

Brush with death

“You might not know my story,” begins Matt Manzari, “but if you do then you know I should be dead.”

“I guess you could say I was a calculated adrenaline junkie. Growing up in upstate New York, my family and I loved adventures - skateboarding, snowboarding, water skiing, boating, camping, fishing, you name it. Then we moved to Florida and I caught gators and lived on the lake all the time.”

Once he tried wake skating, Matt never looked back. Soon all his dreams came true, he was only 15 and sponsored by big brands like Nike, traveling the world doing the sport he loved.

“But honestly there was still something missing,” he admits. “I couldn’t really put my finger on it. But my life felt somewhat selfish and kind of meaningless. I thought, ‘This can’t be it.’”

“At the top of my career, the adventure was losing its satisfaction.”

Having grown up in a church-going home, Matt considered himself a Christian at the time, but his attitude was more of someone taking the free gift of salvation offered by Jesus like a free stimulus check with no strings attached. Matt told the podcast Faith and the Fast life, “I believed in Jesus, I believed in God, but I was still the king in charge of my own life. ... My daily focus was on how do I get more money, more sponsors and more exposure. I was very focused on myself, and not on loving God and others.”

Matt married his good friend Bobbye Jean and went to Bible college.

Up to this point in his life, astonishingly, Matt had never even broken a bone in all his crazy adventures. Then, two days before he was supposed to graduate, he hit the shoreline during a competition.

Matt’s skull was shattered; his jaw, tailbone and hand were broken; and a rebar punctured his leg. He was completely unconscious.

“Before my accident I thought God only cared about the big picture - whether you got saved or not - but through my recovery I realized He cares about everything - my bills were paid, I got to graduate on time and my parents took in my wife and I until I got better. God was taking care of all my needs.”

Matt went through several reconstructive surgeries, over a couple of years his body began to heal and he got his life back on track. This time he pursued what God wanted and ways of sharing Him with others.

“Looking at me, you wouldn’t know I almost died,” he says amazed. “Having a full recovery was

a gift I will never take for granted.” When he went back to wake skating it was like he had never crashed at all, he was riding even better than before. But the worst was yet to come.

In 2013, Matt, then 31, was helping to trim trees at a church in a high reach bucket and ended up in a coma, having been hit by 14 000 volts arching over nearly 20 feet through the air, into the metal bucket.

The electricity had flowed through Matt’s hand and blown through the top of his head, incurring fourth and fifth degree burns (through the muscle tissue and part of the bone) - the equivalent of hooking him up to six electric chairs. Matt’s skin was so badly charred that it left his sternum and ribcage exposed.

Doctors told Bobbye Jean that he likely wouldn’t survive - and warned that if he did wake up, he would have brain damage and need an arm amputation. However, all their predictions proved wrong. Matt had

to undergo 70 surgeries, including a procedure to remove the burnt muscles and ligaments from his chest, as well as multiple skin grafts.

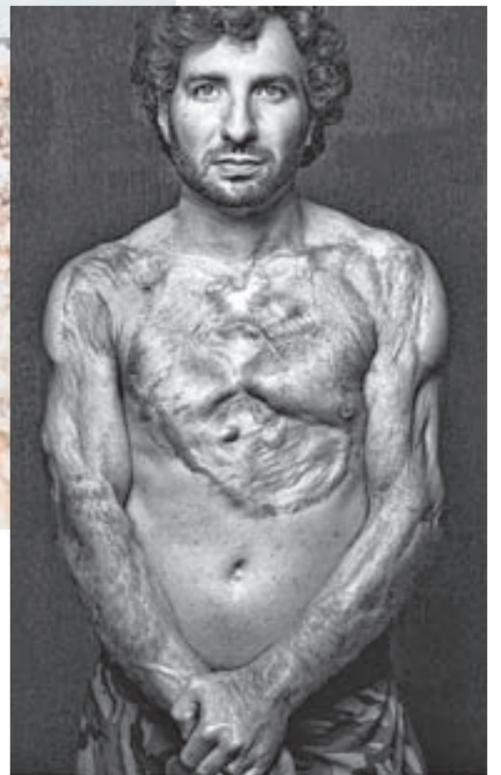
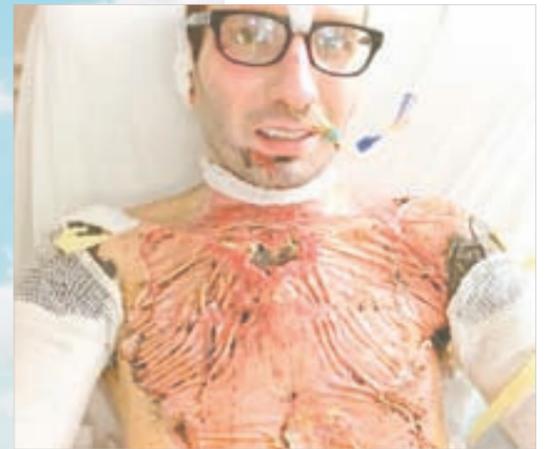
To this day Matt’s father, Darren, recalls the screams as his son’s wounds were debrided three times a day - a procedure that lasted two hours each time and was akin to torture.

At the time of the electrocution, Bobbye Jean was pregnant with their first child.

“It was hard to see a light at the

end of the tunnel, it feels lonely. My identity as a professional wake skater wasn’t enough,” Matt recalls. “When I saw my son for the first time I was filled with such overwhelming love. It made me appreciate how hard it must have been for my dad to watch me suffer.”

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Matt Manzari is back to wakeboarding, despite his terrible injuries from being electrocuted, which have left life-long scars.

MARRIAGE IS A GO(O)D DESIGN

BY JODY BENNETT

RECENTLY *The Sunday Times* in Western Australia published an article opining that now that people in *de facto* relationships can claim superannuation benefits (equivalent to 401K) from their partner’s fund, that the institution of marriage has been rendered redundant.¹

The idea that marriage is just a contract that becomes needless if sex and financial security can be obtained another way, is deeply offensive to those of us who believe this institution joins two people in a divine union that is greater than the sum of its parts. It is also a damaging idea because marriage and family are the foundation of a stable and sustainable society.

In an age where everyone thinks they know best how to live well and make themselves happy, suicide and addiction rates are soaring. Society’s loose morals have not led to people feeling fulfilled, but broken, ashamed, exploited and objectified. I would argue that we should go back to how our Designer ordained us to live - only having sex in the committed relationship of marriage, forsaking all others.

Yes some marriages don’t last, yes people fail and cheat, yes marriage is hard and not always happy, but the design is good and nothing we are doing instead is making us any happier or more fulfilled.

The longing of every human heart is to be loved unconditionally for who we are, to be appreciated and

cherished as a unique individual, and to have the security to be able to express ourselves intimately and vulnerably with another. God designed marriage to meet those needs in an imperfect way that points to His desire for us to ultimately have those needs perfectly met in Him.

Marriage is sublime, the Bible calls it a mystery.² It says that “the two become one flesh”³ and that sex joins us with another human being in a way that involves more than just our bodies, but includes our souls. We may pretend to separate the physical from the emotional, but the Apostle Paul warns us that when we are immoral we are sinning against ourselves⁴, destroying our own psyche for the sake of a hormone rush.

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Fun for Kids

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BACK PAGE

DREAM ACHIEVER
CHRIS DAVIS

MARRIAGE IS A GO(O)D DESIGN

• From page 1

On the other hand, God told Adam in Genesis that it was not good for man to be alone. We are designed as human beings for companionship. The Bible tells us that men and women are distinct from each other and created equal but different. Men have physical strengths and women have emotional strengths that the opposite sex just do not have. We are designed to be joined together in wedlock, using the strengths of each of our genders to raise the next generation.

