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U.S. Edition



GETTING GRATEFUL



At Christmas do we focus on giving or getting?

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

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

If you are counting your blessings and remembering all the good

things you do have in your life, it is easier to feel content. Your focus is on the glass half full, instead of the glass half empty.

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

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

Contentment is not natural

However, that isn't our nature. The Apostle Paul said that he had learned to be content: "Not that I was ever in need, for I have learned how to be content with whatever I have. I know how to live on almost nothing or with everything. I have learned the secret of living in every

situation, whether it is with a full stomach or empty, with plenty or little" (Philippians 4:11–12 NLT).

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

"If you put a child in a room and give him a toy, he'll be relatively happy. But when you bring in another child with another toy, friction begins. They'll fight over the toy

they've determined is the best one. Each child wants what the other has. That's human nature, and we don't necessarily outgrow it.

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

How do we learn contentment?

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

Famous Oxford don C.S. Lewis said: "If I find in myself a desire which no experience in this world can satisfy, the most probable explanation is that I was made for another world."

The Bible says we were made for heaven and an eternity with God.

In so many of the stories in this paper, people chase happiness and fulfilment through drugs, sex, power or wealth, only to find that they are left more miserable than they were before.

● Turn to page 2

Festive ideas Page 9

Fun for Kids Pages 5,6,7

BACK PAGE

WILD RIDER
ANTHONY THOMAS

BIG STAR FACES SOME BIG PROBLEMS

Award-winning hip-hop producer **Timothy Zachary Mosley** (pictured), known as Timbaland, was in the midst of a successful career during the 1990s when he underwent root canal treatment on his teeth and was prescribed painkillers. He soon found they helped him cope with more than just physical pain and became addicted. "It put me in a great feeling of not caring, of just being free," Timothy told *Men's Health* magazine. "I'm like travelling, doing shows, popping

'em, having fun, just being ignorant."

Timothy had helped propel the careers of many of this era's most successful musicians, including Missy Elliott, Beyoncé, Jay-Z, Drake, Rihanna, and Justin Timberlake. But his marriage collapsed, he gained a lot of weight, became pre-diabetic and owed \$4 million in taxes.

He was popping pills "way over the limit" but so feared dying from them that he took some time away "just me and God" to kick the habit.

Timothy knew to turn to God for help because he had been raised in church and established a personal relationship with Jesus as a child. He knew he needed someone more powerful than himself to help him beat his addiction. He also sorted out the other problems in his life.

"I had to downsize, get all that superstar stuff

out of the way," he says. He settled with the IRS then worked to settle with his ex-wife. "The divorce at the beginning was very messy, but now we are good friends," he shares.

"I'm very religious so I'm gonna put it in these terms - God has done a work on me," Timothy told *The New York Times*. He also patched up some broken friendships. "God did a lot of work on me ... I did some changing."

"God was rebuilding my character," Timothy acknowledges, explaining that going through withdrawal was "one of the toughest things" he had ever been through.

"I had to get whipped, because I didn't appreciate anything," the 47-year-old believes. "All my life I felt it was a little too easy."

He is now five years sober and back on track. •

WHAT WEIRD GIFTS!

BY JODY BENNETT

WHAT is the worst Christmas gift you have ever received? My colleague's gran once gave him a repurposed school blazer with the emblem picked off, and someone else I know got an empty wooden box. My mom was once deeply insulted when someone gave her bathroom freshener for Christmas!

A Christmas gift might reveal that someone doesn't really know your tastes or size, or might show that someone only shops the sales. However, how would you like a gift that revealed that someone knew your future?

Imagine if, for instance, Lady Diana Spencer, when she was born, had been gifted a real tiara, a camera and a toy limousine. These would have foretold that she would be a princess; that she would be the most photographed woman in the world, whose life would be mediated by the camera; and that she would die in a car accident.

That is the sort of thing that happened at Jesus' birth. The gifts that He was given that very first Christmas foretold who He was, what His role would be and his death.

In the familiar nativity scene of the stable, baby Jesus, Mary, Joseph, shepherds, and farm animals, there are usually three wise men. There may have been a whole caravan of magi, the Bible actually doesn't tell us how many, but the reason three



in Jerusalem. It was used in the incense that burned continually before the altar of God, it was also included in some of the thanksgiving offerings and was sprinkled on the priests' bread.

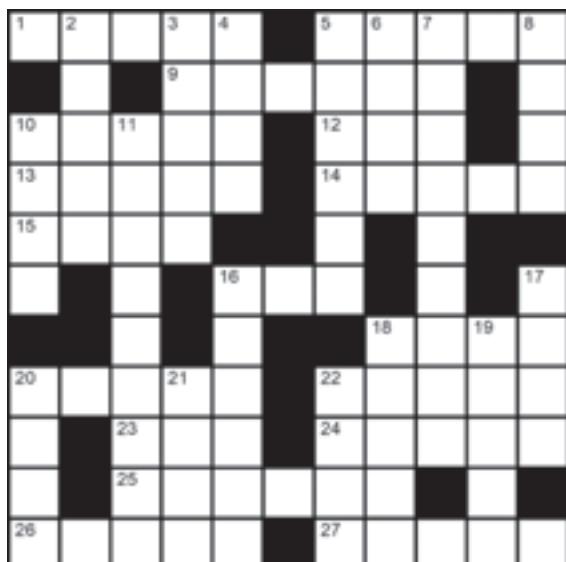
The whole temple would have smelled of frankincense ... and blood from the slain animals. The

Coffee Break

CROSSWORD & SUDOKU

ACROSS

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



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

SOLUTIONS PAGE 11



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

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Photo: Getty Images

are depicted is because they brought three gifts: gold, frankincense and myrrh.

The gold, unsurprisingly, spoke of royalty – Jesus was the prophesied King of the Jews, as his mother Mary was told by the Angel Gabriel when she supernaturally conceived. "... the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David. And He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of His kingdom there will be no end."

When trying to find the baby, the wise men had come to the Roman appointed king of Judea - Herod - and asked "Where is He who has been born King of the Jews? For we have seen His star in the East and have come to worship Him." (Matthew 2:2)

Not too many of us would refuse a gift of gold, I'm sure. It would be a very generous Christmas present! But frankincense, a rare tree resin, seems rather strange.

To Jesus' parents though, frankincense would have had a deep association with the temple sacrifices

scent would have evoked deep associations with the priesthood and the atonement [cleansing from sin] rituals that formed the backbone of the Jewish calendar.

Frankincense indicated Jesus' role as Great High Priest – the ultimate intermediary and advocate between sinful humanity and a holy God. The Book of Hebrews describes how Jesus is a perfect High Priest because He Himself is without any sin, so He doesn't have to make sacrifices for Himself. He also doesn't have to keep making sacrifices, because He is not only the priest but the sacrifice, the "Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world" (John 1:29).

The blood of the animals slain by the Jewish priests covered over people's sins, but the blood of Jesus – both a sinless man and God incarnate – was sufficient to completely wash away the sins of everyone in the world (Hebrews 9:12-15).

