

# GETTING GRATEFUL



## Christmas can be a time to focus on giving or getting

**T**his Christmas, the second Covid Christmas of the world, it would be easy to focus on the negative – foreign holidays we can't go on, overseas family that we can't see, online gifts that are delayed or unavailable. There may also be the more serious issues of a loved one passed or sick from Covid (or some other illness or accident), a lost job, less money due to reduced hours or lockdowns, or relationships that have failed due to enforced distance or smothering closeness.

American author Max Lucado says, "The good life begins not when circumstances change but when our attitude toward them does."

If you are counting your blessings and remembering all the good things you do have in your life, it is easier to feel content. Your focus is on the glass half full, instead of the glass half empty.

Pastor Greg Laurie notes: "Studies have actually linked gratitude with a variety of positive effects. Researchers have determined that grateful people demonstrate less envy, materialism and self-centeredness. Gratitude enhances relationships and contributes to longevity and even our quality of sleep."

"If it came in a pill form, gratitude would be a miracle cure. So if we can learn to be thankful for what we already have instead of what we think we need, it could make us happy."

### Contentment is not natural

However, that isn't our nature. The Apostle Paul said that he had learned to be content: "Not that I was ever in need, for I have learned how to be content with whatever I have. I know how to live on almost nothing or with everything. I have learned the secret of living in every situation, whether it is with a full stomach or empty, with plenty or little" (Philippians 4:11-12 NLT).

Greg Laurie goes on to say: "Some things have to be taught. For instance, children are not naturally well-mannered. Instead, they are naturally selfish and inconsiderate. So we have to teach children manners."

"If you put a child in a room and give him a toy, he'll be relatively happy. But when you bring in another child with another toy, friction begins. They'll fight over the toy they've determined is the best one. Each child wants what

the other has. That's human nature, and we don't necessarily outgrow it.

"So we see that contentment needs to be learned. It doesn't come naturally to us, because we're not naturally content."

### Can we learn contentment?

- **The first thing** to note is that our natural lack of contentment may be an indication, like hunger or thirst, that **there is something fundamentally missing** in our lives.

Famous Oxford don CS Lewis said: "If I find in myself a desire which no experience in this world can satisfy, the most probable explanation is that I was made for another world." The Bible says we were made for heaven and an eternity with God.

In so many of the stories in this paper, people chase happiness and fulfilment through drugs, sex, power or wealth, only to find that they are left more miserable than they were before. It is only when they find a relationship with Jesus Christ and have met that very deep longing to be loved and for their lives to mean something, that they find contentment with their circumstances.

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## Fulani finds Christmas hope

**R**aised a Fulani herdsman, Abdul heartbreakingly recalls the times his own family and friends would attack Christian villages leaving no survivors.

"You cannot count the people they killed – they would go into villages and kill the entire village," he says.

He even admits that he was involved in orchestrating one murder himself, as, with tears, he recounts his old life.

In 2002 he walked past a church by chance and heard a preacher say that Jesus was the only way to heaven; these words filled his mind with questions and his journey to truth began.

He began asking those around him questions about Jesus and the Bible. The advice was always the same: "Christians are not serious people and Islam is the far superior religion." He wasn't satisfied with the answers.

"I was at a loss; if Jesus was the way, then why was I still following Mohammed?"

He was desperate to hear the message of Jesus preached again, even though he knew attending church was a risk.

On Christmas Day he sneaked out of his home and attended a church service. He didn't receive Christ that day but he returned home to find all his belongings outside. His mother discovered he had attended church and kicked him out. He had nowhere to go.

The same night, he had a vivid dream about two paths, and he knew immediately that Jesus

was speaking to him.

"That night, even after seeing how my mother reacted, I decided to accept Jesus Christ as my Lord. It didn't matter to me if they wanted to kill me or disown me. I didn't care. I wanted to accept Jesus Christ."

His family began trying to convert him back to Islam. They tried using voodoo and threatened to kill him but he would not renounce Christ.

He went to church once more and when a police officer saw him there, he warned him that he needed to escape.

"The churches in my town would not accept me as a Fulani and my family wanted to kill me."

This is when he knew he had to leave the state.

After leaving, he prayed continually for a place to go where he would be accepted.

"I prayed to God: I want you to lead me where I will learn your Word better and where I will be embraced and accepted."

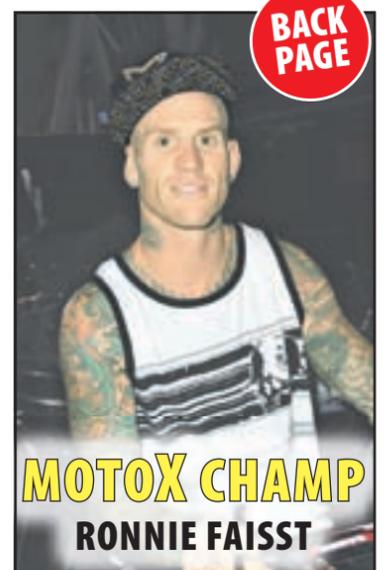
Not long after, his prayers were answered when someone told him about YWAM [Youth With A Mission – a global movement of Christians from many cultures, age groups, and Christian traditions, dedicated to serving Jesus throughout the world]. He had no money, but a pastor blessed him with finances and encouragement to go.

Abdul is still at YWAM and knows he has been blessed, and he looks ahead with hope. •



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Fun for Kids  
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# NEVER GIVE UP

Seventeen-year-old Gomode Nkgomotsang once wanted to just 'disappear' but now has the strength and courage to not quit the minute things get hard – as they often do.

Gomode tells *Challenge News* she was no stranger to obstacles. "My childhood was very difficult," she says. "I had a single mother who raised us four children. We grew up with no father figure. But my mum is a woman of prayer. She taught us to pray and to never give up no matter the situation or predicament."