Of course, this does not negate the meaning, value and purpose of singlehood, in all its forms and for all its reasons. Just that on the whole, for the perpetuating of society and the containment of sexual desire, which can be an incredibly destructive force (just look at the stats on sexual abuse, child porn and human trafficking for a start) God designed marriage.

Genesis 2:21-25: *And the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall on Adam, and he slept; and He took one of his ribs, and closed up the flesh in its place. Then the rib which the Lord God had taken from man He made into a woman, and He brought her to the man.*

And Adam said: *"This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; She shall be called Woman, Because she was taken out of Man."*

Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh. And they were both naked, the man and his wife, and were not ashamed.

1. The Sunday Times, April 10, page 29; 2. Ephesians 5:32; 3. Genesis 2:24; Matthew 19:6; 4. 1 Corinthians 6:18



Matt Manzari



Brush with death

• From page 1

"But his suffering and mine are nothing compared to what Jesus went through for me on the cross, or what His Father went through watching Him. My scars don't compare to His. My pain doesn't come close to His.

"My love for my son, and my dad's for me is small compared to God's incredible love for us."

"When I got home and looked in the mirror, I saw a new me. My value and identity are in God. His love is unconditional. His power is made perfect in my weakness. In Him I'm a new creation."

Although Matt will have pain and scars for the rest of his life, he deems it all worth it in light of the grace he discovered while healing, and the resilience it built into his marriage to Bobby Jean.

Bobby Jean wrote in a blog on March 1, 2014: "Thankfully, Matt

continues to push through it with hope and an attitude of thankfulness for his life. ... My husband continues to praise Christ and pursue Him even in daily struggles. He is a strong man who trusts God with his whole life."

Today Matt is a full-time Christian motivational speaker. On his blog site beyondtheburn.life he says: "God has been faithful and caring through the good times, and even more so in our suffering. We want to encourage all to stay positive and persevere, because this life is only temporary. No matter how big our problems are, God can carry us through!"



Matt and Bobby Jean with the first of their three sons.

Coffee Break

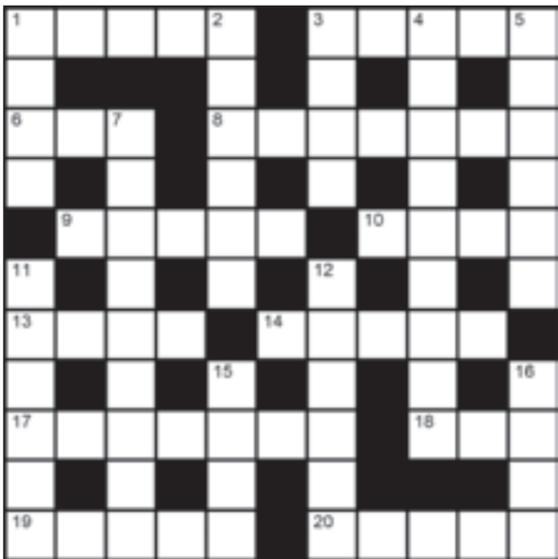
CROSSWORD & SUDOKU

ACROSS

- 1 Hiker's path
- 3 Extinct ground birds
- 6 Military address
- 8 Bunch or clump
- 9 Sales booth
- 10 A great lake
- 13 Omelette ingredients
- 14 Intelligence crew
- 17 Coup organiser
- 18 Roofing material
- 19 Flip over
- 20 Wood shop tool

DOWN

- 1 Ivory source
- 2 Plague insect
- 3 Instrument; barrel
- 4 Cleaning liquid
- 5 Road



- 7 Precipitation measurer (4,5)
- 11 South Indian language
- 12 Corkscrew shape
- 15 Potatoes
- 16 Midleg

SOLUTIONS PAGE 11



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WHEN MARRIAGE GOES WRONG

BY AN EX HUSBAND WITH REGRETS

EVEN the death of my six-week-old daughter did not hit me as hard as marriage breakdown did.

My wife and I both solidly affirmed that divorce was not an option, and that we would work out all difficulties together. Having met in our mid-teens we formed a relationship dynamic that worked well. It worked well because my wife knew the 'game' and subjugated her words and actions to keep marital peace. She was a servant-hearted woman, and believed that a good wife should be subject to her husband. I believed a husband should lead, as the Bible teaches in Ephesians 5:22-24: *Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is head of the wife, as also Christ is head of the church; and He is the Savior of the body. Therefore, just as the church is subject to Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in everything.*

We almost never argued; our home was a home of peace, a haven insulated from the world of relational trauma because we loved each other and we both believed in "until death do us part".

But there was poison in the well. After the death of our daughter, my wife went to counseling, where it became clear that she was sacrificing a lot to keep our marriage peaceable. Although dedicated to each other and deeply in love, it was my wife who was doing all the peace-keeping work.

I was blind to this so didn't appreciate her deep, costly and on-going contribution. As time went on she became less and less interested in carrying this load, and so she became less submissive.

I responded with greater coercion,

expecting her to play by the established rules, I was to be her 'Savior' and she was to revere me in that role.

Our relationship began to deteriorate as my wife moved away from the model we had been using for 25 years, she had begun to find her feet and find her voice. My wife was learning to say, "No". She was developing a healthy independence and I was responding badly.

Eventually I went to counseling where the rules of my game were exposed. The exposure hurt me; I responded with anger. I was incensed, my entitled attitude wanted to dump my counselor and walk off with my illusions intact.

Thankfully I began to suspect the counselor was right. After a month or two I became interested in exploring my blindness; I wanted to expose my faulty understanding and become the husband that I should have been. But by now my wife had left. My efforts were shaping up to be too little and too late.

Counseling was very enlightening, and painful. I became deeply remorseful and ashamed that I had let such bad behavior continue in what I thought was a Godly and Bible-based marriage. I had got some things terribly wrong.

The Bible does say that a Christian marriage should reflect the relationship between Christ and the church, but I had a very incomplete and inaccurate understanding of what this meant.

As the husband, I represented Christ, His chosen mission was to abandon His godly nature and come to earth as a mere man ready to love and serve the church so deeply as to die a cruel death

on the cross. This is an aspect of Christ I had glossed over, yet it is something that the Bible specifically tells us to emulate. Ephesians 5:25 — *Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her.*

A wife represents the church, Jesus, modeled by the husband, does not coerce the church, He speaks the truth in love and humbly leads by example. The church submits to Christ voluntarily, and only to the extent she chooses. I have found that there is so much to learn from the relationship between the church and Christ that applies directly to marriage.

My understanding of Christian marriage has changed dramatically; I see now that in God's model the wife has much more power and freedom than it seems at first glance. If you take away any possibility of coercion from the husband, you are left with a wife

who chooses to submit, according to the love and respect earned by her husband. He knows submission is not demanded but earned, so he loves her so deeply as to be ready to die for her, and truly treasures her by guarding her freedom to do as she wants.

My marriage was not restored, I deeply regret not digging deeper into God's model for marriage before the trouble hit, but I am wiser now and far more appreciative of the way God's Word says it should have been.



COUNSELING WAS VERY ENLIGHTENING, AND PAINFUL

Holding on when the world falls apart

It's a widely accepted statistic that 50% of all marriages end in divorce. But what about couples that suffer the death of a child? That number rises even higher.

When tragedy struck TJ and Sarah Spooner's family, they defied the odds stacked against them as they united as a team in search of strength and hope.

Sarah sat down to share their story with their daughter, *Challenge News* journalist, Harriet Coombe.

Sarah grew up in England in a broken home after her parents divorced when she was a young child.

"I was always determined to have a different life for my children because it left me scarred," she explains.

After leaving home as a teenager, Sarah worked as a live-in nanny for many years and it was through one of those jobs that she met TJ.

"It was love at first sight," she says. "We lived together for a little while and we then arranged to get married. By the time I was actually married, I was three months pregnant with my first child, Richard, who was a surprise but a blessing. Then we had another child, Harriet."