Jesus's death is recognized in the third gift, myrrh, which was used as an embalming agent on the wrappings of dead bodies. Over 30 years

later, when Jesus's body was taken down from the cross:

Nicodemus ... came, bringing a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about a hundred pounds. Then they took the body of Jesus, and bound it in strips of linen with the spices, as the custom of the Jews is to bury. (John 19:39-40)

The betrayal and death of Christ was no accident or mistake of history. It was planned by God before the beginning of the world (1 Peter 1:20-21) in order to make a way, through Christ's miraculous resurrection, for rebellious humanity to find their way back to God.

Thus, right from his childhood, the gifts from the wise men foretold that Jesus Christ was a king, who would be a priest-intercessor for humanity and a human sacrifice for the sins of the world.

It would be pretty

freaky to receive such prophetic gifts ourselves, but I hope you at least get useful or enjoyable ones this Christmas. Remember though, the best Christmas gift ever was the one wrapped in swaddling clothes in the manger. The gift of Jesus Himself is still available to all of us, and I urge you to be a wise man or woman and seek Him out. See how on page 11. •



Myrrh (top), gold and frankincense. The gifts the magi brought to Jesus may not have looked very impressive - more like little stones of various colors - but they were very valuable.



Getting grateful

From page 1

It is only when they find a relationship with Jesus Christ and have met that very deep longing to be loved and for their lives to mean something, that they find contentment with their circumstances.

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

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

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

Hymn writer Fanny Crosby, who was born blind,



These kids are grateful even for toothpaste!

famously said: "If I had a choice, I would still choose to remain blind ... for when I die, the first face I will ever see will be the face of my blessed Savior."

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

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

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

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

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

And may 2022 bring you many more! •



Dennis and Rosemary Appleton with their daughter Kylie, who died at just 16.

DEADLY CANCER JUST DISAPPEARS

BY JANICE TEO

When 77-year-old Dennis Appleton noticed blood in his urine in August last year, he ignored it.

Not wanting to worry his wife Rosemary, he didn't tell her.

It was probably nothing, he thought. Maybe just a slight infection.

Only it wasn't. Every visit to the toilet resulted in fresh blood - and it was only a matter of days before Rosemary saw the blood and insisted her husband see the doctor.

Several tests later, the South Australian couple was given shattering news - Dennis had bladder cancer. It was aggressive and it was growing fast.

Immediate surgery to remove the 15 cancerous polyps in his bladder followed. Three months later, doctors went back in and took out another nine, followed by yet one more operation to remove 12 more growths three months after that.

But the cancer was relentless and would not yield - after six months of treatment which ended in February this year, doctors found another nine polyps.

"This is the most aggressive cancer we've ever seen," they told an exhausted Dennis and Rosemary, adding they couldn't believe how quickly it had grown.

Grimly, they told Dennis the only way to beat the illness was to remove his bladder and prostate gland - it was radical surgery that would compel him to wear a waste collection pouch for the rest of his life.

"I really didn't want to have that operation," Dennis tells *Challenge News*. "I wasn't happy about it at all. I asked the doctors to let me think about it, but given the way the cancer was progressing, they were insistent that I have it done as soon as possible."

Dennis reluctantly acquiesced. While waiting for the surgery, the couple sought prayer from their church. Brought up by God-fearing parents, they had been Christians for as long as they could remember.

"During a prayer session, one of the people told me I wouldn't need the operation," Dennis remarks.

"I woke up the next morning feeling the same thing. That was a very big call - I mean, doctors said it was the most aggressive cancer they'd ever seen."

Dennis reluctantly decided to go ahead with the procedure - and then something totally unexpected happened.

The hospital didn't have enough beds in ICU and had to reschedule his operation.

NEVER DOUBT GOD. NOT FOR ONE MINUTE.

when the nurse came out in tears," she shares.

"I immediately thought the worst - but then the nurse said: 'It's okay, it's okay. There's nothing there!'

"I rushed into the room and saw on the screen that the only thing on Dennis' bladder were two little red spots that the doctors told us were not cancerous. There were no polyps, no cancer!"

On June 22, Dennis went back into hospital for a biopsy on those "red spots" and got the results in mid-July. The report read: "Dennis has the potential to be clear of cancer."

"They've told me to go back for regular tests but that there's nothing to worry about now," he says joyfully.

Asked if he ever doubted God's involvement during the entire ordeal, Dennis declares emphatically: "I trust the Lord with my life, any time, any place, anywhere."

"I was not afraid because whatever happens I know He is with me. Not once was I sick. I had no pain, no discomfort. I believe that God was taking care of me so that I could be a witness to His goodness."

The couple has four children - their youngest, a daughter named Kylie, was born with cerebral palsy and died of a virus when she was 16.

Not all of the other three attend church, but Dennis says they have been very encouraged by his inexplicable turnaround.

"Maybe this will bring them back," he says.

Rosemary has this advice: "Never doubt God. Not for one minute."

"We've all got a cross to bear, but God will either take it from us or help us bear it, if we just reach out to Him."

Tumor leads to break with tradition

After Shiri Joshua (right) was told she had a rare, virulent form of breast cancer (stage 3) she faced a stark choice one Friday afternoon. Would she start chemo or undergo a mastectomy on the following Monday?

"I honestly didn't even comprehend those words," Shiri says on a 100 Huntley Street video.

An Israeli-born Jew, she moved to Toronto at 19, but her family continued to speak Hebrew at home. She always had an inquisitiveness about spirituality. Due to her upbringing, she thought she could only be either orthodox or a secular Jew.

But after Shiri moved to Canada, she fell under the spell of the New Age movement.

"I really did not feel that my traditional Jewish upbringing would satisfy what I wanted," she says. "I knew there was a God; I just did not know Him."

Two years prior to her diagnosis, she had a vision of Jesus. She had heard about the Lord but felt she needed to avoid Jesus because of her Jewish background.

But in her search for spiri-

tuality one day, she asked God if Jesus was real.

"I was in my bedroom not sleeping and I saw Him. I had an open-eye vision of the Jewish Jesus. He looked very Jewish to me," Shiri recalls.

"God in His brilliant way of doing things appeared to me in a way that I would not find threatening. He appeared to me with a *talit*, a prayer shawl.

"And he said, 'Come to me.' His eyes were just love. It must have been a split second, but it felt like eternity."

So, in the cancer clinic in British Columbia, after the doctor left the room, she fell to her knees and prayed to Jesus.

"Lord I'm tired of fighting You. If I die, I die, but I want to come to You," she said. "But if you let me live, I will live for You."

She gave her life to Jesus, the Jewish Messiah, and was born again.

"A wave of peace came upon me. I wanted Him so much but I was so afraid because I was



Jewish."

Without delay, Shiri underwent the mastectomy and started chemotherapy.

She moved back to Toronto to be with her family. A friend brought a pastor to visit her, who helped her to understand more about Jesus.

Six rounds of chemotherapy took six months.

While living with her parents, Shiri was a secret believer for a while. "I didn't want to offend my parents with my new faith, but all I had was Yeshua," she says.

She started attending a Messianic [Jewish Christian] congregation. Ultimately, her parents accepted her new faith.

Seven years later, Shiri is cancer-free. "Amen! I am cured!" she declares.

