

# I KILLED MY HUSBAND

When the charismatic, charming man she married became pathologically obsessive and violent, Leigh Ann Bryant feared for her life and that of her baby. She got a gun to protect herself, never believing she would end up using it.

When her husband's anger turned homicidal, Leigh Ann shot and killed him in self-defence and found herself in prison. But it was there that she had an experience that made her feel free for the first time in her life.

Sharing her story on her website, Leigh Ann said that as she grew up, she never felt good enough.

"A void left me feeling empty inside," she remembers. "I wanted nothing more than to feel worthy and loved. In an effort to fill the vacancy, I immersed myself in the sex, drugs, and rock-n-roll mentality, doing anything and everything to find acceptance and meaning."

But nothing helped, and the black hole within her expanded and grew darker.

"Things I thought would fulfil me only left me feeling even more shameful and repulsive," she admits.

While on a psychiatric clinical placement as a nursing student, Leigh Ann began working with a patient named Vincent, who swept her off her feet.

"His love and attention filled the vacancy in my heart and made me feel priceless," she recalls. "I'd finally found happiness."

They married and, 16 months later, Leigh Ann gave birth to their son. It was about a year later that Vincent became obsessive and controlling.

"I had no freedom," she says. "He controlled my every move and isolated me from all my friends and family. His jealousy mutated and twisted into monstrous anger."

Alone, afraid, and abused, the hole in Leigh Ann's heart returned.



Leigh Ann Bryant (inset and above) talking to female prisoners about her experience.

"I was a prisoner resigned to do whatever needed to be done to keep my once-loving husband from turning on me," she recalls.

Vincent threatened to hunt her down if she ever left him. He said if he couldn't find her, he'd work out a way to make her come back.

"You'd come back for your sister's funeral, wouldn't you?" he threatened. He warned her that if she had him arrested, his friends would 'take care of her' if he was unable to.

So Leigh Ann stayed.

"His anger evolved into terrorising me with daily threats on my life that included a knife to my throat

while he sat on my chest or held me against the wall," she remembered.

She said when he threatened to kill their son, she looked into his eyes and saw that he meant it.

"That's when I knew I had to do something – but what?" she asked. "Not knowing where to turn or who to trust, I got a gun. Although I never intended to use the ammunition that came with it, I believed

holding the weapon in my hand would allow me to be in charge for once."

Vincent's anger finally reached its limit one night.

"His anger turned truly homicidal," Leigh Ann says. "Slash after slash, his knife cut me, filling me with horror I'd never known."

Leigh Ann ran to get the gun she had hidden in her son's nursery.

"The cold steel reassured me and gave me the confidence to face my husband," she remembers. "But instead of yielding control when he saw the gun, my husband taunted me, 'You don't have the guts. It isn't even real'... And then it happened. He came at me to get the gun. As we fought over it, the gun went off. Then it went off again."

Vincent ran out the front door, and Leigh Ann locked it behind him and went to calm her screaming baby. As she rocked him, she heard her husband's voice through the window, pleading for her help. At first, she thought he was trying to trick her into letting him back into the house, but as his pleas grew weaker, she wondered if he was hurt. Looking through the peephole, she saw him lying in their front garden. She called out to him, but he didn't move. She ran to his side and noticed his labored breathing as he whispered her name.

"When I realized he'd been shot, I called 911 and performed CPR," she says. "My efforts to save his life proved once again, I was a failure."

When the police arrived, Leigh Ann panicked and told them an intruder had shot her husband and stabbed her.

But Leigh Ann found herself indicted for murder and jailed while awaiting her trial.

In prison, a cellmate invited her to church, where she received a Gospel tract.

"That night, as I lay in my bunk and read the tract, thoughts of going to hell for my sins brought even more anguish to my already devastated soul," Leigh Ann says. "It told me a simple prayer could save me from the eternal fires. I stared at the prayer, which included words like sin, repent, and Jesus."

She prayed the prayer and waited for something to change, but she felt no difference.

Leigh Ann's cellmate, Alisha, encouraged her to read the Bible.

"The Bible is God's Word," Alisha explained. "It's His way of communicating with us. Just try it."

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**I WANTED  
... TO FEEL  
WORTHY  
AND  
LOVED.**



# WHO DECIDES WHAT'S 'BAD'?

BY JOHN HUTCHINSON AND JODY BENNETT

**GEOFFREY** Robinson, QC, is campaigning to rid the United Kingdom of bad people. (*Weekend Magazine* 22/5/2021)

When asked about which ones he is targeting he said, 'by "bad people" I mean individuals who have been involved in human rights abuses or serious corruption. We should keep them out of our country, and out of our banks, our universities, our hospitals and out of our beaches.'

Robinson was asked, 'How do we decide who is bad, and is that changing?'

That's the big question – 'How do we decide who is bad?'

We all have ideas about bad people. And, there are degrees of badness. How bad does a person need to be? And, who decides what that level of badness is?

James Truslow Adams once said, 'There is so much good in the worst of us, and so much bad in

the best of us, that it ill behooves any of us to find fault with the rest of us.'

Consider the question from God's point of view and prepare for a surprise. The Bible says, 'There is no difference, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God...' Romans 3:22-24

Compared to a holy, spotless, perfect God, we are ALL bad; we are all sinners and we all deserve eternal punishment for rebelling against Him and His good laws. Who of us has not lied or lusted or stolen; cheated or abused a substance or been sexually immoral? Even if you don't think you deserve jail, you must know that if everything was known about your life, you deserve hell.

That is the other question arising from Robinson's quest: 'What do we do with bad people?'

I remember the day at school when, at 10:55 am, the teacher stopped our lesson and let us watch the clock. At 11:00 am a murderer would be hung.

For primary school children, watching the clock hands reach 11:00 am jolted us as we pictured the

man falling to the end of the rope. Nowadays we simply lock them up.