Remorsefully, Gomode recalls, "I was just a greedy, selfish girl, full of anger and a bad liar. Everything that came out my mouth was just lies."

She really struggled without a father in her life but everything changed when she was 10 years old. Someone else was about to fill that role.

"I was 10 years old in Grade 5," she says. "I was at a church and I heard the Good News about Jesus saving us from our sins."

Gomode sat in the pew and listened as people went to the front of the church and talked about how Jesus had changed their lives. "It wasn't just something they saw in a movie, it was real," she says. "For the first time, I believed that my Redeemer lives."



Gomode Nkgomotsang

**YOU DO NOT HAVE TO BE OLD TO BE A CHRISTIAN.**



Gomode wanted to have Jesus in her life. "I decided to become a Christian because I believe that Christ came to this world to die for my sins and that He rose again," she smiles. "Through all of my difficulties He did not leave me. He guided me then and He guides me now."

Gomode prayed a beautiful prayer and committed her life to God. "I

also asked my family and church members to pray for me."

Now, Gomode speaks of the transformation in her life. "It was seven years ago but I still thank God. I no longer struggle with specific sins in my life. Every time I feel tempted to sin I just call on the name of the Lord because I know that He can break every evil desire that wants to take control of my life."

Being a Christian is not always easy though. "I lost many friends," she admits. "It is hard to share your beliefs with others when they do not think the same. I just started focusing on serving God and I stopped listening to those negative people. I grew in my faith."

Gomode channels her passion for Jesus by teaching Sunday school and telling other little boys and girls about God and what He has done for them.

"Accepting Jesus Christ as your Lord and Saviour is a very special thing," she says. "This Jesus Christ that we are serving did everything so that we may be saved. He forgives us and gives us the strength we need when we are weak."

Gomode's favourite Bible verse talks about that God-given strength needed when in tough places in life. "Be strong and courageous. Do not be terrified, do not be discouraged, for the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go." [Joshua 1:9]

Gomode encourages others to seek God for themselves. "You do not have to be old to be a Christian. No. You have to accept the Lord while time is still here because no one knows when He will return."

"I encourage the youth of different countries and continents to give their lives to the Lord. Do not worry about the situation you are going through, just put those problems into God's hands and He will take care of everything."

"Do not think of what people will say. This relationship between you and God is a race you have to run and the important thing is the finishing line, where you will be rewarded. To those who have started the race, I tell you, never give up!"



# Getting grateful

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Hebrews 13:5 in the Bible says, "Be content with such things as you have. For [God] Himself has said, 'I will never leave you nor forsake you.'" Once we are in relationship with Father God we can have the security to know that He is always with us and that He has promised to supply our needs. We don't have to be afraid anymore and we don't have to rely only on our own inadequate strength or ability to sustain us.

Being in a relationship with God also opens our eyes to the good and beautiful around us, so that it is easier to be grateful. We appreciate things that we never noticed before, like sunsets, close calls and last minute provisions. Suddenly our circumstances are no longer random but ordered by Providence and life events take on a new significance.

Knowing God and believing He promises us a life hereafter, also gives us perspective. This world is not all there is and we don't have to try to cram all the good things into 70+ years. If we have to endure poverty or sickness now, we have all eternity to enjoy mansions and healthy bodies.

Hymn writer Fanny Crosby, who was born blind, famously said: "If I had a choice, I would still choose to remain blind ... for when I die, the first face I will ever see will be the face of my blessed Saviour."

**Careful of comparison**

• The second key to contentment, is to be careful who you compare yourself to. It is easier to be grateful and content when you remember that even having a closet full of clothes or a safe, weather-proof home is more than the majority of the world enjoys.

However, if we fill our minds with social media posts of the rich and glamorous, or constantly think of what other people have that we do not, then we are bound to feel inadequate and discontent.

**Giving is getting**

• The third key to contentment is to give. Generous people are happier, more contented people. It was Jesus Himself who said that is more blessed to give than to receive (Acts 20:5).

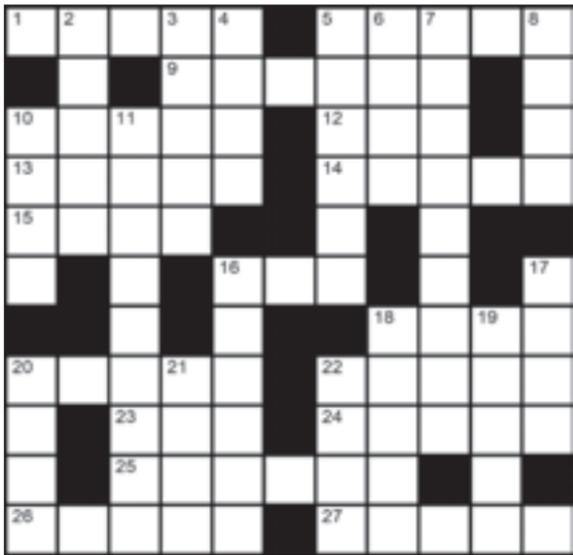
When we are focussing on the needs of others and helping them, then we have less time and inclination to worry about stuff we don't have. We feel a sense of purpose and usefulness that motivates us, and we are reminded continually that there are those who are worse off than ourselves.

So this Christmas, instead of getting depressed or angry at the things you lack, get grateful by turning your life over to Jesus and focussing on all the good people, opportunities and circumstances in your life. And may 2022 bring you many more!

