

A SECOND CHANCE AT FREEDOM

Once on death row, Eddie got a second chance at life, love, and liberty. Would he find redemption?

BY CHERISE BOPAPE

Eddie McLoughlin grew up in Long Island, New York, when times were simpler. He and his brothers spent summers along the Atlantic Ocean – swimming, fishing, and boating. As young children, they had a financially stable home in what Eddie describes as “a typical Irish Catholic family.” They seemed picture-perfect but had deep flaws.

The lure of the streets

By the time his family moved to Arizona, 12-year-old Eddie had experienced

physical, emotional, and psychological abuse. His father had become an alcoholic, and Eddie even ran away from home several times. Eddie hoped he would find purpose and meaning as he embraced the drug culture of the ‘70s, but that lifestyle led to his downward spiral.

In Arizona and California, law enforcement officers arrested Eddie for minor violations. Court-ordered programs and mental health professionals helped. But still, Eddie yielded to the lure of the streets. His poor choices culminated in his arrest in Scottsdale, Arizona.

The charges: first-degree murder and armed robbery. Eddie was only 20 years old.

The sentence

When he needed legal representation, Eddie had the best: a famous trial attorney, John Flynn, who had argued the 1966 U.S. Supreme Court case *Miranda v. Arizona*. Despite Eddie’s lawyer’s prowess, a jury found Eddie guilty, and two years after his arrest, the presiding judge sentenced Eddie to die in the gas chamber.

Eddie had deep-seated problems, and his lawyer noticed. John reminded Eddie that he had taken a

man’s life. He urged Eddie to search his heart and find out why that happened, but Eddie had been hardened by the streets and his home life.

What Eddie needed was a life transformation – one that could only be found by nurturing a relationship with Jesus Christ.

The surrender

Though Eddie knew about God, he says, “I wasn’t saved.” He admits: “I was a handful in the jails.”



Eddie McLoughlin

John Nelson, a Vietnam veteran and evangelist who frequented the jail where Eddie was held, also wanted to see Eddie change. Twice a week, Nelson walked the cell-

block with his Bible in hand. When he stopped at Eddie’s cell, Eddie often refused to acknowledge his presence. Yet John never gave up on him.

Eddie eventually listened. Kneeling in his jail cell, Eddie sobbed and surrendered his life to Jesus. Even the jail personnel were amazed.

The influencer

Though Eddie was growing in his relationship with Christ, he still grappled with insecurities and shame. He craved encouragement.

• Turn to page 2

My life is changing



“
 I stole tools and money from my uncle who is a mechanic.
 My childhood was bad. I grew up without my parents. I would steal and smoke drugs. I was a very bad child in my community. People used to complain about me but I didn’t care because it was my life. This is how I thought before I met Jesus.
 I struggled with drugs, stealing, anger and unforgiveness.
 I became a Christian because God is good and He won’t fail me. My life has begun to change. God is good.
 My favourite verse is Revelation 22:12, ‘Look, I [Jesus] am coming soon! My reward is with Me, and I will give to each person according to what they have done.’
 I want to tell others to give your life to Jesus. He will save your soul and life.”

- Thabo Mbikwane

TIME TO COME CLEAN

BY GREG LAURIE

YEARS ago, a talk show segment featured the story of a little dog named Mugsy who had been hit by a car and was presumed dead by his owners. His grieving family buried him in a corner of their yard. But the next morning at 5:30, there was scratching at their back door.

Much to the family’s surprise, it was their beloved Mugsy. Apparently, he wasn’t dead after all. The persistent pup dug himself out of his grave.

That is what unconfessed sin is like. We may think we’ve buried it, but it will be back. There is only one way to get rid of our sin, and it’s at the cross of Jesus Christ. We can’t cover it. We can’t hide it. And we can’t run from it. It will stay with us until we confess it.

After his sin of adultery and murder, David eventually admitted to God that he had sinned. Later he wrote about it in Psalm 32: “When I refused to confess my sin, my body wasted away, and I groaned all day long” (verse 3).

David continued, “Finally, I confessed all my sins to you and stopped trying to hide my guilt. I said to myself, ‘I will confess my rebellion to the Lord.’ And you forgave me! All my guilt is gone” (verse 5). He didn’t try to blame someone else for his sin. He didn’t try to hide it at this point. Rather, David called it what it was, and he dealt with it in a straightforward way.

We always want to blame others for our sin and say that it isn’t our fault. Do you need to own up to something you’ve done? Or, are you playing the blame game? There must come a point in your life when you say, “I’ve sinned. I’ve committed this iniquity. The problem is me.” And that is when things will change for you.

BACK PAGE



CHANGING THE GAME
STEPHEN CURRY

A SECOND CHANCE AT FREEDOM

• From page 1

That encouragement came from Chuck Colson, founder of Prison Fellowship.

Chuck visited the Arizona State Prison complex where Eddie was housed and spoke during an outdoor evangelistic event. That day, the warden allowed Chuck to visit with Eddie in his cell on death row. The two men talked and prayed. Afterward, they corresponded through the mail for several years.

Chuck helped Eddie to recognize the role of justice in incarceration.

Through his interaction with Chuck, Eddie learned to accept greater responsibility for his actions and said, "Probably for the first time in my life, I was able to look at my crime from the perspective of the victim. It was really weighing heavy on my heart."

Chuck had a profound influence on Eddie. So when Eddie's convictions were overturned he said, "I was able to go to my family and tell my family that I was guilty of what I did, and that I needed to accept responsibility, and that I was going to go into the courts and plead guilty to my crimes."

Eddie's mother wanted him to have a new trial and come home, reminding him that he had already been away for five years.

But on March 17, 1983, true to his word, Eddie went into the judge's chambers, pled guilty, and listened to the judge sentence him to 25 years to life.

He returned to the Arizona State Prison system, but this time Eddie was the influencer. He helped other men to know Christ. He would lead the prison church there for 25 years before his release.

The graciousness of God

After serving his time, Eddie moved into a discipleship training center. Without technical skills and an education, he stood on the side of the road and waited to be picked up for day labor – a task he considered humbling and difficult. At one point, he held three minimum-wage jobs simultaneously.

Eddie met Paula when he was 50 years old and working for a Christian ministry. Her father taught a Bible study in the ministry Eddie worked for. Eddie and Paula began dating, and five months later, they married.

They've been together for 17 years and have two children.