It was at Harriet's christening that their world changed forever.

"We had a party at my parents-in-law's house," Sarah explains. "I wasn't allowed to breastfeed in the garden and my husband was looking after Richard. At some point I think my mother-in-law put him in the garden. We couldn't find him and, after a big search, Richard was found

dead in the swimming pool. He was 22 months old. Harriet was six weeks. And my world shattered."

Sarah remembers the toll the tragedy took on her marriage and the further heartache that came when they had a miscarriage about a year later.

Sarah looked for hope, truth and meaning in New Age practices and concepts like reincarnation.

"But whatever I was looking at always left me searching," she recalls.

The couple had two more children, Thomas and Milly, before deciding to emigrate to Perth, Australia.

Not long after that, Harriet was invited to go to church by a friend from school.

"I said that she could go if Thomas could go as well! While they

were at church, TJ and I would relax and read the paper while Milly was sleeping. Then I saw an article about a religious group that had abused children. So we decided to visit the church to check out what was going on. The people were just so lovely. We were invited to go to a course about the basics of Christianity, but we weren't keen to leave the children with anybody. So they offered to come and do it at our house. I'd been searching for years for peace and for answers and I realized Jesus was Who I had been searching for. TJ and I gave our lives to Christ together at our coffee table in 1994. It was a journey that we took together, just as we've journeyed everything together. We saw that Jesus was the hope for our future here on Earth, but also

our future in heaven with our son and with the Lord. They led us in a prayer and Jesus showed us where we needed to ask for His forgiveness and

also forgive others. It was a gentle process but an encounter with Jesus will change you."

The family continued to attend church together and grow as individuals and as a family.

"Our marriage got stronger," Sarah attests. "We would do all the marriage courses, understanding that like in a car, you have to put gas in and you have to have the car serviced for it to be a good working car. We recognized that even though

we believed we had a good marriage, we still needed to learn and understand and work on things. We understood that we were a team. We loved one another and as parents we wanted to be on the same page. When we did disagree, we would talk about it. There was a sense that we were one."

Over the years TJ and Sarah served in the church, including running courses about grief.

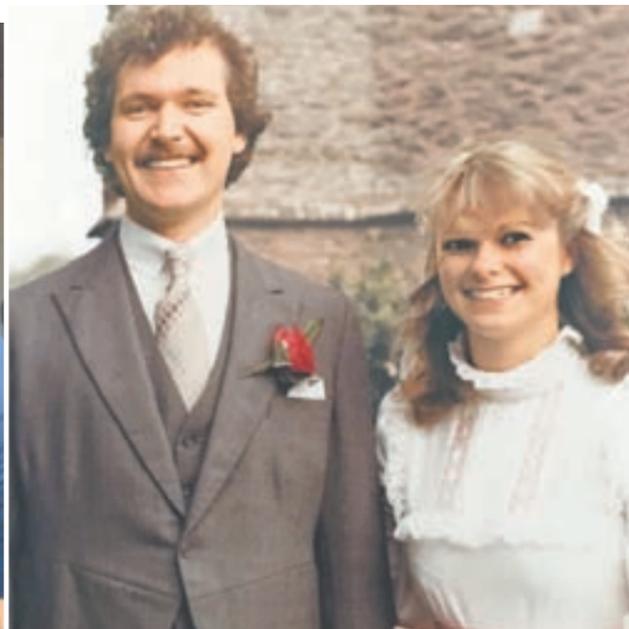
"TJ was very strong and had a very wise way about him," Sarah shares. "He was an elder in every church we attended and was very well respected. He was a mentor and a wonderful father and husband. In 2019 he started suffering with indigestion and felt unwell and I eventually convinced him to go to the doctor. We were

devastated to learn he had stomach cancer.

He had a short battle and died six weeks later. We had worship music playing in the room and I held his hands as he passed away. I said to him, 'Richard is running towards you, Jesus has his hand out, and I won't be far behind.' While TJ was in the hospital I was there 24/7 and the children came every single day. A nurse said to me, 'It's very, very rare to see a family so close.' I talked to her about our faith and why we were a strong unit."

Two-and-a-half years on, Sarah says she finds life without her husband and best friend very difficult at times.

"But I'm blessed by my children and friends and my four grandchildren. TJ's favourite Bible verse also gives me strength: 'Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He will direct your paths' (Proverbs 3:5-6)."



TJ and Sarah were married for 37 years. These photos were taken (above) on their wedding day in 1982 and (left) in 2015.

RICHARD WAS FOUND DEAD IN THE SWIMMING POOL.



"True love stands by each other's side on good days and stands closer on bad days."

— Unknown

Rocky start led to second chance success

BY CHRISTIE SHEEHAN

MY PARENTS got married when my mom was 17 and my dad was 24. I know what you're thinking... my dad sounds like a bit of a cradle snatcher, but my mom's childhood caused her to grow up quickly.

My older brother came along not too long after, and then my mom's dad tragically died of a heart attack when she was 19. He was 45 years old. This threw her into deep grief and she found herself wondering why she had chosen to get married and have a child at such a young age.

My mom decided to leave my dad and shack up with a previous boyfriend. Clearly my dad was heartbroken, so my grandparents came and took the firearms off the farm my parents had been living on to keep him safe.

Thankfully my grandparents, who are no longer with us, were Christians. They took my dad along with them to church and he decided to re-dedicate his life to Christ.

He soon had a congregation of 100 people praying for my mom, that she too would come to know Jesus and that she would return to him with their son.

It was around this time that my mom found herself alone at home with my brother.

Her boyfriend had gone out to get drunk again. She found herself reflecting on her current choices and felt convicted that she was doing the wrong thing.

Torn between knowing she couldn't handle being a single parent and feeling that she couldn't return home, she felt that suicide was her only way out. She drank a glass of turpentine, and when that didn't work she felt even more ashamed of herself.

Something inside of her urged her to call out to



Rob and Tracy Pannell, with their daughter Christie Sheehan. They have been married for 41 years.

God. As she spoke the words, "Lord, if you're real, reveal yourself to me," a song came on the radio... 'One day at a time sweet Jesus, that's all I'm asking of you. Lord help me to take and do everything, one day at a time.' She then heard a small still voice say, "Your place is by your husband's side, and you need to get back there."

My dad at this time was out in a paddock and found himself praying for his wife and child to return to him.

He heard an audible voice say, "It's ok Rob, she's coming back," and instant tears of relief and comfort began to stream down his face.

My mom called the farm and spoke to my grandma who called my shocked dad to the phone.

Shortly after, my dad drove to collect my mom and his son and take them home.

I was born nine months later in a delivery room where they felt God's presence with them both.

Their marriage is not a perfect one, but it certainly is a story of second chances. Over the years they have shared their story of hope with hundreds of couples, individuals and children. I can remember my dad counselling husbands out in the driveway, while my mom was inside with the wives. Sometimes we don't understand why our story is the way that it is, but God is always simultaneously weaving our story into a greater tapestry of hope for generations upon generations to learn from and to cherish.

nudge
WITH KARL FASSE

William Walker Winchester Cathedral

WHEN huge cracks started to appear in Winchester Cathedral in the early 1900s, the Cathedral seemed in danger of complete collapse. The cracks began to appear in the Cathedral's massive walls and arched ceilings.

If architects at the time had looked up to understand the problem, they would have been wrong. The problem was below the ground: the water-soaked and rotting pylons that were the foundations.

Early efforts to underpin its waterlogged foundations failed. That was until William Walker, a deep-sea diver who worked underwater every day for six years, began placing bags of concrete under the cathedral. There is a small statue of him in the Cathedral today in recognition of his work.

What was true of Winchester Cathedral can be true of us. When our life crumbles and cracks begin to appear, look to the foundations. A life built on faith will give you the stability you need.