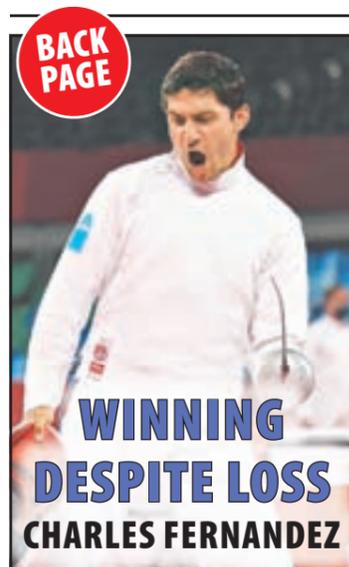
There is however, a better way. It's to make bad people good. And the only way that can happen is by a miracle – that miracle is called salvation.

The Bible says that God doesn't want ANYONE to go to hell but all to come to repentance. So what did He do? He took our punishment for us. He hung on the cross in our place so that we could go free if we simply ask Him for forgiveness and turn away from our sins.

There's a verse in the Bible which says: 'Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come! All this is from God, who reconciled us to Himself through Christ...' 2 Corinthians 5:17-18

Read these stories of people who have been changed from bad people to good people, and know that Jesus is inviting you too to experience a miracle if you'll give your life to Him.

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**BACK PAGE**

**WINNING  
DESPITE LOSS  
CHARLES FERNANDEZ**

# I KILLED MY HUSBAND

• From page 1

Leigh Ann, who had never held a Bible before, let alone read it, decided to give it a go. She said she was desperate to hear from God. She struggled to understand the words but continued to read it every day. She also read Bible studies and Christian books.

While reading one of the Christian books one night, Leigh Ann laughed when she read that the author wrote that she should thank God in all situations, no matter how burdensome.

“He said if I could thank God in the midst of my troubles, He would bring me peace,” Leigh Ann says.

Leigh Ann was incredulous as she thought of the things she had lost: her son, husband, freedom, family, job, house, nursing license, money, sanity, and most likely, her future.

“No one could expect me to thank God for everything I was going through,” Leigh Ann says.

“It was too much. How could anyone be thankful for losing everything?”

Then Leigh Ann received an answer – God spoke to her heart.

“Yes,” the Voice said. “Thank Me. Not for the things you have lost, which are nothing compared to what I have in store for you, but for what you can gain. Accept your situation and thank Me, and I will restore you and give you peace.”

“At last, I understood,” she says. “The prayer wasn’t meant to be fire insurance set to words, but a change of heart and understanding. A relinquishing of myself to the Lord.”

Leigh Ann sobbed as she thanked God and a warm sensation flooded her as she experienced peace, hope

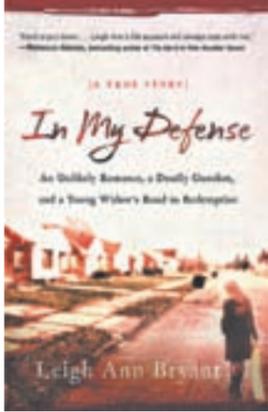
and love.

“The void inside was finally filled – more than I could’ve ever imagined. With each breath, I inhaled His joy and exhaled my despair. Then, another realization hit me – although locked up behind bars, for the first time in my life, I was no longer a prisoner. God had changed my heart as I knelt on the concrete floor of the jail, and I knew, even if my trial resulted in life in prison, His truth had set me free.”

At her trial, Leigh Ann was found guilty of aggravated assault and given a suspended sentence. She had to serve 180 days in jail as a probation condition as well as complete 400 hours of community service.

She is now married to her best friend, Lonnie, and they have a son, Joseph. She also has a step-son, Bailey. Her baby in the story, Vincent, is now a man, who continues to love and support his mother.

Leigh Ann has written a book telling her story: *In My Defense: An Unlikely Romance, a Deadly Gunshot and a Young Widow’s Road to Redemption*.



## CHAPLAIN’S PERSPECTIVE TOTALLY CHANGED

Prison chaplain Elijah Yegon knows for a fact that without divine intervention he would have been at rock bottom with no hope.

He says things were far from perfect. “I was angry, lying and unforgiving. I battled many addictions in my life.”

Elijah tells *Challenge* he did not grow up in a godly home but did attend Sunday school. “Even though I did not understand much I loved to hear about the God who loves all people.”

He was always curious about God and spirituality and yearned to know the truth for himself.

Then, several years later, “The Word of God was being preached by some evangelists. I heard them and it changed my life. The verse that touched me came from Romans 6:23: *For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.*”

So, he accepted the invitation to start a new life. “I decided to fully accept Christ as my personal Savior. I didn’t want to live for myself

anymore. When I accepted Jesus, things changed dramatically.

“The biggest change in my life was that my character has become different. What I have or want is no longer a priority in my life. Jesus is my number one priority.”

Elijah admits that he has faced his fair share of challenges since committing his life to God. “To maintain a Christian life is a challenge. One must be persistent, for there are many difficulties and temptations.”

Elijah’s favorite Bible verse is John 3:16

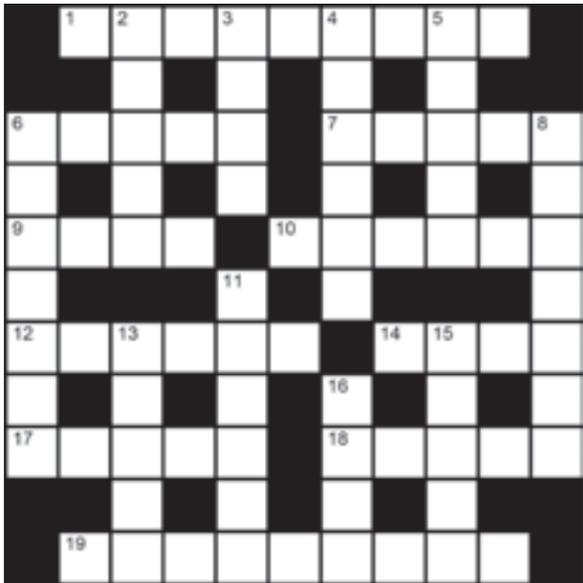
– “For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life.”

Today, Elijah is married and committed to his work as a prison chaplain. He has enjoyed a decades-long relationship with Jesus.