Eddie says, "God's blessed me with a family. ... I thought maybe those dreams had been forfeited, but yet, God's been very, very merciful to me, very gracious to me."

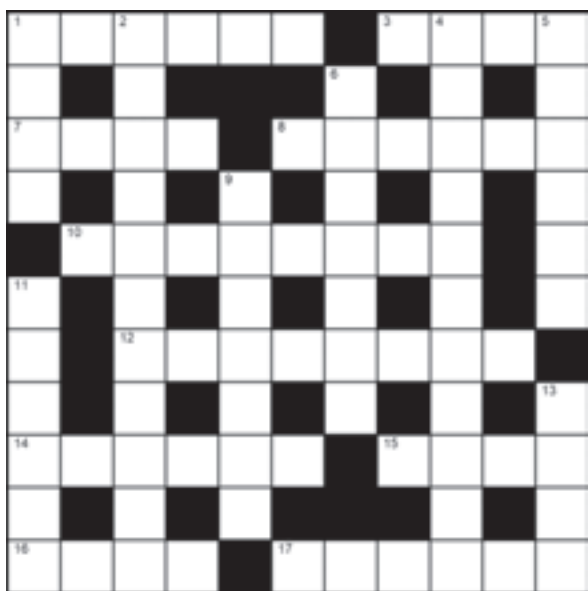
The legacy

Eddie has since returned to prison as a volunteer. Before COVID-19 restrictions were implemented in 2020, Eddie was going into 13 prisons and ministering to about 300 men a week.

The original of this story can be found at www.prisonfellowship.org and it is used with kind permission.

Coffee Break CROSSWORD & SUDOKU

- ACROSS**
- 1 Internet access devices
 - 3 Not many (1,3)
 - 7 Errand, job
 - 8 To make amends for
 - 10 Blood infection
 - 12 Toy with rail track (5,3)
 - 14 Solitary
 - 15 Mix, as ingredients
 - 16 Coral formation
 - 17 At fault
- DOWN**
- 1 Silent
 - 2 Stop, cease
 - 4 A primary principle
 - 5 Any tech thingy
 - 6 Staying power
 - 9 Moral allegory
 - 11 School financial officer
 - 13 Site of a fabled gift horse



SOLUTIONS PAGE 7



"Ah ha, here's your problem! You're trying to make a living as a farmer!"

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Aaron and Pam

BY LOU HAVILAND

Aaron and Pam were both 25 when they began dating after almost 10 years of friendship. Friendship is a great foundation for romance, but their courtship began against the backdrop of drug abuse and addiction.

"We were at a bad time," Pam says. "We were both using drugs. We weren't going anywhere good."

Aaron began experimenting with drugs after the death of his best friend, Mike, who was killed in a fight. Pam was raised in a Christian home with a father who served in the military and says, "There was no reason I should have ended up the way I did."

But within the space of one year Pam was, in three separate incidents, sexually assaulted, raped, and viciously beaten while being robbed. None of her offenders were prosecuted, leaving her angry and bitter. She started using drugs and working as an escort.

"I was of the frame of mind that if men were just going to take from me, I was going to at least get paid for it," Pam says.

Turning to drugs helped dull the memory of the violence and trauma she'd endured. She stopped working as an escort once she and Aaron began dating, and the perfect storm of drug addiction and a lack of money to finance the habit formed over the couple.

Aaron had previously served time in the late 1990s for burglary and remembered a former cellmate's counsel for holding up a bank. All he would need to do, his friend assured him, was walk into a bank, hand them a note, and the money would be given to him.

"Somehow I didn't disagree," Pam recalls. "I drove the getaway car, and Aaron went in and robbed the bank."

The two reasoned that since Aaron was unarmed, no one would get hurt, and that the bank, being insured, would recoup their money later. They saw it as a victimless crime. The robbery went well enough that they decided to try another bank a month later.

"When you're addicted to drugs, everything sounds like a perfect plan," Aaron says.

Within weeks, Aaron was arrested. Pam's arrest took place soon after—followed by her realization that she was pregnant.

Aaron was sentenced to over 20 years in prison. While Pam's sentence of two years was much lighter than Aaron's, her time behind bars was intensely painful.

Pregnant with their son, Pam gave birth while serving her sentence.

"[It was] the worst thing I've ever experienced," Pam says. "You have to go to the hospital in the shackles and the cuffs. And people are looking at you like you're a monster having a baby."

Soon after Pam gave birth, her mother, who had been caring for Pam's older son from an earlier relationship, took care of her newborn.

"The vein that runs through this story is God," Aaron says. "I have a praying mom and a praying family who are just relentless. In their prayers for you, you can't be fully lost. You get lost, but you can't be lost."

When news broke of Aaron's arrest, his mother was interviewed

on television, where she spoke life into her son's emptiness.

"My son has a purpose, he's not this guy," Aaron recalls his mother telling the news reporter. "He's going to be a leader among men."

In his cell, Aaron cried out to God to rescue him, not only from physical incarceration but from the addictions he was enslaved to. His aunt and uncle, who serve as pastors and missionaries, regularly reminded him that he had a hope and a future. His aunt urged him to turn each area of his life over to God.

"I had a lot wrong with me," Aaron says. "My aunt, my mentor, told me, 'Just take one thing at a time. Don't try to fix everything tomorrow.' So that's what I did. I started to live my life in preparation for the day that I was going to walk out of prison."

Piece by piece and moment by moment, Aaron asked God to heal him from the areas of life that he struggled with: cursing, pornography, gambling, fighting.

It was a painstaking process but one that resulted in absolute surrender to Jesus.

He began an in-prison ministry, praying for other men and telling them about the life-changing love of Christ.

After serving her sentence, Pam returned home to raise her sons and became a volunteer for Prison Fellowship Academy.

Pam and Aaron married while he was in prison. For various reasons, their marriage ended, but she continued to visit him so Aaron could spend time with their son.

Despite the dissolving of their marriage, the couple's friendship endured. They had been friends first before anything else, and that solid foundation was strong.

But as they grew in their faith they fell back in love with one another and became engaged in 2021.

And after Aaron's release in 2022, they married again.

While in prison, Aaron completed college courses and countless programs, wrote two books, and continued heading up his ministry to fellow prisoners.

Despite being sentenced to decades of time in prison, Aaron was released after 17 years and now works for re-entry organization Rise, where he serves as a mentor/facilitator for men and women coming out of prison.

The baby Pam gave birth to during her incarceration is now 16 years old, and the couple has four other children: two 24-year-olds, an 11-year-old, and a 9-year-old.