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Perplexed by suffering

Jake Berry, brought up in the suburbs of Sydney, had what he calls a normal and happy middle-class childhood. But even as a teenager he was perplexed by the suffering in the world.

"I'd always wondered how to live with suffering in my life. To me it was either you try your best to escape it by embracing selfishness, or you seek an explanation for it."

The 30-year-old says he remembers feeling lost and hopeless and that he searched for meaning in life.

The school he attended offered scripture lessons, and it was there that Jake first heard about God. He went on to join a youth group at church. Slowly, as he read the Bible and learned more about the life and teachings of Jesus Christ, things began to fall in place.

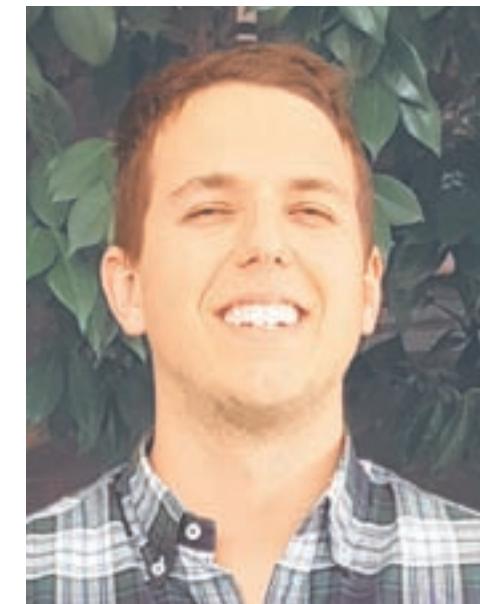
"Jesus' words resonated with me," says Jake, who is a youth worker in Sydney.

"His teaching answered the questions I had about suffering. Jesus explains that suffering comes from humans. We are the problem. But in essence, it's a lack of right relationship with God that causes us to suffer and be unsatisfied. Even when life is good, it's never quite enough. We're always searching for more."

"God, as creator, is the answer to understanding ourselves, as He defines our meaning and highest satisfaction in worship of Himself. I was excited to follow Jesus as I slowly understood the amazing news that He had made a way for me to have a right relationship with him."

"One night as I read the Bible I became convinced that Jesus was God and that I wanted a relationship with Him. I knew from that moment that I wanted to be a Christian."

Since turning his life over to God, Jake says the biggest change has been discovering his life has purpose and value. "I'm made joyful by the fact that God loves me and has a plan for



my life," he says.

That's not to say that he doesn't struggle with certain aspects of his faith.

"Trusting in God can be hard to do practically," he admits. "Sometimes you have to wait on God and have no control."

"When Jesus says 'Why are you afraid, O you of little faith?' in Matthew 8:26, I remember that I too am like the disciples as I worry about my provision. When I sacrifice and suffer for Christ and expect His help, my worry is always disproven by His power."

"I do find it hard to trust Him as much in a way that drives away all fear and I pray for enough faith that I never will worry."

Having finished his Master of Divinity degree, Jake now works for a church. He wants

people to share the hope he has in God.

"People often reject Jesus because they want to be their own leader, or because they trust false promises of immediate satisfaction, or because they're afraid of what it means to follow Him," he muses.

"But God offers something so much greater than any plan you could make for your own life. Nothing else can truly satisfy."

"A Christian thinker once said that the problem is not that we want too much but that we settle with far too little. Riches, family, comfort or worldly importance can't compare to the eternal promises and blessing God wants to give you."

Jake's favorite verses are Colossians 2:13-15 - When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins, having canceled the charge of our legal indebtedness, which stood against us and condemned us; he has taken it away, nailing it to the cross.'

"I love those verses because they explain the gospel so clearly," he smiles.

KGB man's son now works with addicts

When Ukrainian Igor Glushko went to first grade his mother begged him to give up smoking because cigarettes weren't allowed at school.

The little boy had grown up in a tough environment.

"I grew up in a large family of six kids," he says. "My late father was a very violent man, a drunkard and a former KGB officer. He read the Bible but his life didn't reflect any godliness. Father caused us many troubles and a lot of pain."

"While intoxicated he would regularly beat our mother and us so severely that many times I offered to kill him for my mom, so that the beatings would stop."

"My parents got divorced but father still lived with us. That's why we children spent our time outside. On the streets of Kyiv we found smoking and drugs very soon."

"We were doing bad things but our mom was praying! She always made us come to church with her."

"I would take my unbelieving friends and we would sit on the last row, eating sunflower seeds and giggling loudly. When the pastor called for people to turn away from their sin, my mom would turn and look at me with a piercing gaze."

"I always saw tears in her eyes."



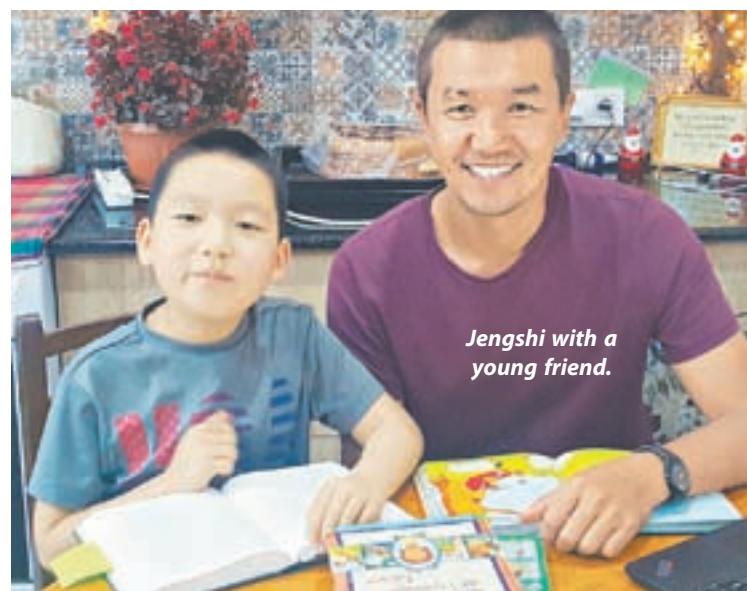
Igor Glushko,
his wife Yana
and their
three children.

"One time when I was 15, I was very drunk at my friend's house. My younger brother found me, and said: 'It's Sunday and mom wants you to come to church. I don't remember the sermon, and I don't remember going to the front, but there I was, at the stage, and all my brothers and sisters had followed me. I invited Jesus to be my Savior. And that very second I became stone cold sober!" My brother Sergey is director of Teen Challenge Ukraine, and I love working in their Coffee House ministry. People from the street, addicts and others, come to have conversations and get support.

"I also work in the methadone clinics with addicted men who are trying to stop using drugs. Every week we go there and build relationships with guys, counsel them and tell them that there is hope in Jesus Christ."

"At least 1-2 people die there every week! Their wives turn into widows, and their children into orphans... It is terrible. I understand people on the street. I struggled a long time and my brother never gave up on me."

Igor's wife Yana works for an organization called Mercy Projects as a youth ministries director in Kyiv, and they have three children. •



Jengish with a
young friend.

ENGLISH EXAM WAS TURNING POINT

Jengish was educated at a school run by followers of a Turkish Islamic scholar and preacher. He left school eager to "live like a real Muslim."