“Christ is the only way to be saved from sin and the only way to enter the kingdom of heaven. There is no other way we can have eternal life. Through Christ Jesus we can be set free from the power and penalty of sin. Trust your life into His loving hands.”

### Coffee Break CROSSWORD & SUDOKU

- ACROSS**
- 1 Absolute rulers
  - 6 Soup scoop
  - 7 Glossy-black bird
  - 9 Salt Lake state
  - 10 Bright garden bloom
  - 12 Enlarge, as pupils
  - 14 Just lying around
  - 17 Long (for)
  - 18 Too closely fitting
  - 19 It slows a descent
- DOWN**
- 2 Land of over a billion
  - 3 Typical learner driver
  - 4 Teeth deposit
  - 5 Opponent, competitor
  - 6 Washday chore
  - 8 Closest
  - 11 Verse segment
  - 13 Andean animal
  - 15 Finger or toe
  - 16 Make designs in glass



[SOLUTIONS PAGE 7](#)



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## God, you better be real!

Bruce Fitzgerald’s rough start in life began before he was even born. When his mother was eight months pregnant with him, his father died. The tragedy took a toll on his mother, Bruce explained in a video on the Lumin YouTube channel. At a young age, Bruce started using drugs and getting into trouble with the law.

“I think it was about my fifth or sixth grade year that I started dabbling in drugs and started being introduced to selling drugs,” Bruce confesses.

“Eventually that led me to spend a few years inside a juvenile facility. Going there was for me like a badge of honour. It was like, yeah now I’ve got another stripe on my shoulder.”

When he was released, he quickly fell back into old habits. It wasn’t long before he was jailed again, this time in the county jail. This was then followed by his imprisonment in the State Penitentiary.

“From the outside looking in, I seemed like I was on top of the world, I was having the time of my life,” he explains. “But really on the inside, I felt totally alone. I couldn’t trust anybody, so the trust factor was completely out the door.”

Bruce described a sense of darkness surrounding him at that time.

“For me the peace came with the weed,” he admits. “The joy came with the club. The love came with all of the girls that I was running around with but it was all fake.”

He recalls a time he was lying on his bed, staring up at the ceiling and feeling as though his body was poisoned. He thought there must be something more to life.

In 2006 he was indicted by the federal government and was sent to prison again.

“I wound up getting into a cell with a guy named Brother Harris, he was the prison pastor I guess you could say,” Bruce explains. “Every day he would tell me that I’m

gonna get saved. He told me Jesus loves me. The way he talked was totally different from anybody else that I talked to.”

Brother Harris lent Bruce a Christian magazine to read. “From the time I opened it, I could not stop reading it,” Bruce recalls. “For the first time ever in my life [I read] the Gospel (the Good News about Jesus), like I’d never heard it before. I was reading through it and I was like, what in the world? Where has all this been my whole entire life?”

He describes it as an ‘aha moment’. He realized if he lined his life up with the will of God that He would open doors that no man could close.

“The first prayer that I prayed, I said, ‘God, you better be real. You better be real because I am going to give you everything. You are all I’ve got.’ And that day, inside that cell was when I said, ‘Okay, this is the God that I know, this is the God who I want to serve.’ When I made the decision to align my life with God, it was a big gamble for me. I was putting it all on the line and I tell you I won. I put all my chips on the table and where I am today, is where I would never believe I would be.”

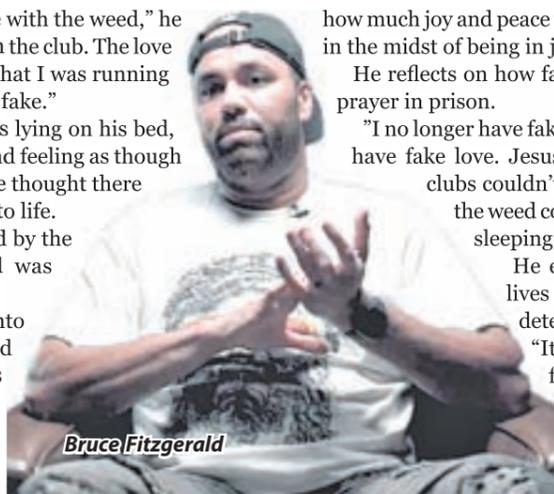
Bruce wrote to his sister and told her about his new-found faith in Jesus Christ.

“I said, ‘I feel happier right here in prison than I ever did when I was in the street,’” Bruce says. “It was crazy how much joy and peace that I had when I accepted Jesus in the midst of being in jail.”

He reflects on how far he has come since his simple prayer in prison.

“I no longer have fake peace,” he attests. “I no longer have fake love. Jesus gives me everything that the clubs couldn’t. Jesus gives me the peace that the weed couldn’t. He gives me the love that sleeping around couldn’t do.”

He encourages others to give their lives to Jesus. “Your past does not determine your future,” he explains. “It doesn’t matter where you’re from, it doesn’t matter how far you have gone away from God. Today is the day of salvation. Today is the day that you want to give God your life.”





# IN PRISON OVER 30 TIMES

**A**bner Garcia Falero battled feelings of rejection from when he was just five years old, after his father abandoned him and his mother and brothers for another woman.

He turned to violence as a way to relieve his anger and stress and joined a gang when he was 16. For the next 10 years he found himself in and out of prison more than 30 times, before being incarcerated in a maximum security prison for seven years.

With one year left in his sentence, Abner was sent to solitary confinement, where he was to carry out the rest of his term. It was there Abner discovered he wasn't alone.

In an interview with The 700 Club, Abner said his father, who was a pastor of a church, had been the person he looked up to.

"He was my everything," he recalled. "I tried to block the reality of 'my father's not coming back.' I didn't know how to go about it. I didn't understand it. I was too young."

He channeled his anger into violence, finding that it got him what he wanted.

"It got me protection," he explains. "[And] a way of me releasing my stress. The higher the level [of violence], the easier it was for me to sleep at night."

He joined a gang at 16, after being expelled from every school he attended. In his gang he found family, protection and support. He said the gang members held a common belief – violence.

He was in and out of prison more than 30 times over the next 10 years for armed robbery, assault and other violent crimes. He wanted out of the gang life but couldn't see a way out.