The original of this story can be found at www.prisonfellowship.org and it is used with kind permission.

“ I drove the getaway car and Aaron went in and robbed the bank. ”

DESERT OASIS

A Joyful Toon by Mike Waters



Why spend money on what is not bread, and your labour on what does not satisfy? Listen, listen to me, and eat what is good, and your soul will delight in the richest of fare.

— ISAIAH 55:2 NIV

Addiction shattered my rock star dreams

BY AMANUEL MENGISTU

Ripped jeans. Long hair. Earrings. As a teenager growing up in Iowa in the 1980s, Rodney Pieres had the appearance of an aspiring rock star, but he did not want to just look the part – he wanted to be a rock star.

“For whatever reason, I just had a natural inclination,” Rodney recalls. “Every time I’d pick an instrument up, I could figure it out by ear.”

Rodney’s guitar-playing uncle introduced him to the hard rock sounds of bands like Led Zeppelin and KISS, and by the age of six, Rodney knew that he wanted to be a musician. Starting when he was a sophomore in high school, Rodney played in a few bands, and his interest in music soon became an obsession. But beneath his obsession with music was a darker fixation with drugs and alcohol that soon overshadowed his musical ambitions.

Contrasting worlds

When asked about his childhood, Rodney likes to say he grew up in “a good, broken place.” After his parents divorced when he was a small child, Rodney split his time between their homes. During the week, he stayed with his mother and stepfather, who tried to raise Rodney in a godly environment. On the weekends, however, Rodney would enter the dangerous world of his wealthy, reckless, drug-dealing father.

“At 12 years old, I was allowed, at my dad’s house, to drink,” Rodney says. “I was allowed to smoke pot. I wasn’t allowed to do cocaine, but I stole it from him and did it anyway because he did it, and he was my hero.”

During his adolescence, Rodney’s life

was divided between these two worlds. By the time he reached high school, he had developed an addiction to alcohol and drugs. His grades dropped, and his interest in football and wrestling faded. It was around this time that Rodney began playing in rock bands, because performing music was more compatible with heavy drug use than sports. He also rebelled against all authority figures in his life.

Running wild

“My mom, God bless her, tried really hard, but I was just wild,” Rodney remembers. “I was a wild kid that just didn’t care. I would just do whatever I wanted, whenever I wanted. If they grounded me, I’d sneak out. If they took the car, I’d steal the keys.”

At the age of 18, Rodney got into a fight and punched his opponent so hard that the man’s spleen was ruptured.

The incident resulted in a felony assault charge and a year in prison. After being released, Rodney moved to Arizona, where his father was living, and jumped right back into his old lifestyle. “I was taking steroids and cocaine and drinking,” Rodney says. “All I wanted to do was play music and lift weights.”

Rodney needed work and became an electrician. However, even while working, he con-



Rodney and his wife.

tinued to drink and do drugs. He got married in 1997 and eventually became a father to two daughters, but the bondage of addiction prevented Rodney from settling into normal family life.

“I would do crack cocaine, and I would disappear for three or four weeks,” he recalls, adding that he had “many, many overdoses.”

Rodney’s substance abuse led to multiple car crashes and near-death experiences, including a three-day, drug-induced coma.

However, despite these brushes with death, and dozens of stays at rehab and detox centers, Rodney continued to relapse. Over time, he developed a heroin addiction and began turning to crime to fund his drug habit.

“I was defrauding companies, doing identity theft and all that,” he says. In 2009 he was sent to prison for 10 years.

The sound of redemption

Being incarcerated deprived Rodney of the things that mattered most to him, including playing music.

“It was horrible,” he says of the first half of his prison sentence. “I had all this music running through my head, and I couldn’t get it out. I had no outlet for it.”

After four frustrating years in prison, Rodney had a life-changing encounter in the summer of 2013. While walking on the prison yard track one day, he heard the sound of music coming from a nearby building.

“I got interested, and I walked in,” he remembers. “It was a prison worship band that was playing, and I sat down, and I just listened.”

Rodney was overcome with emotion while listening. Members of the band approached him and prayed with him, introducing him to faith in Christ. Over the next year, Rodney got sober, joined a Bible study, and started playing in the worship band.

“From that point on, I followed the Lord,” Rodney says. “I didn’t change. He changed me – the way I acted, the way I held myself. I was able to have peace in a place that usually doesn’t have a lot of peace.”

Coming full circle

Rodney was released from incarceration in 2018. A year later, he began to perform at Hope Events in prisons across the country, singing rock songs infused with his story of redemption through Christ.

Between running a thriving electrical contracting business and an anti-trafficking non-profit that he founded with his wife, Rodney is a busy man, but he always makes time to minister to people who are incarcerated.

“I [once] thought being a rock star, touring and being idolized by people, would fill a void inside me,” he says.

“Today, I realize that God gave me the gift... to bring my voice and my words to the hurting, lost, and broken. That is my dream today.”

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NO MORE MISERY AND FEAR

Mzimkhulu Sothuko and his siblings grew up without their parents in extreme poverty.

“Only my granny was taking care of us,” Mzimkhulu recalls.

“We never had food or shelter or even clothes other than what she passed on to us.”

As he grew older, Mzimkhulu went to aid organisations for help when he was really struggling.

“My life had no direction,” he admits.

“I was lost. I had so much anger, unforgiveness, I was ungrateful. Everything was useless and I had suicidal thoughts.”

Eventually Mzimkhulu found himself in prison for a crime he denies committing. It was there that he found hope.

“At Modderbee Correctional Centre I heard about the good news about Jesus Christ,” he shares.

“I was reading the Book of Life (the Bible) and praying and I gave up all my misery, pain, sorrow and fear to Him...”

“I understood that Jesus saved my life. God gave Him so that we can become unified with Him. The spirit that we have in our body is because of Him.

“And He wants to use me to be His messenger and to reveal the power He gives me. I testify that God is love.”

Mzimkhulu says since becoming a Christian his life has become easier.

“I understand that God loves me and He doesn’t want to hurt me and He is not the one who has caused all the trouble in my life.”

He now encourages others not to give up paying attention to Jesus.

“He is the real Saviour. God is the only One whom we can cry to and He is above all.”

Mzimkhulu’s favourite Bible passage is Psalm 23, which says: “The Lord is my shepherd, I lack nothing. He makes me lie down in green pastures, He leads me beside quiet waters, He refreshes my soul.”