Saved from life of conflict

Walking on eggshells was the only way South African Danelia Hoffman knew how to live. It was either that or be beaten. Her father was an alcoholic whose word was law and whose hand was harsh.

Her husband, whom she married at 19, was the same – a drinker who beat his wife and children for the slightest infraction.

“My husband showed no mercy,” Danelia tells *Challenge News*. “He beat us mostly to get rid of his anger.”

Both Danelia and her mother, who was a Christian, tolerated their husbands’ abuse in the mistaken belief that that was what was expected of them.

“One of the worst kinds of abuse is spiritual abuse and to misuse Scriptures,” says a wiser Danelia, now 50.

“Every time we would speak out against my husband’s bad behaviour he would open up the Bible and point out passages saying we needed to guard our tongues, or that the children must obey their parents and the wife must submit.

“He would religiously read the Bible, pray and let us sing hymns – unless he was drinking. Then he would get drunk and become very aggressive. We were not allowed to speak out against his behaviour and needed to be the perfect family all the time.”

Danelia, the third of five children, remembers her home as being full of arguments.

She was, however, close to her grandfather. He was a Godly man who for her 12th birthday gave her a note with Psalm 1: 1-3 written on it. It says: *Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly,*

Nor stands in the path of sinners, nor sits in the seat of the scornful;

But his delight is in the law of the Lord, and in His law he meditates day and night.

He shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that brings forth its fruit in its season,

Whose leaf also shall not wither; and whatever he does shall prosper.

“It has been with me all my life,” Danelia smiles. “I’m sure he prayed for me.”

Danelia attended Sunday School and church from the time she was a child and found comfort in many of the teachings, but because of the home situation, was insecure and conflicted.

“I still didn’t know God well enough to trust Him with everything. I would cry out to God ‘Did you not see this?’

One way she dealt with her anxiety was to excel at school. “That was my escape from the real world,” she explains. “Performing better academically made me proud.”

In Year 12, she attended a Christian camp and there was impressed by a verse from the Bible – “*I have called you by name, you are mine*” – Isaiah 43:1.

Not long after that camp, she says there was an incident in which she felt unfairly treated. “Suddenly I heard a loud voice in my head saying: ‘That is how unfairly I was treated on the cross.’

“I will never forget that; my sense of injustice disappeared.”

These events touched Danelia deeply, and in 2008 she says she “finally took the step of inviting God into my life, making Him my Lord and Savior.”

The insecurity vanished. “I always wondered if I would go to heaven or

hell; I was never sure. But when I actually made a firm commitment, I became sure.”

In 2008, at her husband’s insistence, the family moved to Perth, where Danelia, a midwife, still lives today.

THE INSTITUTION OF MARRIAGE HAD BECOME AN IDOL TO ME.



Moving to a new country did nothing to stop the abuse and in 2013 Danelia left her husband after he beat her in front of their one-year-old son – only to reconcile briefly a short time later.

“I kept on believing God could change him – and I know God is able to do that – but my husband needed to choose to change, and he wasn’t willing to do that.

“Instead, God opened my eyes and showed me the institution of marriage had become an idol to me. I was proud that I was the only one of my siblings who hadn’t gotten a divorce.

“But my marriage was not honouring God and was a bad example for my children.”

In 2016, Danelia finalised the divorce, ending 25 years of marriage.

“I don’t see it as a failed marriage

as I gained four beautiful children,” she remarks. “It didn’t have a fairy tale ending, but God will take care of the rest.”

She says her children are working through the challenges they have endured “with God’s grace and mercy”. She is proud that they are “kind and supportive” and have committed themselves to breaking the cycle of abuse by becoming mental health advocates.

“Yes I had a difficult life, but looking back I can see God’s hand in everything. His plans are always better than my own,” she smiles.

“I learned that Heaven is a free gift that you can’t earn or work for, that only God can save you by the death of Jesus Christ on the cross.

“I don’t feel I have to struggle every day to please God and other people or ask God for forgiveness all the time.

“His rules are like safety rails for our life; they protect us. I have had to let go whatever was driven by selfish ambition, pride and greed, including good deeds and religious activities.”

Today the eggshells are gone. In their place, Danelia says, is a peace that is “beyond understanding.

“I now know what and who I am is because of Jesus and I don’t need other people’s approval.”



Danelia Hoffman

Anger nearly ended our marriage

Comedian Jeff Allen was an atheist with anger management issues that he just couldn’t control, and which nearly cost him his marriage.

“I was addicted to cocaine and alcohol but I quit that 9 or 10 months into my marriage,” Jeff begins in his account on YouTube’s 100 Huntley Street channel. “I was not a nice man. I was an angry, bitter, jaded, cynical, foul-mouthed human being. Very condescending at home.

“I just could not stop the rage. I’d go weeks, months, but then eventually I’d explode and break a bunch of things and scream and holler like a banshee.”

He remembers vividly an incident from 30 years ago that began as argument over old cheese in the fridge and ended with him standing on a chair shouting at his wife as she knelt on the floor sobbing.

When Jeff put his son to bed that night, the boy said “You win, Daddy. You yell, Mommy cries, you win.” Jeff went downstairs and admitted to Tami, “I need help. I have an issue with anger.”

That set Jeff on a self-help journey to try and get a handle on his rage. He tried New Age and Buddhism. He did the 12-step program that gets you to pray to a Higher Power, but he was an atheist. He decided that if he made up a deity he was delusional but these prayers did move him into agnosticism (not knowing if there was a God, rather than denying the existence of one).

The 12-Steps’ famous Serenity Prayer asks for courage to change the things we can and wisdom to know what those things are. “Eventually you realize,” says Jeff, “that courage and wisdom come from God.”

But what pushed Jeff from a general acceptance that there could be a “God” to believing in the personal, incarnate God of the Bible?

“My wife had an affair,” he states. “When I found out, she was away at a dog show and I got all self-righteous and indignant, I phoned her and told her to come back.”



Jeff and Tami Allen have been married for 35 years.

But by the time she returned Jeff had “wrestled with God” and remembered that day shouting at her on the chair, smashing all the dishes, and other rage incidents, and he knew he was equally to blame.

“When she got home, I kissed her on the cheek and said ‘Baby, we’re a mess. We have two kids who need parents. If this is what you want, then you can have him but, if not, we need to do a lot of work. I’ll take 50 percent of the blame.’”

For three more months his wife continued her affair. “The most gut-wrenching, heart-breaking period of my life,” Jeff recalls.

“That summer, Tami was in Ohio with the kids and I was in Arizona. This man I had met had given me all these Bible tapes that I had never listened to. The first one I opened up was Ecclesiastes. It just exhilarated me! *‘Meaningless, meaningless, all is meaningless.’*

“What I got out of that first sermon I ever listened to was: Life without God will have no meaning, without meaning there is no purpose, without purpose you might as well off your-

self – suicide.”

This is exactly the conclusion Jeff had come to himself after eight years of struggle. “I didn’t know there was a name for it, but I was a nihilist.

“Something was really moving in me, listening to these tapes. When I got to one on Genesis 1:1 *‘In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth’* ... I found out later that Francis Shaeffer called this ‘the most pregnant verse in the Bible’ because it gives birth to everything else ... *‘In the beginning, God,’* I just fell on my face.”

Jeff called his friend Phil up and said, “There’s a God, I know in my heart and soul there’s a God!” “Yes, I know, that’s what I’ve been trying to tell you for a year!” Phil replied.

“But why would He want me?” Jeff asked through tears. He had denied and blasphemed God for so long.

“Have you got to the cross yet?” Phil asked.

Jeff started to listen to the New Testament tapes about Jesus and the cross. How Jesus came to earth as the God-man, lived a sinless life, died on the cross in humanity’s stead

and rose again from the dead to live as an eternal mediator between God and man.

“The story of the prodigal son, to this day, tears me up,” Jeff says. “The thought of the Father running with open arms to the fallen one.