## Coffee Break CROSSWORD & SUDOKU

**ACROSS**

- 1 Trainee
- 5 Loud car feature
- 9 Quickly assembled building
- 10 Collectible
- 12 Hoover's agency
- 13 Put up, as a statue
- 14 Speck of land in a river
- 15 Meadows
- 16 Place for fitness buffs
- 18 Nip with your teeth
- 20 Tooth edges
- 22 Say "hi"
- 23 Restaurant gratuity
- 24 Airplane's walkway
- 25 Cold old time (3,3)
- 26 Person from around here
- 27 A shaft from a bow



**DOWN**

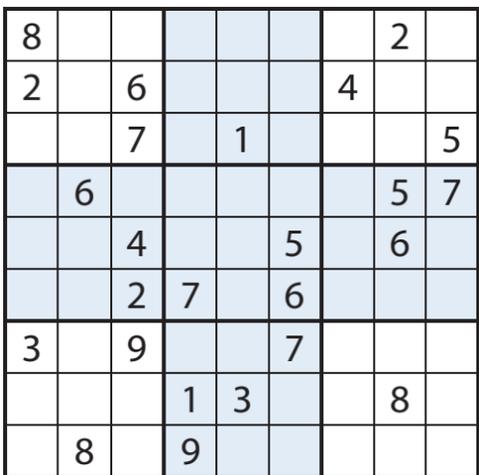
- 2 Blue of the sky

- 3 Long stories
- 4 Quick jogging pace
- 5 Certify as true
- 6 Chem class rooms
- 7 Skills
- 8 Dewy fog
- 10 Jailroom
- 11 Sensible, practical
- 16 Religious music
- 17 Local fair
- 18 Bramble
- 19 Phone company
- 20 Hip, groovy
- 21 12-point type size
- 22 Infatuated, doting

**SOLUTIONS PAGE 7**



"I hope none of you are feeling stress about this test. It's only 50% of your grade, 60% of your future and 100% of your self-esteem."



# The girl who never came home

## There is hope even in the tragic story of Leah Sharibu and the Dapchi schoolgirl kidnappings

BY AINSLEY GAEBLER

Leah Sharibu was only 15 when she and 109 other students were kidnapped from their school in Dapchi, Nigeria by the Boko Haram terrorist group in February, 2018.

The awful event, referred to as the Dapchi schoolgirl kidnappings, received a lot of media coverage. People were outraged and dozens of families suffered.

A month later in March, after government negotiations, the girls were returned safely home – all except for five who were trampled to death in the packed trucks used to kidnap them, and Leah, who allegedly remains the only Dapchi schoolgirl in captivity today.

On the day the girls were released, Leah's mother Rebecca rushed to the vehicles that brought them home. But delight at seeing her daughter again turned to grief when it became clear that she was not among the group.

Upon speaking to some of Leah's friends, she discovered the reason.

The girls told her: "Boko Haram told Leah to accept Islam and she refused. So they said she would not come with us."

"We begged her to just recite the Islamic declaration and put the hijab on and get into the vehicle, but she said it was not her faith, so why should she say it was? If they want to kill her, they can go ahead, but she won't say she is a Muslim."

Leah put her life on the line because she would not deny the One she had put her trust in – Jesus Christ.

Leah's parents and the pastor of her church have spoken to news outlets about how proud they are.

"I am feeling fantastic because she did not deny Christ as her personal Saviour," said Nathan, Leah's father. "That makes me feel great."

"I am so proud of my Leah because she did not denounce Christ," Rebecca added. "When

she went away to school, I gave her a copy of the Bible so she could have her personal devotions even when I am not there. I trained her and taught her the fear of God and she grew up in the fear of God. As her mother, I know her to be an obedient daughter, respectful and someone who puts others before herself."

Leah's steadfastness in her faith during trials must have been reaffirmed by a sermon the school chaplain had preached several weeks prior to the kidnappings – about standing for Christ no matter the cost.

Leah was reportedly the only Christian in the group of Muslim students who were kidnapped. One of her Christian friends, Affodia Andrawus, who witnessed the raid but managed to escape, gave her account of that terrifying day: "We were sitting down to eat. Suddenly, we heard gunshots. We decided to hold hands and run away.

"Leah's hostel is in front of the gate, so we ran that way, calling for her. But she was caring for a sick roommate, Liyatu, and refused to leave her. Leah tried to carry Liyatu while we ran toward the fence. But Leah couldn't run fast and kept falling with Liyatu. Liyatu eventually managed to run to the staff quarters.

for weeks.

Several girls, including Leah, attempted to escape. Three days later, exhausted and starving, the girls asked a nomadic family for help getting home. They gave the girls a jerry can full of milk before betraying them and sending them straight back to their captors.

Just before the group that was

released left Leah behind, she handed them the empty jerry can to give to her parents. It was the only thing she had to send them as a remembrance. That and a message asking for prayer and a note of reassurance: "I know it is not easy missing me, but I want to assure you that I am fine where I am... I am confident that one day I shall see your face again. If not here, then there at the bosom of our Lord Jesus Christ."

Nathan told the press: "Since the kidnapping of our girl, the family has been very sad. Our son, 13-year-old Donald, who used to play, and do everything together with her, has been very affected by her absence, and he keeps asking: 'When is Leah going to come back?'

"As a father, I have to encourage

him, saying: 'By God's grace, Leah can come back home anytime.'"

Many rumours have circulated concerning the whereabouts and fate of Leah Sharibu. If she is still alive, she will be turning 18 in May this year and would have spent over three years in captivity. Some have speculated that she died in 2018 while others think she was forcibly converted to Islam, married off to a Boko Haram commander and became a mother.

However, none of these rumours have been proven and nothing has been categorically confirmed or denied. As of now, no one knows exactly what has happened to her – the quiet and courageous young schoolgirl who chose to sacrifice her freedom rather than deny her God.