“He guides me along the right paths for his name’s sake.

“Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me.

“You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies. You anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows.

“Surely your goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.”

“Jesus has been with me from my mother’s womb,” Mzimkhulu attests.

“I seek Him all the time. In all the trials and troubles God is the only Master who can open all closed doors to a better life.”



Mzimkhulu Sothuko

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The World Hope Ministries Spiritual Care Programme consists of the following courses:

<p>BIBLICAL DISCIPLESHIP 1</p> <p>The lessons in this course will help the student engage the scriptures. This course consists of 4 books: Relationship with God, Fellowship with God, Responsibility to God and Accountability to God. Upon completion of all 4 books, one is issued with a bible in a language of his/her choice, and a certificate.</p>	<p>THE JESUS FILM</p> <p>This film which is based on the biography of our Lord Jesus Christ, from birth to His ascension, is screened by a World Hope facilitator as part of our course.</p>
<p>BIBLICAL DISCIPLESHIP 2</p> <p>This course builds on the foundation laid by Discipleship 1 and provides a deeper understanding of the word of God in the Christian walk. This course consists of two books A and B, each 13 lessons. A certificate is awarded upon completion of each of the books.</p>	<p>GODS ANSWER TO AIDS</p> <p>The purpose of this course is to enlighten and educate individuals of how to overcome the scourge of HIV/AIDS, based on what the Word of God says. This course consists of six lessons six weeks, engaging a DVD and a resource workbook. It is taught by a World Hope Ministries facilitator.</p>

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HOPE MAKES ALIVE

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I'M BACK IN PRISON BUT THIS TIME IT'S FOR GOOD

When Californian Johnny Chang was 10, he was beaten up and robbed on the street. When he told his father what happened, his father thought he was lying and gave him yet another whipping.

Johnny was a child of poor immigrant parents from China. His father was abusive and an atheist who never said "I love you" or apologised.

His mother was a Buddhist who played by the traditional rules of her culture – she was submissive and never stood up for her son.

At 12, Johnny was an explosive mixture of pain, rejection, hurt and anger. But more than

anything he was lonely for a family and emotional connection – so he joined the one place that promised him that – a notorious street gang.

Speaking to the Delafe channel on YouTube, Johnny says: "I took to the streets; if I went home I would get beaten and have to deal with my dad in a drunken rage."

Joining a gang, he says, was the "lesser of two evils."

"When I hit the streets I volunteered to do a lot of things – shooting people, stabbing people – because I wanted to unload my rage and my anger."

Within a year, he was arrested and sentenced to four "really, really traumatic" years in the California Youth Authority.

Sixty-seven days after his release from the CYA, he was convicted again – this time for assault with a deadly weapon in an attempted robbery. He was sentenced to 10 years in prison and had to serve eight.

Life when Johnny was released from prison was no joy ride. As a convicted felon he couldn't find any work and went back to the extremely profitable trade of selling drugs.

He had money – "like \$30,000 to \$40,000 a month" – and he had freedom but he couldn't shake the loneliness and depression. "I always had this emptiness, this void inside me," he says.

One day, his mother asked him for a lift. In the car he told her he noticed she was happier and more peaceful than before, even though the situation at home had not changed.

She told him it was because of church. Johnny rolled his eyes. "I said, 'Mom you're crazy. You've been a Buddhist your whole life and now you're telling me about this Jesus. I don't believe in God. We were raised Buddhist.'"

His mother smiled knowingly and said, "Fair enough."

At his mother's church, Johnny met the pastor, who took him out for a meal and shared the gospel (the good news of Jesus Christ). In two hours, over a bowl of black bean noodles, the young man's life was changed forever.

"Johnny," he began, "are you a sinner?"

"Yes," Johnny replied. "Lying and stealing and stuff."

The pastor replied, "Sin isn't just

about lying or stealing. Sin is not believing in Jesus Christ."

"What he said captivated me," Johnny shares.

Sin, the pastor explained, was putting yourself and not Christ, in the driver's seat. "When you do that you stand in the position of God," he added. "You're putting your thoughts above the Word of God."

"I always had this emptiness, this void inside of me."

"That's why you feel so empty all the time. The emptiness is the by-product of how you've been living your life."

The pastor told Johnny he had a choice – he could run his own life, with its ever-changing feelings and thoughts, or he could trust in God's Word, which never changes and would never lead him the wrong way. Then he told Johnny how much God loved him.

"No matter what, God died for you," the pastor added.

"That was the first time I met Jesus," says Johnny. "I knew about Him theoretically but that day I accepted Him into my heart and that's what changed my life."

Encouraged by his pastor, Johnny saw himself as a "messenger" to his gang mates and was able to share with them his newfound hope in Christ.

One of the hardest things he had to do was reconcile with his father. "But I knew God wanted me to do this."

Father and son met at a cafe and again over a bowl of noodle soup, Johnny's life was changed.

"Dad," he said, "I'm sorry for not being a good son. I'm sorry I brought shame to our family." He had been afraid his father would throw it back at him and say, "That's right! You should be sorry." Instead, he burst

into tears and apologised for his drinking, and his abuse. "I should have been a better dad," he said.

Father and son reconciled and now share a relationship that includes regular fishing trips and, of course, noodle soup.

"It's amazing. And it was only possible because of God," Johnny says.

All this happened eight years ago. Today the one-time, big-time gang-

ster has done a complete turnaround and is now a prison counsellor.

He shares the gospel on many social media platforms and his story has sparked conversations even among people in rival gangs.

"Now I'm doing prison ministry – counselling people who are suffering from depression, loneliness, emptiness, void – and I just want to advance the kingdom of God." •



Once a big-time gangster, Johnny Chang now counsels prisoners who are struggling with depression and loneliness. Photo: youtube.com/@vladv

Where is God in tragedy?

BY MARILYN ADAMSON

GOD is the Creator of the universe who yearns for us to know Him. That is why we are all here. It is His desire that we rely on and experience His strength, love, justice, holiness and compassion. So He says to all who are willing, "Come to Me."

Unlike us, God knows what will happen tomorrow, next week, next year, the next decade. He says, "I am God, and there is no one like me, declaring the end from the beginning."¹ He tells us that He can be "our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in times of trouble."² But we must make a sincere effort to seek Him. He says, "You will seek Me and find Me, when you search for Me with all your heart."³

That doesn't mean that those who know God will escape difficult times. When wars or rampant disease cause suffering and death, those who know God will be involved in that suffering also. But there is a peace and a strength that God's presence gives.