"I knew every day either it was me being killed, or it was me killing someone, or going to prison," he says. "Those were the three things I expected every day when I woke up."

Then Abner was arrested for possessing a weapon while being a convicted felon and was sentenced to seven years in a maximum security prison. But he didn't feel guilty or remorseful.

"It was like I was numb – numb to who I was," he says.

Then a year before his release, Abner hit rock bottom. He was

involved in a prison brawl and was ordered to serve the rest of his sentence in solitary confinement.

"Twenty-three hours in lockdown a day, seven days a week," he remembers. "I hit rock bottom. It felt like me committing suicide would be the easy way out."

When a guard gave Abner a Bible, he threw it to the side of his cell.

"But for 24 hours a day, seven days a week, I knew that Bible was in my cell," he says. "It was like it was saying 'I'm here, God is here.'"

He eventually, started reading it and an internal tug-o-war began.

"I'm the worst of the worst, and can there be a God that can forgive me right now?" he asked. "It was a tug-o-war of 'which way do I go in life and how do I go about it?'"

While reading the Bible one night, Abner had a vision that changed everything for him.

"I saw fire, like I was burning," he remembers. "Like everything around me was on fire. And I got on my knees and I cried and cried and cried. 'I can't be like my father, because my father was a Christian and a pastor. That's not me. I will never be like my father.' And the Lord was calling me and saying, 'I got you. You're looking

for a Father and I've got you. I'm your Father.' For the first time in my life since I was five years old someone appreciated me. Someone loved me. It was like a ton of bricks gone. It was gone. That was the day that the process started."

After he was released from prison, Abner couldn't find work. He had tried to live a godly life but he felt discouraged and resorted to his old ways. It wasn't long before he got arrested for robbery and went back to jail for three years. He resolved to leave his life of crime behind and rededicated his life to God.

"I got on my knees and prayed, 'I give you what I have left, once again,'" Abner says.

God freed him from his anger and helped him to forgive his dad.

"I see Jesus now as my father figure," he explains. "I had a Father the whole time that was looking out for me, that was protecting me. And it wasn't that He left me, it was just that I was blindfolded to the truth, and now the blindfold is off."

Abner is married with a son. He speaks at churches and prisons about God's power to transform lives and has written a book called *The Pastor's Son: A Memoir*.

## Theft is not a 'victimless' crime

**M**att began using drugs when he was just 13. He took them to escape from the pain of seeing his mother being abused - "beaten to within an inch of her life" - is how the former prisoner describes the harm done to her.

"Drugs made me not care about anything, about society, about people," he shares in his account to Prison Fellowship Australia. "All I cared about was myself and how I was going to make my money to take drugs. I was using drugs, drugs, drugs to numb my emotions."

When he turned 18, Matt was sent to jail for robbing a supermarket while high on drugs, and was in and out of prison for the next 12 years.

It was while he was incarcerated that Matt was introduced to the Sycamore Tree Project - an eight-week, Christian-based program that pairs inmates with unrelated victims of crime to share their stories.

The aim of the project, run by Prison Fellowship Australia, is to help prisoners understand the impact of their actions, a technique which proponents say can play a big part in breaking the cycle of crime.

It certainly had that effect on Matt, who not only realized he did leave victims in his wake, but went on to commit his life to God three years ago as a result.

"I've done just under 12 years of jail, and it's taken me this long to pull my head in and to change my life," he says wryly. "I've walked with God these last three years and He's the one who's pulled me out on the other side, clean."

He says the program opened his eyes - "I actually thought I didn't have any victims. I didn't think I was affecting anyone; I thought I was normal."

"But the Sycamore Tree Project made me realize I do have victims. I met one old lady who was asleep in her house when she got burgled. She was so scared she made me see that I still have victims in my life."

Matt also recalls a 94-year-old man who told him his wife died the day after Matt and a friend broke

into their house.

"What a beautiful bloke he was," Matt smiles. "He was a Christian. I offered to pay every single cent back. He was angry at me ... but he said, 'I don't want your money. I just want you to keep following God. If you keep following God, that's a bigger gift than you could ever give me.'"

Matt was stunned. "I couldn't believe it. He even rang me up a week before court and said, 'I wish you good luck. I hope you don't get jail for what you did to me, because I have faith in you that you're going to follow the right path from now on.'"

It was not easy meeting the victims. "It was scary...even if they weren't my victims," Matt admits.

"I thought these people would look at me like I was a criminal but they didn't at all ... Even after what they've been through, they were so willing to give people like me another chance, and another chance, and another chance, and another chance."

"They sat down and listened to me and they teared up to hear what sort of life that I've had. They just wanted to do right by us, even though we did wrong by them."

Matt's family is having a little more trouble accepting the changes in his life. He says his father and siblings have rejected him but adds: "I don't really blame them, because of how many times they heard me say I was going to change my life. But every time I came back to prison. But I proved them wrong this time, so far."

He credits the program and what it has taught him for keeping him on the straight and narrow. "If not for that, I'd probably be back in jail. If I didn't change I was going to end up dead or in jail for the rest of my life," he says candidly.

"It's never too late to change. I was one of the baddest of the baddest men but I've come out and moved forward in life. And you know what? I love life being clean."

"God loves me unconditionally and He knows I stuff up. He tells me to keep going the way I'm going and even though I'll have bad days, I'll come out the other side clean." ●

**IT'S NEVER TOO LATE TO CHANGE ...**



### About Crossroads

The Crossroads Prison Ministries mentorship program connects you with mentors who help you study the Bible.

Mentors write to you, answer your questions, share stories from their own lives, help you see how God is speaking to you through His Word and encourage you to continue to grow in your faith.

Through the mentorship program, Crossroads offers more than one dozen different correspondence Bible study courses that each contain up to 14 lessons.

Each course is designed to help you learn more about God and how to follow Him.

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Gender: \_\_\_\_\_

Referred by: **CHAL**

Prefiero el curso en español.