"But while applying to university I met real Christians for the first time," he explains. "They had a personal relationship with God. God spoke to them. I had never heard of anything like this. In Islam the only person to hear Allah's voice was the prophet Muhammad."

One night Jengish was cramming for an English exam. There were 90 possible topics but only one would appear on his exam. "I chose a topic and said, 'God, if Christianity really is the true faith and I can hear your voice, then give me a sign so that I can believe. If this topic is in my exam tomorrow, I will believe'."

The next day Jengish held his breath as he flipped over the exam paper. "It was the topic I had chosen!"

Jengish began to seriously investigate Christianity.

"A Christian friend lent me a Rus-

sian Bible. I quickly realized that my Muslim teachers knew little about Christianity and had misrepresented what the Bible says. Then I borrowed a book of Christian teaching. I learned about God: Father, Son and Spirit. In the book of Romans, God showed me how Jesus died for our sins to make us righteous."

"After two months I accepted Jesus as my Savior and Lord," Jengish states. This is done by praying a prayer expressing belief in God and inviting Him to rule one's life.

At seminary, Jengish translated Christian books into his native language. "I am currently translating *The Old Testament in Seven Sentences* by Christopher Wright. This is the book that helped me understand the grand narrative of the Bible. The Old Testament shows us what God is like, what people are like, and why we need Jesus to do for us what we cannot do for ourselves."

The project manager lives in a remote region of Central Asia and tells others about God's love. •

MAKING FRIENDS CAN HELP YOU LIVE LONGER

THE saying that friends can save your life actually turns out to be true. Studies are now discovering that low social interaction is just as harmful as smoking 15 cigarettes a day.

This is not the finding of an individual academic, but the result of combining 148 different studies of more than 300,000 people. It is consistent across age brackets and

both genders.

We are created for relationships and without them we are diminished people. Just as God made us for a relationship with Him, He also created us with the desire for relationships with each other. In Genesis when Cain asked God if he was his brother's keeper, the implied answer was "yes".

Of course our character weaknesses

and personal failures mean that relationships are hard work. And right now, social distancing is making friendships particularly difficult.

But we need them, not just to feel good, but for a full and long life. Pray today for the ability to be a good friend, and seek safe ways to connect with your friends even when you can't see them in person. •

cating with and she revisited the Bible verses about mediums.

"I found the Scripture that said, 'You must not consult mediums' (Leviticus 19:31)," Julie remembers. "I know that the Bible says that

Satan can portray himself as an angel of light and I was concerned that that might be the case. I didn't want to offer people false hope."

Julie told her husband she felt she needed to stop her involvement with the New Age. She had a feeling it was wrong. She took down her business website and stopped seeing clients.

"I still wanted to know about God," she says. "I was still searching for Him and I started praying. I wanted to know where He was and who He was and how I could find Him."

One day, during a walk in a park, a stranger spoke to her.

"It's a real nice day today," he said, and I said, "Yeah I guess." I had the weight of the world on my shoulders, a lot going on in my mind. He stopped and he looked at me again and he said, "You know, the Lord loves you." I put my head in my hands and I started to cry uncontrollably. I felt ashamed but I also felt relieved because I believed what he was saying to me."

The man walked and talked with her. "He said, 'I don't know what you've gone through or what you're going through but the Lord loves you and He has always loved you.'"

The man prayed for Julie. At home, she told her husband what had happened. A few weeks later, she told her family she'd like to go to church, and they went with her.

"[The church] did what's called an altar call where you are invited to surrender to Jesus and in that moment I stood up and I was ready," Julie recalls. "I was ready to give my life to Christ. That moment changed everything for me. It was a few short weeks later that I got baptized and then my family followed suit. My life has never been the same – in a good way. God has done more for me than I could ever imagine He would have and I'm so grateful for that moment in the park that I had with that stranger. I'm so grateful that the Lord was there with him, speaking through that man to my heart letting me know that He loved me He hadn't given up on me."

KINDNESS OF A STRANGER

Julie Frame felt like there was a void inside her. She attempted to fill it with unhealthy habits such as alcohol to help numb the pain of difficult experiences she had growing up. When she found the New Age she was drawn in by the ideas of divine love and communicating with spirit guides and angels.

She worked as a medium and communicated with her clients' deceased loved ones. But that all changed when a chance encounter with a stranger set her on a different path.

Sharing her story on YouTube, Julie says she was raised in a religious home and had a good knowledge of God.

"I knew who He was, I knew who his Son Jesus was, and the Holy Spirit, but I was not in relationship with them; just like I know who the president of the United States is but I don't have dinner with him. I don't know what he's like in person," she explains.

She looked into other religions and says she eventually investigated the whole New Age idea. "I really liked the concept of divine love and I loved the thought of unity and this consciousness. I was aware that there is a supernatural spiritual realm. My interest in that began to grow."

Julie started using angel cards to connect with the spiritual realm and before long was using tarot cards. She vaguely remembered some Bible verses that condemned New Age practices, but told herself they didn't apply

to her.

Julie was also interested in what happens after we die and studied mediumship (the practice of communicating between the living and the dead) in the hopes of bringing people comfort.

However, she noticed that clients would walk away unsatisfied and always wanted more communication with their loved ones.

"It wasn't really filling them up," she recalls. "They were grateful for it and maybe it was of some comfort but it wasn't the end. It was just a band aid [over the top of their pain]."

One day Julie was having lunch with a friend and his spiritual teacher, whom he called a 'guru'.

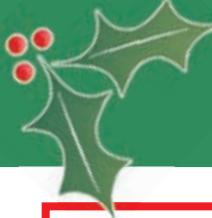
The guru told her she believed many types of spiritual beings existed. That comment got Julie thinking about who she was communi-



Julie Frame and her husband Andy.
The couple are musicians and share their songs on their YouTube channel.

One day, during a walk in a park, a stranger spoke to her.

YOUTH TRUTH



Amazed by evidence

“Ugly". "Stupid". "Idiot". "Loser". The hurtful words landed like punches for Michael. Severe bullying plagued him for much of his childhood and shaped his identity. In response to the bullying, Michael's life became a performance in order to be accepted.

"I was just living a life that strived for love and acceptance," he shares in a video for Christians of the World on YouTube. Michael was a sporty child and knew he wasn't stupid or ugly. He questioned why he was the target of the bullying.

He had been raised in a Christian home so Michael prayed about what he was going through.

"They were very self-centered prayers, like 'Take me out of this.' 'Deal with this for me.' 'Where are you?' 'Why am I going through this?' 'Why am I being persecuted?'" he explains. "When I got to 15 I said, 'Enough is enough, I'm taking control. If You're not going to do anything, I'll do it for myself.'"

It was then that he looked around at his classmates and identified who were accepted.

"The cool kids were the ones that had a lot of girlfriends, that hooked up with a lot of girls, and treated them in derogatory ways," he shares. He determined to never be verbally outwitted. He refused to be demeaned or brought down.