He is bigger than all the problems that can hit us, and we are not left alone to deal with them. God has created humanity with the ability to choose.

This means that we are not forced into a relationship with Him. He allows us to reject Him and to commit other evil acts as well. He could force us to be loving. He could force us to be good. But then we would be robots. Instead He gave us the human dignity of free will.

We have, by our lives and actions, distanced ourselves from God.

The Bible says that "We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way."⁴ The consequences? Our sin has separated us from God, and it affects more than this life. The penalty for our sin is death, or eternal separation from God. However, God has provided a way for us to be forgiven and know Him.

God came to earth to rescue us. "For God so loved the world that He sent His only Son, that whoever believes in Him should

not perish, but have eternal life. For God sent the Son into the world, not to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through Him."⁵

Jesus left the safety and security of His home, and entered the hard environment we live in. Jesus got tired, knew hunger and thirst, battled accusations from others and was ostracised by family and friends. But Jesus experienced far more than daily hardships. Jesus, the Son of God in human form, willingly took all of our sin on Himself and paid our penalty of death. "In this is love, that he laid down his life for us."⁶

He went through torture, dying a slow, humiliating death of suffocation on a cross, so that we could be forgiven. Jesus told others ahead of time that He would be crucified. He said three days after being buried He would show Himself physically alive to those who saw His crucifixion. On that third day, Jesus' tomb was found empty and many people testified to seeing Him alive.

He now offers us eternal life. We don't earn this. It is a gift from God offered to us, which we receive by faith when we ask Him to enter our lives.

If we turn away from our sin and turn back to God, we can have the gift of eternal life through Jesus Christ.⁷

What about heaven?

God does have a better place He offers us. In this world, God will wipe every tear from people's eyes. There will be no more mourning, crying, death or pain.⁸

Right now you can ask God to enter your life. You can call out to God by telling Him something like this in sincerity:

"God, I want to know You. I want to receive Jesus Christ and His forgiveness into my life. I don't want to be separated from You anymore. Please forgive my sin. Be the God of my life from this day onward. Thank you God." •

Footnotes: (1) Isaiah 46:9 (2) Psalm 46:1 (3) Jeremiah 29:13 (4) Isaiah 53:6 (5) John 3:16-17 (6) 1 John 3:16 (7) Romans 6:23 (8) Revelation 21:4

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RISING ABOVE MY PAINFUL PAST

Peter Ekwenugo grew up in a loving but poor home. He didn't attend school and as a result now, at the age of 39, he can't read.

"My childhood was not nice," he tells *Challenge News*. "[But] my father and mother were good people and did all they could to give me a good life."

He was raised in a Christian home and he made a commitment to Jesus as a child but as he grew older he walked away from God. Peter admits he struggled with sexual immorality, alcohol and drug addictions, anger and unforgiveness.

Currently a prisoner at Modderbee Correctional Centre, Peter is six years into a 15-year sentence for robbery and kidnapping.

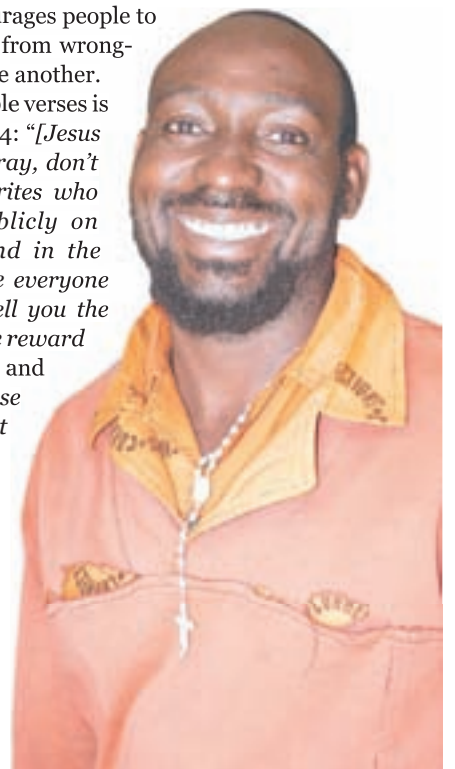
He says things changed for him when he became a truly committed Christian while he was in hospital.

"The spiritual workers at this hospital shared the Gospel [good news about Jesus] with me and helped me to make a recommitment of my life to Jesus Christ."

Peter says the best part about being a Christian is hearing the Word of God and the hardest part is keeping up the discipline of prayer.

Peter reminds people that God loves them and he encourages people to repent [turn away from wrongdoing] and love one another.

His favourite Bible verses is Matthew 6:5 and 14: "[Jesus said] When you pray, don't be like the hypocrites who love to pray publicly on street corners and in the synagogues where everyone can see them. I tell you the truth, that is all the reward they will ever get" and "If you forgive those who sin against you, your heavenly Father will forgive you. But if you refuse to forgive others, your Father will not forgive your sins." •



Peter Ekwenugo

Afrikaans translation

Ek het 'n Toevlug gevind

Bose geeste was 'n normale deel van Mahere Nelia se kinderdae, dit was ingenooi deur haar ouers, wie lede was van 'n kultus, en hulle het dikwels van bose magte gebruik gemaak om ryk te probeer word. "My ouers het toewenaars en toordokters gebruik om geld te kry," vertel die 62 jaar oue weduwee vir *Challenge News*.

"Dit het ons lewens so beïnvloed in die mate dat bose geeste in my lewe gespoek het, en selfs tot nou toe sukkel ek soms met my verlede."

Haar opvoeding het ongewenste gedrag meegebring- Mahere sê sy was rebels en vyandig. Daar was buite-egtelike verhoudings en aborsies.

"Ek het mense se huwelike vernietig," sê die onderwyseres met groot hartseer.

Haar eie huwelik het in 2004 geëindig met die afsterwe van haar man.

Dit was die begin van verandering in Mahere se lewe. Dit het haar na 'n geestelike soeke van haar eie gelei.

"Ek het ernstig na God begin soek toe my man oorlede is, en Hy het my in 'n droom geantwoord," vertel sy.

"In die droom het ek myself sien bid, omring deur 'n ring van vuur, en ek het God hoor sê dat my sondes vergewe is."

Hierdie ondervinding 30 jaar terug het Mahere tot haar knieë gebring, en sy het haar lewe vir Jesus Christus gegee.