At the Falomo Roundabout, in Ikoyi, Lagos, freeway support pillars were painted to honour the 276 abducted Chibok girls, and 110 Dapchi girls, including Leah Sharibu, who is being held for her faith. The #BringBackOurGirls (BBOG) movement staged a sit in at the venue on 5 October 2019 in Lagos, Nigeria, to mark the 2000th day since the Chibok girls were abducted in 2014. (Photo by Olukayode Jaiyeola/NurPhoto via Getty Images) **INSET:** Leah Sharibu



Leah's parents, Nathan and Rebecca Sharibu

### BY GOD'S GRACE, LEAH CAN COME BACK HOME ANYTIME



## A man in a vision helped lead me to true faith

Koffi Julien was going to be a monk. Then he discovered alcohol and sex and that plan pretty much evaporated.

Koffi began with good intentions. Brought up as a Catholic, he was a religious man and keen to fulfil what he thought was his religious calling. However he had no real relationship with God, who he only knew about through rituals, not personally as a friend.

"Although I was educated to enter into a monastery, God had other plans for my life," Koffi says.

His childhood was something of a contradiction. Although he was brought up with all the trappings of faith, his lifestyle didn't reflect that upbringing. He also experienced early tragedy.

"My mother and my grandparents passed away when I was a boy and I lost my way and starting drinking and smoking at a young age," he reveals.

"The drinking and smoking developed into living the night life that was not good and that in turn led to sexual immorality, which went on for 15 years."

Then at the age of 27, Koffi's life took a turn for the better. "One night I had a vision," he says. "I saw Jesus Christ speak-

ing to me and He said: 'I am the way, the truth and the life...'. This verse comes from the book of John, chapter 14 and verse 6. That was in 1995 in the city of Yamoussoukro, the capital city of Ivory Coast.

As arresting as it was, the vision didn't result in an immediate change in Koffi's life. "Instead, after I had the vision I decided that I would make a serious effort to find God," Koffi shares. "It wasn't till five years later, in the year 2000, that I came to that place of making a personal commitment to Jesus Christ."

As a result "God took away my drinking and smoking and delivered me from sexual immorality," he says.

"He enabled me to go to South Africa to learn English and to attend the Back to the Bible Mission in the town of Barber-ton, where I could study

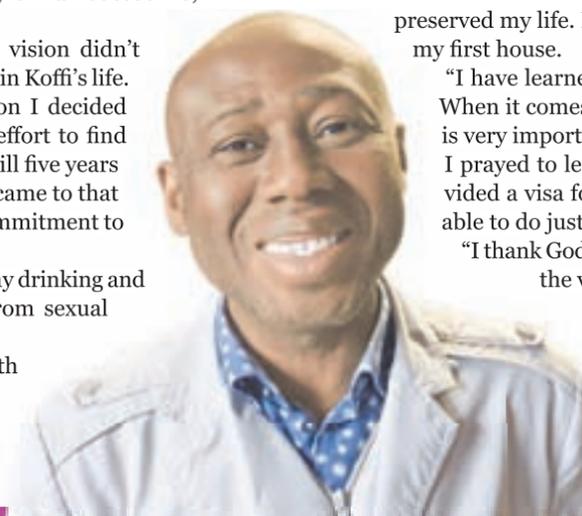
the Bible and be trained to do God's work.

"I felt very much that God had wonderfully given me a second chance at life. In fact I felt that God had miraculously preserved my life. He also provided money for me to build my first house.

"I have learned that with God all things are possible. When it comes to growing in my Christian life, prayer is very important. I discovered this 25 years ago when I prayed to learn English and God miraculously provided a visa for me to go to South Africa where I was able to do just that.

"I thank God every day for fulfilling His promise from the vision He gave me. That verse - 'I am the Way, the Truth and the Life. No one comes to the Father except through Me' is my favourite Bible verse.

"I now have the assurance of eternal life in Jesus Christ and I have the privilege of serving Him," Koffi concludes.



## Zulutranslation

## Wayefuna impilo engunaphakade

U Simon Musebe uvuma ngowakhe ukuthi la ephuma khona kwakungekhe. Wayezungezwe ubumnyama nokwesaba. Kwakuningi ayebhekene nacho kanye nokuba isigqila sezinto.

Kodwa namhlanje, ezisholo, "ngigcwele uthando, nentokoza kanye nokuthula komphumulo!"

Lenguquko emangalisayo yenzeka kanjani?

USimon ukhuluma ngezinto ezazimhlupha ngaphambi kokuthi kube noshintsho empilweni yakhe. "Ngangicabanga ukuthi konke kuhamba kahle nesono siyinxenye yempilo. Izone ezazimbambile kwakuwukuxegelwa isimo, utshwala, amanga, ulaka, umona nokungathetheleli."

Usitshela ngesikhathi elala nowesifazane owayeyilunga lebandla okwakufanele ngabe uphila esifungweni sokuthembeka. "Wakuphinda lokho inyanga eziyisithupha", ezisholo. "Ngangiyisidakwa, esinamanga, esithanda ubumnandi ukudlula yonke into. Kodwa lokuziphatha akumlethelanga intokoza."

USimon wakhulela ekhaya lenkolo, kodwa wayengenabudlelwano noJesu. Kwakunzima ukumamukela uNkulunkulu ngenxa yomndeneni wakhe, owawukholwa, kodwa wamlaxaza ngaphandle.

Lokhu kwashintsha ngo 1994. Abafundi base Nyuvesi babenecrusade la umfundisi wayeshumayela emakethe, Ngamenywa ngaya. Ilapho ngezwa khona ngoNKULUNKULU ophilayo"

USimon utshele I Challenge ukuthi uJesu wafela ukusisindisa ezonweni zethu, kwamthusa ukuthi kuyokwenzekani ngaye uma eshona. "Angifunanga ukufela ezonweni zami! Ngangazi ukuthi ngiyisoni! Ngangifuna impilo engapheliyo ku Jesu Kristu."

