly collecting examples of all too convenient "coincidences" and special features in the underlying laws of the universe that seem to be necessary in order for life, and hence conscious beings, to exist. Change any one of them and the consequences would be lethal.

It is hard to resist the impression that the present structure of the universe, apparently so sensitive to minor alterations in the numbers, has been rather carefully thought out. The seemingly miraculous occurrence of numerical values that nature has assigned to her fundamental constants must remain the most compelling evidence for an element of cosmic design. •

Dar and Winny

BY RICHARD GUNTHER

41



GET ANSWERS FOR YOUR FAMILY

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YOUTH TRUTH

Musician shares hope on TikTok

Stephen McWhirter started walking down a path of rebellion in his early teen years. It started with smoking and drinking but quickly progressed to cocaine, LSD and selling drugs by the time he was 15.

“By the time I was 17 I was a crystal meth addict and I was using crystal meth every day for nearly six years,” Stephen admits in a video on his YouTube channel.

He grew up the son of an evangelist (someone who tells people about the Christian faith), travelling all over the US, from church camp to church camp. But the man he saw preaching on Sunday mornings was not the same man he lived with for the rest of the time.

The hypocrisy put Stephen off Christianity altogether.

“I decided if God is real, He’s not good, and if this Jesus guy is real, I don’t want anything to do with Him. I was so against Christianity that I remember if you even mentioned the name Jesus around me I would have cussed you out.”

People in Stephen’s life continued to pray for him, even crying out to God that he would come to know Jesus for who He really is.

Someone loaned him a book called *The Case for Christ: A Journalist’s Personal Investigation of the Evidence for Jesus* by Lee Strobel and Stephen read it – which he now says is a miracle in itself.

“I just remember accepting this book in like a blur... fast forward I’m living in a house full of musicians. It’s 3 o’clock in the morning and I’m lying in bed.

“I’ve literally got drugs next to me on the side table as I’m reading this book... nobody’s playing music softly in the corner, nobody’s preaching or anything like that but in this moment I encountered the presence of God. It’s the kindness of the Lord to meet you in a place where no one can get the credit but Him. I remembered encountering the manifest presence of God which is just this really churchy word for a tangible encounter with God – you can’t explain it but you just know that you’ve met with Him.

“In this moment we begin to have this internal dialogue that went something like this: He said, ‘Stephen I’m real and I’m good and I have a purpose for your life. What are you going to do about it?’

“In that moment I just cry out to God. I said, ‘God I want to give You my life. I want to quit all this addiction, depression, all these things that I’ve known for so long. They feel like a warm blanket that I don’t even know how to take off.’ I said, ‘God, I can’t do it. I want to but I can’t.’ The Holy Spirit spoke into me something that changed me for the rest of my life. He said, ‘Stephen you won’t do it, I’ll do it.’

“I took God at His Word... I fell to my knees that night in that room and



Stephen McWhirter

I gave my life to Christ. I went from addiction to redemption, from meth addict to worship leader because God is real. It’s not just some Sunday School lesson I encountered – it is the reality and the character and the nature and the power of God as a Saviour.”

Stephen now has a TikTok account (@stephenmcwhirtermusic) where he shares his story and encourages people to accept Jesus as their Lord and Saviour.

In an interview with Think Eternity, Stephen says thousands of viewers made decisions to follow Jesus since he joined the social media platform in May 2022.

On his first live stream on TikTok, Stephen sang worship songs, then shared his story of how he became a Christian and what the good news of Jesus is all about.

“And in the middle of sharing that, I felt the Lord wanted me to say, ‘Hey, if you want to give your life to Jesus, just type yes. And put your first name because I want to say your name

because the Lord calls you by name.” Someone typed “yes” followed by more and more people.

He then created a link on his TikTok bio page for people to go to after they give their life to Jesus so he can connect with them, pray with them and help them find a church.

During one of Stephen’s first TikTok livestreams, a girl came on and said “Hail Satan. I’ve given my life to Satan.”

“I just stopped what I was doing and said, ‘Hey, you know, Megan, if someone wounded you in your life, that person most likely was not a Christian. That wasn’t Jesus.’ By the end of the call, she gave her life to Jesus. She repented (turned away from her sin) and ended up messaging us. She called us, and while crying, shared about her first time praying by herself.”