"Ek het gesien dat alles waardeur ek gegaan het was van geen voordeel nie, van geen nut nie.

Ek het myself en my geestelike lewe net seergemaak."

Sederdien is sy baie bewus van God se beskerming en genesing vir haar kinders, van wie drie ernstige gesondheidsprobleme gehad het.

Haar seun het in 'n koma vir twee weke gelê waar sy lange ophou funksioneer het. 'n Dogter het probeer selfmoord pleeg maar sy het oorleef. 'n Ander dogter het vyf agtereenvolgende operasies ondergaan.

"Maar almal van hulle het hulle siektes oorleef en ek prys die Here vir dit."

Mahere erken dat sy probleme ondervind het om sekere dele van haar ou lewe agter te laat, veral onwenslike seksuele gedrag.

Maar deur gebed en Bybelstudie sê sy, het sy vrede met haar verlede gemaak want sy weet dat Jesus haar vergewe en aanvaar het, vratte en al.

Sy word steeds seergemaak as sy misverstaan en gekritiseer word, maar sy hou vas aan haar gunsteling Bybelverse om haar te troos – Psalm 91 :3-4: "Want Hy is dit wat jou sal red uit die net van die voëlvanger, van die verderflike pes. Hy sal jou dek met sy vlerke, en onder sy vleuels sal jy skuil; Sy trou is 'n skild en pantser."

"God bestaan werklik," sê sy. Hy hoor ons gebede as jy hom ywerig soek en Hy versterk ons deur ons ergste tye.



Mahere Nelia

Zulu translation

Ngathola iNqaba

Imimoya emibi kwakuyinhlayenzeka empilweni ka Mahere Neila esakhula, yayamukelwe abazali bakhe, abangamalunga yenkoleloze eyayenza umlingo wengcebo.

"Abazali bami babesebenzisa umlingo nenyanga ukuzama imali," lomfelokazi ona 62 etshela I challenge news. "Impilo zethu zahlukunyezwa imimoya emibi kangangokuthi namanje ngisathinteka uma ngicabanga la ngibuya khona".

Ukukhula kwakhe kwazala impatho engathandeki-Mahere uthi wayengalawuleki enonya, wayephinga ekhipha nezisu.

"Ngamosha imishado yabantu",kusho lothisha kabuhlungu.

Owakhe umshado waphela ngo 2004 emva kokudlula kukamyeeni wakhe. Lokho kwaphoqelela ushintsho empilweni yakhe.

Kwamholela ohambeni lwakhe lwoMoya.

"Ngaqala ukumfuna uNkulunkulu emveni kokushonelwa umyeni, Wangiphendula ngephupho",esitshela.

"Ephusheni ngazibona ngithandaza, ngizungezwe umlilo, ngezwa uNkulunkulu ethi izono zami zithethelelwe."

Lesosehlakalo eminyakeni ewu 30 edlule samusa emadolweni wamukela u Jesu Kristu. "Ngabona ukuthi konke kukho akunanzuzo,akusebenzi. Ngangikusebenzisa ukuzihlukumeza, nokuzwisa impilo yami kaMoya ubuhlungu".

Kusukela lapho usevikelwa uNkulunkulu futhi uphilisa abantwana bakhe, abathathu babo bebenezimo zempilo ezibucayi.

Indodana yakhe ihlale kucoma amaviki amabili amaphaphu engasebenzi.

Indodakazi yazama ukubulala kodwa yaphaphamiswa. Enye indodakazi seyihlinzwekahlanu uyaphila.

"Bonke baphunyukile ekuguleni kwabo, ngiyambonga uNkulunkulu ngalokho".

Mahere uyavuma ukuthi uhlupeke kakhulu ukuphuma empilweni yakudala, ikakhululazi ukuziphatha ngokocansi.

Kodwa ngomthandazo nokufunda izwi, wenze ukuthula nengemuva lakhe ngoba uyazi ukuthi uJesu umthethelele futhi

umamukele, nakho konke. Uyabuzwa ubuhlungu uma engaqondwa futhi egxekwa, bese ebambelela evesini alithandayo: Amahubo 91:3-4" Uyakusindisa ogibeni lomubi,akwemboze ngamaphiko akhe, ngaphansi kwamaphiko

akhe uyovikeleka, ukwethembeka kwakhe kuzoba ihawu kuwe". "UNkulunkulu ukhona ngempela". Kusho yena."Uyayizwa imikhuleko yethu uma simfuna ngempela asiqinise ezikhathini ezinzima".

In another dimension

IMAGINE there are two people on a flat piece of paper. These people are two-dimensional, having height and width but no depth; the paper is the extent of their world. Can they see you? No. They can see only what's on the paper (in their world). They have no depth perception. Now pretend you use your finger to touch the paper. Now can they see you? They cannot see all of you, but they can see the tip of your finger, the part that has entered their world.

That is an analogy to our situation with God. God exists outside our dimensions. He can exist outside of time and space as we know it. Therefore, it is difficult to "see" Him. We are like the flat people on the two-dimensional paper. We can't see what's in a third dimension. But in this case, we exist in four dimensions (height, width, depth, time), and God exists beyond that.

So how are we to know such a Being? Just as the "flat people" on the paper could not know about you unless you touched the paper, we cannot detect God unless He reveals Himself. He must "touch the paper" of our world. God has to step down in dimensions.

As we study human history, especially religious history, do we find any instances where God "touched the paper" of our world? Consider that God's "finger" has touched our world in a person known as Jesus Christ. Jesus claimed to be God (John 8:58, 17:3), said that to see Him was to see God (John 12:45, 14:9), said that He was the only person who had come directly from God to our world (John 3:13), and forgave people of their sins, which only God can do (Mark 2:5). Many other passages of the New Testament affirm Jesus' deity. He was God who "became flesh and made his dwelling among us" (John 1:14). He is the "image of the invisible God" (Colossians 1:15).

If we are the "flat people" it makes sense that the multi-dimensional Creator God entered our four-dimensional world by becoming a human being. He revealed himself to us. But why would God do that?

"For God so loved the world that He sent His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life" (John 3:16). He entered our world to live as an example and die as an atonement (payment) for our sin, in order that one day, if we commit to Him, we can come and live with Him in His multi-dimensional, perfect, timeless world for all eternity.

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English translation

I FOUND A REFUGE

Evil spirits were part of the furniture in Mahere Nelia's childhood, welcomed by her parents, who were members of a cult and regularly used black magic to try to become wealthy.