"I remember just sitting in my room and I would just come up with scenarios in my head, preconceived ways of how I'm going to win an argument that hadn't even taken place yet. And I fell into sexual immorality. Up until I was 15 I don't think I'd ever even held a girl's



Michael investigated creationism and was blown away by what he discovered. Credit: YouTube

hand. Everything happened so rapidly from the moment I made that decision to be the master of my own fate, to be the god of myself and shape my reality."

Although he started to become popular, it didn't bring him the joy and acceptance he craved. Michael also realized he was in a depression, although he struggled to admit it, even to himself.

"I was introduced to alcohol and I partied a lot," he admits. "I enjoyed it, but there was always something missing." Drugs were a natural stepping stone from the party scene for Michael. But they came with a cost as they impacted his mental health.

During this time, Michael was studying civil engineering. He began to notice his ability to retain information and learn quickly was diminishing. His Christian faith had also deteriorated. Eventually, influenced by his friends and hearing teaching on evolution, Michael turned

his back on God altogether.

"I converted to atheism and depression hit me to a whole new extent. If there is no God, then there is no right or wrong ... If there is no God, there is no meaning and if there is no meaning then there is no purpose and everything that we're going through is just a series of chemical reactions."

Michael's depression was no longer deniable and he finally admitted it to himself as well as his mother. He also admitted he was now an atheist.

"She put me on to Creation Ministries International," he shares. That started him on an almost year-long journey of investigating creationism versus evolution. Throughout school and university, Michael had only been taught one theory – evolution. Now, as he examined the evidence for creationism, he was amazed.

"I was blown away to the extent of the evidence that supported a biblical worldview. And I came out believing there has to be a God."

Hope stirred within him as he started on a new journey studying the world's major religions. "I came to the understanding that religions

say: 'Do,' but Jesus says: 'Done,'" Michael attests. "It's not about what you do, it's about what He's done for you. It's not about your performance, it's about His performance for us. Religion is rooted in pride. It's us saying that we can be good enough, that we can earn our own salvation, that it's about my deeds and my works. And God's going to somehow owe me for what I've done... God's standards are righteous, pure and holy. He's not going to judge by our standards. And when you put your list of good deeds up against perfection, you're going to fall short ... Salvation is something gifted by grace, from a loving Father to His children because it's not something that we could do. We couldn't make ourselves holy. We had to be made holy by He who is holy."

Michael then had a supernatural experience at church.

The pastor had preached about the importance of dealing with the past and shining truth into dark seasons.

When the pastor invited people to come to the front for prayer, Michael didn't hesitate. Michael received God's forgiveness and felt as if he had been washed clean.

"I had never felt so at peace," he attests.

Thinking over the question of why he had been bullied as a child, Michael now refers to the words of Jesus

in John 15:19-20: "If you belonged to the world, it would love you as its own. As it is, you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world. That is why the world hates you. Remember what I told you: 'A servant is not greater than his master.' If they persecuted Me, they will persecute you also."

"I saw through these verses that if we're going to be true disciples of God, we will be persecuted. And since then, I realized that the quest for acceptance, the quest for certainty, the quest for hope, the quest for joy, the quest for satisfaction are all the same path. And it's [the desire for] intimacy and relationship and love with God. It's all found in Him. He's the truth, He is the way and He is the life."

The obedience of Mary

ALTHOUGH the Bible doesn't specify her age, it is widely believed that Mary, the mother of Jesus, was a teenager of about 14 or 15. Many historians agree it was likely, as early marriages were the custom of the time and culture.

In that case, put yourself in Mary's sandals. She's a young girl and an angel suddenly appears and announces that she has found favor with God. We are not told how she found favor with Him, but she was chosen for the most important task in the world – to give birth to the promised Messiah. She wasn't perfect mind you – she was a human and therefore a sinner like you and me. But, she had chosen to live her life for God.

Imagine hearing the angel's words: "You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you are to call him Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High." (Luke 1:32-33)

At this, Mary can see an obvious problem. "How will this be, Mary asked the angel, 'since I am a virgin?'" (verse 34)

It's a fair question to ask and it helps us to understand that it is okay to ask God questions, as long as we listen to – and obey – His answer.

The angel replies, "The Holy Spirit will come on you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the Holy One to be born will be called the Son of God." (verse 35)

Despite her fear and probable concerns about how she would raise a child, let alone the Son of God, Mary is immediately obedient.

"I am the Lord's servant," Mary answered. "May your word to me be fulfilled." (verse 38)



What a massive responsibility Mary had. Not only was she to be pregnant with God's Son, the job wouldn't end there. She would also be giving birth and raising Him too.

I can only imagine the overwhelming fear Mary would have felt. What would people think? Would her fiancée Joseph believe she was still a virgin? **But her trust in the Lord overwhelmed her fear.**

Joseph had his own internal battle. Assuming Mary had been unfaithful to him, he made up his mind to leave her. He could, according to Jewish law at the time, have her stoned to death, however, he decided to end their engagement quietly.

But then an angel visited him and explained God's plans. The angel told him: "Do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit." (Matthew 1:20)

That explanation was enough for Joseph and he too responded with obedience, as it says in verse 24, "When Joseph woke up, he did what the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took Mary home as his wife."

So often when something big happens in our life we respond with feelings of fear, anger and confusion. We may want to run away. We may want to fight for our rights or for our opinion to be heard. Feelings themselves are not wrong, but we must not let them dictate how we respond.

Have you found yourself in an impossible situation and feel confused about what to do? Resist the urge to run away and take your situation to God. Read His Word and get clarity from Him on the situation and obey what He calls you to do.

Contact Challenge!

Do you have a story to tell, a tricky question to ask or want to let us know how Challenge has impacted you? Email harriet@challengetruth.org



CHRISTMAS COOKIES?

NO, I HAVEN'T SEEN ANY CHRISTMAS COOKIES



Who are you following?

The media you consume has an effect on your mood, behavior, thoughts and speech. It also influences what content is recommended to you, so you could find your feed full of negative, mean, unhelpful posts. Instead, check out these creators to find some great advice and inspiration.

YouTube



- Angela Wang
- Steven Bancarz
- Paul and Morgan
- Daily Disciple
- Hannah Williamson

TikTok



- dbreniek02
- tiffany.yuen
- bibleversedaily
- abby_was_bored
- annaliseet
- itsisaacdavid
- allyyarid

Instagram



- reformedbychrist
- boundlessteam
- siimplymickey
- justmythoughtsblogs
- allyyarid

Please note, Challenge may not agree with all content released by these creators. The views and opinions shared in these videos are the creators' own.



Maple glazed ham

Ingredients:

5 kg* (10 lb) leg ham, bone in, skin on
30 Cloves (for studding the ham, optional - mainly for decorative purposes)
2 oranges, cut into quarters
250ml (8.8oz) water

185ml (6.5oz) maple syrup or honey
165g (5.5oz) brown sugar, packed
3 tbsp dijon mustard
(or any other mustard)
3/4 tsp ground cinnamon
1/2 tsp allspice or nutmeg

Glaze:

Method:

Take ham out of fridge 1 hour before cooking.
Preheat oven to 160°C (320° F).
Place the glaze ingredients in a bowl and whisk to combine.
Remove rind then cut diamond shapes across the fat of the ham.
Insert a clove in the intersection of the cross of each diamond (optional).
Place the ham in a baking dish.
Squeeze the juice of 1 orange (4 quarters) over the ham. Then place them along with the remaining orange into the baking dish around the ham.