“I realized that Christianity is the only worldview that tells the strong among us to reach back and pick up the weak, the human debris. When the world breaks a human being, they just toss him the trash heap, but when God breaks a person, it’s for a reason – to build them back up.”

What would Jeff say to someone whose marriage is on the rocks, who is fighting addiction, or who is dealing with anger; who maybe doesn’t believe there is a God, but who doesn’t know how to move forward or get out of their situation? “Pray. Whether you believe or not,” says Jeff.

“Fake it. And seek. Jesus said, *‘Knock and I’ll answer, seek and you will find.’* Swallow your pride, get on your knees, say ‘I can’t do it anymore.’”

I JUST COULD NOT STOP THE RAGE



Love seems to be the swiftest, but it is the slowest of all growths. No man or woman really knows what perfect love is until they have been married for a quarter of a century.

— Mark Twain

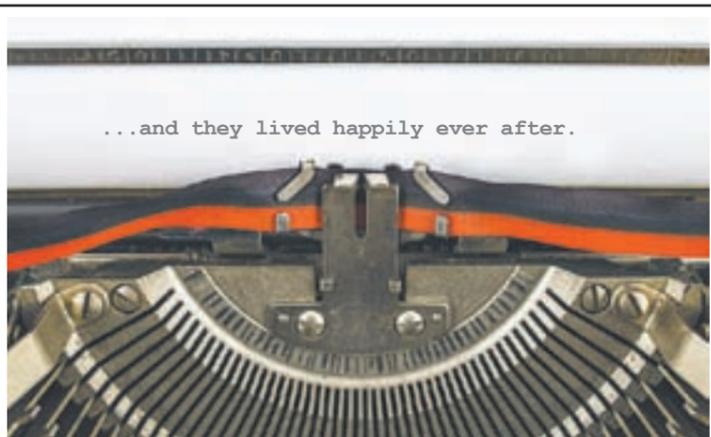
Passion is the quickest to develop, and the quickest to fade. Intimacy develops more slowly, and commitment more gradually still.

— Robert Steinberg

An intimate long term marriage is not the involuntary result of fleeting emotion but the creation of time and will.

— W.H. Auden

YOUTH TRUTH



Don't believe the fairy tale

GROWING up with fairy tales and romantic story lines might con you into believing that when you find 'the one,' you will live 'happily ever after.' However, this is toxic thinking to go into a real relationship with. All those couples in the opposite page will tell you that marriage is hard work. No one lives 'happily ever after.'

We are all sinful, damaged people who come into relationships with different assumptions and expectations. Adjusting to living with another human being so intimately can be very hard. It is particularly deadly to a marriage try to find completion or wholeness

through your spouse.

The reasons marriages work is a combination of compatibility and commitment. Love is more than a gooey feeling, love is an act of the will. There will be times when a marriage is running on devotion, not emotion. It is a choice to forgive when we are offended, and to continue to serve when we would rather be selfish.

Bottom line, don't enter into marriage lightly, but if you do marry, hold on for dear life. Nothing will challenge or change you quite so much, and the rewards are great once you do the hard work of adapting to each other. •

Waiting leads to a happier marriage

STEVEN R. TRACY reports in his article Chastity and the Goodness of God: The Case for Premarital Sexual Abstinence (which can be found on the Gospel Coalition website):

One of the most wide-spread modern myths is that couples need to live together before they get married to see if they are sexually and relationally compatible and thus to enhance future marital health and satisfaction.

In reality, research shows that couples that live together before marriage have higher infidelity rates, lower marital satisfaction rates, and higher divorce rates than those who don't live together before marriage. In spite of the intuitive logic that cohabitation should have a beneficial effect on subsequent marital stability by allowing individuals to truly get to know their partner before committing to marriage, research on this specific dynamic has shown 'no positive effect of cohabitation on marital stability.'¹ In fact, there is a tremendous amount of social science research, particularly studies of cohabitation, which demonstrates the injurious personal and relational effects of premarital sexual relations. For instance, in one major recent study, 1,425 couples were studied to determine the relationship between premarital cohabitation and marital dysfunction. Researchers found that couples who cohabited before marriage 'reported poorer marital quality and greater marital instability.'² This dynamic of cohabitation having a negative impact on subsequent marriage has been replicated in so many different studies that some social scientists have labelled it 'the cohabitation effect.'³ Hence, it is not surprising that the research shows cohabiters are more likely to divorce or separate if they do get married. A study of over 4,000 Swedish women reported that women who cohabit before marriage have an 80% higher marital failure rate than women who did not cohabit with their future spouse.⁴ In short, living together and having sex before marriage does not prepare one for marriage, but decreases the likelihood of a future healthy marriage. •

Footnotes:

1 Lee A. Lillard, Michael J. Brien, and Linda J. Waite, 'Premarital Cohabitation and Subsequent Marital Dissolution: A Matter of Self-Selection,' *Demography* 32 (1995): 455

2 Claire Kamp Dush, Catherine Cohan, and Paul Amato, 'The Relationship between Cohabitation and Marital Quality and Stability: Change Across Cohorts,' *Journal of Marriage and Family* 65 (2003): 539-49.

3 Catherine L. Cohan and Stacey Kleinbaum, 'Toward a Greater Understanding of the Cohabitation Effect: Premarital Cohabitation and Marital Communication,' *Journal of Marriage and Family* 64 (2002): 180-92

4 N. G. Bennett, A. K. Blanc, and D. E. Bloom, 'Commitment and the Modern Union: Assessing the Link between Premarital Cohabitation and Subsequent Marital Stability,' *American Sociological Review* 53 (1988): 127-38.



I was longing for a love I never felt

BY MICHAEL ASHCRAFT

It really bothered Stephany that she couldn't understand — or even hear — the lyrics of Christian music played by her aunt and uncle.

"I was a lost child. I wore tons of makeup to try to fit in. I got into lots of fights. I was really depressed. I tried killing myself several times while I was in middle school and in my freshman year. I felt very unloved," she says. "I didn't have God in my life. The words Christians sang in their songs was like another language to me then."

Because her parents got into drugs and alcohol, she was physically abused and neglected and fell into the foster care system.

"I was very angry at the world. I hated people because of my upbringing. I didn't understand how God could have let this happen to my siblings and myself. I was just angry at God and I didn't even know God. I hated God."

Stephany and her siblings would sleep on floors of just about any friend's house. One couple was very nice and even offered to adopt.

Her mother was incensed by the idea that someone wanted to take her kids from her. So when Stephany returned, she started beating her viciously. "My mom wasn't well," says Stephany, who had just finished her first year of high school.

In response, she ran away and hid in another friend's house.

Her uncle and aunt took her to church. They played Christian music, which Stephany found incomprehensible.

"When my aunt and uncle played Christian music, I couldn't understand the words," she says, "which really bothered me."

When they sent her to youth group, she thought the other girls were strange.

"Ew!" she squealed to her aunt. "Nobody wants to be around Christian girls. Don't ever send me with those crazy Christians again."

She projected a tough exterior, but inside she longed for a love she never felt.

"I felt so lost, so abandoned.

But at the time I felt God pull on my heart," Stephany says. "All I wanted was to feel that freedom. But I didn't feel like I was good enough. How can God love me, not even my mother loves me?"

One day her aunt shared the complete story of the gospel with Stephany. Still, the message of God's love didn't penetrate.

"The more she shared the good news about Jesus with me, the more I felt saddened because I didn't understand God's love," she remembers. "All I felt was that I was doomed because of how awful I was and how I was abandoned."

Finally at a Greg Laurie Harvest Crusade in Angels Stadium, she relented and descended to the baseball field to receive Jesus.

"That moment that I stepped out into the grass, because my heart longed for Him, I felt His presence surround me," Stephany says. "I prayed and cried. From there I felt like I was really open to the Lord. I asked God for forgiveness, and I asked Him to love me."