If you would like to make the radical change Stephen did, see ‘How do I become a Christian?’ on page 11. •



STOCK PHOTO

HAUNTED NO MORE

When Laura Adams was a teenager, something changed in her home. Her normally kind mother began telling her she hated her and wished she hadn’t been born. The rejection led Laura to seek affection elsewhere, and she found it in one-night stands with men. But far from making her feel loved and accepted, it only left her more broken, until she discovered there was a spiritual battle that had been going on around her since she was a child.

Laura tells CBN that the changes in her mother’s personality occurred after she started seeing psychics, tarot card readers and channelers.

Laura was about 11 and, despite her young age, knew these new activities were wrong.

“But there really wasn’t much I could say on the matter; I was just a little girl,” she shares. “So I kind of watched it happen around me.”

Laura’s mother hosted parties which included tarot card readings for guests.

“After a while I started to accept it as the norm. I would see a psychic or a tarot card reader or somebody who would do my chart in astrology. I started taking classes on how to channel. I was reading metaphysical books.”

Laura describes the rejection she faced by her mother as “very, very traumatic”.

As years went on she started sleeping around, resulting in two pregnancies – both of which Laura aborted.

“Everybody had taught me that it was a clump of cells and that this wasn’t worth anything, and I got an abortion,” Laura explains. “I really didn’t put a lot of thought into it. I didn’t want to think that this was a real baby. I didn’t want to take responsibility for something like this. So, it was just easy to do it and to pretend that it never happened.”

As Laura grew older she started hearing voices and having nightmares.

“I would sometimes feel very dark energies upon me, like they were in the room,” she recalls.

“These energies would tell me that they wanted to kill me. The

feeling was so realistic that I could not differentiate it from the truth.”

She sought help from a psychiatrist, who diagnosed her with bipolar disorder.

“He told me I had manic depression. I think that there was some psychosis in there also. He told me that my situation would not get better. That it would actually get progressively worse and at some point I would be institutionalised.”

Laura visited a hypnotist, who believed Laura’s problems were spiritual. When he laid his hands on Laura’s head, she felt something “profoundly dark” leave her.

“That’s the best way I know how to explain it. I felt it come off my head, and it was liberating. I felt a little bit of sanity come back. I

looked at him, and I said, ‘What was that?’ He said to me, ‘That was a demon.’”

Laura was shocked to realise that this meant Satan actually existed, which led to more revelations.

“After a few moments of thinking about it, I realised that if Satan existed, that means that Jesus Christ existed. If that’s the case, then, ‘What am I doing in this man’s office? I need to go to the individual that was responsible for conquering Satan.’

“It was at that point that I left his office and chose to find a Christian path and get help.”

Laura called a Christian friend, who led her to a Christian counsellor. At her first appointment, the counsellor prayed with her.

“It was at that point that I came before the Lord and I told Him that I was receiving Him as my Lord and Saviour. I asked Him to forgive me of my sins.”

It didn’t happen overnight, but Laura is no longer haunted by her past.

“I’m experiencing mental clarity and emotional joy at a level I’ve never experienced before in my life,” she attests.

“The Lord has completely blessed me. That dark hole that was in me for the 38 years that I was on this planet before coming to know the Lord, left me. The abyss went away and I was filled with a joy that I had never known before.” •

“The abyss went away and I was filled with joy.”

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

Drugs and witchcraft nearly killed me

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

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

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

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

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

too much.

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

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

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

“I had no respect for anyone who had a religious view.”

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

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

"No matter how much I talked with this guy, he could not make the flashbacks (hallucinating without being

on the substance) go away," he says.

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

(a form of witchcraft that involves nature worship).

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

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

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

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

"But it was making the problem worse," he says. "The more I meditated, the more I studied, and the more I did the mantras, all it was doing was opening up my mind to see a realm that was unseeable, so it was causing my flashbacks to get worse, not better."

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

"I did not believe him," Pat admits. But when Jeff invited him to come to church, he decided to give it a go. He sat in the service but felt nothing. He went again the next week, and the next week, and still felt nothing. But he thought about what Jeff had said about Jesus being able to make him a new person. He was willing to try. So when the pastor invited people to become Christians, Pat went to the front of the church and accepted Jesus as his Lord and Saviour.

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

"Apparently one of my lungs had collapsed," Pat explains. "I ended up at the hospital because I wasn't breathing.



Pat

The next week after I had healed up in the hospital, my friend was like, 'We can pray over that, God can heal that.' And I said, 'Fine, I'll try it.'