Spoon half the glaze over the ham.
Pour the water in the baking dish, then place in the oven.
Bake for 1.5 - 2 hrs, basting very generously every 30 minutes with remaining glaze + juices in pan. Allow to rest for at least 20 minutes before serving. Continue to baste before serving.

*Imperial equivalent in brackets

Time to feast



Caprese wreath

A simple yet stunning veggie starter

Ingredients:

250g (8½ oz) cherry tomatoes
1 bunch fresh basil
Selection of leafy greens
100g (3½ oz) baby bocconcini
1/3 cup grated parmesan
Sea salt and black pepper
30ml (1 oz) extra virgin olive oil
Balsamic vinegar for dipping



Method:

Wash and dry the salad leaves.
Gently arrange salad in wreath shape around the serving platter.
Cut some cherry tomatoes in half, leave the smaller ones whole.
Nestle the tomatoes and the bocconcini among the salad leaves.
Drizzle with olive oil.
Sprinkle some parmesan cheese and sea salt if desired and serve.

Cheat's pudding

Method:

Remove the lid of the pudding box the night before serving. Pour four tablespoons of the rum or brandy over it. Leave it to soak overnight.

Cook it the next day according to the instructions on the packet

Place custard, cream and remaining rum or brandy in a bowl and whisk together.

Serve drizzled with the custard.

If you're feeling adventurous, warm some brandy, pour over the pudding and flambe it!

Re-think your wrapping

Wrapping presents is one of the great joys of the festive season, but gift paper, ribbons and bags are expensive and can be wasteful.

Gift wraps made from recyclable or re-purposed materials such as brown paper, twine, fabric, flowers and leaves are not only eco-friendly but will probably cut your cost by a fair bit!



You can't get more eco-friendly than giving a plant as a gift!



Using twine or string and some Christmas baubles leftover from decorating your tree, or plants, you can turn simple brown paper into personal and very attractive gift paper - without straining your budget.



Another eco-friendly idea is to fill a hamper with tasty treats and gifts. Lay them on a bed of raffia in a reusable basket.



Gift vouchers can sometimes get a bad rap. They might be considered thoughtless or lazy, but in your quest for a zero-waste holiday season, they fill the criteria very nicely. Personalize the card by buying one that suits the recipient's interests or treat them to a meal at a fancy restaurant.

FOR YEARS CHRISTIANS HAVE USED CANDY CANES TO TEACH KIDS THE GOSPEL...

WHITE REMINDS US GOD IS HOLY, AND THAT OUR SINS CAN BE WASHED AWAY.

HARD CANDY REMINDS US OF GOD'S ROCK SOLID PROMISES.

THE SHEPHERD'S CROOK SHAPE REMINDS US THAT JESUS IS THE GOOD SHEPHERD.



RED REMINDS US OF THE BLOOD JESUS SHED FOR OUR SINS ON THE CROSS.

WE'RE STILL TRYING TO FIND ANYTHING REDEMPTIVE ABOUT FRUITCAKE.

By Cedric Hohnstadt



Did you know?

The lyrics of Silent Night were written by Austrian priest Josef Mohr to encourage his impoverished congregation that there was still a God who cared. The famous melody was penned by church organist Franz Gruber in 1818.

It is the most recorded Christmas carol in history. During both world wars, fighting was temporarily suspended by troops singing their native versions across the frontline.

Bing Crosby's version is the fourth best-selling single of all time.

Undercutting evolution

Gene gun inventor discovered something even more important

Dr John Sanford is a brilliant geneticist. He has published more than 100 papers in the peer-reviewed literature and holds several dozen patents in genetics. Most notably, he was the primary inventor of the gene gun, which allows scientists to take genes from one species and insert them into another species so that they work.

For 18 years, he was a professor of plant genetics at Cornell University.

When it comes to his worldview early in his career, he states:

"I was totally sold on evolution. It was my religion; it defined how I saw everything, it was my value system and my reason for being."

In his incredible book, *Genetic Entropy and the Mystery of the Human Genome*, John tells the reader some of what led him to change his mind. He defines the "Primary Axiom" as the belief that man is merely the product of random mutations plus natural selection. He then writes:

Late in my career, I did something which for a Cornell Professor would seem unthinkable. I began to question the Primary Axiom. I did this with great fear and trepidation. By doing this, I knew I would be at odds with the most "sacred cow" within modern academia...To my own amazement, I gradually realized that the seemingly "great and unassailable fortress" which has been built up around the Primary Axiom is really a house of cards. The Primary Axiom is actually an extremely vulnerable theory – in fact, it is essentially indefensible. Its apparent invincibility derives largely from bluster, smoke, and mirrors. (2nd edition, p. vi)

Once he realized that the Primary Axiom is indefensible, John had to reevaluate his entire worldview. He started off coming to the conclusion that there must be a Creator.

I came to believe in "God", but this still did not significantly change my intellectual outlook regarding origins. However, still later, as I began to personally know and submit to Jesus, I started to be fundamentally changed—in every respect. This included my mind, and how I viewed science and history.

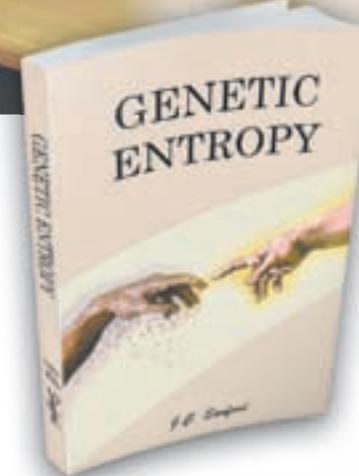
"On a personal level this was a time of spiritual awakening, but professionally I remained "in the closet". I did not feel I could defend my faith in an academic setting. So I felt the need to take temporary leave from academia and institutional science because of the tension I felt in this regard, and the enormous potential hostility I sensed from my academic colleagues.

"I needed some distance from academia to get a hold of my own beliefs and why I hold them."

John, however, has not stopped using his scientific talents. He continues to publish in the peer-reviewed literature, doing original research that demonstrates how indefensible the Primary Axiom is¹. He is also president of Logos Research Associa-



Plant geneticist Dr John Sanford; (below) his first book "Genetic Entropy and the Mystery of the Human Genome"; (bottom) Dr Sanford as a young man with the gene gun he developed.



ates, which is focused on original scientific research related to the field of origins.

Creation Ministries' Don Batten asked John if evolution is important to science.

"An axiomatic statement often repeated by biologists is: "Nothing makes sense in biology, except in the light of evolution".

However, nothing could be further from the truth! I believe that apart from ideology, the truth is exactly the opposite: "Nothing makes sense in biology except in the light of design".

"We cannot really explain how any biological system might have "evolved", but we can all see that virtually everything we look at has extraordinary underlying design.

"I am not aware of any type of operational science (computer science, transportation, medicine, agriculture, engineering, etc.), which has benefited from evolutionary theory. But after the fact, real advances in science are systematically given an evolutionary spin. This reflects the pervasive politicization of science."