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**STUDENT COMMITMENT**

I will finish each lesson I receive in a timely manner and, with the help of my mentors, I will complete each course that I start. I agree that Crossroads may use anything I submit, such as my picture, testimony, writings or artwork, for promotional purposes or to further its mission.

Student Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

When you have completed this form, please return it to:  
 Crossroads Prison Ministries | PO Box 900 | Grand Rapids, MI 49509-0900  
 Crossroads Prison Ministries Canada | PO Box 5837 | Burlington, ON L7R 3Y8

# Set free from addiction

BY MARK ELLIS

As a youngster, South African Declan Wood wanted his father's love and approval, but the abuse he suffered at his hands led to lifelong scars.

"When I did something wrong, made mistakes, my dad beat me with a baseball bat," Declan says on a video recorded by Joshua Generation Church.

During one of the beatings, his father hit a light fixture and knocked it off the ceiling. "Glass was going everywhere and he kept beating me. The way he looked at me when he was beating me, I thought 'this man hates me'."

Declan's mother and sisters also feared his dad. "Who do I turn to? Declan wondered.

At 10 years old, he turned to drugs, mostly marijuana. Later, he and his friends ground up a sedative he referred to as mandrakes (Quaaludes) and mixed it with the marijuana.

"I mixed it with weed to give me a rush, but it was destroying my social life. I never fitted in with the regular kids at school. I never felt a part of everyone else.

By the time Declan was 15 he had been kicked out of eight public schools and three boarding schools. "My life was smoking, doing drugs, stealing cars, going on joy rides, and bringing them back at five in the morning," he recounts.

Following two years of service in the army, he got into hardcore drugs and began breaking into homes to support his drug habit. Eventually he was caught and sentenced to seven months in prison. "I was 20 years old and had my 21st birthday in prison.

After his release, he got into trouble again, was arrested, and sentenced to nine years in prison.

In prison, he joined a gang and sold drugs. After his release, he moved to Cape Town and discovered crack cocaine. "I had a hit and it messed me up. It made me so high I was addicted straight away."

While working as a labourer, Declan met a young woman and she moved in. "A month after I met her, she got pregnant. Nine months later I had this beautiful little girl.

"I thought having this little baby would get me on my feet and I would stop using drugs. But I couldn't. It was just too strong for me."

"One morning after smoking crack all night, I was lying in this bed wanting to cry, but no tears came out. I thought to myself, 'what a terrible father. My girl's going to grow up with a father that can't support her'.

I felt like such a terrible loser. I was looking back on my life, just being naughty, doing wrong, having bad intentions."

In desperation Declan cried out, "God, if you're real, please help me!"

The next day a fellow drug addict came to him and told him about a rehab facility down the road. During rehab, Declan began to read the Bible for the first time.

"It was amazing the power of these words. This was something else. Every now and again a verse would really do something to me. It would do something in my soul. I knew then God was real and He was with me. In that home I got to know Jesus, and I fell in love with Him and His word.

He witnessed the lives of drug addicts transformed and changed.

After rehab, Declan found a job. "I was 36 years old. I started doing handyman work, electrical, painting. I never had confidence before, but the Lord gave me confidence."

However, in 2008, he backslid and went back on crack cocaine. A friend of his sister invited him to church. "I went in there one day and I saw the love of Jesus in these people. I had learned about the power of God, sharing the good news, the Holy Spirit, but I didn't know enough about God's love.

"I was coming to church on Sunday but during the week I was using drugs. It was a terrible time. When you have tasted that God is good, and you're on drugs and can't get off, it's terrible."

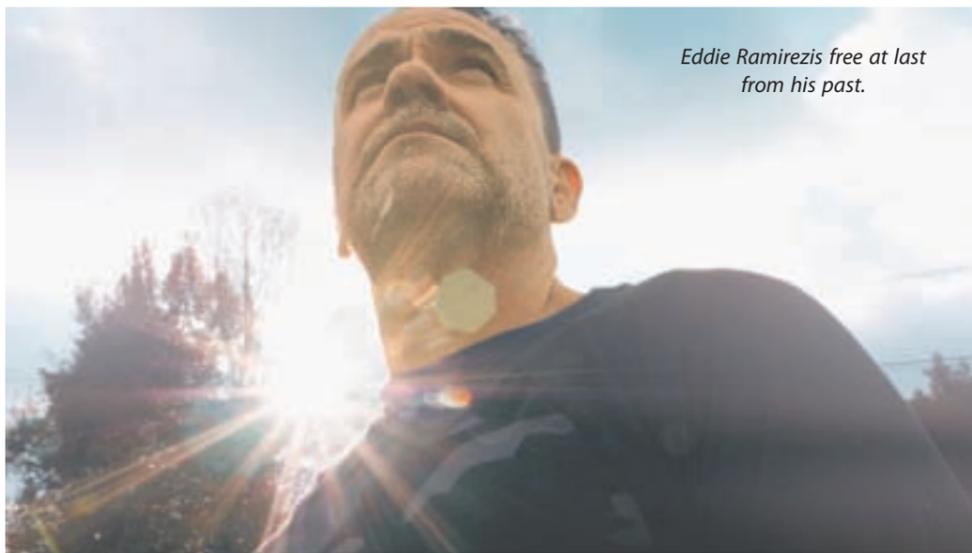
In an accountability group at the church, he confessed his sins. "Sometimes they would rebuke me. One important thing I learned was the importance of living in the light. No matter how many times I slipped up in those five years, I knew I had to live in the light."

Then one day in 2013, unexpectedly, the Lord delivered him from his addiction as he stood in his mother's garage. "I felt the addiction taken right out of me in my mother's garage. From that day, never ever again did I use drugs. Never again was I tempted like I was all those years. The Lord took it out of me in an instant.

"Jesus Christ, himself, came to that garage that day and saved me, he delivered me. He took that drug addiction right out of me."

Declan has since become a leader in the church.

He is thankful for God's transformational power. "The Lord had been good to me. My relationship with my daughter has been restored. I've been able to provide. The Lord has helped me in my business and there is still a lot more to come."



Eddie Ramirez free at last from his past.

## Drugs more difficult to ditch than communism

BY BEN LAHOOD

Without a father, Cuban-born Eddie Ramirez turned to fighting and drugs.