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

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

Pat's life changed forever that day. "The next day I picked up the Bible and I've never put it down since," he shares. "The more I studied and the more I read, the more I recognised that the Bible is true. How do I know it's true? Because I've taken the time to study it. I've taken the time to compare the content to history."

Pat said reading the Bible has renewed his mind as it says in Romans 12:2, "Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is — His good, pleasing and perfect will."

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



Is doubt the end of faith?

BY HARRIET COOMBE

I HAVE struggled with doubt for as long as I can remember. I doubt my friends really like me. I doubt my abilities as a writer. I doubt my husband's eyesight when he says I look beautiful. And sometimes I even doubt God.

I've hidden my doubts, afraid of the judgement that sometimes comes when I voice them. But when I feel safe and encouraged to share even the hard questions I have, I soon realise I am not alone. Doubt is a part of being a human, no matter what you believe.

On the other hand, every human has faith. Even the most hardened atheist relies on faith for what they can't see or prove.

Maybe your doubts about God have stopped you from taking the first step in following Him. Maybe you used to follow Him but your doubts became too insurmountable and you walked away.

When it comes to belief in God, it's okay to have questions and it's okay to have doubts — and in fact, we all do at certain times. Thankfully a lack of doubt is not a pre-requisite for becoming a Christian. In the Bible, Jesus is quoted as saying, "Oh, you of little faith," on more than one occasion to his followers. One of Jesus' followers/disciples even earned the nickname, "Doubting Thomas" due to his propensity for doubt — and this was someone who spent years travelling around with Jesus!

I've come to learn that doubt is just a feeling. Sometimes feelings lie and we definitely shouldn't let them control our lives. If you only went to school or work when you felt like it, how often would you go? Would you ever do the dishes if you waited until you felt like doing them?

Faith, on the other hand, is not a feeling but an action. Therefore, you can have faith while simultaneously having doubts. So what exactly is faith? The Bible says it is, "the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen" (Hebrews 11:1). It is trusting even in what I don't see because God has proven Himself over and over. It is opening our eyes to the truth of Bible. It is choosing to believe because of the evidence (creation, Jesus' empty tomb, Christian's transformed lives) that tells us the Bible is true, not just blindly.

While doubt is normal, if we allow it to rule and don't face the questions it raises, the Bible says we become like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed around by every new idea (James 1:6).

Thankfully, the Bible also gives us the remedy for doubt. Romans 10:17 says, "So faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the word of God." Notice the word is hearing — an active, present-tense verb. That means we need to continue to read the Bible and hear the gospel preached — that Christ died for our sins on the cross and rose again so that we can spend eternity with God. The Bible reminds us of what God has done in the past and that we can therefore trust Him in the present. It says in Psalm 77:11, "I will remember the deeds of the LORD; yes, I will remember your miracles of long ago."

In an article about doubt on thegospelcoalition.org, it says, "Since faith is embracing Jesus, in times of doubt I don't need more faith, I need more Jesus. And when I get more Jesus — through preaching, Scripture, prayer, community — then, maybe even in spite of myself, my faith is revived. When we focus on the Him of Jesus rather than the what of faith, doubts are reduced, relativised, replaced, and even redeemed. It might just be that the path of doubt was God's way of bringing you to a deeper, richer knowledge of Jesus Himself."

Face those difficult questions, pray about them, talk with wise people about them — but don't let doubt put an end to your faith or stop you from making a commitment to Jesus today. •



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BUILDING BETTER RELATIONSHIPS

Breaking a cycle of un-grace

BY ROB FURLONG

Channel Nine recently aired a one-off documentary about the 46-year-old feud between former Test Cricket captains, Ian Chappell, and Ian Botham. For those of you who are unaware, the two men had an argument in a Melbourne pub back in 1977 and they have never reconciled.

And based on the documentary, it doesn't look like they ever will.

Toward the end of the program, Chappell and Botham were brought face to face, and the animosity they have for each other was so intense, you could almost feel it coming through your TV screen – their bitterness, contempt, and anger made for very uncomfortable viewing.

The saddest part of it all for me was the knowledge that all it would take is for one of these men to swallow their pride and simply say, "Mate, I am truly sorry for my part in this – will you forgive me?"

Even sadder, feuds like this are played out in families, marriages, and

friendships every day.

Parents refuse to speak with a son or daughter because they failed to meet some expectation which had never been communicated to them. Husbands and wives erect a wall of silence between each other due to a past hurt. Sisters have a falling out over a petty issue, not speaking to each other for years and go to their graves unreconciled.