USimon wenza isinqumo esashintsha impilo yakhe yonke. Ngabona ukuthi ngiyisini esidinga ukuthethelelwa ngokuphenduka ezonweni zakhe."

Namanje, uSimon ubambeleva kuleliyavesi ngokukaJohane 3:16 ngoba likhuluma ngalokhu ayekudinga uma ehlengana noJesu okokuqala. "uNkulunkulu walithanda izwe kangaka waze wanikela ngeNdodana yakhe ezelwe yodwa, ukuba yilowo nalowo okholwa Iyo angabhubhi kepha abe nokuphila okuphakade."

Wathi angakholwa kuJesu, impilo yakhe yaguquka yonke. "Ngalangazela ukhlanganyela nabantu abazi uJesu njengoMsindisi wabo, ngalangazela ukufunda izwi likaNkulunkulu, kanye nokumfumisa ngimkhonze."

USimon unothando lokukhuluma ngalodaba lukaJESU olumangazayo nabantu. "Ngifuna ukutshela labo abangamazi uKristu ngothando lwakhe! uJesu Kristu usithanda sonke noma sibuthakathaka futhi uthethelela izono zethu. Uyindlela, neqiniso nokuphila {Johane 14:6}

USimon ushiya abafundi nalesisinqiniseko, "uNkulunkulu wethembekile noma thina singathembekanga kuYena. Sinokuphila okuphakade nosathane angeke asephuca kona. Phezu kwalelidwala ngizolakha ibandla lami nama-sango esihogo angeke amelana nalo {Mathewu 16:18}."

## Die soeke na die ewige lewe

## Afrikaans translation

Simon Musebe erken dat sy lewe rof en woes was. Hy was diep onderdompel in donkerte en wanhoop. Hy was vasgevang in verslawings en het met persoonlike probleme gesukkel.

Maar vandag sê hy, "Ek is vol liefde, vreugde en vrede."

Hoe het hierdie ongelooflike transformasie plaasgevind?

Simon vertel van sommige probleme waarmee hy gesukkel het voordat die 180 grade omkeer

in sy lewe plaasgevind het. "Ek het gedink dat alles in my lewe normaal was, en sonde was net deel daarvan.

Spesifieke sonde waarmee ek probleme gehad het was seksuele immoraliteit,

alkohol verslawing, steel, lieg, woede, jaloesie en onvergewensgesindheid."

Hy vertel van 'n tyd toe hy saam met 'n vrou geslaap het wat lid was van 'n godsdienstige gemeenskap wat onder die gelofte van kuisheid moes leef. "Ek het dit 'n paar keer oor 'n tydperk van ses maande gedoen," sê hy. "Ek was dronk, het leuens vertel, en het plesier liefgehad bo enige iets anders. Maar hierdie gedrag het my nie vreugde verskaf nie."

Simon het groot geword in 'n tradisionele, godsdienstige huis, maar hy het nie geweet hoe om 'n persoonlike verhouding met Jesus te hê nie. Hy het dit moeilik gevind om God ernstig te aanvaar, want sy familie wie veronderstel was om godsdienstig te wees, het hom verwerp.

In 1994 het dinge drasties vir Simon verander. 'n Paar universiteits studente het 'n uitreik gereël, en pastore het by die markplein gepraat. "Ek het die uitnodiging aanvaar en het die uitreik bygewoon. Daar het ek vir die eerste keer gehoor van die ware en die lewende God."

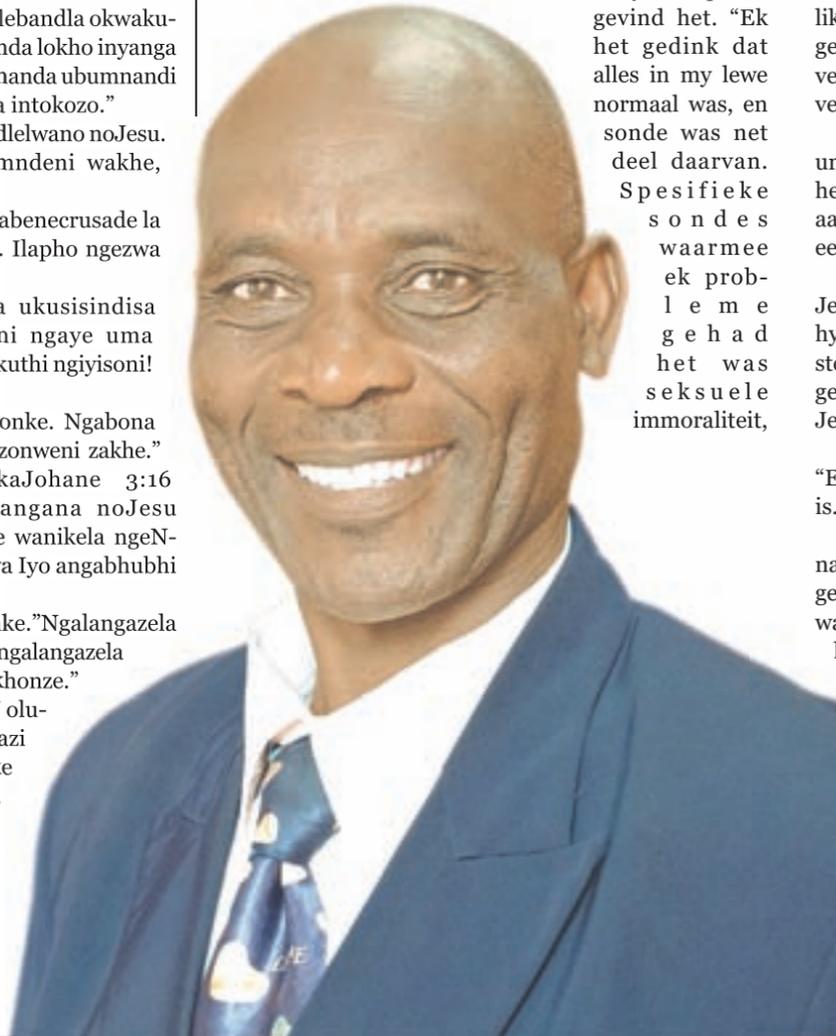
Simon vertel vir Challenge dat toe hy gehoor het van Jesus wat gesterf het om ons van ons sondes te red, was hy angsbevangen oor wat met hom sou gebeur het as hy sterf. "Ek wou nie in my sonde doodgaan nie! Ek het geweet dat ek 'n sondaar is! Ek wou die ewige lewe in Jesus Christus hê."