She surrendered her life to Jesus and was born again.

A few nights later, her aunt "caught" her listening to music late at night on headphones. She asked what Stephany was listening to.

With tears in her eyes, Stephany said: "I can hear what they're saying!" It was Christian music.

But the idyllic life with her aunt and uncle came

to an end. Her mom went to court to ask for the return of her daughter and Stephany was forced to return home. Unfortunately, her mom was still unstable and allegedly "wanted to kill" Stephany.

On December 2, 2002, during her second year at high school, Stephany went into foster care — but not with her uncle and aunt.

It wasn't easy. Her foster "sisters" teased her for being a "crazy Christian." Her brothers were scattered in other homes and she longed to be closer to them, so she was placed in a home nearby.

It was at another foster home that she met Andy Herrera. He was attracted to her and tried to initiate conversations. He began asking about her and visiting her. He would throw a pebble against her window at night to get her attention and when she looked out, blow kisses.

Andy was a Christian guy and won over her heart. Their boyfriend/girlfriend relationship was going well, but her foster situation was not. So her social worker set her up to become emancipated and live in her home with rent assistance. She



Stephany and Andy Herrera on their wedding day.

found several part-time jobs while she completed high school.

Then on a trip with her future in-laws to their native Guatemala, in the jungle outside a Mayan pyramid, Andy pulled out a ring and asked her to marry him.

"Yes!" she replied.

"There was a sunset and everything," Stephany says. "It was very romantic."

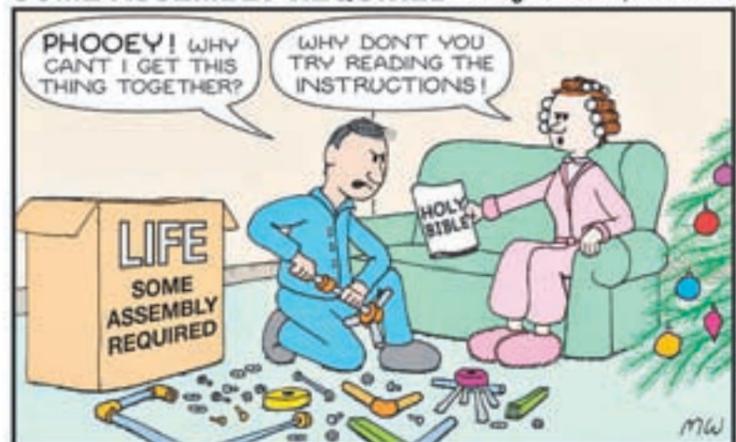
The formerly unloved girl found love in God and love of a husband and a family.

Stephany and Andy Herrera now have five children. She studied to be a beautician and then got a degree in early child development. While Andy works in pest control, she home-schools the kids.

"The Lord called me when I was covered in darkness," Stephany says. "He overflows in me. He's changed my life dramatically. He's taken me out of all that I knew before and He's set me on a path to glorify him.

"I look at my life and I see pain and struggle, but I can also see that it led me to Him. I belong to Him. I'm so grateful to God for leading me and loving me. He's been so gracious. God really has been so loving and gentle with me. God spoiled me." •

SOME ASSEMBLY REQUIRED A Joyful 'toon by Mike Waters



Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight. — PROVERBS 3:5-6 NIV

WHEN MARRIAGE WORKS



Kim and Judy, Married for 29 years, Tip: Marry your friend, forgive one another, and keep Christ at the center of your marriage — it helps you get through the tougher times.



Chandra and Connie, married for 30 years. Tip: A successful marriage is about being patient and kind to each other; not self-seeking but putting the needs of your spouse above your own.



Ossie and Anne, married 60 years. Tip: Love blooms where kindness is planted



Rick and Trish, married 62 years. Tip: Marriage is a commitment to each other to love, encourage and work through differences. Two different lives become one and you have to learn to give and take. Determine that things will work out no matter if it's a stormy day or full of sunshine.



Janice and Edmund, married 34 years. Tip: Focus on and celebrate your partner's strengths and good points, not their weaknesses or failings.



Jody and Adrian, married 20 years. Tip: Little things add up to big things - be polite, be kind, say sorry, hold hands, laugh at each other's jokes.



Steve and Sonya, married 26 years. Tip: Marriage is a triangle with Jesus at the top; the closer you get to Jesus, the closer you get to each other.



Pascal and Adrienne, married 23 years. Tip: Persevere in communication, kindness, mercy and forgiveness.



Pete and April, married 21 years. Pete's tip: Learn to say 'yes, dear!' April's tip: Find things to laugh about (even if it means pranking your spouse)!



Harry and Celestine, married for two years. Tip: Understand your partner's love languages, don't carry arguments into the next day and pray for each other and your marriage, together, every day.



Frank and Trish, married 42 years. Tip: Work together in the beginning and the difficult times; reap the rewards together in retirement.

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



Joshua and Harriet, married 12 years. Tip: Have fun together and encourage and build each other up (when you are together AND when you're apart).



Solving mechanical problems did not resolve Victor Soo's internal dilemmas

BY MARK EMERSON, CMI

Victor Soo grew up in Malaysia but moved to Australia in 1970 to do his tertiary education.

Completing a Diploma in Mechanical Engineering and a Certificate in Fluid Power Technology, Victor went on to have a very successful engineering career.

He designed many solutions to complex manufacturing problems in the automotive and mining industries.

For example, he designed and patented a world-first Australian-Standard-approved residential smoke alarm that can interface with commercial alarm systems (pictured below). This item is still in production for the global market.

He also developed a unique system to troubleshoot his company's wiring and plumbing systems and designed facilities and systems for its training department.

The extensive curriculum he wrote gained the approval of the Victorian State Training Board for Industrial Automation. Annually, he also presented to final-year mechanical engineering students on the latest advancements in manufacturing technologies.

Despite this success, Victor did not find fulfillment and spent his younger days frequenting snooker parlours, playing pinball for beers, smoking, drinking and gambling.

"I did not find satisfaction, and I started thinking about the purpose of life," he shares.

Encountering Christianity

Victor's father was a Taoist who believed in a multitude of gods, but never went to the temple. His mother had some Christian influence but never went to church. So religion meant nothing to Victor.

He encountered different religions in Malaysia and says he didn't see Hindus or Buddhists living out their beliefs.

"I was surprised that my father believed his religion endorsed gambling," he adds. "My mother was also into gambling."

As he grew up, Victor experienced many spiritual manifestations.

He recalls one that involved the worship of the 'monkey god' where its spirit was summoned by a medium who went into a trance.

Engineer encounters the spiritual



Others involved devotees conjuring the dead, piercing themselves and walking over burning coals. "But I questioned the purposes of these rituals," Victor says. "And why did they project an atmosphere of fear?"

He also attended a Christian church and remembers "how well people related with one another."

"There was great warmth and friendliness. I enjoyed the singing. I felt the tranquility, like it was a place where I could belong, and be myself. I felt comfortable and safe. I believed the story of Jesus was more credible [than what other religions taught]."

The turning point came when, as an adult, Victor made a Christian friend and accompanied him to church. There, he again felt the love of the people, just as he had so many years before.

Someone revealed the uniqueness of Christianity to him by explaining that all other religions strive to get closer to God, to find the good life, and get to heaven through good works; but in Christianity, through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus, God reaches out to us by His grace apart from our good works.

"[This man] told me Jesus was God, and how He came from heaven as a man to save us. I learned that Jesus died as a sacrifice for our sins on the cross so we could receive eternal life.

"I was amazed to learn that Jesus died according to prophecy in the Bible and that He rose from the dead just as the Scriptures said He would."

By the fifth week of attending church, Victor had invited Jesus Christ to cleanse his sins and run his life. Victor says he was very touched by the verse, John 3:16 — *For God so loved the world, that He gave His only Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life.*

"I felt this love of God for me very personally and sensed I was now a new person.