Regarding John's book *Genetic Entropy and the Mystery of the Genome*, he says:

"The bottom line is that Darwinian theory fails on every level. It fails because: 1) mutations arise faster than selection can eliminate them; 2) mutations are overwhelmingly too subtle to be 'selectable'; 3) 'biological noise' and 'survival of the luckiest'

overwhelm selection; 4) bad mutations are physically linked to good mutations², so that they cannot be separated in inheritance (to get rid of the bad and keep the good).

"The result is that all higher genomes must clearly degenerate. This is exactly what we would expect in light of Scripture—with the Fall—and is consistent with the declining life expectancies after the Flood that the Bible records."

"The problem of genetic entropy (genomes are all degenerating), is powerful evidence that life and mankind must be young. Genetic entropy is probably also the fundamental underlying mechanism explaining the extinction process.

"Extinctions in the past and in the present can best be understood, not in terms of environmental change, but in terms of mutation accumulation. All this is consistent with a miraculous beginning, a young earth, and a perishing earth—which "will wear out like a garment" (Hebrews 1:11). Only the touch of the Creator can make all things new.

While science was clearly a part of John's conversion, he explains:

"I would not say that science led me to the Lord (which is the experience of some). Rather I would say Jesus opened my eyes to His creation—I was blind, and gradually I could see. It sounds simple, but it was a slow and painful process. I still only see "as through a glass, darkly" [1 Cor. 13:12]. But I see so much more than

Believe It

or Not

BY CREATION MINISTRIES INTERNATIONAL

Beauty and kindness defy evolution

WRITING for *The Federalist*, Glenn T. Stanton notes the "extravagant beauty" in nature that defies evolutionary explanation.

His article describes in detail the contradictory ways Charles Darwin and other evolutionists have tried to explain beauty, which does not seem to serve any evolutionary purpose.

Yale University's Richard Prum's theory is captured in his simple phrase 'beauty happens'.

The bottom line is that naturalistic evolutionists have no compelling explanation for what Stanton calls their "most persistent problem."



The same can be said of humans who perform deeds of sacrificial kindness and care.

If evolutionary theory is right in claiming that survival optimization is our basic drive, then why is this person taking such risks?

If survival of the species is the explanation, then why isn't everyone doing the same?

Here's the biblical response: when we care for others simply because we care for them, we express a vestige of the divine image in which we are created.

God loves us because "God is love" (1 John 4:8). He loves us because it is His very nature to love, not because we have done or can do anything to deserve His love.

When we love through service that is not earned and comes at great personal cost, we act as creatures who reflect the nature of God, our Creator.

If we want to find the cure and the prescription for life we have to open our Bibles. It will transform and revolutionise your life. It will change you from a whiner to a winner; from a loser to a leader, and from a failure to a front-runner. – Nico Bougas

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"For without God, human beings are no longer unique and universal, no longer special in nature. They are just one more chance outcrop of the planet and its biosphere, ultimately no more worthy of consideration than a cockroach. If we lose God, we lose something essential of our humanity."

- Greg Sheridan from *God is Good for You: A defence of Christianity in troubled times*

BUILDING BETTER RELATIONSHIPS

Finding perfect meeting of meaning

BY ROB FURLONG

WITH the amazing increase in technological devices over the past 15 years our ability to stay in touch with each other, even in some of the remotest parts of the world, has increased exponentially. I would like to suggest however that our ability to communicate meaningfully with each other has not progressed at the same rate. If anything, it has gone backwards.

On a holiday a few years back (which included a buffet breakfast in beautiful tropical surrounds each morning) Karen and I were amazed at the number of couples sitting across from each other at the breakfast table gazing into their ... iPads! In such a beautiful setting how sad it was to see people desperately checking their Facebook status rather than connecting with the one they claimed to love forever.

How is it possible that we can live in an era that possesses unprecedented opportunities for communication and yet be so relationally disconnected

from each other? Could it be that we have lost the simple art of being able to talk to each other face-to-face?

Communication experts have described the highest form of communication as Peak Communication – the level at which communication between a couple is natural, easy and free; there is even a sense of knowing what the other person is going to say before they say it – this is peak communication!

One author has described it in this way:

Communication is the meeting of meaning.

When your meaning meets my meaning across the bridge of words, tones, acts, and deeds, when understanding occurs, then we know we have communicated ...

When two persons can share from the very center of their existence, they experience love in its truest quality.

Open and honest communication is all about sharing yourself, your feelings, and your thoughts with the other person.

It also means that you are prepared to share the negatives with each other. Some people live under the delusion that being open in communication with each other

means that you will only ever speak about positive things. But I have benefited enormously from the courage my wife has shown when she has confronted me about attitudes and behaviors that needed attention in my life.

For example, the time Karen made it clear to me that the way I expressed my anger at times was unacceptable was a watershed moment for me.

I am not proud to admit there were times I would raise my voice, shout and say unkind things when angry. Karen was not rude or nasty in how she approached this, but she made her position clear that I needed to address this area of my life. This was peak communication at its most intense!

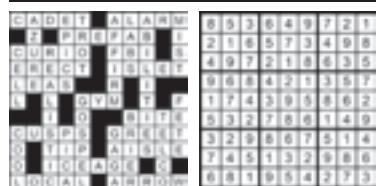
Peak communication does not mean sharing every thought that

comes into your head either.

There are some thoughts that are best expressed to God alone and, if need be, an objective person outside the situation. It is an unkind person indeed who "always speaks my mind" and leaves the recipient to deal with the hurtful consequences of their verbal tirade. We are called to speak the truth to each other, but we are told to speak it "in love". Sometimes the most loving thing a person can do is to hold their tongue!

Open and free communication between two people is an enriching experience but the pathway there must be walked with care and the following statement sums this journey up superbly:

If you knew me yesterday, please do not think that it is the same person that you are meeting today. I have experienced more of life. I have encountered new depths in those I love, I have suffered and prayed, and I am different ... Approach me, then, with a sense of wonder, study my face and hands and voice for signs of change; for it is certain that I have changed.



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 fallen 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 10:8-10

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

Almighty God, Creator of Heaven and Earth,

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

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

What now?

- Tell someone – either a Christian that you know or email us at usaoffice@challengenews.org
- Use the resources in the green box on this page to find a Bible to read and more information regarding Christianity.
- Keep praying. Talk to God anywhere, about anything. He is always listening and you don't need a formula.
- Find a Bible-teaching church to attend.

AS A NEXT STEP :

I have prayed this prayer.

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

* Please tick and write clearly *

Name _____ Phone _____

Address _____

Age, occupation (it helps) _____

Send to: Challenge Literature Fellowship, 2634 Drake Road, Lebanon Ohio, 45036
usaoffice@challengenews.org

All overseas enquiries are referred onto someone in their own country

Make friends and live longer

THE saying that friends can save your life actually turns out to be true. Studies are now discovering that low social interaction is just as harmful as smoking 15 cigarettes a day.

This is not the finding of an individual academic, but the result of combining 148 different studies of more than 300,000 people. It is consistent across age brackets and both genders.