So het Simon 'n lewens veranderende besluit gemaak. "Ek het besef dat ek 'n sondaar is, en dat vergifnis nodig is. Deur bekering het ek weggedraai van al my sondes."

Selfs nou hou Simon die Bybel teks Johannes 3:16 naby aan sy hart vas: "Want so lief het God die wêreld gehad dat Hy sy eniggebore Seun gegee het, sodat elkeen wat in Hom glo, nie verlore mag gaan nie, maar die ewige lewe kan hê." Dit spreek oor wat hy verlang het toe hy Jesus vir die eerste keer ontmoet het.

Sy lewe het heeltemaal verander toe hy in Jesus begin glo het. "Ek wil graag meng met mense wat Jesus as hulle persoonlike saligmaker ken. Ek het 'n begeerte om die Woord van God te lees, en ek wil Hom loof en prys."

Simon is passievol om sy wonderlike storie van Jesus met ander te deel, "Ek wil vir hulle wat nie vir Christus ken nie vertel van Sy liefde vir hulle! Jesus Christus het ons almal lief ten spyte van ons swakhede en Hy vergewe ons ons sondes. Hy is die weg, die waarheid en die lewe. Johannes 14:6" •



## Englishtranslation

## The search for eternal life

Simon Musebe readily admits that he has a rough and rocky past. He wallowed in darkness and despair. He struggled with addictions and personal issues.

Yet today, he exclaims, "I am filled with love, joy and peace of mind!"

How did this amazing transformation take place?

Simon talks about some of the things he struggled with prior to the 180 degree about-turn in his life. "I thought things were normal and sinning was just part of life. Specific sins I had problems with were sexual immorality, alcohol addiction, stealing, lying, anger, jealousy and unforgiveness."

He tells of the time he slept with a woman who was a member of a religious community and who was supposed to be living under a vow of chastity. "I did so several times over the course of six months," he says. "I was a drunkard, spoke lies and loved pleasure more than anything else. But this behaviour did not give me joy."

Simon had grown up in a tra-

ditional, religious home but did not know how to have a personal relationship with Jesus. He found it hard to take God seriously because his family members, who were supposed to be religious, rejected him.

Then, in 1994, things dramatically shifted for Simon. "Some university students had organised a crusade and were having pastors speak at the market places. I followed the invitation and went to the crusade. It was there that I first heard about the true and living God."

Simon tells Challenge that when he heard about Jesus dying to save us from our sins, he was petrified about what would happen to him once he died. "I did not want to perish in my sins! I knew I was a sinner! I wanted everlasting life in Jesus Christ."

So Simon made a life-changing decision. "I realised that I was a sinner and needed to be forgiven of my sins by repenting [turning away] from all my sins."

Even now, Simon holds the Bible verse, John 3:16, close to his heart

because it talks about what he had longed for when he met Jesus for the first time. "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life."

Once he became a believer in Jesus, his life completely changed. "I desire to have fellowship with people who know Christ as their personal Saviour, I desire to read the Word of God, and I desire to worship and give praise to Him."

Simon is passionate about sharing this amazing story of Jesus with others, "I want to tell those who don't know Christ about His love for them! Jesus Christ loves us all despite our weakness and forgives our sins. He is the way, the truth, and the life. (John 14:6)."

Simon leaves his readers with this last assurance, "God is faithful to us even when we are not faithful to Him. We have eternal life that the devil cannot snatch from us. Upon this rock I will build my church and the gates of hell will never prevail against it (Matthew 16:18)." •

## Saved from addictions

Zachary Tengecha's life started out rough and rocky. Before he knew any better, he was doing whatever he wanted. He was caught in some dark places but it was during these lows that he found the way to the light.

Zac talks about the issues that encompassed his childhood. "I was born into a non-believing family where there was a lot of drinking alcohol and abuse."

He himself became addicted to drinking alcohol at a young age. "I struggled with this addiction and frequently lied to my parents and other people," he says.

Zac had not heard much about God or spirituality until he was in primary school. "A Christian union group came to my school," he says. "I heard the message of salvation: that Jesus Christ had come to die for sinners. I realised I was a sinner."

Zac wanted a change in his life so he decided to

become a Christian. "I confessed my sins and surrendered my life to Jesus."

Big changes happened in Zac's life. "I left behind the dirty things I was doing like drinking alcohol, lying, and having bad friends and influences."

Zac says it was hard to stay close to Jesus sometimes, especially when his former friends visited him. "They wanted me to compromise my Christian faith and join them in their traditional beliefs and customs. But Jesus gives me the strength to face these challenges."

Now, the 37-year-old works as a chaplain and shares the story of Jesus with everyone he can. He shares something that is close to his heart, "My favourite Bible verse is Psalms 27:4 which says, 'One thing I have asked of the Lord, that will I seek after; that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to gaze upon the beauty of the Lord and to inquire in His temple.'" •



# Lonely and depressed, she turned to God

**A**nna-Mart Oosthuizen had lots of questions – questions that seemed to have no answers. Lost and confused, she tried to drown out the negative feelings with alcohol.