Eddie was part of the "Freedom Flights" rescuing people from communist Cuba in 1967. When his dad came to America a year later, the youngster hoped to enjoy his family and his new life in America, but it was not to be.

Dad was aggressive and angry, and Eddie never developed a close relationship with him. After a time, his parents divorced.

Feeling cheated without a father, Eddie fought neighborhood kids as an outlet for his resentments. Older boys noticed his toughness and took him into their gang. He latched on the masculine approbation and began to thrive in the life of crime.

"I needed somebody to accept me because I was cheated. I needed somebody that was older than me to accept me and embrace me and say, 'OK, you're part of this.'"

The hole in his heart wasn't filled by crime, however, so he sought satisfaction in drug use.

"What is the next thing? Well, let me get some drugs, let me start doing drugs," he acknowledges.

He worked his way up in drug dealing and landed some high-profile clients. He felt an illusion of power. But he was helpless to stop his own spiraling addiction.

"You're always chasing that first high," he says. "It got me to the point of no return. I was like, I can't stop. There's no way of me stopping. I had

power. I had money; people were looking for me."

When he was almost killed by a truck it brought a wakeup call. When Eddie recovered, a friend who had become a Christian took him to church.

"Once I was there in church, I was like, 'What's here? There's nothing here for me. I'm not making no money here. I need to go out there and make money.'"

His stubborn heart remained resistant. He didn't get saved or repent.

After he survived gunshots to the head, Eddie began to reexamine his lifestyle. "I felt disgusted the way that I would just stay up all night and do drugs," he says. "My nose was like falling apart."

"Cocaine is a drug that once you start doing it there's no turning back," he says. "I was desperate for a way out of this addiction."

At the urging of his mom, Eddie checked into a rehab facility where he had a life-changing encounter with the Lord.

"I remember one night I'm there in my room and I get a visitation from what I believe was the Lord Jesus," he says.

In the vision, Jesus imparted to him: You really want to change your life, all you have to do is walk through this door and if you walk through the door, your life will be changed.

Eddie saw a very narrow door, through which shone a bright light.

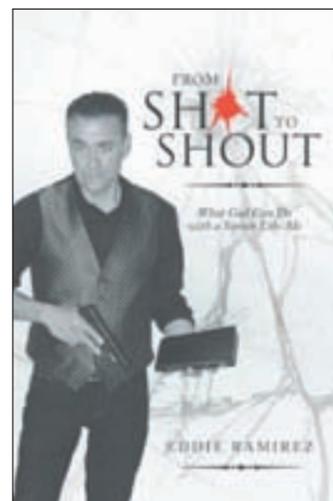
"When I went through the door, all the burden that was on me, everything that was there, all my problems, everything just fell off me," he recalls. "Once I walked through that door, my life was changed. He saved me right on time."

Eddie was instantly set free from drugs. "God literally took the addiction out of my life completely," he says. "He did the work right away.

"I was such a bad person," Eddie adds. "The fact that He would really literally come and save me, I couldn't wrap my mind around that. I was like, 'Why, God, why? Why would You save me? Why would You do that? And Lord, You took care of me. You took care of me when I needed somebody, when I needed a father.'"

Today, Eddie pastors a church in Florida.

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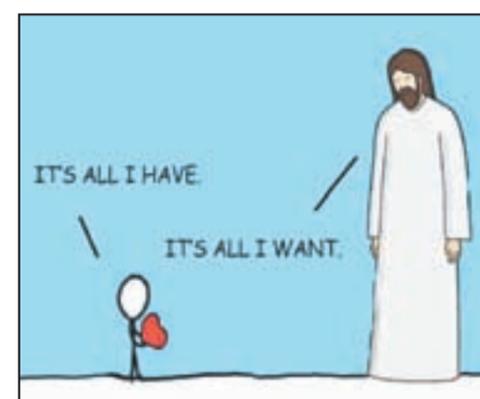
Declan Wood

**TWO** skydivers jump from a plane at 15000 feet. Both are wearing parachutes. One of them folds his arms, ignores the ripcord, and says to himself, "I'm perfectly safe because of my parachute." He is still saying these words as he hits the ground at nearly 100 miles per hour. The other skydiver knows he will be safe only if he does something. He pulls the ripcord and lands safely.

We may know about the Christian faith. We may respect Jesus and agree that what He did on the Cross is the answer to our deepest needs, but until we ask for His help and commit our lives to Him, it is like falling with a closed parachute. We need to take urgent action. We need to pull the ripcord while there is still time. The ripcord is this, "Whosoever calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved" – Romans 10:13.

There is nothing else we can do. We cannot save ourselves – we can only throw ourselves on what Jesus achieved for us on the Cross, He has done everything that we need. Let's act on it, or else we will free fall into hell.

– Evangelist Reinhard Bonnke





# 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

### John 12:42 - 13:17

#### INTRODUCTION

We have reached the last week of Christ's life on earth. It is a very full week when He teaches vital, life-changing truth. John makes it clear that there are many hard hearts that are refusing the truth Jesus brings. There are others who are listening and believing. We will see how events are leading up to that crucial time when the Lord pays the supreme price on the cross. He states clearly that this is the reason He came to earth.

**Chapter 12, Verses 42, 43** At the same time many even among the leaders believed in Him. But because of the Pharisees they would not confess their faith for fear they would be put out of the synagogue; for they loved the praise from men more than praise from God.

It is interesting to note that there were leaders among the Jews who were convinced that Jesus was who He claimed to be. But how sad to

think that they thought more of their own reputations and positions, rather than be seen as disciples of Christ. Following Christ calls for courage.

**Verses 44- 46** Then Jesus cried out, "When a man believes in me, he does not believe in me only, but in the one who sent me. When he looks at me, he sees the one who sent me. I have come into the world as a light, so that no-one who believes in me should stay in darkness."

We notice that Jesus constantly refers to His Father. In so doing, He shows the closeness of the relationship of Father and Son; so close that He is able to say they are one. This points us to the mystery of the Trinity, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Not three Gods, but three persons in one being. Thank God for the light coming into the world.