"My parents used magicians and witch doctors to get money," the 62-year-old widow tells *Challenge News*.

"It affected our lives to the extent that evil spirits haunted my life and even up to now I sometimes struggle with my past."

Her upbringing brought out some very undesirable behaviours – Mahere says she was unruly and hostile. There were numerous adulterous relationships and abortions. "I destroyed people's marriages," the teacher says sadly.

Her own marriage ended with the death of her husband in 2004. This was the catalyst for change in Mahere's life. It led her to a spiritual quest of her own.

"I earnestly started looking for God when my husband died and He answered me in a dream," she shares.

"In the dream I saw myself praying, surrounded by a ring of fire and I heard God tell me my sins were forgiven."

That experience 30 years ago drove Mahere to her knees and she gave her life to Jesus Christ. "I saw that all I had gone through was of no benefit, no use. I was just hurting myself and my spiritual life."

Since then, she has been very aware of God's protection and healing for her children, three of whom had serious health issues.

Her son lay in a coma for two weeks when his lungs stopped functioning. A daughter tried to commit suicide but was revived. Another daughter endured five back-to-back surgeries.

"But all of them survived their illnesses and I praise God for that."

Mahere admits she struggled to leave certain aspects of her old life, especially her past sexual behaviour.

But through prayer and Bible study, she says she has made peace with her past because she knows that Jesus has forgiven and accepted her, warts and all.

She does get hurt when she is misunderstood or criticised, but says she holds firm to her favourite Bible verses to comfort her – Psalm 91:3-4: "He will save you from the fowler's snare and from the deadly pestilence. He will cover you with His feathers, and under His wings you will find refuge; His faithfulness will be your shield and rampart."

"God really exists," she says. "He hears our prayers if you seek Him diligently and He strengthens us through our worst times."

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WORDS FOR THE HEART

STUDIES IN THE GOSPEL OF JOHN

Welcome to this Bible Study. Read slowly what I have written. If you have a Bible, look up the reference verses given, and allow the Holy Spirit to minister to your soul through them. – ALAN BAILEY

Highlights in John

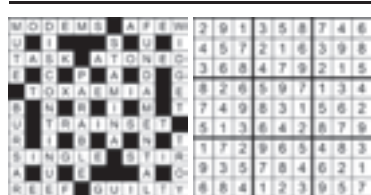
INTRODUCTION

WE have been through John's Gospel together and have learned much. It seems to be a good idea to look back a little and see again some of the highlights of this Gospel before we leave it.

Chapter 3: Verses 1-5 "Now there was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a member of the Jewish ruling council. He came to Jesus at night and said, 'Rabbi, we know You are a teacher who has come from God. For no-one could perform the miraculous signs which You are doing if God were not with him.' In reply Jesus declared, 'I tell you the truth, unless a man is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.' 'But,' said Nicodemus, 'how can a man be born when he is

old? He cannot enter a second time into his mother's womb to be born!' Jesus answered, 'I tell you the truth, unless a man is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.'"

This religious man who came to Jesus by night was surprised at what Jesus said to him. He was a devout Jew who felt he was doing all the things he needed to do to be right with God. But Jesus bluntly told him that there was something necessary which he didn't have. The new birth. Without it, there is no entry into God's kingdom. As Nicodemus couldn't understand what he meant, Jesus went on to show him that there is a spiritual birth which is brought about by the Holy Spirit. A person becomes alive as never before. Many things become new. There will be a love for God and His Word and a love for others. There will be a new sensitivity to sin and a desire to please the Lord. We do not have the power to produce the new birth; it is a miracle from God.



Chapter 6: Verse 35 "Then Jesus declared, 'I am the bread of life. He who comes to Me will never go hungry, and he who believes in Me will never be thirsty.'"

There are a number of claims made by Jesus in John's Gospel commencing with "I am." The first one came after the feeding of the 5,000 and some discussion about bread. Jesus told the people that He was the bread from heaven that gave life to the world. We know that bread supports life and is a daily necessity. Jesus came to give a new kind of life, a spiritual life which He implants in us and then maintains. Christians experience the satisfaction that comes from knowing Him in this way. Our searching is over.

Chapter 8: Verse 58 "I tell you the truth," Jesus answered, "before Abraham was born, I am!"

In this chapter there is a debate surrounding the claims of Jesus. He is opposed by Jews who argue that they are righteous, and He is even demon-possessed. They take refuge in being children of Abraham, the great patriarch. But the Lord ends the argument by this statement. He says that He was in existence before Abraham was born. Abraham lived and died many centuries earlier. Notice, He didn't say "I was," but "I am." This is a claim to be God. It is to say, "I have no beginning and no ending." Jesus' existence did not begin with His birth as a baby. Remember, He came to earth from heaven.

Chapter 10: Verse 11 "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down His life for the sheep."

Much is said in chapter 10 about sheep. People in general are likened to sheep. There are good reasons for this. The people listening to Jesus were well acquainted with keeping sheep and the role of a shepherd. Jesus presents himself as the shepherd people need. He guides, feeds and protects those of His flock. More than that, He even lays down His life for them. All this points to His great love which took Him to the cross to save us.

Chapter 11: Verse 25 "Jesus said to her, 'I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in Me will never die.'"

These words were spoken at the time of the raising of Lazarus from the dead. From this we know that there is a life to come. We will see the death of the body but there is something more. A day will come when the dead shall rise. We have the

Lord's guarantee of this as He claims to be the resurrection. There is much said about this in the New Testament, carrying great importance. We can be certain that death does not end all. There is a new day coming.

Chapter 14: Verse 6 "Jesus answered, 'I am the Way, the Truth and the Life. No-one comes to the Father except through Me.'"

There is no mistaking what the Lord is saying here. Perhaps this is the most challenging claim He has made as it embraces so much. All we could search for is found in Him and in Him alone. There is no other way to the Father but through Jesus. He personifies all truth. True life, everlasting life is in Him alone.

This statement is unacceptable in the ears of modern man but it still stands. It means that all other claims to the knowledge of God are false. There are not numbers of roads that lead to heaven. Notice, that if we do not believe what He has said at this point, then we dismiss Him altogether. To believe in Him means to accept what He says.

Chapter 15: Verse 1 "I am the True Vine and my Father is the Gardener."