“One of my biggest problems was that I felt unbelievably alone within myself,” Anna-Mart confesses. “I desperately wanted everyone to like me, to accept me, and to make me feel important.”

Trying to fill the emptiness within, she resorted to swearing and binge drinking.

“I had been exposed to many things, including bad language and alcohol, so naturally I too started to do the same,” she says. “I always had this feeling that these things weren’t right, but I repressed these feelings, and later it didn’t even bother me anymore.”

Anna-Mart knew about God and the principles of right and wrong.

She had been raised in church, attended Sunday school, and was christened as a baby. Yet she says she did not understand the purpose of it all.

“Through my student years I attended church less and less,” she admits. “I never experienced the presence of God.”

“Now and then I made an appearance in church, hoping that this time would be different and that I would possibly meet God, or maybe just ease my conscience.

“I was just not yet willing to give my all to God.”

Anna-Mart felt like she hit a brick wall, a dead-end, in her quest for truth. But in 2014, she met a man who became a big influence in her spiritual life.

“His testimony and his lifestyle awakened within me a search for God,” she tells *Challenge*. She was invited to his church and felt a personal connection with God for the first time.

But the pull of her old life proved too strong and Anna-Mart returned to her old habits.

Years later, battling depression in a world coping with the coronavirus and lockdowns she decided to try and find God again.

“I thought that this time I was ready to do it,” she says. “I gave my heart to the Lord, or so I thought. I relied on my own insight and did not fully trust the Lord because, what if He did not do His part? I thought I needed a plan B, just in case God did not want me.”

Months passed and Anna-Mart saw no drastic changes in her life. Her insecurity grew as she began to think God did not want her as His child.

“I just struggled on alone,” she says. “My depression was one of the reasons why I could not fully commit to the Lord. I could not trust Him to remove this from me. I rather let the devil take control of my struggle.”

As a result Anna-Mart’s life spiraled out of control. “I was so deeply caught up in my own world. It felt as though my life was falling apart.”

Then, she came to a sudden realization.

“I was just so tired of struggling on my own. I realized that I could do nothing other than seek the Lord with all my heart,” she recalls. “I needed Him so desperately. I had such a great need and yearning for Him. I sought the Lord. I was so hungry for His love and mercy.”

Anna-Mart asked many people how to get saved (rescued from one’s sins by believing in Jesus’ death on the cross) and ended up attending Bible study classes and going back to church.

One early morning in November 2020, Anna-Mart opened the Bible App on her phone and read the verse Ephesians 6:10: “*Finally be*



Anna-Mart Oosthuizen with her fiancé Mike.

*strong in the Lord and in His mighty power.*”

“Right there I realized that I drastically needed the power of the Lord and that I could not get it unless I sincerely committed my life to Him,” she says.

A week later, Anna-Mart went to a Sunday morning church service. As she sat in the pew, she wrestled with her conflicting thoughts so much she barely paid attention to the message.

She was brought back to reality when the pastor said, “If you are not able to say with certainty that you have received salvation and turned away from your sins, then you are on the road which leads to hell.”

Too shy to go up to the front when asked who would like to commit their lives to Jesus, Anna-Mart determined to take the final step and give her heart to the Lord later

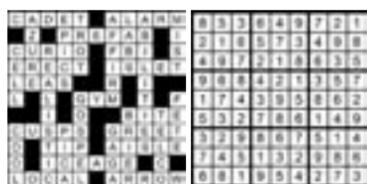
that evening.

All of a sudden, without being able to stop, her hand went up and she walked towards the front.

“I realized that the Holy Spirit (invisible person of God) was busy working with me and through me,” she laughs joyfully. “With the help of the pastor, I sincerely gave my heart to the Lord. I prayed to God and asked for His forgiveness for everything. He saved me! I am now free.”

After pushing God aside for so long, Anna-Mart can now finally rejoice in the knowledge that Jesus will be with her every step of the way. She no longer needs to struggle on her own. He will be there to help and guide her.

She exclaims, “I have trusted the Lord to fill me with His Holy Spirit and to purify me from all my inner sins. Praise the Lord for His mercy and His presence in my life!”



## HOW DO I BECOME A CHRISTIAN?

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

**What now?**

1. Tell someone - either a Christian that you know or email us at [info@challengenews.org](mailto: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:
- A Bible portion
  - Some ‘starting off’ literature
  - Information on a helpful church

*\* Please tick and write clearly \**

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Phone \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

Email address \_\_\_\_\_

**Send to: [cobusbritz@challnews.onmicrosoft.com](mailto:cobusbritz@challnews.onmicrosoft.com)  
Whatsapp Cobus at +27 78 887 7030**

*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 - <b>Olive Tree app</b> (we recommend that you start with an easy-to-read version like the ESV)	
Audio Bible - <b>Bible.is app</b> , or <b>Youversion Bible app</b>	
Christian radio station - <b>CBN radio app</b> (different channels for all genres of music)	
Christian podcasts and sermons - <b>Edifi app</b>	
Christian movies - <b>New Faith Network app</b> (7-day free trial)	
Daily thoughts and inspiration - <b>Our Daily Bread app</b>	
Advice on specific issues, Bible reading plans and studies for new believers - <b>Youversion Bible app</b> .	
The Bible explained with visual aides - <b>the Bible Project on YouTube</b> .	
<b>Alpha Film Series on Youtube</b> - an online introduction to Christianity.	
For kids - <b>Superbook Kids Bible, videos and games app</b>	
Comic book Bible online- <b>goodandevilbook.com</b>	
More inspiring faith stories - <b>back issues of Challenge News at <a href="http://challengenews.online">challengenews.online</a></b>	

## Wise words

God made us: invented us as a man invents an engine. A car is made to run on petrol, and it would not run properly on anything else. Now God designed the human machine to run on Himself. He Himself is the fuel our spirits were designed to burn, or the food our spirits were designed to feed on. There is no other. That is why it is just no good asking God to make us happy in our own way without bothering about religion. God cannot give us a happiness and peace apart from Himself, because it is not there. There is no such thing.