**Verses 47- 50** As for the person who hears my words but does not keep them, I do not judge him. For I did not come to judge the world, but to save it. There is a judge for the one who rejects me and does not accept my words; that very word which I spoke will condemn him at the last day. For I did not speak of my own accord, but the Father who sent me commanded me what to say and how to say it. I know that his command leads to eternal life. So whatever

I say is just what the Father has told me to say.

How important is the Word of God! Ignoring or rejecting it is to bring the unbeliever into judgment. No-one who has heard the Word can claim that they don't know the way of salvation. They are left without excuse. The message of the Gospel sets out the way of life and the way of death. We choose to listen and obey or do otherwise

**Chapter 13, Verse 1** It was just before the Passover Feast. Jesus knew that the time had come for Him to leave this world and go to the Father. Having loved His own who were in the world, He now showed them the full extent of His love.

Jesus often referred to the right hour for his passion and death. He now knew that the hour was near. We marvel at His love. These men had proved themselves to be very unreliable, slow to learn, rivalling each other for a place of importance and having normal human weaknesses. But His love was strong, constant and sacrificial. Think about ourselves at this moment. He loves us in the same way.

**Verses 2- 5** The evening meal was being served, and the devil had already prompted Judas Iscariot, son of Simon, to betray Jesus. Jesus knew that the Father had put all things under His power, and that He had come from God and was returning to God. So He got up from the meal, took off His outer clothing, and wrapped a towel around His waist. After that, He poured water into a basin and began to wash His disciples' feet, drying them with the towel that was wrapped around Him.

Washing of feet was a common practice as people wore sandals in the sandy countryside. It was looked upon as a chore usually done by servants. So the disciples would have been greatly surprised that their Master would do this service. Yet it was not anything foreign to Jesus as He showed that He had come to serve, not to be served. It was an act

of grace and love. No doubt each man felt a little strange as it took place but he would remember the occasion powerfully. Note that Judas the betrayer was one of them.

**Verses 6- 9** He came to Simon Peter who said to Him, "Lord, are you going to wash my feet?" Jesus replied, "You do not realise now what I am doing, but later you will understand." "No," said Peter, "you shall never wash my feet." Jesus answered, "Unless I wash you, you have no part with me." "Then Lord," Simon replied, "not just my feet but my hands and my head as well!"

Peter felt unworthy of this action. He would rather it didn't happen. But Jesus was teaching something they all had to learn and, at the same time, in a symbol, pronouncing them clean from inward defilement. So Peter needed to be part of this action. Realising it, he expressed his strong desire to be in harmony with Jesus.

**Verses 10, 11** Jesus answered, "A person who has had a bath needs only to wash his feet; his whole body is clean. And you are clean, though not every one of you." For He knew who was going to betray Him, and that was why He said not everyone was clean.

These words confirm the thought that inward cleansing was also in view. But it didn't apply to Judas. We will never understand why a follower of Jesus could be so treacherous. We can think of Judas' love of money and his desire to see the Romans overcome, but we can never understand how he could deliver the Lord into the hands of those who were determined to kill Him.

**Verses 12- 15** When He had finished washing their feet, He put on His clothes and returned to His place. "Do you understand what I have done for you?" He asked them. You call me 'Teacher' and 'Lord', and rightly so, for that is what I am. Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet,



you also should wash one another's feet. I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you.

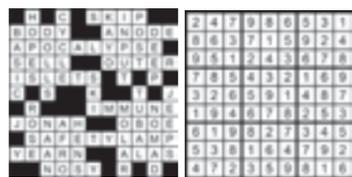
What Jesus did was to model kindness and humility. He wants them to understand that these qualities are to be copied. No-one is too great to be a servant of others. In fact, greatness bows to the needs it sees and does something about them. So these disciples, so prone to compete with each other, are bidden to follow Jesus' example and kneel down and serve each other.

**Verses 16 and 17** "I tell you the truth, no servant is greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. Once you understand these things, you will be blessed if you do them."

Jesus underlines what He has said about masters and servants. The relationships exist, but humble service should be shown to all.

#### CONCLUSION

Confronted with the life of Jesus, we cannot help but admire and wonder at such a Person. How could we think of Him as being just an ordinary man among men? He is so wise, so deep, so different, so perfect. And we could go on. Yet He faced an agonising death at the hands of sinners. We will read more about that as we go on.



## HOW DO I BECOME A CHRISTIAN?

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Almighty God, Creator of Heaven and Earth,

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

Thank You for sending Your Son, Jesus Christ, to earth to live the perfect life I couldn't, and die on the cross for my sins. Thank You that His blood was sufficient to pay my debt to You, and His resurrection proves that there is life beyond death. I accept that His sacrifice is all I need to get right with You –

I bring nothing I have done but I give you everything I am. Help me to live for You. Please be my Savior and my Master. Amen.

#### What now?

1. Tell someone - either a fellow prisoner who is a Christian, or your Prison Chaplain.
2. Ask a friend or family member to bring you a Bible. Ask the Prison Chaplain to sign you up to a correspondence discipleship program.
3. Keep praying. Talk to God anywhere, about anything. He is always listening, and you don't need a formula.
4. Find out if your prison has church services and attend them regularly.

#### AS A NEXT STEP :

I have prayed this prayer.

Please send me:

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

\* Please tick and write clearly \*

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Age \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

Send to: Challenge Literature Fellowship, 2634 Drake Road, Lebanon Ohio, 45036

All overseas enquiries are referred onto someone in their own country

# What makes heaven so special?

BY JODY BENNETT

**WHEN** someone says "heaven", what do you think of?

Wings, harps and clouds? Doing your favourite thing all day? A bland place with lots of singing?

Many people define heaven by the things that make them feel happy and fulfilled on Earth, but what if I were to tell you that in heaven there is no sex, no marriage, no Wi-fi, no computer games, no Netflix, no sport and probably no sleep. Would you still want to go?