We are created for relationships and without it we are diminished people. Just as God made us for a relationship with Him, He also created us with the desire for relationships with each other. In Genesis when Cain asked God if he was his brother's keeper, the answer then and now is "yes".

Of course our character weaknesses and personal failures mean that relationships are hard work. And right now, social distancing is making friendships particularly difficult.

But we need them, not just to feel good, but for a full and long life. Pray today for the ability to be a good friend, and seek safe ways to connect with your friends even when you can't see them in person.



Want to explore more?

Here are some free, helpful, Christian online resources:

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

Isn't that an accurate description of today?

However, selfish people are unhappy people. Studies have confirmed this. We actually get a momentary burst of what we might call temporary happiness when we do something selfish.

One expert pointed out that selfish acts bring us happiness, but only for short-term periods of time. Then our selfish happiness fades quickly and ultimately drives us to more selfish behavior.

On the other hand, selfless acts bring happiness. We know this from experience after we do something for someone else.

In contrast to our narcissistic culture, Jesus said, "If you try to hang on to your life, you will lose it. But if you give up your life for My sake and for the sake of the Good News, you will save it" (Mark 8:35 NLT).

Jesus is effectively saying, "If you get your priorities in order and deny yourself instead of loving yourself and being obsessed with yourself, you will find fulfillment in life."

There's nothing wrong with wanting to be happy. In fact, Jesus is really telling us how to be happy. But it isn't by chasing happiness.

Rather, we'll find it by putting God first in our lives and following Him.



Anthony Thomas of The Kimberley, Australia competes in the bareback riding at the Prescott Frontier Days "World's Oldest Rodeo" in 2016 in Prescott, Arizona. (Photo by Christian Petersen/Getty Images)

BELOW: Anthony Thomas poses for a photograph before competing in the Australian National Finals Rodeo Championships at the Gold Coast Convention Center in 2011 on the Gold Coast, Australia. (Photo by Chris Hyde/Getty Images)

ON A WILD RIDE

If ever there was an illustration of a life full of ups and downs, rodeo riding would be it. Hanging on for dear life on 2,000 pounds of pure muscle as it bucks and heaves to dislodge you would be a fitting description for Australian rodeo rider Anthony Thomas' early life in Perth.

"I was a troubled kid that ran away from home," the 32-year-old professional rodeo cowboy and bareback rider says. "I had a pretty traumatic childhood. My parents had me doped up pretty bad on several different types of drugs."

"I knew that I was troubled and confused and I would've ended up in organized crime, or in jail, or dead if I had stayed there."

At 12, the indigenous Australian boarded at an agricultural college in the Kimberley region, 400km north of Perth.

During school breaks, Anthony worked at cattle stations - and felt an instant connection with the animals. "Being with the horses, the cows and the sheep, that's what gave me a sense of belonging. It felt like home from the first time I stepped out of the car onto a station [ranch]."

He continued breaking wild horses on cattle stations after graduation and was soon competing in local rodeos. "It was from the bush I got my grit and determination," he told the ABC News program *WA Country Hour*.

Anthony did well in the arena and in 2011 was crowned the Australian Professional Rodeo Association bareback riding champion at the largest rodeo in the Southern

Hemisphere.

By now, he was champing at the bit to break into the meat and bones of pro rodeo - the American and Canadian circuit, home to some of the toughest bucking horses and richest rodeos in the world.

"The American horses are some of the strongest, most well-bred bucking horses in the world," he explains. "You're getting on an 1,100-kilo [2,000 lb] trained athlete."

So determined was he to make it to the top that even a life-threatening injury that left him with a shattered skull and a face full of steel from 16 major surgeries has not deterred him. He cannot imagine doing anything else.

"It's definitely an adrenaline rush when you're down in the chutes, look up in the arena and there's 60 to 100,000 people cheering you on," he admits.

However, success in such a macho sport comes with predictable diversions. As Anthony elaborates: "There's always a bar, there's always womanizing and partying and making bad decisions."

"For probably a good ten years of my life, I was as guilty as any man on earth, fighting and drinking and just all of the debauchery that comes with being in a party scene all the time. I remember being down in the dumps, at the lowest of lows."

By 2018, Anthony was among the world's top 15 bareback riders. He was riding high professionally - but at an all-time low personally. Life felt meaningless, he confesses.

Then, on a second date with a woman named Amanda, who is

today his wife, she asked if they could visit a church in Houston.

What happened at church made Anthony buck up - "I started crying. I don't know where it came from," he says in an interview with the 700 Club.

"Now I know it was the presence of the Holy Spirit. It just almost knocked me off my feet. God was just speaking to me and it was an undeniable sense of conviction (over my sin), hope and renewal, a transformation of my life."

He says he now realizes it is possible to have a real relationship with Jesus Christ. "I can talk to Him as a friend. He's always going to be there for me. He's always going to provide for me."

He now lives in Humble, Texas and urges Christians: "Be loyal to God and show Him all the glory for everything He's done."

"God is true and God is real and He's a real savior and He saved my life. And He's provided for me in every situation. Every one of us has a platform right where they are to teach others about the love of Jesus. No matter what - there's a God that's always there for you. He has more for you than you could ever imagine."

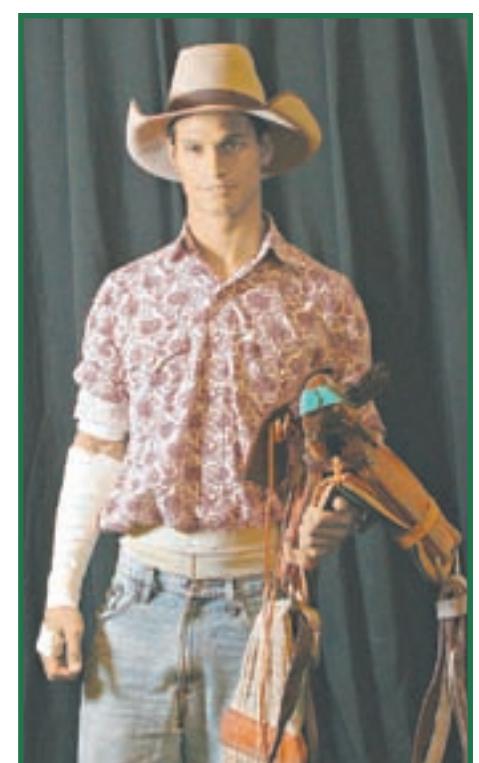
"I should have been a statistic with the childhood I had. I should have been drunk, on drugs, or in jail or dead," says Anthony. He hopes his story will inspire other youth in The Kimberley, Western Australia, which has one of the highest indigenous youth suicide rates in the world.

He now has his sights set on the

world champion bareback title and has qualified for the American Rodeo, and Rodeo Houston in March, two of the biggest and richest rodeos in the world.

"They say bareback riding is taking control of a completely uncontrollable situation," Anthony says. "The horse bucks, jumps in the air, is wild, changes directions and we just have to react and respond."

"I really do believe this is what God put me on Earth to do. I think He prepared me to be a professional bareback rider because I need to trust the Lord and the Holy Spirit's plan 100 percent. Then it's not up to me what happens," he says, surrendering the reins of his life to God. •



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