It is also interesting to note that if you look beneath the surface of each of the situations described above, you will discover that these poor relational behaviours have been learned from each person's family of origin – they have been practiced and passed on from generation to generation!

Philip Yancey calls this the cycle of ungrace, and if we are committed to being peacemakers in our relationships, then we are going to have to break out of this destructive pattern.

How can we do this? Here are a few thoughts.

The first step in breaking the cycle is we must be willing to forgive the other person. I wrote about this last

month, so I will not elaborate on it – only to say that a willingness to forgive the other person is crucial if peace is to be restored to the relationship. King Solomon says it so well – "Sensible people control their temper; they earn respect by overlooking wrongs." (Proverbs 19:11)

To break the cycle, we also need to realise that life is too short to carry a grudge against someone. I sense something of this idea in Paul's advice when he wrote "Don't let the sun go down while you are still angry." (Ephesians 4:26) Think carefully about what he is saying. You have a heated argument with someone, and the day ends with neither of you seeking to reconcile. One day goes by. Then another. Instead of your heart growing softer toward the other person – "I/he/she will get over it!" – you find it is growing harder. In time, the days turn into weeks, then months, then years and short of a miracle, the relationship is now beyond repair. And all that has been achieved is that you – and the other person – have grown old and bitter.

What a waste of life!



Sir Ian Botham (above) and Ian Chappell (left). Photos: Getty Images

One final thought. Breaking the cycle of ungrace will mean that we see and love people as God sees and loves them. As Yancey says,

"All of us need 'grace-healed eyes' to see people as God does."

Think of a broken relationship in your life and ask yourself the following questions:

Am I willing to forgive them?

Do I want to hold this grudge for the rest of my life?

Can I see them as God sees them?

Perhaps you don't want to forgive or cannot see the person as God does. Take some time to reflect on how much you need God's forgiveness, on the times you have hurt others and needed them to forgive you. Then ask for God's help to see the situation through His eyes.

Take the initiative and seek reconciliation with the person – break the cycle of ungrace.

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HOW DO I BECOME A CHRISTIAN?

What? Salvation is an eternal relationship with God – now on Earth and, after we die, in Heaven.

The Lord Jesus says: "I tell you the truth. Everyone who believes in Me has eternal life." John 6:47

"In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world." John 16:33

Who? Anyone can gain the eternal life offered through Jesus Christ, regardless of how you have previously lived or what you have previously believed.

God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life. John 3:16

Why? Because sin separates us from a holy God. Sin is all the wrong things we do, say and think, as well as our desire to be our own boss.

For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. Romans 3:23

How? The Bible says you become a Christian by confessing with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believing in your heart that God raised Him from the dead.

If you declare with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you profess your faith and are saved. Romans 10:8b-10

Ready to change your life forever? Here is a prayer you can pray, but you can also use your own words. The words are not as important as the heart attitude – which only God can see.

Almighty God, Creator of Heaven and Earth,

I acknowledge that I am a sinner. Please forgive me for all the ways I have disobeyed and defied You.

Thank You for sending Your Son, Jesus Christ, to earth to live the perfect life I couldn't, and die on the cross for my sins. Thank You that His blood was sufficient to pay my debt to You, and His resurrection proves that there is life beyond death. I accept that His sacrifice is all I need to get right with You – I bring nothing I have done but I give you everything I am. Help me to live for You. Please be my Saviour and my Master. Amen.

What now?

1. Tell someone - either a 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 this prayer. 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 - 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	

Lessons from a sick bed

BY JODY BENNETT

Continued from last month...

Here are some more insights that came to me while enduring an extended period of illness.

8. Sometimes in all the waiting and pain of a long illness, one can have days of despair where it all becomes too much. That is when I had to remind myself that feelings are not reliable – they lie. Feelings are influenced by how much sleep I've had, my digestion, what others have done or said, what I've watched or Googled, by my pain or discomfort. Feelings are fickle and transitory, they cannot be relied on. I feel God is far away and has abandoned me. "Lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age." (Matt 28:20) I feel like my prayers hit the ceiling. "For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous, and His ears are open to their prayers." (1 Peter 3:12) The Bible reminds me that feelings change but the Word of God is a solid foundation.