- C. S. Lewis

All of our strongest instincts, all of our strongest desires, correspond to a strong reality. Hunger indicates the existence of food. Tiredness suggests sleep. Sexual desire implies sex. This is true not only of physical desires. Loneliness implies friendship. The desire to behave decently implies the existence of decency. The desire for God, therefore, implies God.

- Pastor Tim Keller, from his book *The Reason for God*

We are more sinful than we ever dared to believe, but we are more loved than we could ever hope.

- Pastor Tim Keller

Ronnie Faisst in action during the Crusty Demons Nine Lives Tour at the Rod Laver Arena, May 21, 2004 in Melbourne, Australia. (Photo by Robert Cianflone/Getty Images)



# MOTOX TURNS MOTO+

Ronnie Faisst grew up racing motocross and has raced professionally since he was 18. But his career soared to new heights when he helped pioneer Freestyle Motocross, a variation of motocross in which riders attempt to impress judges with jumps and stunts.

Ronnie talked about starting the sport in a video on his YouTube channel. He said at age 20 he moved to California where free riding was being birthed. With nothing but \$200 and an old, raggedy van, Ronnie drove across America and found a job in construction with fellow motocross rider Mike Metzger's father. When he wasn't working, he was riding and going on film trips.

"Little did we know, we were actually pioneering and birthing a whole new sport called Freestyle Motocross," Ronnie says.

Ronnie took that sport around America in 1998 on the Vans Warped Tour and his career took off.

"Before I knew it, I was traveling all around the world, tours, film trips, competing against the best riders in the world, sponsorship dollars came in, contracts came in, and I would ride that way for the next 20 years," Ronnie explains.

It was a fast-paced lifestyle on the road travelling with his friends.

"About everywhere we went there

were after parties and a wild lifestyle," Ronnie remembers. "And I was just in it to win it... I was known for being the committed guy who trained hard and was always into fitness, but was also known as the guy who got loose and partied a lot and chased all the girls."

One day at home, where he was living with his girlfriend at the time,



Ronnie and his wife Mel.

he saw a snippet of a preacher on television that caught his attention.

"He was talking about fear and I thought, what does this dude know about fear?" Ronnie says. "I deal with this on a daily basis in my sport, so I decided to listen on. I actually liked what he had to say and I decided to watch him the next weekend."

Ronnie started watching the preacher on TV every week for the next year or more. He said he liked that he was really positive, always had a good message about faith and how God was on our side and God loved us and wanted to bless us. Despite this, Ronnie's lifestyle continued as it had been.

"I was listening to him and I was being encouraged by what he was saying, but my lifestyle never really shifted," Ronnie admits. "I was still sleeping around and doing whatever I liked and not even feel-

ing guilty about any of it and just thought that was what everyone was doing."

He said he thought of himself as a good person and that the good outweighed the bad in his life, which meant if he died, he thought he deserved to go to heaven. But when a friend gave him a Bible for Christmas, things began to change for Ronnie.

"When I began to read the Bible for the first time for myself, God really started to speak to me," Ronnie says. "It was like the Word of God was alive, because I couldn't put this book down. I never read books, never even read Motocross magazines, I don't like to read anything and yet I could not stop reading this Book."

He said as he read, verses began to almost jump off the page and challenge him.

"I realised, I say I believe in this faith, but I don't live like I do," Ronnie recalls. "One of the verses that really hit me says, 'What will it profit a man if he gained the whole world but he lost his own soul' (Mark 8:36). [I was] thinking, I'm living my dream, I've got everything I ever wanted and things are good, yet I might be missing the one thing that matters."

A theme Ronnie kept seeing in the Bible was repentance (turning away from doing wrong things).

"The Bible kept saying repent, and repent simply means to change your direction," Ronnie explains. "If I'm walking this way, if I was to repent that means I would turn from the way I was headed and I'm going to turn and go a different direction, and I never did that."

Ronnie said although he watched the preacher for over a year, it

wasn't until he read the Bible that he began to feel challenged and had a desire to make a change and follow Jesus. He said he spoke to a Christian friend in the freestyle industry, Nate Adams, and started attending church with him.

"It wasn't long before they gave a message that challenged me and I just knew, it's time to make a real commitment," Ronnie remembers. "I went forward, responded to the altar call, went up to the front, and gave my life to the Lord. And from that day on, I said, man I'm going to be committed to this. I'm going to go for this. And I remember I did a complete 180 turnaround in my life. I was like, I'm done chasing the girls, I'm done living this crazy lifestyle, I'm done with all the partying, all the alcohol, the drugs, all the stuff, I'm done! I'm going to go for Jesus. And that's where my journey began."

Ronnie said actually making the decision to follow Jesus and pray a prayer of salvation in 2006 wasn't the hard part. He said it has been a lot more challenging to actually

walk it out and stay faithful to his commitment to Jesus.

"I had my challenges, I had my weaknesses, my mistakes and my failures along the way, but God remained faithful and He was able to love me right through it," Ronnie explains. "I'm not here today because I was able to do it perfect. I'm still a believer and I'm still following Jesus mainly because I never quit. His love is perfect and He loved me through my weaknesses. Even when I failed Him, He never gave up on me."

Ronnie refers to the change in him since becoming a Christian as a miracle. He said he has been blown away by what God has done in him.

"I experienced something so real that it shifted everything," Ronnie says. "The desires of my heart have changed, the way my mind thinks has changed, the way that I actually choose to live my life has changed."

Ronnie is married to ex-motocross model Mel and together they run an online Christian ministry and YouTube channel called Ronnie and Mel.

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