This is another illustration, using the natural world to teach a truth. Jesus refers to a vine as a picture of His relationship to the Father and our relationship to Him. He speaks in this passage of believers in Him being part of the vine, drawing life from it. So, there is a special union with Christ that believers enjoy, a closeness of fellowship and sharing. It is because of this that we are expected to bring forth fruit. That fruit is such things as love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness and in short, godliness.

Chapter 19: Verses 17, 18

"Carrying His own cross, He went out to the Place of the Skull (which in Aramaic is called Golgotha). Here they crucified Him, and with Him two others – one on either side and Jesus in the middle."

This is something of a climax in John's report of Jesus' life. So much of what is said previously is leading to this time of suffering. The description of the passion of Jesus and his death is touching, revealing His great love for us while also showing the hatred of those who crucified Him. This is the centre of His saving work – the sacrifice by which we are made right with God.

Chapter 20: Verse 31 "These are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in His name."

John gives us the reason for his writing. All through the book he gives evidence pointing to the deity of Christ, that is, that He is indeed God. His miraculous deeds, His sinless life, His words, His resurrection from the dead. Also, John hopes that readers will find life in Him. Take note that believing is not simply admitting that what is said is true, it means fully trusting in Him to save from sin. It is a personal commitment, leaving the old life behind and stepping out in a new life with Christ. Do consider where you stand at this time.

CONCLUSION

We have explored the Gospel of John. So, we plan to change to the Gospel of Mark. Each Gospel is different to the others but at the same time speak strongly for the glory of the Lord who is at the centre.

How can I become a Christian?

Anyone can gain the eternal life offered through Jesus Christ

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

OUR PROBLEM:	Separation from God "Everyone has sinned. Nobody is good enough because God's standards are perfect" (Romans 3:23)	ADMIT
GOD'S REMEDY / SOLUTION:	Jesus died on the cross "God demonstrates His own love for us in this; while we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8)	BELIEVE
OUR RESPONSE:	Trust Jesus by receiving Him "To all who received Him, to those who believed in His name, He gave the right to become children of God" (John 1:12)	COMMIT

Here is an example of how you can pray.

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

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

AS A NEXT STEP :

If you prayed the above prayer, tick this box



I have prayed this prayer.

Please send me:

- Bible portion
- Some 'starting off' literature
- Information on a helpful church

If you have not prayed the prayer at this stage, tick this box



I would like to think about this.

Please send me:

- Bible portion
- More information as I am inquiring about being a Christian.
- I have a problem (see attached letter)

* Please tick and write clearly *

Name _____

Address _____

Phone _____

Age and occupation (it helps) _____

Email to:

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OR icfriis@gmail.com

Out of South Africa enquiries are referred onto someone in their own country



But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. – ROMANS 5:8 NIV



Stephen Curry #30 of the Golden State Warriors drives to the basket while defended by Dillon Brooks #9 of the Houston Rockets in the second half at Toyota Center on October 29, 2023 in Houston, Texas. (Photo by Tim Warner/Getty Images)

CHANGING THE GAME

American basketballer Wardell Stephen “Steph” Curry II is one of the National Basketball Association (NBA)’s most successful players and has been described as the greatest shooter in NBA history. He is also credited with inspiring teams to regularly use the three-point shot.

But the four-time NBA Champion, two-time Most Valuable Player and nine-time All-Star says he knows basketball is just a game that can be taken from him at any moment.

Stephen, 35, has been playing for the NBA’s Golden State Warriors since 2009 and he talks about the role his faith has played in his career and personal life in a Facebook video as part of a series called Stephen vs The Game.

“You can control what you can control but outside of that there’s another force that’s shaping things the way they are supposed to be,” Steph says in the fifth episode, which is dedicated to his faith.

Steph grew up attending church and says he saw that faith was important to his parents (his father is former NBA player Dell Curry) but he never really understood it and had to make a decision for himself.

When he was in eighth grade, he attended a youth service and listened as the pastor taught that young

people couldn’t live off their parents’ faith but needed to make a decision for Christ for themselves. He says he went down to the front of the church and gave his life to Christ, marking the beginning of his personal journey as a Christian.

Steph says his faith is about a personal relationship with Christ rather than observing a specific religious practice.

“Faith to me is believing in the unseen and having a conviction there is a higher power that has given me a purpose to what I am doing on this earth and for me that is the foundation to how I try to live

my life and... see the world through that lens,” he says.

He says he plays basketball to honour God but that doesn’t stop when he leaves the court and he uses every opportunity he has to let his actions speak louder than words.

“My faith is tested on the court as much as it is in life but it’s the part that always keeps me focused on what I need to do, when it comes to my family, when it comes to job, when it comes to how I treat other people, my appreciation for life and all the good things that happen and how to deal with the bad things that happen,” Steph says.

After a bad injury on the court, Steph’s mother encouraged him to find a Bible verse that he could rely on to give him strength and purpose.

He says he chose Philippians 4:13, which says “*I can do all things through Christ Who gives me strength.*”

He now regularly writes this verse on his basketball shoes.

In an article he wrote for Fellowship for Christian Athletes, Steph says, “God’s given me talents to play basketball for a living, but I still have to work hard to improve every day.

“I know that in the grand scheme of things, this is just a game that can be taken from me at any moment.

“But I love that basketball gives me the opportunities to do good things for people and to point them towards the Man who died for our sins on the cross.

“I know I have a place in heaven

waiting for me because of Him, and that’s something no earthly prize or trophy could ever top. There’s more to me than just this jersey I wear, and that’s Christ living inside of me.”

Steph met his wife Ayesha at their church in Charlotte when they were 15 and 14 years old. They have three children.

The couple started a foundation in 2019 called Eat. Learn. Play. The foundation works to end childhood hunger, increase access to quality education, and provide safe spaces for children to stay active. Nick Friedell of ESPN says Steph is “The greatest shooter of all time.”

“Curry’s ability to hit shots from

all over the floor changed the way the game is played,” he continues. “He has led the Warriors to three NBA championships and earned two MVP awards, becoming the first unanimous MVP in league history in 2015-16. Curry’s influence on the game is seen on every level of basketball as younger generations shoot more than ever while trying to replicate his game.”


In 2021 Steph was honoured as one of the greatest players of all time by being named to the NBA 75th Anniversary Team. And last year, American media and entertainment company Complex ranked him as the 10th greatest player in NBA history. •

“**There's more to me than just the jersey I wear.**”



Stephen Curry during the Warriors’ media day in October. (Photo by Ezra Shaw/Getty Images)

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