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

10. The second way to tackle bad days is to remember this too will pass. Things change, the tunnel ends, the pain eases, the sun comes out. It will not be like this forever. Bad situations improve. Most illnesses and wounds heal. And, as a Christian, even if the worst comes to worst and I die, there is hope even then because heaven awaits. God has promised that I will live eternally in perfection in His presence — a forever without any sorrow or crying or death or pain! "God Himself will be with them and be their God. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away." (Revelations 21:3-4)

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

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

May you find God in your dark times.



Christian Atsu of Newcastle United (left) runs with the ball during the Premier League 2 match between Leeds United and Newcastle United at Thorp Arch Training Ground on March 15, 2021 in Leeds, England. (Photo by Serena Taylor/Newcastle United via Getty Images)

LEAVING A LASTING LEGACY

Rising from abject poverty in Ghana, Christian Atsu played for English soccer teams in Chelsea, Everton, Bournemouth and Newcastle before being signed to Turkish club, Hatayspor in 2022.

Tragically it was there that he lost his life in the earthquake in 2023, aged only 31. He left behind his wife, Marie-Claire Rupio, and two sons and a daughter. He also left behind a legacy of strong faith in Jesus.

“My faith is the most important thing in my life,” he told *The Guardian*. “I know I’m one of the lucky people God has blessed. I’m very lucky and privileged to be in such a position. I had nothing and now I’ve got so much I have to give something back.”

Christian was a young teenager when he made the decision to follow Jesus for himself.

“I reached a level where my parents didn’t have to tell me I have to go to church, or do this or do that,” Christian said in an article for the Newcastle United website. “I realised that I have to make the choice. Parents don’t force their children to go to church. They make sure they bring you up in the way of the Lord, and then you make the decision yourself. That’s what I did.”

Following his death, tributes flowed in from around the world for the winger, who was once hailed as the Ghanaian Messi.

His body lay in state for a week before his funeral, which included a

military procession. He was buried in his hometown, Dogobome in Ada Foah, on Ghana’s south east coast.

Christian’s professional career began with Portuguese team FC Porto when he was 17. Two years later he joined Chelsea on a five-year contract and was immediately loaned to Dutch club Vitesse Arnhem, followed by Everton, Bournemouth and Málaga. Christian joined Newcastle United in 2016, where he stayed until 2021. He then joined Al Raed Saudi Football Club.

In September 2022, he joined Turkish professional league Süper Lig’s club Hatayspor. He played three league games and one in the Turkish Cup. The day before the earthquake, Christian scored the only goal at home to Kasimpasa in the seventh minute of added time.

He represented Ghana at the 2014 FIFA World Cup and four Africa Cup of Nations tournaments. His team was the runner-up at the 2015 Africa Cup of Nations, where he was awarded Player of the Tournament and Goal of the Tournament.

Despite Christian’s international success, however, he never forgot his roots or his family back home. “Whenever I go home, I am happy,” he told *Arms Around the Child*, for whom he was a global ambassador. “You never forget the person you were before you left. I survived but I don’t forget.”

He was one of 10 siblings and was only 12 when his father died. Just before his father died, he told

Christian that he should worship God and help humanity.

Growing up in poverty was not easy for Christian, however and he found it hard to accept the cards he had been dealt.

“Sometimes I would complain to God a lot: ‘Why should I suffer like this? Why should some people have it easy?’ When I was growing, I would read the Bible, trying to understand everything. ‘Why? Why? Why?’”

“Then I realised that I was complaining too much. God’s power has to be manifested in my life for people to see how far He has brought me. The Bible says it is not by our hard work, by what we do, that makes us reach the level that we are now. For example, like me – it is not just by my hard work, though I am working hard, but it is the will of God, the grace of God, that has brought me this far.”

While in England, Christian attended church in Newcastle, stating that he was there to worship God and enjoy the freedom it gave him.

“In the house of God I’m normal,” he said. “I don’t want a celebrity life. When I feel normal I feel free.”

After Christian’s death, former West Ham and Fulham defender John Paintsil paid tribute to his friend. “He helped a lot of people solve their problems, gave out to those in need,” he told BBC Ghana.

Despite his sports success, Ghana’s news outlets claimed that 95 percent of tributes about Christian



Ghanaian soccer player Christian Atsu’s wife Marie-Claire Rupio (L) and children at his funeral at the State House in Accra, Ghana on March 17, 2023. (Photo by Kwame Adzaho-Amenortor/Anadolu Agency via Getty Images)

were focused on his humanitarian work such as bailing out Ghanaians

who had been jailed for stealing food.

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