The Bible actually tells us very little about heaven. But when Jesus was told about a woman who had had seven husbands and asked whose she would be in heaven, He made it clear that in the afterlife there is no marriage or sex. "When the dead rise, they will neither marry nor be given in marriage; they will be like the angels in heaven." (Mark 12:25)

In the glimpses the Apostle John had of heaven, as recorded in the biblical book of Revelation, it was a place of worship – with crowds standing around the throne of God singing praises and bowing before Him.

So, if heaven is not a place where we get to do whatever we want, or gratify all the desires we have on earth, why is it somewhere we would want to go?

Well, the people who want to go to heaven want to be there for one reason only. One thing makes heaven, heaven and the absence of that one thing makes hell the most awful, fearful place it is. That one thing is Jesus.

The people who want to go to heaven want to be there because Jesus is there. He is the embodiment of love, mercy, kindness, goodness and truth. All our deepest longings are fulfilled in Him and therefore the yearning of those who know Him, who call themselves Christians, is to

be where He is.

That is why there is so much worship in heaven. Not because it is forced, like some sort of long boring church service, but because everyone there is so overcome by God's goodness and so grateful He has extended that goodness to them, they cannot but praise Him endlessly!

The Bible makes two other important points about the afterlife that are also relevant.

Firstly, our desires and lusts will not be fulfilled in hell either. Hell is no endless debauched party. Jesus describes it as a blazing furnace, where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth. (Matthew 13:42) It is a place of torment, devoid of any of the goodness, light, purity or happiness that we may know on earth.

Secondly, heaven is not the final destination of those who trust in Jesus for their salvation. John tells us in Revelation 21: "Then I saw "a new heaven and a new earth," for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. I saw the Holy City, the New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Look! God's dwelling place is now among the people, and He will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away." (verses 1-4)

Ultimately, there will be a new Earth and Revelation gives us only a few clues as to what it will be like but for those who know and love Jesus only one fact is important – He will be there and we will never be apart from Him again.

Guatemala's Charles Fernandez falls off Fluoriet as he competes in the men's individual riding show jumping of the modern pentathlon during the Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games at the Tokyo Stadium in Tokyo on August 7, 2021. (Photo by Pedro PARDO / AFP) (Photo by PEDRO PARDO/AFP via Getty Images)

**INSET:** Charles Fernandez of Team Guatemala celebrates during the Fencing Ranked Round of the Men's Modern Pentathlon at the Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games on August 05, 2021 in Chofu, Japan. (Photo by Leon Neal/Getty Images)



# LOSER IS A WINNER

**O**n August 8, as the 2020 Olympics came to a close, Charles Fernandez, Guatemala's last remaining athlete at the Olympic village carried his country's flag with pride at the closing ceremony.

The 25-year-old modern pentathlete did not win any medals at these Games, but he has a winning attitude - and a higher purpose for his sport.

"The people of Guatemala are the reason I do what I do in sports," he told Tokyo 2020.

"I am an athlete for this country. I don't compete for myself but for the people. When I am on the podium... I just think of the smiles of these people who suffer every day, who work every day to achieve a better life.

"However, sometimes it is hard for them to develop as human beings due to the violence and corruption in the country."

Charles was born in Dayton, Ohio in the United States to Christian parents, Carlos - who was originally from Guatemala - and Heidi. When he was seven, his parents answered the call to become full-time missionaries in Guatemala and the whole family moved there.

Carlos, himself a modern pentathlete, founded a mission called Welcome to My Father's House. For the past 17 years, this evangelistic ministry has provided education and medical care as well as sports and construction projects for the Mayan population.

"We help them build churches, houses, schools and community centers," explains Charles, who has been a Christian from the time he was a child and is passionate

about being a role model for the community.

Although he has not been as hands-on since turning professional, his heart is still for the mission field. Once, when he was travelling in Europe, he learned that the Fuego volcano, just 10 miles from his hometown, had erupted. Charles had actually been planning to climb Fuego when he got home that same week.

"We decided to shift our focus from it being a vacation to being a ministry opportunity," he continued. He and his girlfriend Kristen started a GoFundMe page and raised \$2000, which they used to buy food, water and other essential items which were distributed through Father's House.

"It was definitely a huge blessing to be able to help people who were victims of the volcano in any way we could," Charles noted. "These people had literally lost everything."

He was also one of five athletes recruited by the Olympic Committee in Guatemala last summer to build three houses in one of the villages destroyed by the eruption.

"As a Guatemalan, as a Christian, and as a public figure, I wanted to try to create awareness for the people of Guatemala," he said. "This

is not a process that will heal itself overnight."

The modern pentathlon is a grueling one-day endurance competition over five disciplines - fencing, swimming, horse jumping, shooting and running - a skillset that must seem bizarre to anyone who didn't grow up with Tarzan or Erroll Flynn movies.

It is Charles' work as a missionary that inspires him in his role as an athlete.

"My aim as an athlete is to bring hope to them, showing them that anything is possible when you work

hard. The two ways I support the country are different but thank God they fit together in a very special way. This is the reason and motivation for what I do at the Olympics.

"I ask God to give me strength every single day. I know for a fact that without the renewal of my strength through my faith and because of God I would not be the athlete that I am today. That is why I do what I do, to be a light of Christ unto the nations in this sport."

Charles said a personal relationship with Jesus Christ was not something religious but genuine.

"It is not a religious experience. God is not a God who looks for the best of the best, but someone who looks for the broken-hearted in need

of a savior, regardless of your sins and faults.

"My faith in God has always been surrounded by the love and grace He has shown to His children even though we don't deserve it.

"My purpose in life has been to always reflect the love that Christ gave us and serve others selflessly. Being an example of Christ's love on earth through actions has helped

me use the platform that I have to inspire others and be a positive change to my country and the people around me.

"The difference is about how you treat others, how you look at adversity, and how you respond to every-



Charles Fernandez of Team Guatemala celebrates winning in the 200 meter freestyle swimming heat of the Men's Modern Pentathlon on day fifteen of the Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games at Tokyo Stadium on August 07, 2021 in Chofu, Japan. (Photo by Dan Mullan/Getty Images)

thing that happens around you. This allows me to live a happy life as an athlete knowing that it is not about what you do inside sport but how are you doing it that matters." ●

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