"I was overwhelmed. I didn't understand much else about what had hap-

pened, only that God's love touched me deeply and profoundly."

This had an immediate impact. When Victor went home, he told his wife Crystal, for the first time, "I love you!" In his culture, you just didn't do that. And when he told his mother he had become a Christian and that he loved her, she thought he was on drugs!

The transformation was so evident that his wife, a Taoist at the time, also committed her life to Jesus. Since then, Victor has led his mother and his two brothers to Christ.

Encountering creationism

Not long after becoming a Christian, Victor learned about the Biblical account of creation in six days.

"Prior to that, I had never heard about God creating the world," Victor says, adding he was only taught evolution at school.

"I just accepted it as being true. I assumed there was lots of evidence for evolution, so I never questioned what I was taught. The idea that God created everything was new to me."

However, thanks to his engineering background, it was obvious to Victor that things did not make themselves or get better through random chance.

"I knew from experience that all systems need intelligence, forethought, and design. I knew that vast amounts of time will not create or improve anything.

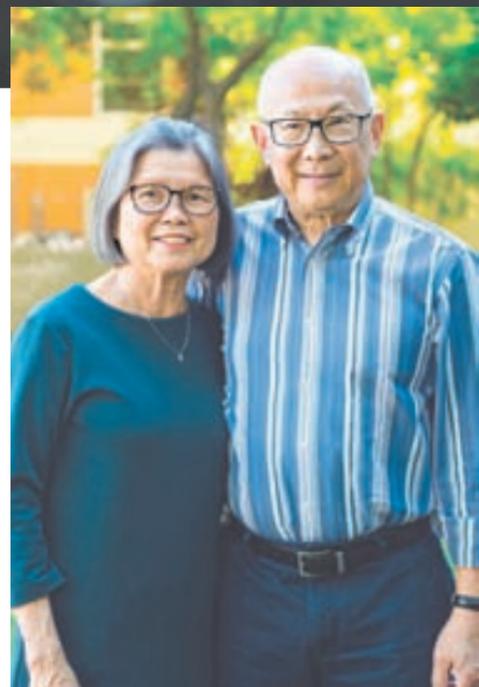
"Living things point to creation because of their amazing complexity, requiring myriads of precise parts to be present all at the same time. This is something that blind, random chance simply cannot achieve."

It became clear to Victor that evolution was based on lies and deception.

He remarks: "I was amazed to discover that the Old Testament points to Jesus as the promised Messiah. It makes sense of who Jesus is and what He came to do.

"Not only have I been pardoned of my sins, but I have been created for a purpose. Without God I'm a mere accident!"

Victor became passionately involved in Christian ministry, helping to establish churches, preaching and leading Bible study groups. He turned down an international promotion, started his current church and



went into full-time service as a pastor. "We know that the Bible is true...However, people today have many questions that come from evolutionary teaching," Victor observes.

"We can't just say, 'The Bible says ...'. In today's evolution-indoctrinated society, we need to answer the challenges.

"We need to show why the evolutionary story is not correct and how the Bible explains the empirical evidence. Our approach, as with 1 Peter 3:15, is to present truth with confidence and in love, not so much to win arguments but to keep friends and lead them to Christ." •



The smoke alarm Victor Soo designed.

VAST AMOUNTS OF TIME WILL NOT CREATE OR IMPROVE ANYTHING.



COMMON FEATURES

The idea that common features means common evolution could just as easily be used to show the features came from some COMMON DESIGNER.

For example, suppose one manufacturer made cars, vacuum cleaners, electric toothbrushes and cell phones - you could find common features in all of these items. That would not mean they had evolved out of each other, or from some common machine in the past. It could simply mean one manufacturer used or modified similar parts to make several different things.

The 'Tree of Life' which evolutionists draw has plenty of animals and plants on the tips of the branches, but the BRANCHES are all IMAGINED. No fossil transitional forms have been found to show how anything today came from anything totally different in the past.

EVOLUTION'S TREE

CREATION'S TREE

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

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BUILDING BETTER RELATIONSHIPS

FORGIVENESS IS VITAL TO A RELATIONSHIP

BY ROB FURLONG

UNHEALTHY anger inevitably leads to an unwillingness to forgive, and many a relationship has been destroyed because people have refused to forgive each other.

Forgiveness is also a very real issue in marriage. The health of a couple's relationship can often be determined by the willingness (or unwillingness) of a husband and wife to forgive each other.

I have talked with many couples over the years, and I never stop being amazed at how people hang on to things they did to each other years ago and the overwhelming pettiness of it all.

"She did this..."
 "He always forgets..."
 "I never do that..."
 On and on it goes.

I am not saying that their hurts (or yours) are insignificant and that they should be simply glossed over. All I am arguing for is that at some point in the relationship, someone needs to have the guts to forgive the

other person. If this does not happen, then the couple is either headed for the divorce court or they will simply learn to co-exist under the same roof in a permanent state of "Cold War".

Forgiveness can be a difficult concept to explain.

This was certainly the case for some missionaries who took the Good News about Jesus to the Eskimos. They couldn't find a word in the Eskimo language which adequately explained what they meant by forgiveness, so they came up with the following:

issumagijoujungnainermik

It literally means "not being able to think about it anymore".

Does this mean forgiveness is simply forgetting the wrong that was done to me?

Most of us have been told at some point to "forgive and forget" and we are no doubt familiar with the saying, "Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words can never hurt me."

Personally, I've discovered this isn't true!

I don't think much about the physical injuries I have incurred over the years, but I certainly remember many unkind things said to me throughout my life.

Perhaps you wrestle with the same thing.

You feel you have forgiven a person for the wrong they did to you, but

there are times when the memory of what was done surfaces again, causing you fresh grief.

Because you still remember, does this mean you haven't forgiven?

Not for a minute.

When the missionaries to the Eskimos came up with their word for forgiveness, what they meant by "not thinking about it anymore" was the hurt or pain done to you no longer holds you. If, and when, it does come to mind, you direct the memory back to God, forgive again and leave it with Him.

Forgiveness has also been described as "repairing the past".

When we forgive someone, we repair the wrong and the relationship.

This does not mean forgiveness comes cheaply. In marriage for example, there should be a genuine acknowledgement by one party that what they did was hurtful and a sincere commitment by them to change their behaviour. And the other person then freely forgives the guilty person from the heart.

Throughout our marriage, Karen and I have regularly practiced the discipline of forgiving each other.

Simple statements like, "I'm sorry for ... I will change ..." and "I forgive you" can feel awkward, but they have enabled us to keep short accounts with each other and not allow petty resentments to build up that over time would undermine our relationship.

The person who gives us strength to forgive is Jesus.

He forgives us freely from His heart and "doesn't think about it anymore" — all we need do is ask.

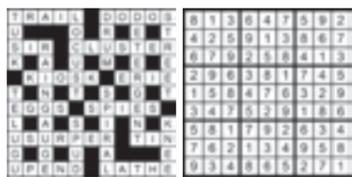
And in forgiving us, He also "repairs our past" — we are restored to relationship with Him.

The essence of the Cross is forgiveness, and it challenges us to forgive also.

When we forgive, we are no longer held captive by the person who wronged us — "we don't think about it anymore" and we repair the past.



Rob Furlong and his wife Karen have been forgiving each other for 41 years this month!



Ask Y:



QUESTION: What is actually involved in 'following Jesus'?

THE British army once used the slogan "Join the army and see the world." Their message was about what was in it for recruits. It would have been more honest to use the headline "Come and die for Queen and country."

The difference between those two approaches sums up what is on offer to those who Jesus invites to follow Him.

Unlike that army advert, Jesus wants us to know exactly what we are getting into. Which is why, for a start, He calls those who would follow Him, His 'disciples'.

OK, so 'disciple' is not a word we use much today. But the word 'apprentice' is. And that's what a disciple is. Jesus is after those who, like an apprentice, will spend their time learning, observing

and following instructions.

And Jesus spelt out the implications with clarity. For a start, He said, "Anyone who does not carry his cross and follow me cannot be my disciple."

People then knew exactly what Jesus had in mind. It was a common sight to see those branded as criminals making their journey toward death with the equipment for their execution on their back.

Those who carried their cross counted themselves as already dead. They had no plans for anything else. In the same way, Jesus calls us to die to our own selfishness, vain ambitions, and personal priorities.

To His would-be apprentices Jesus also said, "If you love me, you will do as I command." So being His follower involves obeying Him. That probably evokes an image of dog training and obedience classes. But it's a far from a blind, mindless obedience.

It means a disciple of Jesus salutes Jesus' flag, marches to His commands and checks out His orders of the day—and then does them.

That involves the many things Jesus spoke about. Like forgiving those who wrong us; praying for those who are unkind to us; not fretting about how things will work out, and avoiding public display when we help others. He spoke of our need to be meek, merciful, pure in heart, and people who seek after peace. And a lot more besides.

Jesus also said that no one should think about following Him unless they were ready to do so publicly. That often means being seen to be at odds with the values and attitudes of a selfish me-centered society, where most people are swimming in the opposite direction.

Don't follow Jesus to find fulfillment — though I guarantee you'll find it. Don't follow Jesus for excitement — yet it will never be in short supply. Instead follow Jesus because He is 'the Way, the Truth and the Life'. He is worthy of your undying allegiance.

HOW DO I BECOME A CHRISTIAN?

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Almighty God, Creator of Heaven and Earth,

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

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

What now?

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

AS A NEXT STEP:

I have prayed this prayer.

Please send me:

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

* Please tick and write clearly *

Name _____ Phone _____

Address _____

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

Want to explore more?

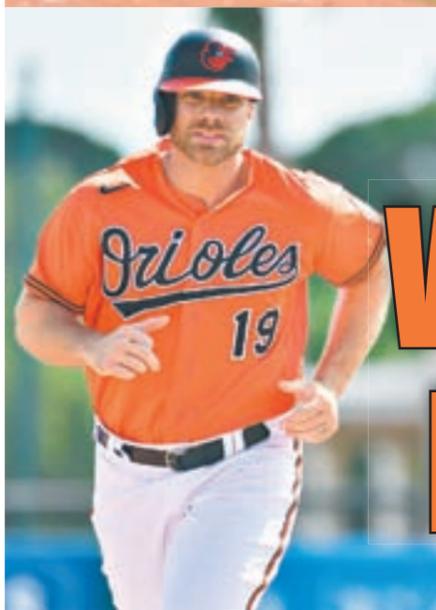
Here are some **free**, helpful, Christian online resources:

Online Bible - Olive Tree app (we recommend that you start with an easy-to-read version like the ESV)	
Audio Bible - Bible.is app , or Youversion Bible app	
Christian radio station - CBN radio app (different channels for all genres of music)	
Christian podcasts and sermons - Edifi app	
Christian movies - 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	
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Chris Davis #19 of the Baltimore Orioles hits a single against the Tampa Bay Rays on May 26, 2018 at Tropicana Field in St Petersburg, Florida. (Photo by Julio Aguilar/Getty Images)

Below: Chris Davis #19 of the Baltimore Orioles runs the bases in a game against the Tampa Bay Rays during Grapefruit League spring training on March 02, 2020 in Sarasota, Florida. (Photo by Julio Aguilar/Getty Images)



WHEN ACHIEVING YOUR DREAM IS NOT ENOUGH

At the age of 24, Chris Davis (now 36) had achieved his life-long dream of becoming a Major League Baseball player with the Texas Rangers. He couldn't understand why he felt so dead and empty inside.

Currently a first baseman for the Baltimore Orioles, Chris began his Major League career with the Rangers in 2008. He had a great rookie year and was the first Texas Ranger to hit a home run in both of his first two Major League starts.

A powerful, left-handed hitter, Chris earned himself the nickname 'Crush Davis'.

In a YouTube video shared by Idols Aside Ministries, Chris talked about his success in his early days with the Rangers.

"I had all the money I could have ever wanted, had my own place in downtown Dallas, had as much fame as I ever wanted or ever thought I would have," Chris remembers. "I would wake up almost every morning and I just felt this huge void and I tried to fill it with alcohol, with girls, going out every night, doing whatever I could to basically distract myself. I woke up one morning and I just thought there's something that's missing here."

Chris found his identity in how well he performed.

"My faith was in how well I did... how successful I was as a baseball player, how many people liked me, how many people thought I was a talented guy and it took me a long time to realize that," he admits. "It actually took me falling all the way to the bottom in 2010. I hit 192 with

one home run. I'm a power hitter so one home run is not very powerful."

When the Rangers made the post-season, Chris was left off the roster.

"[I was] really struggling, really frustrated," he remembers. "I wanted to blame everybody but myself. I was really feeling alone."

While playing for the Rangers, Chris met fellow players David Murphy and Josh Hamilton, who were Christians. He started asking them about their faith in Jesus.

Although Chris had attended church and was baptized as a Christian when he was six, he started playing sports more and more and had little time for church growing up.

As he grew older, he said he didn't understand what it meant to walk with the Lord.

"I had never read my Bible on a daily basis, I had never prayed on a daily basis," Chris explains. "I would say prayers before the game but it was just kind of a repetition. [I was] kind of going through the motions. I started asking them all these questions and I really felt like there was a fire burning inside me."

In an interview with The Increase, Chris said, "I was desperately trying to understand what

this walk with Christ was all about and how to go about it. I realized that baseball had an unbelievable grip on me that was hard to fight."

One night when Chris was in San Francisco, he woke up in the middle of the night struggling to breathe.

"There was just an uneasy feeling in my room," he remembers. "The lights were completely off, it was pitch black. I didn't feel like I was alone and I didn't feel like the person or whatever was in there with me was on my side and I just started praying to God, really crying out and that was the night I really surrendered to Christ."

Chris said, "I asked Him to save me from my worldly desires and show me how to have an intimate relationship with Him. Since that night, I have seen God move in ways I could have never imagined. It wasn't an instant overnight change, but slowly through time He led me by the hand. I still have struggles, but I know that my sins are forgiven, and that God can overcome anything

I am going through that may seem daunting."

Chris says he now reads his Bible every day but he admits it's not always easy.

"I don't want it to seem like every morning I'm opening up the Word and just having this awesome meditation on it and I'm just in full contact with God. There are days that it's a struggle, that I don't really understand what I'm reading or I'm not really feeling a punch from what I'm reading... I think the important thing is to pray on it and just be in the Word."

He said he notices a difference when he doesn't read his Bible.

"Something that I do on a daily basis is surrender - knowing that you're not in control, that there is a higher being that is in control in your life and that loves you," he says. "It's easy to live by your own standards and do whatever you want but it's not worth it. I think that the

work that Christ has done in my life not only on the baseball field but really more outside is a testament to the fact that He is real. I've seen Him move in ways that I could have never imagined and it's a gift that is totally worth it."

Chris said his faith shapes his decisions and is the foundation of his life.

"He is at the center of all my relationships, goals, struggles, and successes," he told The Increase. "God determines how I manage and disperse His money, my time, and is my driving force at all times... I believe that my sole purpose in life is to serve and bring glory to God. I try to apply that principle in all areas of my daily life. Whether it be as a husband, father, son, brother, friend, teammate, or maybe just an acquaintance. I want all the praise and glory to be directed towards God, who is solely responsible for the man I am today." •



Chris and Jill Davis have been married for 10 years. The couple now have three daughters, Ella, and twins Evelyn and Dorothy.

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